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Europe as a power, European sovereignty and strategic autonomy: a debate that is moving towards an assertive Europe

By defending a "geopolitical" Commission, The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, said that the European Union had emerged from its economic and technocratic origins, that it was now ready to assume and strengthen its power, to measure itself against the new global balance of power. In this sense, she was responding to French President Emmanuel Macron who, since 2017, has been theorising about "European sovereignty" and advocating this call for power[1].

The truth is that there is nothing completely new about this moult. Political Europe and Defence Europe have been on the agenda since the start of European integration. Since 1970, Europe has had "*political cooperation*" on diplomatic issues. In 1992, it took the (long-dreamed-of) name "European Union". Since 1999, it has had its own security and defence policy.

The term "*European power*" is old and has traditionally been used by France. The concepts of "*strategic autonomy*" and "*European sovereignty*" are more recent and remain controversial within the Union. A clarification is in the making, as the French Presidency of the European Union, in the first half of 2022, will coincide, in the midst of the presidential campaign, with a review of Emmanuel Macron's achievements, whose European commitment has been a cardinal axis of his work.

EUROPEAN POWER: FROM THE GAULLIST DREAM TO WORLD MULTI-POLARITY

General de Gaulle was criticised for his Euroscepticism, his visceral attachment to the nation-state. Yet the General had dreamed of a powerful, united Europe, that could exist between the Soviet threat and American power. This was the meaning underlying the first European summits in Paris and Bonn in 1961. This is what underlaid the Fouchet plans for political

union that frightened France's partners, because they tended to subordinate the communities to an intergovernmental Europe. This was the meaning behind the veto on the entry of the United Kingdom, which was considered to be the United States' "*Trojan horse*". It was the meaning behind the Elysée Treaty signed on 22 January 1963, as it bid to consolidate the France-German couple.

General de Gaulle was also criticised on other counts: his ambition was a Europe under French leadership. He spoke of Europe as an "*Archimedes' lever*" for France, notably in remarks made at the Council of Ministers on 22 August 1962 and reported by Alain Peyrefitte, when the Soviets had just achieved their first successes in space: "*What is Europe about? It must serve to avoid being dominated by either the Americans or the Russians. With six of us, we should be able to do as well as each of the two super majors. And if France manages to be the first of the Six, which is within our reach, she will be able to wield this Archimedes' lever. She will be able to lead the others. Europe is the way for France to become again what it ceased to be at Waterloo: first in the world[2].*"

Although the General's diplomacy did not succeed in rallying France's European partners, nor in establishing a sound France-German political axis[3], the ideas he nurtured were posthumously successful. A political

[1] What is written in this article are the personal views of the author alone

[2] Alain Peyrefitte, C'était de Gaulle, Gallimard, 2002

[3] G.-H. Soutou, L'alliance incertaine. Les rapports stratégiques franco-allemands 1954-1996, Fayard, 1996

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union began to take shape with cooperation on foreign policy in 1970 and the establishment of a European Union and a monetary union, supported by the Maastricht Treaty (1992). Following on from the Summits of the Six, the European Council was created in 1974 on a French proposal, and became the intergovernmental crowning glory of European integration: the European Council, as Europe's collective Head of State, sets the "lead" on European policy, both in terms of strategic guidelines (cf. strategic programme 2019-2024) as well as crisis management (presently the coronavirus pandemic). The United Kingdom joined the Communities in 1973, but left the Union in 2020, proving General de Gaulle right in hindsight. It has thereby enabled the Union to strengthen its cohesion and solidity, through a better adjustment between the Union, the euro zone and the Schengen area. The Elysée Treaty (1963) established a privileged bilateralism between France and Germany, a "couple" or "motor", which has had an enduring legacy: this relationship, described by Jacques Delors as Europe's "tree of life", once again revealed its potential between Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel, signatories of the Aachen Treaty (22 January 2019) and initiators of an audacious European recovery plan in the midst of the coronavirus crisis.

