

The European Union and the New Perfect Storm

The European Union and the New Perfect Storm:

*The Pandemic, Geopolitics,
and Populism*

Edited by

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**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



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This book first published 2023

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-9129-8

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-9129-5

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FOREWORD

THIS EUROPE, (STILL) SEARCHING ITS WAY

In 2016, when Europe was touched by systematic and synchronized crises – economic, political and strategic crisis – the Institute of Political Science and International Relations “Ion I. C. Brătianu” of the Romanian Academy provided the first big photography of that moment, in the Romanian academic literature. The volume dedicated to these complex crises was published under the title *Perfect Storm in Europe*. The authors, researchers of the Institute, made radiographies of the very challenging crisis files, in various items such as the financial crash in the USA, with its effects invading Europe; Brexit; the migration crisis which made the political European world explode; or the terrorist attacks, irremediably frightening the old continent.

Add to all these acute dynamics the geopolitical incursions of Russia, who was again “going shopping” in the “proximity neighbourhood”, and we have the complete picture of the moment.

We made an advertisement at that time in our volume, claiming that it was an unprecedented moment, and we predicted, in a realistic manner, without any excessive and inopportune shame, that the Perfect Storm to which we might assist would not conduce to the continent’s annihilation, but would surely affect the European integration phenomena, both on their horizontal and vertical axes (enlargement and federalization). The reaction to the Paris and in particular the Brussels attacks indicated the fact that a limit point was reached, beyond which there was no supportability for the achievement (*approfondissement*) of the European enlargement. This affirmation is valid for at least a non- determined period of time, necessary to the EU and Brussels to convince the European citizens that they still are the legitimate and credible holders of the identities and security concerns of the population.

The editorial success of the book was beyond expectations, and a second edition was rapidly issued. The interest of the public for the book themes encouraged us to make an editorial offer in Great Britain, where the volume was published without any delay, in 2017, by Cambridge

Scholars Publishing, under the title *The Perfect Storm of the European Crisis*.

The European crisis/crises were far from being consumed, obviously. The political mainstream fatigue, made clear by the 2019 European parliamentary elections, generated a landscape change across the continent, which maintained, however, its equilibrium, even if of the anti-mainstream trends, from the left or from the right, decisively gained the elections.

Europe was starting to work on its own crisis files, and there were many of them, and very difficult: the trans-Atlantic relationship, the sanctions against Russia and the search of a *modus vivendi* with a neighbour with whom Europe would not wish to confront, the West Balkans and the frontier security, and the silent insinuation of the idea of Fortress Europe, the endemic incapacity to choose between federalism and intergovernmentalism, the idea of the strategic autonomy of the continent, as a propulsion for a Trump-free Europe in the direction of a new global strategic impulse etc.

This seeming tranquillity was, again, interrupted by storms. The first was the pandemic, deeply disrupting Europe, the second, the Chinese defy. If the pandemic did not generate the Chinese challenge, in return it revealed it, like a terrible and cruel litmus paper. And Europe was again in troubles. More, after the American elections and the installation of a new Washington administration (“Biden-Harris”) Europe was laughing with one eye, and crying with the other. Europe laughs, for escaping from a “bully” such as Donald Trump, but cries, because the “multilateralist” Biden attaches it to the hegemonic and triumphal chariot of the Americans, cutting off the European pretensions of “strategic autonomy”.

Again, Europe is searching for its strategic identity, but is conducting that search in a time when the pandemic is not definitively closed – who could predict how many pandemic waves we would be confronted with in the future? –, and when the political and economic effects of the medical crisis have not yet exposed their full potential. And this reflection was the starting point for the idea of elaborating and publishing the first chronicle on the pandemic in Romania: *Fighting ourselves, the virus and the world crises. Academic journal of the pandemic* coordinated by Cristina Vohn and Dan Dungaciu, 2020 – the first book dedicated in an exclusive and explicit manner to the pandemic crisis in the Romanian literature.

The 2020 volume may be considered as a step forward to the 2021 one. Because all the facts that happened after 2016, especially the

pandemic challenge, justified the idea of continuing the project started five years ago.

In this context, we offer to the Romanian public this second book dedicated to the challenges our continent faces. We try to make an appropriate read of the crisis files, to understand and evaluate their consequences. As in 2016, these consequences are numerous, even more numerous if we only take into account the bigger size of the 2021 book.

