European strategic autonomy in security and defence

Now the going gets tough, it's time to get going

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Clingendael Report

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Executive summary

The history of European security and defence cooperation is characterised by a plethora of terms and buzzwords. One of these is 'European strategic autonomy', first introduced in the European Union's Global Strategy of June 2016. The term created political turmoil – both in Europe and in the United States – as it was interpreted as an alternative to NATO. In particular, Allies in eastern Europe opposed pleas for European strategic autonomy out of a fear that the United States might end its commitment to defend Europe. These concerns have not disappeared completely, but there seems to be more common ground regarding the meaning of the term. Even the staunchest proponent of European strategic autonomy – France – has made clear that the Alliance continues to be the primary organisation responsible for the territorial defence of Europe.
On the other hand, European strategic autonomy remains an undefined term, which has contributed to misinterpretation and political abuse in the form of portraying it as 'Europe going alone'. Once more, this is not the case. EU High Representative Josep Borrell has referred to 'a certain degree of autonomy'. EU member states have different views on what strategic autonomy entails, but positions are converging towards an explanation of 'the ability to act, together with partners when possible, alone when needed'. The deteriorating transatlantic relationship under President Trump has been a major factor for bringing European countries closer on the topic of strategic autonomy. Increasing doubt about the US security guarantee might wither away in the post-Trump era, but in many European countries it has already changed the mindset. Furthermore, American pressure on Europe to take more responsibility for its own security is there to stay, whoever occupies the White House. Hence, more European responsibility can no longer be interpreted solely as realising a better burden-sharing in NATO; it is also about Europe becoming a geopolitical actor in the context of the changing international order with China, Russia and the US as the main competing world powers.

European strategic autonomy – also referred to as sovereignty, independence, self-sufficiency or responsibility – embraces all elements of power: political, economic, military and others. Europe's weakest element is security and defence. Thus, realising more strategic autonomy in this area is key to becoming a geopolitical actor. Contrary to the field of trade and finance, for security and defence 'Europe' cannot be limited to merely the EU member states. In the post-Brexit era the United Kingdom – one of the key players in European security and defence – is no longer included. Other European countries, such as Norway, are also not members of the EU. Furthermore, NATO has its own responsibilities in this field. The EU-NATO relationship is an essential issue when it comes to elaborating the concept of European strategic autonomy. For these reasons Europe is not limited to the EU. In this report 'European' means EU plus non-EU European NATO countries, 'strategic' implies that Europe should be able to safeguard

its long-term interests in the field of security and defence, and 'autonomy' refers to Europe's ability to act on its own when deemed necessary. From that follows a definition: *European strategic autonomy in security and defence is the ability of Europe to make its own decisions, and to have the necessary means, capacity and capabilities available to act upon these decisions, in such a manner that it is able to properly function on its own when needed.* From this definition it follows that four interrelated aspects have to be taken into account: the political, institutional, capabilities and technological-industrial dimensions.

In the *political* and *institutional* dimensions the essential question is how to strengthen unity and to accelerate decision-making in crisis situations. The root of the problem is the member states' reluctance to pool or transfer sovereignty in security and defence from the national to the European level. Not addressing the issue by solely underlining national sovereignty provides no solution. It will result in the continuation of finding patchwork solutions on a case-by-case basis at slow speed. A crisis will not wait until Europe has completed its lengthy deliberations. In other words: the current set-up needs to be adjusted to become more effective. Several steps can contribute to achieving this. First, there is unused potential in the Treaty on the European Union. Especially Articles 42.7 and 44 offer sufficient legal pathways to become more assertive in shouldering the EU's responsibility for the protection of its interests and the security of its citizens. Constructive abstention as defined in Article 31 could be used by member states which cannot fully agree on decisions to be taken, but are willing to refrain from vetoing EU action. Secondly, the three largest European countries – France, Germany and the UK, known as the E3 – should take the lead in addressing crises requiring quick action. After Brexit, an ex-EU solution has to be found to involve London in discussions on such action. By linking up to the EU and NATO, either through consultations or in the presence of the Secretary General of the Alliance and the President of the European Council at the E3 meeting table, the interests of the other European countries should be taken into account. If the E3 are able to demonstrate leadership in a way that serves the strategic interests of Europe as a whole, then form – a European Security Council – can eventually follow function to overcome existing mistrust among and resistance from other European countries.

With regard to *capabilities* Europe is lacking clear political direction as to what it should be able to do. NATO has a military level of ambition, the EU has not. The result is more or less 'a free for all' in European capability development, despite all the positive initiatives taken in recent years including permanent structured cooperation. During the German EU Presidency in the second half of 2020 the Strategic Compass exercise has started to provide direction to translate ambition into 'goals and objectives', to be concluded during the French Presidency in the first semester of 2022. This should not end up in another round of updating existing lists of tasks and required capabilities. The international environment has changed fundamentally. If the EU wants to become a geopolitical actor, it can no longer stick to the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) tasks defined in the distant past of the 1990s. CSDP military operations have to

be adjusted, both in scope and in terms of the force spectrum. Furthermore, it has to be taken beyond 'classical' crisis management operations on land by extending the military level of ambition to air and sea surveillance and interdiction operations to protect the EU's wider interests.

Taking into account the diverging threat perceptions and related security priorities across Europe and the lack of a common strategic culture, it will be difficult to reach consensus in the EU on a higher military level of ambition. This problem might be overcome by embedding the EU military level of ambition – once agreed in the Union – in the NATO Defence Planning Process. The contribution of other non-EU European nations could be added to what the EU aims to deliver in order to constitute together 'the European contribution' to the Alliance's military level of ambition. This European contribution to NATO should be defined as 50% of the required Allied forces with the US providing the other half. Such an output target – in addition to NATO's 2% of GDP for defence input target – would be a clear goal of transatlantic burden-sharing, while at the same time setting the aim for European autonomous action when needed. The time horizon should be set at 2035-2040 with a five-year cycle of review and adjustment in case of European countries falling short of reaching intermediate targets. Sustained financial support is crucial. A multi-annual European defence investment plan could provide the framework, financed by the European Defence Fund of the European Commission and, predominantly, by national defence investment budgets. Finally, more investment in European defence has to go hand in hand with more cross-border *defence technological and industrial cooperation*. Many initiatives have already been taken – with the large Franco-German programmes for next generation air and land systems as the core – but this has to be turned into a wider European effort in view of creating, step-by-step and in all domains (air, land, sea, space and cyber), more standardisation and interoperability.

More European strategic autonomy will not be realised overnight. It requires a sustained, long-term effort – politically, financially and militarily. The past has taught us that without a clear beacon on the horizon, the European ship is sailing in all directions. It has resulted in a low CSDP level of ambition which the EU can no longer afford in an era of increased instability and uncertainty. At the same time, leading European expeditionary-oriented countries such as France and the UK had to take the lead in crises requiring immediate action, such as in Libya in 2011 and in Mali two years later. Such leadership by the larger European nation(s) will also be required in the future. The European security architecture might need adjustment in the long term, but institutionally a giant leap forward is not the way to go. All existing formats – be it the EU, NATO or coalitions of the willing – should be used depending on the crisis at hand. European strategic autonomy has to develop gradually using the existing security arrangements in which European countries increasingly pool and integrate their armed forces.

1 Introduction

"We have to keep a certain degree of autonomy in order to defend our interests", according to EU High Representative Josep Borrell speaking to a group of journalists in June 2020. Borrell referred to the US-China confrontation and argued for an EU position not choosing between the two global competitors but acting like Frank Sinatra's signature song, 'My way'.[1] The High Representative's remark is most interesting as he uses the words "a certain degree of autonomy". Despite widespread confusion and disagreement over the exact meaning of the term, there is general recognition that strategic autonomy – in terms of acting alone supported with all necessary instruments – is a bridge too far for the EU, at least in the foreseeable future and in particular when it comes to military power. Moreover, strategic autonomy is a concept that encompasses various sectors, including autonomy in the financial and economic realms as well as in the field of security and defence. For the purpose of this report, the authors focus on strategic autonomy in the field of security and defence – the field in which the least progress has been made over the past years and which is currently experiencing the biggest shortcomings and obstacles.

Based on the current situation some argue against European strategic autonomy, out of a fear that it could lead to an American withdrawal of its military support to the European continent. On the opposite side one can find proponents of a European Union with full strategic autonomy to play its part in the global competition with the great powers (China, Russia and the US), implying once again that the concept is wider than only being autonomous in security and defence. The 'against school' seems to deny the increasing doubt about the US security guarantee to Europe and neglects the need for the EU to pursue its own strategic interests, backed up with military forces when required. The 'pro school' assumes too easily that the EU can overcome its disunity and that serious military shortfalls will be rectified within a couple of years. Aiming for "a certain degree of autonomy" might be a way out, but this raises several questions such as: what degree of strategic autonomy, for what purposes and which related military capabilities are needed? Furthermore, are Europe and the EU synonyms? Security and defence cooperation also takes place outside the EU (and NATO) in various bilateral or multinational formats, the importance of which has even increased after Brexit. European strategic autonomy, in particular when military power comes into play, cannot be regarded as an EU matter only.

1 'Borrell: EU doesn't need to choose between US and China', *euobserver*, Brussels, 2 June 2020, www.euobserver.com/foreign/148520.

For the Netherlands – an EU and NATO member state and actively engaged in multinational defence cooperation formats with neighbouring and other European countries – this raises fundamental issues, which will be addressed in this report. The key question is what the Netherlands should undertake to strengthen European strategic autonomy and its own national ability to act. What are the consequences for the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy, European defence cooperation, the relationship with NATO and the wider European security architecture? Political, institutional, military and industrial aspects are interrelated – thus, they will all be addressed in this report, albeit not each of them singled out in depth. The authors have aimed for a realistic yet ambitious approach, also addressing the issue of various degrees of strategic autonomy.[2] First, in chapter 2 the concept of strategic autonomy is dealt with; what does it mean and how can it be defined? Next, chapter 3 focusses on institutional aspects and the wider topic of European security architecture. The EU-NATO relationship takes a prominent place in the analysis. The question of what the required military level of ambition for European strategic autonomy could be, including the consequences for military and industrial capabilities, is addressed in chapter 4. In the following chapter 5, views on European strategic autonomy in various European countries are listed. Finally, chapter 6 lists the key conclusions and a set of concise recommendations for the Netherlands. The methodology applied to this report is based on a mix of literature desk research and interviews conducted with experts in European countries, the EU institutions and NATO.[3] Three external authors belonging to think tanks in France, Germany and Poland have delivered specific contributions which are annexed to the report. The authors would like to thank Corentin Brustlein, Barbara Kunz and Justyna Gotkowska for their valuable contributions, the content of which remains their responsibility. Finally, a survey was conducted among security and defence experts across Europe by listing various questions related to the issue of European strategic autonomy. The results have been taken into account in the report. Annex 4 lists the complete overview of the survey outcome.

2 Strategic autonomy in the wider sense – encompassing financial and economic aspects, natural resources and energy supply, etc. – is not discussed in this report.

3 The authors are grateful to Jochem Vriesema for his valuable contributions to the report.

2 Conceptualising European strategic autonomy

Debates about Europe's capacity to act autonomously are not new, but have been around since at least the 1990s, following the Balkan wars.[4] The European Security and Defence Policy[5], launched by the EU at the start of the century, aimed, amongst others, at military crisis management operations to be conducted either by making use of NATO assets or autonomously. Since then, almost all EU military operations have been planned and conducted autonomously. The publication of the 2016 EU Global Strategy sparked the birth of the concept of 'European strategic autonomy' (ESA). Ever since, the concept, and comparable terms such as 'strategic sovereignty', have received a great deal of attention from scholars, think tanks and governments throughout Europe. Nevertheless, there is still disagreement about the scope and meaning of the concept. Recently, the German Minister of Defence Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer portrayed the dilemma between remaining dependent on the US, on the one hand, while at the same time strengthening European military capabilities. She referred to "nicht strategisch ganz autonom werden".[6] In general, the idea behind ESA is that Europe should be able to stand on its own feet rather than having to rely on others. Essentially, this revolves around "the ability to set one's own priorities and make one's own decisions".[7]
In addition, to be strategically autonomous implies that one needs to have the means to implement these decisions alone or in cooperation with third parties.[8]

The need for strategic autonomy

The necessity to reduce the dependency on others has become more urgent in recent years. To a large extent, this can be attributed to the following developments. Firstly, the international rules-based order is becoming weaker. Russia and China, but also the US,

4 P. Järvenpää, C. Major & S. Sakkov, *European Strategic Autonomy. Operationalising a Buzzword*, October 2019, p. 2.

5 ESDP, renamed as CSDP (Common Security and Defence Policy) upon the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009.

6 In English: "not to become entirely strategically autonomous". See: *AKK: Rede zur Verleihung des Medienpreises*, Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, 23.10.2020, https://www.bmvg.de/de/aktuelles/akk-rede-medienpreis-steuben-schurz-3816700.

7 B. Lippert, N. von Ondarza & V. Perthes, 'Strategic Autonomy: Meaning and Relevance', in: *European Strategic Autonomy: Actors, Issues, Conflicts of Interest*, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, March 2019, p. 5.

8 P. Järvenpää, et al., European Strategic Autonomy. Operationalising a Buzzword, p. 1.

have played a critical role in undermining this order. Russia has shown an increasing level of aggression in Europe's eastern neighbourhood, exemplified by, among others, the Russo-Georgian War in 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the interference in eastern Ukraine. China, on its part, has become more and more assertive on the international stage over the past decade. The transactional approach of and the general dislike towards multilateralism from the US under President Trump have also contributed to the undermining of the international rules-based order. Furthermore, there has been a severe shift in the US' priorities when it comes to security and defence: over time the Asian continent has received more attention from Washington than Europe.[9] Moreover, the behaviour of the current US administration has led to doubts being cast about the reliability of the US as a NATO ally. Hence, the support provided by the US to Europe in the area of security and defence is no longer self-evident. Next to these external challenges, Europe is also challenged from within: Eurosceptic and nationalist governments threaten to weaken the political cohesion and solidarity of the Union. Examples of this trend include Brexit, but also the undermining of the European norms and values system by states such as Hungary and Poland.[10] Lastly, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic triggered further discussions on EU dependencies and the need to become more autonomous. European states are now increasingly aware that the need to be more independent has become more urgent.[11]

Given these challenges, there seems to be a consensus that an increasing level of independence is necessary in order to avoid that Europe will condemn itself to becoming irrelevant or, even worse, a field of geopolitical competition.[12] However, consensus on the scope and meaning of the concept is lacking, which is not surprising, considering the diverse strategic cultures and varying threat perceptions.[13] Consequently, this results in divergent interpretations of the concept and subsequent disagreement. According to some, ESA should serve a better transatlantic burden-sharing and prevent US disengagement, because in such a situation Europe will pay and do more to guarantee its own security. This view is widely expressed in Western

An increasing level of independence is necessary to avoid that Europe will condemn itself to becoming irrelevant or, even worse, a field of geopolitical competition

9 Ibid., p. 4-5.

10 P. Järvenpää, et al., European Strategic Autonomy. Operationalising a Buzzword.

11 R. Csernatoni, *EU Security and Defense Challenges: Towards a European Defense Winter?*, Carnegie Europe, June 2020.

12 U. Franke & T. Varma, *Independence Play: Europe's Pursuit of Strategic Autonomy*, European Council on Foreign Relations, July 2018, p. 2.

13 E. Libek, *European Strategic Autonomy: A Cacophony of Political Visions*, December 2019.

European countries.[14] ESA critics, on the other hand, put question marks against the feasibility of strategic autonomy, expressing doubts about how realistic it is for Europe to achieve strategic autonomy. Moreover, they have expressed concerns that pursuing strategic autonomy could offset or even offend the US, given the ambiguity of the concept.[15] These concerns are mostly expressed in Eastern European countries, in particular in the Baltic States and Poland.[16]

Defining European strategic autonomy

With regard to security and defence, the concept of 'European strategic autonomy' consists of three essential parts. Firstly, in this report, 'European' refers to EU member states and non-EU European NATO members. The reason being that a credible level of European strategic autonomy requires the involvement of states like the United Kingdom – no longer part of the EU after Brexit – and Norway, an important NATO member. Secondly, 'strategic' refers here to the safeguarding of one's own long-term interests in the field of security and defence. This would imply that Europe can be a credible actor among other powers, such as the US, China and Russia. Finally, 'autonomy' refers to Europe's ability to act on its own when deemed necessary. Based upon this, we define 'European strategic autonomy' as follows:

> *European strategic autonomy in security and defence is the ability of Europe to make its own decisions, and to have the necessary means, capacity and capabilities available to act upon these decisions, in such a manner that it is able to properly function on its own when needed.*

Inherent in this definition is the close interrelationship between the political, institutional, capability and industrial dimensions, as strategic autonomy can only be attained when these dimensions have simultaneously become a reality.[17] Hence, these four dimensions cannot be viewed in isolation considering that developments in one dimension may affect developments in the other dimensions. Politically, strategic autonomy refers to

14 Confirmed in interviews.

15 See for the debate on 'strategic autonomy' for example: P. Järvenpää, C. Major & S. Sakkov, 'Introduction', in: European Strategic Autonomy. Operationalising a Buzzword, p. 8-10; M. Drent, *European Strategic Autonomy: Going it alone?*, Clingendael Institute, August 2018, p. 2-4; and U. Franke & T. Varma, 'How does your country see US concerns about strategic autonomy?', in: Independence Play: Europe's Pursuit of Strategic Autonomy, p. 5.

16 A more extensive analysis of how Poland views ESA is provided in Annex 3.

17 M. Drent, European Strategic Autonomy: Going it alone?, p. 4.

Europe's ability to make decisions and take action independently.[18] The question remains, however, who will be able to lead the development of political autonomy. Institutional autonomy refers to the availability of the necessary governance structures, in order to prepare for and administer the decisions that are taken at the political level.[19] The existing institutional framework in the EU foresees this 'decision-making autonomy', albeit after Brexit one of the three largest European countries will be absent at the table. To associate countries such as the UK and Norway with the EU decision-making process as closely as possible remains a challenge – due to the legal basis of the EU – but it is most desirable for the European 'ability to act'. Next, in order to credibly implement the decisions taken, the availability of military, civilian, financial and operational capabilities is essential.[20] The availability of these capabilities will allow Europe to act independently when a conflict or crisis emerges.[21] There is a general recognition that Europe currently lacks the required military capabilities to act autonomously across the full spectrum. Here again, the capabilities provided by non-EU European countries should be taken into account. Being a member of the EU is not the sole criterion for delivering contributions to European military capabilities. Lastly, for Europe to achieve greater self-sufficiency in the defence realm, a stronger European defence technological and industrial base is required.[22] To this end, strategic autonomy in the realm of security and the development of skills and obtaining the appropriate technologies is necessary.[23] Eventually, this will allow Europe to deal with potential adversaries on its own. Subsequently, continuous investments in the technological and industrial defence base are critical. However, views on what should happen in order to realise a European defence technological and industrial base – instead of the current patchwork of nationally protected defence companies – vary widely, in particular between smaller countries and e.g. France and Germany.

