2. The EU and the World: Tuning To Be Heard

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In the rapidly changing environment both within the European Union (EU) and outside its border, several factors have proven to be major challenges to the EU's external action. Among others, these include the rise of populism in EU Member States, the ongoing migration/refugee crisis, instability near the EU's borders, Russia's geopolitical activism and revisionist policy, Turkey's aspiration to become a regional power autonomous from Western institutions, the foreign policy implications of the ongoing Brexit negotiations, and a decline in transatlantic cooperation. With these facts in mind, it is fair to ask what the EU's response should be to a world that has fundamentally changed and is continuously being transformed.

On 28 June 2016, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini presented the "The Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy" (EUGS) to the European Council. The EUGS' main objective is to articulate and sustain a coherent vision for the external action of the EU. As such, it sheds some light on the matter of the EU's strategy in world affairs, its effectiveness, the variables affecting it, and Europe's reaction to them, particularly as regards the emergence of a "strategic autonomy" as the means to pursue Europe's goals.

This chapter attempts to provide an assessment of the first three years of the EUGS by examining the EU's relations with

its major partners. We discuss the concept of strategic auton-
omy and how the EU's relations with its partners contribute
to this debate. In doing so, we first provide a brief overview of
the EUGS and discuss what "strategic autonomy" entails. We
then examine the relationship between the EU and the United
States (US) in the context of NATO. We continue our analysis
with EU-Russian relations, current EU-Turkish relationship,
EU-China cooperation and the outlook of the Western Balkans
in joining the EU. We conclude by examining Italy's foreign
policy agenda towards the EU security and defence policy and
the development of a European strategic autonomy.

The EU's Global Strategy: A Brief Overview

The EUGS is a brave attempt to assemble and analyse numer-
ous dimensions of the EU's external action in one document[1].
This exercise is not an easy task, but it is a very ambitious one.
Conceivably, the key feature of this document is that "for the
first time ever an EU document lists our vital interests (which
is a breakthrough in its own right)"[2]. It comprises four main
building blocks that are closely interrelated: a) a global strategy
to promote EU's citizens' interests, b) the principles guiding
the EU's external action, c) the priorities of the EU's external
action and d) strategies to transform "words" (i.e. the vision)
into "deeds" (i.e. the action).

Anyone reading the EUGS could draw a number of conclu-
sions[3]. In her foreword, HR Federica Mogherini strikes a tone
that highlights the complexity of the document and the

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[1] H. Dijkstra, "Introduction: One-and-a-half Cheers for the EU Global Strategy",
Contemporary Security Policy, vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 369-373.
[2] S. Biscop, "The EU Global Strategy: Realpolitik with European Characteristics",
Security Policy Brief, Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations, no.75,
June 2016, p. 2.
[3] N. Tocci, "The Making of the EU Global Strategy", *Contemporary Security Policy*,
vol. 37, no. 3, 2016, pp. 461-472.

challenges it faces in adopting an overarching approach to the EU's sometimes conflicting internal agenda:

"Global" is not just intended in a geographical sense: it also refers to the wide array of policies and instruments the Strategy promotes. It focuses on military capabilities and anti-terrorism as much as on job opportunities, inclusive societies and human rights. It deals with peace-building and the resilience of States and societies, in and around Europe. The European Union has always prided itself on its soft power – and it will keep doing so, because we are the best in this field. However, the idea that Europe is an exclusively "civilian power" does not do justice to an evolving reality. For instance, the European Union currently deploys seventeen military and civilian operations, with thousands of men and women serving under the European flag for peace and security – our own security, and our partners'. For Europe, soft and hard power go hand in hand[4].

Critics point out that it is one of several EU documents that aim to strike an internal balance while lacking substantial policy orientation. But, as Biscop suggests, "it is the strategy now. Therefore the question is not what it could have said that it doesn't, but whether it gives us something to work with to render EU foreign and security policy more effective". As Biscop continues, "the answer is: yes, and quite a lot"[5]. More than that, the foreign and security policy priorities laid out in the EUGS encompass a broad range of the EU's external action. This sends a message to the many Euro-sceptical pundits who believe that the EU has nothing to show in the foreign policy realm[6].

The EUGS is clear about the priorities of the EU's external action. The core argument is that security starts at home[7]. This

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[4] European External Action Service, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe: A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*, 2016, p. 4.

