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## European Strategic Autonomy and the Ukraine War

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European Strategic Autonomy and the Ukraine War

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MSC Thesis

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## Summary

The central research question of this thesis is: To what extent will EU support for the Ukraine war influence European strategic autonomy on security in the world?

This thesis makes use of desk research and qualitative research to review the effect of European support to Ukraine on European strategic autonomy. To answer this question, this thesis created a conceptual model which originated from Howorth 2019. Furthermore, this thesis focussed on a comprehensive review of the concept of strategic autonomy, the recent EU support for the Ukraine-Russian war and old initiatives that are taken by the EU to strengthen defence cooperation and their effects on strategic autonomy. There are a total of six interview respondents and one online questionnaire respondent. The respondents shed mostly light on the political cohesion within the European Union (EU) in its current state. Furthermore, the desk research focuses more on the industrial base initiatives and the current operational capabilities.

The perceived political cohesion in the EU is low, this has to do with the difference of interests between member states. While the EU has a working industrial base and operational capabilities the EU has been set on medium (-to low) while the military support given to Ukraine is wholesome. With that, the answer to the research question is that the extent of EU support towards Ukraine on EU strategic autonomy on security in this world is determined by the strengthened industrial base firstly and secondly by achieved targets on operational capabilities, to the limitation of the existing political cohesion.

This thesis offers a unique approach since it focuses on the political cohesion of the EU as well as the operational capabilities of the EU and the existing industrial base. Further study is needed on enhancing political cohesion in the EU, and a second study on what the effects were on EU strategic autonomy after the war has ended.

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## Introduction

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2022, the world was shocked to learn that Russia invaded Ukraine, putting the west under a dawning shadow of an upcoming war. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of December 2023, Admiral Michel Hofman, The Belgium Chief of the Armed Forces, warned Europe that it urgently needs to prepare itself for war with Russia due to the progression of this war(NWS, 2023). Within the EU there is more attention set on increase funding and the European self-defence (European Liberal Forum & Cappelletti, 2023). In recent years, cooperation in the EU related to defence has gained extra attention due to increasing challenges in the world. In 2014, the European Defence Agency was established by the EU and was designed to help with the coordination of defence between member states (European Defence Agency, 2021). The war in Ukraine increased this trend and refocused attention on European security (European Commission, 2023). In making strategic autonomy the goal of the European Commission, some obstacles came along the way. The dimension in which strategic autonomy most definitely exists is security. However, it also includes elements of economic independence, diversification of energy sources, tolerance in cooperation, and enhancement of military capacities in the concept of strategic autonomy. The most sensitive dimension is security, including the ability of the EU to conduct military operations, but also to prevent conflicts with preventive measures or protect its citizens from terrorism, cyber warfare, or hybrid warfare.

The concept tends to lower the EU's over-reliance on other nations for access to significant technologies, raw materials, and defence technology. The Netherlands views the concept in offensive ways as it follows policies such as a properly functioning internal market, stable macroeconomic policy, and stimulating innovation and financing (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2022). But also in defensive ways, such as protections against hostile takeovers, restrictions of unwanted market access, and protections for innovation and knowledge (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2022).

The notion of collective responsibility is a standard that states the EU's foreign policy-making system. It means that joint committed action of policy implementation is needed to achieve collective goals. It implies the cooperation of joint action for the implementation of foreign policy decisions through national and collective means (Chachko & Linos, 2022).

Apart from achieving strategic autonomy in general, there was pressure on the member states when Ukraine was invaded. The EU provided financial and other types of support after the start of the invasion in 2022, including assistance to refugees within and beyond Ukraine's borders, and a €2.5 billion financial support package for direct military assistance to Ukraine using the recently created European Peace Facility (EPF). Additionally, EU leaders agreed on the need to decrease Europe's dependency on Russian gas and strengthen its defence capacity. The EU also imposed broad sanctions packages. The member states made more use of the European Peace Facility (EPF), which is a financial instrument allowing for the EU funding of equipment and infrastructure for the militaries of third countries, with budget contributions provided by member states calculated based on the size of their economies (Council of the European union, 2022b; Chachko & Linos, 2022).