> Strategic autonomy can only be attained when the political, institutional, capability and industrial dimensions have simultaneously become a reality

18 F. Arteaga, T. Jermalavicius, A. Marrone, J.P. Maulny & M. Terlikowski, *Appropriate Level of European Strategic Autonomy*, Armament Industry European Research Group, November 2016, p. 8.

19 P. Järvenpää, et al., European Strategic Autonomy. Operationalising a Buzzword, p. 12.

20 P. Järvenpää, et al., European Strategic Autonomy. Operationalising a Buzzword, p. 12.

21 F. Arteaga, et al., Appropriate Level of European Strategic Autonomy, p. 8-9.

22 N. Witney, *Building Europeans' Capacity to Defend Themselves*, European Council on Foreign Relations, June 2019, p. 9.

23 P. Järvenpää, et al., European Strategic Autonomy. Operationalising a Buzzword, p. 12.

Ultimately the main question regarding European defence remains 'what for'? The survey results – in which the longer definition stated above was shortened to 'the ability to act' – indicate no clear preference. The responses (in which respondents could choose multiple options) provide a balanced outcome: according to 46% of the respondents, ESA means the ability to act worldwide; 38 % held the opinion that ESA should focus on crises around Europe; and 46% indicated that ESA should be pursued for the purpose of Europe's defence. It is the latter that might be considered most surprising as the official policy of European countries, certainly of European NATO members, is that the Alliance continues to be the principal organisation responsible for the defence of Europe. However, if asked 'what is the impact of ESA on transatlantic relations' an almost two-thirds majority (62%) hold the view that it will strengthen NATO. Most likely, many respondents have not interpreted 'the ability to act for Europe's defence' as 'going alone', but as Europe delivering a larger share of the NATO defence burden.

Ultimately the main question regarding European defence remains 'what for'?

For too long the debate on European strategic autonomy has been dominated by the EU versus NATO issue. The call for 'a European Army' by certain political leaders has also contributed to this black and white picture: 'if you argue for European strategic autonomy, you are against NATO and you want to replace it by a European alternative'. Hopefully, the debate on the concept of ESA is now approaching calmer waters and if another term – sovereignty, independence, self-sufficiency, responsibility or others – may help in that respect, so be it (in this report we stick to the term ESA). European strategic autonomy in security and defence is not absolute either: the key issue is 'become more autonomous'. What that implies is addressed in the next chapters.

3 Strengthening the European security architecture

A key prerogative for European strategic autonomy in security and defence is the ability to decide on how, where and when to deploy military forces – also when American and European interests diverge. A more strategically autonomous Europe therefore needs a set of institutions and governance structures that enable both EU member states and European members of NATO to set joint priorities and decide upon a common course of action. It is exactly concerning this political and institutional dimension of ESA where some of the most pressing obstacles arise and where the ambition of European strategic autonomy meets the reality of sometimes overlapping, but often divergent strategic cultures, threat perceptions and national interests.[24] As some have argued, the EU in particular faces not only a *supply side* problem in the lack of capabilities, but also a *demand side* problem because of "the chronic unwillingness of most of its member states to act when a crisis or challenge emerges".[25] This 'demand side' problem is certainly not due to a lack of organisations or formats where such a demand could be articulated. On the contrary, both the EU and NATO already possess a wide range of political, legal and institutional instruments in the sphere of security and defence. European states nonetheless often seek solutions *around* these two main organisations by developing ever more formats with widely varying goals and compositions, which in turn disperses decision-making and risks undermining cohesion and effectiveness. On the other hand, cohesion – in terms of inclusiveness – can also hamper decision-making, in particular in crisis situations. The unanimity rule often results in delaying decisions with the 'lowest common denominator' as the outcome.

This raises the question of to what extent the existing European security architecture is able to accommodate the overall ambition of strategic autonomy, and which changes could be considered to move Europe further towards this overall direction. In this report the term 'European security architecture' will be defined as 'the combination

24 For a recent overview of diverging European threat perceptions, see: Daniel Fiott, *Uncharted Territory? Towards a common threat analysis and Strategic Compass for EU Security and Defence*, EU Institute for Security Studies Brief, July 2020. For an analysis of the different strategic cultures of a number of EU member states, see: Dick Zandee, Kimberley Kruijver, *The European Intervention Initiative – Developing a shared strategic culture for Europe*, Clingendael Report, September 2019.

25 See Y. Reykers, 'No Supply without Demand: Explaining the Absence of the EU Battlegroups in Libya, Mali and the Central African Republic', *European Security 25/3 (2016)*, 346–65; as cited in Niklas Novaky, 'EU it yourself: a Blueprint for a European Security Council', *European View* (2019) vol 18(2), p. 12.

of governance structures, capabilities, norms, ideas and values that allow EU member states and European non-EU NATO member states to collectively make decisions and take action in the realm of security and defence'.[26] This chapter analyses four potential options that are often put forward as avenues for strengthening the political and institutional dimension of ESA: utilising existing mechanisms and treaty articles within the European Union itself; improving EU-NATO cooperation and strengthening a European 'pillar' within NATO; building an interlocking network of smaller formats and coalitions of the willing; and finally the potential establishment of a European Security Council as an instrument of coordination.

The perennially underused potential of the European Union

Analysts have long argued that in order to enhance its role and fulfil its responsibility as a security provider, the EU only really needs to unlock the potential in the instruments it already gave itself with the Lisbon Treaty.[27] From a legal perspective this is certainly true. Since 'Lisbon', the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) contains a mutual assistance clause (Article 42.7) and a solidarity clause in case of terrorist attacks or disasters (Article 222). It also contains provisions for permanent structured cooperation between its members on security and defence (Articles 42.6 and 46, as well as Protocol 10), and even the option to entrust the implementation of CSDP missions to a voluntary group of states under the overall flag of the EU (Article 44). If these articles were to be truly used together and 'dusted off', they would provide the EU with a sufficient legal basis to achieve more strategic autonomy.

However, the fact that these articles are used only very rarely – or in the case of Article 44, never – attests to the fact that it is primarily a lack of political will and consensus, not legal provisions, that hampers the EU's effectiveness. At the core of the EU's much criticised indecisiveness and lack of coherence are three political factors: a deeply rooted reluctance by its member states to pool sovereignty in sensitive areas such as security and defence; their divergent strategic cultures and threat perceptions; and their tendency to (ab)use the consensus principle in a negative-sum rather than a positive-sum way, sometimes holding common initiatives hostage to push for specific

26 The term 'European Security Architecture' in this paper is not to be confused with proposals by the then Russian President Medvedev for a 'new European security architecture', understood as a delineation of spheres of influence on the European continent, as described in Bobo Lo, *Medvedev and the new European security architecture*, Centre for European Reform, July 2009.

27 See for example Anne Bakker, Sven Biscop, Margriet Drent, Lennart Landman, *Spearheading European Defence – Employing the Lisbon Treaty for a stronger CSDP*, Clingendael Report, September 2016.

interests elsewhere.[28] This does not only stem from the legitimate interest of member states to decide on the deployment of their own military forces, which is not even under discussion; it also extends to a reluctance to launch operations led by smaller groups of states under the EU flag within the framework of Article 44.[29] Country-specific concerns such as constitutional limitations in a number of EU member states or Denmark's defence opt-out further limit the potential of this article, even if the states concerned would not have to contribute troops to the mission themselves.

A lack of consensus also blunts the non-military tools of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) such as civilian missions and sanctions regimes, which makes it harder for the EU to deploy its full range of hard and soft power instruments in unison. In 2019, the Juncker Commission already called on EU member states to use the 'passerelle clause' of Article 31.3 to extend the scope of qualified majority voting (QMV) on three relatively 'soft' issues: human rights issues in international forums, decisions to impose sanctions regimes, and decisions on civilian CFSP missions.[30] Von der Leyen reiterated this in her State of the Union Address on 16 September 2020, so far to no avail.[31] Days after her address, in which she came out strongly in defence of the peaceful protesters of Belarus, Cyprus blocked the imposition of sanctions against the regime of Alexander Lukashenko and linked it to the EU response to Turkey. While this has rightfully accelerated the debate on the introduction of more QMV in a number of CFSP areas, the specific exclusion of 'military and defence implications' in Article 31.4 still means that a treaty change would be required to extend QMV to the deployment of military operations. Such a treaty revision is not likely in the short to medium term. An already existing option is to 'constructively abstain' from a decision to launch an EU military operation. Abstention also allows for non-participation in the common costs in the budget for the specific operation under the Athena mechanism. While the option of

Applying the abstention option to an Article 44 decision would at least somewhat alleviate the problem of the 'lowest common denominator' that so often harms the EU's operational effectiveness'

28 One example is blocking the extension of an EU civilian mission in the Sahel unless another EU member state lifted its reservations concerning an EU mission in Iraq.

29 For an overview of both the challenges posed to Article 44 and the opportunities it offers, see Maurice de Langlois and Benedicte Ara, *Article 44 of the Treaty on the European Union: enhancing efficiencies in EU operations*, Institute de Recherche Stratégique de l'Ecole Militaire, November 2015.

30 European Commission, *Qualified majority voting: a tool to make Europe's Foreign and Security Policy more effective*, State of the Union Factsheet 2018.

31 *State of the Union Address by Commission President von der Leyen at the European Parliament Plenary*, 16 September 2020.

abstention remains, the question is whether the financial 'opt-out' will be allowed under the new European Peace Facility that is to replace the Athena mechanism.[32] Applying the abstention option to an Article 44 decision would at least somewhat alleviate the problem of the 'lowest common denominator' that so often harms the EU's operational effectiveness.

As for collective defence, the fear of duplication and even competition with NATO has meant that Article 42.7 has hitherto been interpreted by EU member states in a cautious and restrictive way, focusing largely on terrorism, cyber and hybrid threats rather than a conventional military attack. Given the increasingly blended and complex nature of the threats facing the EU, this article nonetheless creates space for a more proactive role for the EU both in *preventing* and *countering* such threats.[33] Clearly, these are also the domains in which EU-NATO cooperation still has room to grow. The French EU Presidency in the first semester of 2022 might be aiming for such an interpretation of Article 42.7, in complementarity to NATO.[34] Other European countries seem to favour this approach. Table Top Exercises, already planned, will help to create more clarity on the meaning of Article 42.7.[35] With regard to hybrid challenges the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats in Helsinki, which is neither an EU nor a NATO facility, is already leading the way. However, in its desire for a more ambitious CSDP, and in order to increase its resilience, which the COVID-19 pandemic has proved is needed, the EU should step up. One way this could be established is by developing a counter-hybrid or disinformation strategy to combat, amongst other things, fake news.[36] Such a strategy could identify 'what to do' as well as 'who should do what'. Nationally, it requires a whole-of-government or even a whole-of-society approach. At the international level, it requires involvement by the EU in the broadest sense (with a CSDP contribution) and coordination with NATO. A more difficult matter is how the EU and NATO could respond if Article 42.7 were to be invoked by an EU member state in reaction to perceived or real *aggression* by a NATO ally, also because the mutual assistance clause in the EU Treaty is more stringent than Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty[37] The letter by the Greek foreign minister to his EU colleagues, in which he mentioned the mutual assistance under Article 42.7 in response to Turkey's intrusion

32 Information from interviews.

33 Francesco Giumelli, Eugenio Cusumano, and Matteo Besana. *From Strategic Communication to Sanctions: The European Union's Approach to Hybrid Threats – A Civil-Military Response to Hybrid Threats*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2018, pp. 145-148.

34 See Annex 1.

35 Information from interviews.

36 Dick Zandee & Kimberley Kruijver, *Covid-19: de geopolitieke gevolgen voor de EU*, Clingendael Notitie, juni 2020.

37 Article 5 states that each member state of the Alliance will assist other member states when they are attacked "with such action as it deems necessary". This restriction is absent in Article 42.7 of the EU Treaty.

into Greek Exclusive Economic Zones, has already turned this theoretical situation into a real issue.[38]

Finally, the key issue hampering the EU's ambition to achieve more ESA in the field of security and defence is Brexit. The loss of the UK's military might has become more worrisome as the British Prime Minister decided to exclude foreign, defence and security policy from the Brexit negotiations.[39] Until Brexit, the UK spent approximately a quarter of the EU's entire defence budget and provided around 20% of its critical capabilities, even if these capabilities were rarely employed in EU military operations.[40] Thus, while EU member states could make better use of existing EU instruments, they should also look further than CSDP to keep London on board. At first sight, the obvious direction in this regard would be for the EU to upgrade its relationship with NATO.

EU-NATO cooperation and a 'European pillar' within NATO

The EU-NATO cooperation debate has gained prominence as the EU's articulation of its own ambitions has increased. Two schools of thought dominate this debate: those who see the European pursuit of strategic autonomy as the EU *competing* with NATO, and those who maintain that both organisations fulfil markedly different roles and have clearly delineated mandates and responsibilities, and that they therefore *complement* one another which effectively means that there should not be any competition whatsoever. The truth lies somewhere in the middle: opportunities for EU-NATO cooperation abound, but NATO will still have to be somewhat more 'Europeanised' to enable Europe's own pursuit of strategic autonomy.

From the interviews and external contributions a clear picture emerges that for virtually all EU member states the Alliance should remain the primary organisation for collective defence, based on Article 5 of the NATO Treaty. Most EU member states seem to connect Article 42.7 to the protection against other security risks such as terrorism and hybrid threats; it should be complementary to NATO's core task and should not replace it.[41] While the EU Global Strategy reiterates the widely held belief that collective defence will remain the core task of NATO, it also indicates that the EU should be able not only to contribute to that objective, but also to carry out operations in which the US has no

38 Letter of the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikos Dendias to H.E. Mr. Josep Borrell, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President of the European Commission, Athens, 19 October 2020, https://club.bruxelles2.eu/wp-content/uploads/let-art42-7turquie@gre201019.pdf.

39 *PM's speech in Greenwich: 3 February 2020*, the UK government.

40 Jamie Shea, 'European Defence After Brexit: A Plus or a Minus?', *European View 2020* vol. 19(I), pp. 88-94.

41 Information from interviews.

interest.[42] Misinterpretations and political framing have created the notion of 'Europe going alone' with the EU replacing NATO which has sparked concerns across the Atlantic. On the other hand, the US has also voiced criticism of the Alliance in the context of fairer burden-sharing. In turn, this has raised concern in Europe about the American security guarantee, which has led European allies to engage in various 'hedging' behaviours by seeking alternatives to reliance on NATO.[43] These can be designed to keep the transatlantic bond alive, but predominantly serve to bypass the Alliance, by either strengthening bilateral relationships with the US or promoting European defence cooperation. The European policy option that is used most often is to reassure the US of NATO's ongoing value, an approach being led by the UK and predominantly supported by Northern and Eastern European countries. The other possibility is for European states to more firmly align themselves with the US. Poland is leading this approach, as it still regards NATO's efforts in Eastern Europe as unsatisfactory and President Andrzej Duda has called for a permanent American 'Fort Trump'. During 2019, NATO allies, Greece, Hungary and the three Baltic States, all agreed on bilateral defence arrangements with the US. The different strategies could divide the allies along their choice of sides, whether 'banding together' against the US, stalwartly supporting the American leadership, or aligning more with other powers such as China.[44] One way or another, the diverging European views and interests will enhance the already existing friction within the Alliance if European leadership is still lacking.

> Emphasising and strengthening European efforts in NATO can be a means to appease American concerns as well as to address some of the challenges of European's complex security architecture'

However, this can be avoided. Throughout the Alliance's history, including during the Cold War, various formats of forming a 'Eurogroup' or 'Europeanisation of NATO' have been mooted.[45] In particular the idea, originally stemming from the 1990s, to establish a

42 *European Union Global Strategy (EUGS -, Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe*, June 2016, p. 19.

43 See: Jens Ringsmose and Mark Webber, 'Hedging their bets? The case for a European pillar in NATO', *Defence Studies*, 2020, pp. 1-23; Nick Witney, *Building Europeans' capacity to defend themselves*, EuropeanCouncil on Foreign Relations, June 2019.

44 Ivo Daalder, cited in: Steven Erlanger, 'What if Trump Wins? Europeans Fear a More Permanent Move against Them', *The New York Times*, 18 February 2020.

45 See for example: Daniel Charles and David Albright. 'Europeanization of NATO', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 1984, pp. 45-46; Gustav Lindstrom and Thierry Tardy, *The EU and NATO – Essential Partners*, EU Institute for Security Studies, 2019.

'European pillar' within NATO has resurfaced. After the NATO Leaders Meeting in 2019, French President Emmanuel Macron offered the idea as a solution for the diverging views, as a stronger European pillar would strengthen the EU as well as NATO and help with the issue of burden-sharing. Emphasising and strengthening European efforts in NATO can be a means to appease American concerns as well as to address some of the challenges of European's complex security architecture. In our survey 62% of the respondents supported the notion that ESA will strengthen NATO – also a clear sign that in their view ESA should be interpreted as a stronger Europe in terms of security and defence, both for autonomous action as well as to the benefit of the Alliance.

The key question, however, is how this should work in practice. It can be looked at from both the 'what to do' perspective (tasks to be carried out) and the 'what is needed' element (the military level of ambition and required capabilities). The latter issue is addressed is chapter 4. A consensus is emerging that the EU should be able to carry out not only tasks like border control on its own, but also to conduct military operations in its direct neighbourhood independently from the US – including higher in the spectrum.[46] At the same time it is recognised that NATO remains responsible for collective defence. The issue is the overlap between NATO's second task of non-Article 5 operations and the EU's military CSDP operations for which it has autonomy since defence was introduced in the EU around the turn of the century. In the past, this overlap in what is also known as 'crisis management operations' resulted in e.g. parallel maritime operations near the Horn of Africa (anti-piracy) and in the Mediterranean. A more ambitious CSDP and an increased European military autonomy could first and foremost be translated into a leading EU role in such operations. The broad toolbox of the EU – from military means to civilian instruments of all kinds – makes the EU per definition a better equipped organisation to carry out such operations which require a comprehensive approach and a longer-term and more structural engagement to address both the symptoms and the root causes of instability. Furthermore, the US is winding down its own military engagement in the Middle East and Africa. Washington will welcome more European action. NATO could still provide back-up support or even conduct certain military operations itself 'out-of-area', but the Alliance would focus its main efforts on its first core task, collective defence – naturally to be adapted to 21st century requirements. Equally, the EU could help and coordinate with NATO to fill gaps in collective defence, in particular in the area of hybrid threats and challenges. In other words: there would be no formal

Important here is to refrain from the old-fashioned notion that the EU can only serve its defence interests in terms of soft power and should always fall back on NATO when hard power is needed

46 Clearly stated in the 2016 EU Global Strategy. Confirmed in interviews.

declaration of a division of labour, but a focus on a different priority task for both. Important here is to refrain from the old-fashioned notion that the EU can *only* serve its defence interests in terms of soft power and should *always* fall back on NATO when hard power is needed. Strengthening CSDP requires the EU to be willing and able to conduct crisis management operations 'across the board', including interventions high in the spectrum. The latter is confirmed in the survey: a large majority (69%) favour 'all necessary full spectrum military capabilities' for Europe.