[5] S. Biscop (2016), p. 1.

[6] M.K.D. Cross, "The EU Global Strategy and Diplomacy", *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2016, pp. 402-413.

[7] External Action Service, Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe:

entails that it is imperative for the Union to deal with terrorism, hybrid treats, the volatility of global markets, climate change and the challenges for energy security. In doing so, the EUGS explicitly calls for an appropriate level of strategic autonomy as the main foundation upon which the Union can build the conditions to foster peace and promote security. Therefore, the Union needs to invest in collective security by strengthening its links with its partners, especially NATO. At the same time, the EUGS argues that the Union's enlargement policy is necessary for the Union to grow, whereas a more concrete approach should be followed to address migration and consolidate regional resilience[8]. The EU can pursue the peaceful settlement of international and regional disputes by promoting political and socio-economic stabilisation in unstable regions such as the Middle East, Libya, Syria, Africa and the Mediterranean[9]. Overall, the above-mentioned goals and perspectives can be accomplished via a multilateral approach to global governance. As the EUGS characteristically points out: "Without global norms and the means to enforce them, peace and security, prosperity and democracy – our vital interests – are at risk"[10].

The Concept of Strategic Autonomy: What Does It Mean and Why Does It Matter?

"Strategic autonomy" seems to have emerged as the "holy grail" of the EU's approach to world affairs. In the scholarly literature – but also among European leaders, policy-makers and

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A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, EUGS, 2016, p. 9.

[8] W. Wagner and R. Anholt, "Resilience as the EU Global Strategy's New Leitmotif: Pragmatic, Problematic or Promising?", *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 414-430.

[9] M. Smith, "Implementing the Global Strategy where it Matters Most: The EU's Credibility Deficit and the European Neighbourhood", *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2016, pp. 446-460.

[10] EUGS (2016), p. 39.

practitioners – the term originated as a reaction to tectonic shifts in the US approach to Europe and their repercussions on defence and security. Likewise, as evidenced in numerous declarations and documents, the quest for EU autonomy has recently paved the way for a better understanding of the EU's self-perception in foreign affairs and, more importantly, what the EU wants to achieve beyond its borders[11]. As Mogherini bluntly puts it in her foreword in the EUGS text: "The Strategy nurtures the ambition of strategic autonomy for the European Union. This is necessary to promote the common interests of our citizens, as well as our principles and values"[12].

However, there is considerable confusion regarding the scope of this term: sometimes, as Fiott explicitly says, it goes beyond security and defence and "calls for greater 'European sovereignty' apply to economic and foreign policy, too"[13]. Most of the time, however the concept is more narrowly applied to EU defence and security policy goals, and is explicitly associated with the development of an autonomous European defence industry. As stated in the EUGS: "a sustainable, innovative and competitive European defence industry is essential for Europe's strategic autonomy and for a credible CSDP"[14]. Barbara Lippert, Nicolai von Ondarza, and Volker Perthes provide a broader and more normative definition of strategic autonomy "as the ability to set one's own priorities and make one's own decisions in matters of foreign policy and security, together with the institutional, political and material wherewithal to carry these through – in cooperation with third parties, or if need be alone"[15].

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[11] D. Fiott, *Strategic Autonomy: Towards 'European Sovereignty' in Defence?*, Policy Brief, European Union Institute for Security Studies, November 2018.

[12] EUGS (2016), p. 4.

[13] D. Fiott (2018), p. 2.

[14] EUGS (2016), p. 46.

[15] B. Lippert, N. Von Ondarza, and V. Perthes, (eds.), *European Strategic Autonomy: Actors, Issues, Conflicts of Interests*, SWP Research Paper 4, March 2019, Berlin, 2019, p. 6.

There are three main constraints on the EU's ability to conceptualise, formulate and orchestrate a coherent strategy on autonomy: a) deficiencies in the overall strategy of the EU regarding foreign, defence and security policies; b) the diverging national interests of the EU Member States and c) the absence of 'true' EU capabilities to complement or replace the waning appetite of the United States to continue to ensure Europe's security through NATO[16]. It is evident that despite the key institutional developments since the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, the intergovernmental nature of the CFSP and CSDP continues to be the rule rather than the exception. This has hindered the adoption of a single European foreign and security policy, which has in turn constrained the development of strategic autonomy. Additionally, the diverging nature of the national interests of EU Member States reinforces a political context in which a truly strategic autonomy cannot emerge[17]. For many observers, the most important constraint on the EU's ability to create the conditions for strategic autonomy is its continuing dependence on the US, although several EU Member States would disagree. Initiatives such as the establishment of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) in December 2017 and Macron's European Intervention Initiative in June 2018 point to stronger cooperation in the defence field in Europe. But they also belie a high degree of fragmentation in EU security and defence policy[18]. One can conclude that "the EU is not yet able to move towards a higher level of autonomy in security and defence, but the Union is displaying greater responsibility for its security and defence and it is hedging against strategic uncertainties"[19].

