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**Divergent Understandings Regarding the “Strategic Autonomy of the  
European Union”: A Result of the Plurality of Strategic Cultures  
Among the Member States**

MA thesis

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I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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## **Abstract**

In the recent years, the strategic autonomy of the European Union (EU) has become one of the buzzwords when it comes to the defence cooperation of the EU. However, even though that all EU Member States have agreed with the goal in a way that it can be found in the strategic documents, such as the Global Strategy of the EU, in practice the Member States seem to have somewhat different positions and understandings regarding it when it comes to implementation, yet it has received little scholarly attention. This study aims to tackle this issue and sets out to first, provide empirical insights to map the different understandings in an empirically grounded way and second, explain the occurrence of such differences through the various elements of national strategic cultures.

In order to explore this link between the understandings of strategic autonomy and the specifics of national strategic cultures, this study relies on data collected through a series of semi-structured interviews with the security specialists and government officials from five EU Member States that reflect the whole spectrum of Europeanist/Atlanticist divide among the Member States when it comes to strategic orientation.

The findings of this thesis show that first, the understandings of strategic autonomy are indeed different among the Member States to a certain extent and second, the differences in understandings and concerns can indeed be explained through the plurality of strategic cultures among the EU Member States. However, adding more nuance to the existing literature highlighting the differences in understandings, this study finds that while there are certain differences in understandings, there are more differences when it comes to fears and concerns regarding the possible outcomes of the goal. While all elements of strategic culture reflect in the understandings of EU (or European) strategic autonomy in a certain way, then the major driver for the division among the Member States is the strategic orientation (Europeanist/Atlanticist divide).

**Keywords:** Strategic Autonomy, Strategic Culture, European Union, Europe, Estonia, France, Germany, Poland, Sweden.

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## **Introduction**

In the recent years, “strategic autonomy” has become more and more frequently used term in the official documents, strategies and speeches of the European Union (EU) and its officials. As of now, the scholarly literature on the topic of strategic autonomy lacks behind, the concept is widespread in official documents (such as EEAS 2016), media, policy analyses, but only a few scholarly papers on the topic are found (for example Dušan 2017 and Howorth 2018), as most of the literature on the topic comes from various think-tanks (such as Arteaga et al 2016; 2017; Kempin & Kunz 2017; Camporini et al 2017; Varga 2017; Lippert et al 2019). However, as the creation of the “strategic autonomy” of the EU has become one of the ambitious goals of the EU, this issue clearly deserves scholarly attention. As of now, there seems to be an impression that different EU Member States perceive/understand the idea of strategic autonomy differently (for example, Arteaga et al 2016; Bartels et al 2017). As a result, all EU Member States seem to agree with the goal as such, but in practice they do not always agree with the practical steps in that direction. It seems that the Member States emphasize different aspects and set different priorities in the pursuit towards strategic autonomy, which suggests that the Member States understand different things under the term “strategic autonomy”.

However, in order to pursue the goal of strategic autonomy, it is very important to have a better understanding on whether and how do the understandings diverge and second, to understand what causes this divergence. The two aims of this study are to map the different understandings and to find an explanation for such divergent interpretations or understandings of the concept among the EU Member States. The main research questions of this thesis are: first, what are the different understandings and positions of the EU Member States regarding the strategic autonomy of the EU, and second, what is the explanation for those differences? In order to account for the differences in understandings, this study draws on the literature on strategic culture (such as Snyder 1977, Gray 1981; 1986; Johnston 1995) and suggests that the differences in understandings derive from differences in strategic cultures. On this basis, it expects that national strategic culture informs national understandings of strategic autonomy, it expects that differences in understandings of strategic autonomy can be explained by differences in various elements of national strategic cultures. Hence, the hypothesis of

this study is as following: “If the strategic cultures of various countries differ, then their understandings and positions regarding the concept of strategic autonomy will be different”.

As established above, the “strategic autonomy of the EU” has become a new buzzword in the official jargon of the EU. Hence, there is a considerable amount of contemporary EU (or Europe) specific literature on it. While most of the literature focuses on the different dimensions of the strategic autonomy (Kempin & Kunz 2017; Arteaga 2017; Mauro 2018; Drent 2018; Biscop 2018) and on various conditions and steps towards reaching the strategic autonomy (Howorth 2017a, 2017b, 2018; Bozo 2008; Simón 2017; Kempin & Kunz 2017; Camporini et al 2017; Varga 2017), then some have also brought out that the individual EU Member States or different blocks of them perceive this future goal quite differently (Arteaga et al 2016; Arteaga 2017; Camporini et al 2017; Varga 2017; Drent 2018; Bartels et al 2017). Margrient Drent (2018) says that France is actually the only Member State that has a clear understanding and vision of the goal, which itself is no surprise considering that the concept is of French origin. However, somewhat surprisingly, given the apparent divergence over the meaning of the term, only a handful have tried to elaborate and map some of the more specific stances and understandings of the individual Member States or blocks of them (see Arteaga et al 2016; Bartels et al 2017). These who have described the differences between various Member States have done it by explaining the overall stances towards the EU defence initiatives (or defence policies as a whole) and public debates on them (Bartels et al 2017) or by explaining the visions on national autonomy and its compatibility with the EU strategic autonomy (Arteaga et al 2016).

However, the current literature does not tackle those issues directly by describing how each Member State actually understands the various aspects of EU strategic autonomy and what are their preferences and concerns. Hence, we have a body of literature that acknowledges the differences (Arteaga et al 2016; Arteaga 2017; Camporini et al 2017; Varga 2017; Drent 2018; Bartels et al 2017) and that explains the individual countries’ stances towards various defence initiatives, while it does not go into detail while describing the actual differences in understandings or positions regarding the common goal. Therefore, one of the two aims of this research project is to fill this gap in the

scholarly literature by providing empirical evidence on the different understandings across the EU.

In order to provide additional value when compared to the existing literature that has begun to explore the more specific differences in understandings (Arteaga et al 2016; Bartels et al 2017), this thesis aims to approach this issue by asking the experts of various countries directly about their countries' understandings about the different aspects of the EU strategic autonomy. While the current literature has tried to assume the understandings based on past behaviour and goals of national foreign and security policies, then this study will directly explore the different understandings and will analyse, in which ways do the various elements of national strategic cultures reflect in these understandings. The aim is to identify how each country perceives the purpose of it, whether it supports the idea (and on what conditions), the general achievability of it and also, what do they perceive as the main challenges when it comes to moving towards a more strategically autonomous EU. This gathered interview data will be in turn organised into analytical categories: meaning, referent object, three dimensions, purpose, attitude towards third party involvement, general stance/position and the perceived challenges/obstacles on the way.

While the above-mentioned literature has noted the presence of different understandings of the strategic autonomy (e.g. Arteaga et al 2016; Arteaga 2017; Camporini et al 2017; Varga 2017; Drent 2018; Bartels et al 2017), it has not *explained* those differences, leaving the question *why* we observe such variation unanswered. It becomes clear that the understanding of the strategic autonomy is not influenced by just a sole factor alone, but rather by a set of different factors, eventually by strategic culture which ties those factors together and forms the strategic thinking of a country and consequentially its understanding or interpretation of EU or European strategic autonomy. The inability of single factor explanations for the understandings is visible when, for example geography were a major factor, then all of the Member States in one geographical region would have the same understanding. Similarly, if it was influenced just by the size of the country, it would mean that all of the big/small Member States would have the same understanding. However, we are witnessing a greater variety in understandings. Therefore, this thesis suggests that those differences are to a large degree caused by the strategic cultures of the



individual Member States, which in turn have formed as a result of a great variety of different factors.

It has been mentioned that the development of the EU level strategic culture could be one of the preconditions or crucial factors for establishing the strategic autonomy of the EU (Dyson 2013; Kempin & Kunz 2017; Drent 2018). Therefore, as the lack of common strategic culture is something that hinders the development of strategic autonomy, it can be assumed that the differences in strategic cultures do indeed make the different Member States understand the goal of strategic autonomy relatively differently, however, this is something that the existing literature has not attempted to explore based on empirically grounded facts. There are even some brief mentions of the differences in strategic cultures being one of the obstacles for the EU (Arteaga et al 2016; Varga 2017) but no further explanations. Therefore, the second one of the two aims of this study is to fill those gaps in the literature by going more into depth by showing concrete examples of the respective strategic cultures forming the national understandings of the EU strategic autonomy.

In order to ground the discussion on divergent understandings of the EU's strategic autonomy empirically, this study relies on original data collected through a series of semi-structured interviews. Therefore, the central part of this research project is the analysis of data gathered from the interviews with various experts from five EU Member States – Estonia, France, Germany, Poland and Sweden. In every other hypothetical scenario, the United Kingdom should have been included in that list, due to its significant role in the defence of the EU and Europe. However, as this research project focuses on the strategic autonomy of the EU specifically, not the whole Europe – defined in whichever way, then the UK will not be included in the case selection as it might not be an EU Member State by the time this research is finished. The aim of those interviews is to determine the understandings and stances of those respective countries regarding the EU strategic autonomy and to explore, which elements of national strategic cultures are reflected in those understandings.

This research consists of three major parts. The first part is the conceptual framework. It will introduce the concept of the strategic autonomy of the EU and the concept of strategic culture as such. This part will also explain the linkage between strategic culture and the understandings of strategic autonomy, how strategic culture shapes the states'

understanding of strategic autonomy. The second part will describe the methodology and case selection for the study. The third part, which will also constitute the main portion of this study, will be an empirical research on the different understandings of the strategic autonomy of the EU and on the strategic cultures of the individual Member States as independent or intermediate variables as the underlying conditions for divergent understandings. As elaborated above, this part will be carried through by conducting interviews with security specialists and government officials and by the analysis thereof. Last but not least, there will be a conclusion which will summarize the findings and discuss the implications. As stated in the beginning, in order to go forward with something, it is very important to identify the reasons behind different understandings and stances towards that particular issue.

# **1. Conceptual Framework: The Concepts of Strategic Autonomy and Strategic Culture**

## **1.1. The Strategic Autonomy of the European Union**

When talking about the concept of strategic autonomy, some aspects and observations have to be specified first. The first one is the fact that there exists a fair amount of literature on both, on the strategic autonomy of the EU, but also on the strategic autonomy of Europe. As a general concept, headline or buzzword, the literal form “strategic autonomy of Europe” (e.g. Arteaga et al 2016; Drent 2018; The Economist 2018; Varga 2017) is even more widespread in the headlines of various articles and policy papers than the literal form “strategic autonomy of the EU”. However, it can be noticed that generally those terms or headlines are used interchangeably. Even though that a considerable amount of those articles is mentioning the “strategic autonomy of Europe”, they are actually talking about the strategic autonomy of the European Union. It has also been mentioned that the strategic autonomy of Europe is tied to the developments in EU integration (Lippert et al 2019, 9), therefore, even if the strategic autonomy of Europe is used intentionally, it still depends on the institutions of the EU. One must keep in mind that after Brexit, those two literal forms might actually acquire more different meanings, as there is a goal of the “strategic autonomy of the EU”, but at the same time there exists a will or need to keep the UK within European security architecture, in which case the strategic autonomy of Europe is not entirely the same thing as the strategic autonomy of the EU. However, in the framework of this thesis, the focus will be on the “strategic autonomy of the EU” solely. Similarly, the articles and papers that are going to be referenced on in this study are EU-specific despite the overall wording, as their authors are writing about the EU-level goals and institutional challenges after all. Nevertheless, one must acknowledge that these kinds of pitfalls and inconsistencies do indeed exist. In order to make things clear, the interviewees will be asked, which form their country prefers to use.

Second, the concept of strategic autonomy is very EU or Europe specific, it means that in its current form it does not exist as some sort of general overarching concept that is

applicable to all different kinds of cases. Although, one must keep in mind that autonomy as such is part of many strands of literature, just the concept of “strategic autonomy” has been used in the context of very few cases. It has been applied only in some individual cases, such as in the context of India (Carranza 2017; Monsonis 2010; Wulf & Debiel 2015) and obviously, in the context of the EU. Aside from these two, in the following chapter it will also be illustrated how this concept has French origins and how it still is an important part of French strategic thinking. Nevertheless, currently there is no strand of literature specifically dedicated to the concept, in the literature it has been only mentioned in the context of some specific cases, as brought out above. Therefore, the conceptual part of this study introduces the concept of strategic autonomy as it is developed in the context of the EU.

### **Meaning of strategic autonomy**

Strategic autonomy of the EU could mean many things at once, given the lack of authoritative specification of the concept. Even though that the EU Global Strategy (2016) could be considered as one of the catalysts for the idea of EU strategic autonomy, it does not actually define what it means. It states the strategic autonomy as a goal and mentions why is it needed and what needs to be done in order to move towards the apparently common goal. For example, it says that “This is necessary to promote the common interests of our citizens, as well as our principles and values” (EEAS 2016, 4) and that it “... is important for Europe’s ability to promote peace and security within and beyond its borders” (ibid, 9). Other than these, it is mentioned that “A sustainable, innovative and competitive European defence industry is essential for Europe’s strategic autonomy and for a credible CSDP” (ibid, 45-46). These are the only occasions, where one could find a direct reference to the concept of the strategic autonomy of the European Union. As there is no concrete definition of the concept in the document, it can be conceptualised with the help of the document itself and through the existing body of literature on the topic.

Similarly, to the Global Strategy, other studies also avoid giving an exact definition of the strategic autonomy as such. However, when combining characteristics that can be identified in the existing literature, it is possible to define and explain the concept. As

mentioned before, the same concept has been used in the context of India, where it is more clearly defined. For example, Keith Hartley has quoted Aravind Devanathan who said that "... strategic autonomy is the ability of a nation state to pursue its national interests and its preferred foreign policy without being constrained by any other states" (Camporini et al 2017, 15) and Dick Zandee has quoted Arundai Bajpai, who said that it is "... a foreign policy posture, whereby a nation maintains an independent outlook and orientation in foreign affairs with respect to the issues defining her core interests" (ibid, 11). Later in this chapter, the French origins of the concept will be discussed more thoroughly, however, as for the definition, the French have officially defined the strategic autonomy (of France) as "... the state's ability to decide and to act freely in an inter dependent world" (Drent 2018, 4; Kempin & Kunz 2017, 12). Obviously, the EU is not a nation state, nor any kind of state, therefore, it is impossible to apply the exact same definitions on the EU. However, if excluding the notions of "nation", "state" or "nation state", those India and France-specific definitions do offer some insight, what it might mean on the EU level as well.

Aside from these, there have been several attempts by scholars to adjust the definition(s) in ways, that they could be more applicable in the context of the EU. For example, one of the ARES reports (Arteaga et al 2016) cites a European Commission's communication from 2013, which implied that in order to be a credible partner, Europe should be able to act and decide without depending on the capabilities of third parties (ibid, 2). Keith Hartley elaborates on that and combines this rough attempt at defining the concept with the EU Global Strategy of 2016 and suggests that "Europe defines its strategic autonomy in terms of its ability to act and co-operate with international and regional partners wherever possible while being able to operate autonomously where and when necessary" (Camporini et al 2017, 15). Frédéric Mauro (2018, 22) has worked through an extensive amount of trials at definition and has concluded that "...strategic autonomy is no more and no less than the ability of a State to decide upon and to wage war alone." Therefore, it can be seen that the strategic autonomy of the EU does not mean abandoning the third partners but is more about being able to act without them or without their approval.

Other scholars have mostly tried to define the strategic autonomy through the military power and capabilities of the actor seeking strategic autonomy. It is seen as an EU's ability to carry out expeditionary military operations in its near vicinity (Varga 2017, 5),

as military and defence industrial capabilities needed to carry out independent foreign policy (Camporini et al 2017, 16) or as military capabilities needed to engage in autonomous actions (Arteaga 2017, 1).