Finally, it is particularly the nuclear dimension where the roles of the NATO and the EU diverge most. Virtually all EU member states consider the US nuclear umbrella to be vital for European security.[47] However, open discussions should be held about the possibilities to develop a second tier of European nuclear deterrence, especially if the transatlantic relationship would deteriorate further in the future. Post-Brexit, France remains the only EU member state with nuclear weapons. On 7 February 2020, Macron called on European countries 'who are willing' to engage in a strategic dialogue on the role of France's nuclear arsenal in European security.[48] Many EU member states are understandably cautious about replacing their dependency on the American nuclear umbrella with a dependency on France's much smaller arsenal, but in light of the uncertainty over the US and UK future defence relationship with Europe, continental European states would be wise not to decline this invitation outright. Macron's offer is not aiming at a *Eurodeterrent* and neither is it meant to provide 'extended deterrence'. It should be seen as 'a sign of ever-closer solidarity' and 'a signal to the aggressor that the conflict is getting closer to the nuclear threshold when the fate of Europe would be at risk'.[49]

A patchwork of smaller formats – the bottom-up battle

As a familiar way to circumvent the EU and NATO issues of membership statutes, consensus rules and other bureaucratic and time-consuming procedures, countries have often chosen to act in coalitions of the willing or to meet in smaller formats. These predominantly regional cooperation frameworks are more informal in practice and facilitate 'easy meetings' and 'quick decisions'. Different formats for different purposes exist. The three most important ones for the Netherlands are summarised. The Joint-Expeditionary Force (JEF) is an example of an operational multinational force, led by

47 German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), *(Nuclear) Sharing is Caring – European Views on NATO Nuclear Deterrence and the German Nuclear Sharing Debate*, Report No. 10, June 2020.

48 President Emmanuel Macron, *Speech on defence and deterrence strategy before the cadets of the 27th promotion of the École de Guerre*, 7 February 2020, https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2020/02/07/speech-of-the-president-of-the-republic-on-the-defense-and-deterrence-strategy.

49 See Annex 1.

the UK, which pools national military contributions in order to conduct joint operations when needed.[50] The Northern Group is an informal cooperation format that brings together partner countries to discuss issues in the region, such as military mobility and disinformation. Two out of its twelve members – Sweden and Finland – are not NATO countries.[51] Similarly, the latest addition to the European security architecture, the European Intervention Initiative (EI2), provides an informal and flexible platform for members to discuss security and defence topics, including their various threat perceptions, in order to bring their strategic cultures closer together. Moreover, the aim is to enhance the ability of its members to respond to future threats and crises.[52]

These forums, and many more, all contribute in their own ways to European security challenges, in different phases of the thinking-to-acting process, and in different collaboration combinations, regardless of EU and NATO affiliations. They strengthen European defence cooperation and thereby the European pillar in NATO. Operational formats like the JEF can together constitute core force components of the European part of the Alliance. By contributing to better burden-sharing, they could also deliver the key elements of European military capability to back up ESA.[53]

However, to accomplish more ESA in the longer term, Europe also needs more mutual understanding and convergence of the various national strategic cultures, with a view to promoting one overarching European strategic culture. While a more ambitious CSDP is certainly favourable, the EU's institutionalised defence and security framework does not stand alone. Smaller initiatives like the Northern Group or EI2 could be part of the solution. Whereas the Strategic Compass will provide *top-down* guidance to the EU's military level of ambition and should bring coherence to its many defence initiatives, EI2 could be the *bottom-up* format feeding information and ideas into the EU and NATO. The key to its success is the level of informality and flexibility, that creates room to talk to each other in a non-bureaucratic and non-politicised way. Within EI2 several working groups have been established so that each member can choose whether it wants to participate in a certain discussion. Topics include for example the Sahel and terrorism,

50 For more detailed information about the JEF, the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (CJEF), the Framework Nation Concept (FNC) and EI2, see: Dick Zandee & Kimberley Kruijver, *Another solution with added value? The European Intervention Initiative as a new kid on the block of multinational defence cooperation*, Clingendael Policy Brief, December 2019.

51 Alexandra Brzozowski and Alicia Prager, *Northern Group aims to step up regional security cooperation*, Euractiv, June 2019.

52 Dick Zandee, Kimberley Kruijver, The European Intervention Initiative – Developing a shared strategic culture for Europe. Fourteen countries have joined EI2: Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

53 As already argued in: Dick Zandee & Kimberley Kruijver, Another solution with added value? The European Intervention Initiative as a new kid on the block of multinational defence cooperation.

the Baltic Sea area, the Caribbean or legal military issues, including Status of Forces Agreements. Candid discussions can result in non-papers – with the EI2 stamp on them or not – to be sent to the EU and/or NATO to ultimately influence similar meetings and conclusions in these larger frameworks. Moreover, a level of influence also happens within the members' national contexts, as individual participants get to know each other and take information with them back to their capitals. Paris hopes that this will ultimately shorten the national decision-making procedures concerning the deployment of armed forces. A first example is the British-French-Dutch coordinated military action to provide assistance after hurricane Dorian caused enormous damage and a humanitarian disaster in the Bahamas. The EI2 model of bottom-up, informal influencing could represent the beginning of more European integration in the sphere of security and defence, and ultimately more strategic autonomy.

A European Security Council as the 'bridge beyond Brexit'?

While being more effective and faster than the cumbersome process of forging consensus within EU and NATO, the proliferation of smaller formats, vanguard groups and coalitions of the willing nonetheless pose both short-term challenges regarding cooperation and coordination and a longer-term question of strategic coherence and viability. Also in view of Brexit, President Macron has proposed – several times in recent years – to create a European Security Council (ESC), an idea that has received support from German political leaders including Chancellor Angela Merkel. However, discussions on the potential composition and role of an ESC have largely been left to think tanks and advisory bodies.[54] Ideas range from an upgraded meeting of the European Council – based on the principle of inclusiveness – to the smallest possible format of the E3 (Germany, France and the UK). The inclusiveness option would not end the existing problem of slow decision-making and ending up with the lowest common denominator. In fact, such an European Security Council would mean nothing more than the existing European Council in a 'security format'. The E3 option has the potential advantage of quicker decision-making, but runs the risk of neglecting the interests of the other European countries. To combine effectiveness with inclusiveness the Dutch Advisory Council on International Affairs has recently advocated a model of the E3+2. The NATO Secretary General and the President of the European Council would attend

54 Niklas Nováky, *EU it yourself. A blueprint for a European Security Council*, Martens Centre, March 2019. Earlier editions of the idea are articulated in P. Massart, 'Time for a European Security Council', Carnegie Europe, *Judy Dempsey's Strategic Europe*, 3 March 2017; O. Wientzek and C. E. Rieck, *Brussels' New Telephone Number? – How a European Security Council Could Strengthen EU Foreign Policy*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Facts & Findings no. 311, Berlin, August 2018.

all meetings, representing all other European countries and even Canada and the US.[55] In case of regional crises EU and/or NATO countries with a particular interest could join the meetings. Furthermore, the ESC would not be a new institution, but an informal gathering with rotating chairmanship (comparable to the G7). Few would be comfortable if such a Council could take binding decisions without democratic legitimacy and a sound legal basis, which would effectively make it an upgraded consultative body.[56] The Dutch Advisory Council's proposal takes this concern into account by arguing for a 'playmaker role' for the ESC – the format in which crises are discussed as well as the action to be taken, the execution of which is to be handed over to the EU, NATO or a coalition of the willing.[57] The Dutch government has rejected the proposal by arguing, amongst other things, that "*a priori* the proposed format does not seem to have added value for the Dutch role and influence with regard to decision-making on European security."[58] Legitimacy may also be an issue, even if an E3+2 format were only to prepare rather than formally to take decisions. Other models might be considered, e.g. E3-Plus consultations back-to-back with European Council meetings. The expert survey also points out that there is limited support for an European Security Council based on an E3 or E3+2 format. Over 50% argue for a composition with all EU member states, which could simply be the existing European Council. These results seem to reflect the concerns across Europe that an ESC even in an E3+2 format may not take into account the interests of those that are absent from the table.

Nevertheless, Macron's idea of looking for a more effective European forum, in particular in crisis situations, deserves further attention. The main added value of an European Security Council would be that it could be a quick, high-visibility step that could formalise and legitimise the already existing E3 practice and that would keep the UK linked to European security. In addition, if NATO and the EU are both represented at a high level it could also strengthen EU-NATO coordination and cooperation. Taking into account that a discussion on composition and other key governance elements could rather divide than unite Europe[59], it might be more politically expedient at this stage not to aim for a formal establishment of a European Security Council but rather to have it constituted by growing practice which to a large extent will be dependent on how the UK will engage itself in European security matters after Brexit. Furthermore, such a measure by itself is unlikely to be sufficient to address the more fundamental political

55 Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV), *European Security: Time for New Steps*, Advisory Report No. 112 AIV, June 19 2020

56 Information from interviews.

57 Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV), European Security: Time for New Steps.

58 Brief van de minister van Buitenlandse Zaken Stef Blok en de minister van Defensie Ank Bijleveld-Schouten betreffend Kabinetsreactie op AIV-advies "Europese veiligheid: tijd voor nieuwe stappen" aan de Voorzitter van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 5 oktober 2020. Translation into English by the authors.

59 Point made by several interviewees.

and institutional shortcomings that undermine the European ambitions of strategic autonomy. A longer-term approach is required, for which the bottom-up approach from formats such as EI2 and the Northern Group is better suited than top-down decisions by the 'big three' that risk alienating smaller EU members. Gradual strategic convergence, starting with a small but open-ended group of countries that act in unison within both the EU and NATO Councils, might be more promising in the long term than building yet another level on top of an already crowded European security architecture. Therefore, E3 consultation and coordination might best take place completely informally without raising questions relating to governance and composition at this stage.

… it is neither necessary nor desirable to entirely overhaul the European security architecture and to replace it with a new design

Considering the four options together, it seems that it is neither necessary nor desirable to entirely overhaul the European security architecture and to replace it with a new design. The essence is to adopt the existing institutions to the needs of Europe taking more responsibility for its own security. There is scope for activating or more clearly defining EU Treaty articles, in particular Articles 44 and 42.7 respectively. EU-NATO cooperation can be further improved and strengthened by a European pillar in NATO, while a de facto division of labour could also be considered (see next chapter). Smaller groups and coalitions of the willing play a role as well, either by generating multinational force packages or by aligning operational concepts. Politically, alternative and informal formats – such as E3 – will be required in circumstances in which quick decision-making and action might be required.

4 Military level of ambition

Today, the EU is playing in the world league when it comes to trade, but finds itself in the amateur third division in military terms. Promotion to the professional league will only succeed when its member states converge on strategic aims and strengthen the political, diplomatic, military and industrial capacities that have to underpin a geopolitical Union. Defining the level of ambition in security and defence is a prerequisite for moving in that direction. It is at the core of the debate on European strategic autonomy. The 2016 EU Global Strategy (EUGS) refers to "an appropriate level of ambition", while the Implementation Plan on Security and Defence – released in November of the same year – also falls short of defining "a new level of ambition".[60] It is expressed in terms of goals (fostering peace and safeguarding security within and beyond the EU's borders) and three tasks are mentioned: (i) responding to external conflicts and crisis; (ii) capacity building of partners; (iii) protecting the Union and its citizens. The third task has generated the most discussion as it might overlap with NATO's core task of collective defence, although EU member states that are also members of NATO have repeatedly stated that the Alliance remains the principal organisation for collective defence. Furthermore, since President Trump has put European NATO members under huge political pressure to spend more on defence, efforts to improve European defence capabilities – including through EU policies and instruments – have increasingly been expressed as contributions to a better transatlantic burden-sharing. In simple terms: better European military capabilities serve the Alliance; they do not compete with improving the NATO force's posture.

Strategic Compass and an EU military level of ambition

Nevertheless, the question of what the Europeans should contribute "to such collective efforts, as well as to act autonomously if and when necessary"[61] remains unanswered. The EUGS states that member states should have "full-spectrum land, air, space and maritime capabilities, including strategic enablers", but neither the Strategy nor the Implementation Plan defines a military level of ambition in terms of quantity (what size of military operations) or quality (what sort of capabilities). Repeatedly, EU Military Staff representatives and many think-tank experts have pointed to this flaw in the

60 *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe – A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*, June 2016; *Implementation Plan on Security and Defence*, Council of the European Union, 14392/16, Brussels, 14 November 2016.

61 EU Global Strategy, p. 19.

Union's capability development planning. Still, it took the member states four years to acknowledge that an additional step is needed. Based on a proposal of the Ministers of Defence of France, Germany, Italy and Spain, the Council decided in June 2020 to launch the development of the *Strategic Compass*, starting with a threat analysis to be concluded by the end of the same year. According to the Council Conclusions "the Strategic Compass will enhance and guide the implementation of the Level of Ambition agreed in November 2016 in the context of the EU Global Strategy (…). Building on the threat analysis and other possible thematic input, the Strategic Compass will define policy orientations and specific goals and objectives in areas such as crisis management, resilience, capability development and partnerships. The ongoing work on the security and defence initiatives will also feed into this process while the Strategic Compass should provide a coherent guidance for these initiatives and other relevant processes."[62] In other words, in the end the Strategic Compass should more precisely define the level of ambition defined by the EU Global Strategy. At the same time, it has to provide strategic direction and bring cohesion to the plethora of EU defence initiatives[63], undertaken in the last few years but for which overall political guidance is lacking. The EU's Capability Development Plan is considered as too general by listing broadly defined capability priorities.[64] The Strategic Compass should fill this void.

The carefully orchestrated time-schedule for the development of the Strategic Compass, starting with the threat analysis during the German EU Presidency in the second semester of 2020 and the French EU Presidency in the first half of 2022, might point to a Paris-Berlin 'deal' to take an important next step in defining the future course of EU security and defence. Leaving aside that it will take almost two years before the exercise will be completed, there remain serious doubts as to whether it will succeed for the reason that very little points to a fundamental change concerning the main drivers of disunity within the EU on the military level of ambition. First, Berlin and Paris themselves do not seem to agree. France underlines the importance of larger-scale, high-end operations and also points to wider security interests (economic, geopolitical, etc.) – thus broadening the scope of CSDP operations or 'going beyond CSDP'. If the EU will not deliver, the French have alternative formats available (coalitions of the willing). Germany seems to be willing to strengthen CSDP, quantitively and qualitatively, but is reluctant – to say the least – to apply military power in the broader sense of supporting the geopolitical interests of the EU. Furthermore, Germany is hesitant with regard to

> The Strategic Compass should more precisely define the EU level of ambition

62 *Council Conclusions on Security and Defence*, 8910/10, Brussels, 17 June 2020, para. 4.

63 In particular Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the European Defence Fund (EDF) and the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD).

64 Information based on interviews.

alternative formats (coalitions of the willing) due to political and constitutional limitations. Berlin favours "small, incremental steps in a bottom-up approach, seeking to have all EU capitals on board".[65] The diverging strategic interests – first and foremost between the eastern and southern parts of Europe – will continue to result in the different threat analyses and defence priorities of the member states. Furthermore, some member states will insist on complementarity between EU and NATO processes[66], will be reluctant to discuss EU operations and missions inside EU territory or might raise other political objections.[67] The first step in the Strategic Compass exercise might provide common ground on an updated threat assessment – as it is likely to take all possible threats on board – but the difficulties of the exercise will be to retain consensus among all EU member states when it comes to identifying 'the goals and objectives' in the next phase.

In the next steps of the Strategic Compass the EU could take a fresh look at the December 2008 European Council declaration on enhancing the European Security and Defence Policy, which defines several numerical and precise targets for military operations and civilian missions.[68] For example, the declaration mentions that the EU should be capable of conducting concurrently two major stabilisation and reconstruction operations of approximately 10,000 personnel maximum for at least two years. The declaration also refers to maritime or air surveillance/interdiction operations. None of these targets, already defined more than ten years ago, have been elaborated in more concrete terms later on. A permanent maritime presence in order to protect and defend the EU's overseas trade and other interests could be considered in view of the changed security environment in which sea routes might be challenged, in particular in the Indo-Pacific area.[69] Now is the time to take the 2008 targets on board in the discussions on the EU military level of ambition and to adapt them once the threat analysis in the first step of the Strategic Compass exercise becomes available. Finally, the question of enlarging the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) can no longer be postponed when the CSDP military ambition level is raised. In most European countries there seems to be a willingness to consider an expansion of the MPCC in relation to a more ambitious EU military level of ambition. This could be done

65 See Annex 2.

66 In particular the Political Guidance for the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP), latest version agreed in 2019, and the 'reflection process' launched by Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg.

67 Daniel Fiott, Uncharted territory – Towards a common threat analysis and a Strategic Compass for EU security and defence.

68 *Conclusions of the Brussels European Council of 11 and 12 December 2008 on the European Security and Defence Policy*, Press Release, Council of the European Union.

69 Suggested by interviewees.

in a gradual way, in which size and composition follows the realisation of a higher EU military level of ambition.[70]

In the context of the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) Germany leads the Crisis Response Operation Core (CROC) project, which is meant to conceptualise a military force needed for crisis management. However, as is currently known CROC envisages no more than a brigade-size force plus enablers.[71] In terms of size such a force is larger than the EU Battlegroup, but far below the original Helsinki Headline Goal (60,000 military) or the size of any of the two stabilisation operations mentioned in the 2008 European Council declaration (20,000). The CROC force might be suitable for smaller CSDP operations, but it falls short of a large-scale, high-spectrum European capacity as advocated by France and other European countries. Some have argued for an army corps "on which the EU objective of strategic autonomy would centre" while at the same time providing one of the three army corps provided for in the NATO planning.[72] The smallest contribution of member states should be a brigade. The corps would have all necessary support and enablers. It could comprise of both heavy armoured brigades and rapidly deployable motorised brigades, thus having components for both territorial defence and expeditionary crisis management operations. Comparable European formations should be planned for air and sea operations, based on building blocks consisting of frigates and squadrons.[73] In the naval area a multinational Western European Maritime Task Group as well as one for the Mediterranean could be established, consisting of all relevant capabilities above and below the water surface. A proposal has already been made for an European Air Intervention Group for high-end air campaigns, such as in Libya in 2011 and against ISIS.[74] Naturally, a more ambitious European military level of ambition should also take into account existing multinational defence formations, such as the Franco-British Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (CJEF) and the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), suitable for both territorial defence as rapidly deployable forces and for crisis management operations outside Europe. Here, the distinction between European and EU is very important: UK engagement in European security requires UK involvement in developing and deploying the required capabilities. This requires efforts in the EU, but when appropriate third country arrangements are absent or when London insists, for other reasons, on cooperating outside the EU framework, alternative multinational formats should be used to keep the UK connected to European security and defence.