The European Union is inspired by strategic autonomy in the defence atmosphere, but this pursuit paradoxically creates new dependencies. For example: strengthening the European Defence industry is one of the first ideas that come to mind when discussing options for increasing autonomy. However, the option presented may have a negative influence such as protectionism, which in turn hinders innovation (Brzezinski, 2022). Secondly, Europe can invest in the R&D of new military capabilities. This however can create tensions for an arms race (Erlanger, 2023). Strengthening cooperation between EU member states as the third alternative may result in the loss of national sovereignty, with conflicts between different interests being dangerous. (Sjursen, 2022). A final alternative would be to become more dependent on the US nuclear forces as an effective deterrent. To this end, although the EU

might quite well be strategically autonomous, it is thoroughly dependent on the US for nuclear deterrence protection (Rasmussen, 2023). With these and perhaps other alternatives available, further investigation into what is meant by strategic autonomous policy. To that extend, the central research question is:

“To what extent will EU support for the Ukraine war influence European strategic autonomy on security in the world?”

This thesis is scientifically relevant since it will try to develop a more thorough meaning of the concept for it to offer an analytic framework for present and future initiatives to improve EU integration. Strategic autonomy is not a well-defined concept in literature. Strategic autonomy is a vague concept in the literature. Rasmussen (2023) and Howorth (2019) for example studied this concept, however, the definitions remain vague. This thesis might bridge the knowledge gap by providing insights into strategic autonomy and the Ukraine war. Also, the concept has been gaining momentum in the EU, as the Ukraine war has highlighted the unions' limitations and vulnerabilities. This thesis creates valuable insight by analysing factors impacting strategic autonomy. Moreover, this thesis examines the EU but gains insight from the interview participants from France and The Netherlands.

Research in this field is socially relevant because the EU faces security challenges, such as state aggression, terrorism and cybercrime. Further research may enhance stability in cooperation and the ability to examine and overcome hurdles in cooperation. The outcome of the pursuit of strategic autonomy has a strong impact on European citizens, as this thesis provides public discourse on EU policy. The EU will help itself in the future by supporting Ukraine in the long run. Lastly, it is relevant also because the Ukraine war has shown that the European Member states are vulnerable to external threats (EPRS, European Parliamentary Research Service & Clapp, 2023). The scientific relevance of this thesis lies in its complexity,



actuality and policy relevance. The European defence cooperation has a complex network of actors, interests and effects. By researching the connections, it may shed light on the bottlenecks and limitations these structures have. The Ukraine war has highlighted the existence of defence organisations and has led to new policy initiatives, such as the EU sanctions (Thompson et al., 2022).

To answer this question, the thesis will investigate the following aspects:

1. A comprehensive review of the concept of strategic autonomy
2. The recent EU support for the Ukraine-Russian war and old initiatives that are taken by the EU to strengthen defence cooperation;
3. The lasting impact of those initiatives on the strategic autonomy of Europe.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1 Literature review**

In this chapter, the literature review will be presented to further define the concept of strategic autonomy; the dependent variable in this study. To delve into the concept of strategic autonomy, this thesis uses the literature study from Howorth (2019) and Fiott (2018). Both literature studies form a basis to develop a conceptual model which will be the foundation of this thesis. Other author's work will be discussed, as they may shed light on the different parts of strategic autonomy.

#### ***2.1.1 Strategic Autonomy***

Strategic autonomy can, according to Meijer & Brooks (2021) be defined as the institutional capacity to independently plan and conduct military operations across the full spectrum of conflict and to autonomously develop and produce the related defence capabilities with minimal or no assistance from the United States. The independence of the EU from US assistance in this definition is however controversial.

The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) was launched in 1998 to achieve strategic autonomy. The policy seeks to stabilize the volatile neighbourhood of the EU without relying too heavily on the US. Recent developments, such as the 2019 European Global Strategy, the post-Brexit re-launch of the CSDP and the Ukraine war have renewed the focus on strategic autonomy. Howorth (2019) argues that strengthening the EU-NATO relationship, rather than focusing solely on defence initiatives undertaken by the Union, is the key to achieving strategic autonomy in the longer term. This will also help to strengthen, rather than weaken, the transatlantic bond.

In "Strategic Autonomy and the Defence of Europe: On the Road to a European Army?", (Bartels, Kellner & Optenhögel, 2017). explores the European Union's ambition to achieve

strategic autonomy within its security domain. This work delves into the EU's historical context and its goals to create a role for the EU in global security, aiming for autonomy that reduces dependence on external powers like NATO and the United States. Howorth critically examines initiatives such as the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the European Defence Fund (EDF), and the role of the European Defence Agency (EDA) in promoting innovation and integration in the EU.

