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POLICY BRIEF

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S STRATEGIC AUTONOMY: A PRACTICAL SOLUTION OR VERBAL AMBITIONS?

Žaneta Ozoliņa

THE RĪGA CONFERENCE

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The Rīga Conference Policy Briefs Introductory Remarks

Dear the Rīga Conference Participants, Dear Readers,

In 2021, international relations have still been sailing in troubled waters, and further answers have been sought to issues related to the long-term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on global development.

This year, on the one hand, existing triggers have augmented: rapid developments and power shift in Afghanistan with potentially global consequences; Russia's escalation of tension and sabre-rattling at the Ukrainian border; increasing confrontation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority; and an irresponsible behaviour by the Belarusian regime. On the other hand, also the issues long in the focus of international agenda have retained their urgency: competition among global and regional powers; increasing risks to international rule of law and democratic values; climate change; the diverse faces of the migration challenge; the ever-increasing role of new technologies in tackling foreign policy matters; and the fight against disinformation.

It still calls for a responsible and broad-based approach on the part of the international community to achieve results conducive to global development and security. The further implementation of the European Green Deal policy and the NATO reflection process 2030 have been significant contribution to this end.

International processes are growing increasingly sophisticated and intricate, when alongside a classical approach to diplomacy foreign policy makers and implementers are expected to come up with swift, unconventional and creative, while at the same time sustainable and effective solutions. They demonstrate the need for a more inclusive approach that results

in even more governmental and non-governmental actors being engaged in foreign policy.

I wish the readers of the Rīga Conference Policy Briefs to continue enriching their insights and knowledge of regional and global foreign policy processes and be active in generating new ideas on their path towards that goal.

Edgars Rinkēvičs

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia



Rīga Conference Policy Briefs Introductory Remarks

“Peace” is defined as “a period in which there is no war”¹ or “freedom from disturbance; tranquility”². Like before, this year, globally, there were neither. While there have been breakthroughs in combating the COVID pandemic with vaccination roll-out and major economic stimuli from governments, the virus is continuing to disturb our daily lives. The war in Eastern Ukraine is still ongoing as Ukraine battles for its’ territorial integrity, while in Georgia the same fight has become a frozen conflict. The hybrid warfare is maturing and becoming more complex as demonstrated by Lukashenko’s regime in hijacking the Ryanair flight, as well as in orchestrating the recent breaches of Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish borders by brutally using innocent, misled people as hybrid warfare tools. There is little tranquility in our societies. Dis-information continued to be a troublesome weapon throughout the year and it has fueled further divisions among people with anti-vaccination campaigns being the most prominent theme. The attack on the U.S. Capitol in the beginning of the year, the rise of conspiracy theories and populism are clear symptoms of confused, scared and/or angry people.

Existing security challenges, such as Russia’s opportunism and constant military build-up, uncertainty of terrorism threats boosted by the Taliban take-over in Afghanistan, unpredictable climate cataclysms, together with emerging challenges related to advancements in technology and supply chain vulnerabilities will only add to this unrest, this state in-between peace and war.

As a result, demand for security will continue to increase. And Western democracies must be able to deliver. Winston Churchill once famously said:

¹ Oxford Languages

² *Ibid.*

“Never let a good crisis go to waste”. Thus, we must learn the lessons and act decisively to ensure security – to ensure that our democracies are prepared and capable to overcome whatever might come our way. To ensure that our societies feel safe and become more resilient in the face of ever evolving challenges. In this endeavor Western democracies need to do more and together to achieve true peace.

Open discussion, exchange of knowledge and ideas can certainly help to seek answers on how to do it better and I believe this year’s Riga Conference will be a valuable opportunity to do so.

Artis Pabriks

Minister of Defence of the Republic of Latvia



**THE EUROPEAN UNION'S STRATEGIC
AUTONOMY: A PRACTICAL SOLUTION
OR VERBAL AMBITIONS?**

Žaneta Ozoliņa

INTRODUCTION

The commonly used concept of “strategic autonomy” is certainly part of the political discourse rhetoric of the European Union (EU), over which many spears have been broken in recent years. Since 2016, when Member States adopted the EU Global Strategy Paper¹, Europe had to face many unprecedented challenges and threats: uncontrolled migration, terrorism, conflict in neighbouring regions, hybrid threats, the consequences of climate change affecting the quality of human life and many others. The EU’s ambitions to be more responsible for the safety of its citizens were therefore justified. The increasing threats coincided with a shift in the power balance of the superpowers, which highlighted that 1) the US Donald Trump administration distanced itself from its traditional global partner Europe and international treaties, 2) the aggressive behaviour of the Russian Federation showed that its influence on the world could grow and 3) the economic power of the People’s Republic of China was increasingly bolstered by political and military capacity. The concept of “strategic autonomy” is thus used as a term to describe the EU’s commitment to a policy based on developed military capabilities that are supported by stalwart Member States making rapid and decisive decisions to protect and guarantee the security of their citizens.