As one can see, there are numerous attempts by various scholars to define the concept both, in EU's (or Europe's) context and also as an overarching concept that could apply to other cases as well. Arguably, the main reason for that is the lack of official attempt to define strategic autonomy or even elaborate it more. The lack of a concrete definition could be explained through the general unwillingness by EU Member States to open this kind of "can of worms" (Drent 2018, 4). However, one could say that every one of those attempts of creating a definition for the concept, does indeed offer a valuable insight into what it might mean in reality. Frédéric Mauro, who has written one of the most thorough overviews of the concept, has reached a conclusion that such thing as an absolute strategic autonomy does not exist and that without contextual clarifications it is more like a suitcase into which you can put whatever you want (Mauro 2018, 22). Therefore, it can be said that all of the aforementioned attempts of defining the concept do indeed fit into that "suitcase". When applied to the EU, this means that when we are talking about EU strategic autonomy, it refers to the EU's ability to decide for itself, without the influence of third parties and without relying on the capabilities of third parties, which foreign policy or military actions to take or not take with or without its allies and partners.

### **Three dimensions of strategic autonomy**

Most of the previously mentioned definitions were focused on defining the concept of strategic autonomy as a whole or defining it through one of its dimensions. There is a consensus in the contemporary literature, that the strategic autonomy consists of three dimensions or components and that it is actually a sum of those three parts and that the strategic autonomy cannot be achieved without achieving it in all of these dimensions. These three dimensions of strategic autonomy are: political autonomy, operational autonomy and industrial autonomy (Arteaga 2017; Kempin & Kunz 2017; Biscop 2018; Brustlein 2018; Drent 2018; Mauro 2018). Although this division of dimensions was first mentioned by Arteaga, Kempin and Kunz in two separate papers in December 2017, others seem to agree, and it appears in most of the new papers on the topic. Otherwise, it

already appeared in previous papers, that the strategic autonomy has to be reached in various spheres, mostly the operational and industrial dimensions were brought out (Drent 2018, 4). Therefore, the concept of strategic autonomy consists of three aforementioned elements. When combined with the specification of the concept in previous paragraph, it can be said that in order to have the ability to decide and act with or without (and without the influence of) third countries, the EU needs to achieve autonomy in political, operational and industrial spheres. In principle, even though that this specification has so far been used in the context of EU or Europe, the same could apply to other cases as well (such as individual countries or other groups of countries).

It is important to notice that the talk on three dimensions is also revealing what might be the purpose of strategic autonomy and what could be the end results of it. When combined with the definitions provided in the previous section, it answers what should the strategic autonomy allow the EU or Europe to do, by what means and to what end.

Political autonomy is the capacity to define foreign and security policy goals and to act upon them (Kempin & Kunz 2017, 10; Mauro 2018, 22-23). Mauro (2018) adds that being autonomous does not mean just doing what one wants, but it is more about acting under one's own rules. Therefore, in European or European Union context it is mostly about the defining of mutual goals that could somewhat transcend the national interests of the Member States, which is obviously a demanding, yet important aspect. Especially so, given the relatively recent first attempts at common security and defence policies.

Second, the operational autonomy is the capacity to plan and conduct civilian and military operations based on the institutional framework and capabilities without major contributions of third parties (Kempin & Kunz 2017, 15). As it implies having necessary capabilities at its disposal, operational autonomy of the EU is yet to be achieved. However, this is the dimension that has caught the most attention out of three, most of the headline goals and previous papers focus mostly on this part.

Third, the industrial autonomy is the ability or capacity to develop and build the capabilities needed to achieve operational autonomy (ibid, 24). In other words, it is the capacity to design and produce the military equipment needed to accomplish the military operations (Mauro 2018, 26). Basically, it means that the defence industry of the EU should be self-reliant. All in all, these types of autonomy are mutually dependent (Kempin

& Kunz 2017, 11). To put it more simply, it all starts from the delineation of strategic goals (political autonomy) to determine the operational needs (operational autonomy) which translate into industrial decisions (industrial autonomy) to provide the equipment needed to accomplish these goals (Arteaga 2017, 1-2). All in all, when specifying (EU) strategic autonomy, it can be done according to these three essential dimensions of strategic autonomy.

### **Drivers for the EU strategic autonomy**

If talking about the concept, it is also very important to understand the reasons behind the EU seeking strategic autonomy. Of course, there is a plethora of various reasons and motives for pushing the strategic autonomy to the agenda of the EU. Many of those reasons have been analysed in numerous papers and articles and many remain to be analysed. For example, Pascal Boniface wrote already in 2001 that while Europe possesses every facet of power, like economic, technological and cultural, the only one which is missing is the strategic autonomy (Boniface 2001, 392). It implies, that already back then, strategic autonomy was somewhat a logical next step, as everything else was already achieved. However, aside from “growing up” and the general pursuit for self-reliance in international politics, some of the more widely accepted and analysed reasons or push-factors will be shortly elaborated below.

It could be said that one of the main overarching reasons to seek EU strategic autonomy is the changing security dynamics of the region and the whole World. This could include many situations, starting from the conflicts in Middle East and North Africa, followed by the influx of refugees and ending with the rise of populism. However, one of the main catalysts could be the Russian Federation violating the European security order. All of those imply that there are various conflicts in the EU’s near vicinity and that the EU must be prepared for both, conventional and unconventional conflicts in order to maintain stability (Kempin & Kunz 2017; Fischer 2017). The challenge is that different Member States perceive those threats differently.

Second, given that the UK was one of the main opponents of even closer cooperation of the EU, Brexit definitely opens some new doors but also closes others. It is not a



coincidence that the goal of EU strategic autonomy was revealed just a few days after the Brexit vote. Brexit means that the UK gave the EU a “free pass” to move further with the defence integration (Kempin & Kunz 2017; Fischer 2017; Howorth 2017a; Smith 2018).

Third, the election of Donald Trump as the President of the United States of America could somewhat be considered as a last straw. However, one has to consider that the previous Presidents and other Presidential candidates have similarly voiced their opinions that the EU should take more responsibility for its defence. This as a reason for seeking more strategic autonomy was already mentioned in 2008 (Bozo 2008). Therefore, the election of Donald Trump as the President cannot be a reason for the goal, but it enforces it and gives it more relevancy. What is sure, is that Trump is sending mixed signals to Europeans and is generally unpredictable which means that the EU has to take some of the matters to its own hands (Kempin & Kunz 2017; Fischer 2017; Howorth 2017a, 2017b, 2018; Smith 2018; Riddervold & Newsome 2018; Biscop 2018; Drent 2018). All in all, from this overview of push-factors, it can be seen that multiple factors can drive the push towards strategic autonomy. While not the main focus of this study, what is important to note is that at present there is such a push towards EU strategic autonomy.

### **French origins of the concept**

Given that the term “strategic autonomy” was originally coined in France, it is important to understand the French way of thinking behind this concept. Nowadays, France is one of the main proponents of the idea of EU strategic autonomy, especially so since Emmanuel Macron was elected as the President of France. Furthermore, strategic autonomy as such has deep roots in French strategical thinking, therefore, it is no wonder that France is one of the main proponents of the goal. Strategic autonomy has been the priority goal of French defence policy for decades. Hence, the French understanding of the concept is important to understand it in the context of the EU.

The idea of strategic autonomy, even though that not in its current literal form, has Gaullist roots. General de Gaulle has mentioned the “strategic autonomy” only once, in one of his speeches in 1950, but the idea of national independence became very widespread (Mauro 2018, 4). Between 1958 and 1963 he actually wanted to lay the

foundations of a genuine European security system separate from NATO, but it was perceived as a dangerous dream by France's partners. This period, however, is known as the Gaullist moment (Haine 2015, 991). Several scholars have compared the EU's ambition of strategic autonomy or any steps towards it to be "Gaullist moments". Furthermore, the EU strategic autonomy is seen as something Gaullist by nature (Boniface 2001; Haine 2015; Brustlein 2018; Mauro 2018). The only exception being the fact that it has transcended from French strategic thinking to EU strategic thinking, a turn initiated by France in many ways (Haine 2015; Brustlein 2018).

Even though that the idea of strategic autonomy was very strongly enrooted in French strategic thinking, it first appeared in the French doctrinal writing in 1994 in a defence White Paper. There, it was described as a combination of nuclear deterrence and conventional intervention capabilities and as an independence and freedom of political action (Lebrun 2018; Mauro 2018, 5-6). Ever since then, it has been continuously written in the White Papers in 2008 and 2013 and also in many other strategic documents (Mauro 2018, 9-11). In some of these documents, France has also talked about the strategic autonomy of European Union, even before it was declared as a common goal. This implies that for France, the strategic autonomy of France and the strategic autonomy of the EU do indeed compliment each other and are somewhat intertwined (Arteaga 2017). Some say that France is actually the only Member State that has a concrete understanding of what does strategic autonomy really mean (Arteaga 2017; Drent 2018; Simón 2017).

## **1.2. Strategic culture**

In this section, the concept of strategic culture will be introduced in order to understand, why it is an important factor in guiding countries' strategic decisions and understandings of new phenomena. The argument is, that if strategic culture is behind national strategic understandings and decisions, it must also have a role in the process of developing an understanding or position about the EU strategic culture in the individual Member States.

### **The concept of strategic culture**

The linkages between culture and national security policy were already described in the works of Thucydides and Sun Tzu (Lantis 2002, 93). Although the ideas under the term of "strategic culture" are not that new, the term itself was coined in 1970s by Jack Snyder, most notoriously in his article "The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations" (Snyder 1977). In this article he analysed the US and Soviet approaches to nuclear deterrence. He and many others found out that the approaches to the nuclear deterrence and to nuclear strategy as a whole are quite different between the two superpowers of the world, which otherwise are in similar geostrategic situation and environment. Due to these differences, the Soviet strategy is unpredictable for the US specialists and policy makers as they had so far assumed that the Soviets have similar approaches and that they make decisions similarly as the US. He argued that those differences in strategical thinking in terms of nuclear strategy are indeed caused by the different strategic cultures of those two major world powers, more notably by various domestic factors such as historical experiences, political culture, national identity and geography (Snyder 1977).

In the same article, the first attempts to define the concept of "strategic culture" are made. He (Snyder 1977, 8) wrote that:

Strategic culture can be defined as the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behaviour that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other with regard to nuclear strategy.

This paper was very nuclear strategy oriented, but it does a good work in defining the concept, if we were to drop the “nuclear strategy” in the definition, it says a lot about the concept as a whole. He acknowledged that the attitudes might change, but “... new problems are not assessed objectively. Rather, they are seen through the perceptual lens provided by the strategic culture” (Snyder 1977, preface v). Therefore, through the words of the creator of the concept, strategic culture is a combination of many variables and it does indeed influence the decisions of a (state) actor. Snyder’s paper is very important, as it initiated the concept or even an area of studies – even in contemporary literature, Snyder’s work is always mentioned.

Just after the aforementioned article was published, the concept of “strategic culture” started to gain popularity and in some ways started to live its own life. The concept became widespread and developed further despite the fact that Snyder had later distanced himself from the concept that he had coined (Zaman 2009, 76). While Snyder had applied the concept on the Soviets decision-making apparatus, then Colin S. Gray quickly followed up and applied the same concept on the US as well and has published many papers and books that develop the concept further (see Gray 1981, 1986) and has later argued against more contemporary critique towards the first generation of works on strategic culture (Gray 1999). He mostly wrote about the development of “national style” and strategic culture of the US strategic thinking. One of the major points was that the US did not have a strategy of winning a nuclear war, for them the nuclear war would mean that everybody has lost. If the Soviet Union were to understand the American way of thinking, this could possibly prevent a nuclear war. Similarly to Snyder he argued that the strategic thinkers of the US have neglected the roles of history and culture in trying to understand the national styles and strategic cultures (Gray 1981, 1986).

Later on, Alistair Iain Johnston has divided the scholars of strategic culture into three generations (Johnston 1995). Both, Snyder and Gray, accompanied by some other authors, obviously belong to the first generation of the studies on strategic culture. The first generation was prevalent from the end of the 1970s until the middle of 1980s. What characterises the first generation, is the belief that the strategic culture is specific to one state and that it is composed of many different variables. While Snyder (Snyder 1977; see also Johnston 1995, 36-37) argues that strategic culture is merely one of the things influencing the strategic understandings and decisions, then others already saw it as

something absolute that always predetermines the decision-making process (Gray 1981, 1986; Johnston 1995, 37; Zaman 2009; 74-76). The plethora of different aspects or variables of strategic culture is also Johnston's main critique towards the first generation, he argues that these variables are of different classes of inputs and that each of those could stand by itself as a separate explanation for strategic decisions. For example, if everything could be considered as part of strategic culture, then there is no room for other variables that are not part of strategic culture, therefore it is very hard to disprove strategic culture's role in influencing the decisions (Johnston 1995, 37; Bloomfield 2012; 445). Similarly, he is sceptical about the very determinist approach towards the strategic culture and brought out some inconsistencies in the works of the first generation. Johnston believes that there might be other "cultures" than the mainstream one and that the strategic culture is ever-changing and not as homogenous as described by the first generation (Johnston 1995, 37-39).

According to Johnston (1995), the second generation was prevalent in the second half of 1980s. The second generation could be somewhat characterised through its *realpolitik*-like approach, that the strategic culture is a tool of a political hegemony to justify its military actions for the wider public (Johnston 1995, 39-40; Zaman 2009, 77-78). Therefore, it is of discursive nature and similar to a speech act. The second generation argues that there is a difference between what the leaders think or say what they are doing and the deeper motives of what they actually do. It establishes "widely available orientations to violence and to ways in which the state can legitimately use violence against putative enemies" (Bradley S. Klein 1988, 136 in Johnston 1995, 39). It implies that the hegemons or leaders use the "strategic culture" or a respective state to explain or justify its actions without causing a public opposition to said actions. The main critique towards the second generation seems to be that in this case the strategic culture is somewhat a myth or a story to tell, not something real, therefore scientifically not that relevant. Mainly because it does not describe how does the strategic culture explain the actual actions – it does not even elaborate if it influences the said action (Johnston 1995, 39-41). Although not mentioned in those papers, it seems that the second generation is actually describing the process of securitization.

The third generation started to appear in the 1990s. The main characteristic of the third generation is the exclusion of behaviour and action from the definition of strategic culture.

To put it simply, the third generation sees the strategic culture as an independent variable and the behaviour as a dependent variable. It means that no longer is the behaviour a part of strategic culture, which makes the operationalisation of the concept and future research on it more straight forward. The behaviour is here seen as a concrete decision, stance or action which is caused by the strategic culture. By doing this, the third generation attempts to avoid the methodological weaknesses of the first generation. Also, the third generation puts more emphasis on the recent developments and is not looking that far into the history as the first generation. Otherwise, the definitions provided by the third generation are not that different from the first generation. Other than that, it offers the possibility to analyse strategic culture more on a case by case basis: some use military culture, some use political culture, some use political-military culture and so on. The third generation approach allows to use just some parts of strategic culture that are more relevant to the individual case to explain the decisions and actions instead of using the concept as a package deal (Johnston 1995, 41-43; Lantis 2002, 96-97; Zaman 2009, 78-82). Johnston, who belongs to the third generation, has come up with a brief and straight forward definition of the concept: “I assume that strategic culture, if it exists, is an ideational milieu which limits behavioral choices” (Johnston 1995, 46).

Although Colin S. Gray has acknowledged the methodological weaknesses of his generation, his main critique towards Johnston’s understanding is that the strategic behaviour cannot be separated from the strategic culture (Gray 1999, 62; for further debate between the two, see Bloomfield 2012, 445-447). Also, it has been brought out that while it is difficult to operationalise the first generation’s approach to the concept, the same problem applies also to the third generation (Bloomfield 2012, 445). Even though that there are some disagreements between different scholars, the third-generation approach is the most prevalent in the contemporary literature on strategic autonomy while the first generation as the pioneer of the concept is also not forgotten (Lantis 2002, 106).