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[16] A. Billon-Galland and A. Thomson, *European Strategic Autonomy: Stop Talking, Start Planning*, European Defence Policy Brief, European Leadership Network, May 2018.

[17] F. Tassinari and S. Tetzlaff, *European Security post-Merkel: Denmark should urge Franco-German Coordination on EU Defence*, DIIS Policy Brief, November 2018.

[18] B.O. Knutsen, "European Defence Research in Crisis? The Way Towards Strategic Autonomy", *Global Affairs*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2016, pp. 287-295.

[19] D. Fiott (2018), p. 1.

Dealing with the Major Partners:
The EU Response in World Affairs

The objectives set out in the EUGS can be translated into specific actions for the EU to accomplish in world affairs. Below, we examine and assess the relations and strategic priorities of the EU with its major partners in the global political arena. We begin our analysis with the EU's most important partner, the US, and continue with Russia, Turkey, China and the Western Balkans.

EU-NATO relations and the transatlantic enigma

Despite recent misgivings, strong cooperation with the US within the NATO framework is a crucial goal for the EU[20]. As the EUGS stresses, the EU will invest in a solid transatlantic partnership in order to reinforce resilience and address conflicts as part of its broader goal to promote and consolidate global governance[21]. The EUGS builds upon this and highlights the need for the development of a European strategic autonomy within the context of EU-NATO cooperation. As the EUGS' authors characteristically write, "in this context, the EU needs to be strengthened as a security community: European security and defence efforts should enable the EU to act autonomously while also contributing to and undertaking actions in cooperation with NATO. A more credible European defence is essential also for the sake of a healthy transatlantic partnership with the United States"[22].

For the EU, undoubtedly, the US remains the most significant partner not only in the sphere of security and defence, but also for its broader economic and political implications. Notwithstanding the rocky state of relations under the current

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[20] S. Biscop, (2016b) "All or Nothing? The EU Global Strategy and Defence Policy After the Brexit", *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 431-445. S. Biscop, "All or Nothing? The EU Global Strategy and Defence Policy After the Brexit", *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2016b, pp. 431-445.
[21] EUGS (2016), pp. 36 and 37. EUGS (2016), pp. 36 and 37.
[22] Ibid., p. 20.

US administration, the European External Action Service (EEAS) explicitly defines the EU-US partnership as constructed on a solid foundation of common values, including the rule of law, democracy, respect for human rights and alleviation of global poverty[23]. The two partners account for more than 50% of the global GDP and their economic interdependence is significant, with bilateral relations comprising the largest trade volume in the world. Both partners contribute close to 80% of global development assistance[24].

In the security and defence realm, the EU-US bond is increasingly defined in narrow, interest-based terms. When shared interests are at stake, both entities are supportive of each other or at least work closely to solve global challenges. However, in the last two decades, there is evidence of growing divergence regarding transatlantic security mutual understanding and joint actions[25], coupled with a gradual US disengagement from the European theatre.

The complexity of EU-US cooperation in security and defence impacts the perspectives of the development of a European strategic autonomy. Whether within EU Member States or in international fora, the debate about strategic autonomy "has come in response to recent US criticism of the EU"[26]. Consequently, it typically turns reactive: on the impact of strategic autonomy on the transatlantic relationship and on the need for differentiation from the US[27], rather than on the necessity for an autonomous European actor in defence and security[28]. How far Europe can go without the US and especially

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[23] European External Action Service, The United States and the EU, 6 September 2017.

[24] Ibid.

[25] M. Smith, "Transatlantic Security Relations since the European Security Strategy: What Role for the EU in its Pursuit of Strategic Autonomy?", *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 40, no. 5, 2018, pp. 605-620.

[26] U. Franke and T. Varma, *Independence Play: Europe's Pursuit of Strategic Autonomy*, European Council on Foreign Relations, July 2018, p. 3.