One recommendation from Howorth is to create a European Security Council. This council would help to fasten the EU decision-making and help the EU with information about international affairs. Another recommendation is that the European Council hold sessions to create a precise definition of strategic autonomy. In four areas the EU should create autonomy. These are domestic security, crisis response in the neighbourhood, 'connectivity' with the world (see the connectivity strategy) in space, airspace and cyberspace, and on the high seas, and eventually territorial defence. Furthermore, Howorth states that the EU troops should be brought back home eventually and there should be an EU-US agency created for nuclear planning (Howorth, 2019). The author also tries to refocus the attention on politics and strategics, instead of operational capabilities. Semantics play a strong role due to the negative connotation the word autonomy has. In the end, he provides policy prescriptions for achieving strategic autonomy by the EU (Howorth, 2019). The Global Strategy of the European Union has called for strategic autonomy of Europe. Given the barriers that have been outlined, any such achievement would have to come through long-term, directed, and coordinated effort (Meijer & Brooks, 2021).

In general, numerous capability shortfalls, legal/procedural hurdles, and infrastructural deficiencies make the military readiness of Europe very low today. Capability shortfalls are present in most militaries across Europe; they have quantitative and qualitative capability shortfalls that would stop European militaries from meeting their NATO commitments. First,

many of the measures needed to fill Europe's defence capacity gaps will require cooperation, which would have to overcome Europeans' disinterest not just temporarily, but over a very long period. And second, due to differences of interests that eventually led to limitations in industrial cooperation. With capability bottlenecks, the technological challenges are high. Having limitations does not help the EU create strategic autonomy (Meijer & Brooks, 2021).

In the book *European Strategy in the 21st Century: New Future for Old Power*, attention is paid to the changes the EU needs to make concerning its role and strategy in the light of changes in geopolitics and challenges. The emphasis is on unity and strategic view, as it has to be guided by EU values and interests. One of the ways to achieve strategic autonomy of defence would be to break away from dependence on external powers and to enhance military potential as well. The present period is marked by competition between the United States, China, and Russia. In such a scenario, the need is a need for foreign policy. This part holds the foreign policy of the EU, which contains such things as the emphasis on diplomatic measures, military interventions, and the creation of partnerships. Those three remain the tools of influence through which the EU can exert its influence (Biscop, 2020).

This is falling back into what Biscop calls strategic autonomy: the EU's capacity for independent choices, the right mix of military capabilities, technological innovation, and political cohesion. This requires that the EDF or PESCO reaches their potential. Furthermore, the relationship between the EU and the US should be balanced, as it is currently not. Finally, Biscop comments that the EU lacks a vision - a proactive long-term view, and anticipatory, rather than reactive (Biscop, 2020).

In "Strategic Autonomy: Towards 'European Sovereignty' in Defence?", Fiott developed a framework of strategic autonomy with new dimensions of strategic autonomy. First is political autonomy, meaning political coherence, which is about the ability to have decision-

making on defence and security that is free from any influence. Second, operational autonomy to operational capabilities and means having military capabilities to conduct operations on its own. It contains forces, equipment, and logistics (like rapid response forces). Industrial autonomy, or industrial capacities, is the third dimension. This means there is a solid European defence base that has the competence to produce technologies and equipment, making it less dependent on external partners. It secures and diversifies supply chains, avoiding the vulnerability of the union during a crisis. The last dimension is technological autonomy. This dimension refers to having a Research and Development (R&D) component in the industrial base to maintain innovation and the creation of projects. Lastly, the authors include cybersecurity divisions in this dimension, due to the advancing technological threats and the need for security in defence systems (Fiott, 2018).

Fiott also states that there are certain drivers of strategic autonomy. The first driver is geopolitical shifts. The first element of this shift is the unpredictability of U.S. foreign policy. Their policy aimed for the EU to increase its defence spending. Aside from unpredictability, the U.S. is perceived not to be very reliant. The second element is that there is a rise in China and Russia's influence. Both nations have a growing influence and assertiveness, that are perceived as potential threats to European security. The last element is regional instabilities. The author states that conflicts in the Middle East or North Africa may create additional challenges. Certain examples would be the migration crisis or terrorist threats (Fiott, 2018).

The second driver of strategic autonomy is European integration. The EU has been on an integration mission concerning defence. Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) has been created for deeper defence integration, but also the EDF (European Defence Fund) for collaborative defence research. A last element of this driver is the internal political dynamics, such as Brexit the author mentions. The strategic imperatives come last as the driver toward strategic autonomy. This driver deals with the improvement in credibility, effectiveness, and

complementarity with NATO. According to Fiott, the achievement of strategic autonomy would mean that the EU is better placed to contribute to global stability and support international norms. Strategic autonomy does not imply an alternative to NATO; rather, it constitutes a guarantee that Europe will be capable of acting independently when necessary and be more effective with partnerships (Fiott, 2018).