70 Based on interviews.

71 Sven Biscop, *Putting the Core at the Centre – The Crisis Response Operation Core (CROC) and the Future of PESCO*, Egmont Security Policy Brief No. 119, December 2019.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

74 Nick Witney, Building Europeans' Capacity to Defend Themselves, p. 7.

The EU-NATO framework

The EU has to define its own more ambitious military level of ambition, but the question remains if the member states will succeed in view of their lack of unity on the matter. The solution could be provided by connecting the EU and NATO military levels of ambition. Contrary to the EU, the Alliance has a defined military level of ambition: one major joint operation-plus or two major joint operations and six smaller joint operations. The NATO guidance also stipulates that no single member state will deliver more than 50 percent of the overall force requirement. Several defence experts have argued for turning half of the Alliance's military level of ambition into a European one, which would imply that the European NATO countries should be able to conduct one major joint operation or three smaller joint operations – the other 50% being provided by the US[75]. Such a European military level of ambition could serve as the target for European autonomous military operations and – in the worst case – as a Plan B to have an alternative in case of an American abandonment of the Alliance's Article 5 security guarantee.[76] European governments do not refer to Plan B – which could undermine NATO and the need for continued US involvement in European security – but even a situation in which NATO has to defend its territory in Europe with reduced or no American military support is not unthinkable if the US armed forces would be massively engaged in a conflict in the Pacific area. Thus, an approach of defining what the European NATO Allies should be able to deliver can be regarded as one of the options for defending Europe.

This approach might make it more acceptable for countries demonstrating a reluctance to define a higher military level of ambition in the EU. How could this work? Once defined, the EU military ambition level could be incorporated in a coordinated EU-NATO political guidance for defence planning and capability development. The non-EU European contributions – such as from Norway and the UK – could be added to the EU input in the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP) in order to constitute the overall European contribution to the NATO military level of ambition. This coordinated EU-NATO approach would be advantageous both from political and military points of view. Politically, member states could more easily find common ground and agreement on a more ambitious EU military level of ambition as this would also be an input to NATO. At the same time it would allow for connecting countries like Norway and the UK to the European pillar in NATO. Militarily, it would

Europe should deliver 50% of the NATO military level of ambition

75 The Canadian contribution could be added to the US, together constituting the North American 50%.

76 Hans Binnendijk and Gene Germanovich, 'NATO needs a European level of ambition', *Defensenews*, 7 December 2018, www.defensenews.com/opinion/2018/12/07/nato-needs-a-european-level-of-ambition/; Dick Zandee, *Resetting NATO and European strategic autonomy*, Clingendael Alert, December 2019.

provide clear direction and targets as to what 'Europe' (EU members plus non-EU Allies) should aim for, driving their capability development efforts. Furthermore, it could provide the right narrative of "assuming a greater share of the burden of defending Europe" that "both motivates Europeans and avoids antagonising Americans."[77] In view of improving the transatlantic relationship such a coordinated EU-NATO effort would offer a clear-cut output goal in addition to the 2 percent defence spending input target. Our survey supports this approach: over 50% of the respondents have chosen for connecting the EU military level of ambition to the European contribution to NATO.

Naturally, a coordinated EU-NATO approach gives rise to a considerable amount of problems, in particular the non-overlapping membership – an issue still dominated by the Turkey-Cyprus issue – and the consequences of Brexit. The model leaves the respective responsibilities of both organisations intact; each will take its own decisions. In recent years, the EU and NATO have shown how to overcome political-bureaucratic obstacles by acting practically and bypassing formal structures. This could also be the way out for coordinating the level of ambition issue, e.g. by further increasing staff-to-staff contacts and avoiding statements to be agreed by all member states of both organisations. Furthermore, a coordinated EU-NATO approach has the advantage of combining the demands of regeneration (filling the European hard power capability gaps) and innovation for adapting security and defence to the digital age. It is in the latter area that the EU with its technology investment programmes and civil-military interfaces in strengthening resilience can deliver important contributions.[78]

The impact on capability development

The aim of Europe delivering 50 percent of NATO's conventional force posture, including eventually all support and enablers to operate autonomously, is a huge challenge. It could take decades and requires sustained financial investment. In 2019 an expert group analysed the consequences using two scenarios in which the US would not participate militarily alongside European nations: for defending the sea lines of communication the Europeans would need to invest up to $ 110 billion for capabilities that are currently lacking; for defending European territory against a land-attack by Russia this would amount to $ 357 billion over a period of up to twenty years.[79] This may sound like utopia, but if all EU countries would spend 2 percent of their GDP on defence,

77 Nick Witney, Building Europeans' Capacity to Defend Themselves, pp. 2-3.

78 Douglas Barrie, Ben Barry, Dr. Lucie Béraud-Sudreau, Henry Boyd, Nick Childs, Dr Bastian Giegerich, James Hackett, Meia Nouwens, *European defence policy in an era of renewed great power competition*, ISSS-Hans Seidel Foundation, February 2020.

79 Douglas Barrie, Ben Barry, Dr. Lucie Béraud-Sudreau, Henry Boyd, Nick Childs, Dr Bastian Giegerich, *Defending Europe: scenario-based capability requirements for NATO's European members*, ISSS, April 2019.

an additional amount of $ 100 billion would be available every year.[80] Even if half of that extra money were to be added to European defence expenditure year after year, it would be more than enough to finance the capability gaps in the coming twenty years. The survey reveals that 66% of the respondents regard European strategic autonomy in security and defence as being highly realistic or realistic in the coming 20 years. With the caveat that the precise European military level of ambition was not included in the question, one could conclude that at least "a certain degree of autonomy" is deemed as a realistic goal in the next two decades.

Money is an issue, but more importantly European countries have to step up multinational defence cooperation and they should invest together in capabilities to solve key shortfalls, most of which have already been known for two decades: intelligence and strategic reconnaissance, standardised command & control systems, air-to-air refuelling, precision munitions and long-range fire power. At the same time European armed forces should transform to the digital age. The civil-military interface for countering hybrid threats should be strengthened. While NATO provides the right political-military context for defining the European military level of ambition, the EU offers better instruments for addressing shortfalls in programmes and projects by using the European Defence Fund, the European Defence Agency as well as the institutional connection to civil actors and agencies. The issue is not a lack of tools, but providing the right political direction based on a much higher EU military level of ambition.

The economic consequences of Covid-19, if a vaccine to resist the virus were not to be available soon, could seriously endanger the upward trend in European capability development in recent years. Not only ongoing acquisitions to fill existing capability shortfalls but also European collaborative programmes for next generation capabilities – such as the Eurodrone and other future equipment projects – could end up in the danger zone of delay or postponement. In order to prevent a repetition of what happened after the financial-economic crisis more than ten years ago, the European Council (as well as the NATO Council) should state clearly that defence should be excluded from any government spending cut in view of the worsened international security environment and the need for a sustained European response, which would require member states to ensure multi-annual investment in defence.

Bring in industry

Strategic autonomy in military matters cannot be decoupled from the supply side: the defence industry. An ambitious European military level of ambition has to be underpinned by industrial autonomy in order be independent from suppliers outside

80 Nick Witney, Building Europeans' capacity to defend themselves, p. 3.

Europe. But should it apply to every piece of equipment or matériel the military are using? Furthermore, does Europe have to be self-supplying in all sectors of technology? Not necessarily. First, not all capabilities are critical for autonomous military action. For example, in the case of non-availability by armed forces transport aircraft, soft skin vehicles and other equipment can also be hired from civilian companies or bought on the world market. Second, European military already make use of dual-use capabilities such as for earth observation (e.g. by commercial satellites, the EU Kopernikus programme), global positioning (the EU Galileo programme) and maritime security (civilian maritime patrol aircraft, data from the European Maritime Safety Agency, etc.). Technologies related to intelligence and reconnaissance, command & control, sensors, data fusion and analysis and to many other areas are predominantly developed by civilian companies. The need for European defence industrial autonomy comes down to hard security capabilities, such as integrated platforms (tanks, armoured vehicles, frigates, submarines, fighter aircraft, etc.) and military-specific and encrypted types of reconnaissance and command & control systems.

The need for European defence industrial consolidation – that is ending national fragmentation and realising a real European Defence Technological and Industrial Base – has been on the agenda for decades. The attempt by the European Commission to open up the European Defence Equipment Market by regulation has failed.[81] Although this 'royal road' should not be permanently closed, the Commission is unlikely to succeed as long as key member states – hosting large defence companies – will continue to block a smooth drive. The solution has to come from member states working closely together in smaller groups, which should be mirrored by defence industries in the same countries. A good example is given by the industrial holding of Nexter in France and Krauss Maffei Wegman (KMW) in Germany to develop together the next generation of European tanks, armoured vehicles and other equipment with the aim of becoming Europe's leader in land systems.[82] To become such a leader, the Nexter-KMW holding should open up to other European companies in order to multiply standardisation and interoperability. However, creating a real European land vehicles producer is not simply an industrial matter. It requires involvement from governments in other European countries in order to create commonality on the demand side as well. Thus, deepening their defence cooperation with Germany and France is essential and it is not limited to the land sector. The Future Air Combat Systems is another originally Franco-German programme to commonly develop the next generation of fighter aircraft and unmanned combat systems. So far, only Spain has joined the programme, which is supported by the defence industrial cooperation of Airbus, the Thales Group, Indra Sistemas and Dassault Aviation. The British Tempest project with Italian and Swedish industrial participation shows that European countries are still duplicating efforts for the development of

81 The Defence Procurement Directive 2009/81/CE.

82 KNDS (KMW Nexter Defence Systems). See: https://www.knds.com/index.php/.

future generation air combat systems. The first steps have also been taken in the naval sector, e.g. by Germany and Norway developing new submarines. Belgium and the Netherlands have been operating the same frigates and mine-hunters for decades. They have agreed to commonly procure next generation ships of both types, thus continuing their integration model which allows for full interoperability and cost-efficient education, training and maintenance.[83] The European Defence Fund, despite its lower financial volume than originally proposed by the European Commission, should be fully used to stimulate cross-border defence industrial cooperation.[84] Naturally, it should be capability-driven: serving the priority needs of European armed forces based on the military shortfalls that have to be addressed to fulfil step-by-step European strategic autonomy. The existing instruments in the EU, activated in recent years – such as Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) – should be fully utilised to serve this goal, with giving priority to solving European military shortfalls that strengthen European strategic autonomy.

How to address the challenge?

A much higher EU military level of ambition and the aim of a 50% European contribution to the NATO's military level of ambition is an enormous challenge. Cynical analysts might call it unrealistic, an opinion supported by the record of what has been achieved in the last two decades by European countries in terms of improving their military capabilities: picking low hanging fruit, not taking bold steps to solve key European shortfalls.[85] Therefore, 'business as usual' is not the way forward. Europe has to take giant steps and these require first and foremost to set ambitious targets. Without them European political leaders will lack the 'goals and objectives' that the Strategic Compass exercise is aiming at. Without clearly defined goals and objectives, European countries will continue to sail without a compass, not knowing where to sail to and how to get there.

More practically, an ambitious European military level of ambition requires at least: (i) a sustained increase in defence budgets over the next decades; (ii) a further deepening of defence cooperation and the integration of armed forces; (iii) defence industrial consolidation; (iv) using civilian capabilities of a dual-use nature. With regard to budgets, European countries should commit themselves to longer-term investment plans, which – regardless of the outcome of elections or general cuts in government

83 Belgium hosts the mine-hunter education, training and maintenance facilities in Oostende while the Netherlands is hosting these facilities for the frigates in Den Helder.

84 During the negotiations with the EU member states the proposed amount of €13.5 billion for the years 2021-2027 was lowered to € 8 billion.

85 See e.g.: Dick Zandee, 'Quo vadis EDA?', *European defence matters*, European Defence Agency, 2019, issue #17.

spending – should be implemented. Countries with arrangements for multi-annual financing – such as Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands – could share their experiences with other European partners. The multi-annual national investment plans have to be coordinated at the European level – in synchronisation between the EU and NATO – and should be capability-based, that is to realise the military levels of ambition. A fifteen to twenty-year milestone could be chosen for full implementation. Intermediate steps could be formulated for a cycle of five years, with a monitoring and review process and, if required, taking additional decisions in the case of targets not being reached. Connected to this European defence investment plan, member states should step up multinational defence cooperation – using existing smaller formats as well as groups with a variable composition for the acquisition of new equipment connected to cross-border industrial collaboration. Finally, the scope offered by dual-use technologies and capabilities – in programmes such as Galileo and Kopernikus; for maritime and air surveillance, (force) protection, medical support and logistics – should be explored to the maximum. The consideration is not only cost-reduction, but also to connect defence more to the civilian market that is now leading in many technologies and producing at much higher speed than the defence market.

5 Views across Europe

As mentioned in previous chapters, ESA is a contested concept of which consensus among European states regarding the scope and exact definition is lacking. To provide clarity on how various European states are perceiving ESA, nine European states have been assessed: the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The selection of these countries is based on the assumption that their perspectives on ESA are divergent, also taking into account their divergent geographical locations.

Each individual country section starts with a summary of its perception of the main threats. This summary is mainly based on the security and defence strategies and policy papers of the countries concerned. Secondly, linked to threats perception the country's views on ESA are analysed, with particular focus on the institutional and capability aspects related to the military level of ambition. Thirdly, the country's views on how pursuing ESA might affect NATO are analysed, including the attitudes on American concerns about ESA. The three elements are not necessarily listed in the same order for each country.

Czech Republic

The national strategy documents of the Czech Republic list a various number of potential security and defence threats. Issues include: illegal immigration, cyber threats, instability and regional conflicts in and around the Euro-Atlantic area, and climate change combined with technological and demographic developments.[86] The 2015 security strategy also expresses concerns about the weakening of the multilateral security system.[87] Additionally, in its Long-Term Perspective of Defence[88], the Czech Ministry of Defence emphasises major security trends, including the use of force and a violation of international law as an instrument in advancing (political) objectives and pursuing power politics by ambitious states. Remarkably, the Czech strategy documents do not mention the potential threat posed by state actors like China and Russia.

86 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, *Security Strategy of the Czech Republic*, 2015, p. 13; Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic – Military History Institute (MHI), *The Long Term Perspective for Defence 2035*, 2019, pp. 10-11.

87 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Security Strategy of the Czech Republic, p. 13-14.

88 Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic – Military History Institute (MHI), The Long Term Perspective for Defence 2035, p. 9.

When it comes to responding to these challenges, the Czech Republic sees a role for both NATO and the EU. To this end, the EU should take more responsibility and share a bigger burden for crisis management operations and capability development, especially with regard to high-end capabilities. Prague aims for the EU to reach a level of ambition that gives the EU the ability to act effectively in crises in Europe's direct neighbourhood, in particular the southern flank (Middle East and Sahel regions) where crises may eventually destabilise Europe's own territory. In other respects, the EU has to take a bigger share in crisis management and, thus, realise a better burden-sharing. Furthermore, the EU has to strengthen its capabilities to deal with the new threats, such as cyber and other hybrid challenges.

However, the Czech government acknowledges that the EU is still far from being an autonomous player. A higher level of ambition will not be realised overnight, but requires a step-by-step approach.[89] Moreover, according to some there lies a risk in pursuing ESA, as the US might misunderstand ESA by perceiving it as a replacement for NATO. Therefore, the concept of ESA needs to be defined and explained more clearly to ease tensions in the transatlantic relationship.[90]

Denmark

In its 2019-2020 Foreign and Security Policy Strategy Denmark expresses concerns about a rapidly changing and unpredictable world.[91] Three main causes are mentioned to explain this trend: an increasingly threatening Russia, a more and more assertive China on the international stage, and the diminishing global leadership role of the US. For Denmark, one of the five Arctic coastal states[92], changing geopolitical dynamics in the Arctic region, mainly caused by increased Russian and Chinese presence, is of particular relevance. Next to these changing geopolitical dynamics, the country also prioritises migration, terrorism, cyber and hybrid threats as major security threats.

Copenhagen considers the concept of ESA as more divisive than unifying. Therefore, political labels should no longer be used and a shift away from discussing terms and concepts is necessary. Moreover, the preferred term is 'responsibility' with regard to ESA instead of autonomy.[93] In the Danish perspective, Europe should take more responsibility in safeguarding its security, but only in limited areas, namely in response to the challenges related to technology and hybrid threats, cyber capabilities, post-conflict

89 Information from interviews.

90 F. Arteaga, et al., *Appropriate Level of European Strategic Autonomy*, ECFR, 2019, p. 9.

91 Danish Government, *Foreign and Security Policy Strategy*, 2019-2020.

92 Greenland, although having a large degree of autonomy, is part of the Kingdom of Denmark.

93 Information from interviews.

stabilisation operations and crisis management in the EU's neighbourhood.[94] In the latter case, it is not a choice between the EU or NATO; both can play a role in the European southern neighbourhood as certain operations can best be carried out by coalitions of the willing, e.g. in cases where a clear legal mandate is missing.[95] Territorial defence is a NATO task and deepening ESA efforts can potentially disrupt the transatlantic relationship and the functioning of NATO. This eventually results in a position in which Denmark wants to pursue strategic autonomy to the extent that efforts should be limited to the abovementioned areas.

France

In France's 2017 Defence and National Security Strategic Review China and Russia are regarded as threats in terms of contesting and undermining international institutions and instruments, by favouring bilateral relations and the pursuit of economic influence in their respective neighbourhoods.[96] The same document also lists the following as threats or challenges: the arc of instability around Europe, with particular focus on the Middle East and the Sahel region; climate change; energy dependencies, international crime; but also contested spaces (maritime, outer space, etc.). In short: a very wide threat assessment.

France's interpretation of ESA is based on its national concept of autonomy. Transferred to the European level it would imply that Europe has the ability to assess, decide and act in situations where European interests are at stake. It is about Europe taking more responsibility for its own security and to act collectively.[97] Furthermore, ESA is defined on three different levels: political, operational and industrial/technological.[98] From a French perspective, ESA is more than only strengthening CSDP: "it is a legitimate ambition that goes along with sovereignty", which is not equal to 'going alone'. There are limits to autonomy, so there is a need for "allies and partners with whom we can maintain relations of strategically-calibrated dependence."[99]

After Brexit, Macron has promoted the concepts of ESA and 'European sovereignty' as part of the larger project of a *l'Europe qui protège* (Europe that protects). Florence Parly, French Minister of the Armed Forces, has stated that "strategic autonomy only has meaning if it is part of the European project: building our strategic autonomy means

94 U. Franke & T. Varma, *Independence Play: Europe's Pursuit of Strategic Autonomy*, ECFR, July 2019, p. 22.

95 Information from interviews.

96 *Defence and National Security Strategic Review 2017*, p. 18.

97 Information from interviews.

98 Arteaga, Felix, et al., Appropriate Level of European Strategic Autonomy, p. 8.

99 See Annex 1.

building a Europe of defence".[100] Building *I Europe de défense* entails the aim of building a defence architecture based on a framework of three pillars: the crucial role of NATO in providing collective and territorial defence, the EU institutional framework, and bilateral and multilateral cooperation (such as EI2). Thus, Paris considers ESA to be perfectly compatible with NATO membership as it will strengthen the position of European countries as security actors. The EU's focus can no longer be the sort of crisis management operations resulting from the Balkan wars in the 1990s. Militarily, the EU (or European coalitions of the willing) should be able to carry out operations high in the spectrum and on a larger scale as well as dealing with immediate threats stemming from international terrorism. Building a more common strategic culture is an essential prerequisite (hence EI2).[101]

In short, the French ambition regarding ESA reaches further than Europe's southern neighbourhood; it is about becoming a worldwide geopolitical actor, which will be a positive development for France, Europe and NATO.[102] For Paris ESA is 'existential'; it is about "being heard or drifting toward irrelevance."[103]

Germany

In its 2016 White Paper on security policy[104] and its 2020 Strategy Paper on Strengthening the Security and Defence Industry[105], Germany foresees multiple potential threats, including (transnational) terrorism, increased military activity at EU and NATO borders, increased employment of hybrid instruments, energy scarcity, and technological developments in the field of digitalisation and artificial intelligence.[106] Russia and, to a lesser extent, China are considered to pose the biggest threat.
By stating that these threats have far-reaching implications for the security of Europe and especially for eastern EU member states, Germany emphasises that the provision of crisis management capabilities is important. Traditionally, Berlin places multinational cooperation upfront for countering these threats. However, it admits that multinational cooperation projects in the recent past have been disturbed by many problems.
In response, several years ago Germany introduced the 'framework nation concept', which entails that one larger country assumes the responsibility for the development

100 Florence Parly, *Discours de rentrée de Florence Parly, ministre des Armées*, Paris, September 2020.

101 Information from interviews.

102 Information from interviews.

103 Ibid.

104 *White Paper 2016 on German security policy and the future of the Bundeswehr*, July 2016, p. 130.

