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EUROPE'S QUEST FOR STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

A Liberal Intergovernmentalism Approach to the
Initiatives of the CSDP introduced amidst the
Russian Invasions of Ukraine (2014 and 2022)

Stavros Apostolopoulos

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Abstract

In a rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape marked by the Russian invasions of Ukraine between 2014 and 2022, the European Union's security and defence policy approaches have garnered significant attention. This research critically examines the adaptations within the European Union's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) initiatives in this context. Positioned against this backdrop, the study adopts the Liberal Intergovernmentalism (LI) theoretical framework to interpret the nuances and implications of the CSDP measures, further evaluating their alignment with the EU's ambitions of strategic autonomy (SA). Utilizing a robust research strategy, the analysis extensively harnesses content analysis of official documents sourced from EU institutions. Central to the discourse is the noticeable dichotomy between the EU's transformative steps within its CSDP amidst the Russian invasions and its journey towards achieving comprehensive strategic autonomy. The findings underscore the integral role of member states' national interests, intergovernmental negotiations, and the balancing act between fostering European defence collaborations and maintaining strong ties with international allies, notably NATO. Concluding insights spotlight the EU's pragmatic approach to navigating security challenges, while recommendations emphasize the potential of expanding the analytical spectrum and exploring the dynamics of NATO-EU relations more profoundly in future studies.

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Contents

- List of Abbreviations.....iv
- List of Figures v
- 1. Introduction..... 1
 - 1. 1. Background 2
 - 1. 2. Research Problem..... 3
 - 1. 3. Aim and Research Question..... 3
- 2. Previous Research 5
 - 2. 1. European Security in the Face of Conflict: EU Responses to Crisis 5
 - 2. 2. Theoretical Frameworks of CSDP and European Defence..... 5
 - 2.2.1. The Constructivist Approach 5
 - 2.2.2. The Neo-Functionalist Approach 6
 - 2.2.3. The Neorealist Approach 6
 - 2. 3. CSDP and Strategic Autonomy..... 7
 - 2. 4. European Security and Transatlantic Relations 7
 - 2. 5. Research Gap 8
- 3. Theoretical Framework 9
 - 3. 1. CSDP’s Evolution Between the Russian Invasions of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022 9
 - 3. 2. Liberal Intergovernmentalism..... 10
 - 3. 3. Strategic Autonomy 11
 - 3. 4. Analytical Framework..... 14
- 4. Method and material 16
 - 4. 1. Research Strategy 16
 - 4. 2. Data Collection Method 16
 - 4. 3. Sampling 17
 - 4. 4. Data Analysis Method..... 17
 - 4. 5. Research Ethics 19
- 5. Results and Analysis 20
 - 5. 1. CSDP Initiatives and Liberal Intergovernmentalism 20
 - 5.1.1. National Interests 20
 - 5.1.2. Intergovernmental Negotiations..... 22
 - 5.1.3. Common Institutions..... 24
 - 5. 2. EU’s Pursuit of Strategic Autonomy..... 26
 - 5.2.1. Strive “for” EU-SA in Defence..... 26
 - 5.2.2. EU-SA “through” Capabilities..... 29
 - 5.2.3. EU-SA and Distancing “from” External Actors 31
- 6. Discussion 34

6. 1. Limitations	35
6. 2. Credibility of the Study.....	35
6. 3. Conclusion.....	36
References	37
Empirical Sources	41

List of Abbreviations

CARD,	Coordinated Annual Defense Review
CDP,	Capability Development Plan
CFSP,	Common Foreign and Security Policy
EDA,	European Defence Agency
EDAP,	European Defense Action Plan
EDF,	European Defense Fund
EDITB,	European Defense Industrial Technology Base
EEAS,	European External Action Service
EPF,	European Peace Facility
EU-SA,	Strategic autonomy of the European Union
EUGS,	European Union's Global Strategy
EUMS,	EU Military Staff
ESDP,	European Security and Defense Policy
LCD,	Lowest Common Denominator
LI,	Liberal Intergovernmentalism
MPCC,	Military Planning and Conduct Capability
OHQ,	Operational Headquarter
PESCO,	Permanent Structured Cooperation
PSC,	Political and Security Committee
RDC,	Rapid Deployment Capacity
SA,	Strategic Autonomy

List of Figures

Figure 1: The 360° strategic autonomy wheel 13
Figure 2: Three approaches to European sovereignty 14
Figure 3: Analytical Framework 15

1. Introduction

When the Cold War ended, European security was in a transitional stage designed to complement, but not replace, the existing framework of transatlantic security cooperation, i.e., NATO, creating a new institutional entity integrated into the European Union, the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP).

With the Treaty of Lisbon, the ESDP was renamed as the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), which aims to strengthen the military capabilities of the EU so that it can make decisions of a military nature in support of respective policies, thus contributing better to NATO, which always remains the basis of the collective security of European countries (Naumescu 2022).

However, Russia's first invasion of Ukraine in 2014, resulting in the annexation of Crimea, and its second incursion in 2022 were significant moments in history that established new parameters. In this light, the EU partially overcame the tradition of hesitant and delayed decision-making by quickly bridging internal differences and reacting unitedly, introducing a series of tough sanctions against the Putin regime and providing high-value weapons to Ukraine. Due to its ground-breaking consequences, the Ukrainian crisis has produced extraordinary unity and cohesion among European political leaders and brought forward the challenge concerning the CSDP's ability to emerge as a coherent security actor.

Consequently, Russian revisionism has significantly influenced the discourse surrounding the EU's pursuit of strategic autonomy (SA), thus triggering a profound re-evaluation of the EU's capacity to assert its independence in security and defence matters. The invasions have unveiled vulnerabilities in the EU's security landscape, prompting intensified discussions about enhancing the EU's SA to safeguard its interests and protect its member states. The crisis has underscored the EU's reliance on external actors for security provisions, particularly on the transatlantic alliance with NATO and the United States. Therefore, this evolving context has pushed for a more cohesive and integrated approach among EU member states, fostering the development of a European defence capability that can function autonomously if necessary. As a result, the invasions have acted as a catalyst for more profound reflections on the EU's security and defence posture, revitalizing discussions on military cooperation, investment in defence capabilities, and the broader integration of security strategies, with SA emerging as a central tenet in this evolving discourse.

The research puzzle of this thesis delves into the interplay between the Liberal Intergovernmentalism (LI) framework and the EU's pursuit for SA in defence, focusing on the period between the two Russian invasions of Ukraine. By interpreting the CSDP initiatives undertaken during this specific timeframe through the lenses of both LI and SA, the underlying premise is rooted in a transitive logic.¹ If CSDP initiatives can be expounded through LI, and if these very initiatives align with the objectives and principles of SA, then the broader trajectory of EU's SA can be elucidated through the LI framework.

By addressing this multifaceted research puzzle, this thesis seeks to bridge existing gaps in scholarly discourse by integrating the LI framework with the intricate subtleties of EU-SA in defence.

¹ Transitivity in logic refers to a fundamental relational property where, if one term relates to a second term, and the second term relates to a third term, then the first term necessarily relates to the third term. Formally stated, if $A \rightarrow B$ and $B \rightarrow C$, then $A \rightarrow C$ (Britannica 2016).

Furthermore, it aims to contextualise the Union's role and significance within the emergent geopolitical milieu, particularly in the context of Russian revisionism.

1. 1. Background

The CSDP was officially launched in 1999 with the signing of the Treaty of Amsterdam. It represents the EU's framework for addressing security challenges, including conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict stabilization. It covers civilian and military security and defence, allowing the EU to employ a comprehensive approach to security issues. The CSDP, in its current form, provides the EU with an operational capability based on military and non-military assets, which can be used in missions outside the EU to maintain peace, prevent conflicts and enhance international security following the principles of the UN. These missions include joint disarmament operations, humanitarian and rescue missions, conflict prevention, and peacekeeping missions, contributing to the objectives set by the EU Council (Koppa 2022).

Inevitably, the first challenge against the effectiveness of the CSDP was Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014, where the former, from a strategic partner with an essential role in the EU's energy security as the leading supplier of natural gas, turned into a revisionist power with the annexation of Crimea, a territory with strong historical links to Russia and a majority Russian-speaking population. The cause for the attack was the fact that Ukraine had been considering signing a trade deal with the EU in 2013, bringing it closer to the EU and out of Russia's influence. International rebuke and penalties were imposed in response to this action. However, conflict in the area has persisted since Russian-backed rebels started fighting in eastern Ukraine, with numerous individuals displaced due to fighting.

Moreover, by launching the pre-emptive war against Ukraine in 2022 to prevent it from joining NATO, Russia has created a significant security gap for the EU and its member states as the conflict threatened to spill over into neighbouring countries. This invasion was one turning point in history where new systemic constants have been created, triggering a series of legislative and institutional revisions across the continent. However, although the measures taken by the various nations differed in their legal status—some were constitutional, while others were legislative—they nonetheless forged a new reality that could fundamentally change the institutional and legal framework for security and defence in Europe as a whole.

These latest developments led to a bold action plan for a more robust EU security and military strategy by 2030, the "Strategic Compass", officially agreed upon by the EU Council on March 21, 2022. It is a tool created by the EU to direct the development of the CSDP, aiming to offer a comprehensive and coherent framework for the EU's operations in the security and defence sector and to assist in coordinating the EU's capabilities and resources with its strategic goals (Matlary 2018).

The culmination of the Strategic Compass's projection of power logic is the European Peace Facility (EPF), instituted in 2021 and extensively mentioned in the Compass. Specifically, it refers to a new means of financing military actions that allow the EU to provide weapons, infrastructure, and technical support of a military nature, also used as the primary means of providing military aid to Ukraine.

1. 2. Research Problem

The 2016 EU Global Strategy (EUGS) introduced the concept of SA, recognizing the need for the EU to collaborate in international security. France and Germany have been key advocates of European SA, proposing initiatives and stressing the importance of a more credible and realistic European defence. Establishing initiatives such as the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the European Defense Fund (EDF) supports the EU's efforts to strengthen defence capabilities and industrial cooperation. On the other hand, while the EU aims to develop independent defence capabilities, it still relies on NATO resources for larger-scale operations. The EU's military ambitions and integration into the CSDP are shaped by the need to cooperate with NATO and maintain a partnership with the United States.

Achieving SA while balancing cooperation with and dependence on NATO remains challenging. While progress has been made in strengthening the EU's defence capabilities and promoting SA, challenges remain regarding cohesion, political will and decision-making capacity. Cooperation with NATO and the US is seen as essential, and developing more robust EU military capabilities aims to complement NATO rather than achieve complete independence. Although the aforementioned geopolitical events have brought about notable alterations in the EU's defence strategies, the extent to which these changes have successfully translated into substantial advancements in the EU's capacity to shape and implement its security initiatives independently remains a complex and pressing concern. Hence, the problem that this thesis addresses is the apparent disjuncture between the positive transformations in the EU's CSDP due to the Russian invasions and the limited progress in "taking a leading role in the strengthening of the international security" (EEAS 2021), and, thus bolstering its SA, in defence.

1. 3. Aim and Research Question

This thesis explores and dissects the impact of changes in the EU's CSDP, examined via the initiatives taken between the Russian invasions of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022, on the EU's pursuit of SA. Through an analysis of the alterations in the CSDP during this critical period, examined under the framework of LI, this study aims to elucidate the extent to which these changes have contributed to or hindered the EU's ability to assert its SA in the realm of security and defence.