The political cohesion among member states is one of the major challenges to strategic autonomy, something which Fiott observes as mainly identified at three elements. According to the author, different interests and strategic cultures might come out over autonomy. Another element is the gaps in military capabilities and resources of the member states that make a call for an increase in defence spending. The last factor is that the EU remains dependent on non-EU defence industries (Fiott, 2018).

### ***2.1.2 Political cohesion, operational capabilities and industrial equipment***

Howorth (2019) states that there are ultimately three dimensions to strategic autonomy. The first one is political strategy/cohesion. This element is about “the agreement on the long-term of political and strategic finalité of strategic autonomy” (p.12). As the author states, there are different opinions about the political dimension of strategic autonomy, mainly because the discussions are “either premature or divisive- or both” (p.12). Howorth disagrees and sees it as one of the main ingredients for strategic autonomy despite the course it would take to create an agreement. The author also states that without agreement on the long term (with regards to the political goals of strategic autonomy, talking about the specifics is useless). Howorth indicates that a grand strategy is necessary in this dimension, but maybe not per se for other dimensions. As stated earlier, semantics are important in this dimension. Strategic autonomy has been perceived negatively, while it does not imply a separation of some sort. Federica Mogherini said that the EU seeks ‘cooperative autonomy’, indicating that while autonomy is preferred, cooperation remains very important to the EU (p.12).

Howorth (2019) emphasizes the EU's ability to create crisis-management missions without reliance on external partners, that is what defines this dimension. It focuses on the development and enhancement of military and operational capacities within the union. Howorth (2019) states moreover that grand strategies may be ineffective, and a step-by-step approach is the go-to when approaching strategic autonomy. Lastly, to have an effective approach, it must align with a broader strategic objective to ensure the efforts are not only for developing capabilities but also for the creation of integration between the member states.

Howorth (2019) discusses that the industrial equipment dimension focuses on the development and maintenance of a robust defence industrial base within the EU. By having this dimension secured, the EU defence equipment funding may support strategic autonomy. Defence projects (such as PESCO), highlight that objections from the US are focused on this dimension. They expressed concerns about the extent to which US companies would be involved in EU defence equipment funding. Moreover, this dimension is crucial in reducing dependency on non-EU sources and increasing the EU's industrial (and technological) capacity. The focus is set on creating autonomy by meeting defence needs and reducing risks coming from reliance on non-EU partners.

## **2.2 Conceptual model and hypothesis**

Based on 2.2, a conceptual model can be made based on Howorth's (2019) analysis of strategic autonomy. To put it into perspective, Fiott (2018) stated that these dimensions are also the challenges to strategic autonomy, as stated at the end of paragraph 2.1.1. The dependent variable is "Strategic autonomy", placed on the left. The moderating variable is the European support Ukraine receives (it examines the extent to which support for Ukraine influences the three independent variables and, consequently, strategic autonomy), it is placed in the middle. The three independent variables are (1) Political cohesion, (2) Operational capabilities and (3) Industrial equipment. The conceptual model is visualized in Figure 1. For context, the

independent variables influence the dependent variable strategic autonomy given the moderating variable EU-Ukraine support.



*Figure 1 Conceptual model based on Howorth (2019; pages 12, 13)*

Our theoretical framework mentioned that strategic autonomy is influenced by political cohesion, operational capabilities and the industrial base given the European support to Ukraine. The research question investigates the impact of the EU support for the Ukraine war given these dimensions of strategic autonomy and its mediating variable.

The research question is: “To what extent will EU support for the Ukraine war influence European strategic autonomy on security in the world?”. This thesis explores the effect of European support on European strategic autonomy. There can be three hypotheses formulated based on the theory and the independent variables. These are:

The first hypothesis is that increased EU support for Ukraine will increase political cohesion among EU member states.



- In the literature, political cohesion is seen as a foundation of the EU where it acts. Helping Ukraine can be seen as a common goal. As such, political cohesion may be increased.

The second hypothesis is: that EU support for Ukraine will improve the EU's operational capabilities.

- Helping Ukraine may lead to more cooperation when it comes to the EU's operational capabilities. By having more cooperation, improvement in this area may follow.

The last hypothesis is: that EU support for Ukraine will stimulate the development of the EU's industrial base.