While there are different conceptualizations, and while it is difficult to operationalize, it is nevertheless possible to develop an understanding of the concept by comparing the definitions by more prevalent first and third generation authors, it seems that the differences are not that great actually and that there are valuable insights from both sides. In the Gray-Johnston debate it became clear, that both find the contextual approach to be suitable – for each problem there is a different approach on how to use the concept of

strategic culture and which elements of it to include (Johnston 1995; Gray 1999; Bloomfield 2012). What is important here, is the fact that strategic culture is something that forms the national understanding of new issues and problems and on how to tackle them. Therefore, the conceptual lens provided by the concept of strategic culture, more specifically with the approach of third generation, will be used to identify how do the various elements of national strategic culture reflect in a state's understanding of EU or European strategic autonomy.

### **Strategic culture in the context of the EU**

As the main topic of this research is the difference in understandings of the strategic autonomy of the EU, it is important to briefly describe how the concept of the strategic culture has been applied in the context of the EU. Even though that this study does not aim to apply the concept on the EU as a whole, the debate on it still offers some valuable knowledge on if and how the strategic culture of the EU exists and what is the role of the strategic cultures of the individual Member States in it. Especially so, as it has been brought out that the lack of EU strategic culture is hindering its aspirations towards the strategic autonomy (Dyson 2013; Kempin & Kunz 2017; Drent 2018). Furthermore, while the goal of strategic autonomy first appeared in the EU strategic documents in the Global Strategy of 2016, then the strategic culture appeared as a goal in the European Security Strategy of 2003. It was written that “We need to develop a strategic culture that fosters early, rapid, and when necessary, robust intervention” (Solana 2003 in Rynning 2003, 480; see also Haine 2011, 582). Therefore, the absence of EU strategic culture and the existence of multiple different strategic cultures in the EU, is something which might result in a fact that there is no one common understanding of strategic autonomy instead of many different ones.

The talks of the EU strategic culture started to appear in the scholarly literature in the beginning of 2000s. Previously, it was seen as a state-centric concept. One of the first papers to discuss about the possibility of the EU strategic autonomy is the “The Beginnings of a European Strategic Culture” published by Paul Cornish and Geoffrey Edwards in 2001 (Cornish & Edwards 2001). In this paper, there is also a first attempt at defining the EU strategic culture. They have defined it as “the institutional confidence

and processes to manage and deploy military force as part of the accepted range of legitimate and effective policy instruments, together with general recognition of the EU's legitimacy as an international actor with military capabilities (albeit limited)” (Cornish & Edwards 2001, 587). Up to date, this is one of the most important works on the topic.

Cornish and Edwards (2001) are generally very optimistic about the strategic culture of the EU. In their opinion, the EU strategic culture was already in the development through the process of socialisation, accelerated by the institutional arrangements made at the Helsinki European Council in 1999. They also mention that it might be a different kind of strategic culture, as it is not applied on a state and also because it is not that much about defence (NATO's responsibility) as about making a difference in crises and conflicts (Cornish & Edwards 2001, 588, 596). Some others are optimistic about the EU's ability to have a distinct strategic culture as well. Jolyon Howorth (2004, 90) has added to Cornish and Edwards, that indeed, the agreement of all the Member States to step up a game and to make the EU a legitimate security actor with capabilities in hand, is a huge step forward. It is also brought out that the fact that the EU has carried out military missions, is already an evidence for the existence of the strategic culture within the EU (Biava et al 2011) and the fact that each Member State has its own strategic culture, does not necessarily mean that the EU strategic culture does not exist (Norheim-Martinsen 2011; Haesebrouck 2016).

While some are optimists about the applicability of the concept on the EU, then some others are more pessimist about it. Sten Rynning (2003), for example, says that the EU does not have the potential to construct its own strong strategic culture because the matters are mostly in the hands of the individual Member States. Similar pitfall is brought out by Howorth (2004) who is otherwise more optimistic. Several others have mentioned the failures of the CSDP missions, which are evidence for the lack of common strategic culture (Haine 2011; Dyson 2013).

The failures of the CSDP missions are to some extent explained through the different strategic cultures of different Member States. Starting from the different approaches to the use of force and ending with the Atlanticist/Europeanist divide among the Member States (Haine 2011; Dyson 2013; Biava et al 2011). The Europeanist/Atlanticist divide has also been brought out by several other authors (Howorth 2002; Stahl et al 2004;



Norheim-Martinsen 2011). This implies that the Atlanticist/Europeanist divide is uniquely European phenomena and is part of the national strategic cultures of the individual Member States. Different Member States have different strategic orientations when it comes to the US' role in Europe, some support the *status quo* and some support deeper European defence cooperation in parallel to NATO. Those somewhere in the middle are either Euro-Atlanticists or Neutrals (Howorth 2002, 97; Stahl 2007, 418; McCormick 2008). According to John McCormick, the Atlanticists value the transatlantic security relationship with the US and they are loathing everything that could be interpreted as undermining or replacing the transatlantic security cooperation. Europeanists on the other hand look towards more independent EU and think that the EU should reduce its reliance on the US (McCormick 2008, 195).

As mentioned above, this study does not aim to argue whether there exists such a thing as EU strategic culture or not, but the literature on this debate offers some knowledge on the concept when it is put into the European context. For this research, there are two important assumptions from the previous discussion to take into account. First, it is clear that each Member State has a distinct strategic culture, which in turn influences its understandings, thus decisions and actions. While there might be elements of emerging EU strategic culture, at present, national strategic cultures still supersede – meaning that at the EU level, there is a plurality of national strategic cultures rather than a single EU strategic culture. Therefore, we also have a plurality of interpretative contexts in which the EU's objective of “strategic autonomy” is made sense of. This makes it harder to find a common ground between all the Member States when it comes to making strategic decisions. Second, as part of the multiplicity of strategic cultures inside the EU, one can identify an Atlanticist-Europeanist divide amongst the Member States when it comes to strategic orientation. This, as an important aspect in making strategic decisions, could be considered as one of the components of national strategic culture of each Member State. As elaborated above, the strategic culture is always unique for each country, however there are some patterns and clusters which can be used to cover the wider range of countries with a representative sample. Europeanist-Atlanticist divide is one of those.

## **Strategic culture shaping understandings**

From the previous introduction to the concept of strategic culture, it became clear that the most relevant works on the topic have all agreed that the strategic culture is something that influences the behaviour, or more importantly in case of this study – the understanding of a new phenomena by a state,. The concept itself is composed of many different aspects that influence the state’s strategic culture. Rashed Uz Zaman has conveniently summarized all of the most cited components of strategic culture: “... geography, climate and resources; history and experience; political structure; the nature of organizations involved in defence; myths and symbols; key texts that inform actors of appropriate strategic action; and transnational norms, generational change and the role of technology. Elites, political institutions, and public opinion as keepers of strategic culture are some of the elements cited” (Zaman 2009, 82). In addition to these, in European context the Atlanticist/Europeanist divide plays a big role in national strategic cultures (Howorth 2002; Stahl et al 2004; Norheim-Martinsen 2011; Haine 2011; Dyson 2013; Biava et al 2011). Therefore, it can be expected that if the strategic culture of a state forms its understanding of a new phenomenon, then these same characteristic traits of the strategic culture of a state re-surface in its understanding of EU strategic autonomy.

Out of these components and sources, the Atlanticist/Europeanist divide is the most important one for this study as it shows the general stance of a Member State towards any new security related developments and initiatives. Therefore, it will also be the basis for the case selection. A more thorough explanation of the case selection can be found in the next chapter. Alongside with the strategic orientation (Europeanist/Atlanticist divide), several other indicators will play a role in determining the strategic culture of a Member State and consequently shape its understanding regarding strategic autonomy. Those are taken into consideration while compiling a questionnaire for the respondents in order to get a more complex empirically grounded explanation for the differences. To name a few: attitude towards the use of force, historical experiences, geographic location, strategic orientation and threat perception will be taken into account. But, the main division is expected to occur along the Europeanist-Atlanticist divide.

As this study seeks to explain the differences amongst the Member States when it comes to the understanding of the EU strategic autonomy, the concept of strategic culture is the

most appropriate one to apply. However, while the literature on strategic culture has mostly focused on its effects on *behaviour*, how it shapes the behaviour of states, then this study focuses on *understandings*, how it shapes understandings of strategic objectives (see Zaman 2009 on how culture shapes understandings). The process of developing an understanding, opinion or a stance on something that is as vaguely defined as the strategic autonomy, is definitely influenced by the different components of strategic culture. Already the first works on the strategic culture established that the Soviet Union and the US have different understandings regarding the nuclear strategy due to their strategic cultures (Snyder 1977; Gray 1981: 1986). However, this understanding was considered as a crucial part of the concept.

This research will take the path of the third generation, the strategic culture (or rather the various elements of it) is used as an independent variable and the behaviour (or the understanding of the strategic autonomy) is the dependent variable. As the main assumption is that the strategic culture of an individual Member State shapes its understanding of strategic autonomy, the hypothesis of this thesis is “If the strategic cultures of various countries differ, then their understandings and positions regarding the concept of strategic autonomy will be different”.

## **2. Methodology**

### **Case selection**

This research is designed to be a comparative study with five different cases. One of the main aims of this research is to provide an overview of different understandings regarding the EU strategic autonomy across the Member States and to explore whether these understandings are linked to the specifics of the strategic culture of the respective Member State. Given that there are 28 or 27 (depending on the outcome of Brexit) Member States in the EU, it would be impossible to thoroughly analyse the understandings and strategic cultures of each Member State in depth. Hence, this study relies on a sample which reflects the range of positions/understandings that exist among EU Member States. The sample is compiled in a way that it includes the most different samples – a representative sample. Five EU Member States that display differences in terms of strategic orientation, were included in the sample.

The assumption is that the strategic culture of a respective Member State is the independent variable which influences its understandings and positions regarding the strategic autonomy – or more precisely – the various elements of strategic culture reflect in a Member State’s understanding of EU strategic autonomy. Therefore, the concept of strategic culture is to be the basis for case selection or sampling decision. As it is rather impossible to find states with identical strategic cultures, it has to be narrowed down for it to be a criterion for case selection. As it was elaborated in the last chapter, one of the very important elements in the strategic cultures of European countries is the Atlanticist/Europeanist divide amongst the Member States. This is an element that is different across the EU and therefore it allows to categorise the states in a way that the sample would be representative of the whole EU. Some countries are more (Trans)Atlanticist, some are more Europeanist when it comes to strategic orientation. And some countries are somewhere in the middle of the two – Euro-Atlanticists and/or (former)Neutrals. In the following analysis, however, other elements of strategic culture are taken into account as well. Also, one has to consider that the strategic cultures might change in time, even though that the Atlanticist/Europeanist divide is the basis of the case

selection, the respondents will still be asked about their opinion on their country's strategic orientation.

In order to provide an overview as representative as possible, five countries were chosen to the sample. The chosen representative cases are the Republic of Estonia, the French Republic, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Republic of Poland and the Kingdom of Sweden (Estonia, France, Germany, Poland and Sweden). Given that the UK is arguably the most Atlanticist country in the EU (Stahl et al 2004; Howorth 2002; McCormick 2008), it should have been included in the sample. However, as the future is unclear due to Brexit, and the UK will most probably not be in The EU in the future, it will not be included in this research.

As the author of this study is from Estonia and the study aims to be both, academic and practical at once, Estonia is considered to be the reference point of the comparison. Otherwise, Estonia is clearly an Atlanticist country (see Howorth 2002; McCormick 2008; Kadi Salu and Erik Männik in Biehl et al 2013, 102; Viljar Veebel in Bartels et al 2017; 152-163). Also, Poland is definitely an Atlanticist country as well, has been in the past and continues to be (Howorth 2002; Zaborowski & Longhurst 2003; Longhurst & Zaborowski 2007; McCormick 2008; Ireneusz Bil in Bartels et al 2017). To name a few more Atlanticist countries that will not be included in the case selection: Denmark, the Netherlands, Portugal and most of the Central or Eastern EU Member States have traditionally been considered as Atlanticist states (Howorth 2002, Stahl et al 2004 McCormick 2008).

Sweden is mostly considered to be somewhere in between, as it is a Neutral or formerly neutral and its approach to neutrality is in constant change (Howorth 2002; Stahl et al 2004, 418; McCormick 2008; Doeser 2017; Chiara Ruffa in Biehl et al 2013, 349; Gunilla Herolf in Bartels et al 2017). However, it could be said that many countries which traditionally used to be on one or another spectrum of the Europeanist/Atlanticist divide, have generally shifted towards the middle (Biehl et al 2013, 390). Therefore, even though that several countries were listed as either Atlanticists or Europeanists, the in between Euro-Atlanticist positioning could nowadays be the safest option for grouping the countries, as very few countries define themselves as representatives of the extreme ends.

Aside from being some of the most influential countries of the EU and the drivers of EU security cooperation, France and Germany could both be traditionally considered as more or less Europeanist countries (Howorth 2002; Stahl et al 2004; McCormick 2008). Already because of their role and importance, it would be impossible to exclude those two from the selection. France is considered by many to be the epitome of Europeanism, it locates on the polar opposite end of the Europeanist/Atlanticist divide, when compared to the UK (Howorth 2002; Stahl et al 2004; McCormick 2008; Talmor & Selden 2017; Jean-Pierre Maulny in Bartels et al 2017). Others have pointed out the French exceptionalism (Haine 2015; Tenenbaum 2017) or have thought that the historical French Europeanism is slowly becoming more Atlanticist (Talmor & Selden 2017). Germany is generally Europeanist, but every now and then it has had some Atlanticist tendencies – nowadays, however, it is more Europeanist than Atlanticist (Stahl et al 2004; Dalgaard-Nielsen 2005; McCormick 2008; Claudia Major and Christian Mölling in Bartels et al 2017). All in all, while France lies in the most Europeanist end of spectrum, then Germany is somewhere between the middle and the Europeanist end. Aside from France and Germany; Belgium, Luxembourg, Spain and quite often (depending on the current government) Italy have traditionally been considered as Europeanist states (Howorth 2002, Stahl et al 2004 McCormick 2008).

All in all, it can be seen that all of the countries have their own place on the relative Europeanist-Atlanticist scale, and it is possible to rank them in an order in relation to that scale. Starting from the Atlanticist end and moving towards the Europeanist end, the order would be as following: strongly Atlanticist Poland, Atlanticist Estonia, Neutral or Euro-Atlanticist Sweden, Europeanist Germany and strongly Europeanist France. From the literature it appears that there is not much difference between Poland and Estonia in terms of strategic orientation (Biehl et al 2013), however, it has become clear from the recent developments that Estonia is more willing to take part of various European initiatives than Poland. Considering that these five countries arguably represent the whole range of EU Member States in terms of strategic orientation, the offered case selection is justified. Whilst the Europeanist-Atlanticist divide is the basis for case selection, there are many other factors that come into play in forming strategic culture of a country and which might add additional variation within the sample. This study seeks to explore the additional

variations as well through the empirical and inductive approach, based on the gathered data.

### **Semi-structured expert interviews**

As it has already been elaborated, there is a lack of empirically grounded insights into the Member States' understanding of EU strategic autonomy and its relation to their strategic cultures. Therefore, in order to move from speculations to empirically grounded discussion, it is necessary to generate original data. Such data can be retrieved by conducting interviews with specialists from those countries to ask for the precise understandings. More specifically, the semi-structured format of interviews was chosen.

Semi-structured interview was chosen as a data collection method mainly due to its flexibility. The respondents will receive a thorough overview of what kind of questions they are going to be asked and the author will have a freedom to guide the discussion towards the right direction if needed. Also, semi-structured interview is the most recommended format for that kind of interviews where the respondents might be busy professionals with tight schedules. If needed, the format allows to conduct the interviews through a phone call in case the author and interviewee are located in different countries, which was the case for this research (Goldstein 2002; Leech 2002; Van Puyvelde 2018; Bryman 2012).