Given this intricate interrelation, LI stands out for its nuanced approach to understanding integration processes and presents itself as a more fitting theoretical framework than other models. While some perspectives heavily emphasise the institutional role and potential unintended consequences of these processes, LI distinctly captures the deliberate dynamics driven by negotiations among member states. Rather than rigidly focusing on the unchanging nature of state power and material interests, LI presents a more adaptive interpretation. It acknowledges that intergovernmental negotiations and the pursuit of shared benefits often steer states' actions. Finally, LI strikes a balance instead of solely highlighting ideational factors and the evolving norms that shape state behaviour by appreciating the interplay of tangible interests and ideational influences in guiding intergovernmental decisions. Given this balanced and detailed approach, LI emerges as a suitable framework for investigating the EU's strategic trajectory and initiatives.

Considering the above, the research question that guides this research is:

“How the EU’s Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) initiatives, introduced between the Russian invasions of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022, can be explained under the theoretical framework of Liberal Intergovernmentalism, and to what extent do these initiatives correlate with EU’s pursuit of strategic autonomy in defence?”

2. Previous Research

2. 1. European Security in the Face of Conflict: EU Responses to Crisis

The EU has been at the forefront of collective security and crisis management discussions in an ever-evolving global landscape. As conflicts and geopolitical challenges continue to shape the continent's security paradigm, the intricate interactions between the EU, NATO, and member states have become subjects of intensive research.

Both Fabbrini (2022) and Moser (2022) delved into the profound repercussions of the Ukrainian war on the European Union's future trajectory. Fabbrini's comprehensive exploration highlighted the multifaceted impact of the conflict, spanning from the EU's collective identity and global positioning to its intrinsic capacity to address emerging security challenges effectively. This crisis-driven transformation catalysed critical concepts like SA, defence capability enhancement, and the pursuit of a harmonized foreign policy, underscoring the need for unity among member states and adept management of divergences to forge a resolute response to external challenges. Moser similarly thoroughly examined the war's implications for the EU, encompassing collective identity, global stance, and response readiness to security issues. She disentangled the discourse surrounding SA, NATO's sustained relevance, and the effectiveness of the CSDP in a transformed security milieu and accentuates the growing emphasis on collective defence and the doctrine of deterrence within NATO's member states.

Fiott (2023) argued that crises, exemplified by the Russia-Ukraine conflict, can drive EU integration in defence. He examined the PESCO and the EDF within the context of the Ukrainian crisis, seeking to discern whether the crisis has acted as a catalyst for enhancing integration and nurturing SA. His conclusions offered a dual perspective: While the crisis has prompted certain member states to advocate for intensified cooperation, divergent national interests and intricate political constraints inevitably influence the extent of integration achieved. Hence, the crisis exposed inadequacies within Europe's security framework, sparking dialogues on SA and the role of the CSDP.

2. 2. Theoretical Frameworks of CSDP and European Defence

2.2.1. The Constructivist Approach

The CSDP can be extensively dissected through the constructivist lens, focusing on the creation and influence of a distinct 'European identity'. This identity shapes the foundational values and interests of EU member states and their citizenry. Constructivism melds 'top-down' structural influences with 'bottom-up' agent-driven perspectives. A central tenet is a significant variance in strategic cultures across EU member states, highlighting that differing norms regarding the use of force can challenge collective defence initiatives (Piechowicz and Szpak 2022).

Hence, when states rooted in their unique strategic cultures encounter similar geopolitical or security situations, their reactions and decisions inevitably vary. This disparity can stifle collective crisis management due to divergent public support, unclear strategies, resource deficits, or operational delays. The crux of the constructivist argument is the absence of a shared European strategic culture. Nevertheless, while persistent strategic cultural differences exist among member states, there are

emerging signs of convergence, particularly around the legitimacy of humanitarian intervention and a preference for civilian instruments over militaristic ones. This convergence resonates with the constructivist assertion that shared norms restrict collective CSDP action to areas of agreement. However, while constructivism illuminates these differences and convergences, it falls short in explaining why CSDP operations predominantly align with more “pacifist strategic cultures” (p.13) over those advocating for a more assertive stance (Haesebrouck 2015).

2.2.2. The Neo-Functionalist Approach

Central to neo-functionalism, established by Ernst B. Haas, is the interplay between state and non-state actors in the integration process. Haas introduced the concept of “spill-over effects,” which describes the unintentional outcomes that emerge when states transfer political power to supranational entities. As states cede sovereignty, sub-state entities like social movements gain momentum and influence, leading to a transformative process where states increasingly align with supranational elements, triggering further spill-over effects. This cyclical process reshapes the political landscape, causing national priorities to evolve in response to regional pressures.

Schmitter (2013) acknowledges four key assumptions of neo-functionalism that are relevant to the CSDP: 1) states are not the sole power players in a region, with sub-state groups and interests playing vital roles; 2) integration is driven by specific state interests rather than shared values or identities; 3) the process starts with “low politics” and progresses to more sensitive areas like security and defence; and 4) collaborative problem-solving introduces spill-over into other areas, drawing in more actors and broadening cooperation.

Applying this framework to the CSDP, one can investigate dominant actors, integration drivers, policy convergence in defence and security, shifts in state values, and the political transition from high to low politics. The dynamics indicate that while states remain crucial, their original interests are being overshadowed by a converging European policy. Interestingly, sub-state entities, which should be leading regional integration as per neo-functionalistic theory, seem to have their influence contained (Nordberg 2011).

2.2.3. The Neorealist Approach

Hyde-Price (2012) employs neorealism to scrutinize CSDP. Neorealism is primarily concerned with the systemic and structural nature of international politics. It emphasizes the anarchic nature of the international system, where states act based on their interests, primarily driven by power considerations. Under this theory, the international structure is pivotal in determining state behaviour. However, neorealism acknowledges its limitation; it can elucidate the systemic pressures and structural opportunities affecting states but cannot precisely predict how states will respond to these pressures and possibilities.

One of the examples illustrating this limitation is the development of the CSDP. While neorealism sheds light on the systemic pressures influencing states, it may fall short of comprehensively understanding the evolution and intricacies of the CSDP. The theory cannot necessarily pinpoint how states within the EU will react to global challenges, as it fails to account for the complex interplay of variables at both the national and EU levels.

Furthermore, according to Simón (2017), for European nations, the concern of relative decline is a “systemic incentive” for cooperation under the CSDP. However, participation in the CSDP alone might not counteract a nation’s relative decline. The CSDP’s evolution should cater to each country’s interests and strengths. European countries have diverse strengths, so their visions for the CSDP can differ. These calculations of relative gains and losses are both global and regional. The balance between these considerations depends on situations, and states often weigh their gains and losses against European and non-European counterparts (p.211).

2. 3. CSDP and Strategic Autonomy

Sinkkonen and Helwig (2022) present an extensive overview of the evolving “strategic autonomy” concept within the EU’s global role. They illustrate the evolution of this term beyond a mere military focus, expanding it to encompass broader dimensions, including economic, political, and technological realms while highlighting the contentious nature of SA and recognizing its diverse interpretations and implications for the EU’s global position. Thus, they stress the importance of comprehending the multifaceted nature of this term and its effects on the EU’s interactions with other global actors, arguing against viewing the term in binary terms and suggesting it should be seen as a complex framework shedding light on the EU’s efforts to manage external interdependencies across various policy domains.

Varga (2017) evaluates recent initiatives within the CSDP framework that aim to advance European SA. The author delves into challenges related to capability development, operational coordination, and political determination and assesses the contribution of these initiatives to European SA, acknowledging progress while highlighting challenges in coordination, capacity building, and member-state integration. Hence, a comprehensive approach that includes political commitment, investment, and strategic cohesion as crucial factors in achieving SA is needed.

Howorth (2020) explores shifts within the CSDP framework and their implications for the EU’s pursuit of SA. He introduces “strategic autonomy” as the EU’s aspiration to enhance self-reliance in security matters and meticulously examines the complexities associated with realizing this aspiration, considering the EU’s reliance on NATO and the intricate nature of interdependent defence relationships. The author highlights that the transition towards SA in the CSDP is multidimensional, requiring a balanced approach aligning autonomous defence capabilities with collaborative engagements with NATO.

2. 4. European Security and Transatlantic Relations

M. E. Smith (2020) explores the evolving dynamics of transatlantic security relations following the European Security Strategy (ESS) adoption and navigates the EU-SA and its implications for its partnership with the United States. His study advocates for a balanced approach that harmonizes EU self-reliance with continued cooperation with the US, recognizing shifts in the transatlantic security landscape since the inception of the ESS. Similarly, Retter et al. (2021) stress ongoing transatlantic dialogue and shared perspectives as crucial and highlight the potential for SA to influence the dynamics between the EU, the US, and NATO. They also argue that balancing autonomy and collaborative security efforts is complex.

Brustlein's (2019) study demonstrates the synchronization between the CSDP and NATO, examining shared operations, joint exercises, and collaborative efforts. His study evaluates how global security challenges influence the strategies of both CSDP and NATO, highlighting the practical benefits of cooperative crisis management and capacity building. Thus, he argues that sustained coordination and dialogue are significant, especially when faced with evolving security exigencies. While cooperative strides are acknowledged, the author also accentuates the potential for further synergy between CSDP and NATO.

Furthermore, Demetriou (2016) argues that European NATO allies should focus on enhancing their military capabilities to counter the challenge of US unilateralism and strengthen European defence integration. He emphasizes the need for cooperation between the EU and the United States within NATO, highlighting that a more robust EU aims to complement rather than compete with the United States. The author underscores that the EU's military ambitions and the CSDP integration are built on the foundation of partnership with NATO and the United States while acknowledging the EU's continued reliance on NATO assets for larger-scale operations.

2. 5. Research Gap

At the heart of this research study is the choice of Liberal Intergovernmentalism (LI) as the guiding theoretical framework, setting it apart from more commonly evoked theories such as constructivism, neo-functionalism and neorealism, which carve out specific dimensions of the European defence narrative. Firstly, neo-functionalism posits that European defence integration is spurred by the interplay between various actors, including non-state ones, and the spill-over effects catalysed by transferring portions of sovereignty to supranational bodies. In contrast, neorealism emphasises international power dynamics and views states as primary actors driven by material power and national interests. Within this lens, European defence is often seen as a strategic landscape where states compete for power, often sidelining the role of collaborative supranational institutions. Constructivism underscores the evolution of state behaviours and policies based on shared norms, identities, and ideas. From this perspective, European defence is situated within a broader socio-cultural and normative matrix where shared beliefs and identities mould states' actions and defence orientations.

However, for the context of my thesis, LI emerges as the most appropriate framework to understand this mix of cooperation and competition in the EU. While the theories mentioned above offer valuable insights, LI strikes a balance by recognising both state preferences' role and supranational institutions' influence in shaping European defence. Moreover, LI's emphasis on intergovernmental negotiations and decision-making processes complements the intricate blend of state interests and institutional dynamics inherent in European defence.

Finally, a conspicuous absence exists in contemporary research: a synthesis that seamlessly weaves the evolution of CSDP initiatives, as documented by the European Parliament, between the Russian interventions in Ukraine and the dual frameworks of LI and SA. While there is a profusion of literature dissecting individual themes like CSDP, SA, and the EU's crisis responses, a cohesive narrative that draws parallels across these domains, especially set against recent geopolitical shifts, remains elusive.

