

The European army concept – an end-goal or a wake-up call for European security and defence?

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Abstract

The article contextualises the concept of the European army within wider European security and defence discourse. The European Union (EU) is facing complex challenges, which requires a strategic approach to IR. This research examines the EU's strategic posture and capacities in the international arena by employing two leading concepts of IR theory – constructivism and realism. Since the EU operates in an interlinked world, the article takes into account a wider geostrategic environment and heterogeneity of concepts and interests of actors in various pockets of the globe, offering viable future perspectives for the phenomena in its focus. It suggests a functional development of a EU's strategic culture and a fine-tuned reconsideration of its exclusively constructivist approach to contemporary security challenges.

Keywords: European army, defence and security, strategy, Euro-Atlantic community, international relations

Introduction

The European Union (EU) has found itself in an increasingly complicated geostrategic environment. Only comparing the first sentences of the 2003 European Security Strategy and the 2016 EU Global Strategy is more than illustrative. While the first document starts with the following statement: “Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free.” (European Commission, 2003), the second document opens with “The purpose, even existence, of our Union is being questioned.” (European Commission, 2016). The changing attitudes of the new US administration towards European security and the very concept of transatlanticism, increasing assertiveness of Russia, China and even Turkey, are putting the EU under severe pressure to redefine its own security, level of strategic ambition and capacity

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development. The EU is a *sui generis* example of an agglomerate of power, whose member states have specific national interests and strategic cultures. This, coupled with decreasing resources at its disposal in the age of financial conundrum, is obviously not making this issue less demanding.

Additional burdens to the functionality of the EU's decision-making system, such as political consequences of the migration crisis, increased terrorist threats, a rise of populism and decreasing legitimacy of EU institutions, are only adding to the complexity of the situation in which the EU nowadays attempts to redefine its position. Perhaps the most complicated development is the first ever departure of a member state – widely known as Brexit – which threatens to generate unprecedented strategic consequences for both the United Kingdom (UK) and the EU. The challenge of losing a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), a nuclear power, a former colonial power and a central figure of the Commonwealth, which used to contribute to the EU's security policy with 25% of defence spending and up to 20% of deployable forces and assets, is without precedent.

There are different ideas about how the EU should cope with such a cumbersome situation, both externally and internally. A window of opportunity also arises with Brexit, since the biggest opponent to the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) further integration is leaving the bloc, thus giving way to others to intensify negotiations in that specific field. Initiatives like Permanent Structured Co-operation (PESCO) and the European Defence Fund (EDF), that followed the adoption of the EU Global Strategy (EUGS), have been regarded in that fashion. Modest but potentially ground-breaking developments in the field of EU Security and Defence have signalled that the Union is increasingly aware of the fact that there is a need to develop common visions, concepts and capacities for the period to come. Diverging and overlapping concepts of national and co-operative security in the wider transatlantic framework (NATO) on the European continent have been *enriched* with an emerging EU concept that it is yet to be clearly defined, especially when it comes to its level of ambitions and capacity development. Fundamentally, these parameters will be defined through member states' political will to transcend the current political system of the Union, especially in the field of security and defence, their economic capacity to invest in that process, as well as through the changing nature of the EU's geostrategic environment in which its position in the global arena will be determined.

Therefore, current debates reflect different ideas about the optimal *security profile of the EU* that range from sovereigntist ideas about exclusive authority of the state in this specific field to those who do not only opt for further development of the EU's defence capacities, but are arguing in favour of the EU's strategic autonomy in its full operational capacity and hard-power deterrent. Subsequent expressions of affirmative attitude towards the idea of a joint European Army by high-ranking

French and German officials, however vague and unclear, add an additional dimension to the existing European security discourse.

This is precisely the reason why the authors of this text have decided to analyse the challenges and opportunities for the EU in the current strategic environment, and take into account the accelerating pace of progress in the field of security and defence over the course of the last few years. The aim of this research is to offer a strategic analysis of the contemporary security environment of a *sui generis* construct like the EU and to accordingly provide viable solutions for the demanding and turbulent period to come. The development of a security profile of the EU, grounded on its capacity to develop a functional framework for a common strategic culture which enables it to yield implementable solutions and undertake efficient policy actions, is of unprecedented importance. Therefore, contributions to existing academic efforts to contextualise European security and defence and to provide intellectual guidance for policy developments in the period to come are very important. Given the fact that the strategic position and leverage of the EU directly affects the efficiency and effectiveness of a wide range of its policies, this debate is relevant not only to members of academia and policy makers. Its results and consequences, in a more or less direct way, will affect the everyday life of all European citizens, regardless of their national background and standard of living. These objectives demand a well-structured and thorough approach to the research, based on a sound theoretical framework, which is presented in a separate chapter of this article thus enabling the authors to undertake this task.

The introduction offers the definition of the phenomena in focus, presenting its specific discourse in and around the EU, as well as a wide range of factors that influence its development in the contemporary international arena. It provides the reader with an overview of the research design presented above and a scan of the structure of the paper that follows.