The demand for joint action to mitigate risks is audible in the capitals of all Member States. According to Mark Leonard (Head of the European Council on Foreign Relations) and Jeremy Shapiro (an expert on European affairs): “After a long period of denial, most European policymakers in both

¹ European External Action Service. Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy. (2016). Retrieved (12.03.2021) from: https://eas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf

Brussels and member states now broadly recognise that preserving what they have built in Europe requires a forceful response to the new geopolitical age. As a result, a proliferation of terminology and efforts like this one has emerged from think tanks and government bodies. All reflect a broad sense that Europeans need to participate in this global competition or they will lose. Terms such as 'European sovereignty', 'strategic autonomy' and 'open strategic autonomy' all seek to address this broad problem even as they emphasise different dangers or aspects of it."²

Over the past five years, there has been no shortage of verbal innovation from EU institutions and politicians to describe the same old problems: failure to agree on defence and security policies, the implementation of operational decisions and a unified course of action in difficult international situations. Therefore, it is not surprising that the well-conceived idea of strategic autonomy has not resulted in a cohesive group that admires and welcomes the flow of the diversity of the descriptor – strategic sovereignty, open strategic autonomy, strategic vision, strategic compass.

At the moment, we can distinguish between three dominant opinion groups. One group consists of representatives of EU institutions working directly on external, security and defence policy issues and a series of political elites from Member States who enthusiastically defend the Union's move towards closer integration in a wide range of policies that strengthen its economic, political and military capabilities and would make the EU a stronger, more united player on a global scale. This group could be identified as the optimists, and it indicates a direction in which Member States would have the energy and financial resources to invest in measures that protect citizens and long-term national sustainability in general. The second – the critical group – is composed of experts (representatives of the epistemic community) from world think tanks who highlight the objective reasons for the emergence of the concept of strategic autonomy but also question whether the new

² Leonard, M., Shapiro, J. Sovereign Europe, dangerous world: Five years to protect Europe's capacity to act. ECFR, December 2020. Retrieved (12.03.2021) from: Sovereign Europe, dangerous world: Five years to protect Europe's capacity to act – European Council on Foreign Relations (ecfr.eu)

set of words will resolve conflicts that exist since the birth of the EU, i.e. regarding strategic cultures, geopolitical interests, national security and defence policies. The third group is composed of perseverant critical optimists from think tanks, whose reasoning stems from an objective need to make strategic choices. If Member States are excluded from participating in international and global processes in the short term, then, in the medium term, their populations will be at an even greater risk than during the pandemic of 2020-2021 (when the closure of borders, solidarity and cross-reference, the range of basic goods needed for human life and health, and the lack of vaccines in the EU were important examples of the necessity for strategic autonomy).

The wide-ranging set of diverse views further encourages the search for answers to the fate of the strategic autonomy of the EU. Will it remain enumerated in official documents as proof of the conflicting expectations of Member States, or will it become a political motivator for joint and ambitious action? Three milestones are needed to answer this question: where are the roots of the EU's strategic autonomy, what has already been achieved, and in what direction is this strategic autonomy evolving?

WHERE ARE THE ROOTS OF THE EU'S STRATEGIC AUTONOMY?

Although the concept of strategic autonomy has previously been used extensively, it became an integral part of the European Union's political discourse in 2016 with the adoption of the EU's Global Strategy³, which refers to it as one of the pillars of external and security policy. It is significant that the Union's security is covered by this document from a variety of viewpoints, including protection, energy, cybersecurity, strategic communications and responses to other current challenges. Despite the initial overarching nature of

³ European External Action Service. Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy. (2016). Retrieved (12.03.2021) from: https://eas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf

strategic autonomy, Member States are paying the most attention to the area of defence, as it is the sector that is experiencing the slowest integration and the highest level of reticence against decisive action.