[27] A. Billon-Galland and A. Thomson (2018).

[28] U. Franke and T. Varma (2018), p. 3.

the binding context of NATO becomes a matter of its willingness to be prepared for some controversy and political disputes with the US[29].

Plainly, President Trump has sent mixed signals concerning the development of a European strategic autonomy. On the one hand, he sticks to an 'America first' doctrine conducted independently of international partners, while delivering withering criticism of the unwillingness of European NATO members to increase defence spending to the agreed-upon benchmark of 2% of GDP. In such a context, an autonomous EU in the field of security could find room for development without the restrictive commitments of the NATO framework. On the other hand, the US defence establishment remains sceptical of providing the conditions to allow Europe to become an autonomous security power given the US interests that are at stake in Europe, such as US access to European bases[30].

In a strategic environment where the US is no longer willing or able to play the role of global hegemon, the rise of the EU would mark a momentous change both for the future of the EU as a global security actor and the strengthening of the transatlantic cooperation[31]. Yet, at present, its record both in terms of normative legitimacy and actual achievements remains mixed. Undoubtedly, "Europe needs strategic autonomy in the policy area of defence. This sort of autonomy is crucial because it opens the door to the creation of an autonomous EU defence industry. But, this is not apparently an easy task due to the close dependence of European defence key technologies on the US. The solution is more cooperation at the EU level, but always with a balance with the US"[32].

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[29] B. Lippert, N. Von Ondarza, and V. Perthes (2019).

[30] Ibid.

[31] J. Howorth, "Strategic Autonomy and EU-NATO Cooperation: Threat or Opportunity for Transatlantic Defence Relations?", *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 40, no. 5, pp. 523-537.

[32] I. Galariotis, *The Role of National Parliaments in EU Defence Cooperation*, Policy Brief, School of Transnational Governance, European University Institute, Issue

The EU-Russia relations

The EU-Russian relations have been in flux over the past decade. Traditionally, the EU has regarded Russia as a geopolitical rival with a revisionist approach aimed at fundamentally altering the *status quo* in the wider region of Eurasia[33]. Russia had an alternative geopolitical project in the common periphery throughout the 2000s, when it refused to join the European Neighbourhood Policy project. In addition, the Strategic Partnership with the EU has been effectively frozen since 2007, when the two parties were supposed to but failed to renegotiate a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA)[34]. At the same time, though, Russia has always been a 'strategic partner' within EU political circles. The interdependence of the two entities, sealed by Europe's gas dependence on Russia, remains unchanged. In fact, it is likely to rise in years to come as EU demand for gas is expected to grow, and alternative providers are nowhere in sight[35]. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 marked a turning point that led to a substantial deterioration in the relationship between the two entities.

The EUGS stresses the importance of Russia's compliance with international democratic norms as a key strategic challenge for the European security order[36]. As one of the world's main upholders of human rights, the EU is very critical of Moscow's record. As stated in the EUGS document,

2019/04, June 2019, p. 6.

[33] I. Galariotis, *Powering Europe. Russia, Ukraine, and the Energy Squeeze*, in *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 68, no. 8, 2016, pp. 1463-1464 (book review).

[34] M. Emerson, F. Tassinari, and M. Vahl, *A New Agreement between the EU and Russia: Why, What and When*, CEPS Policy Brief, no. 103, May 2006, Centre for European Policy Studies.

[35] R. Kandiyoti, *Powering Europe. Russia, Ukraine, and the Energy Squeeze*, New York, NY & Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

[36] M. Mälksoo, "From the ESS to the EU Global Strategy: External Policy, Internal Purpose", *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 374-388.

> […] peace and stability in Europe are no longer a given. Russia's violation of international law and the destabilization of Ukraine, on top of protracted conflicts in the wider Black Sea region, have challenged the European security order at its core. The EU will stand united in upholding international law, democracy, human rights, cooperation and each country's right to choose its future freely[37].