In order to adequately analyse the problems in the focus of this research, a functional methodological framework has been set in the first chapter. Namely, international relations (IR) theories offer a variety of opportunities for the conceptualisation of policy phenomena at the international level, which is particularly applicable in the case of developing EU security and defence policies. The different ways that realism and constructivism understand the main drivers in IR may be used to analyse the contemporary development of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). While the first concept focuses exclusively on the state in an anarchic international arena, characterised by power, particular interests and a zero-sum game, the second one looks more at the normative structures and identities that shape the relations among political actors and structures.

The second chapter of this paper deals with the context analysis of the EU's strategic reality, where it takes into account the interests and strategic postures of the main global players, whose policies and behaviour will continue to shape the international environment that determines the EU's strategic orientations. It also

considers particular national interests and strategic cultures of the EU's member states, especially the most influential ones, which would heavily impact developments in the EU's security and defence realm.

Trying to add to the existing academic body of literature, the conclusion offers balanced and viable, yet forward-looking arguments that could potentially enrich the EU's current security and defence discourse, as well as help yielding implementable policy solutions for the period to come.

1. Approaching European security through the lens of constructivism and realism

Contemporary security threats are characterised by their unconventionality and asymmetry. The nature of such threats is seldom identifiable and preventable. The transformation of the international order was likewise generated by these new emerging threats, and by the interaction between actors and the new reality into which they are inserted. This fact led to a transformation in the international, and thus, contemporary order, which is significantly different from the one inherited in the twilight of the Cold War. Therefore, states should be prepared and equipped to deal with these threats and with a rapidly changing security paradigm. The European Union itself ought to devise a comprehensive security policy. Therefore, in order to do an academically rigorous and overarching analysis of European security, one needs the validity provided by theoretical approaches. In this sense, this chapter will dwell on two of the most prominent theories in the field of IR: constructivism and realism.

1.1. Constructivism

Constructivism, as an alternative theory in IR, is a consequence of the IR debates of the 1990s. Much like realism, constructivism is a pluri-dimensional theory with multiple tendencies within. Constructivism emphasises normative, material structures and identity in shaping relations between political agents as well as structures. Constructivists consider ideational structures to be more important than material structures. Ideas, beliefs and values play an extremely important role in determining social and political actions. Meanwhile, material resources are only given meaning by the human processes of shared knowledge (Burchill *et al.*, 2005). Normative and ideational structures are thought to shape the social identities of political actors. "Just as the institutionalized norms of the academy shape the identity of a professor, the norms of the international system condition the social identity of the sovereign state" (Burchill *et al.*, 2005, p. 197). In this manner, constructivism has fundamentally contrary assumptions to realism as constructivists emphasize the socially constructed nature of the relations between states. According to Wendt (1999, p. 1), "(1) the structures of human association are determined primarily by

shared ideas rather than material forces, and (2) that the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature”. Following Wendt *rationale*, international security can better be achieved by changing the pattern of social interaction between states in the international sphere.

Constructivists argue that understanding non-material structures is the cornerstone of comprehending how an actor’s identities are conditioned. Identities ultimately form interests and actions. Thus, understanding how actors develop their interests is crucial to explaining a wide range of international political phenomena. To explain interest formation, constructivists focus on the social identities of individuals or states (Burchill *et al.*, 2005).

With regard to national interests, constructivism poses that these are not the basis of state interaction *per se* but rather they are constructed by taking into consideration state goals such as “physical security, stability, recognition by others and economic development” (Griffiths *et al.*, 2008, p. 51). To the concept of anarchy, prominent in the realist tradition, constructivism does not attribute particular relevance. In the words of Wendt (1999, p. 6), “anarchy is what states make of it”. It does accept the anarchic pattern of the international system, however, emphasizing that the system by itself does not characterise the relationship between states. Rather, it stresses that a variety of social structures is possible under an anarchic regime and that the social identity of each state defines the future relations among them (Griffiths *et al.*, 2008).

1.2. Realism

Realism is almost as old as the discipline of International Relations itself. It became prominent and achieved theoretical prevalence in the field particularly after the 1940s. As pointed out by Booth (2011), the term classical realism, rather than define a concrete and everlasting body of theory, refers to the ideas of a concrete, largely US-based group. Among their influences, Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes and Rousseau take an especially important role.

Realists acknowledge the state as the main referent object and actor, perceiving international organisations and non-governmental organisations as irrelevant, mainly used as instruments of convenience in the necessary interactions with other states (Hough, 2008). Hence, the international order is a state system in which anarchy reigns. Order is a value and concept fundamentally lacking in the above-state paradigm. Thus, classic realists see international order as a sort of battleground in which states actively compete to maximise their power and achieve superiority over their foes. As Morgenthau (1948) has famously posed, “international politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power”. This process is seen as intertwined with states’ own security. The justification to the states’ *modus operandi* is given by the concept of national interest. That is, the state ought to fulfil

its own people's interests even if, in so doing, it causes a conflict with another state and its people.