The focus on defence was determined by the previous experience of Member States in protecting their national defence policies, as well as by their reluctance to increase spending on national defence. This situation recalls past historical attempts to achieve closer cohesion in external and security policies, which are characterised by ambitious plans with the increments for implementation becoming slower in light of other commitments. The most notable examples are the inclusion of a common external and security policy in the ambitious Maastricht Treaty in 1993 and the EU's delayed, ineffective and even controversial action during the Balkan war, which had provided the opportunity to demonstrate the EU's commitment to promoting and strengthening peace and security beyond its own gates. Another prominent example of this situation is the creation of EU Battle Groups. These have been operational since 2007 but have not been used once, even in situations where their participation could be deemed logical and necessary, such as in the case of the Congolese or Libyan missions. Member States have eventually come to call for strategic autonomy in the EU's capacity to mitigate and address international challenges. They have become aware of the current gaps in military capabilities, national defence and security policies, the defence industry and R&D. This has happened in light of the ever-increasing capabilities and ambitions of global players, which were further heated up by former US President Donald Trump's frequent criticism of the insufficient investment in defence and the non-compliance of member states, as in official documents. If the global role of the US is reduced but external threats and regional conflicts keep increasing, then there is nothing left for the EU to do but to grow its own muscles by building its potential and capacity for defence. If Europe has global ambitions, they cannot be achieved by economic or political means alone. Military capabilities are also needed.

The initiative for strategic autonomy as it was originally conceived raised more questions than answers. There is no doubt that the EU is capable

of deftly formulating politically ambitious objectives, but struggles arise in the implementation of policy and other processes regarding these ambitions. By introducing the concept of strategic autonomy, the intent was to encourage Europe to play a more cohesive role in external and security policy as opposed to isolating and narrowing its action in international developments. This created general confusion as well as confusion about how to implement the concept. The relevance of the term's interpretation is aptly described by the assessment of Leonard and Schapiro: "Such autonomy should not be confused with a retreat into isolationism or protectionism. Europe's openness and the resulting interdependence are the very essence of the European integration project. The well-regulated movements of goods, money, people, and ideas sit at the heart of the European construction. The point of strategic sovereignty, as the European Commission's idea of 'Open Strategic Autonomy' also expresses, is to sustain that openness by increasing Europeans' ability to act independently and shape the world around them."⁴

The EU's commitment to not deviate from the chosen path of strategic autonomy was reaffirmed once again by the European Commission in 2017 by presenting a vision for the future of Europe.⁵ This was followed by reflection papers, one of which focused entirely on protecting Europe⁶ and made a clear reference to the need for closer integration in the development of military and civilian capabilities.

If all the initiatives and political commitments following the enforcement of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 and the approval of the EU's Global Strategy in 2016 are placed in one basket, it can be argued that they are all focused on encouraging Member States to assess, exploit and develop military potential, which are equally important for guaranteeing the security of citizens and

⁴ Leonard, M., Shapiro, J. Sovereign Europe, dangerous world: Five years to protect Europe's capacity to act. ECFR, December 2020. Retrieved (12.03.2021) from: Sovereign Europe, dangerous world: Five years to protect Europe's capacity to act – European Council on Foreign Relations (ecfr.eu)

⁵ White Paper on the Future of Europe. Retrieved (16.03.2021) from: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/white_paper_on_the_future_of_europe_en.pdf

⁶ European Commission. (2017). Reflection paper on the future of European Defence. Retrieved (16.03.2021) from: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/reflection-paper-defence_en.pdf

for strengthening regional and international security. This security basket also contains a number of other initiatives including the PESCO⁷ format, the European Defence Fund⁸, the European Intervention Initiative proposed by France⁹, the Capability Defence Mechanism (CDM), the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) and the traditional cooperation between the EU and NATO, which has been increased since 2016.

“The political agreements among the Member States as mentioned above show evidence that the motivation for enhanced cooperation in the field of security and defence is a necessity, not a desire. However, the old but crucial questions still remain: How to make the EU act as a single actor in international processes? How to achieve rapid decision-making? And what are the most effective means for influence on a global scale?”

WHAT DEVELOPMENT STAGE ARE WE IN DURING THE MIDDLE OF 2021?

A change in the conceptual and practical development of the EU's Strategic Autonomy was brought about in the spring of 2020 by the start of a pandemic that, at the very high price of human lives, exposed the long-standing but obvious problems of the EU. These were related to political choices that spoke against the very logic of the structure and functioning of the EU: closing borders, restricting the free movement of goods and people, confusion in the coordination of public health policy, weak inter-institutional

⁷ Permanent Structured Cooperation. Retrieved (15.03.2021) from: PESCO | Member States Driven (europa.eu)

⁸ European Defence Fund. Retrieved (15.03.2021) from: European Defence Fund (EDF) (europa.eu)