In contrast to this critical EU tone, the EUGS recognises that the relations between the two entities are strongly interdependent and that they have to work together in areas where their interests overlap. In March 2016, EU ministers of foreign affairs and the High Representative Federica Mogherini agreed on five guiding principles for the EU-Russian relations: "full implementation of the Minsk agreements; closer ties with Russia's former Soviet neighbours; strengthening EU resilience to Russian threats; selective engagement with Russia on certain issues such as counter-terrorism; and support for people-to-people contacts"[38]. Cooperation should be also strengthened in numerous policy areas including climate change, maritime security, education and research, and cross-border assistance. In the last three years, the EU has done exactly what the EUGS suggests: namely, a two-track approach in its Russia policy. Therefore, on the one hand, it has imposed several restrictive measures on Russia due to its violations of international law (mainly for the case of the annexation of Crimea). On the other, the EU has figured out how to further develop its political and economic bonds with Russia through the consolidation of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in crucial areas such as energy, education, science and technology, justice and freedom, and trade. In addition, the EU has worked very closely the last three years to enhance its multidimensional approach to resilience in Ukraine. This has been mainly accomplished through major financial support to Ukraine to consolidate a robust

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[37] EUGS (2016), p. 33.
[38] M. Russell, *The EU's Russia policy: Five guiding principles*, European Parliamentary Research Service, European Parliament, PE 614.698, February 2018, p. 1.

reform process, including fighting corruption, developing the public administration sector and the judiciary, and strengthening civil society[39].

When it comes to its strategic autonomy, the EU is interested in reinforcing its relations with the countries of the Eastern Partnership. Moscow sees these developments more as threats to its own aspirations of regional hegemony than as a framework of cooperation between it and the EU. In this respect, in a zero-sum logic, the fractures that appeared in the transatlantic relationship after President Trump took office are being seen as an opportunity for Russia to shape a multipolar world order based on the influence of major powers (such as China, Russia and the US, and the EU as well). Additionally, Russia is more interested in collaborating with individual EU Member States than with the Union as a whole; therefore, the consolidation of EU strategic autonomy has importance for Russia only in the sense of detaching the EU from the US[40]. For the EU, the enhancement of European strategic autonomy as an antidote to Russia's assertive policy will only come if EU Member States effectively work together towards the development of an independent EU defence policy. Yet, this would be a difficult task because profound differences among EU Member States on how to deal with Russia will persist.

The EU-Turkish Conundrum

Turkey's longstanding hopes for EU accession have faded over the last decade, especially after the advent of the economic crisis in Europe. Turkey is no longer attracted to a Union experiencing deep socio-political and economic crises. At the same time, Europe does not want a new member state that may create more problems than it solves. One would argue that Turkey's prospects for EU accession were always questionable given substantial

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[39] European External Action Service, The European Union's Global Strategy: Three Years On, Looking Forward, EUGS, 2019.

[40] B. Lippert, N. Von Ondarza, and V. Perthes (2019).

concerns from several powerful EU Member States, such as Germany and France, regarding Turkish integration in the EU family of states. The fraught relationship between the EU and Turkey has been significantly complicated by the 2015 migration crisis and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's aspiration to transform Turkey into a regional power in the wider Eurasian region.

The EUGS does not mince words when it comes the EU's Turkey policy. The basic proposition is that under the framework of the current EU enlargement policy, the EU seeks to stabilise and consolidate the resilience of the Turkish economy and society. This could be achieved through a strict conditionality approach that aims to reform and transform the internal political landscape in Turkey based on the rule of law and the norms of democratisation. In addition, the strategic challenge for the EU is to promote economic convergence and good neighbourly relations with Turkey, together with cooperation in sectors such as migration, energy security, terrorism, and organised crime[41].

Three years after the presentation of the EUGS, the EU positively evaluates its existing cooperation with Turkey. The EU evaluation of the EUGS states: "The EU has successfully cooperated with Turkey on preserving multilateralism and addressing common challenges in areas such as migration, counterterrorism, energy, transport, economy and trade"[42]. It continues by stating that considerable improvements have been made in the realm of foreign policy between the EU and Turkey regarding "issues of common interest, notably Syria, Iraq, Iran, the Middle East Peace Process, Libya and the Gulf"[43], which is quite surprising since Turkey's EU accession perspectives have come to a standstill, as confirmed in the 2019 EU progress report[44]. At the time of writing, the ongoing Turkish military incursion in the Kurdish-populated areas of Northern Syria has further strained the faltering relations.

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[41] EUGS (2016), p. 24.
[42] EUGS (2019), p. 18.
[43] Ibid.
[44] European Commission, *Turkey 2019*, Report, Brussels, 29 May 2019.