3. Theoretical Framework

3. 1. CSDP's Evolution Between the Russian Invasions of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022

In 2016, the European Union's High Representative/Vice-President (HR/VP) at the time, Federica Mogherini, unveiled the EU Global Strategy with the primary objective of addressing the evolving dynamics in the global strategic landscape. This strategic framework instigated a comprehensive review of the European Union's organisational structures and paved the way for substantial transformations within the CSDP. Consequently, a series of noteworthy initiatives were introduced, which included the PESCO, the EDF, the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) and the EPF, as documented by the European Parliament (2019, pp.4-5). It is important to note that these initiatives were not exclusively oriented towards defence matters but were also strategically aimed at reinforcing the overall political cohesion of the European Union (Major and Mölling, 2020). Moreover, the introduction of the EPF in 2021 signified a significant milestone in the EU's pursuit of a more proactive and influential role in global peace and security while representing "the strongest attempt to date to enhance solidarity among member states for the financing of military missions and operations through a more substantial increase in common costs" (Serrano 2020, p.34).

As a result, this research endeavours to scrutinise the changes that unfolded within the CSDP framework between the two Russian incursions into Ukraine. These changes are intrinsically linked to the aforementioned initiatives, which are pivotal in the CSDP context. These initiatives, responding directly to the security ramifications of the Ukrainian crises, epitomised the European Union's collective commitment to adapt and enhance its defence and security mechanisms in light of evolving and multifaceted threats.

Thus, PESCO is a significant initiative within the framework of the CSDP, which was designed to facilitate enhanced defence cooperation among willing and capable member states. It gained renewed prominence following the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, which exposed vulnerabilities in the EU's security and defence capabilities. PESCO aims to strengthen Europe's defence capacities by fostering collaborative projects in defence research, development, procurement, and operational planning. It complements the CSDP by promoting a closer, more coordinated defence integration among member states and contributing to the EU's overall defence policy (Council of the European Union 2017).

Furthermore, the EDF represents a landmark initiative that seeks to enhance the development and deployment of cutting-edge defence technologies through collaborative research and projects. By providing funding and support for defence research and development, the EDF contributes to the growth and sustainability of the EDTIB (European Parliament and Council of the European Union 2021). It promotes synergies between the civilian and military sectors by supporting the development of dual-use technologies, which can lead to economic growth and innovation beyond the defence sector (Haroche 2020).

Complementary to the EDF, the CARD is an instrument introduced in 2017 to facilitate a comprehensive and coordinated assessment of member states' defence spending, capabilities, and investment priorities (EDA 2020). It aligns with the EU Global Strategy's emphasis on enhancing defence capabilities and

promoting cooperative security. Thus, it supports implementing the Global Strategy's objectives and contributes to a more proactive and integrated approach to security challenges (Biscop 2017).

The MPCC, established in 2017, aims to enhance the EU's capacity to plan and conduct military operations and missions, being under the control and direction of the Political and Security Committee (PSC) and the EEAS, both of which consist of representatives from member states (Naumescu 2022). Its primary role is to plan and conduct EU-led military operations and missions. MPCC and NATO's military structures are complementary, and the EU and NATO maintain close cooperation in crisis management. The MPCC's establishment has helped improve coordination and avoid duplication between the two organisations, enhancing the overall effectiveness of European security and defence efforts. The establishment of the MPCC is a concrete demonstration of the EU's willingness to take on a more active role in crisis management and security (Fiott 2020a).

Finally, the EPF is a pivotal instrument within the EU's security and defence policy framework. Established through the EU Council's Decision (CFSP) 2021/509 on 22 March 2021, the EPF embodies the EU's commitment to enhancing its capacity to engage in peacekeeping, crisis management, and conflict prevention missions. Its primary mission is to provide the EU with the means to respond swiftly and effectively to emerging security challenges, particularly those arising from regional conflicts and crises. The latter is achieved by offering a versatile financing mechanism that supports various activities, including funding military operations, capacity-building endeavours, and initiatives related to security sector reform in partner countries. By allocating resources to support military operations and the broader aspects of peacebuilding and stabilisation, the EU aims to address the root causes of conflicts and contribute to long-term peace and security.

3. 2. Liberal Intergovernmentalism

As Moravcsik (1993) introduced, LI is a theoretical framework in European integration studies that seeks to explain decision-making processes and dynamics in the EU. It emphasizes the role of national governments as crucial actors and focuses on their preferences and intergovernmental negotiations as the driving forces behind EU integration. This theoretical framework perceives EU policy development as a tripartite progression, where states, as rational agents, initially identify their preferences, proceed to interstate negotiations, and then formulate shared institutions. It determines national inclinations based on social influences reflecting issue-centric functional relationships and elucidates governmental sway on interstate negotiations through asymmetrical interdependence among national inclinations. Lastly, it views shared institutions as tools for aligning or reliably ensuring states uphold and expand upon their agreements.

This three-stage theoretical framework provides a comprehensive insight into the European integration process by delineating how states within this framework initially identify their preferences, engage in deliberations to establish a collective consensus, and subsequently institute or refine entities to safeguard the fruits of the negotiation (Moravcsik 1998, pp. 19–20).

According to the **first stage** of LI, member states identify their national interests, reflecting the EU's intrinsic diversity influenced by geography, history, and security. These interests, continually evolving due to changes in the EU market or global trends, guide state actions in the EU, from trade to foreign policy. Domestic factors, such as public sentiment, major interest groups, and governance structures, significantly shape these interests. In this framework, governmental leaders integrate societal

preferences into state inclinations towards European integration (Pollack 2012, p.10; Moravcsik 1997, pp.518–520). Though these preferences typically represent national directives, they can shift in response to external factors (Moravcsik 1998). State preferences derive from stable and dynamic processes, and their nature often dictates the theoretical approach. Moravcsik’s analysis emphasizes economic interests in EU integration but acknowledges the interplay of ideology and geopolitics.

The **second stage**, intergovernmental negotiations, arises when member states grapple with differing national interests. These negotiations span multiple policy domains, such as economic positions, trade pacts, and defence ties. Invariably intricate, these dialogues necessitate trade-offs. The negotiation dynamics are pivotal in crafting EU policies. They exemplify how states, in the spirit of LI, collaboratively navigate shared European goals. Influential member states often steer these negotiations, ensuring a consensus that mirrors their internal preferences (Pollack 2001, p.226), whereas supranational entities have marginal impact. However, challenges, including asymmetrical interdependence and informational disparities, can hinder these negotiations, thus significantly shaping the bargaining dynamics (Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig 2009, 71). Furthermore, the discordant inclinations of nation-states, often a product of international relations nuances, are reconciled through LI’s rationalist bargaining approach (Moravcsik & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 70) since governments which are keen on core agreements often cede in some areas to facilitate broader consensus (Moravcsik 1998, p.479).

Finally, in the LI framework’s **third stage**, member states develop common institutions to foster cooperation while preserving sovereignty. These institutions coordinate state activities in shared policy areas like the euro currency management. They function within state-defined parameters, ensuring that national interests shape decision-making. Moravcsik (1998) suggests that states sometimes choose supranational actors for stability, especially when high consensus defection risks (p.9). Institutions reduce uncertainties, easing states’ cooperation (p.67). LI’s approach values national commitment mechanisms in the EU, emphasizing domestic alignment. It raises the question of when and why EU governments delegate decision-making power (Moravcsik 1999) while regarding international institutions as regulators for international cooperation.

3. 3. Strategic Autonomy

The evolution of the EU-SA epitomizes the bloc’s shifting geopolitical orientation and desire for a more prominent global presence. As Charles Michel, the European Council President, articulated, Europe’s strategic independence has become a paramount objective for the modern generation, reflecting a lineage of ideas that span decades (Michel 2020).

After the Cold War era, France became the breeding ground for SA. Rooted in Gaullist ideals, this early conceptualization was not about absolute sovereignty but more about mitigating Europe’s reliance on the United States, particularly in foreign policy matters (Howorth 2020). Throughout the 1990s, this aspiration for a unique European identity in global geopolitics, especially in defence, remained persistent. Both NATO’s role and the EU’s position within that alliance provided a recurring context for debates on European SA (Miró 2023).

Building on this backdrop, “European Strategic Autonomy” was inaugurated in an official document in December 2013 during the European Council’s first thematic discussion on defence (European Council 2013). Highlighting the importance of defence, this document emerged amidst the EU’s concerns over developments in Ukraine, especially after President Yanukovich’s announcement to halt a significant

association and trade agreement with the EU (Fisher 2014). After this announcement, significant protests against Ukraine's pro-Russian government led to its downfall, followed by Russia's invasion of Eastern Ukraine and Crimea. Against this backdrop of heightened Russian assertiveness, the EU's discourse on SA began to solidify (Pasquali 2023).

Subsequently, the 2016 European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) reintroduced the idea of EU-SA. Presented by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to the European Council, the document underscored the ambition to attain a certain degree of SA, particularly in defence and security (EEAS 2016). Thus, the events of 2016 prominently placed the concept of EU-SA in European discussions. Despite the introduction in official documents, there was a glaring lack of precision in its definition, leading to varied interpretations and intensifying debates. As a result, EU-SA evolved into an essentially contested concept (Pasquali 2023).

While a universally accepted definition for SA remains elusive, a consensus is emerging in academic circles. Wendt, for instance, views autonomy as the ability of a state to control resource allocation and governmental choices, ensuring survival and preserving its liberty (Wendt 1999; Zieliński 2020). Sinkkonen and Helwig (2022) further refine the term, emphasizing the EU's capacity to independently shape and implement policies in alignment with its global objectives while reducing dependence on external entities.

Nevertheless, this definition has not been without its critics. Based on semantic interpretations, many scholars caution against the EU adopting an isolationist stance under the guise of SA. They argue that such an approach suggests a desire to disentangle Europe from the interdependent global ecosystem it has helped shape over the years (Leonard and Shapiro 2019). Concerns about the EU becoming increasingly insular in policy domains arise, potentially disadvantaging nations that have benefited from its openness (Guinea 2022). Similar apprehensions exist in the realm of security and defence. Factors such as competition, potential detachment from NATO, and the UK's resistance to a unified European defence, further accentuated by its exit from the EU, have kept these concerns alive (Pasquali 2023).

Addressing these challenges, both scholars and European institutions have embarked on efforts to reconceptualize SA, both in terminology and essence. "Strategic autonomy" has been frequently replaced by terms like "Strategic Sovereignty" or "Open Strategic Autonomy," terms which are often used interchangeably. This linguistic shift mirrors a corresponding change in the underlying concept (Pasquali 2023). In fact, the incorporation of the word "open" with "strategic autonomy" first surfaced in speeches by Trade Commissioner Phil Hogan in 2020, reflecting a desire to assuage protectionist concerns (Tamma 2020; Miró 2023).

The reimagined concept of European (open) SA is now understood as the capacity to influence the emerging global economic and political governance structures, foster beneficial bilateral relations, and shield the EU from unfair practices (European Commission 2021a). Notably, the aim is not self-sufficiency but to reduce dependencies in areas that might jeopardize the EU's autonomy. The latter aligns with the EU's commitment to openness and multilateralism, with a nuanced approach of acting multilaterally when possible and autonomously when necessary (European Commission 2021b, p. 16; European Commission 2022).

The multifaceted nature of policy areas that the EU targets for enhanced SA is effectively captured by the 360° strategic autonomy wheel (Damen 2022). This framework identifies critical clusters like

geopolitics, demography, environment, economy, information management, and values, underlining the imperative to address significant dependencies therein.



Figure 1: The 360° strategic autonomy wheel (Damen 2022)

Moreover, Damen (2022) argues that the term EU (strategic) sovereignty is often used as an alternative for (strategic) autonomy. As elucidated by Fiott et al. (2021), the emphasis is on determining the appropriate circumstances for exerting political freedom alongside an urgency to diminish dependencies and bolster capacities for independent action. Such discussions often revolve around the following three questions (Figure 1) (Fiott 2020b):

1. “What does a political community need strategic autonomy for and what are the overarching strategic aims?”
2. “What capacities and political frameworks does a political community require to enhance autonomy?”
3. “What are the main obstacles impeding independent political action and what dependencies is the political community seeking freedom from?”