As Charles de Gaulle had wished, by practising the method of compromise and influence with greater flexibility, France has found the means to increase its power throughout Europe. It is the example of space and Ariane, that provides a perfect example of what the General meant by the "Archimedes' lever", and where France has long established its predominance, whilst at the same time playing its European card. Paris has never abandoned its own power assets, such as its nuclear deterrent and its nuclear arsenal, its seat on the United Nations Security Council, a capacity for diplomatic initiative, an autonomous capacity for military projection and intervention, the French-speaking world and the overseas territories. At the same time, Paris has used the European dimension to modernise its economy, stabilise its currency, carry weight in world economic relations, and also develop its influence outside the Union.

The problem of European power goes back to the early 1970s when the United States, bogged down by the Vietnam war, and losing its economic hegemony (end of the gold convertibility of the dollar in 1971), moved, under the impetus of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, towards the recognition of a "multipolar" world. Kissinger even declared 1973 "The Year of Europe". Jean François-Poncet, Minister for Foreign Affairs under Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (1978-1981), is said to have been the first to popularise the expression "*European power*" (although no trace of this can be found in his memoirs).

Although the 1970s declined into euro-pessimism as a result of the economic crisis and the stalling of European integration, the project of a powerful Europe resurfaced under François Mitterrand and Helmut Kohl with the ambition, declared in Maastricht, of a common foreign and security policy and even common defence. Following this Jacques Chirac (1995-2007) was the President who used the expression "European power" the most[4]. Diplomats then readily started to refer to Europe as a "power multiplier", another way of referring to the "Archimedes' lever".

This project nevertheless has given rise to a double disappointment from the French point of view. Firstly, German reunification upset the balance of power between the two countries: although it did not result in German detachment from Europe, France could no longer claim political pre-eminence. The transition took place between Helmut Kohl, who repeated that it was always necessary to "bow twice before the French flag", and Gerhard Schröder (1998-2005), who defended a new stance aimed at "normalising" German foreign policy and defending "German interests". The two countries, after a serious quarrel in 1999-2000, decided to stand together against the US policy in Iraq and to use Russia as a counterweight, but this geopolitical stance then gave way to a return to a traditional transatlantic relationship in which Paris felt it was better to align itself so that it could be more influential, as shown by France's return to the integrated military command of NATO (2009) under the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy.

While France and Germany know how to sing from the same hymn sheet, they could also wield real influence, a possibility that has been strengthened by the UK's departure. Together they represent more than a third

[4] T. de Montbrial et G.-H. Soutou, La défense de l'Europe : entre Alliance atlantique et Europe de la défense, Hermann, 2015

of the Union's population, which is almost a blocking minority. But their agreement is never a foregone conclusion, which gives diplomats a lot of work in terms of discussions, to overcome misunderstandings, find compromises and act together. One of the difficulties lies in the definition of European power: in France, people are prepared to intervene militarily; in Germany, economics, diplomacy and law are preferred.

However the two countries were united in their policy of dialogue and firmness vis-à-vis Russia, in the so-called E3 negotiations (including the United Kingdom) with Iran, in their attempts to counter American extraterritorial law and in the rebalancing of relations with China. It has been more difficult for them to define common action in hot conflicts such as the Sahel, Libya, Syria, Turkey, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict etc. Furthermore, since Germany has no nuclear weapons, it still sees its ultimate security in the Atlantic framework, under American protection, whereas France can claim a form of strategic independence.

The second disappointment concerns enlargement. France remained reluctant for a long time and was obliged to accept it under pressure from the United States and the United Kingdom, but also from Germany, which wanted to integrate its hinterland into the Union. The French position has always been to favour deepening over enlargement, and it has largely succeeded in doing so, with each enlargement going hand in hand with further progress towards integration. But the fact is that the enlarged Europe is heavier, less agile and more heterogeneous than that of the founding States. The trauma of the split in 2003, at the time of the American invasion of Iraq has continued, with eighteen States - members or future members of the Union - rallying to the American position, the Franco-German rejection being supported only by Belgium and Luxembourg. At present, French diplomacy needs to invest more than ever before in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, because the agreement of these countries (which have remained close to Washington) is a condition for any progress.

It is because of these disappointments regarding the ambition of European power that France has wanted to preserve its own autonomy, which allowed it to

intervene in Libya in 2011, in the Sahel or in the Central African Republic in 2013, against Daesh in Iraq and Syria, as well as against the regime of Bashar el-Assad after the use of chemical weapons. Despite recent progress in European armaments cooperation, the French armaments industry remains essentially national (the aircraft carrier, frigates, Rafale, Leclerc tanks, submarines, etc.) with often good export successes. But the ambition of a powerful Europe is again coming to the fore.

