



FACULTY OF EDUCATION  
THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG  
香港大學教育學院

## To What Extent Will the EU Be Able to Achieve Military ‘Strategic Autonomy’ in the Long Run?: A Constructivist Perspective”

Interview in the framework of the HKU MIPA Capstone Project

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FREDERIC  
MAURO

# PERCEPTIONS OF THE CONCEPT OF STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

**Strategic Autonomy** is a 'mot-valise', literally a 'word-bag', better translated in English as a '**rag bag**'

in which everybody puts the clothes (meanings) that it pleases, including stinky ones by its detractors in order to discredit the idea.

Five different meanings of the concept:

	<b>Original Strategic Autonomy</b>	<b>1994 - 2009</b>
	<b>Extended Strategic Autonomy</b>	<b>2013 - 2016</b>
	<b>A French ploy against NATO</b>	<b>2016 - ...</b>
	<b>Global Strategic Autonomy</b>	<b>2019 - ...</b>
	<b>Open Strategic Autonomy</b>	<b>2020 - ...</b>

## NOTHING COMPLICATED TO UNDERSTAND ABOUT 'STRATEGIC AUTONOMY'

At the origine a French concept that emerged in the Defence White book 1994

**STRATEGIC AUTONOMY**

=

Ability to wage war alone if necessary and with allies if possible

**ABILITY TO DECIDE**  
(freedom of decision)  
Political autonomy

**CAPACITY TO ACT**  
(freedom of action)

**INTELLIGENCE**  
(freedom of appreciation)

**DECISION MAKING PROCESS**

**FORCES**  
Operational autonomy

**ARMAMENT**  
Industrial autonomy

**Defence industry**

**Defence research**



The real question is:  
which type of war?

## THE ORIGINAL STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

1998  
St Malo declaration

1. The European Union needs to be in a position to play its full role on the international stage. (...) 2. To this end, the Union must have the **capacity for autonomous action**, backed up by credible military forces, the **means to decide to use them**, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to **international crises**.

1999  
Cologne Summit

In pursuit of our Common Foreign and Security Policy objectives and the progressive framing of a common defence policy, we are convinced that the Council should have the ability to take decisions on the full range of conflict prevention and crisis management tasks defined in the Treaty on European Union, the "Petersberg tasks". To this end, the Union must have the **capacity for autonomous action**, backed up by credible military forces, the **means to decide to use them**, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to **international crises** without prejudice to actions by NATO. The EU will thereby increase its ability to contribute to international peace and security in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter.

2009  
Lisbon Treaty

Article 42. 1. (T.E.U). - The common security and defence policy shall be an integral part of the common foreign and security policy. It shall provide the Union with an **operational capacity drawing on civilian and military assets**. The Union may use them on missions **outside the Union** for peace-keeping, conflict prevention and strengthening international security in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter. The performance of these tasks shall be undertaken using **capabilities provided by the Member States**.

## THE ORIGINAL STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

Obviously it is a **military concept**

it is intimately linked to the will of the European Union to be an **actor in international relations** and not a playground, i.e., a '**geopolitical Union**'

 **Capacity for autonomous action**

 **The means to decide to use them**

 **To solve international crises in Europe's neighbourhood**

In a nutshell: Strategic Autonomy = Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) = Crisis Management/outside the Union/without the US-NATO = Never again Yugoslavia

It is 100 % NATO compatible – pushed by the Americans ('Yugoslavia is your backyard not mine' Bill Clinton – Obama's 'leadership from behind') – accepted by the Brits - wanted by the French.

## THE EXTENDED STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

Still a military concept but in an extended framework, both industrial and related to foreign affairs

### 2013 Council conclusions

Europe needs a more integrated, sustainable, innovative and competitive **defence technological and industrial base (EDTIB)** to develop and sustain defence capabilities. This can also enhance its **strategic autonomy and its ability to act with partners**.

### 2016 Global Strategy

The (EU Global) Strategy nurtures the **ambition of strategic autonomy** for the European Union. (...) An **appropriate level of ambition and strategic autonomy** is important for Europe's ability to **foster peace and safeguard security within and beyond its borders**. (...) A sustainable, innovative and competitive European **defence industry** is essential for Europe's **strategic autonomy** and for a credible CSDP.