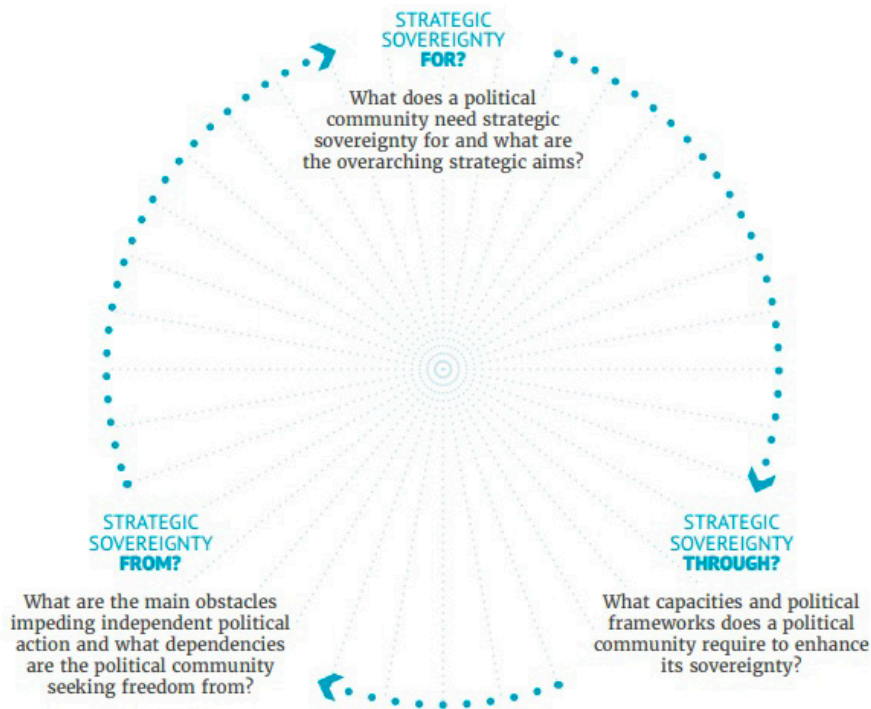


Figure 2: Three approaches to European sovereignty (Fiott 2020b)

Concerning the “Military, defence and security” cluster, SA focuses on achieving functional autonomy, particularly in areas of defence, and on the associated foreign policy. Within this purview, SA is visualized as a policy geared towards maintaining significant independence in security and defence, enabling the EU to safeguard its territories and project its influence beyond its borders without external interference. Such autonomy can be narrowly perceived in terms of defence technology and industry or, more broadly, encompassing operational freedom and territorial defence (Zieliński 2020).

Concluding, the Russian aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022 marked a pivotal moment in the debate on SA. The intensified US involvement, characterized by bolstered deterrence measures in Europe and crucial military aid to Ukraine, has, for the time being, quieted doubts over the US’s commitment to European security (Helwig 2023). This fact made it clear that collaboration with NATO and the US remains indispensable, and the EU’s pursuit of enhanced military capabilities seeks to complement NATO rather than seeking complete autonomy.

3. 4. Analytical Framework

Building upon the theoretical underpinnings elucidated in the preceding sections, I have constructed the analytical framework depicted in Figure 3. This framework serves as a blueprint, guiding my research trajectory. Precisely, my analysis pivots on two main axes: the contextualization of the aforementioned CSDP initiatives within the three stages of the LI framework and their correlation with the three articulated approaches to SA, as first introduced by Fiott et al. (2021) and delineated by Damen (2022).

The initial phase of my analysis seeks to juxtapose the CSDP initiatives with the LI framework through their correlation with the member states' national interests, their bargaining positions, and the resultant institutional choices at the EU level.

Subsequently, the ensuing phase of the study endeavours to bridge the initiatives mentioned above with the EU-SA concept. Thus, for this linkage to be made possible, three sub-questions will be addressed in support of answering the central research question:

1. To what extent do the CSDP initiatives taken amidst the Russian invasions in Ukraine aid the EU in its strive **for** strategic autonomy in defence?
2. How can the EU's strategic autonomy in defence be achieved **through** the CSDP initiatives taken amidst the Russian invasions in Ukraine?
3. To what extent do the CSDP initiatives taken amidst the Russian invasions in Ukraine exemplify the EU's pursuit of strategic autonomy in defence by distancing **from** external influences or nations?

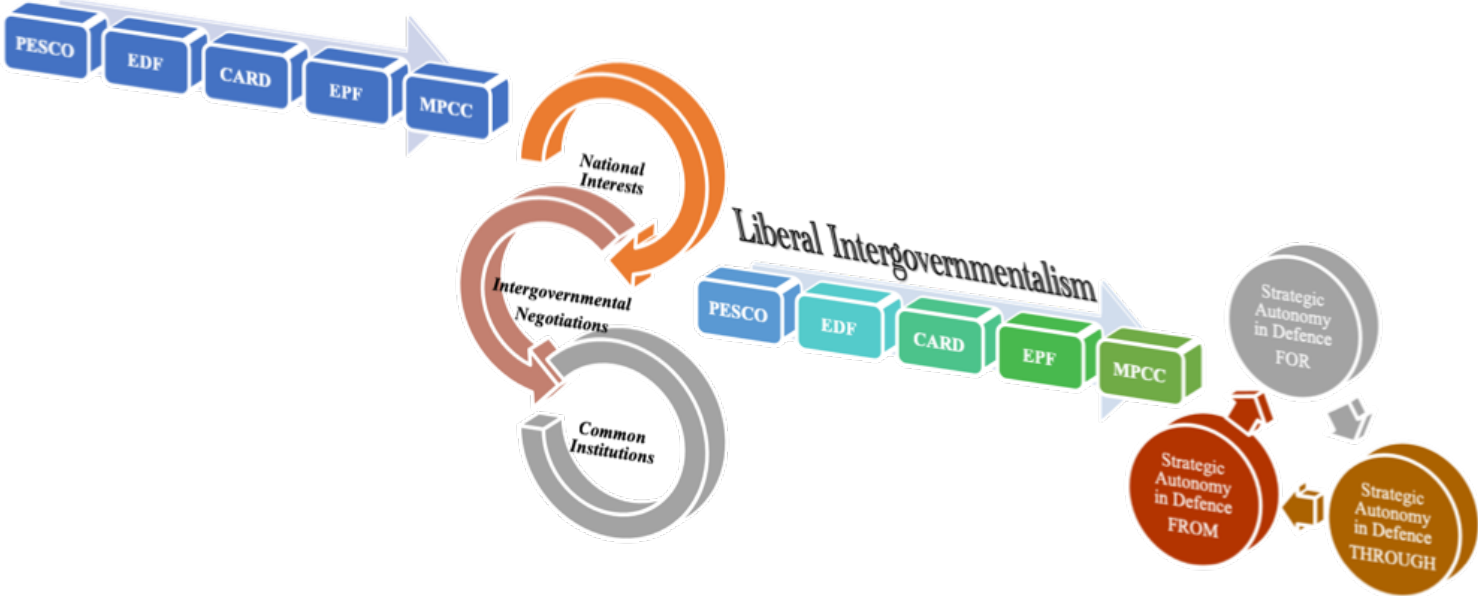


Figure 3: Analytical Framework

4. Method and material

4. 1. Research Strategy

Given that qualitative research methods facilitate a more profound insight into unique cases and provide insights into “how” inquiries (O’Brien 2021; Berg and Lune 2017; Gray 2021), the current study has chosen the most fitting methodology. Therefore, a qualitative content analysis of documents was employed in this research. The latter provided a deep and comprehensive understanding of the evolution in the EU’s CSDP between the Russian invasions of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022 and their implications for the Union’s pursuit of SA. This approach enabled a nuanced exploration of the intricate dynamics and multifaceted factors that shape the relationship between CSDP and SA's overarching goal within the EU context by systematically analysing relevant documents.

Thus, to answer the research question of this study, a deductive approach was applied to ascertain the potential correlations between the CSDP initiatives under study and the theoretical underpinnings of LI and SA. Hence, this approach in this study first involved operationalizing the theoretical framework of LI on the identified CSDP initiatives and then critically examining their correlation with the EU-SA in the context of the Russian invasions of Ukraine. Building on the assumptions and arguments of the analytical framework served as a guide for analysing the empirical data, thus offering a deeper insight into how the theory could be applied to the specific case of the CSDP’s evolution between the Russian invasions.

An alternative research strategy for this study could involve conducting detailed case studies of the actions and rhetoric of chosen EU countries regarding the notion of SA, enabling a more extensive exploration of distinct instances or situations and, thus, affording more profound insights into the attitudes and actions of these nations. Nevertheless, this approach was not chosen due to its qualitative essence, which renders it open to scrutiny regarding the applicability of conclusions to broader contexts. Furthermore, case studies are susceptible to researcher subjectivity and are acknowledged for their demanding and labour-intensive nature (Denscombe 2017). Hence, in light of this study’s research goals and limitations, content analysis was deemed a more fitting and beneficial method for collecting comprehensive and measurable data from a broader standpoint.

4. 2. Data Collection Method

Kabir (2014) claims that data collection is one of the essential elements in a research study, as it captures quality evidence leading to data analysis, providing a credible answer to the research questions. The data collection method employed in this research study primarily involved content analysis of documents related to the evolution of CSDP between the Russian invasions on Ukraine, as identified by the establishment of relevant initiatives, i.e., EDF & CARD, PESCO, MPCC & EPF, and their contribution to EU-SA. Through this method, I aimed to identify significant shifts in the EU’s approach to defence and security after Russia’s actions. Titscher and Jenner (2000) contend that the essence of content analysis lies in identifying noteworthy and significant content elements by unveiling a coherent structure within a document, delineating codes, establishing categories, and endeavouring to unearth implicit content. Accordingly, by meticulously labelling and categorizing the textual material in the

documents, I analysed qualitative content patterns and delved into the connotations of content encapsulated within the texts.

The empirical investigation encompassed a series of procedural stages. After an initial perusal of the texts to acquire a foundational grasp of the content, the subsequent phase entailed an analytical reading employing the designated analytical framework. This reading facilitated the coding of the data in alignment with the framework. However, the analysis did not only strictly focus on the identified CDSP's changes. My additional aim was to identify the challenges and opportunities associated with developing an independent EU defence policy by examining the factors that shape the policy and the impact of broader geopolitical trends on the EU's ability to act autonomously in defence and security matters.

4. 3. Sampling

Purposive sampling of documents was used during the research project. In content analysis, purposive sampling of documents can identify patterns, themes, and meanings within a specific set of documents. It is a method of selecting a sample of documents based on specific characteristics or criteria relevant to the research question, where the researcher can judge which documents will provide the best perspectives on the studied phenomenon (Gray, 2021).

Thus, this study employed EU-wide desk research through the EUR-Lex search engine and a systematic analysis of the Union's official publications. The selection of the documents was grounded in their relevance, authenticity, authority, and representativeness. Key decisions such as establishing PESCO and the EPF served as foundational documents, outlining the framework and intention behind some of the EU's most significant defence initiatives post-2014. Policy documents like "The Strategic Compass" provided insights into the strategic thinking and direction of the EU in security and defence, offering an understanding of the EU's vision and priorities.