EUROPEAN POWER: REAL BUT INCOMPLETE

Despite differences within the Union, European power has become a reality. It is essentially economic and normative in nature[5]. It is a power through the strength of its market and its law (competition policy, the REACH chemicals regulation, the general regulation on data protection), a trade power that can defend its interests and negotiate balanced agreements with third country partners (fifty trade agreements, in comparison with Japan's 18 and the USA's 14), a monetary power supported by a stable currency which occupies a comfortable second place in the world after the dollar, a power that imposes itself through its leadership in environmental matters (with the objective of climate neutrality by 2050), a power in development aid (representing half of the world's ODA by adding the Union and the Member States), an aeronautics and space power (with Airbus and Galileo).

In diplomatic and military matters, the game is more complicated. The European Union is part of the Western camp; it has interests and values that converge by and large with those of Washington. Twenty-one EU Member States are also members of NATO and dependent on the American guarantee of security. It is extremely difficult, and in general not very consensual, to define a line that breaks away or even distances itself from Washington.

Yet Europeans have countered (or not followed) Donald Trump's foreign policy on Iran, on the climate, on trade and on competition issues, and also on Israel. They have opposed Washington's unilateralism with a determined commitment to preserve and strengthen multilateralism, for example by deciding to set up, with

[5] I. Manners, "Normative Power Europe : A contradiction in terms?", Journal of Common Market Studies, 40(2), 2002 ; Z. Laïdi, La norme sans la force : l'énigme de la puissance européenne, Presses de Sciences Po, 2013 ; A. Bradford, The Brussels Effect, 2020

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several major trading partners (including China), an alternative dispute settlement body to the WTO body blocked by Washington. Similarly, the European Union re-iterated its commitment to the WHO, advocating reform of the organisation in the face of the US policy of withdrawal.

Europe responded timidly for a long time to the extraterritoriality of US law, for example with the 1996 blocking regulation, adopted but never implemented, following the d'Amato and Helms-Burton laws against Libya and Cuba. During Donald Trump's presidency it developed the INSTEX mechanism in response the USA's withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear agreement and to US extraterritorial sanctions regarding Iran. This mechanism has been implemented symbolically to allow certain deliveries to Iran to take place in the form of barter, but it shows that Europeans have the political will and the means to act.

With Russia, the relationship has been strained as tension continues to escalate regarding values and influence in the eastern neighbourhood in particular. The Union is mainly aligned with the United States, even though France and Germany have taken the initiative to mediate on Ukraine within the framework of the "Normandy Format". However, European unity (which has not yet been broken) has also helped the EU to establish a balance of power with Moscow and to set limits.

With China, relations reached a turning point in 2019 prior to the coronavirus crisis. Due to Sino-American tensions (*the Thucydides trap[6]*) and various disputes with Beijing the European Union began to speak of a "systemic rivalry", a strong, unprecedented expression. The European Union and its Member States did not grant China the status of being a market economy. They tightened control over strategic investments (notably after the purchase of the German robot manufacturer Kuka by the Chinese in 2016), concluded an agreement over investments based on reciprocity, dispatched Huawei from its dominant position on the telecommunications market and stepped-up criticism in terms of Human Rights violations in Hong Kong and against the Uighur. However, we might wonder whether

Europe would have taken such a direction without the pressure of the USA.

With other countries and other regions of the world, Europe carries influence not only through the trade agreements it has concluded with South Korea, Japan, Canada, for example, or through the development aid it distributes to poor or developing countries. The relationship with Africa is crucial in many respects (economy, development, raw materials, migration issues, environmental issues, the fight against terrorism, etc.). With Turkey, the prospect of membership is fading, but the European Union maintains a close relationship both economically and politically. It needs Turkey's cooperation on migration issues, while trying to balance pressure to counter Erdogan's destabilising actions, notably illegal drilling in the Eastern Mediterranean. We might also mention the diplomatic involvement in the Iranian nuclear agreement or the various missions undertaken as part of the common security and defence policy[7].