We hope that this book will be received with the same interest and attention as the precedent one, issued five years ago. We also hope, as soon as possible, for a British version of this second volume dedicated to the European crises.

The construction of the book is based on four chapters exploring: the relationship between the EU and the USA; the pandemic issue and the relationship of the EU with China; the migration, Brexit and populism; the neighbourhoods of the EU. The domestic and foreign challenges confronting the EU appear in their complexity and convergence, putting strong pressure on the ambition and necessity for EU to define itself as an important actor of the new world order under construction.

This volume is a “moving” photography of the European crises that converge and melt forming a new perfect storm over the EU. The image may appear with a movement effect, it may be still unclear, but it captures, for sure, the symptoms of the suffering of the EU. The book offers various angles of analysis and observation resulting in a complex landscape of the EU – but not only of the EU – now facing big challenges and changes.

The documentation and elaboration of the studies are the fruit of intensive and continuous effort, especially taking into account that the speed of the events interesting the problematic of the book was, and continues to be, amazing. For this reason, the adaptation, the upgrading and the consequent completion of the studies were an important challenge for the authors, always in competition with the alert tempo of their individual and social existence.

Perhaps the most illustrative example is the pandemic crisis, which complicated and aggravated each one of the items analysed in this volume, and brought the authors closer to their theme of research. This volume has its own life, being written from the perspective of the researcher who is participant or witness to the subject he analyses and tries to understand, with the same concern for placing the research on the necessary and very specific theoretical base.

We would like to thank our colleagues from the Institute of Political Science and International Relations “Ion I. C. Brătianu” of the

Romanian Academy for their effort and availability to align themselves to the political and strategic challenges of our world, and for their capacity to offer to the public, with an incredible and regular rhythm, such interesting books that represent honest and lucid chronicles of our times.

Bucharest, 1 December, 2021.

Dan Dungaciu
Ruxandra Iordache

CHAPTER 1 –
EU AND USA

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE: EUROPE'S "STRATEGIC AUTONOMY"

DAN DUNGACIU

A spectre is haunting Europe, the spectre of "strategic autonomy."¹ It has been included in key European policy documents, claimed in speeches by its most imposing leaders, and strongly promoted by the European media. There are many controversies surrounding the formula, and there is no need to list them here.² Suffice to say that what the phrase suggests is, in essence, an empowerment of Europe on the big stage of international relations based, in particular, on the capabilities of the European defence industry (read French) and, on a larger scale, on the big European companies.

We will now try, beyond the almost insurmountable ambiguities of the syntagm,³ to underline the point where it all started and point out the paradox we have now reached. There are two fundamental problems about "strategic autonomy" that we will discuss, both of which are practically ignored in the materials devoted to the issue.

1. *From whom* will Europe become strategically autonomous?
2. What is the "geography" of "strategic autonomy": EU or Europe? Let's start at the beginning.

¹Frédéric Mauro, *Strategic Autonomy under the Spotlight: The New Holy Grail of European Defence* (English Edition) GRIP; 1st edition, 2018.

²Ulrike Franke, Tara Varma, "Independence play: Europe's pursuit of strategic autonomy," European Council on Foreign Relations, July 18, 2019, https://ecfr.eu/special/independence_play_europes_pursuit_of_strategic_autonom/; Hans Kundnani, "European sovereignty without strategic autonomy," *Chatham House*, January 19, 2021, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/01/european-sovereignty-without-strategic-autonomy>; Olivier-Remy Bel, "What European strategic autonomy requires: Smart talk, more action," *New Atlanticist*, January 7, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/what-european-strategic-autonomy-requires-smarter-talk-more-action/>

³Paolo Tamma, "Europe wants 'strategic autonomy' – it just has to decide what that means," *Politico*, 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-trade-wants-strategic-autonomy-decide-what-means/>

In the beginning was... fear

2015 was the year the “perfect storm” hit Europe.⁴ Faced with the global economic crisis, Europeans began to feel deeply, after 2010, that “Europe” no longer delivered on its promises, and was no longer a source of prosperity and comfort. When they felt this, they walked away from it. The “European” attachment of the “Europeans,” as the polls indicated, diminished, causing them to retreat *inwards* to the local *national* dimension. The socio-economic crisis generated a deep crisis of confidence at the European level. Against this background, other threats appeared, such as the issue of migration and refugees, which only amplified, geometrically, the feeling of uncertainty that transformed into fear and anxiety. A terrible wave of terrorism was at its height, plunging the European population into an unparalleled crisis. There was also the threat of Greece leaving Europe, and the geopolitical adventures of Russia— in all, an accumulation of unprecedented concomitant threats.