The questions were divided into two blocks (see Appendices 3-5). The first block focused on the country's understanding and position regarding the EU strategic autonomy and the second block included some more specific questions regarding the different elements of the country's strategic culture. The questions regarding the strategic autonomy were asked in a manner, that the answers would demonstrate some identifiable mutual elements between the two concepts but at the same time would give a comprehensive overview of the understanding of the strategic autonomy.

The goal was to interview at least three but not more than five experts and/or elites from each country. The main criteria for choosing the experts to establish contact with was that they should be actively involved in the fields of security, defence and/or foreign policy. The sample includes security experts and government officials. In order to seek contact

with the experts and elites, the author contacted the Estonian Embassies in Berlin, Paris, Stockholm and Warsaw and the Embassies of France, Germany, Poland and Sweden in Tallinn to ask for their recommendations. The Embassies were very helpful, they provided the author with many contacts of people who are the most knowledgeable or active in this field of study.

As a result, the author tried to establish contacts with the suggested experts through an email letter. The initial letter included some information about the author, information about the research project and some more technical details about how and when the interview should ideally take place. Also, full anonymity was offered. In case of positive response, further arrangements were made, and the interviewees received the informed voluntary consent form (see Appendix 2) and the preliminary list of questions (see Appendix 3 and 5) in English or Estonian. Some of the interviewees preferred to answer in written form, they received the list of questions with some additional guiding questions (see Appendix 4). For the full list of interviews, see Appendix 1. Given the high positions of many respondents, many of them decided to remain anonymous, they are referred to as “Name (undisclosed)” and their position is marked as “government official from country X” or as “security specialist from Country X”, depending on their position or affiliation. In order to have a more open discussion, there was an agreement that none of the answers or statements will be attributed to specific respondents, even if they chose to not remain anonymous. The empirical part of this thesis is a synthesis of all the answers, structured after the countries.

The interviewees were notified beforehand that the interview takes around 30 minutes of their time. The interviews were planned accordingly, as time is of essence for the experts and elites. The shortest interview took 20 minutes and the longest took 50 minutes (upon their approval to exceed the promised 30 minutes). Also, the interviewees were notified that the interviews are semi-structured and that the author might ask some additional questions over the course of the interview. Those who requested to answer in written form, received a questionnaire where the most important additional questions were added. The purpose of the additional questions was to establish a connection between the understanding of strategic autonomy and strategic culture in case the respondents did not arrive at those conclusions themselves while describing their country’s understanding of strategic autonomy (see Appendix 4).



In total, the author conducted 17 interviews with security experts and government officials of these countries. Many of them asked to not attribute any citations to their persons, therefore, the interview data will be presented in a way that the answers cannot be backtracked to these persons. Out of these 17 interviews, nine chose to remain fully anonymous and eight allowed to list their name and position in the list of interviews (see Appendix 1). Five interviews were conducted in person, eleven were conducted over a phone call and one respondent provided their answers in written form. Only one respondent requested the author to not digitally record the interview. The author is in possession of the digital recordings of all other interviews.

In order to identify in which ways do the various elements of strategic culture reflect in a Member State's understanding of strategic autonomy, the understanding of strategic autonomy was divided into following analytical categories: meaning, referent object, three dimensions, purpose, third party involvement, stance and challenges/differences. The elements of strategic culture taken into consideration were: attitude towards the use of force, historical experiences, size and location of the country, strategic orientation and threat perception; all of those are often intermixed with each other. Subsequently, the analysis aims to identify, what analytical categories of the understanding of strategic autonomy are reflected by which elements of strategic culture of a specific Member State.

### **3. The cases of France, Germany, Sweden, Estonia and Poland.**

The aim of this chapter is to map the different understandings regarding the EU strategic autonomy and to analyse, whether these understandings are linked to the national strategic cultures of studied Member States. The analysis on a specific Member State is divided into two sections: strategic autonomy and strategic culture. The understanding of EU strategic autonomy means both, how does a Member State understand or define the concept and what is its general position on it. Some of the questions regarding the strategic autonomy are more general and should give a broader overview of the understanding. Some questions on strategic autonomy are more specific and aim to divide the understanding into analytical categories, mostly the additional questions asked over the course of the interview.

The questions on strategic culture aim to describe the strategic culture of a specific Member State. Where possible, secondary sources are used in order to triangulate interview data. Overall, the data on both, strategic autonomy and on strategic culture is used to explore, whether the understandings or strategic autonomy reflect the specifics of the strategic cultures of the Member States.

This chapter is divided into five countries and then each country is divided into two logical parts: strategic autonomy and strategic culture. The strategic autonomy section will be descriptive by nature, as it presents new data. This section will be structured after the identified analytical categories of strategic autonomy: meaning, referent object, three dimensions, purpose, third party involvement, stance and challenges/differences. The strategic culture section will describe the elements of national strategic cultures, based on interview data and literature. Alongside with that, the second section will present an analysis, in what ways are the various elements of national strategic culture reflected in the respective Member State's understanding of EU (or European) strategic autonomy. In addition, the last section of this chapter will focus on the discussion on the general findings of this study.

### **3.1. France**

#### **Strategic autonomy**

First of all, when talking about French understandings regarding the strategic autonomy of the EU (or Europe), it is important to keep in mind that the term was coined in France, strategic autonomy of France is a long-established foreign policy and security policy goal of France and that France is the main initiator of the idea. Therefore, the French understanding will tell a lot about what it actually implies. As one of the respondents has put: “Wherever the strategic autonomy is mentioned, one could be sure that there are French drafters behind it.” The same interviewee added that in a way, EU strategic autonomy is meant to strengthen French strategic autonomy: it should enable France not to remain alone in conflicts outside of the borders. Another interviewee also added that it enforces the French strategic autonomy.

Two of the respondents thought that it is more correct to talk about European, not EU strategic autonomy. Both said that while the developments and initiatives institutionally take place in the framework of the EU, all European countries should be able to be involved. Especially so, considering Brexit. Another respondent thought that even if talking about European strategic autonomy, it still means EU strategic autonomy in a sense that the developments depend mostly on the EU, not other European countries. Therefore, according to these interviews, in French perspective it is more correct to talk about the strategic autonomy of Europe.

All three thought that from French perspective, all three dimensions of strategic autonomy are equally important. One of them said that if we lack behind in one dimension, then other dimensions become weaker as well and then we are not able to independently intervene. All three especially toned the importance of industrial autonomy. It might be because they are fully aware that from the perspective of other countries, the industrial dimension is considered to be a no go or very problematic. One of the respondents said that in order to have people “on the ground” somewhere, we need to own enough capabilities and therefore also own equipment. Another one added that if the EU relies on the US-produced weapons and equipment, then thousands of jobs are lost in favour of the US. Therefore, in French understanding, the industrial dimension is a crucial part of

strategic autonomy and they do not see strategic autonomy without achieving industrial autonomy as well.

When it comes to the purpose of the EU strategic autonomy, then one of the respondents said that it is the EU's ability to intervene wherever, whenever and with or without whomever. All three agree, that it should provide the EU with an ability to intervene outside of EU or Europe. Every respondent hinted that in some ways, it means that the EU could be a superpower next to other global players such as the US, Russia and China. Also, all three agree that while it is an important tool for interventions and establishing EU's global role, territorial defence is not the primary goal. Everyone mentioned that territorial defence is still and remains in the area of responsibility of NATO. One of them said that if a war would break out in one of EU Member States, then this would be in NATO's competence. France does not see strategic autonomy as a replacement for NATO or as a parallel institution, in French thinking it should be complimentary to NATO.

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, none of the respondents thought that non-EU countries should be excluded from the framework. The same applies with the US, even though that the US is geographically not in Europe, it is very important to keep them as close as possible. One expert said that the cooperation with third partners is not just merely compatible with the idea of strategic autonomy, but it is the key element of it. Same respondent also said that even though that some might link EU strategic autonomy to Charles de Gaulle, it is not like that, France is much more pragmatic nowadays than in the 1960s and that this is not an anti-USA step. Two respondents said that by aspiring strategic autonomy, the EU would also strengthen the European flank of NATO and that it would be a good answer to American concerns regarding Europe not doing enough for its defence. Aside from that, it was said that the EU should be able to independently intervene in situations that are not in US' interests (such as conflict management in North Africa and Sahel). One of the capabilities mentioned is the capability for first entry in a conflict situation. Therefore, according to these interviews, the French see it as a burden-sharing that could actually strengthen the transatlantic cooperation by not depending on the US in every conflict.

It is no surprise that all French experts said that France supports the idea of EU (or Europe's) strategic autonomy. One of the respondents, however, said that France supports

European strategic autonomy, but EU strategic autonomy might be a bit unrealistic. However, everyone agreed that the strategic autonomy of Europe is realistic and achievable. Only one of them found that it is an absolute term and that full strategic autonomy could be achieved. All of them thought that it is a long-term goal and cannot be achieved very soon.

When asked about the possible obstacles and challenges on the way to strategic autonomy, the main issues mentioned were: strategic cultures changing too slowly, explaining the concept to Member States and the US, lack of common understanding, misunderstandings, unwillingness to increase defence budgets, different attitudes towards the industrial autonomy and the general inability to make decisions. One of the respondents brought out the differences in the systems of government amongst the member states. Some countries are presidential (such as France) where one person is in charge of the whole position, but in parliamentary systems it takes a lot of time to find common ground between the Member States.

Everyone agreed that France understands strategic autonomy differently than other Member States. One said that while France has a practical way of seeing it, then others understand it differently. The same respondent alongside with another one said that while France sees strategically autonomous Europe as complimentary to NATO, then some other countries fear that it might be against NATO. Another respondent added that the differences come from historical experiences: France has always been a superpower that has enjoyed relative autonomy and has been very exposed to the outside world. Other countries that have never been fully autonomous or have never been global actors, do not care about strategic autonomy as such.

All in all, the French understand European strategic autonomy as something that should allow the EU (or Europe) to intervene outside of its borders where, when and with whom they want. It is seen as something that strengthens the French strategic autonomy as well. Compared to other studied countries, the French have a strong militaristic emphasis in its understanding of strategic autonomy. According to these interviews, they prefer to talk about European strategic autonomy, as it is not exclusive for non-EU countries. Furthermore, it is not just inclusive, cooperation with other countries is detrimental. French strongly support and are the main proponents of the European strategic autonomy.

Especially so, when compared with other studied countries. All three dimensions of strategic autonomy are seen as equally important. Unlike several other Member States, they see industrial autonomy as something that must be achieved in order to be strategically autonomous – this dimension is brought out more as they understand that these other countries do not see it in the same way.

### **Strategic culture**

During the interviews, it became clear that historical experiences play a big role in French strategic culture. France has been enjoying a global role for a long time, it has always valued autonomy, sovereignty and self-reliance. As one of the respondents mentioned – unlike many other countries, France has been able to enjoy these things through its history and is now looking to pursue its ambitions through the strategic autonomy of Europe (or EU). Due to that, France considers itself to be on high position in the hierarchy of countries and is willing to fight to preserve its status as such. Also, the French consider that they have certain responsibilities in the international system, especially in its post-colonial space (Talmor & Selden 2017; Bastien Irondele and Olivier Schmitt in Biehl et al 2013). Some would call that “French exceptionalism”. Given that French national strategic autonomy has long been a part of French strategic culture, they see the European strategic autonomy as an extension to the national one. Therefore, it is no surprise that the French are the strongest supporters of the idea. Furthermore, as France considers itself to be one of the leaders of the first world, they see that EU strategic autonomy is somewhat their mission. All in all, this historical self-image aspect of French strategic culture is most likely the most important factor reflected in its understanding of European strategic autonomy.

When it comes to attitude towards the use of force to pursue and protect one’s interests, all three agreed that for France there is no big controversy about it as long as it takes place within the framework of international law. However, all three brought out that while there is no big opposition towards it, some people might oppose to any use of force. For example, when French soldiers died in Afghanistan in 2012, then France decided to pull out due to public pressure. One of the experts told that while Germany and the US lay on the opposite spectrums in that aspect, then France is somewhere in between. Another one

added that the use of force becomes handy when diplomacy has failed. Overall, French see their armed forces as an advantage on the world stage and if needed, they can be used accordingly as long as it takes place within international law. Unlike some other studied countries, Germany and Sweden for example, French see their armed forces as the primary instrument for achieving its security objectives, more than international aid or commerce. And alongside with the UK, France is one of those countries in Europe which gives priority to military force instead of non-military instruments in conflict management (Bastien Irondelle and Olivier Schmitt in Biehl et al 2013, 133). This part of strategic culture perfectly explains, why French understanding of European strategic culture is much more militaristic than in some other countries. According to both, interviews and literature, the French see the security cooperation of EU or Europe as an extension of their military might.

Regarding the strategic orientation, all three respondents agreed that the US is very important partner with whom we share main values. They also said that France would ideally want best of both worlds and that French positioning on the Europeanist/Atlanticist scale has changed over time. One said that it lies somewhere in the middle. Another one added that while it is in the middle, then in the future it is definitely more Europeanist. And the last one said that France already is an Europeanist country. Two of the respondents mentioned that the US is not as reliable anymore as it was before.

The same comes out from the literature – France is seen as the epitome of Europeanist states (Talmor & Selden 2017, 170). For example the French vision for Europe could be concluded by the expression “*Europe puissance*”, which means that “Europe should be able to guarantee its own security and behave as a global actor in world politics, ultimately with nuclear deterrence” (Bastien Irondelle and Olivier Schmitt in Biehl et al 2013, 131). However since the full reintegration into NATO military command in 2009, France has shown some Atlanticist tendencies (Talmor & Selden 2017; Bastien Irondelle and Olivier Schmitt in Biehl et al 2013). It is said that “French security interests remain relatively constant. What is changing are perceptions of how to best achieve those goals” (Talmor & Selden 2017, 170). Another important aspect to notice is that in order to make allies less sceptical about CSDP, France had to show that it supports NATO and transatlantic cooperation and that developments in CSDP are not meant to undermine NATO (Bastien

Irondele and Olivier Schmitt in Biehl et al 2013). Hence, it can be concluded that while being an Europeanist country, France needs to be an active contributor in NATO in order to earn trust from partners for them to support France in its endeavours for European defence. What is sure, is that when compared with other countries in this study, then France is the most Europeanist country out of these.

This somewhat inconsistent positioning on the Europeanist/Atlanticist scale also reflects in the understanding of strategic culture. To put it bluntly, the French seem to be somewhat sceptical about the reliability of the US in contemporary world, however they are willing to show support for the transatlantic cooperation in order to ease the concerns of other EU Member States. Therefore, they tone out that the strategic autonomy should enable Europe to act autonomously, without the help of the US if needed, but that it is not in any way aimed against the US.

When it came to threat perception, then terrorism was mentioned as the main threat currently. One of the respondents answered the question by saying “terrorism, terrorism and terrorism”. Two of the respondents tied terrorism with conflicts in North Africa and migration crisis, however noted that migration crisis does not cause terrorism, on contrary, terrorism causes migration crisis. Other than that, Russian attempts at destabilising Eastern Europe and China’s growing influence were mentioned.

As established above, French feel a certain responsibility for their post-colonial space. Given that as of now, there are various conflicts going on in North Africa and Sahel region, which are the former French colonies, the instability, terrorism and influx of migrants from these regions are impacting France to a noticeable degree. Hence, French experts mentioned these regions as examples of where the common military operations in the framework of European strategic autonomy could take place. Managing these conflicts alone is a demanding task for France and they are expecting help from their European allies to not rely on the US.

All in all, in French case the studied aspects of French strategic culture do reflect in its understanding of European (or EU) strategic autonomy. However, in case of France, the main aspect to consider is that strategic autonomy has long been part of their strategic thinking and now it has emancipated to the EU level. Therefore, French understanding is somewhat more nuanced than in other countries and it transcends the aspects of strategic



culture studied in this study. Therefore, the French understanding of strategic autonomy deserves a separate research paper.