Realists assume that, in order to survive, the aforementioned maximisation of power is rooted in human nature. Humans will eventually act according to the limitations posed by their own human condition – flawed and self-interested (Hough, 2008). As argued by Weber (2010), drawing upon Morgenthau's view, people "may not be purely evil, but [they] certainly [are] tainted by the original sin. And that means that pessimism about how [people] (organized into sovereign nation-states) will behave is the only realistic way to approach international politics". Thus, the potential for disaster or destruction is constantly lurking. This pessimistic view of human nature is markedly one of the main characteristics of classical realism and the most relevant cause for dissonance between classic realists and structural realists (interchangeably known as structural realists or neorealists). Thus, classic realists expose their case clearly: people are "flawed and therefore prone to conflict. This explains why cooperation is never guaranteed and world government is unachievable" (Weber, 2010, p. 15).

The EU is fundamentally a constructivist concept that has developed in a very complex post-conflict environment, with a basic idea to preserve peace in the European continent. Therefore, its founding documents were literally cleansed of strategic vocabulary and focused on the development of a peaceful society, based on fundamental liberal-democratic values. However, recent developments at the international arena have challenged its post-Cold War understanding of IR and revitalised the realist approach. The EU found itself in a very uncomfortable situation, stuck between its constructivist *habitus* and its wider geostrategic environment dominated by assertive actors led by the realist approach to IR. The idea driving the authors of this text is to test the EU's approach to the current IR reality and analyse elements of both concepts in an attempt to find a fine-tuning balance that would be viable in the period to come.

2. The context analysis of the European security and defence

The idea about a common approach towards security in the EU is as old as its first institutional mechanisms. In the immediate post-war period, there were already different initiatives in that regard, while the very idea of formation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in the early 50s had a lot to do with institutionalising co-operation among former adversaries which would ensure stability and security in the Old Continent. Hence, even the establishment of the first form of economic co-operation at the European level had an important security dimension of its own.

The period that followed was marked by many modest attempts to upgrade co-operation among member states in political and security affairs, which culminated in the formulation of a joint policy, the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy

(CFSP), laid-down in the 1993 Maastricht Treaty. While the aforementioned development represented the first ever formulation of a common policy in the foreign and security policy field of the newly established EU, the implementation capacities were assumed only in 1999 with the enactment of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). Due to the character of the policy itself, which is directly related to the essence of sovereignty at the national level, the entire CFSP concept was built on a complicated bottom-up decision-making procedure and principle of unanimity. Based on a liberal-democratic interpretation of a *good power* in a postmodern European security discourse, the CFSP directed its efforts towards developing capacities in the field of humanitarian and rescue tasks, peace-keeping, peace-making and crisis management. The concept of soft power, which gained ground in post-Cold War Europe, was based on the EU's attractiveness and persuasion within the wider Europeanisation process that dominated EU enlargement to post-socialist states of the former Eastern bloc. The fundamental liberal-democratic values that represented the backbone of the European project allowed for the concept of security community to be determinant of the security landscape in the wider transatlantic community. Because the EU was developed as a *sui generis* concept of peaceful coexistence, based on the abovementioned liberal-democratic values, the period when European security was almost entirely managed by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the US in particular, the entire discourse was cleansed of strategic vocabulary and accordingly of an opportunity to develop a common strategic concept, not to speak about a joint strategic culture. It was therefore obvious that terms like deterrence, coercion, containment, confrontation and power balance were simply not contemplated in the EU policy making at all. Even the Lisbon Treaty, which significantly upgraded the functionality of the entire CFSP policy framework, has not set the stage for more concrete developments in that direction.

As Colin S. Gray (2010) puts it: "when operational art is all that matters, strategy is often neglected." This applies greatly to the EU's concept of the use of force, since operational capacity was in the spotlight of policy development and not the strategic use of deterrence and coercion to avoid *ad hoc* deployments. In other words, it is difficult to speak about the political strategy for the use of force when the entire effort is concentrated in order to show a capacity to deploy once the crisis erupts and to conclude the mission with as few casualties as possible, while prevention and pre-emption are not seriously taken into consideration.

The EU therefore found itself deprived of the capacity to act like a strategic actor in the international arena during the post-Cold War period when the European security landscape started to deconstruct. The process reached its peak in the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis. The era in which some prominent authors contemplated about *the end of history* (Fukuyama, 1992) was obviously replaced by a *post-postmodern European security discourse* which has not only brought back military hardware to the eastern borders of the EU, but also severe challenges to

security within its territory, hence regenerating political realism at the expense of constructivism.