105 *Strategy Paper of the Federal Government on Strengthening the Security and Defence Industry*, Die Bundesregierung, February 2020.

106 Ibid. p. 1-3.

and realisation of capabilities. It should be noted, though, that Germany develops FNC in the NATO context, i.e. focussing on territorial defence.[107]

With regard to ESA, Germany feels responsible for supporting France, although as a policy issue it has mainly resulted from the increasingly tense relationship with the US under President Trump. The German national discourse can be seen as a reaction to the view that the US has become unreliable in its position towards European alliances and rules-based multilateralism.[108] However, contrary to the French concept of strategic autonomy – European sovereignty to become a global geopolitical actor – Germany limits ESA strictly to security and defence. At the same time there is a reluctance to use the term ESA, because this terminology has caused a stir – in particular in view of decoupling European security from transatlantic security. NATO remains "the guiding star in German defence policy".[109] In a recent speech the German Minister of Defence Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer underlined the importance of the Alliance for European security, arguing that European countries first and foremost have to increase their contribution to NATO.[110] When it concerns European action on its own, Berlin limits the 'ability to act' to the CSDP crisis management tasks, including a higher military level of ambition, primarily focussed on Europe's neighbourhood. For example, if the EU were to deploy a brigade-size force to Africa, the member states should also provide all necessary enablers (reconnaissance, transport, etc.). CSDP is the preferred framework for its participation as coalitions of the willing often lack a clear legal mandate which is a key requirement for German participation.[111]

For aligning the different positions of European countries on ESA, 'European' should also include non-EU European countries such as Norway and the UK.[112] In that case, ESA will have a different connotation, removing the contentious aspects. Furthermore, it should be made clear that ESA – in terms of strengthening CSDP crisis management capabilities – is fully compatible with NATO. Practically, a division of labour would exist with NATO taking care of the eastern flank and the EU of the southern neighbourhood. Therefore, Germany emphasises the strengthening of European capabilities and support-related instruments such as Permanent Structured Cooperation and the European Defence Fund. French-German defence industrial cooperation can also help in developing a sense of urgency for improving European military capabilities.

107 Rainer Glatz, Martin Zapfe, *Ambitious Framework Nation: Germany in NATO*, SWP Comments, September 2017.

108 Franke & Varma, Independence Play: Europe's Pursuit of Strategic Autonomy, p. 26.

109 See Annex 2.

110 AKK: Rede zur Verleihung des Medienpreises, 23.10.2020.

111 Information from interviews.

112 Information from interviews.

Italy

In the Italian 2015 White Paper on Defence the main threats such as terrorism and conventional military attacks are perceived to be a national priority; other threats can be dealt with on a European level.[113] Based upon Italy's geographical location, the Mediterranean is the main region of interest for the country. The White Paper contends that Italy should play a leading role in international operations in this region, given the vulnerability of insecurity spillover, the nation's central geographical location and its knowledge of and relations with countries in North Africa.[114] Rome does not neglect the importance of other regions like Central Asia and sub-Saharan Africa and is therefore willing to contribute to missions there. Italy's policy documents do not highlight China and Russia as threats to its security. In contrast, after the outbreak of the Covid-19 crisis China – in particular as a result of its 'masks diplomacy' was considered by many Italians as a partner rather than a threat versus a hesitating EU – but such perceptions wither away as time goes by.

Despite these developments in the domestic discourse, Italy is an active player in European defence cooperation. In 2016, Rome proactively contributed to the launching of the EU Global Strategy. The country is ambitious with regard to European security and defence. It promotes the idea that Europe should be more involved in its neighbouring regions such as sub-Saharan Africa. As long as efforts do not compromise NATO commitments, Italy will support the pursuit of ESA.[115] However, Rome acknowledges that there is a definition issue, also because, officially, the country does not favour a division of labour between the two organisations (NATO-east, EU-south), although it seems to develop in that direction practically. Italy supports a proactive Europe that cooperates closely with NATO and believes that ESA contributes to burden-sharing.[116] In general, ESA should not be promoted as a process of decreasing dependency on US hegemony, considering that the transatlantic alliance is highly important to the country. Hence, it can be said that Italy is of the opinion that ESA should be complementary to national priorities and to NATO, which should cooperate with the EU to reinforce Europe's role as a security provider. The focus of such cooperation should be on the EU's neighbourhood[117] and on responding to new threats such as cyber-attacks.[118]

113 Andrea Gilli, Alessandro R. Ungaro, and Alessandro Marrone. 'The Italian White Paper for International Security and Defence'. *The RUSI Journal* 160.6, 2015, p. 34-41; *White Paper for international security and defence*, The Ministry of Defence, 2017, p. 8-14.

114 Ester Sabatino, *The Italian White Paper on Defence*, Rome Office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, November 2017, p. 6.

115 Franke & Varma, Independence Play: Europe's Pursuit of Strategic Autonomy, p. 30.

116 Information from Interviews.

117 Information from Interviews.

118 Franke & Varma, Independence Play: Europe's Pursuit of Strategic Autonomy, p. 30.

The Netherlands

The Integrated International Security Strategy 2018-2022 shows that the Netherlands is aware of a changing geopolitical environment in which traditional major powers like Russia and China are becoming more assertive and in which the role of the US as a leader is changing.[119] Alongside other political developments such as Brexit, the Netherlands sees many potential threats, varying from terrorism to cyber and hybrid threats. Since 2014, Russia in particular is considered to pose a threat to Dutch security, with the MH17 downing over eastern Ukraine playing a significant role in the public perception of Russia.[120] Although a recent poll[121] has revealed that only 36% of the population consider Russia to be a threat to the country's security, government documents continue to underline the Russian military and non-military hybrid threats. Furthermore, the Dutch security and defence documents frequently mention China, in particular in relation to its activities in the South China Sea and the economic expansion of the Belt and Road Initiative.[122]

The Defence Vision 2035, published in October 2020, portrays a comparable wide and complex set of security challenges and sets a new course for the Dutch Armed Forces to be adapted to the changing security environment. The document argues for more European *self-sustainability* ('zelfredzaamheid' in Dutch). Europe should be able to act independently when its own interests are at stake. The Dutch government will aim for an EU which is more capable of acting as a geopolitical player, able to protect and defend European security interests on its own.[123] Naturally, such a far-reaching aim will require huge investment in European military capabilities. It should also strengthen NATO and the inclusion of non-EU countries such as the UK is considered essential. Formats such as EI2, the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) and others can help in this respect.

In military-operational terms, the Dutch government aims at strengthening CSDP capabilities as the focus of ESA. Geographically, the priority region is Europe's southern neighbourhood, including sub-Saharan Africa.[124] Although there is no formal statement

119 *Working Worldwide for the Security of the Netherlands – An Integrated International Security Strategy 2018-2022*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

120 K. Van der Pijl. *Flight MH17, Ukraine and the new Cold War: Prism of disaster*, Manchester University Press, 2018, p. 1.

121 Bob Deen, Christopher Houtkamp, Hugo Klijn & Monika Sie Dhian Ho, *'What do you think: are the Russians coming?' – Polarised views on Russian threat in the Netherlands*, Clingendael Barometer Alert, September 2020.

122 *Working Worldwide for the Security of the Netherlands – An Integrated International Security Strategy 2018-2022*, p. 36.

123 *Defensievisie 2035 – Vechten voor een veilige toekomst*, Ministerie van Defensie.

124 *Pragmatisme voorbij – Het Nederlandse beleid ten aanzien van de rol van het Gemeenschappelijk Veiligheids- en Defensiebeleid in de Europese veiligheidsarchitectuur*, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, augustus 2020.

on a division of labour between the EU and NATO, practically the Dutch government seems to support the idea that the EU takes responsibility for the south and NATO remains responsible for the east. Capability development in the EU context should also serve NATO. Such a pragmatic and capability-related approach to developing ESA would be in line with Dutch ambitions.[125]

The Netherlands continues to define NATO as the cornerstone of Dutch and European security. The recent shift is towards a higher military level of ambition for the EU that should become capable of conducting operations in the highest parts of the spectrum. In response to a report of the (Dutch) Advisory Council[126] on International Affairs the Dutch government stated that the Netherlands is willing to cooperate closely with the French and the Germans. It promotes the development of the 'hard power' of the EU. If necessary, the Netherlands is supportive of using coalitions of the willing. It should even be explored if the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) could be used for operations by coalitions of the willing.[127]

Poland

In Poland's Defence Concept of 2016 the threat posed by the Russian Federation occupies central stage.[128] Russia's aggression against Georgia in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 are examples of how Polish documents describe Russia's way of enhancing a position in the global balance of power. Poland's main focus regarding potential security threats is on Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, the country recognises that there are also serious challenges along the southern NATO border, in particular in the Middle East and Northern Africa. Polish documents describe these challenges as deep, multi-faceted crises.[129]

In the past, Poland has been campaigning for a permanent stationing of NATO troops on its territory, as the US security guarantee is perceived as crucial.[130] Therefore, Warsaw has been rather sceptical towards the concept of ESA, because the term could proliferate misperceptions and create challenges to EU-NATO relations.[131]

125 Franke & Varma, Independence Play: Europe's Pursuit of Strategic Autonomy, p. 35.

126 *European Security: Time for New Steps*, Advisory Report No. 112, Advisory Council on International Affairs, June 19, 2020.

127 *Kabinetsreactie op AIV-adviesbrief "Europese veiligheid: tijd voor nieuwe stappen"*, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 5 oktober 2020.

128 *Security Environment of Poland Today and in 15 Years – Defence concept of the Polish Ministry of National Defence*, 2016.

129 *Polish Defence in the Perspective of 2032 – Defence concept of the Polish Ministry of National Defence*, 2016.

130 Franke & Varma, Independence Play: Europe's Pursuit of Strategic Autonomy, p. 90.

131 Information from Interviews.

A too proactive push for ESA can be perceived as the desire to terminate the dependency on the US, which poses a serious threat to the American involvement in European security. For that reason Poland also remains sceptical when discussing nuclear deterrence in a European context. The government in Warsaw strongly holds the opinion that ESA should complement NATO, and should avoid delinking, duplicating, or discriminating between the EU's and NATO's activities.[132]

Subsequently, Poland has limited aims in the context of ESA: restricted to areas like post-conflict stabilisation and crisis management rather than deterrence and territorial defence. Nevertheless, the country is supportive of ESA if it implies that Europe should pursue more responsibility for its own security, as this will contribute to both the security of the continent as well as the transatlantic relationship. Thus, the EU should not solely take the south into consideration for developing military capabilities. EU efforts should also reinforce NATO's capabilities, in other words "support (but not replace) NATO with regard to collective defence."[133] Furthermore, Poland underlines the importance of involving defence industries in medium and smaller states when it comes to strengthening the defence industrial base.[134] But ESA should not be interpreted as 'sovereignty' as this would touch upon the national prerogative in defence matters.[135]

Sweden

Sweden's National Security Strategy of 2017 discusses the fundamental challenges that both Sweden and the EU are facing.[136] Events such as the refugee crisis, Brexit, and increasing nationalistic tendencies in member states are used to explain that EU cooperation is called into question by a number of countries. At the same time the urge to cooperate on a European level is emphasised by Stockholm.[137] Sweden's geographical focus of its threats range from developments in the Arctic, the South China Sea to large areas near the EU's southern borders where instability, armed conflict, a lack of democracy, terrorist elements and a lack of human security and respect for human rights can be observed. An important actor in the country's threat analysis is the Russian Federation; the illegal annexation of Crimea and aggression against Ukraine demonstrate that Russia is fundamentally challenging the European security order and the principle of non-intervention.[138]

132 Franke & Varma, Independence Play: Europe's Pursuit of Strategic Autonomy, p. 90.

133 See Annex 3.

134 Ibid.

135 Information from interviews.

136 *Sweden's National Security Strategy*, Government Offices of Sweden – Prime Minister's Office, January 2017.

137 Ibid. p. 12.

138 Ibid. p. 12-14.

Given these challenges, Sweden is of the opinion that Europe should take more responsibility in protecting its own security. Recently, Stockholm announced a significant increase of 40% in its defence spending in the period 2021-2025.[139] ESA is seen as a relevant concept. There is no common understanding as to what the term means, and thus better communication about the definition is needed. In essence, the concept should not be considered as something absolute, meaning that ESA should not be approached as an end goal that European countries should strive for. In contrast, it should be seen as a tool that will help Europe in taking more responsibility to strengthen European security. Sweden believes that ESA serves Europe, but that does not mean that it excludes partners, like the UK and the US.[140]

Logically, Nordic security and defence cooperation with the neighbouring countries in particular has a central place in Sweden's policy. Even though Sweden is not a NATO member, it has become highly NATO-standardised through active cooperation with the transatlantic alliance; the country also has strong bilateral ties with the US.[141] Despite this, Stockholm has recently shown support for operational autonomy in its conception of ESA, stating that the "EU should act with our partners [whenever] possible, but on its own if necessary".[142] Nevertheless, Sweden has always had an uncomfortable relationship with European defence cooperation. This is showcased by its scepticism and voting behaviour towards defence issues, often aligned with the UK. However, as a result of Brexit, Sweden's opinion has shifted towards being increasingly supportive of EU cohesion and operational autonomy. Ambitions are limited to the EU's neighbourhood and sub-Saharan Africa, arguing that territorial defence is not a task for the EU. Sweden acknowledges that the EU has a varied toolbox with both civilian and military means, but the EU is still not deploying them in a concerted way.[143] Despite being a non-aligned country, Sweden stresses that ESA initiatives should not duplicate those of NATO. As Sweden emphasises that cooperation with the US is central to European security, Stockholm argues that the EU should not add more layers of bureaucracy to its defence efforts.[144]

139 'Sweden to increase military spending by 40% as tension with Russia grows', *The Guardian*, 15 October 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/15/sweden-to-increase-military-spending-by-40-as-tension-with-russia-grows.

140 Information from Interviews.

141 J. E. Møller, 'Trilateral defence cooperation in the North: an assessment of interoperability between Norway, Sweden and Finland,' *Defence Studies, 19* (3), 2019, p. 235.

142 *Joint declaration on EU Cooperation and Security by the Republic of France and the Kingdom of Sweden*, 2019.

143 Information from Interviews.

144 Franke & Varma, Independence Play: Europe's Pursuit of Strategic Autonomy, p. 42.

United Kingdom

UK policy documents like the National Security Strategy of 2015 discuss a number of security threats, including terrorism, espionage, cyber threats and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.[145] Russia is discussed extensively, making it clear that Russia's increasingly aggressive, authoritarian and nationalist stance poses a threat to the UK.[146] Another important security issue for London is China's changing role. The country was seen by the UK as a potential economic partner, which is warmly welcomed after Brexit. However, recent developments like the turmoil in Hong Kong has left the UK with doubts as to whether it should follow the US' position of seeing China as a strategic competitor which needs to be contained militarily and diplomatically, or whether it should continue its policy of engagement with wider international support.[147] Moreover, the British government is searching for a position in relation to the European Union to address these types of challenges, after its departure from the Union.[148]

When it comes to addressing these challenges, in security and defence terms the UK can still cooperate with other European countries in two ways. First, in NATO which London views as the main security provider in Europe. Second, through smaller multinational formats or bilateral relationships. The best example of such an approach would be the strengthening of Anglo-French security cooperation under the 2010 Lancaster House Treaty.[149] The two countries have key similarities: both are former colonial powers with an expeditionary culture; both are nuclear powers; both can deploy the full spectrum of military force; and both hold permanent seats on the United Nations Security Council.[150]

Due to the insecurity concerning the UK's future after Brexit, the general opinion in London is rather sceptical towards the EU's efforts to strengthen its defence capabilities through ESA initiatives. Unclarity surrounding the role of the UK in ESA leads to a situation in which the country wants to avoid the EU taking over traditional NATO

145 *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015*, HM Government, November 2015.

146 Ibid. p. 18.

147 Charlie Cooper, 'Britain toughens stance on China as it eyes U.S.', *Politico*, July 2020.

148 *Revisiting the UK's national security strategy: The National Security Capability Review and the Modernising Defence Programme*, Publications of the Parliament, UK, 21 July 2019.

149 On 2 November 2020 a joint declaration was issued on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Lancaster House Treaty, which pointed to a continuation of the existing bilateral cooperation. See: *Joint Declaration of the French minister for the Armed forces and the British Secretary of State for Defence for the 10*th *anniversary of Lancaster House*, November 2, 2020, file:///Joint%20FR-UK%20ministerial%20declaration%20-%2010th%20anniversary%20of%20Lancaster%20House.pdf.

150 Martill, Benjamin, and Monika Sus. 'Post-Brexit EU/UK security cooperation: NATO, CSDP+, or 'French connection'?.', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 2018, p. 855–859.

responsibilities such as collective territorial defence.[151] Therefore, London believes that the EU should focus on crisis management and post-conflict stabilisation in Europe's neighbourhood, complementary to NATO operations. The UK's main concern regarding ESA is that its ambitions may weaken the transatlantic alliance.[152]

151 Olivier de France, *Strategic autonomy and European security after Brexit*, IRIS-France Presse, March 2019.

152 Franke Varma, Independence Play: Europe's Pursuit of Strategic Autonomy, p. 43.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

The concept of ESA

European Strategic Autonomy (ESA) is a controversial and contested concept. This is mainly due to the continuous disagreement surrounding the scope and exact definition of the concept, and the potential implications of pursuing ESA. Nevertheless, states within Europe have become increasingly aware that a greater level of autonomy is required in order to address contemporary challenges, ranging from an aggressive Russia, an assertive China and the increasing instability in Europe's southern periphery.

ESA is a concept that has to encompass political, economic, military and other aspects. While the EU is a world power in economic, financial and trade terms, it is weak in the military sense. Therefore, for the EU to become a geopolitical actor, first and foremost it is key to get its act together in the security and defence realm. In that context ESA can be split up in the three constituting words:

- 'European' has to refer to EU member states and non-EU European NATO countries – for the reasons that important partners such as post-Brexit United Kingdom and Norway share comparable security interests and are important providers of military capabilities;
- 'Strategic' implies that Europe should be able to safeguard its long-term interests in the field of security and defence;
- 'Autonomy' refers to Europe's ability to act on its own when deemed necessary.