### **3.2. Germany**

#### **Strategic autonomy**

First of all, when it came to the meaning of EU strategic autonomy, all four respondents said that EU or European strategic autonomy means the ability to act on its own without being dependent on third countries. One of the respondents specified by saying that it is meant for acting globally for European interests without being squeezed in between other global players. One of the interviewees said that it should enable the EU to conduct stabilizing activities within its near neighbourhood. And the last one said that it is about setting priorities and acting upon them without being dependent on others – taking fate more into our own hands. The same interviewee brought out that in German debate, the government and politicians prefer to talk about European sovereignty instead of strategic autonomy. Everyone toned out that while it is important to be able to act on our own, it does not mean not cooperating with others – acting alone only if the situation requires.

Three of the interviewees thought that in German debate, when talking about strategic autonomy, the focus is on the EU. One of the respondents thought that using the form “European strategic autonomy” would undermine EU and NATO. However, they added that in reality the coalition of willing (EU Member States with third partners) might be more realistic than strictly EU strategic autonomy. One interviewee (who specified that this is their own personal opinion) thought that while it might be more correct to talk about European strategic autonomy, then in German debate Europe usually means EU, but it is not like that and should not be like that because there are differences between the two. Everyone noted that while talking about EU strategic autonomy, other European countries should not be excluded. UK, Norway, Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries were listed as examples of countries that could benefit from EU strategic autonomy. All in all, in German debate it is more correct to talk about EU strategic autonomy, not about European strategic autonomy.

When it came to the three dimensions of strategic autonomy, the opinions diverged quite a bit. One of the respondents avoided giving a direct answer to that question. One respondents thought that all three dimensions are equally important in German understanding and that they depend on each other. One interviewee thought that in German debate the industrial autonomy is not as important as for some other countries, while other two dimensions are equally important. Another interviewee thought that while the focus is on political and industrial dimensions and that there is a strong debate regarding both, then operational autonomy is not as much in focus. Therefore, as the answers were quite different, it is hard to make conclusions about it and impossible to have a straight forward answer. From the answers it seems that there is a relative unclarity regarding the dimensions of strategic autonomy in Germany.

When it came to the purpose of strategic autonomy, everyone hinted that as already mentioned, it should allow the EU to set priorities and act upon them with or without third partners. Some mentioned that it is not strictly about defence cooperation, but also about spreading EU soft power. Financial, economic and monetary aspects of autonomy were mentioned. The EU's ability to support and protect its businesses from sanctions was mentioned as a good example (especially EU's actions regarding US-Iran developments). One respondent said that strategic autonomy should allow the EU to fulfil all goals set in Petersberg tasks.

When it came to defence issues, then everyone agreed that currently the territorial defence is in the responsibility of NATO. Three agreed that it should also be like that in the future. One thought that there is a certain element of territorial defence in the idea of EU strategic autonomy, especially as there is a growing uncertainty regarding the reliability of the US. Everyone agreed that military wise the strategic autonomy should allow the EU to act outside of its borders. However, all mentioned that it is much more than just military operations and they preferred to use words such as "peace enforcing" and "civilian missions". One respondent did not like the term "expeditionary military operation", in their words it is a stabilizing mission (Mali as an example). Others also somewhat undermined the military aspect in strategic autonomy. Therefore, it seems that while Germany acknowledges that strategically autonomous EU must have the capacity to intervene but they would not be so eager to intervene militarily. For Germany, civilian and economic aspects of strategic autonomy are much more important.

All four agreed that strategic autonomy does not mean cutting ties with other partners or undermining NATO. One respondent thought that if talking about EU strategic autonomy specifically (which is used wrongly in their opinion), then the involvement of third parties would not be compatible with the idea. However, everyone agreed that strategic autonomy as Germany understands it (be it EU or Europe), must be inclusive for non-EU partners, especially NATO allies.

Everyone agreed that Germany generally supports EU strategic autonomy with certain caveats. One respondent said that Germany definitely supports the discussion on it and that we should come up with common definition for it in order to go further. However, they added that Germany supports it as long as it does not go too far. Three respondents said that as long as it means increased cooperation, better capabilities and more sovereignty for the EU, then Germany supports it. One of them said that the issue of increasing EU sovereignty (therefore also strategic autonomy) is going to one of the priorities during the German presidency of the Council of the EU in 2020. Two said that Germany supports it as long as it does not mean moving away from the US and NATO. Therefore, it can be seen that Germany is generally supportive of the idea as long as it is not about opposing to the US and as long as it is about strengthening the EU. Everyone also agreed that this is indeed something that the EU should be seeking and that if the Member States can overcome their differences, then it is also possible. However, everyone noted that it is a relative term and full strategic autonomy as such cannot be achieved by any actor in the interdependent world.

Everyone pointed out that the main obstacle on the way towards strategic autonomy is the general lack of consensus among the Member States. Everyone has different interests and fears, therefore it is hard to find common ground. For example, fears of weakening transatlantic relations and problems with defence spending were mentioned. One brought out that for some countries there might be a fear that it would lead to a creation of EU army. Everyone thought that Germany understands strategic autonomy differently than other countries. To name a few reasons for that, they mentioned that some countries are closer to dangerous regions or Russia, some countries fear about the loss of national sovereignty, countries have different political cultures and that other countries are not as ambitious as France.

In conclusion, Germany understands EU strategic autonomy as a tool to strengthen EU sovereignty and global role. Even though that the focus is on EU, other countries are not excluded from the security cooperation. There is no common ground amongst the experts on the importance of three dimensions of strategic autonomy. Also, Germany does not see strategic autonomy just as a mean for military operations, on the contrary, they prefer other aspects more and are quite sceptical about military interventions as such. Generally, as long as the EU strategic autonomy is not targeted to be against the US and as long as it is strictly about strengthening the EU, Germany is supportive of the idea. In comparison with other studied countries, German understanding of EU strategic autonomy is much more extensive and much less about military might. When contacting German experts for the interview, very small percent of them agreed for the interview. Many said that they are not knowledgeable enough on the subject or that it is currently a too touchy subject to comment on. It can be understood that the concept is not fully clear for Germany and that their understanding of it is in active development phase.

### **Strategic culture**

The general consensus amongst the interviewed German experts is that Germany is very reluctant and cautious when it comes to the use of force. If it has to be used, then only within the framework of international law and with UN mandate. It was said that Germany has been a pacifist country ever since the end of the Second World War and that the first troops were deployed again to a crisis situation just in the 1990s. Two of the experts said that the need for the use of force is very difficult to “sell” to the general public and that there is no consensus on it. Also, one of the experts said that German Armed Forces are not in good enough condition nevertheless and that if Germany takes part of international mission, then German soldiers are never sent to the most dangerous places.

When looking into the literature, it comes as no surprise that Germany has been a relatively pacifist country ever since the end of the Second World war. And also, since Germany started to deploy its troops again in international missions, the general stance about it has been quite reluctant. In order to deploy, renew or withdraw troops to or from somewhere, German Government needs approval from the Constitutional Court and the Bundestag. Furthermore, in order to not lose political capital, the public opinion plays a

big role in the decision process (Julian Junk and Christopher Daase in Biehl et al 2013, 143-144). For the general public to support involvement in international missions, there are certain caveats. For example: the Armed Forces can only be dispatched as part of international missions, use of force must be the last resort only and it must meet a humanitarian need and must serve to de-escalate violence (Dalgaard-Nielsen 2005, 357).

The attitude towards the use of force as such reflects in German understanding of EU strategic autonomy as well. In comparison with other countries, German understanding of strategic autonomy is much broader than it being just military means. Furthermore, Germans avoid using words such as “military mission” or “expeditionary military operation” in the context of EU strategic autonomy as they see that there are much better ways for the EU to assert its global role, such as soft power, economy, finance, civilian missions and monetary policies. It shows that as a relatively pacifist state, it is hard to “sell” military operations to general public, even if in the framework of the EU. Although Germany is supportive of the idea, then unlike France they do not see it in such militaristic manner. In Germany’s case, the attitude towards the use of force is connected with German historic experiences to a great degree and they reflect in the understandings in a similar manner.

When it comes to strategic orientation, all four respondents agreed that the US is the major ally for providing security in Europe. One respondent said that nobody wants the US to leave Europe. Two others added that the EU must do more to strengthen the alliance, one of them said that this is especially the case after the strategic shift in the US (from Europe and Middle East to Asia-Pacific). When asked to position Germany on the Europeanist/Atlanticist scale, then all four said that it is somewhere in the middle. One said that in German understanding there should not be such scale as the ends are not mutually exclusive, a country could be (strongly) Europeanist and Atlanticist at the same time. Another respondent thought that while Germany lies somewhere in the middle, then it leans more to the Europeanist side. One of the respondents thought that different institutions might position differently on that scale. In the literature it is also said that especially since the Chancellorship of Angela Merkel, Germany is one of those European countries that belongs in the middle. While NATO is seen as a tool for robust military interventions, then the EU is for broad civil-military approaches (Julian Junk and Christopher Daase in Biehl et al 2013, 145). While the Europeanist side has always been

very strong (ibid; Dalgaard-Nielssen 2005, 354), then the Atlanticist side of strategic orientation has had its ups and downs (Dalgaard-Nielssen 2005, 354).

This relatively central (or a bit Europeanist-leaning) positioning when it comes to strategic orientation, is self-evident in Germany's understanding of EU strategic autonomy as well. The Europeanist side is supporting everything that deepens and enforces EU cooperation and furthers integration. The Atlanticist side supports it as long as it is directed towards the strengthening of the EU and Europe, and not at the expense of other forms of cooperation (e.g. NATO) and is not targeted against the US or Trump. Similarly, Germany understands it as burden-sharing by the European flank of NATO in order to strengthen transatlantic cooperation.

When asked about the most attention worthy threats, then two of the interviewees noted that there is no direct territorial threat for Germany. Everyone brought out the security situation in EU neighbourhood as the main threat where all other more specific threats (hybrid warfare, terrorism, destabilisation, erosion of current international order) stem from. One respondent mentioned the challenges in maintaining European unity as a threat. The threat perception is also playing a certain role in Germany's understanding of EU strategic autonomy. When compared with states that perceive a direct threat against their territory (Estonia and Poland), then Germany is not as sceptical about the EU strategic autonomy in a sense that they do not fear that it might be directed against the US or that it might compete with NATO.

Other countries are afraid that this might be the case and that they could be left alone in a conflict situation in a case where the EU is responsible for the territorial defence, Germany on the other hand has an adamant position that strategic autonomy is not meant to decouple NATO and that it is not targeted against the US and they are not afraid that other countries might understand it differently. Being realistic, if Germany does not want EU strategic autonomy to entail these things, then it will not. Other countries might perceive German understanding differently or might be afraid that it might change, and this is one cause for general mistrust for the project in other countries. In German case, threat perception or self-perceived role in EU decision-making process is closely connected to both, size of the country and geographic location.

All in all, it can be concluded that the various elements of German strategic culture do indeed reflect in its understanding of EU strategic autonomy. Especially the historic experiences of Germany which have pushed Germany to be a more pacifist state.

### **3.3. Sweden**

#### **Strategic autonomy**

When the Swedish experts were asked about the meaning of EU strategic autonomy from the Swedish perspective, they all said that it does not have one clear definition yet and it somewhat depends on a context. One of them mentioned that according to some sources Sweden is one of the countries that had the most problems with the concept in EU Global Strategy. When it comes to definition, one of the respondents said that it means increased EU capabilities for action. Another one said that it is the goal to create a stronger European defence to strengthen both, ourselves and our cooperation with our partners. Third expert offered a quite thorough definition in his own words as following:

For Sweden, greater strategic autonomy means that the EU is better able to act (more autonomously) in the fields of security and defence. Along with possessing the necessary capabilities, the EU and its Member States should have a defined set of priorities and steering actions, whilst also having structures to implement decisions. Furthermore, Member States must be willing to use their capabilities

All three thought that it is more correct (at least from Swedish perspective) to talk about European strategic autonomy, not about EU strategic autonomy. The importance of cooperation with the UK and Norway was brought out as an example by all of them. One added that “Sweden has been actively seeking to include UK, Norway and even Denmark (opt out) in PESCO and European Defence Fund (EDF) cooperation. Therefore, for Sweden the referent object of strategic autonomy is not just EU, but Europe as a whole, most importantly EU together with the UK and Nordic Countries. This is different perception than for example Estonians have, who understand strategic autonomy as an EU-level goal which would allow cooperation with other states.

When it comes to the three dimensions of European strategic autonomy, then all three said the political and operational dimensions are very important, one especially toned out

operational autonomy, but the industrial dimension is something that Sweden definitely does not support. Therefore, the industrial autonomy is not a part of Swedish understanding of EU strategic autonomy. “It is an excuse for limiting competition and setting obstacles for foreign investments. It is against the ideas of the foundation of the EU, which was all about free market,” one of them said. The same respondent and one another one said that some of the important Swedish defence industry enterprises do have UK and US shares in ownership and that it would not be clear what would happen if we were to seek industrial autonomy. For Swedes, industrial autonomy is seen as sign of protectionism, which is considered to be worrisome.

With regards to the purpose of European strategic autonomy, two of them said that “It should give us the freedom of decision to decide and act, with partners if possible and alone if necessary”. Another respondent had similar logic about it. They quoted a government bill where it was stated that the EU should be able to “independently carry out the most demanding missions, which are commonly understood as peace enforcement missions.” The importance of peace enforcement and the civilian aspect of CSDP missions were also brought out by the other two.

When it came to third party involvement, somewhat surprisingly, all three thought that it is extremely important to avoid decoupling NATO or to send any wrong signals to our partners and for this, we have to make our ambitions clearly understandable for everyone. It should be complimentary to NATO in Sweden’s opinion. One of the interviewees said that it should not be contradictory in any way to support both, transatlantic relationship and deeper EU defence cooperation – they are enhancing each other. Also, two of the respondents added that the strategic autonomy should not mean the creation of EU army, as Sweden has a long history of non-alignment. When asked if it is more about territorial defence or expeditionary missions then all three thought that it is more about conflict solving outside of Europe, but one of them said that the territorial defence aspect is somewhat becoming more important as well, but still, it should not mean the creation of EU army.

To the question regarding Swedish support for the idea of European strategic autonomy, most implied that it might be a bit in between. It is necessary, but there are some concerns, hence the scepticism/reluctancy. One of the respondents said that “Sweden’s political side



needs to start to discuss these issues more actively and should define their interests and start acting upon them.” Another one of the respondents said that it is very important, but some of the aspects have to be made clear first. Another respondent added that yes, it is important, but we should act only in a way that it is clear for all partners. If it is about the autonomy in decision making and taking actions and not about industrial autonomy and if we still act together with our partners when possible, then it is a good idea generally. Anything more than that is too ambitious. Therefore, based on these answers it can be said that Sweden is somewhere in between, they are not against the project, but they are somewhat reluctant. If the industrial autonomy would be part of European strategic autonomy or if it could lead to the creation of EU army, then Sweden would most likely not support it. Nobody gave a clear yes or no answer in that regard.

Regarding the achievability of strategic autonomy, all three underlined that for Sweden the strategic autonomy is definitely not an absolute term or concept, it is relative. One of them said that “It should not be seen as binary in a way that you are either autonomous or not” and implied that in some areas EU already is a global player, such as in economy, in standard setting or in data protection. Other one added that is about enhancing our capabilities, not about achieving a full strategic autonomy as such – and this way, in relative terms, it is achievable.

About main obstacles on the way to (more) autonomous Europe, all three mentioned the lack of clear common definition of the concept. Two of the respondents mentioned the lack of political will (unable to take common decisions) and the lack of strategic resources/enablers (such as operational Headquarters or air to air fuelling capabilities). One of the two added the different threat perceptions as an obstacle, especially the North-South divide. In conclusion it can be said that for Sweden, as for many other countries, the lack of unity and common understandings is the main thing hindering further developments.