### 2016 Council Conclusions on implementing the EUGS in the area of security and defence

The Council is committed to strengthening the Union's ability to act as a security provider and to enhance the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) as an essential part of the Union's external action. This will enhance its global strategic role and its **capacity to act autonomously when and where necessary and with partners wherever possible**. (...)

### 2020 Regulation on the European Defence Fund – Art. 3. Objective

The general objective of the Fund is to foster the competitiveness, efficiency and innovation capacity of the European defence technological and industrial base throughout the Union which contributes to **the Union strategic autonomy and its freedom of action** (...)

## THE EXTENDED STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

Still a military concept  
but it became less precise



**The link with CSDP is blurred:** ‘safeguard security *within* and beyond its borders’



**The division of labour with NATO becomes unclear:** ‘*when* and *where* necessary’



**Emphasis is put on the industrial aspect of the Strategic autonomy**

## THE OTHER 'STRATEGIC AUTONOMY'

The imprecision of the concept has opened the door to all sorts of interpretations



The blurring of division of labour with NATO drove Eastern and Nordic countries to think that SA was a **French ploy to decouple EU from NATO**



Incapable or unwilling to accept the idea of an European defence, some others, especially in Germany, insisted that: ' the stakes of strategic autonomy are not limited to security and defence. They apply to a wide range of issues including trade, finance and investments'. It is the concept of a '**global strategic autonomy**' i.e., everything which is important (see European High Representative/Vice President Josep Borell: Why European strategic autonomy matters 03/12/2020: [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89865/why-european-strategic-autonomy-matters\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89865/why-european-strategic-autonomy-matters_en))