Publications that detail specific measures, such as assistance to the Ukrainian Armed Forces, provided tangible evidence of the EU's operational decisions in response to external security threats. Reports such as the CARD report were instrumental in gauging the progress, challenges, and adaptations within the EU defence initiatives, offering a longitudinal perspective. Furthermore, documents from the EEAS and European Commission enriched the understanding by offering details on defence mechanisms like the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity and perspectives on European defence from an industrial and strategic angle.

By drawing from various arms of the European Union – the Council, Commission, EDA, EEAS, and the European Parliament – the analysis benefited from multiple institutional perspectives, ensuring a well-rounded and comprehensive understanding of the EU's defence and security landscape from 2014 to 2022. A complete list of the documents mentioned above is referenced at the end of the thesis.

4. 4. Data Analysis Method

Content analysis transcends mere word counting and delves into a comprehensive exploration of language, aiming to meticulously categorise extensive textual content into a succinct set of categories that encapsulate analogous meanings (Wodak, Meyer, and Titscher 2000, pp. 60–61; Pouikli 2020). By

employing content analysis, scholars can quantify and scrutinise the occurrence, significances, and interconnections of specific terms, motifs, or ideas (Vaismoradi and Snelgrove 2019; Pouikli 2020).

A pivotal stage in text analysis is the systematic coding of data, which contributes to various objectives: reducing voluminous data, comprehending a phenomenon, constructing a conceptual framework, and advancing theoretical propositions (Saldaña 2021, pp. 44–45; Pouikli 2020). Then, the coded text must be categorised before deducing overarching themes (Denscombe 2017, p.255). Hence, while reading the empirical sources, the analytical process was initiated by identifying the fundamental units of analysis, such as words and sentences. From these units, I extracted the codes which I interpreted to be connected to the analytical framework. After that, the codes were grouped into categories and the latter into themes. Each one of the latter corresponded to one aspect of the thesis framework.

This process was aided by NVivo 14 software, which assisted in managing and analysing the qualitative data. While a deductive approach primarily guided the categorisation, the word-frequency count function of the software also called for an inductive exploration of other high-frequency words, i.e., “technology” (644 counts), “industry” (458 counts), “investments” (360 counts), which also helped to align the content of the empirical data with the analytical framework. Hence, as already stated, the analysis results were also based on additional factors influencing the EU’s defence policy associated with the coveted SA. The structure used to analyse the empirical material is the following:

Codes	Categories	Themes
CSDP, CARD, EDF, EPF, PESCO, MPCC →	CSDP Initiatives	CSDP initiatives established in the light of the Russian invasions of Ukraine
Russia, Ukraine, war, invasion, 2014, 2022 →	Russian revisionism	
national, autonomy, Member States, sovereignty, voluntary →	national interests (1st stage of LI)	Theoretical Framework of LI
negotiations, agreement, veto, collaboration, cooperation →	intergovernmental negotiations (2nd stage of LI)	
institutions, Parliament, Council, Commission →	common institutions (3rd stage of LI)	
strategic autonomy, strategic sovereignty, defence, security →	Aims of EU-SA	Theoretical Framework of Strategic Autonomy
capacities, capabilities, industry, technology, investments, defence →	Capacities to improve EU-SA	
NATO, external actors, dependence, investments, defence →	Freedom from dependencies	

4. 5. Research Ethics

Gray (2021) mentions that research ethics refer to all these moral principles which will ensure that it will be conducted responsibly and in a “morally defensible way” (p.191), while Denscombe (2017) states that the most crucial principle of research ethics is the protection of the researcher’s integrity.

This research adhered to the principles of rigour, objectivity, and transparency. The utilization of publicly available documents ensured that data collection maintained ethical standards, upholding the integrity of the research process. Under ethical guidelines, this study acknowledged potential limitations inherent to content analysis and its reliance on open-source materials. Thus, the findings presented reflect an unbiased and scholarly examination of the EU’s pursuit of SA in defence.

5. Results and Analysis

5. 1. CSDP Initiatives and Liberal Intergovernmentalism

The development of the CSDP within the European Union is closely linked to LI. In the context of CSDP, LI can provide insights into how member states' preferences and strategic considerations influence the EU's pursuit of autonomy in security and defence. By weaving insights derived from relevant documentation, this section provides a comprehensive analysis of how the CSDP initiatives mentioned in previous chapters align with the three stages articulated by Moravcsik.

5.1.1. National Interests

As highlighted within the LI framework, the formation of national priorities is visible in the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, representing this stage's core aspects and underscoring the imperative to address a wide array of security challenges, ranging from conventional military threats to novel challenges like cyber threats and environmental shifts (EEAS 2016).

Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig (2009) argued that differentiated national preferences among EU member states often result in strains and conflicting interests. Notably, the defence sector has historically displayed significant disparities in national perspectives, especially concerning the extent of its integration into European frameworks. The dichotomy is often seen between two distinct factions: the European integration proponents and the Atlantic alliance supporters within the EU. Countries like France, Germany, Spain, and Belgium have traditionally leaned towards the European integration perspective, while Denmark, Poland, Slovakia, and the Baltic States have gravitated towards the Atlanticist viewpoint (Zaborowski 2019; Velandar 2020).

Aiming to overcome this dichotomy, PESCO is a testament to the EU's dedication to integrating Member States' national interests into the broader European defence architecture. The Council of the European Union (2017) mentions that:

*“The decision of Member States to participate in PESCO is **voluntary** and does not in itself affect **national sovereignty** or the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States.”* (p.4),

accentuating the importance the EU places on national determinants, even as it charts a path of deepened defence collaboration.

Furthermore, the EDF also acknowledges the primacy of member states' sovereignty and national security considerations by converging national and communal defence planning. European Commission (2022) crystallises this intent:

“With the EDF, the Commission will continue to actively encourage Member States to further define strategic defence capabilities priorities and enablers following the adoption of the Strategic Compass through the revised CDP and the CARD outcomes. It will contribute to align defence planning and collective spending to support their development” (p.7).

The previous statement conveys an aspiration for a cohesive European defence roadmap and accentuates the significance of each state's unique strategic priorities. By urging member states to articulate their defence objectives, the EU Commission underscores the tenet that genuine alignment mandates mutual respect for national interests and a commitment to broader European goals.

In the same context, CARD serves as a structured and periodic review mechanism that mandates member states to crystallise their defence capability priorities and needs by underlining the individual states' need to introspect, consider domestic pressures, and subsequently articulate their defence imperatives.

“...support the CARD to the maximum extent possible acknowledging the voluntary nature of the review and individual constraints of participating Member States.”

(Council of the European Union 2017, p.17)

“Key drivers remain primarily nationally defined requirements” (EDA 2022, p.6)

In the statements above, the essence of national sovereignty in defence considerations comes to the fore. The EU is cognizant that its overarching defence strategies and policies are, at their core, driven by *“nationally defined requirements”*. This acknowledgement is crucial as it sets the stage for realistic expectations of how integrated a collective defence posture can be. The voluntary nature of support for CARD further reinforces this, acknowledging that while there is a shared vision, the commitment level may vary based on individual state circumstances. The phrase *“individual constraints of participating Member States”* is a sobering reminder of member states' diverse challenges, needs, and priorities. It highlights the EU's recognition that one size does not fit all, and the path to a collective defence stance requires flexibility, understanding, and a genuine respect for national sovereignty.

The implementation of CARD also aims to harmonise EU defence activities within its structure and with external entities like NATO. The EU recognises the need for a multipronged approach to defence — one that harnesses the strengths of both NATO and the individual defence strategies of its member states:

“This will also further harmonise EU activities with NATO and national priorities to ensure mutual complementarity and coherence.” (EDA 2022, p.4) and

“Improve coherence among EU defence initiatives ... Continue to mainstream them into national defence planning.” (EDA 2022, p.5).

Using *“mutual complementarity and coherence”* indicates an endeavour to find common ground where EU, NATO, and national objectives intersect, allowing for synergistic operations rather than parallel or competing ones.

Furthermore, the push to *“mainstream”* EU initiatives into national defence planning suggests an aspiration for these collective defence measures to become standard components of individual state defence strategies. Given the diverse security interests across the EU, this is no simple task and suggests a willingness to be adaptive and considerate of individual state priorities.

Finally, the EPF allows for providing military and defence assistance to third countries. Member States have a vested interest in stabilising neighbouring regions, as this directly affects their security and stability. By contributing to the EPF, Member States can shape the EU's efforts in addressing crises,

reflecting their national preferences in conflict resolution. In the context of LI's first stage, Council Decision (CFSP) 2021/509 (Council of the European Union 2021) states:

“In cases where a Member State has abstained in a vote and made a formal declaration... that Member State shall not contribute to the costs of that assistance measure.” (p.4),

underlining a principle that maintains the sovereignty of the individual states: a state that abstains from a vote and formally declares its position will not have to bear the costs of the decided action. This clause respects the financial sovereignty of Member States and implicitly acknowledges the intricacies of national interests that might be divergent from collective EU decisions, especially when it comes to sensitive areas like military equipment or platforms. By allowing Member States the option to abstain and, more crucially, not to bear the costs of an action they did not support, the EU is highlighting a core principle: while collective security is a shared goal, the unique national interests of each state cannot and should not be overshadowed or financially burdened by the collective decisions of the Union.

5.1.2. Intergovernmental Negotiations

The second stage of Liberal Intergovernmentalism delineates the intergovernmental bargaining process, where Member States navigate the intricate terrain of reconciling their divergent preferences to reach mutually advantageous agreements (Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig 2009).

One remarkable manifestation of intergovernmental bargaining within CSDP is embodied by PESCO, whose inception was marked by a delicate balancing act involving trade-offs and compromises among Member States. The latter sought to align their national defence interests with the broader objective of EU defence cooperation. This intricate bargaining process within PESCO exemplifies the intergovernmental dynamics envisioned in the LI framework's second stage (Biscop 2018).

Therefore, in EUGS, it is mentioned that:

“The participating Member States taking part in a project shall agree among themselves on the arrangements for, and the scope of, their cooperation, and the management of that project.”
(Council of the European Union 2017, p.11),

which underscores a core feature of PESCO's intergovernmental nature. When involved in a project, each participating country can negotiate, shape, and determine the nature of its contribution and involvement. This ensures that the nuances of national interest are respected, and that Member States retain their sovereignty, even within a collective initiative.

The EDF complements the PESCO by seeking synergies between EDF and PESCO projects. This symbiotic relationship between the two initiatives implies that Member States participate in negotiations and discussions to align various projects. Also, by its very construct, the EDF carries the monumental task of streamlining defence research and development and fostering joint procurement of capabilities. Such a broad scope means that the EDF cannot operate in isolation; it is intimately entwined with the complex web of intergovernmental negotiations:

“Given that the aim of the Fund is, in particular, to enhance cooperation between legal entities and Member States across the Union.”
(European Parliament and Council of the European Union 2021, p.3)

The following extract from Regulation 2021/697 positions the EDF as a complementary mechanism to national defence funding structures, implying a tacit recognition of the sovereignty of Member States in defining their defence budgets:

“The European Defence Fund should complement national funding already used for that purpose, act as an incentive for Member States to cooperate and invest more in defence and support cooperation during the whole life cycle of defence products and technologies.”

(European Parliament and Council of the European Union 2021, p.1)

The text above also emphasizes the EDF’s role in promoting cooperation, reflecting the intergovernmental dynamics at play. The term *“incentive”* indicates that the EDF is not a passive fund but a strategic tool designed to drive Member States towards shared goals. This formulation would have required intricate negotiations, as states sought to ensure that the EDF would not override or overly influence their national defence funding decisions but rather incentivize collective action.