Developments after the Cold War brought a new dynamic in which Europeans discontinued thinking in traditional strategic terms, and renounced deterrence, coercion and balance of power as its basic constituents. Namely, the constructivist approach to international affairs is based on an idealistic perception that liberal-democratic values are universally acceptable. Therefore, the persuasion capacity of constructs like the EU is estimated relatively high, reaching beyond the realistic limits of Europeanisation within the framework of a relatively successful enlargement process. That is why this approach falls short of foreseeing the geostrategic perception of *others vis-à-vis* the enlargement process itself, failing to notice that the process is a *win-win* scenario only for actors within the limits of its reach, while it represents a typical *zero-sum game* for other actors in the wider international arena. This approach, firmly based on the relevance of its fundamental values, has limited interest in analysing the strategic posture of potential opponents to enlargement. Hence, it does not see a reason to contemplate the possibility of confrontation or critically assess the capacities at the EU's disposal, both soft and hard, if this scenario unexpectedly occurs. Matlárý (2018, p. 24) offers an interesting perspective on that:

Threat and risk in the post-Cold War period is often diffuse and strategic thinking is therefore not always able to concentrate on specific threats that the state should plan for. Moreover, as more non-state actors have become involved on the world stage, the state is no longer the only kind of actor. Most armed conflicts since the Cold War have taken place inside states rather than as wars between military machines owned by states. This security situation has led to increasing emphasis on risk management instead of strategic thinking, something which typically involves policy only, not adversarial analysis.

Another important aspect of this dilemma is a significant difference in the strategic cultures and interests of EU member states, in particular of the ones with the greatest means and complexity of decision-making, which is at odds with the necessity to act swiftly in case of crisis. When one adds to this limited defence spending and almost non-existent military industry co-operation in the contemporary EU, it is not that difficult to estimate its real capacity to deter, coerce and respond to an emerging strategic challenge. This aspect will be covered in detail in the following chapter.

The US has been the main determinant and a guarantor of European security since the Second World War. It has used all traditional strategic means, as well as the growing synergy of NATO, whose main goal as a political-military alliance was to deter the Soviet threat to European security. This has, however, fundamentally changed in the post-Cold War period, reaching its peak with the US's strategic pivot

to Asia and the rhetoric of its current administration. While there is an overarching impression that populism is gaining ground in the transatlantic space and elsewhere, two developments from the Anglo-Saxon world have clearly surpassed the others – Brexit and election of Donald Trump in the last US presidential elections. His election campaign moto, America First, and ingrained resentment towards globalism have had a direct impact on the US foreign policy, which is still shifting. Contemporary international isolationism and disregard for fundamental institutions and basic agreements, that have made the international arena relatively functional in the post-Cold War period, have brought into question the entire concept of multilateralism. Furthermore, a very conflictual and unapologetic attitude towards international affairs, even towards allies in the transatlantic community, coupled with similar attitudes of other major actors (Russia and China), seems to be leading international affairs back into turbulent waters, characterised by *realpolitik*, zones of influence and statecraft based on the use of force.

Once a champion of multilateralism, which was clearly recognisable during president Obama's two terms in office, the US foreign policy today seems to be seriously questioning that concept. The character of the new administration's foreign policy could be linked to the professional background of the president in office, if not also to his psychological profile. Success in the business industry that he was part of was always a zero-sum game, where the principal objective was to outscore rivals instead of joining forces with them to achieve mutually beneficial goals and outcomes. The traditionalist leverage of power and wealth was hence *transferred* from a business to a foreign and security policy environment. Along that line of reasoning, unilateral actions and bilateral relations of the US with other individual international actors have been given a clear priority over multilateral endeavours with outcomes that could potentially generate multiple benefits for all stakeholders in the process. This, however, is a highly risky approach to international affairs, designed primarily to appease the electorate at the domestic level, and is already showing visible signs that it could backfire in the long run and endanger the position and leverage of the US in the international arena. The amount of withdrawals from international institutions, treaties and diplomatic practices is unprecedented in the foreign policy record of the US. Perhaps a step that will have the biggest impact on the European security and the motivation of European leaders to move toward strategic autonomy is the US's decision to withdraw from the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) with Russia, a treaty that cleansed the European security discourse of a nuclear component. While this does not immediately imply nuclear deployments in and around the EU, it leaves it unsheltered, at least psychologically, and in urge to find its own solutions with very limited deterrence capacities, if any.

The US's new foreign policy, at least in the eyes of its transatlantic allies, appears unexpected and strategically short-sighted. The US has abandoned fundamental, long-established compromises and codes of conduct in the field of

foreign and security policy, which affects its image in the transatlantic community and beyond.