⁹ Ministry of Armed Forces. European Intervention Initiative. Retrieved (15.03.2021) from: L'Initiative européenne d'intervention (defense.gouv.fr)

cooperation, etc. However, one of the most painful conclusions – while the EU discussed strategic autonomy in defence policy – appeared to be the lack of strategic autonomy in the efforts to ensure the health and quality of life for EU citizens in the context of the pandemic. The initial confusion was followed by a “political gathering” between the European Commission and the European Parliament, which also covered a substantive review of strategic autonomy. During the video conference of the European Council on the 23rd of April 2020, European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen emphasised the importance of increasing the strategic autonomy of the Union and producing the essential goods for survival within the borders of Europe. They also noted that the first steps have already been taken towards better monitoring of foreign direct investments.¹⁰ The goal of this monitoring is to protect strategic infrastructure from investments that “could threaten legitimate public policy objectives”.¹¹

For the EU, such a painful and unflattering lesson has an impact on the content of the concept of strategic autonomy. A difficult and ambiguous situation arises when considering the categories of security theory, i.e. extending the understanding of strategic autonomy from ‘security’ to ‘defence and security’ that is focused on a comprehensive approach including military and economic security to achieve strategic autonomy. The European Defence Community has been long in the planning since 1951, but it only truly began to take shape in 2016 in terms of its capabilities, effective decision-making procedures and a tangible defence industry. However, these proved to be insufficient in light of the challenges of the pandemic. The EU may have been unable to agree on implementing the Common Security and Defence Policy in the past, particularly in situations where military resources are needed, but the pandemic exposed an inability to act swiftly in other sectors that are necessary for ensuring the sustainability of European resilience. The adoption

¹⁰ Regulation (EU) 2019/452 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 March 2019 establishing a framework for the screening of foreign direct investments into the Union. The regulation is applied from 11 October 2020.

¹¹ Retrieved (15.03.2021) from: Video conference of the members of the European Council - Consilium (europa.eu)

of the EU's Global Strategy on Resilience has been discussed at greater length than Strategic Autonomy, but unfortunately, no concrete action has followed in this respect. The "2020 Strategic Foresight Report" published by the European Commission¹² recognises the need to focus more seriously on resilience and highlights the capability to address challenges and to transform the EU into a more sustainable, fair and democratic union.¹³ One innovation of this report is the introduction of sustainability monitoring, which is precisely the kind of comprehensive policy monitoring that has been lacking so far. When compared to many other reports, the most significant added value of this report is that it addresses certain dimensions that play a strategic role in ensuring EU autonomy: the social, economic, geopolitical, green and digital dimensions.¹⁴ If the EU is not able to act as a single player in global processes in these areas, both the prestige of the EU and, more importantly, the quality of life of its citizens and the sustainability of the community will suffer. One of the key issues to be answered is the EU's ability to find the optimal formula for maintaining the balance between increasing its military capacity and, at the same time, targeted development of multilateral strategic autonomy – internationally and regionally.

The EU's geopolitical advantages and merits listed in the various documents are ambiguous. Many of the conditions described as potential are actually high-risk. Hence, the claim that the EU is perceived as a trusted partner and a responsible leader requires a more detailed justification, as those countries (China and Russia) participating in the global game have more confidence in power than in responsibility. The geopolitical importance and sustainability effects of EU benefits (such as global trade potential) are an advantage of the EU, but economic growth rates are also significant in other countries around the world. The assumption that the EU is building on sustainability in its neighbourhood and beyond can also be criticised. If sustainability

¹² European Commission. 2020 Strategic Foresight Report. Charting the course towards a more resilient Europe. Retrieved (15.03.2021) from: [strategic foresight report 2020_1.pdf](#) (europa.eu)

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ European Commission. 2020 Strategic Foresight Report. Charting the course towards a more resilient Europe. pp. 8-34. Retrieved (15.03.2021) from: [strategic foresight report 2020_1.pdf](#) (europa.eu)

is assessed by the funding of different programmes in these countries, then this statement can be accepted, but if the assessment was based on a diversified analysis of sustainability, then the EU's contribution to the neighbourhood would not be very efficient. The recognition that the EU has long-standing experience in setting international standards is unquestioned, but the nature of international relations has changed over the past five years. It is dominated by centrifugal forces and national policies. What the EU considers to be an advantage and significant potential, can thus be considered a weakness from the viewpoint of other countries. On the other hand, the bold statements that the EU is a 'space power' and can effectively harness its geopolitical capabilities cohesively and effectively can be judged to be wishful thinking.¹⁵

The stated elements of capacity are based on an analysis of the prevailing trends in international relations, assuming that in the future they could change in nature, as could the ability of the EU to exploit the existing challenges to its benefit. Among the major challenges are the pressures from national interests on multilateralism and the global financial system, the movement of major global trends in the East and South, the changing security environment, the ability to manage migration, and the lack of unity in addressing specific external and security policy issues. The Covid-19 crisis has also demonstrated signs of weakness, such as the EU's over-reliance on non-EU producers, which can create supply interruptions and affect certain sectors of the economy. Decline in trade and investment can have an impact on global prosperity and stability and further weaken EU positions and its economic sovereignty. The crisis has also accelerated attacks by authoritarian regimes on democracies using false narratives.¹⁶