All three agreed that on a larger scale, Sweden perceives European strategic autonomy differently than other countries, and not just Swedish. One of them said that even while it is different in the whole EU, then there are certain common understandings between Baltic and Nordic countries. Another one brought out that even Swedish understanding or position is changing over the time, “At first, we had a similar position with Poland and

the UK but after the Brexit, we have moved closer to German position.” When asking for the causes of these differences, then the most important thing that everyone brought out was the attitude towards the industrial autonomy. One of them mentioned the different historical backgrounds, for instance, Swedish history of non-alignment does not allow the creation of EU army. Furthermore, “When Sweden joined the EU, then we never saw it as a security policy instrument, unlike Finland for example”. Other than these, they also mentioned the Swedish relation with the UK and US as drivers for Swedish positions.

All in all, even though that some of the respondents mentioned that Sweden has no clear understanding about the concept, they did manage to specify the main characteristics and concerns regarding it. It appears that it has been quite thoroughly discussed in Swedish debate. The answers for any of the questions did not differ much and they all thought in a similar way. In Swedish understanding, European strategic autonomy should allow Europe (or EU) to act more autonomously in the fields of security and defence, alone if needed and together with partners if possible. For Sweden it is very important that the referent object of strategic autonomy should be Europe as a whole (UK and Nordics included), not just the EU. Although a neutral non-NATO country, Sweden is against any decoupling with NATO and thinks that it should not weaken transatlantic relations in any way (close cooperation between the EU and NATO). Sweden is generally in between in its support for European strategic autonomy, as long as it does not entail industrial autonomy and as long as it does not lead to the creation of EU army, Sweden is ready to support it. But before that, those concerns have to be solved.

### **Strategic culture**

Regarding the Swedish attitude towards the use of force, two of the respondents said that it might be justified in certain circumstances, but only in the framework of international law. Both stressed the international law as the most important enabler or disabler. One of the two added, that the preventive and political measures should always come first, and the use of force could only be used as a last resort. Another respondent said that Sweden has always had an active role in foreign policy and peacekeeping and that it has embraced the CSDP and its missions but has always tried to strengthen the civilian characteristics

of the instrument. However, they added that “Sweden has traditionally perceived itself as a moral superpower and could thereby be less inclined to use force”.

When looking into the literature, it can be seen that Swedish strategic culture ranks the international operations above territorial defence, especially when it comes to cooperation, prefers peacekeeping and civilian missions, and often decides based on moral obligations (Doeser 2017, 292). Swedish participation in international operations (especially EU) is often based on solidarity (Christiansson 2010; Chiara Ruffa in Biehl et al 2013, 350-353). Otherwise, the history of non-alignment is one of the greatest factors in Swedish strategic thinking (Christiansson 2010; Doeser 2017).

Swedish attitude towards the use of force is heavily connected to its historic experiences as a non-aligned country and this reflects in Swedish understanding of European strategy in many ways. For example, for Sweden to support strategic autonomy, an important condition to be met, is that it should not in any way lead to the creation of EU army. Sweden is not a NATO member state and it does not want the EU to become a similar defence organisation – also, it should not decouple NATO in any way. Sweden did not join the EU to find itself in military alliance one day. On a similar note, Sweden sees strategic autonomy as something that should allow to conduct expeditionary military operations that are mostly of civilian nature. Everything further that that could already resemble military alliance. However, as Sweden is inclined to use force in conflict management and civilian areas, Sweden is not against deploying troops as part of internationally recognized missions. Third, due to the history of neutrality, Sweden has developed a relatively large defence industry that has been privatized quite a while ago. Any developments towards a more closed or protectionist EU/Europe, are worrisome for Sweden. Due to foreign shareholders, the future for Swedish national defence industry would remain unclear.

When it comes to strategic orientation, all mentioned that even while Sweden is not a member of NATO, it sees the support from the US as of vital importance. Therefore, US involvement is a part of Swedish strategic culture. Everyone mentioned that in the last years, the cooperation with the US has become deeper and more important (joint exercises and purchase of military equipment for example). It was also brought out by one of the respondents that it “should not be a choice”, as both are very important and

complementary to each other. They all would position Sweden somewhere in the middle on Europeanist/Atlanticist scale. It also comes out from the literature, that even though that Sweden is traditionally non-aligned, it has taken part of NATO missions (force of good) due to moral obligations and that it values the relationship with NATO and the US almost as much as it values its active position in the EU. Alongside with that, they want to act together with other Nordic countries (Christiansson 2010; Doeser 2017; Chiara Ruffa in Biehl et al 2013).

Swedish central positioning on the Europeanist/Atlanticist scale reflect in its understanding of strategic autonomy in a way that while Sweden supports deeper European defence cooperation, it does not want it to start decoupling NATO and harm the partnership with the US. Sweden values its security cooperation with the US, and they do not want to weaken it due to alternative forms of cooperation. Hence, Sweden remains sceptical about the idea of strategic autonomy as long as it is not clearly defined and explained to non-EU or non-European partners.

When it came to threat perception, all three mentioned that since the Crimean annexation and conflict in Eastern Ukraine, Russia is the main conventional military threat. Other than that, terrorism and various kinds of hybrid threats were mentioned. Threat perception does not seem to play a great role in Swedish understanding of strategic autonomy. Unlike Central and Eastern European countries (Estonia and Poland in this case), Sweden is not that afraid that other countries might not perceive Russia as a threat. Quite the contrary, Sweden is sure that at least Nordic and Baltic countries are on the same page regarding that issue and does not fear that Sweden might be alone in its position.

All in all, there are no contradictory results when it comes to the reflection of Swedish strategic culture in its understanding of strategic autonomy. All the measured dimensions of Swedish strategic culture do indeed influence its stance or understanding on strategic autonomy to a certain degree. However, the most important element to understand in Swedish case is the neutrality and history of non-alignment, which does not allow Sweden to go too far with security cooperation.

### **3.4. Estonia**

#### **Strategic autonomy**

First of all, when it came to the meaning of EU strategic autonomy, all three started by saying that it is impossible to develop a concrete understanding and/or position as long as it is not officially defined. However, all of them added some insights what it could mean from Estonian perspective. Everyone thought that it is definitely a response to the US. One said that "...even though I personally know that it is not that black and white issue, from the Estonian perspective it seems that the idea is somewhat targeted against the US and NATO. For some countries, an unpleasant US president is considered to much worse than an unpleasant Russian president..., like really". One mentioned that one of the main drivers for this idea is the fact that the EU and NATO countries are uncertain about Trump standing firm to his obligations regarding the NATO Article 5. Another one added that the concept is to a certain degree caused by "being offended" or "resentfulness". Another one said that the concept has no actual substance and that it is was initiated by the High Representative Federica Mogherini, but now French President Macron has taken an active role in it: "if you really want to understand what it means, you have to ask from Mogherini and Macron". Other two agreed that it is somewhat a French ambition on the European level. However, all three noted that the issue is definitely not as black and white as Estonian understanding. They hinted that while Estonia has some fears regarding the concept, they might be groundless. None of the Estonian respondents were able to provide a precise meaning or explanation for the strategic autonomy. Therefore, the Estonians fear that the EU strategic autonomy is not just an autonomy from whoever, but from the US.

When asked, whether it is more correct to say EU strategic autonomy or European strategic autonomy, all three said that it is definitely EU strategic autonomy, as the developments are taking place in the framework of the EU. Therefore, in Estonian understanding the referent object of strategic autonomy is the EU.

When it comes to the three dimensions of EU strategic autonomy, then all three thought that while political autonomy and operational autonomy are somewhat needed anyway (inevitable), then the industrial autonomy is definitely showing signs of protectionism

and this is not good in contemporary interconnected world. One of the respondents said that even the US cannot afford to be 100% industrially autonomous and another one of them said that the open defence industrial market is the only thing that guarantees competition, fair prices and sufficient innovation and mentioned the different tanks developed in European countries as examples of too high investments and lack of innovation. Another respondent said that “It is a legitimate, however a poorly hidden attempt by some countries to boost their national defence industries with European money”. Therefore, in Estonian understanding, industrial autonomy is not preferred at all, while other two dimensions are necessary.

When it comes to the purpose of EU strategic autonomy, then one respondent said that it is impossible to really answer to this question until the concept is clearly defined. However, to the extra questions he answered that for example the EU battle groups already exist, and it might be needed to coordinate their work better, but still the larger scale strategic autonomy would be unrealistic and that if some future steps were to be taken, it should be done in a manner that the “Ams (Americans) wouldn’t tell us, okay, take all the matters into your own hands then”. Another interviewee added that while the EU already has some elementary operational capabilities, the strategic autonomy should help the EU to decide and react quicker and in unity. He also gave the battlegroups as an example: “They exist, but they are basically not used”. He even thought that if the EU were to be more ambitious, it could think about protecting the globally important trading routes in its near vicinity, for example on the North Sea. One of the respondents said that ideally the strategic autonomy should allow the EU to take part of limited expeditionary military operations without necessarily asking the US for help, mostly in the Middle East and North Africa region, he gave Libya as an example. He also said that the EU could have a bigger potential in conducting civilian or follow-up missions after a bigger conflict has ended, for example, after NATO has intervened and the country needs to be built up again. Therefore, in terms of purpose, the Estonian understanding is that strategic autonomy should enable the EU to decide and act in a more coordinated way, if needed, then without US support (without sending wrong signals). The preferred ways for the EU to act are mostly of civilian and economic nature in Estonian understanding.

All three agreed that the EU strategic autonomy should not duplicate NATO in any way, for example there is no reason to establish an EU military Headquarter, as there already

is NATO Headquarter. Everyone agreed that the EU should not concentrate on territorial defence, because this is and should remain solely in NATO's area of responsibility – therefore, it should allow the EU to react to various crises in the EU's vicinity, with or without NATO or US. All in all, NATO is the main security guarantee for Estonia and they do not want to undermine NATO's role in any way. For Estonia, European autonomy should enable the EU to act alone if needed and with partners if possible.

Similarly, when asked whether Estonia supports the idea of EU strategic autonomy, two experts said that even though it is somewhat unrealistic, it could be agreed on to a certain degree if it would be guaranteed that it would not duplicate NATO and would rather complement it. One of the respondents brought out, that civilian missions and development of a framework for military mobility could be good examples of that. He added that it would be really dangerous to create an alternative territorial defence system next to NATO, this could be fatal for both. Another respondent said that indeed, he could not imagine an article 42(7) in place of NATO article 5, but it would be very good nevertheless if the EU countries were to spend more on their defence (which would be good for transatlantic cooperation as well). The third respondent was much more pessimistic about it and said that Estonia cannot support anything that is not clearly defined and could possibly jeopardise NATO cooperation. Overall, it could be said that none of the respondents actually support the idea or find it even necessary, but they hinted that it could be more or less agreed with if the aforementioned aspects were guaranteed by definition.

However, the same respondent who was the most pessimistic about the necessity of the goal, said that the next US elections will tell a lot about the future of potentially strategically autonomous EU. He also thought that instead of aspiring towards the strategic autonomy in the field of defence, the EU should focus more on the areas where it already is a global player – such as trade. Another respondent thought that “the fact that there is no EU China policy is already a sign that the strategic autonomy as such is utopia”. He predicts that it cannot become a reality in less than 30 years, even that is too ambitious given how slowly the countries are increasing their defence spending, however, he added that “life (circumstances) might push us towards the EU strategic autonomy anyway”. Therefore, in Estonian understanding, EU strategic autonomy in its current form is rather

ambitious and unrealistic. However, autonomy could be sought after in other areas than defence, where the EU already is a global player.

When asked about the major obstacles and challenges on the way towards the strategic autonomy, everyone mentioned the lack of common definition as the primary problem. Two of them mentioned the possible danger of duplication with NATO and general disunity among the states. One of them also added the lack of political will, different threat perceptions and different approaches to the defence spending as such. Everyone agreed that yes, there is a divide amongst the different understandings on the concept, but Estonia is definitely not alone in its position. Everyone explained the differences through the different approaches to the US involvement (Europeanist/Atlanticist and geographic divides). Two of them added different historical experiences and different threat perceptions as the possible reasons for different understandings.

All in all, EU strategic autonomy is understood in Estonia as something that is somewhat targeted against the US and is based on reactionary thinking. Also, while the political and operational autonomies are seen as necessities, then industrial autonomy is seen as a protectionist endeavour that cannot be supported in any way. It should allow the EU to act alone (in expeditionary operations) if needed and together with partners if possible, non-military measures are preferred. For Estonia, the strong caveat for supporting (or rather agreeing with) EU strategic autonomy is that it should not in any way decouple NATO or send wrong signals to the US. If this criterion is guaranteed, then Estonia is not going to be against it, although not too eager as well.

### **Strategic culture**

The answers to the question about Estonian attitude towards the use of force as such were quite contradictory. One respondent refrained from answering directly as it is not his area of competence, but he thought that the fact that Estonia has been quite eager to take part of many different interventions, might talk for itself. Another interviewee said that "... it would be very strange if Estonia as a small country would be the first one to shake its fist at everyone. The use of force is and should always be the last resort, it would mean that the politics and diplomacy have failed. However, the use of force is a valid argument in



diplomacy.” The third one on the other hand thought that when compared to Western Europe, Estonia might be a bit more belligerent and the use of force is not as taboo as in many other countries. Nevertheless, he added that the attitudes might have changed lately, as now it would definitely be more of a taboo to act contradictory to the decision of the UN Security Council (Kosovo and Iraq as examples from the past). Everyone seemed to agree that Estonia’s participation in military operations is necessary to show our loyalty to our partners.

However, when corroborating these findings with the literature, it becomes clear that Estonia has been very eager to take part of international military operations. In fact, the only way for a country as small as Estonia to use military force is to operate within international coalitions where larger states play the lead role (Kadi Salu and Erik Männik in Biehl et al 2013, 101). But, Estonia has showed an ambition to become one of the most active contributors in the EU when it comes to the field of civilian crisis management (ibid 109). Also, the participation in international military operation has not been a taboo and it has two roles for national defence: first, it provides the necessary experience for defence forces and second, it provides international support from allies, if Estonia would find itself in a conflict situation (Holger Mölder in Ries 2014, 49-50).

This means that Estonian attitude towards the use of force is approving as long as it is within the international law and international coalitions. For a country as small as Estonia, there is no other way to use military force. Estonia has been taking part of many international military operations as it gives both, experience to its soldiers and security guarantees by the partners. The Estonian attitude towards the use of force reflects in its understanding of EU strategic autonomy in a way that in EU context, Estonia supports non-military measures in crisis management. However, if needed, EU should be able to act militarily as well as long as it does not threaten transatlantic bonds.

In terms of strategic orientation, all three agreed that Estonia is definitely an Atlanticist country. Two of them said that the US is the only real guarantor of peace in Europe and that whenever they have stayed away from Europe, something bad has happened. One of the respondents added that “it is always not that black and white though, there are some experts who do not trust the US as much as others. Also, being (trans)Atlanticist does not mean that we should not have deeper cooperation with Europeans”. Estonia being an

Atlanticist country is also confirmed by the literature, as it was laid out in the methodological part of this study.

The strong Atlanticist stance of Estonia is likely the most influential element of strategic culture that reflects in its understanding of EU strategic autonomy. As an Atlanticist country, Estonia is rather sceptical about the project as they fear that it might lead to the weakening of transatlantic bond. Hence, Estonia is ready to move forward with strategic autonomy with the caveat that it must not be targeted against the US and that it must not in any way decouple NATO. As long as this is guaranteed, Estonia will not be against the developments towards strategic autonomy. Strategic orientation partly explains the Estonian stance towards the industrial autonomy as well. If a country values transatlantic cooperation, it does not want to cut off its markets, which would be seen as an unfriendly gesture.