- Helping Ukraine with ammunition for example may increase the demand in the industry. This eventually may lead to increased production and R&D.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

This thesis uses two qualitative methods. The first method is semi-structured interviews with policymakers/ officials that may provide insight into the decision-making processes and motivations behind the EU's response. Dexter (1970) describes expert interviews as a technique in which experts are chosen based on their specific knowledge and involvement in the topic of interest. He argues that these interviews provide a way to obtain detailed, insider information that is often not directly observable or documented.

The second method is desk research. According to Moore in "How to Do Research, desk research is a method that can include both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Desk research is concerned with analysing data, including statistics, analytics, and literature, to deduce an in-depth understanding of the subject. Desk research is also known as document research. Ensuring that the sources are reliable and authoritative is important, as the quality of the data will define the results of the research (Moore, 2013). In this thesis, mostly literature review and document study will be part of the desk research. Desk research is often used to support primary research to fine-tune the scope of research and optimize resources. Desk research allows us to identify likelihoods, confirm previous findings and provide context. The keys which hold the answer to the research question lie in the keystones of strategic autonomy which are in this thesis the variables. The variables are political cohesion, operational capabilities, industrial equipment, and a mediating variable, which is Ukraine support. It requires a deductive approach where a theory is presented with a corresponding hypothesis (chapter 2) which will be analysed in Chapter 4.

### **3.2 Scope of the thesis**

In this thesis, the focus is set on the impact of Ukraine's support of strategic autonomy in the EU. The institutions relevant are mostly European institutions (EC, EDA, EEAS, NATO). This thesis examines the reports coming from these actors. As for the relevant member states, the scope of this study is narrowed down to the EU, France and The Netherlands, due to the availability of interview candidates. France is a big contributor to strategic autonomy in the EU (as stated in the interviews), and having a French perspective is of value in this thesis. What is missing is the viewpoint of the Baltic states, the southern member states and the UK (due to having security ties with the EU). The EU contributed to strategic autonomy by creating initiatives with member states and other actors. Initiatives for example are the European Defence Fund, PESCO and the strategic compass.

Furthermore, the focus is set on the western perspectives as earlier stated. This focus is set for (1) the lack of interview candidates, but more so because (2) the Dutch remain a rather neutral stance on strategic autonomy. Whereas the French have a protectionist viewpoint, the German remain pragmatic with the focus set on strategic autonomy with their allies (instead of clear independence). An assumption rises during the interviews that other member states, such as the Baltic states, have a different viewpoint. These member states may have a more deterministic perspective on strategic autonomy because war is geographically much closer than for example The Netherlands.

### **3.3 Data collection methods**

#### ***3.3.1 Interviews***

In this thesis, there have been expert interviews conducted. According to Bogner, Littig and Menz (2009), published a discussion of expert interviews, an expert is someone who has specific knowledge about a problem, development or event. It shows that expert interviews can

have a wide range of applications, including exploring a research topic, collecting data for qualitative and mixed methods, and generating quantitative data for statistical analysis.

In table 1 the experts are detailed with their function, the date of the interview as well as how the interview was taken place. The selection criteria are that participants need to have their expertise and experience relevant to strategic autonomy and our sub-variables. Our second method is content analysis of official documents (desk research) and articles that allow analysis of the EU's strategic choices and their alignment with strategic autonomy. By using these two methods, this thesis provides a deeper understanding of different factors shaping the EU's approach to the Ukraine war.

The contents of the interviews are used to delve deeper into the understanding of the strategic autonomy of the different interviewees, to gain information about the past efforts of strategic autonomy and to gain insights into the efforts and effects of the initiatives. This information is then used to determine the degree of influence of the variables. However, due to the lack of interview candidates, the information is hard to cross-examine. The interviews are coded and then the main themes will be deducted. In table 9 the codes used are summarized, these codes are the general codes used. In the second document that is provided with this thesis, the detailed coding is marked.

This thesis includes six interviews and one online questionnaire response. The first person interviewed is the CEO of an economic information firm. This person was chosen due to his expertise and knowledge in economic intelligence and war. The second person interviewed is a lawyer, ex-advisor of the French president and ex-pioneer of the European Defence Fund. The second person was chosen because the European Defence fund is a part of this thesis, and this person has insight knowledge of this initiative and the French perspective of Strategic Autonomy.