Strengthening European strategic autonomy will create fundamental challenges to Turkey's aspirations to become a regional power with a different geopolitical agenda from that of the EU in the common EU-Turkish neighbourhood. Turkey would not welcome a strong EU that could contain Turkey's strategy and influence in the wider geographical region of Eurasia. Erdogan's anti-Western sentiments are clear evidence on this. However, one would consider that Turkey's case is considerably complex given the national security concerns within Turkey regarding the Kurdish question. The challenge for the EU is to transform its policy of transactionalism towards Turkey (see, for instance, the agreements between the EU and Turkey the last two years for the migration crisis) in such a way as to allow Turkey to accept and comply with the EU rules-based order[45]. But, this has to be done carefully taking into account the specificities of Turkey's case and based on the 'sensitive' relations between the two entities, especially in the last decade (see, for instance, Müftüler-Baç's argument for an External Differentiated Integration approach)[46]. This would help the EU on its path towards strategic autonomy, since Turkey would become a cooperative partner in combating common problems such as immigration and terrorism.

The EU-China partnership

The relations between the EU and China have grown substantially in recent decades. Although there was very little trade between the two as recently as twenty years ago, they have now established a multi-billion dollar commercial partnership[47]. Diplomatic and political ties between the EU and China have

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[45] M. Pierini, *Options for the EU-Turkey Relationship*, Carnegie Europe, 2019.

[46] M. Müftüler-Baç, "Turkey and the European Union: External Differentiated Integration or a Transactional Relationship?", Paper prepared for the EUSA Conference, 9-11 May 2019, Denver, Colorado.

[47] J. Howorth, "EU Global Strategy in a Changing World: Brussels' Approach to the Emerging Powers", *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2016, pp. 389-401.

also strengthened significantly. There are summits taking place on an annual basis, regular ministerial meetings and an extensive sectoral dialogue aiming to strengthen the bond between the two entities[48].

At the same time, the EU acknowledges the challenges that arise from China's penetration in numerous international economic spheres (as evidenced by the lengthy debate within the EU regarding the diffusion of Chinese 5G equipment in various EU Member States)[49] and the difficulties that are evident within the EU Member States in welcoming a model that is based on principles that contrast with the EU one (consider, for instance, the "cautiousness" with which the EU faces the reception of the memoranda of understanding under the Belt and Road Initiative as well as the 17+1 framework between China and several Central and Eastern European Countries). For this reason, the EU attempts to arrive at "a flexible and pragmatic whole-of-EU approach enabling a principled defence of interests and values" considering China as a strategic competitor[50].

The EUGS is purely strategic when it comes to the EU position towards China by highlighting the need to create coherent trade and investment ties, "seeking a level playing field, appropriate intellectual property rights protection, greater cooperation on high-end technology, and dialogue on economic reform, human rights and climate action"[51]. More than that, the EUGS asks for the deepening of the EU's economic diplomacy in the wider region of Asia, "working towards ambitious free trade agreements with strategic partners such as Japan and India, as well as ASEAN member states, with the goal of an eventual EU-ASEAN agreement"[52]. Considering the latter, it

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[48] European External Action Service, EU-China Relations Factsheet, Brussels, 18 October 2019.

[49] G. Grieger, *5G in the EU and Chinese telecoms suppliers*, European Parliamentary Research Service, European Parliament, PE 637.912, April 2019.

[50] European Commission, EU-China: A Strategic Outlook, 12 March 2019, p. 1.

[51] EUGS (2016), pp. 37 and 38.

[52] EUGS (2016), p. 38.

is fair to point out that the EU's pivotal engagement in the region of Asia would create an atmosphere of severe antagonism between the EU and China challenging the EU's attempts to cooperate with China[53].

Three years after the announcement of the EUGS, we have seen the EU enhance its partnerships in Asia and reach trade agreements with Japan, Vietnam and Singapore. At the same time, and despite the aforementioned concerns, the comprehensive strategic partnership with China has been updated to reflect the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation. This does not come as a surprise, since the EU considers China a source of economic growth and an important market for Europeans who want to invest in China and Chinese businesses seeking to transfer capital to Europe[54]. However, one should not disregard the implications of the US-China trade war on how the EU will attempt to defend the norms and principles of the liberal international order and, consequently, how the EU will formulate a strategy concerning EU-Chinese relations in the years to come. Apparently, the impact of the trade war between the US and China has already hit the EU since the global growth prospects have been diminished with an effect on fragile economies such as the ones in the EU[55]. It remains to be seen whether the EU will keep a cautious yet constructive approach towards China or will become more critical putting in danger the collaboration between the two entities[56].