Additionally, President Trump supported many processes and actors that are carrying a significant potential for the EU's disintegration. He expressed his wholehearted sympathy to Brexit and its proponents, as well as to the extreme right political forces in France, Germany and other EU countries, in hopes of loosening if not disintegrating the EU. This would be to the benefit of the US, which would be in a significantly better position for negotiation, dealing with individual European states rather than with the EU as a whole. If we assess the way Trump's administration is changing the US attitude towards the role of NATO in the European security, focusing almost entirely on the request for increased defence spending, as well as the US's withdrawal from TTIP negotiations, it becomes clear that the transatlantic partnership, at least the way remember it, is unravelling. This leaves the EU vulnerable in security terms, crippled of its capacity to coerce and deter, and forced to consolidate its CSDP policy in the best possible way if it wants to be able to tackle contemporary security challenges and increasingly assertive actors worldwide.

Russia is following an entirely different logic in the development of its security and defence capabilities than the one we are witnessing in Western Europe, especially when it comes to its wider strategic framework, posture, deterrence and coercion, as well as the political philosophy behind it. Primarily, in order to understand Russia's behaviour in the international arena, one has to realise the fact that it does not aim at becoming a liberal-democratic state but rather a global superpower.¹ Constructivism is not the appropriate theoretical framework for the analysis of Russia's foreign and security policy. The concept of shared values, being the most important component of the security community in the transatlantic space, does not have comparable relevance in Russian political discourse. The values and principles that Russia proclaims to promote, even the most general ones, like the principle of national sovereignty and minority rights, are used for purposes of national security policy in the wider international arena. Meanwhile, Russia uses its privileged position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, its strong strategic posture and influence in different pockets of the globe, as well as its highly-developed hybrid warfare doctrine and capacities to its own advantage.

Russian political realism operates in a slightly modified Cold War framework of spheres of influence, a right naturally given to those who have a capacity to defend it and use it as a departure point for strategic arm-wrestling in regions where its absolute power is contested. The disappearance of the Soviet Union from international affairs after the Cold War is openly regretted and it is a central departure point for

¹To which extent it can realistically do so, given its weaknesses, is another important debate. Nevertheless, Russia's strategy and all of its policies are developed with the ambition to drive the country in that direction.

Russia's current revisionism. President Putin's infamous statement in his 2005 annual state of the nation address is very illustrative: "The collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geo-political catastrophe of the century"².

Therefore, Russia considers the post-Soviet space a zone of its exclusive national interest and is eager to use any tools necessary to prevent somebody else's *intrusion* into its surroundings. This was clearly visible in former president Medvedev's concept of Russian foreign policy, also known as the Medvedev Doctrine, where one of his fundamental five points emphasised that "as is the case of other countries, there are regions in which Russia has privileged interests"³.

This relates especially to the enlargement of the EU and NATO, an act which Russia considers as an aggressive imposition of western values, that has taken place through misused processes to extend the influence of the transatlantic community, the US in particular, at the expense of Russian national interests. From the Russian perspective, the entire post-Cold War transformation of Eastern and Southeastern Europe was regarded as a geopolitical endeavour *par excellence* of *western extension to the east*, and not, as presented by the EU and NATO, as a process of democratisation and Europeanisation based on adopting *values of a free and democratic world*. In other words, the transformational policies without Russian consent were considered acts of adversaries, which justified fierce Russian reactions, culminating in developments in Georgia and Ukraine. This case revealed significant deficiencies in the transatlantic community when it comes to strategic framing and development of activities and policies. NATO's 2008 membership invitation to Georgia and Ukraine was anything but a strategic act. First of all, Russia's potential reaction was not seriously taken into account. Secondly, it looked as if NATO was about to grant membership to states which could not have been offered Article 5 security guarantees due to their specific geostrategic position. On the other hand, Russian reactions to that were obviously well prepared and strategic. A limited scope military intervention, which ended in the occupation of pockets of Georgian territory (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and Ukrainian territory (annexation of Crimea, frozen conflict in Donetsk and Luhansk region), has effectively blocked the development of that scenario and even prevented the possibility of NATO itself to gain compromise on that.⁴ In the words of Matlár (2018, p. 50):

This case shows that Russia will resist NATO—and perhaps EU—membership for states in its traditional and self-styled 'sphere of interest'. It

² Osborn, A. (2005), Putin: Collapse of the Soviet Union was 'catastrophe of the century', Independent (retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/putin-collapse-of-the-soviet-union-was-catastrophe-of-the-century-521064.html>).

³ Stratfor (2008), Geopolitical Diary: The Medvedev Doctrine (retrieved from <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/geopolitical-diary-medvedev-doctrine>).

⁴ Very simply, states that do not control their territory cannot be admitted to NATO due to the fact that Article 5 of the treaty cannot be enacted.

also illustrates that the West—both Europe and the US—will not counter force with force in this part of Europe.

Even the annexation of Crimea, which was a clear display of violation of international law, only resulted in condemnation from western states and sanctions that showed insufficient capacity to avert Russian actions.