The present-day European became increasingly scared, anxious, and frustrated. The resurrection of “populist” identity parties was the *consequence* of these moods. By no means were they the *cause* of the European crisis we have witnessed. In all continental opinion polls (Eurobarometers), *security* (fear of migration, terrorism, Islam, etc.) was at the top of the citizens' agenda. The nativist parties speculated on the phenomenon and rose spectacularly in the polls.⁵

What went less noticed was that Brussels did the same. With its eye on the same polls, it skillfully (re)launched the idea of a Europe *united to protect. A Europe that protects you!* It protects you from internal enemies but also from external ones. The corollary of this idea was *Defence Europe*, which was much talked about at the time; the topic exploded, and – very importantly – was quickly and massively budgeted, at least in the first instance, at the EU level.

However, it was not an economic or security idea from the start. *Defence Europe was a political idea. It was the only way for European leaders to revive the European appetite of frightened and bewildered citizens.*

Starting with the fears of Europeans, both internal and external, Europe aimed, after 2015, to reconfigure itself: “European unity”, longed for but untouched by Jean Monnet, needed to become the most consistent response to these plenary expressed fears. Pivoting again around the

⁴Dan Dungaciu, Ruxandra Iordache (eds.), *The Perfect Storm of the European Crisis*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017.

⁵*Ibidem*.

“Franco-German engine,” the Europe proposed by President Macron brings together the political power of Germany (“coal”) and the French army and defence industry (“steel”) to restart the European engine towards a sovereignty dreamed of and targeted by the founding fathers of Europe.

From here to the idea of “strategic autonomy” was only one step further.

Europe's “strategic autonomy”

There is a widespread view that the whole discussion about Europe's “strategic autonomy” was not an option but an obligation generated by the Trump administration and America's refusal to consider the EU a viable and reliable partner. Left without a partner on the other side of the Atlantic, what else could Europe do but find its own purpose and ensure its own security? “Strategic autonomy” would have been, in this interpretation, a fortuitous and unwanted but... fatal option.

This opinion is widespread and for this reason deserves clarification. In reality, this is not the case; the reality is the exact opposite.

To anticipate a little, what happened to the Bush administration is also happening in this case, especially after the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. The most powerful and tenacious anti-American current was born then; some even accredit the twentieth century as the “anti-American century.” Then, even during the American intervention, the idea of European uniqueness based on the contrast between Europe and America appeared. Europe is not America! Europe was born on the streets of anti-American protests in European capitals, and its identity evolved in contrast to what American society was and is. This thesis was launched at the same time in the major European newspapers and generated a wide debate.

Yesterday as today. President Bush was the pretext for the rise of strong anti-Americanism, deeply rooted in some areas of Western Europe. More tenacious than the unpopularity of the then president, it found the *perfect pretext* in the personality of George Walker Bush.

We are now in the same logical situation. The idea that “Trump is to blame” only illustrates an identical feeling, which has erupted again in an even angrier tone.

How are things in reality? Europeans had long been obsessed with distancing themselves from America; they did not need Trump to generate this thought nor to say it out loud. Whoever reads the Union's foreign policy agenda document – the Mogherini Document, after the name of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy – will quickly understand.

Published in European Commission documents since 2013, the formula was enshrined in June 2016 through the document entitled “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy.” Mogherini’s strategy pivoted, explicitly and precisely, around the concept of strategic autonomy in relation to which the EU’s foreign policy vision is configured.

Here is a disambiguating quote, taken from the preface signed by Federica Mogherini:

The strategy fuels the ambition for **strategic autonomy for the European Union** (emphasis added by us).⁶

And the justification for this option is further explained

This is necessary to promote the common interests of our citizens, as well as our principles and values. However, we know that such priorities are best served when we are not alone. And they are best served in an international system based on rules and multilateralism. This is not the time for world cops and lone warriors. Our foreign and security policy must face global pressures and local dynamics, it must face superpowers, as well as increasingly fractured identities.... We will invest in regional coordination and cooperation between and within regions. And we will promote the reformed global governance, one that can meet the challenges of the 21st century. We will engage in a practical and principled way, sharing global responsibilities with our partners and contributing to their strengths.... So, we will invest in win-win solutions, and we will go beyond the illusion that international politics can be a zero-sum game.⁷