The commitments formulated as mobilising strategic resources for humanitarian and assistance purposes to make Covid-19 vaccines and medicines available to the wider world have not even been met within the internal borders of the EU, not to mention globally. The claim that the EU is a leader in

¹⁵ European Commission. 2020 Strategic Foresight Report. Charting the course towards a more resilient Europe. pp. 14-15. Retrieved (15.03.2021) from: [strategic foresight_report_2020_1.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁶ European Commission. 2020 Strategic Foresight Report. Charting the course towards a more resilient Europe. pp. 16-20. Retrieved (15.03.2021) from: [strategic foresight_report_2020_1.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

action and is backed by the “European Team” has not materialised in terms of either its intended role or the approach.¹⁷

Although there has been a growing consensus between Member States and at the European political level regarding the meaning and content of strategic autonomy, there is still confusion on how to tackle this politically designed concept, the implementation of which is still overshadowed by unknowns. If a concept like European sovereignty is added to the debate, the answers are even more complicated. As Thomas Kleine-Brockhoff described the situation in a discussion, the use of the concept of sovereignty is a bad idea, because it focuses more on protection and less on security and can become a term that divides rather than unites countries. Calling for greater European sovereignty also makes reference to federalism, which has many opponents in Europe.¹⁸

WHERE IS EUROPE MOVING?

At the centre of the pandemic, Europe has no alternative to looking hopefully towards the direction of strategic autonomy, which could ensure its ability to swiftly make decisions on issues relating to the well-being, security and stability of citizens and the community as a whole. Indeed, the recent and ongoing crises (ranging from financial, economic, migration and finally Covid-19) have encouraged even the most sceptical countries to change their views on the concept of strategic autonomy. However, the EU's capacity to act autonomously and to step up its role in the world and at home will be determined by a number of variables.

First, one of the movers of the EU's strategic autonomy was its historically – the US, who had begun to speak of distancing itself from defending

¹⁷ The “European Team” aims to pool the resources of the EU, its Member States, financial institutions, in particular the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

¹⁸ Retrieved (15.08.2021) from: FACE-OFF: With a Biden Presidency, is European Sovereignty Still Needed?– YouTube

Europe and European interests. The peculiar status of a “freeloader” in NATO security and defence policy matters was no longer possible, as highlighted by the constant criticism of European countries not reaching the 2% defence budget that was being contributed from the US side. The “freeloader” was being threatened to be thrown out of the train, which led to the need to seek money for the ticket. The renewal of a traditional strategic partnership with the US could undermine the interest and willingness to invest in European defence capabilities, which in turn would successively undermine its global role. The allure of economic power alone is not enough to prevent the influencing of international relations, especially when some of the dominant powers show a trend of revisionism in both the use of military force, the application and even conquest of territorial claims, and the review of international norms. Even if the reduction of pressure on some of the partners may seem to be a relief in the short term, particularly in a pandemic environment where shifting funding from safety and protection to health and economic maintenance is a necessity, it may prove critical in the long term because of the global ambitions of countries such as China and Russia.

Second, defining and defending the EU's global interests is important in the context of the rivalry between regional powers on spheres of influence and leverage. According to the authors of a study carried out by the European Parliament: “In their quest for a hybrid solution, where ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ power elements would come together in a unique manner and would allow the EU to reassert its position internationally, scholars and practitioners have advanced concepts like ‘smart power’,¹⁹ ‘sharp power’,²⁰ or ‘shaping power’.²¹ The same academics and practitioners posited that the most flexible and rapid manner to ensure that the EU effectively defends its

¹⁹ Davis Cross, M. K. (2011). *The European External Action Service and Smart Power*. USC Centre on Public Diplomacy.

²⁰ Biersteker, T. (2020). The Potential of Europe's Sharp and Soft Power, *Global Policy*, 11 (3).

²¹ Grevi, G. (2019). Strategic autonomy for European choices: The key to Europe's shaping power. EPC. Retrieved (26.03.2021) from: Strategic autonomy for European choices: The key to Europe's shaping (epc.eu)

interests in a world increasingly dominated by geopolitical considerations would be to use its 'soft' power tools in a 'hard manner'...".²²

Third, the EU has adopted a number of important documents, the introduction of or the departure from which will determine the future strategic fate of the Union. One of these is the 2020 Strategic Foresight Report, which includes a number of key policy elements to encourage the transition from words to actions. It is a complex approach that combines geopolitical and internal political aspects, identifying potential risks in each of them.