The third person is a high Dutch military representative in Brussels. This person was chosen because the interview may provide insights into strategic autonomy from a Dutch perspective. The fourth and fifth people are policy officers from the Netherlands who specialise in strategic autonomy and the project to rebuild Ukraine. These policy officers were chosen because they specialised in specific aspects of strategic autonomy. Whereas one specialises in “open strategic autonomy”, and the other in “rebuilding Ukraine”. The sixth person is an ex-colonel in Belgium, and due to availability, responded to the interview questionnaire online. The Belgian candidate was chosen due to his unique viewpoints towards strategic autonomy as he was also a pioneer of strategic autonomy in Europe. The seventh person is a military officer who holds information about bottlenecks in the EU.

**Table 1: Interview respondents**

<b>Interview</b>	<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Function Title</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Date</b>
Interview 1	Nicolas Zubinski	CEO OGMA intelligence	MS Teams	May 2024
Interview 2	Nicolas Ravailhe	Lawyer, engineer EU defence fund	MS Teams	May 2024
Online Questionnaire	Jean Marsia	Retired colonel, ex-pioneer of EU Defence Fund	Online	May 2024
Interview 3	(Anonymous)	High Dutch military representative in Brussels	WhatsApp	May 2024
Interview 4	Hidde-jan Buning	Policy officer Rebuild Ukraine, Ministry of Foreign Affairs	MS Teams	May 2024
Interview 5	Charlotte Huijskens	Policy Officer Strategic autonomy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs	MS Teams	May 2024

Interview 6	Frans de Vries	Military officer	Whatsapp	Juli 2024
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### 3.3.2 Desk research

A desk research will be employed in this thesis as earlier stated. The sources used are the EU, the Dutch government and think tanks. Table 2 shows the sources highlighted which are used in this thesis's desk research.

**Table 2: Sources of the desk research; see also the list of documents (last chapter)**

Source	Specified source
EU	Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) Council of the European Union European Commission European Defence Agency European External Action Service European Union European Union Institute for Security Studies European Council EPRS, European Parliamentary Research Service
The Dutch government	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken
Think Tanks & Others	The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies NATO

A point to make about the desk research is that the documents do partly indicate the consensus about strategic autonomy, but mostly give an elitist viewpoint on this subject. The part of the conceptual framework that addresses the document is mostly the second and third independent variables (industrial equipment variable and operational capabilities). The

interview candidates may give general insight on those variables but on specifics the document study provides the details. The interview candidates gave a strong insight into the first variable (political cohesion).

### **3.4 Data analysis method**

The data collected has to be analyzed in trying to test the hypotheses and answer the research question. How such analysis shall be done is explained in this section. First of all, one will go through the steps that will be involved during the analysis process, and then an operationalization table which will be used to analyze the data will be provided.

Analysis of the data collected will take place in four steps. The first step is to make a coding scheme that can be used to code the documents selected and interviews conducted. This coding scheme is based on the literature presented in chapter 2 and relates to the variables used in this study, it is found in table 9 (general codes). The second step is to use the coding scheme to code both the documents and transcripts of the interview. In the second document provided with this thesis, the document coding is found after each interview. The third step is a very practical one and involves gathering relevant coded passages from different sources together in one document and grouping them. The last step of the analysis is to compare the different coded passages brought together and draw conclusions from them that can be presented in chapter 4 of this study.

The operationalization purpose is to provide a guideline which can be used to consistently code the collected data on the indicators that can test the hypotheses and answer the research question. Therefore the indicators are linked to the variables used in the conceptualization of this study.

### 3.4.1 Strategic autonomy

In Chapter 2, Howorth (2019) highlighted that there are three elements of Strategic autonomy. The elements are the variables which are found in the figure in chapter two, namely: political cohesion, industrial equipment and operational capability. In table 3 the variable is operationalised.

**Table 3: Operationalisation strategic autonomy**

<b>High strategic autonomy</b>	<b>Medium strategic autonomy</b>	<b>Low strategic autonomy</b>
All of the criteria are met: 1) High political cohesion 2) High operational capabilities 3) Strong industrial equipment	Two of the criteria are met: 1) Medium political cohesion 2) Medium operational capabilities 3) Medium Industrial equipment	One or none of the criteria are met: 1) Low political cohesion 2) Low operational capabilities 3) Weak industrial equipment

### 3.4.2 Political cohesion

The second operationalisation of the sub-variables is found in table 4. In the literature (Howorth, 2019), part of political cohesion is grand strategy. This is the first element of political cohesion. The second element is unity of interests and the third element is unity in policy interpretations. For political cohesion, these three are the criteria and it is highlighted in table 4. If all of the criteria are met, that would mean a high degree of political cohesion. At least 2 would mean there is medium political cohesion, and no criteria met would mean there is low to no political cohesion.