Hence, the EDF’s direction is determined by defence capability priorities commonly agreed upon by Member States, in coherence with other initiatives, such as CARD and PESCO:

“Strategic orientation for the EDF is provided through the defence capability priorities commonly agreed by Member States within the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), and in particular in the context of the Capability Development Plan (CDP) and in coherence with other EU defence related initiatives such as the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) and the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO).” (European Commission 2022, p.6)

In the context of intergovernmental negotiations, the previous statement signifies discussions among member states about harmonizing EDF objectives with those of other defence initiatives. The emphasis on *“commonly agreed”* priorities underscores the intergovernmental nature of EU defence policy. The CSDP and the CDP provide overarching direction, but their alignment with CARD and PESCO reflects an intricate web of negotiations. For the EDF to receive strategic guidance harmonized with CSDP and CDP and remain coherent with CARD and PESCO, it signifies that member states have negotiated at multiple levels to strike a balance between collective European defence imperatives and national security interests.

Finally, to support the EU’s commitment to strengthening its defence posture through enhanced cooperation, CARD and PESCO emerge as tools that identify and exploit collaborative opportunities:

“Other Union processes such as the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) and Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) have the purpose of supporting the implementation of relevant priorities by identifying and taking up opportunities for enhanced cooperation with a view to fulfilling the Union’s level of ambition in the area of security and defence.”

(European Parliament and Council of the European Union 2021, p.2).

These *“processes”* can be seen as outcomes of Member States’ negotiations, aiming to pool resources and capabilities without necessarily ceding national autonomy in defence. Hence, *“supporting the implementation of relevant priorities”* hints at a compromise: while individual states might have distinct defence concerns, they collectively recognize the need to address broader, shared threats to European security through cooperation.

5.1.3. Common Institutions

LI's third stage emphasizes the establishment and functionality of common institutions, aiming to foster cooperation between member states while preserving individual sovereignty. These institutions not only facilitate shared activities and policies but are also designed to operate within parameters defined by member states to ensure national interests continue to influence decision-making.

The designation of the High Representative, EEAS, the EU Military Staff (EUMS), and the European Defence Agency (EDA) to jointly administer PESCO's secretariat functions embodies the third stage of the LI framework. The amalgamation of these roles ensures the streamlined functioning of PESCO while harnessing diverse perspectives from distinct entities:

"[...] the High Representative, also in his or her capacity as the Head of the EDA, the EEAS, including the EU Military Staff (EUMS), and the EDA shall jointly provide the necessary secretariat functions for PESCO (Council of the European Union 2017, p.12)

This institutional arrangement aims to maintain cooperation while keeping member states' sovereignties intact. The joint provision also potentially minimizes uncertainties and risks of defection, as different institutional actors work collaboratively towards a shared goal.

Moreover, the EDA acts as a pivotal institution, orchestrating the bridge between Member States and the European Commission, and thus facilitating cooperation, streamlining processes, and reducing uncertainties:

"The EDA has a key role to play by assisting Member States to develop the required capabilities, strengthening the CDP and acting as an interface between Member States and the Commission without being a substitute for national positions being conveyed to the Commission through other channels." (EEAS 2016, p.21).

The EDA's role, as highlighted, is to bolster capabilities and fortify the Capability Development Plan (CDP), but crucially, it is not there to supplant national positions. This distinction is pivotal and reflects the underlying essence of the third stage: institutions are meant to foster cooperation within bounds that do not eclipse the sovereignty or interests of individual member states.

In the context of the EDF, monitoring and reporting responsibilities are also delegated to the European Commission:

"The Commission shall monitor the implementation of the Fund on a regular basis and shall report annually on progress made [...] to the European Parliament and to the Council."
(European Parliament and Council of the European Union 2021, p.25)

The text above accentuates the Commission's vital role as an oversight entity ensuring transparency and accountability in the Fund's implementation. Regular reporting to pivotal bodies like the European Parliament and the Council not only reinforces the Commission's duty but also serves as a mechanism to continually align Member State activities with the overarching objectives of the EU.

As Hooghe and Marks (2019) argue, LI interprets institutional outcomes as practical reactions to challenges in collaboration. It projects that nations will share or allocate the necessary power to make it

advantageous for national entities to adhere to agreements. The usual result is centred around the “lowest common denominator” (LCD), and the extent of this unification can shift based on the particular cooperation dilemma faced (p.1116).

The concept of the LCD materializes in PESCO by reflecting the balance between collective oversight and state autonomy. The European Council oversees every participant’s endeavours via the National Implementation Plan tied to their formal commitments:

“The participating Member States have set out in their respective National Implementation Plans their ability to meet the more binding commitments they have made to one another.”
(Council of the European Union 2017, p.4).

The mention of “*National Implementation Plans*” and “*binding commitments*” implies a structured system whereby Member States pledge to specific standards. The challenge, however, lies in balancing national capabilities with collective ambitions. By each member state defining their capabilities and constraints, the collective endeavour does not exceed the lowest threshold of commitment or capability. It ensures that no state is overburdened or feels excluded, but it might also mean that the least committed or capable member could curtail the overall ambition.

The binding nature of PESCO solidifies participants’ commitments, utilizing qualified majority voting to suspend states that fall short of their implementation plans. However, the stipulation that further legal decisions require unanimous consent in the Council allows states to veto decisions misaligned with their national priorities, ensuring their continued influence:

“Legal acts are adopted by unanimity (except decisions regarding the suspension of membership and entry of new members, which are taken by qualified majority).”
(EEAS 2019, p.2)

Furthermore, PESCO underscores the need for transparency and accountability while ensuring that all meet the fundamental commitments. The High Representative’s report acts as a mechanism to measure how each state aligns with the collective’s basic standards. This scrutiny is pivotal to ensure that the LCD does not result in laxity in commitment and that the basic standards agreed upon are being met:

“The High Representative’s report shall describe the status of PESCO implementation, including the fulfilment, by each participating Member State, of its commitments, in accordance with its National Implementation Plan.” (Council of the European Union 2017, p.12)

Finally, since duplication is often a by-product when diverse entities, such as the member states of the EU, pursue parallel or similar goals, PESCO aids in streamlining collective endeavours. By agreeing upon a basic set of goals or standards, Member States can better allocate resources, avoid redundancy, and ensure efficiency.

“In particular, EDA shall support Member States in ensuring that there is no unnecessary duplication with existing initiatives also in other institutional contexts.”
(Council of the European Union 2017, p.13).

The EDA’s role in assisting member states to prevent duplication again ties back to the concept of the LCD. When states operate based on a minimum agreed standard, it becomes easier to identify and rectify

overlapping efforts, ensuring the efficient use of resources and preserving the integrity of the collective mission.

5. 2. EU's Pursuit of Strategic Autonomy

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014 led to concerns about the EU's ability to address security threats effectively. The crisis highlighted the EU's limited military capabilities and lack of a cohesive response. In 2017, at the Sorbonne, a speech was presented by Emmanuel Macron, the President of France, in which he characterized the global context as one characterized by the rise of nationalism, protectionism, and isolationist authoritarianism; he stressed:

“In the area of defence, our aim needs to be ensuring Europe’s autonomous operating capabilities, in complement to NATO [...] we laid the foundations of Defence Europe: Permanent Structured Cooperation [...] and also a European Defence Fund to fund our capacities and research.”
(Macron 2017)

Although he did not use the exact term “strategic autonomy”, his appeal took place in France, and the idea began to gain ground. However, all Member States did not adopt the concept of EU-SA in defence. France, a strong supporter of the idea, had varying levels of support from other countries, with concerns raised by those with transatlantic ties or proximity to Russia. The main challenge for the advocates of SA was to clarify that pursuing greater European defence autonomy did not entail a reduction in cooperation between EU countries and the United States within NATO. It was emphasized that EU-SA aimed to strengthen the European pillar of transatlantic cooperation in NATO rather than oppose NATO itself (Borrell 2020).

Nowadays, there are several discussions regarding the term “European Sovereignty” and the differences between “strategic autonomy” and “strategic sovereignty”. Where “strategic sovereignty” may resonate more positively with people, emphasizing the EU's capabilities, “autonomy” emphasizes independence. As already proposed in the theoretical framework of this thesis, the analysis of the CSDP initiatives taken amidst the Russian invasions in Ukraine and their impact on EU-SA will be based on Fiott's (2021) three-way approach of understanding “autonomy”, striving for autonomy for specific purposes, autonomy through capabilities, and autonomy from specific influences or countries.

5.2.1. Strive “for” EU-SA in Defence

In the period from 2017 to 2019, in the framework of the debate on the EU-SA in a changing geopolitical landscape, the implementation of the plans of the EU Global Strategy in the field of security and defence, such as the European Defense Fund, has led to critical discussions within the academic community about EU-SA (Camporini et al. 2017).

EDF's multifaceted objectives, which illuminate the intricate tapestry of defence autonomy which goes beyond mere weaponry to include technological autonomy, are evident in the following statement:

“The aim of the Fund is to enhance the competitiveness, innovation, efficiency and technological autonomy of the Union’s defence industry, thereby contributing to the Union’s strategic autonomy by supporting the cross-border cooperation between Member States.”
(European Parliament and Council of the European Union 2021, p.2)

Technological autonomy in defence represents a blend of innovation, production, and deployment. It implies creating cutting-edge defence solutions and ensuring their compatibility across member states. The emphasis on cross-border cooperation among Member States highlights the collaborative nature of the EDF, which aligns with the EU's broader goal of SA by fostering collective efforts toward defence self-sufficiency.

EDF plays also a pivotal role in bolstering the EU's defence capabilities:

"[...] the European Defence Fund, is key to strengthen our defence capabilities and also equip Member States' forces to face the future battlefields." (Council of the European Union 2022, p.33)

By providing financial support and incentives for cross-border cooperation among Member States, the EDF facilitates the development and acquiring cutting-edge defence technologies and equipment. This collaborative approach is vital in enhancing the EU's overall defence capacity, enabling it to address contemporary and future security challenges effectively. The EDF, thus, emerges not just as a fiscal tool but as a binding force, ensuring that the EU, as a collective, remains at the forefront of defence innovation and adaptability.

CARD cardinally contributes to the EU-SA by fostering a harmonized comprehension of defence priorities and capabilities. CARD's envisioned role as the cornerstone of an end-to-end defence mechanism underscores its significance:

"[...] it is set to become a cornerstone of a coherent EU mechanism to boost collaborative defence capability planning, development, procurement and operation." (EEAS 2017, p.2)

From the initial stages of capability planning to the operational deployment of forces, CARD's integrative approach ensures that the EU's defence initiatives are harmonious and targeted. Moreover, CARD mitigates the risks of siloed operations and disjointed strategies by fostering collaboration at each stage. This integrative role amplifies the EU's defence capabilities, positioning it as a formidable defence entity that embodies the principles of SA.

The review process serves as an avenue through which member states collectively evaluate their defence undertakings, encompassing defence investments, financial allocations, and capability augmentation blueprints. This collective introspection empowers member states to harmonize their defence aspirations, discern inadequacies, and contrive joint resolutions. Additionally, this synchronized approach efficaciously mitigates redundancy while magnifying the EU's capacity to address security challenges jointly. This strategic synchronization amplifies defence initiatives and strengthens the EU-SA through judicious resource utilization and concerted action:

"[...] to overcome the fragmentation of the European defence landscape through coordinated and continuous efforts [...] in three major areas which are interlinked: defence spending, defence planning and defence cooperation." (EDA 2020, p.1)

Furthermore, EU-SA is underpinned by a shared understanding of threats and a collective commitment to address them. Disparate threat perceptions can lead to a disjointed defence response, diluting the effectiveness of any strategic initiative. CARD's emphasis on cultivating a shared defence culture seeks to address this potential pitfall:

“[...] contribute to develop the common European security and defence culture and address differing threat perceptions.” (EDA 2020, p.4)

By promoting continuous dialogue, facilitating intelligence sharing, and emphasizing joint training exercises, CARD aims to align the defence perceptions of Member States. This alignment is paramount. EU-SA remains an elusive dream without a shared understanding and acknowledgement of threats. CARD’s role, therefore, is pivotal in transforming this dream into a tangible reality by fostering unity in perception and purpose.