Taking these three explanations together ESA could be defined as follows: *European strategic autonomy in security and defence is the ability of Europe to make its own decisions, and to have the necessary means, capacity and capabilities available to act upon these decisions, in such a manner that it is able to properly function on its own when needed*.

In order to achieve ESA, it is important that progress is being made on the following four closely interlinked dimensions: politically, in order to take decisions independently; institutionally, allowing for inclusiveness unless it reduces effectiveness in crisis situations; capabilities, needed for autonomous action; finally, in terms of technological and industrial capacities, to be independent in areas for which supply chain security has to be ensured. Such ESA is not 'absolute'. When and where Europe can act with others – in particular the United States – this should be the preferred option. The same applies to import dependency: there is nothing wrong with supplies from outside Europe in case the products are not regarded as 'strategic' or when the delivery is guaranteed by a reliable

partner. European strategic autonomy should not be defined as 'going alone' all the way; it is about 'more autonomy', about increasing Europe's ability to act, together with others if possible and on its own when needed.

The European security architecture

The current European security architecture is varied and elaborate enough to accommodate the European ambition to achieve more strategic autonomy; ample instruments exist both within and outside the EU and NATO that could be strengthened without the need for significant treaty changes or new institutions. Especially Articles 42.7 and 44 of the Treaty on the European Union offer sufficient legal pathways to become more assertive in shouldering its own responsibility for the protection of its interests and the security of its citizenry, even if opinions vary on the interpretation of their scope and applicability. The latter should not block their use; discussing the matter is the way to find common ground. Coupled with a more 'Europeanised' NATO, in which European states are both 'strategic payers' *and* 'strategic players' that contribute half of NATO's capabilities, European countries can use two formidable international organisations that can deploy a range of civilian and military instruments to safeguard Europe's strategic interests and shoulder both its regional and global responsibility. Efforts to achieve a formal delineation of responsibilities between the EU and NATO are futile and counterproductive, given the fluidity of security threats and the political dynamics within each organisation. Both are better served by an implicit 'distribution of labour' whereby the EU takes primary responsibility for crisis management operations in its southern neighbourhood and NATO focuses on defending Europe from the threats from the east.

However, at the root of the problems regarding the political and institutional dimensions of ESA is the reluctance to pool or transfer sovereignty in the domains of security and defence, areas that lie at the very heart of sovereign statehood. It is this paradox of Europe's dual desire to be more strategically autonomous *as a whole*, while simultaneously wanting to preserve the national autonomy of its individual states, that sets it apart from the unitary actors that dominate the current geopolitical landscape. Ultimately, a fragmented Europe with widely diverging interests, threat perceptions and strategic cultures that continuously has to find patchwork solutions on a case-by-case basis will be less effective in the global arena than other major powers. Organising and managing this fragmentation in the quintessentially European way of compromise, cooperation and eventual convergence requires a sustained strategic conversation, both from the top down within the context of the EU's Strategic Compass and from the bottom up through smaller groups of 'frontrunners'. Frameworks such as the European Intervention Initiative (EI2) are explicitly designed to promote the convergence of strategic cultures; others, such as the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), have more operational objectives but also contribute to a further alignment of strategic outlooks of groupings of European countries. Such groupings can contribute to strengthening European strategic autonomy

while at the same time improving Europe's contribution to NATO. They can inspire other European countries and will stimulate the growth of a common strategic culture. But these processes take time, and history has shown that it requires a real sense of urgency before long-held positions begin to shift. The unstable geopolitical environment, the impact of Covid-19 and the stormy transatlantic relationship might just give enough cause for such a strategic conversation to be held – without holds barred.

The idea of a European Security Council should also be seen in this light of the evolution of European strategic autonomy. It is not a 'quick fix' for solving the fragmentation by superimposing yet another institutional layer on an already crowded security architecture. It should rather be seen as a desirable end result that completes a longer process of strategic convergence. Given the plethora of divergent national interests and a degree of mistrust among other European countries, a formal establishment of a European Security Council composed of the E3 (France, Germany and the UK) – even if the EU and NATO would be represented – might be counterproductive. A 'natural' process – 'just do it, don't argue first about a mandate' – seems to be the way to go. For effective decision-making in crisis situations, an alternative outside the EU is needed for the simple reason of including the UK and in order to act quickly. If the E3 are able to demonstrate leadership in a way that serves the strategic interests of Europe as a whole, then form can eventually follow function.

Military level of ambition

After a delay of several years the EU is now engaged – in the Strategic Compass exercise – in defining the military impact of the higher ambition level for its Common Security and Defence Policy, referred to in the 2016 EU Global Strategy. Based on the threat analysis, to be completed before the end of 2020, the EU has to take the next step in the course of 2021 to translate ambition into 'goals and objectives'. As the international environment has fundamentally changed – a combination of an assertive Russia, a rising China and increasing Sino-American tensions – Europe can no longer stick to the CSDP tasks defined in the distant past of the late 1990s.[153] The Union's approach to security and defence has to be stepped up, if it wants to become a serious geopolitical actor. First and foremost, this implies taking CSDP beyond its original purpose of the EU's role

153 Crisis management operations according to the Petersberg tasks, which were originally agreed upon by the Western European Union Ministerial Council in 1992. These tasks are: humanitarian and rescue tasks; peacekeeping tasks; tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking. In 1997, these tasks were incorporated into the EU (Treaty of Amsterdam). The Lisbon Treaty expanded the list with three new tasks: joint disarmament operations; military advice and assistance tasks; post-conflict stabilisation tasks. See: https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/common-security-and-defence-policy-csdp/5388/shaping-of-a-common-security-and-defence-policy-_en.

in crisis management – in practice, predominantly small military operations, in lower levels of the spectrum and, in recent years, increasingly of a training and assistance nature. To protect and, if needed, to defend the interests of the EU and its citizens the CSDP concept has to be broadened in scope and scaled up in terms of the force spectrum. In that context, the December 2008 European Council Conclusions may be taken into account and reassessed, in terms of more sizeable land operations but also air and maritime surveillance and interdiction operations. The latter can play a particular role in contested areas and seas the use of which is key to the economy, welfare and well-being of Europe and its citizens.

Agreeing on a more ambitious military level of ambition in the EU is a Herculean task due to both the diverging security priorities of its member states – in particular in the east and the south – and the defence spending and capability development challenges resulting from this. Without political, financial and military sustained engagement in the coming two decades, this task cannot be carried out successfully. The political solution to overcome the European split of security interests could be to connect the EU military level of ambition to NATO's. After inserting the EU agreed military ambition level – and the associated list of required military capabilities – into the NATO Defence Planning Process the military contributions of non-EU European NATO Allies should be added. Together, it delivers the European contribution to NATO's overall military level of ambition with both Europeans and Americans delivering half of the target. Such a 50:50 burden-sharing between Europe and the US would also add a very clear output criterion in addition to the 2% (of GDP) spending input target. Furthermore, this coordinated framework for the military levels of ambition of both organisations offers much better opportunities for coordinated capability development, defence planning as well as the EU and NATO monitoring and review processes. Finally, activities on seeking synergies and complementarity in counter-hybrid responses – already on the agenda of EU-NATO coordination – can be embedded in an output-oriented context, also for connecting non-military contributions in the EU to the Alliance's efforts.

The ambitious target for the EU military level of ambition and the European ambition level in NATO needs sustained support from the highest political level. In the European Council and in the NATO Council European countries should commit themselves to a 15-20-year milestone for realising these targets. In order to sustain the political pressure, intermediate targets could be defined on the basis of a 5-year cycle. At every 5-year mark an assessment should be made as to whether the intermediate target has been reached. If not, additional decisions should be made to correct the failure. Capability development, the selection of projects and acquisition programmes should be driven by the needs to fulfil the intermediate targets and the longer-term milestone. A multi-annual European defence investment plan could provide the framework for sustained financing by the European Defence Fund of the European Commission and, predominantly, by national defence investment budgets. Member states should be encouraged to follow the example of countries already having experience with multi-

annual defence agreements or equipment funds. Finally, more investment in European defence has to go hand in hand with more cross-border defence technological and industrial cooperation. Franco-German initiatives on next generation air combat systems and land vehicles is a good start, but a European family of air, land and maritime systems requires that such bilateral programmes are opened up, at the appropriate moment, to other European countries and their defence industries.

Views across Europe

It comes as no surprise that European countries have varying threat perceptions. For example, Denmark and Poland focus in their security strategies on Europe's eastern neighbourhood by expressing concerns about the assertiveness of the Russian Federation. Others, such as Italy, prioritise the southern neighbourhood of Europe by emphasising the developments in North Africa and the implications of migration flows. Western European countries, including the Netherlands, have a wider set of threat perceptions. As a result, interpretations and expectations of ESA are different across Europe in three main areas. First, there is no common view on the aim of ESA among the nine countries assessed (the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, the United Kingdom). Italy and Sweden remain supportive in pursuing ESA, while the Czech Republic, Poland and the United Kingdom have more sceptical views. Given the ambiguity of the concept, countries such as Denmark and Germany prefer to avoid using the term ESA, arguing that it should be replaced by 'responsibility'. Moving beyond the conceptual discussion, Germany interprets ESA primarily as Europe's ability to act – in particular in crisis management – while France highlights that strategic autonomy has a much wider connotation, i.e. related to Europe becoming a geopolitical actor. Despite these differences, there is one aspect that all countries have in common: all nine are of the opinion that Europe should take greater responsibility in safeguarding European security interests. Most importantly, there is no support for 'going alone'; all countries, including France, hold the firm view that Europe should act with partners whenever possible.

A second point of divergence among European countries on ESA is its impact on transatlantic relations. In particular Denmark, the Czech Republic, Poland and the UK are afraid that ESA might disrupt transatlantic relations and undermine NATO. France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands underline that ESA can and has to contribute to an increasing level of burden-sharing by Europe within NATO; in other words more strategic autonomy requires better European capabilities (owned by the member states) which will simultaneously also strengthen NATO. Although none of the nine countries is arguing for a formal division of labour between the EU and NATO, most of them seem to support the idea that the EU should focus primarily on the southern neighbourhood – using the broad toolbox of instruments, military and civilian, at its disposal – while NATO focusses its efforts on collective defence in 21st century-style against the threat from the east.

The third area in which the European countries have different positions is the issue of governance structures and institutions that are necessary for Europe to realise ESA. President Macron's proposal for the creation of a European Security Council has received lukewarm support from Germany only. The majority are of the opinion that existing governance structures suffice, both in the EU and NATO. Another significant issue is the question of who should be involved in European security: solely EU member states or also non-EU European NATO members. The 'EU-only option' has no support. The post-Brexit situation of the UK seems to generate wide support for having both EU member states and non-EU European NATO members involved, which underlines the importance of interpreting 'Europe' as 'EU-Plus'.

Finally, when it comes to Europe's military level of ambition, there is agreement among the nine countries that Europe should be able to independently conduct crisis management operations in its immediate neighbourhood, including high in the spectrum. This was already stated in the 2016 EU Global Strategy. However, when it comes to indicating what it means in terms of the sort, scale and intensity of military operations most countries hold their cards close to their chest or, perhaps more likely, they have not yet made up their minds as the Strategic Compass exercise has just started. Here, France – likely to argue for an EU military level of ambition related to the role of a geopolitical power – and Germany, favouring a less ambitious level and related to the 'classical' CSDP, may clash again during the next steps of the Strategic Compass activities. Other countries, such as the Netherlands, could play a role in finding common ground between Berlin and Paris. On a positive note, most countries seem to support the position that the EU should be able to respond to new threats – such as cyber and hybrid – for which Article 42.7 could provide the context in a complementary way to NATO's Article 5 responsibilities.

Recommendations for the Netherlands

1. The Netherlands should promote European strategic autonomy (ESA) as a concept serving its interests and those of its EU and NATO partners. Strategic autonomy is not 'going alone'; it has to be promoted as 'more autonomy', as increasing Europe's ability to act, together with others if possible and on its own when needed. By defining the aim of ESA and what is needed in political, institutional, capacity and industrial terms to implement it, the misinterpretation of the concept can be minimalised.

2. In order to realise ESA in the realm of security and defence four interrelated elements – political decision-making, institutions, capabilities, the defence industry – have to be addressed in a synchronised way. In other words, more autonomy requires 'more Europe' in all four elements. For the Netherlands, this implies a further orientation on security and defence cooperation with primarily Germany and

France but, equally, to actively strive to engage the United Kingdom in European defence matters.

3. A genuine move towards more strategic autonomy for the EU requires first to activate the unused potential of the existing treaty provisions in order to become more effective. The Netherlands should continue to support the European Commission's proposal to apply qualified majority voting, including with regard to civilian missions, sanction regimes and human rights. Furthermore, The Hague should campaign for mitigating the paralysing effect of the unanimity principle with creative measures. For example, 'constructive abstentions' could be used for military operations taking place under Article 44.

4. Building a common strategic culture and threat perception is key to increasing ESA. It requires sustained effort top-down and bottom-up. The various smaller formats that exist across Europe – such as the European Intervention Initiative (EI2), the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) and the Northern Group – should also be utilised for this purpose. The Netherlands should promote this utilisation of bottom-up multinational defence cooperation for the wider aim of contributing to ESA.

5. In the long term a European Security Council (ESC) could be created as the capstone, rather than the foundation of the European security architecture. The E3 (France, Germany and the United Kingdom) should form the core but other European countries may join as required, depending on the crisis at hand. It is important to 'buy in' the consent of other European countries for any smaller format that could meet in crisis situations. For the near term a 'natural growth path' seems to be the way forward rather than starting a discussion on the establishment of an ESC which may divide rather than unite European countries.

6. The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and its related military level of ambition have to be adapted to the changed security environment of the coming decades to address both complex military threats – from state and non-state actors, in Europe's periphery and beyond – as well as to contribute to countering non-military hybrid challenges such as cyber threats, disinformation and interference in elections. In particular with regard to CSDP operations, a more proactive attitude and more substantive participation is required from The Hague.

7. An EU military level of ambition in support of ESA has to be ambitious in terms of scope – from small to larger operations – and intensity up to the highest part of the spectrum. In order to become a geopolitical actor the EU should be able to deploy military forces to protect and, if needed, to defend its strategic interests such as the protection of sea lanes of communication. The Netherlands could reintroduce in the Strategic Compass exercise the December 2008 European Council Declaration, which mentions e.g. air and maritime surveillance and interdiction operations.

8. Politically and militarily, it makes sense to synchronise the EU and NATO military levels of ambition. This could be done by inserting the EU military level of ambition into the NATO process and, by adding the contributions of non-EU European Allies, to aim for a European half of the Alliance's military level of ambition with the US providing the other half. The Netherlands should promote this aim which will also deliver a clear-cut output target in addition to the NATO 2% input goal.

9. In particular France and Germany have different views when it comes to defining the sort, scope and intensity levels of European military operations other than for NATO's collective defence. Paris favours a military level of ambition related to the EU as a geopolitical power, while Germany wants to stick to the 'classical' CSDP tasks of crisis management. The Netherlands, supportive of strengthening the EU's geopolitical role while at the same time arguing for beefing up CSDP, can play a constructive role in bringing France and Germany closer with regard to the European military level of ambition. The Hague could also strive to serve as a 'bridge' to keep the United Kingdom engaged in European security matters and military operations.

10. Sustained high-level political involvement and long-term financial commitment are prerequisites for realising ambitious EU and European military levels of ambition. A 15-20-year milestone should be set with 5-year intermediate targets to be evaluated at European Council and NATO Summit meetings. Additional decisions have to be taken if intermediate targets have not been fully realised.

11. A European defence investment plan should provide the framework for long-term financing by the European Defence Fund and, particularly, national defence budgets. Commitments should be firm multi-annually and should not be changed due to the outcome of elections or other factors. Countries with multi-annual financial defence arrangements, including the Netherlands, should share their models and experience with European partners.

12. A stronger and more consolidated European technological and industrial base is a prerequisite for ESA in security and defence. Ongoing efforts to increase cross-border cooperation should be supported, not only by industry itself but also by governments. The Netherlands has to engage itself in the larger multinational procurement formats, such as the Franco-German future generation combat air and land systems programmes. Buying European will not be the rule, but should be preferential when it leads to more European standardisation and interoperability as well as to securing strategic industrial supply.

Annex 1

Why Europe should strive for more strategic autonomy – a French view

France has been a very active participant in the debate on European Strategic Autonomy (ESA). While the end result of European efforts toward greater strategic autonomy ought to be agreed upon among Europeans, viewed from Paris the bottom line is clear: we are nowhere near the degree of autonomy we should be striving for, and we should thus be doing more. However, from the beginning, the discussion on ESA has been plagued with misunderstandings and politicisation. Arguments from all sides have been caricatured or have fallen on deaf ears. France itself has sometimes contributed to this situation, as a gap seemed to exist between some blunt or imprecise presidential statements and the actual policy followed by the government. Yet, Emmanuel Macron's speech on deterrence and defence, delivered on February 7, 2020, has brought both clarity and depth to that topic and, as the single most important speech on defence matters of this presidential term, has helped to articulate in a coherent and careful way France's view on the value and importance of ESA[154].

It would be hard to fully grasp why France attaches so much importance to strategic autonomy without understanding the lessons it drew from its historical experience, and how they still, after decades, reverberate in national priorities. Seen through the lens of French national strategic culture, enjoying the highest possible degree of strategic autonomy should be a natural goal for all countries, but is one that becomes ever harder to fulfil. Even though it struggled to reduce its dependence vis-à-vis the United States during the Cold War, France still has no choice but to rely on its allies, whether to conduct strategically sustainable military operations or to design, develop, procure and maintain the capabilities needed to engage in war in the next decades. The consequences are that, from a French perspective, (1) there is nothing wrong *per se* with the aspiration for strategic autonomy, it is a legitimate ambition that goes along

154 *Speech of the President of the Republic on the Defense and Deterrence Strategy*, February 7, 2020, https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2020/02/07/speech-of-the-president-of-the-republic-on-the-defense-and-deterrence-strategy.

with sovereignty; and (2) since we all have to face the limits of our autonomy, we all need allies and partners with whom we can maintain relations of strategically-calibrated dependence.

Following the landmark presidential speech in February, this paper stresses three main arguments that support the current French policy on ESA: European security interests are already interdependent; stronger and more credible Europeans are needed to revitalize and rebalance the transatlantic alliance; Europe risks sliding into irrelevance if it does not find a way to define its shared interests and make them heard and respected by other powers.