Although it is making increasing use of sanctions, the European Union is far from mastering the tools of hard power like the United States. Its CSDP is more of a peacekeeping tool, like that of the UN, or an armed arm of its development policy. The size of CSDP operations (a total of 5,000 troops, mostly civilians) is moreover modest when compared to those of the UN or NATO. And Europe relies for its defence on NATO, as explicitly stated in the following terms of article 42-7 of the Treaty on European Union.

Despite its incompleteness, its economic and legal dimension, rather than its diplomatic and military dimension, European power exists and is increasingly acknowledged and assumed as such. Returning to the thread of Charles de Gaulle's thoughts, this is also the consequence of how Germany and Franco-German relations have evolved. After the election of Donald Trump, Angela Merkel stated that "*Europe must take its destiny into its own hands*". Since the European Council of December 2016, the Union has reiterated that it must "*take greater responsibility for its own security*". More recently, Wolfgang Schäuble, President of the Bundestag, and Josep Borrell, High Representative for

[6] G. Allison, Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?, Mariner Books, 2017

[7] More than 30 since 2003, 15 underway, including in Africa, the traditional area of France's diplomatic and military action.

Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, defended the idea that Europe must "speak the language of power".

However, the term "*European power*" remains controversial. It is not an "agreed vocabulary", as we say among diplomats. A bit like the European army, sometimes brandished by politicians in their speeches, it is a slogan. The term frightens a number of partners who, on the one hand, do not want to take up an ambition that might suggest that it is intended to challenge, counterbalance or emancipate themselves from American power and, on the other hand, fear Franco-German leadership from which they would be excluded.

This means that it is also necessary to work on the question of political legitimacy to carry the ambition of power forward. The Commission has strong legitimacy within the remit of its competences, which are significant in the economic field. The High Representative, head of the European External Action Service (EEAS), provides European institutional legitimacy in certain diplomatic negotiations conducted by the major capitals. The Franco-German partnership must also be opened up, according to the situation (Balkans, Mediterranean, Africa, Eastern neighbourhood), to other partners such as Italy, Spain, Poland, the Netherlands, and even the United Kingdom, because power will remain in national capitals more than in Brussels when it comes to political and security issues for the foreseeable future.

EUROPEAN SOVEREIGNTY AND ITS LIMITS

Emmanuel Macron struck hard with his speech at the Sorbonne on 26 September 2017 as he launched the goal of "European sovereignty", the keys ideas of which are: defence, the protection of the borders, foreign policy, ecology, digital, the economy (with industry and currency). He rounded off his remarks on several occasions by also mentioning food sovereignty, technological sovereignty, health sovereignty and space policy.

Emmanuel Macron's speech was mainly addressed to Germany, which had just held its legislative elections, the obvious outcome of which seemed to be Angela Merkel's reappointment to the Federal Chancellery. This speech was meant to please the Germans. Because of the past, Europe is part of German identity, and in a way, Germany represents a "fusion" with European identity[8]. As Helmut Kohl said, the unification of Germany and the unification of Europe are two sides of the same coin. The idea of a sovereign Europe, crowning the German federal State, is well accepted on the other side of the Rhine, and some social democratic politicians such as Heiko Maas, Minister of Foreign Affairs, or Olaf Scholz, Minister of Finance, have openly taken it on board. The Treaty of Aachen speaks of a "*united, effective, sovereign and strong European Union*".

And yet, the concept of European sovereignty is ambivalent and debated. In the purist view of jurists, States have been sovereign since Jean Bodin (*La République*, 1576) and the Treaties of Westphalia (1648). Sovereignty has been the means for princes - for States - to claim their independence from the outside, an independence which is an attribute of the sovereign State under international law. Inside, sovereignty means that States have the "*competence of competences*". From this point of view, the European Union is only an international organisation of a regional nature; it only has powers of attribution, defined by treaties and governed by the principle of speciality and other restrictive principles, such as proportionality or subsidiarity.

Admittedly, the Union is also a political organisation, which embodies a European identity, asserts a foreign policy on the international stage and is governed by a democratic principle (through the election of the European Parliament, a separation of powers at European level, rules of respect for the rule of law and fundamental rights). But the German Constitutional Court re-iterated in its decision on the Lisbon Treaty (30 June 2009), that the European Parliament did not represent a "European people", which, in its view, justifies that the German people remain in control of their economic, cultural and social living conditions, which are considered to be the "*democratic self-determination of a constitutional State*". A State may also leave the Union, as the United Kingdom has just done, if it wishes to regain full sovereignty.