Moreover, the EPF has emerged as a pivotal instrument in this regard. As the EU continues to navigate an increasingly multipolar world, initiatives like the EPF will be critical in ensuring the Union remains an autonomous and influential actor in global defence and security affairs. In the last Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, EPF’s capability to rapidly respond, provide military support (Council of the European Union 2022b; 2022c), and engage in high-stake geopolitical situations underscores the EU’s maturing defence ambitions, as denoted in the Strategic Compass:

“Through an increased use of the European Peace Facility, the EU can rapidly provide important assistance to partners [...] This can also be done by supporting partners’ defence capabilities in moment of crisis, as in the case of the assistance package to support the Ukrainian armed forces to defend their territorial integrity and sovereignty...” (Council of the European Union 2022, p.15)

This statement underscores the agility and responsiveness of the EPF. The ability to “*rapidly provide*” assistance to partners indicates the EU’s pursuit to be a more proactive and decisive actor in global security affairs. The reference to providing “*military equipment*” and supplementing “*training by CSDP missions*” suggests that the EU, through the EPF, is not only engaged in soft-power diplomacy but also tangible, hard-power initiatives. This fact bolsters the EU’s profile as a comprehensive security provider, enhancing its SA by reducing reliance on external entities for defence collaboration. Furthermore, the EU asserts its strategic role in the continent’s security landscape by extending support to the Ukrainian armed forces during a geopolitical crisis. This signals the EU’s capacity to act in real-time defence scenarios and showcases its commitment to upholding international norms, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.

Finally, the Strategic Compass (Council of the European Union 2022a) places the MPCC in a central role regarding the EU’s strive towards a self-reliant defence mechanism, serving as a testament to the EU’s determination to centralize command, refine its rapid deployment capacities, and actualize its ambitions within a set timeframe:

“[...] the MPCC is described as the preferred military strategic level C2 structure to function also as the Operational Headquarter (OHQ) for the EU Battle Groups (EU BGs) and the EU Rapid Deployable Capability (RDC).” (EEAS 2023b)

“[...] the progressive involvement of the Military Planning and Conduct Capability will shape the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity” (Council of the European Union 2022a)

Here, SA is not just about possessing forces but also about the efficient command and control of these forces. EU Battle Groups and the RDC are pivotal for quick response in defence scenarios. Positioning MPCC as the OHQ for these units implies a direct ambition to centralize, streamline, and unify the EU’s rapid response under a singular, native strategic command.

In this regard, the RDC aims to develop a European rapid reaction team with a staff of up to 5,000 military soldiers, which, by the time it is operational in 2025 (EEAS 2023a), it will be an improvement to the Union's battlegroups, which since their reaching operational capacity in 2007, have never been deployed for a mission:

“By 2025, an EU Rapid Deployment Capacity, allowing the swift deployment of a modular force of up to 5000 troops in a non-permissive environment, will be fully operational.”

(Council of the European Union 2022a)

The statement above offers a timeline and a tangible goal. SA is underpinned by tangible capabilities and a readiness to act. The presence of a fully operational, sizable rapid deployment force that can act in challenging environments epitomizes this readiness. The association of the MPCC with this ambition cements its status as the lynchpin in the EU's drive to operationalize its defence autonomy.

5.2.2. EU-SA “through” Capabilities

Central to the aspiration of the EU-SA is the EDITB. As a conduit, the EDITB is poised to channel the EU's defence ambitions from fragmented individual efforts into a cohesive and unified front. Historically restrained by nationalistic barriers, the European defence sector often operated in isolated pockets. EDITB seeks to bridge these divides, envisioning an integrated, state-of-the-art European defence industry. The underlying belief here is straightforward: for the EU to be genuinely autonomous, it must possess an indigenous, technologically superior defence industrial base. Only by harnessing the potential of the EDITB “through” its capacities, innovations, and integrative mechanisms can the EU hope to achieve the coveted SA.

“[...] the European defence technological and industrial base (EDTIB) can fully meet Europe's current and future security needs and, in that respect, enhance its strategic autonomy and strengthen its ability to act with partners.” (EEAS 2016, p.7)

As the theoretical framework describes, SA denotes the capacity to address security needs without over-reliance on external entities. The EDTIB, in this paradigm, becomes the backbone, the engine room, ensuring that the EU is equipped with the latest defence technology and industrial output. Moreover, by augmenting its ability to “act with partners,” the EU is not closing itself off but ensuring that it does so from a position of strength and self-reliance when it collaborates.

The symbiotic relationship between the EDTIB and overarching industrial strategies is evident in the new Industrial Strategy 2020 strategy:

“The new Industrial Strategy 2020 strategy laid the foundations for an industrial policy that would support the twin transitions, make EU industry more competitive globally and enhance Europe's strategic autonomy.” (European Commission 2021, p.22),

which makes clear that it is not just about defence in isolation; a resilient defence base stems from a broader industrial policy that seeks global competitiveness. Enhancing SA is thus tied to the EU's capacity to navigate global market transitions and establish its industries, including defence, as global frontrunners.

Furthermore, PESCO, with its focus on jointly developed defence projects, offers an avenue for Member States to pool resources and capabilities. However, the mere act of cooperation does not automatically translate into SA. For this, there is a need to direct investments in areas that genuinely enhance the EU's independent defence capabilities:

*“In line with commitments already made through PESCO and in view of the strategic challenges we are facing, it becomes urgent to **spend more and better.**”*

(Council of the European Union 2022a, p.30)

As the bedrock of the European defence industry, the EDITB provides the necessary infrastructure for research, innovation, production, and deployment of defence technologies. “Spending more and better” implies increasing defence budgets and channelling funds in a manner that reinforces the EDITB. A robust EDITB, in synergy with PESCO's cooperative framework, can create state-of-the-art defence technologies and systems, thus not only enhancing the EU's military prowess but also reducing its dependency on external, non-EU sources for critical defence equipment. Thus, through astute financial investments directed at strengthening the EDITB under the PESCO framework, the EU can significantly advance its goal of SA in defence.

The EDITB, coupled with PESCO's collaborative ethos, plays a pivotal role in projecting the EU's power and influence, both within its immediate neighbourhood and on the global stage, as the recent events of the Russian invasion of Ukraine have shown. It is not merely about possessing capabilities but effectively deploying them to safeguard interests and exert influence:

“The EU has to increase its presence, effectiveness and visibility in its neighbourhood and on the global stage through joint efforts and investments.” (Council of the European Union 2022a, p.2)

In this context, a dynamic EDITB ensures the EU can access the latest defence technologies, allowing it to field advanced military assets in conflict zones or peacekeeping missions. This technological edge translates into tactical advantages, ensuring the EU's effectiveness in various operational theatres. Secondly, as espoused by PESCO, joint efforts and investments mean that the EU, rather than being a conglomerate of individual states with disjointed strategies, acts as a cohesive entity. A united front, backed by advanced defence technologies from the EDITB, increases the EU's visibility on the global stage. It sends a potent message about the EU's resolve and capability to shape global outcomes in line with its interests and values.

Moreover, the EDF enhances the Union's freedom of action, allowing it to operate independently in defence matters:

“In particular, the European Defence Fund (EDF)... is already a game-changer for establishing a European defence ecosystem [...] that will enhance the Union's freedom of action and its technological sovereignty and competitiveness.” (European Commission 2022, p.3)

The statement above emphasizes the transformative impact of the EDF, both in terms of its substantial budget and role in shaping the European defence landscape. The EDF's financial resources are earmarked to support the development of interoperable defence technologies and equipment, reflecting the EU's ambition to build a robust and cohesive defence ecosystem.

In the contemporary global defence landscape, traditional measures of military might, such as the number of tanks or aircraft, are being juxtaposed, if not overshadowed, by the ascent of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, cyber capabilities, and advanced robotics. Such technologies redefine the theatres of conflict and recalibrate the balance of power with non-traditional actors equipped with sophisticated technological tools capable of challenging established military superpowers.

Within this context, the EDITB emerges as a pivotal entity. It serves as the crucible where these emerging and disruptive technologies are conceptualized, developed, and fine-tuned. However, the challenge for the EU is twofold. First, it must be at the vanguard of technological innovation in defence, ensuring its military apparatus is not just contemporary but ahead of the curve. Second, it must ensure that these technologies are indigenously developed, eschewing dependencies on external actors, thereby cementing its SA:

*“The development of **emerging and disruptive technologies** is key to maintaining a military advantage, including through the dedicated budget under the European Defence Fund.”*
(Council of the European Union 2022a, p.35)

Hence, the EDF plays a game-changing role. As alluded to in the previous statement, the EDF is not just a financial mechanism but a strategic tool. By allocating a dedicated budget for developing these cutting-edge technologies, the EDF ensures that the EDITB has the requisite resources to undertake expansive research and development initiatives. By channelling resources towards developing emerging and disruptive technologies, the EU fortifies its military capabilities and lays the foundation for a future where its defence autonomy is not just aspirational but an unequivocal reality.

5.2.3. EU-SA and Distancing “from” External Actors

Angela Merkel stated in May 2017, *“The times in which we could completely depend on others are, to a certain extent, over [...] We Europeans truly have to take our fate into our own hands.”* (Henley 2017). Chancellor Merkel’s statement serves as a clarion call for the EU-SA in defence, advocating for a reduced dependence on external entities. Given the evolving challenges, notably the Russian actions in Ukraine, this assertion captures the essence of the EU’s imperative to craft a self-reliant defence trajectory in terms of military capabilities but also in terms of political resolve and strategic foresight.

The European Council meeting in March 2022 produced the Versailles Declaration, demonstrating a strong political commitment to achieving a greater EU-SA. The statement emphasized cooperative defence investments, energy independence and reducing dependencies in various sectors, including critical raw materials and technology (Declaration 2022). Dependencies can be Achilles’ heels during geopolitical tensions, particularly in the defence domain. A well-rounded EDTIB aids the EU in navigating away from these vulnerabilities. Joint procurement, a highlight of the following statement by Thierry Breton, Commissioner for the Internal Market, is especially salient:

“We need to focus on reducing strategic dependencies, supporting innovation of the defence ecosystem, encouraging joint procurement of defence capabilities [...] for this, we rely on the industrial defence and aerospace sectors, a high-tech ecosystem that is an essential driver for Europe’s strategic autonomy and technological sovereignty.” (European Commission 2022a)

Hence, by pooling resources and synchronizing defence requirements, Member States can leverage economies of scale, reduce redundancies, and foster interoperability. In essence, joint procurement, facilitated by a thriving EDTIB, translates to a more integrated, cohesive, and thus autonomous European defence posture.