**Table 4: Operationalisation of political cohesion**

<b>High political cohesion</b>	<b>Medium political cohesion</b>	<b>Low political cohesion</b>
All of the criteria are met: 1) Grand strategy 2) Unity in policy interpretations 3) Unity in interests	Two of the criteria are met: 1) Grand Strategy 2) Unity in policy interpretations 3) Unity in interests	One or none of the criteria are met: 1) No grand strategy 2) No unity in policy interpretations 3) No unity in interests

**3.4.3 Operational capabilities**

The third variable is operational capabilities. This variable is characterised by the creation of operational funds, R&D initiatives and military forces within the EU. Again, if three criteria are met, it would indicate that there is a high degree of operational capabilities in the EU. Medium operational capabilities if two are met and low to none if no criteria are met. It is operationalised in table 5.

**Table 5: Operationalisation operational capabilities**

<b>High operational capability</b>	<b>Medium operational capability</b>	<b>Low operational capability</b>
All of the criteria are met: 1) Creation of operational funds 2) Creation of R&D initiatives 3) Creation of military forces' capacity	Two of the following criteria are met: 1) Creations of operational funds 2) Creation of R&D initiatives 3) Creation of military forces' capacity	One or none of the criteria are met: 1) No creation of operational funds 2) No creation of R&D initiatives 3) No creation of military forces' capacity

### 3.4.4 Industrial equipment

The third dependent variable in this thesis is industrial equipment. This variable includes three elements. These are the initiation of R&D, advancements in member-state cooperation and lastly the production capacity in the union. Again, if three criteria are met, it would indicate that there is a strong industrial base in the EU. Medium industrial base if two are met and weak to none if no criteria are met. The variable is operationalised in table 6.

**Table 6: Operationalization of the variable industrial equipment**

<b>Strong industrial base</b>	<b>Medium industrial base</b>	<b>Weak industrial base</b>
All of the criteria are met: 1) The creation of R&D funds 2) Advancements in member states' cooperation 3) High Production capacity	Two of the criteria are met: 1) The creation of R&D funds 2) Advancements in member states' cooperation 3) Medium production capacity	One or none of the criteria are met: 1) No creation of R&D funds 2) No advancements in member states' cooperation 3) Low to no production capacity.

### 3.4.5 EU-Ukraine support

There is one mediating variable in this thesis, this is EU support. EU has three elements (at least, this thesis looks at these three elements to determine the degree of support given to Ukraine). These elements are military, diplomatic & political and economic support. The variable is operationalized in table 7 and in table 8 there is a detailed operationalization table.

**Table 7: Operationalization of the variable EU support**

<b>Strong EU-Ukraine support</b>	<b>Medium EU-Ukraine support</b>	<b>Low EU-Ukraine support</b>
<p>All of the criteria are met:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Military support</li> <li>2) Diplomatic &amp; political support</li> <li>3) Economic support</li> </ol>	<p>Two of the criteria are met:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Military support</li> <li>2) Diplomatic &amp; political support</li> <li>3) Economic support</li> </ol>	<p>One or none of the criteria are met:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) No military support</li> <li>2) No diplomatic &amp; political support</li> <li>3) No economic support</li> </ol>

**Table 8: Detailed operationalisation**

<b>Detailed operationalization</b>
<p>All of the criteria are met:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Military support</li> </ol> <p>Military support includes three types of elements with independent variables, these are political cohesion (common defence policies), operational capabilities (alliances, training programs) and industrial equipment (production capacity).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2) Diplomatic &amp; political support</li> </ol> <p>Diplomatic support includes three types of elements about the independent variables, these are political cohesion (united foreign policy), operational capabilities (effectiveness of missions) and lastly industrial equipment (Infrastructure support usage).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3) Economic support</li> </ol> <p>Diplomatic support includes three types of elements concerning the independent variables, these are political cohesion (financial solidarity), operational capabilities (effectiveness of economic aid) and lastly industrial equipment (technological development and resilience of production chains).</p>