With regards to threat perception, two respondents listed the three most attention worthy threats as “Russia, Russia and Russia” and third one also said that the main threat is Russia. All of them said that other threats (hybrid) are also caused by Russia. One of them said that it would be naïve to think that for example terrorism or China are serious threats for Estonia. This reflects in Estonia’s understanding of EU strategic autonomy in a way that Estonia is afraid that other EU Member States might not perceive Russia as such a big threat as it is for Estonia., therefore Estonia understands strategic autonomy in a way that it would be desirable only on the condition that it would strengthen the EU’s ability to defend itself from Russia In Estonia’s case, threat perception is deeply connected with the strategic orientation, and both are connected to geographic location, size of the country and historical experiences. Estonia is as a small country is bordering Russia, which has lately caused instability in its neighbouring countries and with whom Estonia has many negative experiences from the history. Size of the country does also reflect in Estonia’s negative stance towards the industrial autonomy. For a country with relatively little financial means, it is important to keep markets open in order to ensure best quality/price ratio for military equipment.

All in all, it can be said that all of the studied elements of strategic culture of Estonia do indeed reflect in its understanding of EU strategic autonomy. As elaborated above, the most important aspects to consider in Estonian strategic culture when it comes to EU

strategic autonomy, are strategic orientation, threat perception, geography and historical experiences.

### **3.5. Poland**

#### **Strategic autonomy**

When it came to the meaning of EU strategic autonomy, then three out of four respondents said that the concept is not officially defined yet and that there is no public political discussion in Poland about the concept. One of them said that they monitored Polish media prior to the interview and there is basically no information about it in Polish and it definitely needs more discussion in Poland. Another one of the respondents said that even though that there has been no discussion, Poland has actually managed to develop its positions regarding the concept. One added that indeed, it was initiated with the EU Global Strategy, which did not offer any kind of definition for the concept and that therefore it is very politically loaded concept. They added that from the Polish point of view, it is mostly about strengthening the EU capabilities but has certain protectionist tendencies. Another interviewee added that “The idea of EU strategic autonomy is one of the ideas that is meant to strengthen Europe and European part of NATO,” and later added that personally they prefer to not use the term “strategic autonomy” as it is too unclear, hence it would be better to talk about “further developments for European defence.” Nobody gave an attempt at definition, the discussion moved straight to the point (Polish preferences and concerns).

When it came to the referent object of strategic autonomy (EU or Europe), the respondents had somewhat different opinions. One of the respondents explained that on political (or academical) level there is a difference between the two and that it needs to be analysed, some countries prefer one version and another countries prefer another; but practically, when politicians talk about one or another form, they are generally talking about the same thing interchangeably. Later they added that for Poland, European strategic autonomy would be better way to describe the concept. Another respondent agreed with the same thoughts. One interviewee thought that it is more correct to talk about EU strategic

autonomy as it should relate to the EU more and one respondent did not touch upon this topic at all. Overall, it could be said that when it comes to the referent object of strategic autonomy, EU and Europe are used somewhat interchangeably in Polish discussions (one respondent brought it out). However, in Polish understanding both mean generally the same things. Still, when compared with for example Estonia, the referent object is less clear for Poland.

When it comes to three dimensions of strategic autonomy, then two of the respondents thought that currently there is no reason to talk about operational autonomy or industrial autonomies, as it is necessary to concentrate on the political dimension first. One of them added that there can be no operational dimension to autonomy without having the necessary capabilities and capacities first. One of them said that currently we should be having talks and making agreements about the political dimension, stop on the first dimension for a while and when the political goals are better defined, we could proceed with the other two dimensions. The other two did not touch upon the three dimensions but one of them added that “While it (strategic autonomy) is about the strengthening of capabilities, there are currently not enough capabilities to begin with.” Therefore, in terms of three dimensions, Polish understand that it is important to achieve political autonomy (or consensus) before moving forward with the other two dimensions. Although Poland is not against any of those dimensions, then some hinted that industrial autonomy contains protectionist elements which are not that preferred.

When it comes to the purpose of EU strategic autonomy, then everybody agreed that ideally the strategic autonomy should enhance the defence cooperation of Europe or EU as long as it does not create parallel institutions to NATO that could undermine or challenge the transatlantic link, it should rather supplement it. Generally, all respondents talked more about Polish fears and concerns regarding the concept, which means that it has a somewhat negative connotation in Polish understanding. All of them expressed concerns that it might in some ways challenge or decouple NATO. One of the respondents said that Poland does not want the EU to become the United States of Europe and it is unclear, if strategic autonomy would be a step closer to it. Another respondent said that the wording of the concept is somewhat contradictory, as the EU has always wanted to cooperate with others, but the word “autonomy” itself implies self-sufficiency (but added, that it probably does not entirely mean that). Another respondent said that Poland does

not really know what might be hidden behind the concept and is thus cautious about it. Other one also expressed concerns that this otherwise useful idea could bring some unwanted consequences. In addition to others, they mentioned that the European mutual defence clause next to the NATO article 5 could cause some confusion in the case of crisis: it could cause a prolonged discussion about which one of the two to use. Therefore, the Polish understanding of the purpose of strategic autonomy is dominated by fears and concerns and they have more answers regarding what the purpose of strategic autonomy should not be. However, if the fears are to be found groundless, then it should strengthen European or EU defence cooperation and should strengthen the European flank of NATO. Polish see strategic autonomy as something that should not in any way decouple NATO or jeopardise transatlantic relations.

When it came to third party involvement, then the consensus seemed to be that it is very important to include third countries in this framework when it comes to cooperation, as the EU cannot be strategically autonomous on just its own. However, the respondent who preferred EU strategic autonomy to European strategic autonomy, said that in that case NATO would be responsible for the territorial defence and the strategic autonomy could make it possible to conduct expeditionary military operations outside of the EU or Europe (in Sahel, for instance). Two other respondents said that the EU strategic autonomy is more about being a global actor and about conducting external missions (coalition of willing). Another respondent (who did not like the term of strategic autonomy) thought that both, territorial defence and external operations are very important for Europe as long as it does not decouple NATO but rather fills the gaps of it. Others were also adamant that the European or EU strategic autonomy should complement NATO (military mobility, civilian missions, integration of defence industries). Therefore, in terms of third-party involvement, Polish see that the cooperation with other countries is crucial for EU strategic autonomy. However, they see that the EU must be able to carry out some expeditionary operations independently in its near vicinity if needed.

It appeared that none of the Polish respondents were actually against or for strategic autonomy, but just expressed some of the concerns and generally found it to be somewhat necessary. One of the respondents stated directly and others implied indirectly that Poland could support European strategic autonomy on some conditions. The first condition being that the EU framework for defence cooperation could not in any way decouple or

challenge NATO and that it should improve the areas where NATO is lacking behind. Second, the political goals and the concept itself should be very clearly defined, if it would become one of the tools against “Russia-problem”, then it would be a necessary tool. Many expressed concerns that some countries do not perceive threat from Russia as much as countries that do actually border Russia, Poland however always does its best to understand the security concerns of other Member States (coming from the south). One of them said “If Russian threat is not defined, then what would be the reason for strategic autonomy?” Everyone implied that the goal might become more realistic in longer term. Generally, it seems that Poland is somewhere in between on its support for strategic autonomy. If the conditions would not be met, they would not support it, but otherwise find it to be agreeable.

When asked about the possibility of achieving the goal, all implied that it is a relative term that is currently hard to move towards due to various reasons stated below. One of the respondents asked rhetorically “Is EU something that could be fully achieved some day? I think that the main value of the EU is that it is adapting to new situations and is ever changing. Sometimes, the process of moving towards a common objective has more value than the objective itself.” Therefore, in the Polish understanding, strategic autonomy is not an absolute value that could be fully achieved one day, but it is rather seen as a “toolbox” for necessary capabilities.

The main identified obstacles on the way towards strategic autonomy were the different attitudes towards Russia and the US. Alongside with these, different approaches to defence spending, different threat perceptions and different geographical locations were mentioned.

Three respondents thought that Poland has different understanding about the concept than other countries and that it is mostly caused by the aforementioned reasons that make states perceive things differently. Fourth respondent thought that there is a certain divide, but all Member States who are also NATO members, could perceive it similarly with certain exceptions. However, if comparing the findings on Poland with findings from other countries, it could be said that while neutral Sweden has a very similar understanding with Poland, but NATO members France and Germany (and even Estonia) are more different.

All in all, Poland understands EU strategic autonomy as something that should enable the EU to deepen its defence cooperation and to act alone in certain expeditionary missions without the help of third partners if needed. Poland thinks that in order to move further with it, it is important to reach a higher degree of political unity (or political autonomy) and to define the concept in a clear manner. Like Estonia, Poland is ready to not be against the idea of strategic autonomy, as long as it will not decouple NATO and as long as other countries are willing to define Russia as a threat. Poland has always understood the threat perceptions of other Member States and expects them to in turn understand Polish concerns as well. Unlike (perceived from Polish point of view) some other countries, this issue should not be a one-way street.

### **Strategic culture**

One of the respondents started the discussion by saying that the questions on strategic culture actually helped them a lot to explain Polish positions on the EU strategic autonomy later on and preferred to start by describing Polish strategic culture. He said that Polish strategic culture is influenced by four “syndromes” (historical experiences) of Polish nation. The first one is the “Russia and Germany syndrome” – it means that Poland has had a difficult history with the two and does not culturally trust these countries. The second one is the “syndrome of betrayal”, partly caused by the Western European countries’ decision to not help Poland with military means when the Soviets installed a puppet government after the defeat of Nazis. Third one is the “victim syndrome”, that Poland has always been the victim of conflicts and has never been an aggressor in recent history. And the fourth syndrome is the “lack of trust”, which is in turn caused by the other three. It means that Poland has always had to defend itself by its own means, even if they were promised to be helped.

The historically induced fear of abandonment, standing alone and weakening of alliances reflect strongly in Polish understanding of EU strategic culture. For example, Poland has a great distrust towards the European allies due to the history being abandoned by them. Therefore, Poland could not support a defence cooperation that could in any way undermine transatlantic defence cooperation. Similarly, even if countries such as France

or Germany promise Poland that this would not be the case and that they are also ready to stand for Poland in the case of crisis, Poland is not ready to trust them fully.

When it comes to the attitude towards the use of force, everyone agreed that the full use of force is always justified when it is used for territorial defence. About the use of force outside of borders, two experts found it to be legitimate if it is allowed by international law and two experts found it to be a bit controversial due to Polish own historical experiences, although one of them said that the limited use of force might be justified in order to ensure peace. Everyone mentioned that Poland has taken part of many military coalitions and international missions to show solidarity to its allies. However, one of them said that the Iraq and Afghanistan missions were quite controversial for the wider public. Similar points are also apparent in literature, for example: “Poland’s strategic culture is also characterized by the resolve to ensure the most robust international security guarantees attainable, coupled with the belief that armed force can be used only in self-defense or to aid other nations oppose oppressive regimes” (Marcin Terlikowski in Biehl et al 2013, 269). Foreign deployments are also seen as a tool to gain needed political capital to ensure Poland’s safety if needed (ibid, 272; Doeser et al 2018, 12).

Polish attitude towards the use of force is similar to the one of Estonia in a way that it is seen as a tool to ensure the help of allies in the case of crisis. Therefore, Poland is willing to take part of international coalitions, also in the context of the EU. It reflects in Polish understanding of EU strategic autonomy in a way that Poland is willing to take part of EU military operations in order to show solidarity to its European allies and that they expect the same solidarity from them if needed.

Regarding the strategic orientation, all four experts said that the US has a crucial role in European security and that it is extremely important to continue and even enhance the cooperation with the US. Other than supporting the US’ role in Europe, Poland has very deep bilateral ties with the US. As one of the respondents put it, “For Poland, strategic partnership with US is one of the pillars of strategic security architecture among NATO and EU.” One of the experts added that according to the syndrome of betrayal, the US is the only country that has not betrayed Poland and therefore Poland has full trust for the US, which is partly caused by mistrust towards Russia and Germany. Two respondents said that Poland is definitely an Atlanticist country. Third and fourth respondents said that



yes, Poland appears as an Atlanticist country, but it is not that black and white issue, as they also value the European cooperation. For example, in the literature it has been said that even though that Poland is strongly Atlanticist, it is also pro-CSDP. It is seen as a “second insurance policy” (Marcin Terlikowski in Biehl et al 2013, 274). Overall, the US involvement is one of the pillars of Polish strategic culture, be it multilateral or bilateral. At the same time, it does not mean that Poland would be against deeper EU defence cooperation.

The strategic orientation reflects in Poland’s understanding of strategic autonomy in a similar way than in the case of Estonia and is deeply connected to geographic location, historical experiences and threat perception. It reflects in a way that Poland has certain concerns regarding the EU strategic autonomy: they fear that it might undermine transatlantic security guarantees and that it might decouple NATO in a way. However, as Poland is also pro-CSDP, they are willing to support (or rather, not be against) EU strategic autonomy as long as it is clearly defined that it is not meant as autonomy from the US and as long as it is not meant to decouple NATO.

When it came to threat perception, everyone said that conventionally the only real threat is Russian aggression. One of them added that of course, it is not officially stated but is self-evident. One respondent added the activities of ISIS and Al-Qaeda and their affiliates as the second and the risk of loosening transatlantic bond as the third most attention worthy threat. Another respondent said that as an addition to Russia, there are unconventional hybrid threats, such as cyber warfare, spread of disinformation and terrorist activities. However, everybody toned that Russia is the main threat for Poland and the other threats such as terrorism are big problems for allies and therefore for Poland as well. Therefore, Polish strategic culture focuses mostly on territorial defence and traditional threats.

Threat perception also reflects heavily in Polish understanding of EU strategic autonomy. Poland considers traditional and hybrid threats coming from Russia as the main threats towards Poland. However, Poland is afraid that other EU Member States might not perceive the Russian threat as strongly as Poland, while Poland at the other hand perceives the threats towards Western or Southern Member States as attention worthy. Poland expects solidarity among the Member States when it comes to threat perception and if the

strategic autonomy would become another tool to counter Russian threat, then Poland would find it to be a necessary goal.

All in all, it can be said that in Poland's case, the various elements of Polish strategic culture do indeed reflect in Polish understanding of EU strategic autonomy. The most influential factors shaping the Polish strategic culture and therefore its understandings of EU strategic autonomy are the listed historically induced "syndromes" of Polish nation. All elements of Polish strategic culture stem from these syndromes. Rather surprisingly, based on the conducted interviews, Poland has somewhat less negative views towards the EU strategic autonomy than Estonia. It has to be accounted for that some of the differences might be caused by the fact that the author of this thesis is Estonian and conducted the Estonian interviews in Estonian, which could cause the respondents to be more open to people from their own country.

### **3.6. Discussion of findings**

The findings of this study show that the understandings of EU or European strategic autonomy are indeed somewhat different across the Member States, but there are many similarities as well. First, countries have relatively different understandings regarding whether the referent object of such strategic autonomy is the EU or Europe as a whole. For example, according to the interviews, Germany and Estonia prefer to talk about EU strategic autonomy and even if they are talking about European strategic autonomy, then the focus is still on the EU. Sweden and France, on the other hand, prefer to talk about European strategic autonomy, Sweden is especially adamant on this. From the interviews with Polish experts, it did not become clear whether Poland prefers EU or Europe as the referent object. While this thesis was written with the assumption that the EU is the referent object of said strategic autonomy, then in reality it turned out that this issue is more complex than anticipated. According to many Member States, the EU and Europe cannot be used interchangeably as the referent object while discussing this issue.

Second, the findings of this study suggest that while the three dimensions of strategic autonomy which are often considered to be central aspects of strategic autonomy, are not in fact that central – at least not for every Member State. Out of the five countries that

were studied, France is the only one who considers all three dimensions to be elementary for strategic autonomy. France is aware that other countries might have problems with industrial autonomy especially, hence it uses every chance to tone out the importance of industrial dimension. Estonia and Sweden on the other hand, for various historical and cultural reasons, do not see industrial autonomy as part of strategic autonomy and it is seen as a protectionist idea that cannot be supported in any way. Poland, for example, wishes to focus on political dimension foremost, as it the precondition for other dimensions to be even possible. Germany on the other hand is rather conflicted about the three dimensions, it shows that this issue needs more discussion in Germany.