“ If the EU is able to focus not only on resilience but also on a comprehensive approach (production, reserves, supply of raw materials, trade in peace and crisis conditions, etc.), then it will be possible to talk about a strategic approach to strategic issues and the development of a strategic culture.”

As Jānis Karlsbergs noted in a discussion held by LATO: “Protection cannot be isolated from solid strategic issues such as the market.”²³

Also important is a commitment to regular monitoring of resiliency and the development of a regular report based on the evaluation of key indicators in a dashboard mechanism.²⁴ It could be argued that the EC's actions resulting from such reports will be thousands of pages, but the process of preparing them and the consequent comparison of national achievements will encourage Member States and EU institutions to fulfil their commitments and focus resources on achieving certain objectives. Without the monitoring mechanism, the 2020 Strategic Foresight Report could become a routine document that

²² Anghel, S., Immenkamp, B., Lazarou, E., Saulnier, J.L., Wilson, A.B. (2020). On the path to 'strategic autonomy'. The EU in an evolving geopolitical environment. European Parliamentary Research Service. Retrieved (12.02.2021) from: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/652096/EPRS_STU\(2020\)652096_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/652096/EPRS_STU(2020)652096_EN.pdf)

²³ Retrieved (12.03.2021) from: Strategic Autonomy of the European Union: Is a comprehensive approach possible? – YouTube

²⁴ European Commission (2020). 2020 Strategic Foresight Report. Charting the course towards a more resilient Europe. pp. 35-38. Retrieved (18.03.2021) from: [strategic_fore_sight_report_2020_1.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/epru/strategic_fore_sight_report_2020_1.pdf) (europa.eu)

gets forgotten, without reference in the Council's conclusions about whether countries continue to deliver on the promises made. From the Latvian viewpoint, it would be beneficial to develop a set of maintenance indicators at the EU level and a synthesised resiliency index.²⁵ As early as 2015, the Latvian Researchers' Group recommended that such an index be developed while working on public safety issues.²⁶

Fourth, being aware of the dual situation created by and around European strategic autonomy, in which wishful thinking prevails over practical action, the Council, under the German Presidency, launched a new initiative: developing the EU's Strategic Compass. The idea has already received a good deal of criticism. For example, the Belgian expert Sven Biscop writes that a new document does not guarantee that it will be followed by action.²⁷ The Strategic Compass is planned to be developed by the first half of 2022 and aims to agree on common objectives for protection that are set out in a joint threat assessment. The initiative is based on the assumption that a shared interpretation of threats will contribute to closer integration of existing military projects, as well as the identification of individual and European capabilities and the promotion of joint procurement of armaments.²⁸

To hope that the EU Strategic Compass will influence the formation of the security and defence community, is naive, reckless and unwarranted.

²⁵ European Commission (2020). 2020 Strategic Foresight Report. Charting the course towards a more resilient Europe. p. 38. Retrieved (18.03.2021) from: [strategic_foresight_report_2020_1.pdf](#) (europa.eu)

²⁶ Bambals, R. (2015). Societal Resilience: the case of the Russian-speaking community in Latvia. In: Ozoliņa Ž. (ed) *Societal Security in Latvia: Inclusion-Exclusion Dilemma. A portrait of of the Russian-speaking community in Latvia*. Rīga: Zinātne. pp. 69-73.

²⁷ Biscop, S. (17.12.2019). From Global Strategy to Strategic Compass: Where Is the EU Heading? Egmont. Retrieved (18.03.2021) from: [From Global Strategy to Strategic Compass: Where Is the EU Heading?](#) – Egmont Institute