Interdependent security interests

European countries have already reached a situation of the *de facto* interdependence of their security interests, and this can only deepen in the future. This can be easy to dismiss as the way each nation defines its security interests is strongly shaped by its national objectives, its strategic culture and its geography. One can hardly ignore this when comparing the predominant threat perceptions and strategic priorities of eastern Europeans with those of southern member states. Still, an increasing number of security challenges affect the majority of the European capitals in parallel, sometimes simultaneously. More than half a dozen European countries have been struck by terrorist attacks organised or inspired by ISIS (Islamic State). The return of great power rivalry translates into multiple ripple effects on our societies and economies, from information warfare and competition in outer space to trade war and the strategic use of foreign direct investments – all of which have potentially severe consequences for European collective security. Climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic are obvious examples of global challenges with effects on European security that, although indirect, could be very deep and lasting, and will in any case affect all Europeans. The logical consequence of this growing interdependence can be found in France's attempts to promote an ambitious interpretation of Article 42.7 of the Lisbon Treaty as the embodiment of European solidarity in the face of common threats, and as a useful complement to NATO's Article 5 that could be used to support non-NATO EU members such as Sweden and Finland, including militarily.[155]

The perception of our growing interdependence thus goes even beyond the recognition of how each of our nation's economies benefits from the EU and its member states, or the fact that we face common threats and security challenges, and is best reflected

155 *Transcription de la Conférence Conjointe du Président de la République, Emmanuel Macron et du Président de Finlande Sauli Niinistö*, Elysée, 30 août 2018, available at: https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2018/08/30/conference-de-presse-conjointe-demmanuel-macron-et-de-sauli-niinisto-president-de-la-republique-de-finlande

in President Macron's February statement on the role of French nuclear weapons in European security: "On that point, our independent decision-making is fully compatible with our unwavering solidarity with our European partners. Our commitment to their security and their defense is the natural expression of our ever-closer solidarity. Let's be clear: France's vital interests now have a European dimension."[156] From the point of view of France, then, the degree of interdependence between European nations has reached a point at which their vital interests may be at stake simultaneously – scenarios in which, for instance, the fate of Europe would appear to be at risk due to a major escalating conflict. In such a scenario, the French President might consider signaling to the aggressor that the conflict is getting closer to the nuclear threshold. France's invitation to European partners to start a dialogue on European security interests and to participate in combined exercises by France's nuclear forces follow the same logic. The proposal is neither a "Eurodeterrent" nor a French policy of "extended deterrence". A "Eurodeterrent" would imply that the decision-making process regarding the use of nuclear weapons would no longer be national, while an extended deterrence posture would imply that France offers explicit security guarantees to other European countries. Neither the former nor the latter is part of the President's proposal. Still, according to the current French president's view, and thus to France's policy, the nation's fate could be so intertwined with the fate of some of its European allies that it might credibly consider invoking its *ultima ratio* to protect them[157].

The only chance for a revitalised Alliance

A more strategically autonomous Europe does not mean the death of the Atlantic Alliance, but its best chance to remain meaningful in an era of renewed great power competition. It is in no one's interest to undermine the Alliance as the political, security and military challenges abound. But strengthening European strategic autonomy has nothing to do with severing the link between Europe and the United States, and everything to do with becoming better allies and forming a stronger partnership fit for the decades ahead, as is explicit in Macron's February speech[158]. That the European contribution to NATO's military power has been insufficient for decades is indisputable, so much so that in many capability areas needed for actual combat Europeans have become even more dependent on the US now than they were in the 1980s. Getting Europeans to pull their weight within the Alliance and finding a new balance within NATO is long overdue.

156 Speech of the President of the Republic on the Defense and Deterrence Strategy, op. cit.

157 In a different manner, President Hollande stated in 2015 that "who could believe that an aggression, which would jeopardize Europe's survival, would have no consequences?".

158 See for instance "[t]he Europeans must now take greater responsibility for this European defence, this European pillar within NATO".

ESA is not just about better sharing the burden with the US, but also about actually hearing it when it warns us about its long-term need to focus increasingly on competing with China and the strategic dilemmas it faces in doing so. For decades the US offered credible security guarantees to dozens of countries, including European NATO members, because its elites agreed on the benefits to be drawn from an active US involvement in world affairs and because for three decades the US military enjoyed a comfortable margin of superiority over any potential adversary. Both pillars have eroded: the consensus in Washington regarding the value of an active involvement in world affairs has been weakened by, among other factors, a decade of indecisive and costly wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a generational shift and a looming social and economic crisis; the US military advantage has reduced – even though it has not disappeared – due to China's increasingly ambitious military build-up[159]. Washington faces increasing trade-offs in terms of strategic priorities, and the message Europeans have received from their US ally has been consistent over time: contrary to what was the case before and during the Cold War, Europe will be neither the battlefield nor the prize of the competition for hegemony. Although these signals have become more blunt under the presidency of Donald Trump, they had appeared before it started and will still be there after it ends, whether in 2021 or in 2025. A Biden presidency, however appealing and appeasing it currently appears to Europeans, will reflect the same structural tendency.

In the longer term, European strategic autonomy should not aim at substituting every bit of military capability and support that the US has provided Europe while the former withdraws from the continent. Instead, it should be our way to convince Washington that we are increasingly credible allies and reliable partners. Efforts towards achieving greater ESA should aim at transitioning toward a more balanced and revitalised transatlantic partnership, in which the US contribution to European security would remain, but be refocused on specific attributes for which the US could not be replaced (including, for instance, extended nuclear deterrence, a "trip-wire" and some niche high-end conventional capabilities). For Europeans, this would mean not only being better able to handle the security and military challenges that appear in their immediate neighborhood, but also proving credible and reliable diplomatic and military partners for the US in their areas and domains of key interest, whether in the Indo-Pacific region or in outer space and cyberspace[160].

159 Eric Heginbotham *et* alii, *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard. Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power, 1996-2017*, Santa Monica, CA, RAND, 2015.

160 For a more detailed argument on that matter, see Corentin Brustlein and Luis Simón, 'Battle-Ready? Preparing European military forces for a more competitive environment', in Corentin Brustlein (ed.), *Mutual Reinforcement: CSDP and NATO in the Face of Rising Challenges*, Focus stratégique, No. 93, Ifri, October 2019, pp. 33-44.

Being heard or drifting toward irrelevance

Finally, one of the most important challenges ahead is to redevelop Europe's sense of ownership regarding its own security, which requires supporting the emergence over time of a European strategic culture. There are multiple dimensions to this. The European Intervention Initiative (EI2) is one of them, and supports this goal by allowing for the long-term development of habits of cooperation between European militaries that are able and willing to train and conduct military operations side by side. But the endeavour has to go beyond this practical dimension and include a substantial intellectual effort that, although it has to involve the armed forces, should not be limited to them. Being an US ally has been too comfortable, and decades of strategic dependence have damaged our ability to collectively think about our security, our role, and, perhaps more importantly, about our ability to be heard in the midst of geopolitical rivalries. This is particularly the case when thinking about the future of the European security and arms control architecture after the end of the INF treaty – a treaty which, although it aimed at mitigating the arms race and the risk of war in Europe, was signed, and ultimately abandoned based on decisions taken outside of Europe, in Washington and Moscow. As stated by France's current minister of state for European affairs, Clément Beaune, the ambition is about opening "[…] Europeans' eyes to the need for a powerful Europe that makes no apology for existing and knows that its fate cannot, and must not, be decided by outside powers. […] Europeans know that they must once again speak the language of power, without losing sight of the grammar of cooperation."[161]

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161 Clément Beaune, 'Europe after COVID', *Atlantic Council*, September 14, 2020, available at : https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/commentary/feature/europe-after-covid/.

Annex 2

Germany and European strategic autonomy: two constants at play

German thinking on security, defence and Europe traditionally revolves around two constants. First, Berlin conceives of its security, and consequently its defence, in and through multilateral frameworks. German security is ensured by the country's membership of the European Union (Common Security and Defence Policy-CSDP) and, first and foremost, NATO. The Atlantic Alliance continues to be the guiding star in German defence policies. Second, Berlin mainly sees its role in Europe as being that of a unifier which ensures cohesion, brings together divergent positions and helps to forge compromise – in particular under current circumstances when the European security debate is structured along East vs. South lines: the threat and challenges stemming from Russia vs. instability and unrest in the Middle East and Africa, which can be mirrored in territorial defence vs. expeditionary operations. These two constants are key in understanding how ideas on European strategic autonomy are received in Germany and how German thinking on European security and defence is evolving more broadly.

Like in the rest of Europe, Donald Trump's election as President of the United States came as a shock to Berlin. However, unlike some of its European partners – and notably France – Germany did not draw the conclusion that Europe inevitably needs a "plan B" to compensate for degrading transatlantic relations and uncertainties regarding US security guarantees. In fact, Angela Merkel's often cited 2017 'Beer Tent speech' ("the times when we could fully rely on others are somewhat over") has had no concrete ramifications in defence policies, neither at the national level nor when it comes to formulating ambitions for defence policies at the European level. Changes are nevertheless palpable in foreign policy in the general sense (e.g. in handling the United States' withdrawal from the JCPOA with Iran). More prominently, however, the field where ideas linked to strategic autonomy have most impacted German stances and rhetoric is digital sovereignty. Strengthening 'Europe's digital and technological sovereignty' has been made a priority of Germany's autumn 2020 EU presidency.

Security through multilateralism

Germany has no tradition of national strategic autonomy and thus no automatic propensity to think in those terms. This may be one reason why European strategic autonomy never became a declared German policy objective. More important reasons are nevertheless linked to the two constants identified above, and they pertain to both substance and wording. When it comes to substance, voices arguing that European security needs to be thought of in a radically different manner are a scarce phenomenon in Germany. Yet, the idea of Europe pursuing strategic autonomy in the realm of defence is considered a significant departure from the foundations of European security, centred around NATO. The French discourse on a waning transatlantic link is widely viewed as exaggerated (as well as an expression of structural French anti-Americanism). Hopes of returning to better transatlantic relations after Trump are still alive, and the fact that Germany does not really perceive any imminent military threat certainly contributes to a lesser sense of urgency in Berlin as compared to what can be felt in Paris. While today most of Berlin is aware of the fact that a return to some sort of transatlantic *status quo ante* (however defined) is unlikely, this does not automatically lead to the conclusion that radical change in European defence policies is the answer. Overall, CSDP continues to be seen as European integration rather than as 'actual' defence. To the extent that 'actual' (i.e. territorial) defence is deemed necessary, this is considered to be a task for NATO. The traditional German approach to CSDP as European integration therefore still appears to be a viable option: small, incremental steps following a bottom-up logic, and Germany's role is defined as that of the consensus builder rather than as the leader providing bold ideas and strategic guidance. It is in this light that German ambitions to further CSDP ought to be seen, including during the German EU presidency and with respect to the German-launched Strategic Compass project with its four baskets (crisis management, capability development, partnerships and resilience). This also applies to the European Peace Facility, as well as beyond the EU context to other notions such as that of Germany being a 'middle power' (*Mittelmacht*) or serving as a framework nation for smaller countries (*Anlehnungspartnerschaft*). In the same vein, it is hardly surprising that Germany is also not a key player in supporting French initiatives to fill Article 42.7 of the Lisbon Treaty with more life.

In sum, German efforts are thus directed at improving CSDP within the existing framework and remain in line with the hitherto agreed upon degree of ambition for EU defence policies. Rather than adding bold new ambitions to these pre-existing, historical ones, Berlin by and large wants to see the EU more able and more efficient in living up to them. This does not mean that Germany sees no need to invest in CSDP: living up to already stated ambitions in fact already requires the EU to strengthen its defence arm. The methodology continues to be made up of small, incremental steps in a bottom-up approach, seeking to have all EU capitals on board. In other words, German ambitions hardly go beyond making what already exists actually work.

Germany and France

These more limited ambitions stand in contrast to both French ambitions for CSDP (and other formats of European defence cooperation) and the idea of European strategic autonomy in a broader sense, i.e. understood as Europe acquiring the ability to defend itself without the United States. Berlin does not see the need for the latter. It is nevertheless in this wider sense that the term strategic autonomy is arguably most present in the German debate on (the future of) European security, in particular in light of increasing doubts regarding the transatlantic link and American security guarantees. In that context, the German debate is reflective of the general European debate, in which 'Atlanticists' are pitted against 'Europeanists'. One of the many flaws of this debate – at both German and European/transatlantic levels – is that the reference points ('autonomy in doing what?') of both camps in the debate are different. Atlanticists mostly interpret strategic autonomy as an attempt to decouple European security from the United States. In the Europeanist camp, arguments mostly refer to the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy, and therefore crisis management and peacekeeping operations. 'Defence' consequently means different things to different participants in the debate. Given that the Europeanist camp is not very strong in Germany, most arguments relating to European strategic autonomy are against such an ambition (however defined), pointing out the perceived risk of undermining the Atlantic Alliance as the cornerstone of the European security architecture.

Finally, as far as the "French" ambitions are concerned, i.e. a focus on the European Union's ability to intervene militarily, past experiences have left Berlin – like many other capitals – even more sceptical about such operations than it already was from the outset. This goes beyond CSDP: in a transatlantic context, Afghanistan is widely considered to be a failure. In a more European context, where mostly the French push for action, Mali is largely viewed as a potential quagmire. Operations in Northern Africa come with huge political risks at the domestic level, which are not seen as being outweighed by their security benefits. That Berlin is more comfortable with developing capabilities rather than using them is of course not a new observation and was e.g. at the heart of debates surrounding the launching of PESCO. Germany in general remains uncomfortable linking defence policies to security policy. While ideas on what Berlin would prefer its strategic environment to look like are relatively clear (with a rules-based order being on top of the priority list), thinking about the role that military power may play in achieving it makes Germans uneasy. Very importantly, therefore, and not always easy to understand for Berlin's partners (and Paris in particular), initiatives such as the Strategic Compass do not automatically imply that Germany is ready to show more military engagement.

Forging European compromise

The fact that European strategic autonomy is a French-driven concept is yet another, somewhat hidden reason why Berlin has never truly embraced it. Distrust vis-à-vis France, though widespread in many quarters when it comes to defence matters, is nevertheless not the main factor. Rather, the second constant plays an important role: given Berlin's ambition to bring together all its European partners in a compromise, Germany could hardly endorse something it knew would not take off in large parts of the Union, notably in its Eastern and North-eastern quarters. Seen from that angle, the Strategic Compass or the willingness to push for Europe's digital sovereignty are thus compromises in themselves. These projects pick up French ideas and can consequently be read as Berlin supporting its key partners in Paris – which, disagreements notwithstanding, is of crucial importance to the Germans. At the same time, their scope and ambition are well within German and pan-European comfort zones, including in their wording (sovereignty rather than autonomy – the former ironically being considered more palatable than the latter).

The limits of Germany's approach

In the debate surrounding European strategic autonomy, Germany thus stays true to itself. Berlin is much less concerned with developing a grand vision than it is with forging compromise and consensus. German initiatives are based on a bottom-up approach with incremental steps. Capability development is at their heart.

A critical appraisal of Berlin's efforts may consequently argue that they serve as some sort of *ersatz* (replacement) measures, and in two ways given that it allows for skirting two crucial issues. First, within a CSDP context, focusing on developing capabilities allows one to neglect the question of how, when and under which circumstances these very capabilities should be used and how decisions about this should be made. This is still the big unresolved question – both at the national level in Germany and at the European level. Nationally, the Grand Coalition's attempt at reforming the Bundestag's parliamentary reserve on military deployments (following the work of the so-called Rühe Commission, which published its final report in 2015) failed, leaving the issue hanging in the air. At the European level, disagreement among capitals has been the major obstacle to a more militarily active European Union. Ideally, the Strategic Compass will eventually be translated into a level of ambition and capability specifications, also addressing the question of when and how to use these capabilities. Whether any impetus in that direction will ever emanate from Berlin remains to be seen.

Second, and in a much larger context well beyond CSDP, the focus on capability development also allows activity to be displayed while leaving the key question of European security untouched: what if Europe indeed had to live without or with weaker US security guarantees, officially or de facto? In such a scenario, what would CSDP's

role be, and what would be expected of Germany? It seems evident that German bottom-up incrementalism cannot provide the answer as it will ultimately reach a conceptual glass ceiling. That said, neither can the notion of European strategic autonomy as currently debated across Europe be the answer.

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Annex 3

Poland and the European strategic autonomy debate

While analysing the Polish approach to the European strategic autonomy concept one needs to be aware of the different contexts of the debates in Western Europe and in Poland. The discussions on European strategic autonomy began in Western Europe in mid-2016. The starting point was the publication of the European Union Global Strategy, mentioning the term for the first time. French-German proposals on enhancing cooperation and integration in the EU followed as a response to the outcome of the Brexit referendum. Furthermore, the debate on European strategic autonomy in security and defence gained traction after the election of Donald Trump as the US President in November 2016, followed by increasing tensions in the transatlantic relationship, in particular with countries such as Germany.

In Poland this development correlated with the NATO Warsaw Summit held in July 2016. During the Summit NATO decided to deploy military forces in the eastern flank countries on a semi-permanent basis, which marked a breakthrough in the Alliance's deterrence and defence policy towards Russia. The Summit required months of preparation from the main players in the Polish security and defence establishment. Poland had to allocate considerable personnel and other resources, also for maintaining the momentum of NATO's decisions and their follow-up implementation. There was no interest in diverting attention to debates on further developing the EU's security and defence policy. Moreover, in the following years – while West European countries were involved in disputes over different policy areas with the Trump administration – Poland had been developing a bilateral partnership with the US that in the military sphere was finalised with the 2020 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement. The asymmetry of the West European versus Polish perceptions of the US as a European security guarantor was best shown with the announcement of the partial withdrawal or redeployment of US troops from Germany and with the mentioned US-Polish agreement on expanding Polish military infrastructure, moving the US Army V Corps Headquarters and additional 1000 US soldiers to Poland.

The Polish debate on European strategic autonomy has thus been limited from the outset, with the government and the public concentrating on strengthening NATO and US activities on the eastern flank. Moreover, the vagueness of the concept – i.e. whether it meant the EU's ability to autonomously conduct crisis-management operations in

the southern neighbourhood in the face of US gradual military disengagement from Africa and the Middle East or whether it alluded to gradually transforming the EU into a defence alliance replacing NATO – has not been helpful. There was also little public and even little official understanding of the gap between the narrative and the fairly modest (though complex) EU framework of military (PESCO, CARD, CDP), industrial (PADR, EDIDP, EDF) and financial (EPF, CEF military mobility) cooperation instruments that have been under development since 2016. In Poland, the European strategic autonomy concept has been widely perceived as an instrument of those countries which favoured a decoupling of Europe from the US in political, military and industrial terms. As such it was understood in Warsaw as being directed against vital Polish interests. The majority of the Polish political class still regard the US as Poland's main NATO ally whose political, economic and military presence in the region is of the highest deterrence value. Striving for a stronger US presence in Poland and at the same time supporting vague European strategic autonomy was therefore not an option. Thus, from time to time Poland's elected representatives denounced the concept in public, and Polish officials criticized the use of the term on expert and working levels. This perception has also influenced the debate on Poland's participation in PESCO. Parts of the Polish security and defence establishment perceived PESCO through European strategic autonomy lenses and were against Polish participation in 2017 when PESCO was discussed. However, other views prevailed in the debate and Poland joined PESCO in December 2017.