Furthermore, the EU has implemented the European Defense Action Plan (EDAP), which is part of a comprehensive defence package of the EU, complementing other instruments such as the CARD and the PESCO. Its potential lies in its ability to support and strengthen the EDITB by providing funds and incentives for defence research, development, and acquisition, leading to increased efficiency, innovation, and competitiveness in the defence sector (Jaklin 2018). The EDAP and the EDF are geared towards carving a path where the EU reduces its vulnerabilities and dependencies on external entities and, instead, fosters an environment of self-reliance:

“Examples of actions which already address strategic dependencies in this area include...the European Defence Action Plan towards a strong, competitive and innovative defence industrial base, the European Defence Fund...” (European Commission 2021, p.10)

By aiming for a *“strong, competitive and innovative defence industrial base,”* the EU is not merely seeking to manufacture equipment but is attempting to reshape its entire defence industry. An internally robust and competitive defence industry ensures the EU can produce and innovate crucial defence technologies within its borders, thus not only reducing the need to import but also lessening the accompanying risks of political compromises or supply chain disruptions.

However, amidst the pursuit of EU-SA, cooperation with the United States and NATO appears to be of paramount importance, its importance stressed in various documents and official statements. Indeed, following its introduction, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has welcomed PESCO because it should *“strengthen European defence which is good for Europe but also good for NATO”* (European Parliament 2017).

The EU acknowledges NATO as the primary platform for collective defence among its member states, which does not contradict the EU-SA goals. Instead, it underscores the EU’s commitment to contribute positively to Euro-Atlantic security. In practical terms, the EU-NATO partnership fosters interoperability and synergy between the two organizations’ activities. This notion is apparent in the EUGS, where it is stated that:

“Europe’s strategic autonomy entails the ability to act and cooperate with international and regional partners wherever possible, while being able to operate autonomously when and where necessary.”
(EEAS 2016, p.17)

This statement makes apparent that the EU is championing a dual approach. On the one hand, it values cooperation with global partners, emphasizing mutual benefits and shared goals. On the other, the EU underscores the necessity of having the agency to make independent decisions, particularly in situations where its interests might not align with those of its partners.

Hence, the relationship between NATO and the EU-SA is characterized by a delicate balance between autonomous defence capabilities and collaborative security efforts. The EU’s pursuit of SA is not isolated from NATO; instead, it envisions a strengthened European defence posture that can

complement and benefit from NATO's collective security umbrella. In a joint statement, United States Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President of the European Commission Josep Borrell "*acknowledged the importance of a stronger and more capable European defence that contributes to global and Transatlantic security and recall the need to develop coherent, complementary, and interoperable capabilities. They support the fullest possible involvement of the United States in EU defence initiatives.*" (US Department of State 2021)

Thus, the EU-NATO symbiosis underscores the pragmatic reality that Europe's security challenges are best addressed through a coordinated approach that enhances both SA and cooperative defence. The EU's commitment to NATO is also explicitly mentioned in the Strategic Compass:

"This Strategic Compass will enhance the EU's strategic autonomy and its ability to work with partners to safeguard its values and interests. A stronger and more capable EU in security and defence will contribute positively to global and transatlantic security and is complementary to NATO, which remains the foundation of collective defence for its members."

(Council of the European Union 2022a, p.13)

Such a pronouncement shows that the EU's drive for SA is not a solitary journey. The emphasis on NATO's role as the bedrock of collective defence for its members sheds light on the EU's understanding of the balance between independent action and the need for collective, coordinated security efforts.

Concluding the analysis, the intertwined relationship between NATO and the EU-SA emerges as a dance of collaboration and individual agency. Far from isolating itself in its quest for autonomy, the EU envisions a defence landscape where it can stand firm independently but also understands the strength of collective action. This stance speaks to the EU's historical bonds with entities like NATO and the complex challenges of contemporary geopolitics, which demand individual resolve and collective action.

6. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the EU-SA is an illuminating case study in the complex world of geopolitical strategies, driven by a melange of external threats, internal dynamics, and global interdependencies. The framework of liberal intergovernmentalism, which posits that national interests drive intergovernmental negotiations that, in turn, shape the common institutions, serves as the theoretical bedrock of this study, and offers a lens through which the CSDP's initiatives, taken amidst the Russian invasions in Ukraine, can be contextualized.

Firstly, the EU's paramount challenge is balancing between preserving individual Member States' sovereignty and pursuing collective security objectives. Member states' unique security priorities are evident in documents like the EUGS, which underscores the need to address various security challenges. The dichotomy between proponents of European integration and Atlantic alliance supporters highlights the varying national perspectives within the EU. However, initiatives like PESCO and the EDF demonstrate the EU's commitment to accommodating these divergent interests.

Secondly, the heart of European defence integration lies in the intricate ballet of negotiations. Member States do not merely align for the sake of unity; they constantly negotiate, aiming to maximize their benefits while minimizing potential pitfalls. This stage involves trade-offs and compromises among member states, aligning their national interests with broader EU defence cooperation goals (Bergmann and Müller 2021). The joint provision of secretariat functions for PESCO by various institutions ensures cooperation while respecting member states' sovereignties, with the EDF complementing PESCO by fostering intergovernmental negotiations to align projects.

Thirdly, institutions like EDA and EEAS, while crucial for streamlining European defence endeavours, also embody the inherent contradictions of European integration. On the one hand, they ensure that collective efforts do not stray into redundancy while avoiding duplication, thus helping allocate resources efficiently. On the other, they must operate within bounds set by Member States to ensure that national interests remain influential.

In the next stage of our analysis, it was evident that the nature and extent of the EU-SA, especially in defence, is multifaceted. There is an evident strive to bolster its independent defence capabilities, reduce external dependencies, and carve a unique position on the global stage. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014 served as a wake-up call, exposing the EU's limitations in addressing security threats effectively. The Sorbonne speech by Emmanuel Macron in 2017 marked a turning point, where the idea of SA began to gain traction. Macron's emphasis on complementing NATO rather than opposing it was crucial in framing EU-SA as a cooperative rather than isolationist endeavour.

The strive "for" EU-SA in defence encapsulates the EU's ambition to be a self-reliant actor in defence. To this end, the EU has embarked on initiatives like the PESCO and the CARD, aiming to bolster collective defence capabilities. While CARD focuses on coordinating defence budgets and identifying capability shortfalls, PESCO embodies the cooperative spirit, fostering collaborative projects among member states. Central to these initiatives is the desire to eliminate redundancies, ensure efficient resource allocation, and position the EU as a credible security actor. These mechanisms reflect a concerted effort to transition from a predominantly civilian power to a more robust defence entity while emphasizing collaboration and synergies among member states.

Moreover, EU-SA can be achieved “through” its defence industry. At the heart of this endeavour is the EDITB, which seeks to mend these fissures by integrating the European defence industry, ensuring a technologically superior and indigenous defence base. Such integration is crucial for the EU to be genuinely autonomous and to avoid excessive reliance on external sources. The EU believes that achieving SA requires advanced capabilities and ensuring their indigenization. This ethos is evident in the EU’s Industrial Strategy 2020, which intertwines defence aspirations with a broader industrial vision of global competitiveness. The synergy between a robust EDITB and PESCO’s cooperative framework can potentially transform the EU’s defence capabilities, reducing external dependencies and reinforcing SA.

Finally, the EU’s dependencies “from” third countries for strategic resources, materials, products, or protection can be a significant challenge. When these sources are disrupted, the EU’s ability to act autonomously can be compromised. International geopolitical dynamics and conflicts can limit the EU’s freedom to act independently, particularly in areas where significant power interests collide. In defence, progress in EU-NATO cooperation has helped overcome some of these challenges and allowed the EU to strengthen its defence capabilities without conflicting with NATO’s roles (Latici 2020). The Russian invasions of Ukraine heightened security concerns within the EU, prompting a shift toward enhanced defence cooperation through mechanisms like PESCO while constituting a coherent EU-SA approach to NATO defence policy desirable as it complements the efforts of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Clapp 2022).

6. 1. Limitations

While aiming to comprehensively analyse changes in the CSDP evolution between the invasions of Ukraine by Russia in 2014 and 2022 and its implications for the EU’s pursuit of SA, this study acknowledges several limitations that influence its scope and depth.

Firstly, the reliance on the theoretical framework of LI might inadvertently constrain the exploration of alternative theoretical perspectives that offer nuanced insights into the observed CSDP initiatives. Secondly, data availability concerning internal decision-making processes within EU institutions and member states was limited, potentially hampering a comprehensive understanding of the driving motivations. Additionally, the focus on CSDP changes within the context of the Ukraine invasions omitted broader geopolitical complexities, potentially limiting a holistic understanding of the subject.

Finally, the temporal constraint of 2014 to 2022 excludes post-2022 developments, potentially not capturing the long-term consequences of analysed events and policy changes. Furthermore, the study’s scope extends to implications on the EU-SA yet does not exhaustively examine broader impacts on member states’ foreign and security policies, NATO-EU relations, or global security dynamics.

6. 2. Credibility of the Study

According to Denscombe (2017), the credibility of a study is judged regarding its validity, generalizability, reliability, and objectivity (p. 198). The credibility of this study was established through a meticulous approach to data quality, which played a pivotal role in enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings. The selection of source materials, drawn from reputable institutions within both political and academic spheres, served as a foundation for reliable conclusions. This deliberate

choice of credible outlets ensured that the research findings were firmly grounded in well-founded and dependable data, thereby augmenting the study's validity and reliability.

However, using content analysis methodology on the selected source material could prompt considerations about the potential generalizability of the findings. While the analysis focused on specific documents, efforts were dedicated to extracting overarching patterns and essential components that could extend implications beyond immediate boundaries. Hence, by identifying these fundamental features, the research aimed to derive broader insights applicable to a range of security challenges faced by the EU. This approach mitigated concerns about the transferability of findings, thus adding depth to the study's contributions.

The objectivity of this study is anchored in its meticulous selection and analysis of primary documents directly sourced from official EU bodies. By intentionally excluding external academic research and relying solely on official publications during the analysis, the study safeguards itself from potential interpretative biases that might arise from secondary sources. Such an approach ensures that the insights derived are grounded in the EU's unfiltered intentions, decisions, and perspectives, offering an unbiased examination of the CSDP initiatives and its pursuit of strategic autonomy.

6. 3. Conclusion

The main theoretical implication of the study is the logically derived assumption that the connection of LI to CSDP initiatives and the intrinsic relationship of these initiatives to EU-SA solidify the relevance of LI as a valuable framework for understanding the EU's defence and security aspirations. The flow of transitive logic is the following: LI has been first identified as a framework that can effectively contextualise the dynamics of the EU's CSDP initiatives. Simultaneously, there is an evident linkage between the CSDP initiatives and the EU-SA, with the former playing a vital role in actualising the latter's goals. By connecting these relationships, it becomes clear that LI can also be employed as a theoretical lens to critically examine the EU's efforts towards achieving SA through its CSDP initiatives.

Another implication could be derived from the EU's balancing act between autonomy and collective security, which carries important lessons for other regional and global actors. The EU's approach provides a model for effective security governance in an increasingly complex and interconnected world where security challenges transcend borders. It demonstrates that sovereignty need not be sacrificed in the pursuit of collective security. Instead, states and regional organisations can strive for SA while actively engaging in cooperative security efforts, recognising that autonomy and collective action are not a zero-sum game.

Concluding the findings of this thesis, the applicability of LI in understanding the EU-SA through the CSDP becomes evident. The nuances and intricacies of the relationship between LI and EU-SA offer a rich tapestry of insights and interpretations. Thus, as avenues for future research, it would be invaluable to broaden the theoretical framework, juxtaposing LI with alternative models such as Constructivism or Neofunctionalism, to discern potential differing interpretations of the EU's defence and security ambitions. Furthermore, the intricate and evolving relationship between the EU and NATO warrants a deeper dive, especially considering the EU's drive for SA. Exploring the negotiations, compromises, and intergovernmental dynamics within this alliance could shed light on the multifaceted nature of the European defence landscape.

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