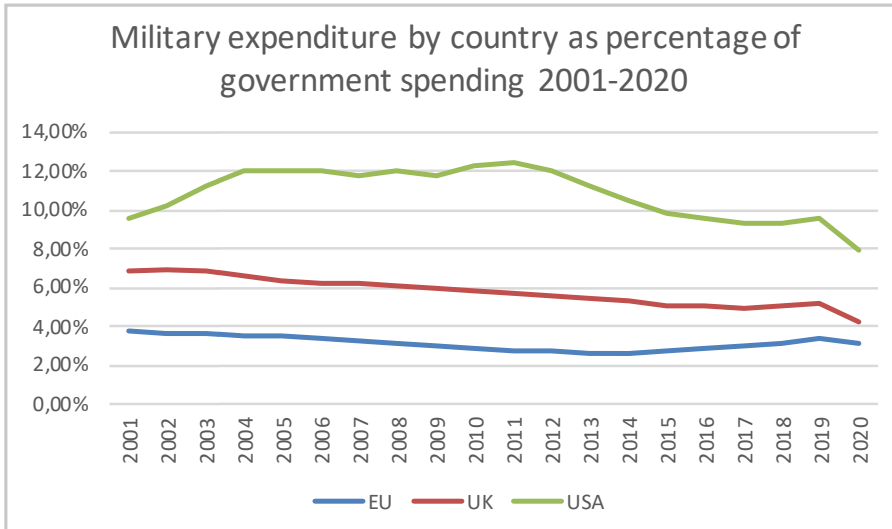
²⁸ The EU's Strategic Compass. Berlin is pushing the EU to adopt a document on fundamental military policy. ITS core: Intelligence services' threat assessment. (22.06.2020). Retrieved (22.03.2021) from: [The EU's Strategic Compass – GERMAN-FOREIGN-POLICY.com](#) (german-foreign-policy.com)

However, this process has one significant added value: discussions about threats in Europe and possible policies will contribute to the harmonisation of views. Even if the diversity of views determined by the national security interests of each Member State continues, the discussion about threats will generally play a positive role in seeking practical solutions for development of the EU's capacity. The EU Strategic Compass is not a solution, but it is a platform for introducing individual solutions and for contact point searches. Exactly this process is described by Mark Leonard, who writes that "the Strategic Compass process could indeed help develop a much-needed common European security culture and help close the gap between the reality of the security challenges and the development of European capabilities."²⁹ The process is, of course, important in the development of any policy. However, this inevitably does not lead to the best solution. Andžejs Viļumsons, a Latvian diplomat, points out that the problem arises because the processes in Brussels are often formed from the wrong end. Instead of initially agreeing on the target and then developing policies to achieve it, new terminology is emerging as are political documents that include these terms, which assume that the content will follow later. The result might be different if one started with the most complicated issues first, e.g. the neutral countries of EU Member States that are members of the NATO Alliance, the EU security-centred countries, and their opposing views on defining the objectives of the Union's security and defence policy.³⁰

Fifth, the EU's strategic autonomy is and will depend on the willingness of the Member States themselves to invest in the security and defence sector. It is not possible to build an abstract set of EU capabilities if they are not developed at a national level. [See tbl. on page 21] Direct expenditure in the defence sector will become a crucial indicator for at least two reasons: (1) the high cost of the mechanisms to mitigate the effects of the pandemic,

²⁹ Leonard, M., Shapiro, J. Sovereign Europe, dangerous world: Five years to protect Europe's capacity to act. ECFR, December 2020. Retrieved (12.03.2021) from: Sovereign Europe, dangerous world: Five years to protect Europe's capacity to act – European Council on Foreign Relations (ecfr.eu)

³⁰ Retrieved (23.03.2021) from: Strategic Autonomy of the European Union: Is a comprehensive approach possible? – YouTube



which are driving the rise in defence costs; (2) the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU, which has an impact on defence capabilities since this country has been carrying the largest burden (in terms of the size of the armed forces, R&D investment, upgrading of arms, defence industry and other aspects).

Sixth, every ambitious EU project has played an important role in determining actions taken by national leaders/coalitions and in achieving the objectives set by the players. France, who has its own ambitions and considers the EU as one of the means for achieving them, is a driver of the security and defence of strategic autonomy. However, there is no consensus among EU Member States on accepting such leadership. France’s long-standing “rapprochement” policy for Russia, which is being continued by Emanuel Macron, raises suspicions in many EU Member States. Such flirting with a country whose aggressive ambitions are not hidden could lead to a weakening of EU positions. As Klaine-Brockhoff accurately notes, Macron’s vision can lead to a strategic *nomansland*, where Europe will be given a place somewhere

between Russia, China and the US.³¹ He continues that safety must not be sacrificed for autonomy, because the only one who benefits from it is France, as it is a nuclear country with potential for nuclear deterrence.³²

CONCLUSION

The list of conditions necessary to bring about the EU's Strategic Autonomy could be continued. The report by the European Parliament's Study Group noted that "the prerequisites for achieving an effective 'strategic autonomy' are political will, common strategic vision and the capacity to act."³³ These same conditions are mentioned in each document of the European Common Foreign and Security Policy and of the Common Security and Defence Policy. Unfortunately, since the Maastricht Treaty was adopted in 1993, the calls for Member States to speak in one voice and to act in unison have only partly been heard. Is a breakthrough possible this time? Will the EU act decisively in defending its strategic interests? There is no clear and evidence-based answer; only time will tell. However, if the global shift of geopolitical forces and the painful consequences of the pandemic have not taught Europe, then the concept of strategic autonomy will be followed by a number of other terminological exercises that will yet again call for increased political will and visions, leaving the EU to be a fragmented local player.