[8] *V. Schmidt,* Democracy in Europe. The EU and National Polities*, Oxford University Press, 2006*

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The Union's competences have been significantly strengthened since the start of European integration in 1950. They have developed in accordance with what Hendrik Brugmans, the first rector of the College of Bruges, called "*reverse federalism*". They have bypassed the core of State sovereignty, the '*regalian*' powers. States, kings, forged sovereignty through the power to dispense justice, through the right to mint money, through the raising of a permanent army financed by taxes, by monopolising legitimate violence (as defined by Max Weber) and the conduct of diplomacy. Charles de Gaulle spoke of foreign policy and the three levers that command it: "*the diplomacy that expresses it, the army that supports it, the police that covers it*". After the failure of the project for a political Europe and the European Defence Community, European integration preferred to focus on the economy and sectorial cooperation (coal and steel, agriculture, common market, and customs union) so as not to attack sovereignty head-on.

Now however, the nature of European integration has changed and has penetrated the heart of the States' sovereignty. From a formal point of view, Community law, which is now called Union law, differs from traditional international law. It takes precedence over national law and has direct affect in the Member States, according to principles established at an extremely early stage by the Communities Court of Justice (*Van Gend en Loos* and *Costa c/Enel*, decisions 1963 and 1964). Majority voting, which made it possible to overcome the veto of the Member States and put them in a minority, was blocked by General de Gaulle at the end of the empty chair crisis (Luxembourg Compromise, 1966) but was implemented by the Single Act (1986) and still applies in the so-called "Community" competences (about 60% of the cases cited by the Treaties). There were even plans (Juncker proposal) to extend it partially to foreign policy (sanctions, human rights, civil CSDP missions). Moreover, in addition to the Council vote, which expresses the position of the Member States, the European Parliament expresses the position of the citizens, according to political trends, and therefore a form of majority European opinion, a European "general will".

From a material point of view, the European Union has gone beyond the framework of a common market. When we list its "exclusive competences" according to the treaties (customs union, competition policy, trade policy, monetary policy for the Euro area states, fisheries) and taking into account the Union's own legal order, we see that there is a core of European sovereignty. This is particularly true for the currency and a part of external relations (according to the rule of external and internal parallelism of competences), where European sovereignty is superimposed on national sovereignty. There is also a European budget that finances European public policies and is significant in size (1% of European GNP). No other international organisation in the world has comparable means. This budget will even double under the "recovery plan" agreed in July 2020, and will be financed for the first time by a substantial European public debt raised on the markets.

The concept of European sovereignty does not only mean that the Union takes on, at least for the competences entrusted to it, the shape of a federal state. It has also been carried forward by a new context for at least a decade. The depletion of public finances after the 2008 crisis (and after the coronavirus crisis) has forced Member States to pool their resources to a greater extent, for example in the area of defence. The American strategic withdrawal, which began under President Obama (2008-2016), is also obliging Europeans to take charge of their own affairs in their regional environment. Terrorism and migratory pressure, problems that have become more acute following the failure of the "Arab Spring", are forcing them to manage together their internal security, the protection of their citizens, the management of external borders and relations with countries of emigration. It is revealing that a neutral country such as Austria chose "*Europe that protects*" as the slogan for its presidency in 2018. The geopolitical tensions between the USA, Russia and China are also forcing Europeans to mourn their representations of "la-la land" (Hubert Védrine) and to stop behaving like "*geopolitical herbivores in a world of geopolitical carnivores*" (Frank-Walter Steinmeier). Finally, Brexit, while representing a clear loss in terms of resources and capacities, has rid Europeans of a difficult, "sovereignist" partner who was reluctant to let Europe move forward with integration.

In this profound change, the sovereignty agenda may be the means for Europe to overcome its weaknesses, reduce its dependence and increase its power. It means that the road to independence for large European States like France no longer involves national sovereignty but European cooperation. It also means that Europe is ready to go beyond its horizon, which for a long time remained purely economic, to address real sovereignty issues such as defence, security, technological autonomy, and border management. For those who believe in Europe, European sovereignty is also a means of turning sovereignty against the "sovereignists", of showing that Europe is not a loss of control but, on the contrary, a means of regaining control (" taking back control ", as the Brexiters put it.)