This long quote from the Mogherini Document is necessary to understand the context and subsequent disputes between Europeans and the Trump Administration. Donald Trump was elected on November 9, 2016, five months after the release (not the *drafting*) of the document. By the way, at the time of the document’s production, almost no one in Europe believed or hoped that President Trump would be elected. Therefore, *European “strategic autonomy” had already been launched— even in the perspective of a Hillary Clinton presidency, which would have been the complete and absolute opposite of Donald Trump’s.* The conclusion is clear: What was previously announced in June could not, in fact, have

⁶European External Action Service, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy*, 2016, https://ec.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf

⁷*Ibidem.*

been the reaction to the “arrogant,” “mercantile,” and “unilateral” presidency of the Republican President elected in November.

What followed only deepened the already created Atlantic fault and the structural differences between Europe and America.

France takes the lead and becomes a “gun hand”

The second important step was being taken, where else? ... in France. In his discourse on September 27, 2017, President Macron, the good populist of Europe who shattered the political class on behalf of a national (for the French) and European (for the rest) project, proposed a five-component “sovereign Europe”:

1. A Europe that guarantees security in all its dimensions
2. A Europe that responds to the challenge of migration
3. A Europe facing Africa and the Mediterranean
4. A Europe based on a model of sustainable development
5. A Europe of innovation and regulation adapted to the digital world.⁸

Beyond the fact that Eastern Europeans sighed with melancholy when they read the third dimension of “sovereign Europe” (nothing was said about *them* and their neighbourhood), we are interested here in the first dimension, the security one – “we need a Europe that can guarantee every aspect of security” – which forged such a daring concept of “strategic sovereignty.”

Here is how the French President outlined the security aspects of the continent:

- In the field of defence, Europe must establish a common intervention force, a common defence budget, and a common doctrine for action. We must encourage the implementation of the *European Defence Fund* and *Permanent Structured Cooperation* as soon as possible in order to complement them with a European intervention initiative that will allow us to better integrate our armed forces at every stage.

⁸Emmanuel Macron, *Initiative pour l'Europe* – Discours d'Emmanuel Macron pour une Europe souveraine, unie, démocratique [*Initiative for Europe* – Emmanuel Macron's discourse for a sovereign, united, democratic Europe], 2017, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2017/09/26/initiative-pour-l-europe-discours-d-emmanuel-macron-pour-une-europe-souveraine-unie-democratique>

- In the fight against terrorism, Europe needs to ensure closer links between our intelligence services by creating a European Intelligence Academy.
- Every aspect of security must be ensured collectively: Europe needs a common civil protection force.

The context is essential here. Once again, the biggest mistake is to consider the project as strictly economic or commercial, one in which strategic autonomy would be (just) a French attempt to relaunch its defence industry to the detriment of the Americans. It is much more than that (even if the appearance, of course, has its own significance). In fact, *it is, as I have suggested, a purely political project* (with obvious economic implications), which aims, on the founding model of the Coal and Steel Community, to re-found Europe, starting from the worst problem, acutely felt by Europeans after the “perfect storm” of 2015 –the security issue. In a political attempt to “positively negate,” Europeans thought they could start from the acute need for security and thus redraw the present and future of the continent.

Here is the crux of the story.

Beyond the political message, there is obviously a military one. Europe, in order to achieve “strategic autonomy,” must also be convincing from this point of view.

And the EU's “gun hand” had to be France.

France, that is... Europe

Be careful what you wish for! Everything that has happened and is happening now around Europe is ideally serving the French President's project: the transatlantic relationship is still under construction (China remains, albeit tacitly, an apple of discord), Turkey is ultimately playing by itself, Russia is resuming its old domestic and international political practices, neighbouring crises or frozen conflicts are alive and well, people are taking to the streets and protesting – a cordon of acute insecurity is being drawn from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea.

What could be more tempting – and legitimate? – than to throw yourself into these crises as a “strategic sovereign”?