China would like to see the EU become an autonomous actor in global politics across the board, and in this respect it

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[53] X. Chen, *The EU's "Pivot to Asia" Will Increase Competition with Beijing*", ISPI Commentary, Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), 27 September 2019.

[54] EUGS (2019).

[55] R. Basedow, "The US-China trade war: Risks and opportunities for the EU and the United Kingdom", LSE EUROPP Blog, 2019.

[56] N. Casarini, *US-China Trade War: Why the EU Should Take Sides and Favour the Rules-Based Order*, IAI Commentaries, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), 19/47, July 2019.

would welcome any EU progress towards strategic autonomy[57]. Obviously, this would be convenient for China only if there are no negative repercussions for it. The appointment by China of a special envoy for the first time in the history of EU-China diplomatic relations is a strong sign that China would like to follow a more engaged and 'strategy-driven' approach towards the EU. For such an approach to succeed, the EU should expand its China policy beyond the merely economic sphere, and pursue a foreign policy strategy that assumes that China can be important partner and contributor to global security and peace in unstable regions.

The EU and the Western Balkans' European perspective

The strategic priorities of the EU towards the Western Balkans focus on a "credible accession process grounded in strict and fair conditionality" in order to reinforce the resilience of the region's countries[58]. The EU's commitment to improving its relations with the countries of the Western Balkans and to continue working with them until they join the EU family was fully re-affirmed in the 2018 European Commission's "Strategy for the Western Balkans"[59]. However, the recent veto from a few EU Member States on the EU accession perspective of North Macedonia and Albania in October 2019 created a negative '"throwback" in the wider strategy of the EU towards the Western Balkans. One possible implication would be the end of North Macedonia's pro-EU government. Another risk is that the Serbia-Kosovo peace process could take a dangerous turn[60].

Seen in this light, the EUGS is too complacent in assessing the future of the relations between the EU and the Western

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[57] B. Lippert, N. Von Ondarza, and V. Perthes (2019).

[58] EUGS (2016), p. 9.

[59] European Commission, A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans, Brussels, 6 February 2018.

[60] A. Rettman and E. Zalan, "Macron warned on danger of Balkans veto", *EUObserver*, 17 October 2019.

Balkans. The EU considers the geographical region of the Western Balkans as "an integral part of the EU's own regional space" and this is fundamental for the European accession perspectives of all regional counties[61]. For instance, key examples of the current developments in the region concern

> the historic Prespa Agreement between Greece and North Macedonia, the ambitious reform agendas such as the unprecedented judicial reform in Albania, the increased cooperation through resilience-building measures on security and counter-radicalization, and the regional roaming agreement signed by all Western Balkans governments[62].

The development of EU strategic autonomy would be a game changer in the consolidation of the European perspective of the countries of the Western Balkans. One key reason is that these countries could rely on the EU to face security challenges typically originating from the East. In this respect, these countries are now more than ever in favour of the evolution of the EU as coherent security actor in Europe's close neighbourhood. The key premise for this to take place is that the EU resolves its continuing ambiguity over enlargement, which at present fundamentally undermines the credibility of its position. Despite internal political constraints within most EU Member States, the EU should not follow buy into the "enlargement fatigue" hypothesis, but instead offer official membership to the countries of the Western Balkans. This would be a crucial step towards the consolidation of EU strategic autonomy, encompassing the geographic region of the Western Balkans in its sphere of influence.

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[61] EUGS (2019), p.17.

[62] Ibid.

The Italian Position, at Home and Abroad

While a comprehensive review of Italy's foreign and security policy is beyond the scope of the present chapter, it is evident that each of the policy and geographical areas discussed here have repercussions and consequences on Italy's own standing and positions. This is on account of both domestic and external factors. At home, Italy has displayed and in some cases anticipated some of the same disruptive trends witnessed in other European and Western countries: slow growth, rising Euroscepticism and anti-migrant sentiments across the political spectrum, as well as the mainstreaming of so-called populist forces, which have inevitably had a knock-on effect on foreign policy views in the country.