It is true that European sovereignty remains limited and relative. Under the legal and judicial order, Union law is limited to the competences and policies of the Union and the bulk of administrative, civil, commercial and criminal law remains national in nature. Economic policy, social policy, culture, education, health, policing and justice remain national prerogatives. In diplomatic, military, fiscal and budgetary matters, unanimity continues to apply in the Union, which means that these issues are not really '*communitarised*'. In many other areas such as labour immigration, police and intelligence cooperation, and the choice of energy mix by each State, unanimity also remains applicable.

For many Member States, the concept of European sovereignty is frightening and inappropriate. The Nordic countries (the "New Hanseatic League" formed in 2018: Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Ireland) retain a national tropism, they are reluctant to integrate, especially in the budgetary and fiscal field, because they do not want to be burdened by too costly solidarity with the rest of Europe. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe rely on European solidarity, particularly the Structural Funds, but do not want to see European supra-nationality imposed on them, since it is reminiscent of the "limited sovereignty" they had under the Soviet Union, particularly in matters of migration (the reception of asylum seekers), social issues (e.g. the regulation of posted workers), the environment (the abandonment of coal), and the rule of law.

Even in Germany, the concept is not universally accepted. Out of annoyance, some German politicians have turned the French initiative around and proposed the Europeanisation of France's seat on the UN Security Council[9]. Emmanuel Macron's proposal to discuss French nuclear deterrence in a Franco-German framework (recalling the "concerted deterrence" proposals of the mid-1990s) has met with polite reserve for the time being. And Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, German Defence Minister, triggered controversy when she recalled at the end of 2020 that there could be no European defence outside of NATO.

Emmanuel Macron himself acknowledged in an interview that the concept of European sovereignty might appear "a little excessive". Ursula von der Leyen does not use it (unlike her predecessor Jean-Claude Juncker) and, for the time being, the term has only been used in the digital field, in the 2019-2024 strategic programme approved by the European Council before the new European Commission was set up: "*Europe will be digitally sovereign*". This means that, in this area at least, Europe wants to free itself from its dependence and exist in its own right on the international stage: i.e. the ambition of a "European cloud", a digital tax, fair competition imposed on the players in the digital economy, European data protection, etc.

We could speak, in a similar sense, of space sovereignty, food sovereignty, monetary sovereignty, financial sovereignty, technological sovereignty and European health sovereignty. The European Union is creating economic sovereignty without saying so by promoting the role of the euro, by filtering strategic foreign investments, by organising the response to the extraterritoriality of American law. In the financial field, it could organise, (by creating a European sovereign fund?) so as not to let the United States capture half of the international financial savings. It is undoubtedly more difficult to talk about budgetary, fiscal, diplomatic and military sovereignty, since the competence of the Member States, and of NATO in the field of defence, remains paramount in these matters.

[9] The Aachen Treaty settled this dispute as it indicated that the priority of Franco-German diplomacy is for Germany to achieve a permanent seat (art. 8).

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STRATEGIC AUTONOMY: FROM DEFENCE TO THE ECONOMY

Strategic autonomy is to sovereignty what means are to ends. The concept may appear less ambitious, less political and more technocratic. However, the adjective "strategic" enhances its importance. The strategist in ancient Greece was the general who commanded the army. Strategic is that which relates to large-scale military operations (as opposed to tactics), international power relations and, by extension, all matters or decisions whose importance distinguishes them from routine or secondary matters, and which have a long-term horizon that goes beyond day-to-day contingencies. A strategist is one who excels in command, conduct and decision-making at this level of importance and temporality. In the world of diplomacy, there is talk of "strategic affairs" (politico-military), "strategic stability" (in the sense of the balance of nuclear deterrence), "strategic partnerships", and there are also sometimes strategic diplomats who have a sense of the long term (e.g. Talleyrand, Metternich, Bismarck, Delcassé, Briand and Stresemann, Kennan, Schuman, Védrine).

The concept of strategic autonomy derives from the de Gaullist idea of independence (based in particular on national nuclear deterrence) and made its official appearance in the French White Paper on Defence and National Security in 2013, which speaks of "France's autonomy of decision and action" based on "national control of capabilities vital to its defence and security". The Strategic Revue of 2017 repeats that "*France must retain its ability to decide and act alone to defend its interests*", stating that this autonomy is both operational, industrial, technological and diplomatic.