In this case, again, it became clear that there was no strategy on the side of the transatlantic community, which was only able to react to Russian actions and not in a way that would anticipate and prevent them. Furthermore, developments in Syria, where Russia built up its position by using the geostrategic location of newly acquired Crimea as a strategic springboard, have shown how developments in one part of the world influence solutions in another. Namely, the fact that Russia became an important partner in resolving insecurity in Syria, as well as the negative consequences that it carries for the western world, have alleviated international pressure over its territorial gains in Ukraine and resulted in the silent acknowledgement of its annexation of Crimea.

This clearly reveals a conceptual distinction when it comes to use of force between liberal democracies and authoritarian actors. The same goes for the failed attempt to extend membership to Georgia and Ukraine. The assumption that the EU and NATO can enlarge to any state that *decides to join in an acceptable democratic fashion* is short of strategic foresight and outlook. Similarly, the assumption that the use of military power for political purposes is obsolete, even when it includes the violation of a UN member state's territorial sovereignty, proved to be oblivious to the general trends of deregulation of contemporary international affairs. In these circumstances, authoritarian actors that have championed defence spending over the last few decades have a strategic advantage which has to be taken into account.

3. The concept of a European army on the horizon? National interests and the road ahead

“Our future as Europeans will at some point be with a European army”⁵. These words of the European Commission's President Jean-Claude Juncker, back in 2015, convey the President's vision of defence and security integration and, ultimately, EU cohesion.

Mr. Juncker's proposition, bold and ambitious as it may be, does not hold other significance than raising the topic to the European agenda and signalling a new way forward for the Union. The European Commission's President does not solely own the power to push the EU onto this specific path. Nonetheless, it does point out a way forward and the necessity to renew the EU's defence and security policies, as well as clearly state the Union's need to pursue different strategies to hold off

⁵ Keating, D. (2015), Juncker calls for an EU army, Politico (retrieved from <https://www.politico.eu/article/juncker-calls-for-an-eu-army/>).

potential new threats in a rapidly changing globalised world. The decision-making process though remains in the sphere of the member states.

The EU Member States' national interests play a key role in the functioning of European defence due to the EU's decision-making processes. Particularly, in the area of foreign and security policy, Member States remain in charge. Decisions regarding the aforementioned topics are made under the rule of unanimity (Horworth, 2012). Thus, policy requirements for establishing deeper integration in terms of security and the possibility of creating a European army are tied to individual member states' interests and views on the issue. While, in principle, all states have a say on this issue, the most influential ones will be those who will steer the entire process. For that reason, mindful of the spatial limits of this article, only their specific positions will be presented in the following lines. This, of course, does not imply neglect of relevance of the position of other member states.

France has been at the forefront of the idea of a European army for decades. In fact, President Charles de Gaulle tried unsuccessfully to pursue this endeavour in the 1950s. In 1996, the then prime minister, Alain Juppé, proposed the same idea. In an interview in 2018, President Macron made a similar appeal by calling for a real European army "as part of his idea for *L'Europe qui protège* (a Europe that protects)" (Franke, 2018). President Macron's stance, first and foremost, intends to call for *more Europe*, that is a deeper level of integration, particularly in defence and security terms, as well as revitalising a struggling European Union. Furthermore, it is a call for action against possible external and internal threats – terrorism and populism primarily – that severely cripple the EU's capacity to project its normative power, its greatest asset, elsewhere. President Macron's initiative is also strategic as it intends to position France at the forefront of the European project as a driving force of the organisation, leading efforts to level its status with Germany in terms of leadership within the Union. Adding to the expected opposition from the United States – which prefers defence and security matters to be dealt with in NATO's realm – President Macron faced other problems, internally, that will most likely slow down his stance in the European sphere. During his term as French President, he faced very low approval ratings (around 30%), while populism loomed in the country – as shown in the 2017's election. Additionally, dealing with the *gilets jaunes*' protests has been a burden for several months. Hence, France's internal situation will likely put a halt to President Macron's initiative, at least for the foreseeable future.

Germany has aligned itself with France and the European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker. Chancellor Merkel has stated that the "[European Union] has to work on a vision to establish a real European army one day" (Lawrence, 2018). Chancellor Merkel's statement reflects the poor relationship between the United States and Germany and the general feeling of European leaders about relying on NATO after Donald Trump's election. According to the German Chancellor, Europeans have to take the necessary steps to guarantee the survival of the European community (Bennhold and Erlanger, 2018). Even though the idea of

not colliding with but complementing NATO was reaffirmed, it remains clear that the idea of a European army serves the purpose of emancipating European countries from NATO, thus projecting a stronger and more independent Union. It also marks a turnaround in Germany's take on foreign and defence policy. Traditionally, Germany has been one of the most Atlanticist countries within the EU, one of the most committed to a truly effective partnership with the United States. The recent relations between the EU and the US, however, particularly over NATO, have provided an opportunity for a more assertive role of Germany in the security and defence policy (Bennhold and Erlanger, 2018). This, in turn, reasserts Germany's leadership role within the Union, and provides a common goal ahead for more integration. The new Franco-German friendship treaty⁶, signed in the city of Aachen in 2019, gives further impulse to the idea of a European army and a clear signal of aligned policy in Paris and Berlin. According to Chancellor Merkel, the treaty frames "a common military culture" which could "contribute to the creation of a European army" (McCarthy, 2019). Nevertheless, Chancellor Merkel faces similar problems as her French counterpart. Her CDU party is working out its leadership transition and obtaining poorer results in elections, while populism is an important issue in the country. Leaving soon, Chancellor Merkel's commitment to the creation of a European army could be overturned by future circumstances.