Let's quickly recall some of these crises:

- **Libya:** a geo-economic dispute concerning not only the delimitation of energy perimeters but also the hierarchy of internal power; at stake is, beyond this state, the access of European forces to the Middle East and North Africa;

- **Eastern Mediterranean:** the dispute between Turkey and Greece in the Aegean Sea is about resources, but also concerns a reassessment of the status of the Eastern Mediterranean;
- **Ukraine and unresolved conflicts:** Ukraine wants to get out of the Russian trap, but the dangerous “Normandy Format” (Germany, France, Ukraine, Russia) is responsible for resolving the Donbas issue, based on the Minsk Agreements, interpreted differently by the parties involved so far;
- **The anti-Orange Revolution in Belarus:** a major political crisis *without any geopolitical vector* and which ended, on the ground, with a wider and more insidious Russian domination (Lukashenko, at this time, does not even have the freedom to play at both ends, which he enjoyed before the crisis);
- **The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict:** the resurgence of a frozen conflict that brought Azerbaijan and Armenia face to face again, with obvious momentous advantages for the former, ended in negotiations that, on the one hand, reduce Armenia's influence in the area but on the other hand strengthened the role of the Russian Federation as a guarantor of an internationally negotiated peace, with its soldiers – which it did not have before – present on the territory (as “peacekeepers”); in addition, it brings Turkey closer to Russia and more present in the Caucasus;
- **The “clash of civilizations”:** the war of caricatures, or the recent attempt by President Macron to “domesticate Islam” in France,⁹ again leads to Huntington's famous prediction. Beyond that, we are witnessing a diplomatic dispute between Turkey and France that is increasing their strategic confrontation on various levels.

What is the problem? France, the most constant promoter of the idea of “strategic autonomy,” is involved in practically all these conflicts, either directly or indirectly. France's interests in Libya's future are enormous – and in North Africa and the Middle East too. In Ukraine, France is a member of the Normandy Format, which is responsible for finding a solution to the Donbas conflict. Regarding the dispute between

⁹Emmanuel Macron, *La République en actes: Discours du Président de la République sur le thème de la lutte contre les séparatismes* [The Republic in Acts: Discourse of the President of the Republic on the theme of fight against separatism], 2020, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2020/10/02/la-republique-en-actes-discours-du-president-de-la-republique-sur-le-theme-de-la-lutte-contre-les-separatismes>.

Armenia and Azerbaijan, Paris has been and is co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group. And in the Eastern Mediterranean, France – a power in the Western Mediterranean – has found a new vocation through the blunt dispute, so far only at the level of words, that it has with Turkey. As for the possible “clash of civilizations,” it is obvious that Paris is at the forefront of the dispute.

A total show! But also a risky one. What we will have to follow from now on is not only the evolution of each case, all of them are interesting, but *the whole problem and, above all, the way in which the Union will overcome all these challenges*. Through the vision expressed in 2017 and introduced, later, in a series of European documents, Paris – which is no longer just Paris! – has raised the bar enormously. As a result, *France is now risking not only its own prestige but also the prestige of the whole of Europe in its winding path to “strategic autonomy”* expressed, emphatically and with vision, in the French language.

In all files we find... Russia

The second issue is that practically in all these cases, from Libya to mountainous Karabakh, France meets... the Russian Federation. The positions of the two regional powers coincide, and this synchronicity can generate consonant positions and mutual support on various issues. At this point, one cannot repress the thought that French president Macron was the same European politician who pleaded, in his famous and controversial speech at the meeting of French Ambassadors on August 27, 2019, for a “new relationship with Russia” because “pushing Russia outside Europe is a strategic mistake.”¹⁰

And then the paradox appears. In the current development, Brussels, through its “gun hand,” will come to fatally approach the positions of the Russian Federation in the region, even to strengthen them. In these circumstances, it becomes clear that the Union's “strategic autonomy” will not manifest itself towards its great Eastern neighbour.

From whom will Europe become strategically autonomous then?

¹⁰Emmanuel Macron, *Discours du Président de la République à la conférence des ambassadeurs [Discourse of the President of the Republic at the ambassadors' conference]*, 2019, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2017/08/29/discours-du-president-de-la-republique-a-l-ouverture-de-la-conference-des-ambassadeurs>

The post-Brexit security dilemma: EU security or Europe's security?

Another issue still undisputed in the file of Europe's "strategic autonomy" is "geography" as such. Whose "strategic autonomy" are we talking about? Europe's, or (only) the European Union's? The issue is unclear, and the discussion has not even really begun.