But at the same time France has promoted the idea of European strategic autonomy. The Franco-British declaration of Saint-Malo (4 December 1998) which launched the Union's security and defence policy mentioned "*autonomous capacity for action supported by credible military forces with the means and the will to use them to respond to crises.*" The term "strategic autonomy" officially appeared in a Commission communication and Council conclusions on the European defence industry (2013) and then in the Union's global strategy on foreign and security policy, drawn up under the aegis of Federica Mogherini in 2016. The Council spoke of "*the ability to act autonomously when and where necessary, and with partners wherever possible*". The Franco-German Aachen Treaty aims for "Europe's capacity for autonomous action" (art. 3).

Autonomy is distinct from independence and can even be said to be part of an assumed interdependence. In this context, the Germans have long since readily used the term '*Handlungsfähigkeit*', 'capacity to act', which the British also accepted before leaving the Union. Before the goal of sovereignty, strategic autonomy[10] emphasises the strengthening of its capacities. This is true in both senses of the term at present, in the sense of defence as well as in the industrial sense.

In the field of defence, the underlying issue, beyond the strengthening of European capabilities, is the European Union's relationship with the United States and NATO. After the United Kingdom's withdrawal, France is the only country left that can provide the Union with nuclear protection. Emmanuel Macron proposed to his European partners to open strategic dialogue on this subject. But it is understandable that the other Member States do not wish to deprive themselves of American nuclear protection as part of the wider security guarantee provided by the United States. The coupling of American and European security was a key issue during the Cold War and is provided for by the stationing of a US military contingent in Europe, which has increased its presence in the Baltic States and Poland in the face of the growing Russian threat. Beyond the nuclear issue, Europe has been dependent on the United States for intelligence, UAVs, tanker aircraft, etc. A large number of Member States continue to buy American defence equipment, which is one of the reasons why Donald Trump encouraged Europe to increase its military spending.

The strategic dependence on the USA is part of Europe's genes. A report dared to qualify this as "fetishism" and "infantilism" in a bid to wake Europeans from their strategic torpor. Progress has been made. Since 2016 the European budget has been allocating funds directly to joint capability research and development projects and a European Defence Fund has now been created

[10] E. Macron refers to "this strength that Europe can have for itself", "the idea that we choose our own rules for ourselves". See also the definition of strategic autonomy in a study by the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (February 2019): "being able to set its own foreign and security policy priorities, take decisions on them and create the conditions for their implementation - institutional, political and material - in cooperation with third parties or, if necessary, autonomously".

with an allocation of €7 billion for the period 2021-2027. Through its CSDP operations, Europe has become a "security producer": for example, through its Operation Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina, its Operation Atalanta off the Horn of Africa against maritime piracy, its maritime operation off Libya, which could be completed by another maritime security operation in the Gulf of Guinea. This is even more true if we add the action of Member States in their national capacity, in particular that of France in the Sahel or elsewhere in Africa, with the French operation Serval in Mali in 2013, followed by several European operations (EUTM Mali, EUCAP Sahel, and Takuba) to back up France's engagement and support the region's governments.

Although collective defence is a mission delegated to NATO, the Union's own collective defence clause exists. It was triggered for the first time in support of France after the terrorist attacks of 2015. It can be used in favour of the Union's six neutral States that are not protected by NATO, such as Austria, Cyprus, Finland, Ireland, Malta and Sweden. It was completed by a Franco-German collective defence clause in the Aachen Treaty (Article 4). One could imagine that Europeans might at some point decide to formulate, within the Atlantic Alliance, their own security interests and their contribution (including nuclear, in France's case) to the security of the Alliance, as the ten countries of Western European Union did in 1987 at the Hague Platform, where they spoke of a "*community of destiny*". This would be a step towards the constitution of the "European pillar" of the Alliance proposed by President Kennedy in 1962.