Abroad, the bedrock of Italian foreign policy, which has traditionally rested on pro-EU and Atlanticist pillars, has been shaken to its core in light of ongoing European introspection and of the absence of a reliable partner in the US. On the European front, and notwithstanding Rome's substantial contribution to the conceptualisation of the EUGS, Italy has assumed a more critical posture on a variety of European dossiers. The need for EU "reform" has become the code word for questioning key positions, from Eurozone governance to migration policy. On transatlantic relations, Italy remains a trustworthy partner of the US, mitigated by a traditionally deferent position towards Russia. It has also been explicitly open to China's advances in Europe, first and foremost in relation to Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative.

In this context, the ongoing discussion on strategic autonomy assumes particularly interesting connotations. Italy has consistently been a strong supporter of the need to develop European defence capabilities and interests. It has strongly supported the development of Permanent Structured Cooperation as well as parallel initiatives, such as the French-led European Intervention Initiative, which Rome officially joined in September 2019 with a view to strengthen interoperability and

strategic "anticipation". As such, the more disruptive under-pinnings of "strategic autonomy", particularly as seen in the French interpretation of the concept and as regards the diminished role of NATO in European security, displays "Gaulliste" instincts that are likely to be unpalatable for Rome. This is not only for the thinly-veiled anti-American implications of the concept, but perhaps also in view of the recent spats between Rome and Paris as regards other key dossiers from industrial policy to migration and to the support key Italian figures have given to the *gilets jaunes* movement. Yet, Italy has displayed remarkable dynamism in developing what effectively amounts to a "multi-vector" approach to strategic partnerships. Moreover, while the constraints illustrated in this chapter limit Italy's room for manoeuvre, Rome is right to focus on developments in its geopolitical sphere of influence, as demonstrated by its continuing engagement in Libya and by its recent overtures to the North Macedonian government in the wake of the EU accession rejection.

In recent months, foreign policy headlines in Italy have understandably concentrated on problematic cases such as Russia and its presumed meddling with individual Italian parties and policy makers, yet it is striking how much, Italian foreign policy is characterised by continuity rather than change, especially in light of the momentous changes of the previous years at home and abroad. Ongoing domestic instability means that Rome is unlikely to take the lead in most of the dossiers described in this paper, let alone develop a grand strategy for them. Yet it displays a remarkable resilience of the underlying values and interests guiding European foreign policy.

Conclusions: Towards an Enhanced EU Strategic Autonomy?

The above analysis provides encouraging signs that the EU, three years after the announcement of the EUGS, has managed to reach some of its objectives regarding its relations with

several partners in different policy areas. This is remarkable, since the relations of the EU with its major partners, i.e. the US, Russia, Turkey, China and the countries from the Western Balkans, were not an ideal starting point.

Yet, one aspect that is considerably difficult to ascertain is how far Europe can go in developing a broader strategic autonomy framework that can help the Union to act as a coherent and efficient actor in world affairs. The underlying question is whether the EU Member States, despite their internal divisions in several policy areas, are willing to formulate and forge a truly joint strategic culture for the Union as a whole. The way forward towards an enhanced EU strategic autonomy should have the following characteristics with regard to the EU's main partners:

- In a narrow sense, the EU should follow an independent path in the realm of defence policy detached from the US. This strategy would reinforce its goal towards the development of a strategic autonomy for the Union and will stabilize the EU's relations with relevant partners such as Russia and Turkey.
- Less fragmentation or a more coordinated approach of Europe's often polyphonic positions is a necessary condition for numerous policy areas, so that the EU speaks with one voice and acts with one body in world affairs. This was admirably displayed in the October 2019 official visit of President Macron to China, where he was accompanied by German business leaders, a German minister and other EU officials.

Which leads to:

- The approach of the EU to China should go beyond a deterministic economic framework. China is a powerful player in world affairs and the EU needs to establish a broader cooperative scheme with China in the foreign policy realm in order to jointly face common security problems and consolidate multilateralism globally.

- Turkey should be seen as a major partner that could still reorient itself towards the Union through mutual efforts to take on international challenges ranging from migration to organized terrorism, climate change and human rights' violations. A similar strategy could be articulated for Russia, despite the long-lasting fraught relationship between the two entities.
- The enlargement strategy of the EU should continue being the major transformative process towards democratisation and stabilisation in the countries of the Western Balkans. The countries of the Western Balkans should be given an unequivocal signal from Brussels, even as some EU Member States would like to revise its enlargement policy.