The effects of Brexit on security issues have so far received the least attention from analysts. Not by chance. It is the most difficult field to quantify because there are many variables, surprising evolutions, and no predefined models or recipes. There are five actors that need to be put, consistently, on the same page: Great Britain, NATO, USA, Europe, and... the European Union

Let's study them one at a time:

Great Britain and the EU

Until Brexit, the UK's military commitments to the EU mainly included the following components:

1. Support for EU battle groups by providing troops and equipment
2. Contributions to EU operations such as Operation EUFOR Althea, European Union Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina, EU Training Mission in Mali, EU Mediterranean Naval Force (EUNAVFOR MED), also known as Operation Sophia to Combat Migrant Trafficking in the Southern Mediterranean. The United Kingdom also runs the EUNAVFOR operational headquarters of Operation Atlanta in Northwood.
3. There are other bilateral commitments made by London:
 - a. Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) with Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. JEF is based on the idea of an adaptable military force, designed to increase Britain's ability to respond quickly, anywhere in the world, together with its allies, in one project or another or on behalf of international organizations such as the UN or NATO. In the JEF, the UK contribution includes the main command groups, armoured, aviation, air, and sea;
 - b. Development of a Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (CJEF) with France, based on the Anglo-French Treaty of Lancaster House signed in November 2010. The United Kingdom and France have jointly committed to

developing a CJEF as a permanent bilateral capability for use in a variety of operational contexts and through various institutional arrangements (bilateral, NATO, EU, or coalition).

- c. A United Kingdom–Netherlands amphibious force for joint training and operation.¹¹

There are, in addition to those listed, other types of bilateral or multilateral commitments of lower intensity.

What will happen to these operations after Britain leaves the EU?

From a military point of view, Brexit removes from the EU one of its two military powers capable of functioning and thinking on a global scale, thus leaving France as the only major military power in the European Union. With its departure, Britain is taking with it a disproportionate share of Europe's state-of-the-art military equipment. In quantitative terms, credible reports estimate that Brexit will reduce the EU's military capability by a quarter in terms of combined defence spending and the number of European troops deployed.

Even from a political point of view we do not know, for the time being, what will happen next. And this is not only because of London, but because of an uncertainty that floats, after Brexit, like a thick fog over the whole continent, on both sides of the Channel. This uncertainty can be expressed as follows: from now on, *will we talk about the security of Europe or about the security of the European Union?*

European security or EU security?

It is an essential and obviously fundamental political issue. What will happen after Brexit? What will the British do in this matter? What about the Europeans?

Despite the potential impact of Brexit on the UK economy, London is currently unable to take a global role in the current world system. Its main interests will remain linked to the European continent through the forces of history, geography, common values, and economy.

From this perspective, the most pressing security dilemma is the one stated: the security of Europe or the security of the EU.

It is clear that the two issues cannot be equated, not even in theory, and the key question is to what extent Brussels will assume *the*

¹¹James Black, Alexandra Hall, Kate Cox, Marta Kepe, Erik Silfversten, *Defence and Security After Brexit: Understanding the Possible Implications of the UK's Decision to Leave the EU*, Rand Corporation, 2017.

idea of strategic EU autonomy to the detriment of a – hypothetical – European strategic autonomy.

In the first version, the role of Great Britain decreases dramatically, but the chances of a true strategic autonomy of the EU are also precarious. Left without a key player, namely London, the Union is poorer both strategically and militarily.

As already noted,¹² the key questions in this area would be the following:

1. Is the EU's strategic autonomy a precondition for European strategic autonomy?
2. Is European strategic autonomy a precondition for the EU's strategic autonomy?

Whether strategic autonomy refers to collective defence or operations outside the EU, there are several layers to consider in order to answer this question: operations, capabilities, funding, political will, foreign policy, and nuclear deterrence. In its current state, in practice, the best thing the EU's strategic autonomy can hope for today is *the ability to act alone in its neighbourhood*. However, as has been noted, the EU does not actually have the capacity to act with high intensity in its “close vicinity,” as the Libyan operation showed. In addition, European missions are limited to crisis management, with no concrete commitments to combat. Left without Britain's capabilities, we cannot imagine that the EU would be more efficient from now on, although the departure of the “American Trojan horse” from the EU (London) could mean, in the medium and long term, a systematic and sustained effort undertaken by Europeans to develop their own military and technological capabilities, long blocked, including by Britain, for fear of “doubling with NATO.”¹³

But if we talk about Europe and not just the EU, things are more complex and need to be placed in perspective. Britain, in this case, went nowhere. It remains in Europe, so it remains involved in European security. In this logic, the Atlantic dimension of the British options can be preserved, i.e., the importance of NATO, because *a strong European security component within NATO could be developed* with the support of London. In such a case, as has been said, we are talking about several components: European strategic autonomy refers both to *operations outside the area* and to *collective defence*. When we talk about the last component, of course, the end of the road is *the nuclear dimension*, in

¹²Olivier de France, “Strategic autonomy and European security after Brexit,” *IRIS*, 2019, <https://www.iris-france.org/135189-strategic-autonomy-and-european-security-after-brexit/>

¹³*Ibidem*.

which Great Britain is a significant player and where NATO will remain the major landmark.