Although there has been progress towards a kind of European strategic autonomy in the area of defence, the idea is frightening as soon as it is placed alongside the trans-Atlantic relation and that it might suggest that Europe is trying to emancipate itself from the USA. A degree of strategic autonomy is gradually being accepted in terms of resources, but we are far from real political autonomy and it is not certain that the wound that was inflicted in 2003, when Europe was divided between countries in favour of and against the American offensive in Iraq, has really healed. On the contrary, the security challenges brought by Russia and China are encouraging Europeans to huddle closer to the Americans. For these reasons, Europe has "*shameful strategic autonomy*" (Pierre Vimont): it is significant that the Foreign Affairs Council of 7 December 2020, held shortly after the election of Joe Biden, discussed strategic autonomy talking only of the transatlantic partnership, adopting significant conclusions on this issue alone. Things must therefore continue to mature through a mix of political leadership, capacity building, concrete and solidarity-based contributions to European and Atlantic security and the development of a common European strategic culture.

In the economic and industrial areas it is completely different. Europe now clearly shows that it wants an industrial strategy, a true industrial policy in fact. The space programme (which is old), the financing of joint military projects, the Alliance of batteries (to reduce dependence on China), the structuring of a hydrogen industry (to combat climate change), the idea of a European cloud, the alliance of raw materials, the initiative in the field of semiconductors and processors, are all recent and concrete, often Franco-German based expressions of this increasingly committed industrial ambition. In the field of health the Union has also developed its response to the coronavirus crisis (reserves of medical equipment, joint research and grouped purchases, particularly for vaccines, etc.).

The concept of "open strategic autonomy", launched by the previous Trade Commissioner Phil Hogan in the context of the health crisis, attempts to reconcile the supporters of a strong industrial policy, starting with France, and those countries that want to maintain openness as a guarantee of competitiveness and innovation. Strategic autonomy is neither autarky nor protectionism, but involves the constitution of strategic stocks, the diversification of supply chains (to reduce dependency), the control of strategic foreign investments, and the strengthening of innovation and critical technological capacities in Europe. The conclusions of the European Council (October) and the Competitiveness Council (November) gave it a precise remit: "*it is important to achieve strategic autonomy while preserving an open economy in the most sensitive industrial ecosystems and in specific areas such as health, defence, space, digital, energy and critical raw*

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materials". All the sectors mentioned here are obviously key areas of European sovereignty, rooted in the Union's economic competences.

A MORE "EUROPEAN" EUROPE?

Diplomats are wary of semantic, theological, ideological quarrels, which delay compromise, waste time, waste energy, and they are right. It is the substance rather than the name that counts, it is action rather than words that make an impression. The European Union has already done much to assert itself and defend its interests and values, but it is still far from being a fully-fledged power that can think and guarantee its own security. It remains more a daughter of peace than a guarantor of it.

The work of words is nevertheless important, and it is to France's credit that it has been stimulated and made progress. These debates also allow Member States to compare their concepts and objectives and to identify the conditions for an agreement. Didn't Jacques Delors say that Europe is a "*thought in action*"?[11] ? The words "sovereignty" and "power" are still slogans, but they are there, they are floating around the European Union and give meaning to its action and its relationship with the world. "Sovereignty" expresses the Union's aspiration to embody a shared political identity on the world stage and to strengthen its power. Although the term remains controversial, European sovereignty exists and is rooted first and foremost in the economic core of

the Union's competences, which has grown over time. The terms "strategic autonomy" are more elaborate and conditionally accepted, referring to this mix of capacity/willingness to act and interdependence, protection and openness, public support and private innovation. They form the basis of a European consensus which has now taken shape.

Misunderstandings should be avoided. Strategic autonomy and sovereignty do not mean that the European Union has the ambition to break the transatlantic link or to become a centralised federal State. As Jean-Yves Le Drian put it, "this common sovereignty does not take anything away from our national sovereignties[12] and it strengthens NATO[13].

At a time when the transatlantic partnership can make a fresh start with President Biden, these words of programme are slowly giving substance to the idea that Europeans draw from within themselves the solidarity of their interests, the articulation of their values, their will and their capacity to act. They express the idea of a more "European" Europe that asserts itself as a "community of destiny".

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[11] D. de Rougemont, *Vingt-huit siècles d'Europe, préface de J. Delors, éditions Christian de Bartillat, 1990*

[12] *Speech in Prague, 6 December 2019*

[13] *Column with H. Maas, German Foreign Affairs Minister, 15 December 2020*

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