Polish preferences for "European defence"

In spite of the scepticism towards the European strategic autonomy concept it is in the Polish interest to strengthen European military output. There is a growing understanding that even if the USA is not withdrawing from Europe, Washington is adapting its military presence on the continent and Europeans need to do more in the southern neighbourhood and to reinforce, to a greater extent than is currently the case, the US forces on the eastern flank within NATO's collective defence posture. From the Polish perspective the preferred framework for increasing European efforts has always been NATO. However, the Polish government recognises that the process of reinforcing the EU's security and defence policy will continue and might also be instrumental for enhancing the security of Poland and the eastern flank. During the EU's internal discussion on PESCO Polish officials presented three caveats for Poland's participation. They also form the guidelines for the overall Polish approach to the development of the EU's security and defence policy. From the Polish perspective the EU's initiatives in this area should: (1) take into account threats and challenges both from the southern and eastern neighbourhood of Europe; (2) be beneficial to the development of military capabilities for both crisis management and collective defence; (3) support the defence industry not only in the largest EU members but also in the medium-sized and smaller states. There is also a tacit agreement that the term European strategic autonomy should be avoided. Summing up, the EU should not only be able to engage more in

crisis management in the south but also support (but not replace) NATO with regard to collective defence.

The Polish debate on the EU's role in crisis management in the southern neighbourhood has so far been limited. Warsaw has not developed an explicit strategy on EU priorities or on the relationship between EU engagement and engagement by other actors such as NATO and Coalitions of the Willing under US or French leadership. From Warsaw's perspective some form of US involvement in crisis management in the European southern neighbourhood needs to be maintained; NATO operations as well as Coalitions of the Willing under US leadership should be supported. There is also a conviction that Warsaw needs to show solidarity with its southern allies and demonstrate a military presence in the region. For that purpose Poland uses different frameworks of military engagement: NATO (operations in Iraq and Turkey), the EU (operations EUTM RCA, Sophia and Irini) and Coalitions of the Willing under US leadership (Iraq). From Warsaw's perspective the EU should not duplicate command structures for crisis management that already exist in NATO or at national levels; instead, the EU should use allied or national resources for this purpose. This is related to the lack of qualified military personnel that have to meet increased demand also in the NATO framework.

Poland would like the EU to support NATO's collective defence with regard to developing military capabilities and improving military mobility. This requires a broad definition of capability development priorities on the part of the EU which form the basis of the Capability Development Plan (CDP) and the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD). The priorities adopted in 2018 largely correspond to those of the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP), a positive development that needs to be continuously reflected in the CDP and CARD. Equally important is a balanced choice of PESCO projects that reflect the priorities of both southern and eastern EU member states. However, this requires that Poland (and other eastern flank countries) enhances its engagement in shaping military cooperation in PESCO by participating in a larger number of projects and by putting forward its own proposals. Poland is currently a member of ten projects and is the lead nation in one of them (the SOF Medical Training Centre). Additionally, all EU efforts (legal, infrastructural, financial) in improving military mobility are highly important for Warsaw.

For Poland, the goal of developing the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base has been problematic for various reasons. Warsaw treats military-technical cooperation with the US as a way of further strengthening US-Polish and US-European defence relationships. Therefore, it has been against the strategic autonomy of the European defence industry that could lead to a gradual exclusion of US companies from the European defence market. It has also opted for a permissive third party participation in the EDF and PESCO. In the process of enhancing US-Polish military relations, Poland has so far given priority to bilateral armament projects or it has bought US equipment off the shelf. However, Warsaw increasingly understands the need to

diversify the military-technical cooperation with its European partners. Currently one of main problems is the unwillingness of the two largest EU member states (France and Germany) to cooperate with Warsaw in key projects of Polish interest like the new generation main battle tank for which Poland will probably have the biggest demand within the EU.

The recent shift in the West European discussions on European strategic autonomy has not yet been widely noticed in Warsaw. The term "European sovereignty" that is gradually replacing or complementing European strategic autonomy in the debates aims to widen the understanding of the EU's autonomy beyond the foreign, security and defence agenda to include the ability to assertively shape policies on trade and industry, among others, in an increasingly challenging international environment.

Poland as a status quo country

In general, Poland may be characterised as a status quo country that has been profiting from its membership of NATO and the EU, and that is interested in preserving both organisations in their current form and structure. Its preferable policy choices are: first to keep the US politically, militarily and economically engaged in Europe; second to maintain NATO as the main US-European alliance with the priority of developing defence and deterrence vis-à-vis Russia; third to preserve the current shape and power balance in the EU.

Increasingly, these three preferences are being challenged. Polish answers to these challenges have so far been preservative. In the face of the Trump administration reassessing US engagement in Europe, Poland has bet on investing heavily in the US-Polish partnership at the political, military and economic level. With deteriorating US-(West) European relations the goal was to keep and expand the US engagement at least in Central and Eastern Europe. The conviction still prevails that US engagement is key to maintaining the integrity and sovereignty of the eastern flank countries that no European alliances can replace in the foreseeable future. At the same time Poland has a vital interest in maintaining a functioning NATO, even if it sees the organisation being faced with the increasingly different political interests of the major allies and a growing lack of political cohesion, to which the US, France, Turkey and Germany have each been contributing in their own way.

The main but underestimated challenge seems to be the development of a new Polish approach to the debates on the EU's adaptation to the changing international landscape. Brexit has changed the political configuration of the EU and Poland has lost an important EU ally balancing the Franco-German tandem. London and Warsaw shared similar approaches to many important policy areas including transatlantic relations, Russia, European security and defence, the internal market, the common currency and trade. Since 2016 the Franco-German relationship in the EU has been strengthened and

the position of Poland, a middle-sized member state with regional aspirations and at times differing interests, has become increasingly challenging. Therefore French ideas on European strategic autonomy and proposals for introducing qualified majority voting and a European Security Council along with “adaptations” in other policy areas are met with unease in Warsaw. They strengthen the conviction that Polish interests will be further sidelined and its relations with the US will be challenged in such an “adapted” Union. For Poland the pressure to choose between the EU and the US is the worst case scenario.

However, a debate in Poland on the future of the EU that takes into consideration Polish interests, the different positions of the main EU member states, the changing international environment and possibly a changed US-European relationship is overdue. A more inclusive approach on the part of France and Germany towards Poland might be a factor inducing such discussions.

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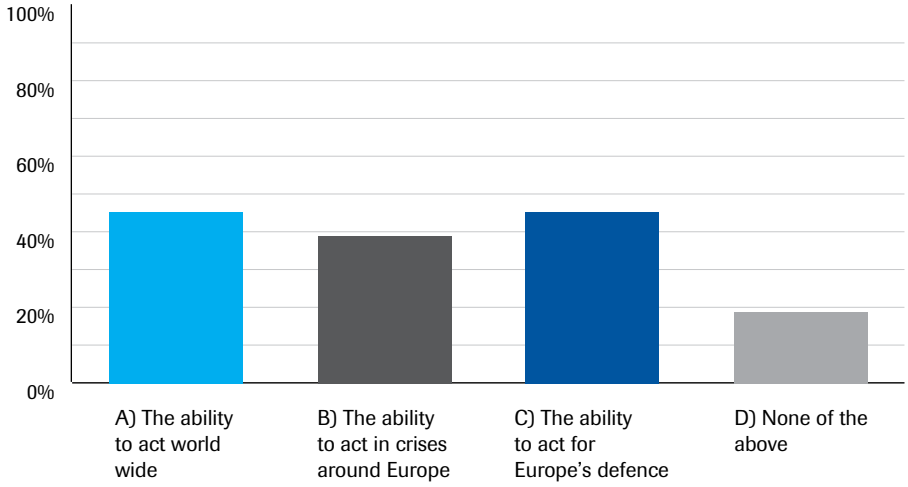
Annex 4

Survey on European strategic autonomy

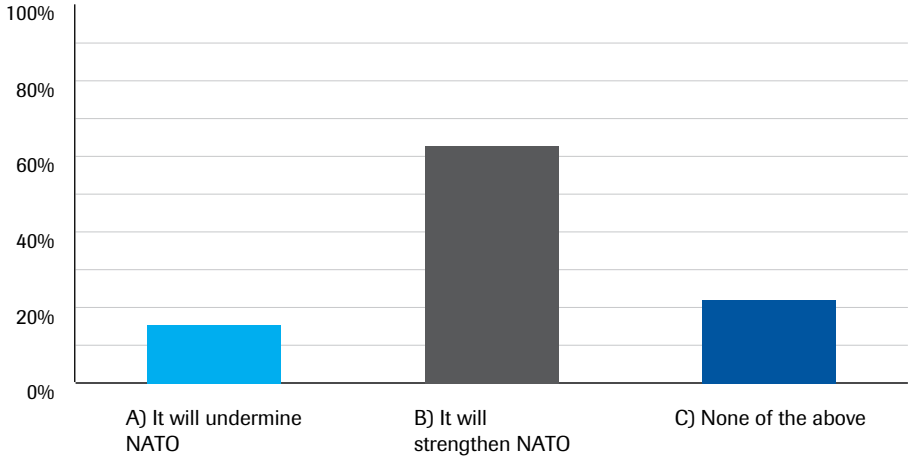
In order to diversify the methodology of this research and to be able to use additional information, a survey has been conducted among experts throughout Europe.
The survey has been used as an extra source of information, not as the sole input for analysis and drawing conclusions – a literature assessment and interviews with policy makers in various European countries form the basis. The survey results have been incorporated in the report to substantiate the main findings. The survey has been completed, anonymously, by 78 security and defence experts, such as policy-makers, defence attachés and think-tank researchers. Based upon the list of respondents who filled out their country of origin, it can be concluded that at least 16 experts of different European nationality took part in the survey, representing a geographically diverse group.

What is European Strategic Autonomy (ESA) in your view? Please choose from the following options (multiple answers possible)



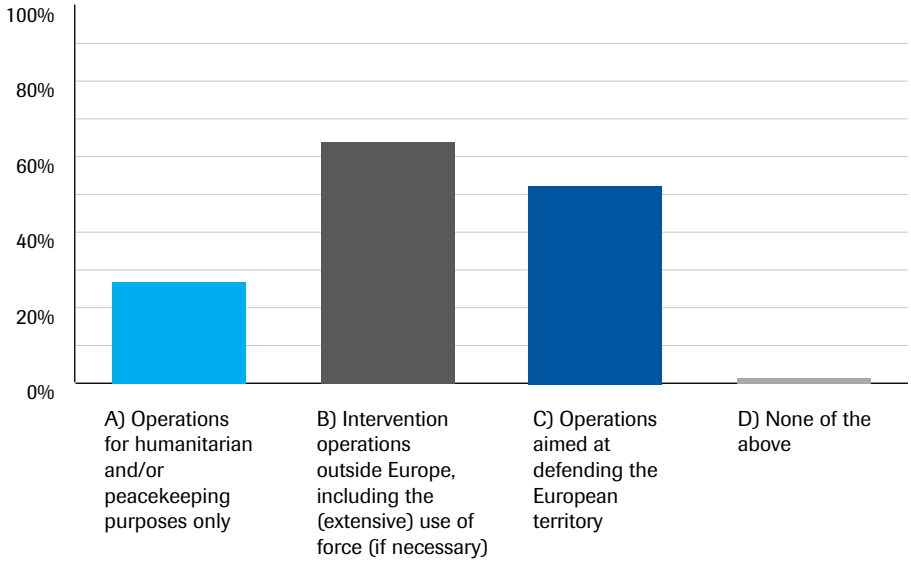
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
A) The ability to act world wide	45.57%	36
B) The ability to act in crises around Europe	39.24%	31
C) The ability to act for Europe's defence	45.57%	36
D) None of the above	18.99%	15

What is the impact of ESA on transatlantic relations/NATO? Please choose one of the following options



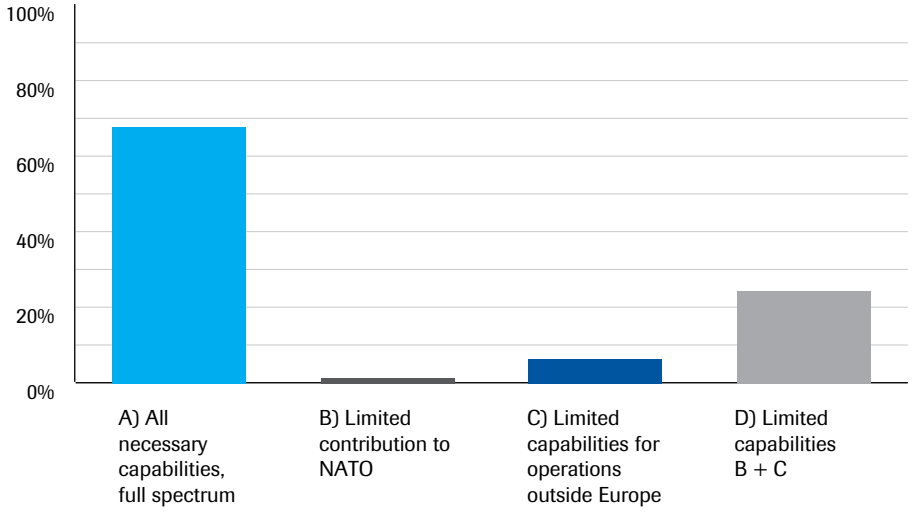
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
A) It will undermine NATO	15.38%	12
B) It will strengthen NATO	62.82%	49
C) None of the above	21.79%	17
		78

What military level of ambition should Europe aim for? Please choose from the following options (multiple answers possible)



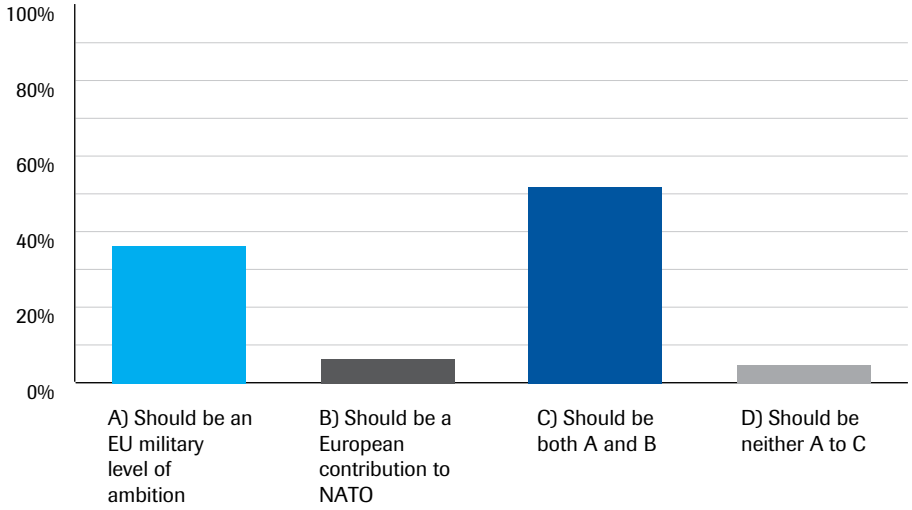
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
A) Operations for humanitarian and/or peacekeeping purposes only	26.92%	21
B) Intervention operations outside Europe, including the (extensive) use of force (if necessary)	64.10%	50
C) Operations aimed at defending the European territory	52.56%	41
D) None of the above	1.28%	1

What military capability level should Europe aim for? Please choose one of the following options



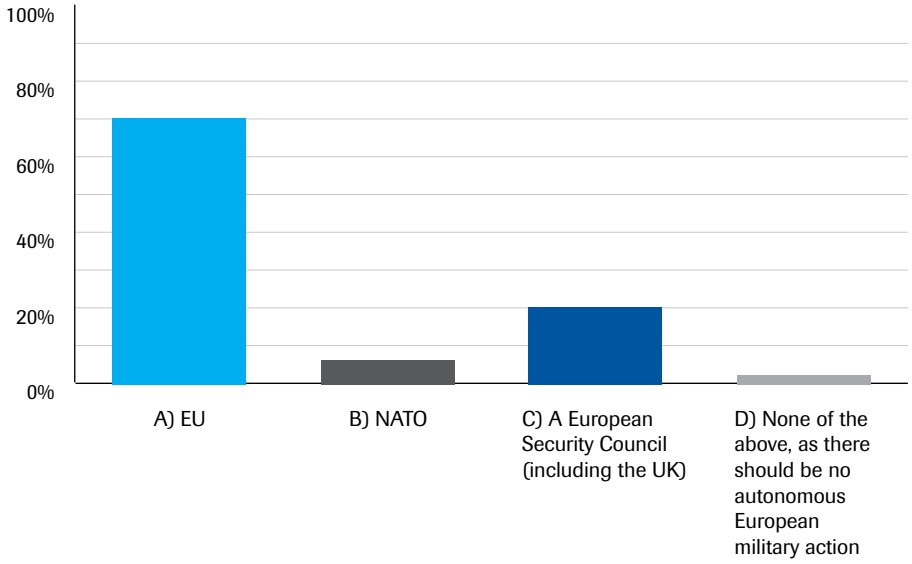
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
A) All necessary capabilities, full spectrum	67.95%	53
B) Limited contribution to NATO	1.28%	1
C) Limited capabilities for operations outside Europe	6.41%	5
D) Limited capabilities B + C	24.36%	19
		78

The European military level of ambition… Please choose one of the following options



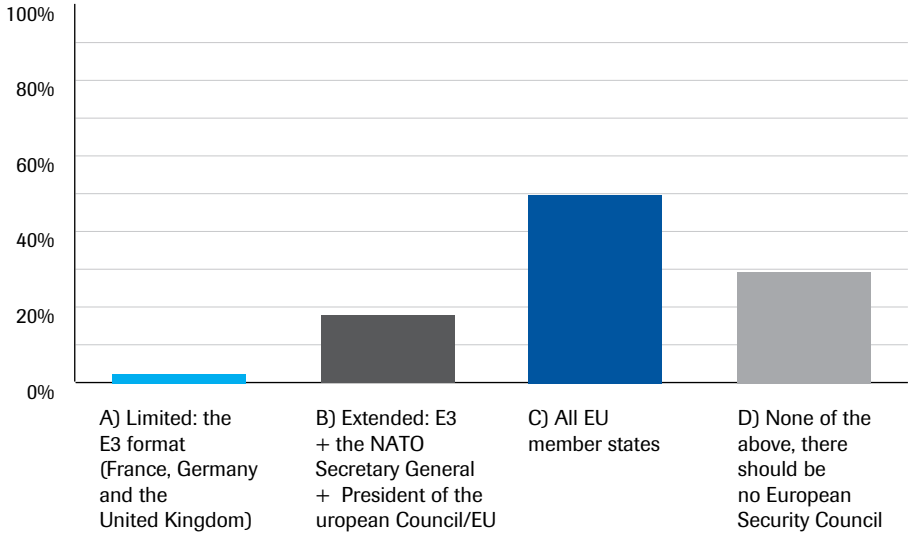
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
A) Should be an EU military level of ambition	36.36%	28
B) Should be a European contribution to NATO	6.49%	5
C) Should be both A and B	51.95%	40
D) Should be neither A to C	5.19%	4
		77

Which organisation should primarily be used for decision-making on autonomous European military action? Please choose one of the following options



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
A) EU	70.51%	55
B) NATO	6.41%	5
C) A European Security Council (including the UK)	20.51%	16
D) None of the above, as there should be no autonomous European military action	2.56%	2
		78

If a European Security Council is to be created, what should it look like?
Please choose one of the following options



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
A) Limited: the E3 format (France, Germany and the United Kingdom)	2.56%	2
B) Extended: E3 + the NATO Secretary General + the President of the European Council/EU	17.95%	14
C) All EU member states	50.00%	39
D) None of the above, there should be no European Security Council	29.49%	23
		78