³¹ Retrieved (20.03.2021) from: FACE-OFF: With a Biden Presidency, is European Sovereignty Still Needed? – YouTube

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Anghel, S., Immenkamp, B., Lazarou, E., Saulnier, J.L., Wilson, A.B. (2020). On the path to 'strategic autonomy'. The EU in an evolving geopolitical environment. European Parliamentary Research Service. Retrieved (12.02.2021) from: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/652096/EPRS_STU\(2020\)_652096_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/652096/EPRS_STU(2020)_652096_EN.pdf)

THE LATVIAN TRANSATLANTIC ORGANISATION
(LATO) IN ACTION

LATO

LATO is a non-governmental organisation established in 2000. Its aims are to inform the public about NATO and Latvia's membership in the Alliance, to organise informative public events about Latvian and Euro-Atlantic security issues, to promote partnerships with other countries, to lay the foundations for Latvia's international role as a member of NATO, and to foster the international community's understanding of Latvia's foreign and security policy aims. During the past 20 years, LATO has numerous achievements to be proud of. LATO organises the most influential security conference in the Baltic Sea region: The Rīga Conference facilitates discussion about issues affecting the transatlantic community and annually gathers international experts in foreign affairs and security/defence matters, policy makers, journalists, and business representatives. LATO promotes policy relevant research on topics such as gender equality, peace and security, resilience in the borderland, and the subjective perception of security. A series of various initiatives intended for increasing the interest of Latvian, Baltic and European youth in security related issues have been put in motion, including an annual future leader's forum and masterclasses for young political leaders. LATO's most recent project is the Secure Baltics platform, which serves as an information hub for those who are eager to join the debate on international security.

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SECURE BALTICS

LATO has launched a new internet platform SecureBaltics (www.securebaltics.eu). The site gathers different materials – policy briefs, discussions, interviews, studies, educational materials – created in the framework of the Rīga Conference, as well as work from our partners. It is a stable platform that the Rīga Conference community can rely on and use as a credible source of information in the region.

Purpose

The purpose of the platform is to collect the know-how that is generated by the excellent minds gathered at the Rīga Conference on an annual basis. The Rīga Conference gathers regional and international experts in foreign policy and defence, academics, journalists, and business representatives by promoting the discussions on issues affecting the transatlantic community. It has been growing in influence since its inception in 2006.

Every year, for two days the National Library of Latvia is the centre of the most important regional discussions on security issues. However, it is not enough to engage in these discussions only once a year. Therefore, LATO developed SecureBaltics as a practical tool which can encourage the use of any resources and materials that have been produced as part of the Rīga Conference or its follow-up events.

Reach

The platform tries to provide materials in both, English and Latvian, in order to reach multiple audiences. It is intended for the traditional Rīga Conference community of opinion leaders and experts in foreign policy and defence matters as well as any other interested parties that could benefit from the generated materials such as high school teachers looking for study materials.

Vision

LATO hopes that SecureBaltics will become the go-to hub for resource associated with defence and security issues in the Baltics within the next few years.

Materials

The platform SecureBaltics provides resources:

- For all interested parties, including expert community, in the form of interviews, policy briefs, commentaries on topical issues
- For teachers and lecturers in the form of study materials and tests that can be included in academic curriculum
- For students in the form of lectures and study materials, as well as interactive study materials through games.

Partners

The SecureBaltics portal is supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia and the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia.

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Žaneta Ozoliņa is the author of more than 100 scholarly articles and editor of several books, including “Rethinking Security” (2010), “Gender and Human Security: a View from the Baltic Sea Region” (2015), “Societal Security: Inclusion-Exclusion Dilemma. A portrait of Russian-speaking community in Latvia” (2016), “Re-defining Euro-Atlantic Values: Russia’s Manipulative Techniques” (2017) and “Stratcom Laughs. In search of an Analytical Framework” (2017). She is a member of the editorial boards of several journals, such as *Journal of Baltic Studies*, *Defence Strategic Communications*, and *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*, and is Editor-in-chief of the journal *Latvijas intereses Eiropas Savienībā* (*Latvian Interests in the European Union*).

She was Chairman of the Strategic Analysis Commission under the Auspices of the President of Latvia (2004-2008) and was a member of the European Research Area Board of the European Commission (2008-2012). Žaneta Ozoliņa has been engaged in various international projects commissioned by the European Parliament, the European Commission, NATO, the Council of the Baltic Sea States and other international bodies.



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