Third, while the findings suggested that there are certain differences in understandings among the Member States, they also show that there are many similarities in understandings as well. Aside from the aforementioned divergent understandings regarding the referent object and three dimensions, when it comes to other analytical categories of strategic autonomy, the understandings as such of the concept itself are not that different. For example, all countries agree that strategic autonomy should mean more autonomous EU or Europe in a way that it could act alone in certain situations, if needed. All countries agree that it is mostly about expeditionary military operations, as the territorial defence is and should remain in the responsibility of NATO. Every country agrees that third party involvement is compatible with the strategic autonomy, furthermore it is considered to be essential by every country. Instead of differences in understandings as such, there are more differences in fears and concerns that might be groundless in some instances where none of the other countries think that strategic autonomy must entail the feared aspects.

Therefore, it appears that the understandings of strategic autonomy are to a degree dominated by fears and concerns regarding how other countries might perceive things: misunderstandings rather than understandings. Experts from all countries aside from France, said that the lack of definition for EU or European strategic autonomy is a major factor that hinders further steps towards achieving it, as it is unclear what might be meant under this goal. Experts from even the more sceptical countries expressed that the EU is a forever developing project and what might be unreasonable now, might be an inevitability in the future. Therefore, what can be taken away from this discussion, it that

the understandings are dominated by fears and concerns and a common definition for the goal might avert some of those concerns.

The findings of this study show that the various elements of national strategic cultures do indeed reflect in the understandings of strategic autonomy. As elaborated above, the understandings are dominated by fears and concerns – those fears and concerns especially, are deeply connected to the various elements of different national strategic cultures.

First example, the more Atlanticist a country, the more it understands the EU or European strategic autonomy as something that could undermine transatlantic security cooperation and as something that could decouple NATO. Thus, the more Atlanticist a country, the more sceptical it is of strategic autonomy. These concerns are not in that case justified, as none of the studied countries find that said strategic autonomy should in any way be targeted against the US or that it should replace NATO. Everybody agreed that there should be no decoupling and that the US is and should remain a close ally for providing security in Europe.

Second, the strategic orientation and the fears/understandings related to it are closely connected to threat perception. The more a country considers Russia to be a threat, the more likely it is afraid that other Member States would not perceive it as big as threat as it is and are therefore concerned that strategic autonomy of EU or Europe would not be a useful tool for countering Russia. Atlanticist Member States see NATO as the main tool for countering threats coming from Russia and are afraid that EU or European strategic autonomy might undermine NATO's role, which in turn would increase Russian threat. Furthermore, a rather tautological connection is that the more a country considers Russia to be a threat, the more Atlanticist it is, thus more sceptical about the strategic autonomy. In reality, at least some experts from each country listed Russia as one of the contemporary threats.

Third, countries that are less inclined to the use of force, are more likely to support civilian and economic measures instead of military interventions, in their understanding, the same applies to EU or European defence cooperation under the framework of strategic autonomy. However, the use of force could be justified as a last resort in certain circumstances and they are willing to take part of such missions. Sweden as a neutral non-

aligned country is adamantly against any developments that could lead to the creation of EU army. None of the experts from other countries mentioned EU army as a prospect, but to be honest, they were not asked about it. This is an issue that deserves more attention and could be a topic for another study.

While the approach taken in this study has allowed to identify clear findings and draw conclusion about the different understandings of EU or European strategic autonomy and on how are those understandings reflected by various elements of national strategic cultures, certain limitations concerning this study have to be acknowledged as well. First, it has to be acknowledged that the concept of strategic culture has been accused of being tautological or impossible to disprove. Although this could have posed a challenge to this study, this limitation was circumvented by applying the third-generation approach and by devising a more specific analytical frame of “elements of strategic culture” rather than applying the concept of strategic culture as a whole.

Second, it must be taken into consideration that the case selection and selection of interviewees might affect the results to a certain degree. Although the experts interviewed as part of this study had very similar approaches with other experts from their countries, it would be wise to increase the sample of experts for future researches. The results of this study showed that three or four experts are enough for making conclusions based on the interviews, but a bigger sample size would definitely help in terms of reliability and validity. On a similar note, there is a potential danger of bias, as most of the interviews were conducted over a phone call and in a language that is not the first language of any of the respondents.

## Conclusion

All in all, this study had set two aims: first, to map the different understandings of EU or European strategic autonomy; second, to find an explanation for those differences. In order to achieve them, a series of semi-structured interviews with security specialists and government officials from five EU Member States were conducted. On the basis of gathered data, the two main findings are:

- First, despite the common commitment to the goal of EU or European strategic autonomy, the findings of this study suggest there are in fact certain differences in the way in which different EU member states understand or interpret the goal of strategic autonomy. However, there are many similarities as well.
- Second, these divergences in understandings or interpretations are reflected by various elements of national strategic cultures, which shape the understandings of strategic objectives at the EU level.

By mapping different understandings and by demonstrating how these understandings reflect differences in strategic cultures, this study has achieved both aims and has answered to set research questions. The findings of this study confirm that the hypothesis “If the strategic cultures of various countries differ, then their understandings and positions regarding the concept of strategic autonomy will be different”, is empirically grounded.

By achieving these aims, this study contributes to the existing literature and discussion on strategic autonomy by first, relying on original interview data for mapping the different understandings; second, explaining those differences through an analytical lens of strategic culture.

First, when compared with existing literature on the topic that has analysed the national perceptions (such as Arteaga et al 2016 or Bartels et al 2017), then this study offers new knowledge in a way that it relies on interview data that is more detailed in a way that it aims to directly map the different understandings, instead of assuming the understandings based on past behaviour or general security and foreign policy standpoints.

Second, while the current literature (Arteaga et al 2016; Bartels et al 2017) has focused on more general questions and therefore has developed an understanding about the existence of such variation of understandings based on previous behaviour, then this study had a different approach by first, showing the exact differences and second, finding an explanation for them based on the various elements in strategic cultures.

When it comes to implications, this study adds to the current literature and discussion by: first, showing that some “taken for granted” elements in strategic autonomy are more complex in practice; second, showing that the differences are mostly based on fears and concerns, instead of different understandings as such.

First, as laid out in the conceptual framework, some authors prefer to talk about “strategic autonomy of Europe” (e.g. Arteaga et al 2016; Drent 2018; The Economist 2018; Varga 2017; Puhl 2018) and some prefer to talk about “strategic autonomy of the EU” (Howorth 2017a; 2018; Arteaga 2017), however when looking at these studies, the terms are used somewhat interchangeably without further specification what one or another referent object means in reality. Some scholars have acknowledged this issue by saying that what is meant by European strategic autonomy, often focuses on EU strategic autonomy (see Lippert et al 2019, 9). The findings of this study suggest that for many Member States, there is a big difference between those two terms, and they find only one version of them to be correct. Therefore, these terms cannot be used interchangeably and have to be applied carefully.

On a similar note, while the three dimensions are considered to be central to the definition of strategic autonomy by many (such as Arteaga 2017; Kempin & Kunz 2017; Biscop 2018; Brustlein 2018; Drent 2018; Mauro 2018), it is not that central for all countries. Especially, the primarily French quest for industrial autonomy is taken with a grain of salt in many countries and could be a deal-breaker for further practical steps. Therefore, it deserves more attention whether it is possible to include all three dimensions as a goal and whether they should be taken for granted in definitions.

Second, while the current literature has noted the presence of different understandings (for example Arteaga et al 2016; Arteaga 2017; Camporini et al 2017; Varga 2017; Drent 2018; Bartels et al 2017), this study adds to the discussion by proving that while there are certain differences in understandings, then there are also many similarities in

understandings. The different interpretations and understandings are dominated by fears and concerns which lead to misunderstandings regarding how other Member States interpret strategic autonomy. It leads to a situation that a country understands strategic autonomy in a certain way but it does not support it due to the fear that other countries might understand it differently – a fear which is more often than not – groundless.

All in all, when it comes to future prospects of studies on this topic, the findings of this study could be expanded to create “clusters” of Member States. In principle, the same analytical focus could be applied on other EU Member States as well in order to understand how they might perceive the strategic autonomy and what might be their concerns and positions regarding it. For example, neutral or non-aligned countries might hold similar views to Sweden with regards to the use of force and the creation of EU army. Atlanticist countries that are bordering or are in near vicinity of Russia, might have similar concerns as Estonia, Poland and to some extent Sweden. Europeanist countries are likely to be less sceptical about the goal of EU or European strategic autonomy. Southern countries were not studied in this thesis, but it might be expected that their concerns stem from instability in Middle East and North Africa regions (similar to France). Therefore, by providing an explanation of what leads to the observed differences in understanding, the framework of this study can in principle also be applied to other Member States to understand, in which way they might understand and interpret the strategic autonomy of the EU or Europe.



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### **Interviews:**

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von Ondarza, Nicolai. 2019. Interview conducted by the author on May 7, 2019. In author's possession.

Puglierin, Jana. 2019. Interview conducted by the author on May 7, 2019. In author's possession.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1. List of interviews

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Time and place of the interview</b>
Matti Maasikas	Undersecretary of the Estonian MFA, Deputy Minister for EU Affairs.	Estonia	March 15, 2019. Tallinn.
<i>Undisclosed</i>	Government official from Estonia.	Estonia	March 22, 2019. Tallinn.
Marko Mihkelson	Former chairman of the Foreign Affairs (2003-2005; 2011-2015; 2016-2019), National Defence (2015-2016) and EU Affairs Committees (2007-2011) of the Estonian Parliament.	Estonia	March 25, 2019. Tallinn.
Guillaume Lagane	Head of North Bilateral Relations Department, French Ministry of the Armed Forces.	France	April 19, 2019. Phone call.
Dimitri Mauchien	Head of the European committee of the Young IHEDN (Jeunes IHEDN) and a collaborator of a parliamentarian at the Assemblée nationale.	France	April 25, 2019. Phone call.
<i>Undisclosed</i>	Security specialist from France.	France	May 7, 2019. Tartu.
<i>Undisclosed</i>	Security specialist from Germany.	Germany	April 25, 2019. Phone call.
<i>Undisclosed</i>	Security specialist from Germany.	Germany	May 2, 2019. Phone call.
Jana Puglierin	Head of Program at the Alfred von Oppenheim Center for European	Germany	May 7, 2019. Phone call



	Policy Studies and an expert at the DGAP		
Nicolai von Oндarza	Deputy Head of EU-Europe Research Division at the SWP.	Germany	May 7, 2019. Phone call.
<i>Undisclosed</i>	Government official from Poland.	Poland	March 20, 2019. Phone call.
<i>Undisclosed</i>	Government official from Poland.	Poland	March 20, 2019. Phone call.
<i>Undisclosed</i>	Government official from Poland.	Poland	March 22, 2019. Tallinn.
<i>Undisclosed</i>	Government official from Poland.	Poland	March 26, 2019. Written answers.
Daniel Olsson	Head of division in the Department for European Security of Swedish MFA.	Sweden	March 14, 2019. Phone call.
<i>Undisclosed</i>	Government official from Sweden	Sweden	April 3, 2019. Phone call.
Calle Håkansson	Analyst at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI)	Sweden	April 8, 2019. Phone call.

## CONSENT FORM

### INFORMED AND VOLUNTARY CONSENT

I have been able to ask questions about the interview and they have been answered.

I understand that any attributed quotes from the interview will only be used for the purposes of published academic work. If I choose to not remain anonymous, I understand that my name will appear in the list of interviewees at the end of the study, but my statements will not be connected to my name in the study itself. If I have agreed to conduct the interview anonymously, I understand that I will be listed as “a government official from Country X” or as “a security specialist from Country X” in the list of interviewees.

I have been told about the purpose and topic of the interview, and how my responses will be used.

I understand that I am not required to answer any of the questions and I can withdraw from the interview at any time.

I wish to remain anonymous.

I agree to this interview being digitally recorded. The digital records will not be shared to any third party and will only be used by the author for the purposes of this academic work.

I agree to participate in this interview.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Preliminary list of questions for a semi-structured interview**

### **EU strategic autonomy**

- 1) From the perspective of your country, what is EU strategic autonomy?
- 2) In your country's view, what is it for and what should it enable the EU to do?
- 3) Is your country generally supportive of the idea of EU strategic autonomy?
- 4) Is it possible to achieve strategic autonomy?
- 5) What might be the main challenges and obstacles?
- 6) Do you think that your country understands EU strategic autonomy differently than other Member States?
- 7) If so, what might be the reason behind those differences?

### **Strategic culture**

- 1) For your country, what would you say is the attitude towards the use of force? Is the use of force considered to be a legitimate instrument in pursuing/defending one's interest?
- 2) When it comes to strategic orientation, how does your country see the role of the United States in Europe?
- 3) Briefly, name three potential conventional or unconventional threats that your country considers to be the most attention worthy.
- 4) In your opinion, is there such a thing as EU strategic culture?

## Appendix 4. List of questions with guiding questions for answers in written form

Note: *The additional guiding questions found in this document were asked from all of the interviewees who did not mention the needed things themselves. This document was used as an interview guide by the author.*

### **Preliminary list of questions for a semi-structured interview**

#### **EU strategic autonomy**

- 1) From the perspective of your country, what is EU strategic autonomy?
  - What would be the characteristics of strategic autonomy?
  - Political autonomy, operational autonomy and industrial autonomy: which one of those is the most important for your country?
  - EU strategic autonomy or European strategic autonomy?
- 2) In your country's view, what is it for and what should it enable the EU to do?
  - Should it enable the EU to project military force more easily or effectively to pursue or defend its interests?
  - Should it be just about territorial defence or also about expeditionary military operations?
  - In the view of your country, is the involvement of third parties in said operations compatible with the idea of EU strategic autonomy?
- 3) Is your country generally supportive of the idea of EU strategic autonomy?
  - If no, how about if it were a longer-term goal?
- 4) Is it possible to achieve strategic autonomy?
  - Again, how about further in the future?
  - Is strategic autonomy absolute or relative term?
- 5) What might be the main challenges and obstacles?
  - Political will? Lack of resources? Different threats? Pulling in different directions? Parallel to NATO?
- 6) Do you think that your country understands EU strategic autonomy differently than other Member States?
- 7) If so, what might be the reason behind those differences?

#### **Strategic culture**

- 1) For your country, what would you say is the attitude towards the use of force? Is the use of force considered to be a legitimate instrument in pursuing/defending one's interest?

- 2) When it comes to strategic orientation, how does your country see the role of the United States in Europe?
  - Is your country more Atlanticist or more Europeanist?
- 3) Briefly, name three potential conventional or unconventional threats that your country considers to be the most attention worthy.
- 4) In your opinion, is there such a thing as EU strategic culture?

## **Esialgsed küsimused poolstruktureeritud intervjuu jaoks**

### **EL strateegiline autonoomia**

- 1) Mida mõistetakse Eestis EL strateegilise autonoomia all?
- 2) Mis on Eesti arvates selle eesmärk ja mis võimalusi see EL-le annab?
- 3) Kas Eesti üldiselt toetab ideed EL strateegilisest autonoomiast?
- 4) Kas strateegilist autonoomiat on võimalik saavutada?
- 5) Mis on sellega seoses suurimad takistused ja väljakutsed?
- 6) Kas Teie arvates on Eesti arusaam EL strateegilisest autonoomiast teistest liikmesriikidest erinev?
- 7) Kui jah, siis mis võiksid olla nende erinevuste põhjused?

### **Strateegiline kultuur**

- 1) Milline on Eesti suhtumine sõjalise või mittesõjalise jõu kasutamisse? Kas jõu kasutamine võib mingis olukorras olla legitiimne viis oma huvide kaitsmiseks või teostamiseks?
- 2) Millisena näeb Eesti Ameerika Ühendriikide rolli Euroopas?
- 3) Nimetage lühidalt kolm potentsiaalset konventsionaalset või mittekonventsionaalset ohtu, mis Eesti arvates väärivad kõige rohkem tähelepanu.
- 4) Kas on olemas selline asi nagu EL strateegiline kultuur?

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