From this perspective, a commitment on both sides toward *European security* could lead to the construction of an effective and efficient European component within NATO, with the support of Great Britain, which could lead to *a strategic European autonomy* under the umbrella of NATO and could include conventional and unconventional means, from state-of-the-art capabilities to industrial *know-how*, and from information gathering to nuclear deterrence.¹⁴

As a conclusion, if only a partial one, let's say that, in principle, the relationship between European security and EU security is mutually conditional, not in the sense that they would be equivalent but in that one can determine the other. As noted,¹⁵ the British could even come up with the argument that *European strategic autonomy is a precondition for European security and, indeed, a necessary precondition for the EU's strategic autonomy*.

We are, for the time being, at the level of hypotheses and assumptions. Political decisions have not yet been made. So far, no one – neither London nor Brussels – has published strategic documents in this regard; we'll have to wait until the final clarifications.

Until then, let's move from these shifting sands to another security layer, theoretically clearer and more predictable.

NATO –The pillar of stability

The North Atlantic Alliance will become even more important for the UK, and the increase in defence spending announced by the UK in November 2020 shows that it plans to remain a credible ally of the Alliance. As one well-known British expert put it, Britain “will remain a European country, but from a NATO-centric perspective,” and NATO is “the cornerstone of our defence in the United Kingdom.” Therefore, it is likely that Britain's commitment to NATO's permanent commands and force structures will continue (e.g., hosting the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps HQ in Innsworth). Similarly, it is likely that, depending on the resources it will still have, the United Kingdom will continue to provide capabilities and personnel to support NATO-led operations and exercises under current plans. These include the framework battalion for increased presence in Estonia, contribution to NATO integration units, maritime

¹⁴*Ibidem*.

¹⁵*Ibidem*.

commitments in the Aegean Sea and elsewhere, and support for security measures, such as Romanian or Baltic air police operations, in which British assets participate on a rotating basis.¹⁶

The UK is likely to continue to engage in the Alliance's highly trained forces as well as in other existing bilateral, regional, and international fora, such as the United Kingdom's permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Institutional cooperation with NATO, OCCAR, the OSCE, and others will endure, albeit with some indirect complications arising from Brexit. Despite the growing uncertainty about the relationship with Brussels, including its economic capabilities to project itself outwards for the foreseeable future, Britain, strongly anchored in NATO, should remain a global player capable of projecting a combination of power, hardware, and software more than any other EU nation –with the exception of France.

Great Britain and America

Democratic President Barrack Obama warned the British on the eve of Brexit that if they vote to leave the EU, they will have to stand in line to await a bilateral agreement with the United States.

The relationship between Great Britain and the USA is to be tested in the coming period, with a Joe Biden not at all sympathetic to Brexit, who talks about a return of the USA to Europe. In addition, the personal relationship between Biden and Johnson is not one of friendship. Americans today refer to Britain as a “close ally,” not a “special one,” although the relationship between London and Washington has earned Britain the nickname of the “Trojan horse” in the EU regarding European collective defence projects.

China remains a test and a challenge. In this case, it can be said for sure that the United Kingdom will support the American position. In this file, the relationship between Europeans and Americans began *on the wrong foot*, with the (almost) ostentatious signing by the former of a trade agreement with China before the inauguration of the new president and without consultation with US partners, despite warnings and veiled suggestions on Twitter by President Biden's security adviser Jack Sullivan.

In addition, the United Kingdom has been, and still is, sceptical about Russia's role in Europe, unlike France and Germany. The United Kingdom is expected to continue to maintain its positions on the East

¹⁶James Black, Alexandra Hall, Kate Cox, Marta Kepe, Erik Silfversten, *quoted work*.

Flank, from the pledge for Ukraine's sovereignty to the support of the Baltic allies. In this context, a greater commitment to a democratic Europe, the rule of law, core values, and human rights is to be expected. Hence the recent sanctions against the dictatorial regime in Belarus.