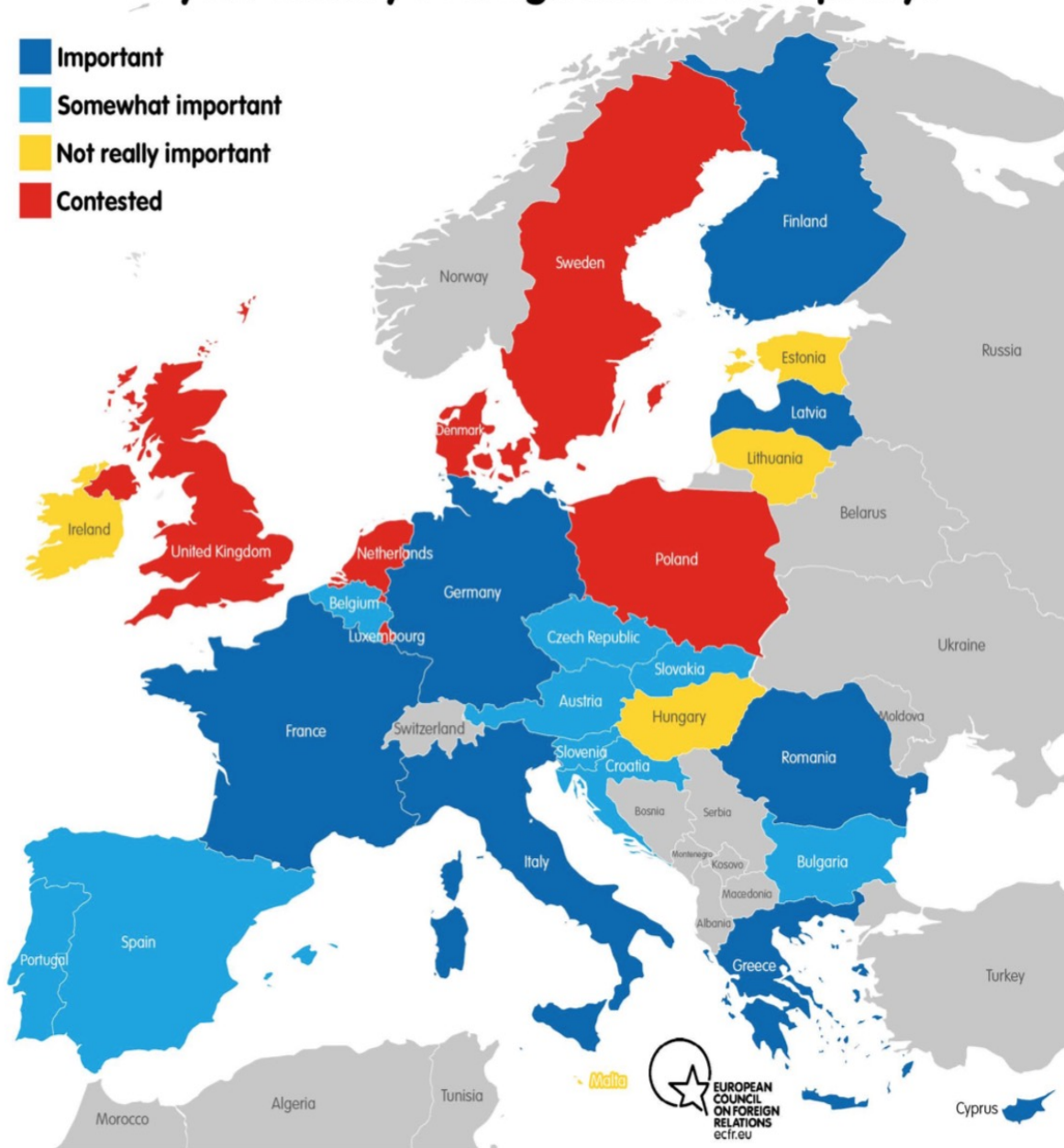


Finally, worried about the idea that Industrial Strategic Autonomy could be tantamount to protectionism, some others pleaded for an '**open strategic autonomy**' (see European Commission Executive Vice-President Margrethe Vestager, 'Transatlantic relations in the digital age' 06/2020: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjrZwYZbo28&feature=youtu.be>)



## How important is the goal of European strategic autonomy to your country's foreign and defence policy?

- Important
- Somewhat important
- Not really important
- Contested



Therefore it comes as no surprise that there is no common perception in Europe of what is and what should be a 'Strategic Autonomy'

And finally even the French seem to abandon the concept that became too vague, to another one '**European Sovereignty**' allegedly less controversial

*© Independence play: Europe's pursuit of strategic autonomy*  
European Council on Foreign Relations – July 2019 Ulrike Franke and Tara Varma [https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR\\_Independence\\_play\\_Europe\\_pursuit\\_strategic\\_autonomy.pdf](https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR_Independence_play_Europe_pursuit_strategic_autonomy.pdf)

# STRATEGIC AUTONOMY AS A GOAL FOR THE EU ?

If Europe is going to pursue its quest for Strategic Autonomy its leaders have to be very clear on what they want to achieve



Nothing to do with **Sovereignty** which is a legal concept of international law and must remain so – is the condition for a State to be a State.



nothing to do with **Independence** which is a multifaceted concept (financial, commercial, technological etc...). That does not mean that those facets are not important – and some of them '**critical**' – but to recognise that does not solve our problem of military dependence



Strategic autonomy, as the word 'strategic' implies, belongs to the **realm of defence and security**

'Stratigos' = the one that thinks the war



For the moment there is almost an agreement between France and Germany

**Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer – German Defence Minister – speech in Hambourg 19/11/2020**

‘The idea of strategic autonomy for Europe goes too far if it is taken to mean that we could **guarantee security, stability and prosperity in Europe** without NATO and without the US. That is an **illusion**. But if we take it to refer to our **capacity to act independently as Europeans where our common interests are concerned**, then yes, that is our common goal and reflects our common understanding of sovereignty and ability to act. ‘

Emmanuel Macron – French President: **the EU should become more powerful on the world stage and able to operate independently in a wide range of areas, from military operations to industrial policy** — especially since the U.S. is increasingly shifting its focus from Europe to Asia



France and Germany agree on Strategic Autonomy in its original version (CSDP) = capacity to act independently in Europe’s neighbourhood and they also agree that it goes hand in hand with a strong ‘European pillar for NATO’. But for Germany it seems that it will always be like that as for France, the EU is bound to become some sort of a ‘European Defence Union’

The others European countries are more in favour of the status quo i.e., Pax americana

What would it take for the EU to be strategically independent?

- A. The intention to defend itself  
    whatever this defence might mean: collective defence or crisis management
- B. The capacity to act
- C. The ability to decide



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## Questions

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