An optimistic view of a common European military endeavour would reminisce about "longstanding bilateral military cooperation between EU countries such as the Franco-German European Corps or the German/Dutch Corps, the EU's multinational Battle Groups or fused military services such as the joint Belgian-Dutch navy" (Tigner, 2018). Nonetheless, neither of these initiatives presuppose ceding military sovereignty. Furthermore, taking into consideration the ongoing *division* within the EU, the case for a truly European security policy that safeguards European interests, security and political *status quo* remains bleak. The aforementioned concurs for the difficult moment within the union and, consequently, for the lack of *momentum* for reforms that could lead to deeper integration in security terms.

Adding to the above-mentioned governance issues, the EU will face further problems if it is to deepen its security and defence policy and eventually create a European army, particularly with regard to its capabilities and resources. While efforts are being made to strengthen European defence budgets – in 2015-2016 they stopped their post-Cold War decline – NATO defence expenditure data is paradigmatic of the EU's own current level of commitment to its defence in the context of the alliance (Pothier, 2019). NATO's 2018 defence spending estimates show a disproportionate expenditure, particularly when comparing the EU 28 and the United States. In 2018, the EU 28 spent *circa* \$285,742 million while the United States reached an expenditure of *circa* \$706,063 million, more than double that of

⁶See the full text of the Treaty of Aachen at the following link: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/germany/france-and-germany/franco-german-treaty-of-aachen/>.

EU member states, to a total NATO defence expenditure of \$1,013,406 million (NATO, 2018). In relative terms, just a minority of European countries have reached the goal of 2% of defence expenditure as a share of GDP, namely Greece, Estonia, the United Kingdom and Latvia, while the United States is currently spending 3.5% of their GDP (NATO, 2018). This question has been raised lately and has been in the centre of the discussion regarding the alliance, especially after President Trump's request to European members of NATO to increase their defence expenditure to a minimum of 2% of their GDP. The failure of European countries to increase their contribution in the context of NATO reveals the difficulties that EU member states would face in the event of creating their own army without the crucial contribution of the United States. Furthermore, it would imply that significant resources would have to be diverted to *militaristic purposes*, a scenario that is somewhat paradoxical to the EU's core values and its normative power tradition.

Another important issue casting a shadow on cohesive security and defence policy at the EU level is the lack of interoperability and effective resource allocation among member states. Economies of scale are hugely important to improve effectiveness and efficiency, particularly as pressure on national budgets remains high (European Commission, 2017). Thus, the duplication of military systems used by EU member states creates additional difficulties. Within the EU-28, there are 17 different types of main battle tanks, 29 different types of destroyers/frigates and 20 different types of fighter planes, totalling 178 different weapon systems. The United States, on the other hand, has 30 types of weapon systems (European Commission, 2017). EU member states not only lack interoperability in terms of equipment, but they also provide different training and strategies to their military personnel which, in turn, makes any kind of deep cooperation extremely difficult. Predictions are made for 2030 (Barrie *et al.*, 2018) with a multitude of scenarios in concurrency to access the EU's capabilities. Several shortfalls, which indicate further problems lying ahead for the EU's operability, even in the long run, are estimated (Barrie *et al.*, 2018). Thus, in the case of a European army, the EU member states would face similar problems, if not more structural ones, which would fundamentally undermine the capacity of a truly European defence.

A final problem overshadowing the creation of a European army is public opinion polls about the issue. Meanwhile, there is no clear rejection of the concept, nor a clear majority supporting it and giving confidence to European leaders to pursue this endeavour, especially at a time when the main proponents face complicated domestic situations. According to the Eurobarometer, the EU 28 approval for the creation of a European army is 55%. Thus, it is far from being overwhelming and far from showing a clear way forward in terms of public opinion. In 11 out of 28 countries, 40% or more people totally oppose the creation of a European army. Thus, keeping in mind the level of public support, the aforementioned question related to capacity, as well as burdening domestic issues in

leading EU member states, it remains very unlikely that important steps regarding the creation of a European army will be taken in the foreseeable future.