The extent to which the American and British positions will rhyme every time remains to be seen. Moreover, the Biden administration is very similar to the Obama administration, and the latter has not been a success in terms of foreign policy. Under these circumstances, there is a risk that the new US administration will set unrealistic goals – Biden's desire to form an “alliance of democracies” with an interest in India's involvement as a counterweight to China – or, despite initial statements, to massively sweeten positions to the point of ineffective concessions (such as the Obama administration's famous “reset” with Russia).

In the current global redesign of the security issue, with some even talking about “a new world order,” Brexit is just one episode. For now, with many more questions than answers.

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US-EUROPE RELATIONS: CURRENT DYNAMICS AND FORECASTS FOR THE NEAR FUTURE

CRISTI PANTELIMON

In a paper published under the coordination of Federiga Bindi in 2010,¹ the chapter dedicated to the relationship between the European Union and the US by Andrew Moravcsik seeks to combat the increasingly widespread idea in recent years of deteriorating US–EU strategic relations. Moravcsik states that, on the contrary, a comparison between the type and level of US–Europe relations before 1989 (during the Cold War and the bipolar system) and their level and type after 1989 clearly shows a considerable improvement in these relations, with one exception; namely, the American intervention in Iraq in 2003.

The author actually recalls the major disagreements between Europeans and Americans during the Cold War (politics towards Russia, Östpolitik, the issue of trade relations in the '60s–'70s, the anti-European behaviour of Americans regarding European colonial possessions, Charles de Gaulle's policy towards NATO, and so on). In contrast, apart from the attack on Iraq in 2003, after 1989 most intervention decisions in other states were agreed on by the two geopolitical entities. The conclusion is therefore very optimistic.

The truth is that in almost all respects the Cold War was a much more contentious period than the current one. We live in a much friendlier and more cooperative period of transatlantic relations than ever before in the last 50 years. The basis of conventional wisdom is incorrect.²

And yet! From 2010 until today, i.e., in ten years, things have evolved, and the proof is that the same Federiga Bindi supervises as editor

¹Federiga Bindi (ed.), *The Foreign Policy of the European Union: Assessing Europe's Role in the World*. Brookings Institution Press, Washington DC, 2010.

²Andrew Moravcsik, "U.S.–EU relations: Putting the Bush years in perspective," in Federiga Bindi (ed.), *quoted work*, p.205.

another work, published in 2019, whose title is rather worrying: *Europe and America: The End of the Transatlantic Relationship?*³ The editor's tone in introducing this latest volume is rather one of concern about the transatlantic relationship. The paper is quite current, appearing after the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran – whose acronym is JCPCOA, from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. This withdrawal preceded the recent serious crisis between the US and Iran that began after the assassination of Iranian General Quassem Soleimani. In general, however, by being published by an American publishing house, these two volumes represent, albeit veiled, the voice of American diplomacy, which seeks to accredit the idea that the relationship between the US and Europe is good despite all the rough edges.

However, beyond the Atlantic, in Europe, where the idea of a relative strategic separation of Europe from the USA, or at least of an equal relationship between the two geopolitical entities, is becoming more pertinent, the tone is not so optimistic.

“Relations between the United States and Europe will continue to cool,” Hubert Vedrine, a former foreign affairs minister (1997–2002) in L. Jospin's government, said in August 2020.⁴ He believed that the geopolitical situation of the United States since the time of Obama (which had to deal with the rise of China) required special behaviour from the Americans, which logically implied that less attention would be given to Europe. The big challenge for Americans is China's rise; its “bet” that it will become the world's leading power in 2049 is a serious affront to the United States. In short, the global scene looks, in Vedrine's vision expressed in an interview with me, as follows.

Trump wants to get rid of multilateralism: he is not an isolationist; he is unilateralist and selfish. As far as Europe is concerned, relations will gradually continue to cool. There will always be a connection, but more and more distant. What created the transatlantic merger was Hitler's and then Stalin's specific threat to Europe. Even if a Democrat came to power after the 2020 elections, he would not completely return to the past.

Already for Obama, Europe was neither central nor vital. For Europeans, it is obviously complicated, because they live, after the end of the war and the success of the Marshall Plan and NATO, in a mental dependence on the USA.

³The book was published by the same American publishing house (Brookings Institution Press in Washington) as the one dedicated to EU foreign policy.

⁴<https://www.lecho.be/opinions/carte-blanche/les-relations-entre-les-etats-unis-et-l-europe-vont-continuer-a-se-distendre-hubert-vedrine/10164424.html>