There can be no recognisable international political actor without a strategy. A strategic approach to relevant international issues assumes at least harmonised, if not unified, values and/or threat-perception metrics and capacities to pre-empt and respond, depending on the theoretical background of your approach to IR. The applicability of selected approaches cannot be measured *in a vacuum*. In other words, every international political entity that attempts to assume an important role on broader regional or global level has to take into account the wider geostrategic environment and diversity of concepts, guiding principles and interests of players in different corners of the globe. The biggest trap for a growing normative power is to assume limitless implementability of its values, especially if this is to serve as a conceptual springboard for the development of the capacity to understand and predict the actions of the others in a given geopolitical environment, in other words, a strategic foresight capacity. International affairs are a dynamic arena, where different tools are used, in which one period sheds light on the transformation capacity and normative power as a game-changer, while other periods require hardware and capacity/political consensus to use it in order to be perceived as a recognisable actor, capable of maintaining its own security and of contributing to the consolidation of others in its immediate neighbourhood and beyond.

The concept of transatlantic community, the way we have known it so far and, in particular, US support to sustainable European security, seems to be deconstructing. This has a cumulative and multifaceted impact on the strategic leverage of players on both sides of the Atlantic in the wider international arena. While the US appears to be drifting away from the role of the leader of the free world, mainly due to its international isolationism and disregard for international institutions and treaties, the EU is struggling with internal divisions and rise of populism, while being deprived of the US's comfortable, decades-long security shield. In the increasingly deregulated international affairs, this is a clear signal that the constructivist approach to IR and security may fall short of providing adequate responses to emerging challenges, particularly in the case of a *sui generis* political organism like the EU. Recognising this does not necessarily mean giving up on its *constructivist habitus*, based on synergy, solidarity and the concept of shared values, but rather equipping it with tools that would not only contribute to its resilience, but also to the Union's political leverage in an increasingly volatile environment characterised by political realism.

The current momentum in the international arena provides an opportunity to get at least the first phase of this process started, even though there is limited agreement on the desired goals and outcomes. At this point, even modest institutional developments in the field of CSDP, like PESCO and EDF, topped by the initiation of a debate about future perspectives of European security and defence, could potentially modify the current discourse and be regarded as a solid departure point.

Conclusions

Two channels of development of CSDP – strategic and practical – should go hand in hand. While previous paragraphs clearly define our attitude towards the need to build a common strategic culture, we recognise the fact that very limited progress could be expected unless there is a clear break-through in the practical sphere. The gradual deconstruction of national barriers in the defence industry co-operation, *per exemple*, supported by EU funds, has a significant potential in the multiplication of the profits, which can attract European companies and create additional job opportunities. This develops an economic base for a European defence industry that could potentially serve as a pillar for increased synergy in this specific field. Namely, shared interests frequently help foster joint threat- perception that leads to harmonised attitudes to emerging challenges and ways to tackle them, creating an opportunity to consolidate a common strategic approach to the issue at stake. If the real sector follows and creates capacities that can serve as a functional back-up to joint policies, it is not that difficult to envisage a more robust, if not assertive, European security and defence capacity capable of providing a solid backup to the EU's current peace-keeping and development aid potentials. Perhaps this is the spot where constructivism meets realism in the EU policy and defence realm.

To use sports terminology, if you want to achieve something, you have to raise the bar. The debate about the European army, especially the statements of the highest EU and member states' officials, should be viewed in that sense. More concretely, understanding the current crisis in the transatlantic concept of security community, and showing the political will and potential to do more for European security, does not mean abandoning the concept itself. It would be unwise to assume that the proponents of this debate do not understand the importance of NATO and the US as its dominant member for European security, regardless of the current dissonance in the tones of partners on the two shores of the Atlantic. *Au contraire*, a closer look at the CSDP's institutional development reveals that it actually reflects the priorities of NATO, meaning that the very essence of this policy has a complementary and not competitive character *vis-à-vis* the Alliance. Furthermore, in the words of Cox-Brusseau (2018), the goals of CSDP developments:

[...] are far more likely to be as just as much political as practical. The utility of common defence as a mechanism for establishing a new sovereignty structure and boosting integration should not be forgotten when assessing the recent Franco-German calls for a European army, nor should the potential unifying role that PESCO could play in European politics be ignored, particularly in the wake of the United Kingdom's departure.

As we pointed out earlier on, there can be no recognisable international political actor without a strategy. To build it, especially for an entity like the EU in

such a turbulent international environment, it takes a lot of time and effort. This is primarily due to the fact that the current IR reality requires the Union to maintain/acquire capacities for both constructivist and realist *modus operandi*. The EU must maintain its fundamental values, synergy and solidarity as its core principles of existence. On the other hand, it seems that an increasingly unpredictable international environment, characterised by a major trend of deregulation and a rising number of assertive realist actors, requires more than just diplomatic tools, development aid and *ad-hoc* crisis management capacities.

If the current trends in the field of CSDP indicate an intention to do two things at once – ensure further integration and political stability of the EU as a basic precondition for the development of joint security and defence, as well as modestly start developing the capacities in this specific field, in accordance with the unfavourable climate both in the EU and beyond – then, they should be cautiously welcomed as the optimal departure point upon which to build in the period to come.

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