**Table 9: coding scheme**

Theme	Codes
Political cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sovereignty and Autonomy</li> <li>• Policy and Influence</li> <li>• EU Policy and Relations</li> <li>• Policy Evolution and Context</li> <li>• Internal market rules</li> <li>• Geopolitical Context</li> <li>• National Interests and Policy</li> <li>• Challenges and Reconstruction</li> <li>• Political Perspective</li> </ul>
Operational capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic and Military Operations</li> <li>• Geopolitical Strategy</li> <li>• Defence and Security</li> <li>• Strategic Influence and Policy Challenges</li> <li>• Support and Influence</li> <li>• Defence and Collaboration:</li> <li>• Dependencies and Preparedness:</li> </ul>
Industrial equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economics and Markets</li> <li>• Energy and Dependencies</li> <li>• Economic Considerations and Dependencies</li> <li>• Economic and Production Considerations</li> </ul>

Theme	Codes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic and Strategic Focus</li> <li>• Collaboration and Unity</li> </ul>

### 3.5 Validity and reliability

This thesis uses two methods to research the relationship between EU strategic autonomy and EU support. It will help to increase the validity and reliability of this thesis. With the interviews, this thesis aims to gain insight into the political cohesion in the EU that cannot be gained from content analysis. Content analysis offers context about policy making and certain impacts of those policies. By triangulating findings, a complex picture can be made. However, access to high-rank officials for interviews on military topics is not easy. Moreover, there is a limitation in this thesis, and that is that strategic autonomy is a process whereas the Ukraine war only has so much impact. Lastly, the number of conducted interviews may influence the credibility of this thesis since there will only be six of them.

Operational definitions increase internal validity since, in this way, variables can be measured consistently. The external validity deals with representativity and generalizability. This research will currently be done as desk research together with expert interviews. This thesis needs to concede that, due to a lack of interview candidates and thus associated missing viewpoints, the external validity of the research may be affected.

As for the reliability of this thesis, by conducting semi-structured interviews and document analysis from trusted sources, the internal reliability is positive. The external reliability is about, if another researcher uses the same methods and analysis, would this researcher replicate the conclusion? By using multiple methods to determine strategic autonomy, the reliability of this research underscores positively on the results of this thesis.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1 Independent variables

#### 4.1.1 *Political cohesion*

##### 4.1.1.1 **Grand Strategy.**

The EU has adopted multiple initiatives that involve a strategy to enhance strategic autonomy. The European Union's Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) formed the first grand strategy that was introduced in 2016. The EUGS was introduced by Federica Mogherini (ex-high representative for the EU). It represents the efforts to create a vision for the EU's role in the international sphere. The EUGS was created because of geopolitical competition, security challenges and threats like terrorism and climate change (European Union External Action, 2016).

The EUGS has several objectives and themes that underline the approach of the union concerning foreign and security policy. For this topic, the focus is set on grand strategy. The strategy outlined in the EUGS is about building partnerships (European Union External Action, 2016), increasing strategic autonomy with partnerships and advocating global governance to promote the EU's values and interests in the world (European Union External Action, 2016).

Furthermore, the strategic compass outlines a future vision (and therefore grand strategy) of the EU designed to guide the security and defence policies. The strategic compass was adopted in March 2022 and it aims to enhance strategic autonomy by providing directions in security and defence matters. The strategic compass has four elements. Act (increase the readiness of crisis management operations), secure (strengthen the EU's ability to protect its citizens and infrastructure), invest (fostering defence investments to reduce dependencies) and partner (to address global challenges) (Council of the European Union, 2022a; EPRS et. Al,

2023). France is a producing nation, where there is more emphasis on the self-creating ability to produce a product (appendix E, Appendix D).

#### **4.1.1.2 Policy Interpretations.**

As stated in the second interview, to achieve strategic autonomy, there are three requirements. 1) To have R&D, 2) to be able to create a product and 3) to buy and use the product (Appendix C). The influencing factors that move strategic autonomy are, for example, the interests of member states. Interview candidates also state that there is a difference of interests between the member states, causing a non-autonomous EU (Appendix B). These interests differ in weapon programs (for example: French fighter jets vs F35 program), energy programs (French nuclear energy program vs Germany's reliance on Gazprom) and legislative progress (the ability to build a weapon factory vs reliance on external sources).

One respondent noted that “the progress towards strategic autonomy made by the EU in its support for Ukraine will remain marginal as long as the Member States do not federate. A European federal state could have an army, but an association of states cannot, because states have a monopoly on the legitimate use of armed force “ (Appendix I). The system of the EU is currently not able to work autonomously and therefore strategic autonomy cannot be achieved for the time being. However, a couple of respondents indicate that the EU may be autonomous in a couple of decades, after creating unanimous weapon programs, bridging the difference of interests and creating a new legislative binding war hand vest (Appendix D).

There are three pillars for open strategic autonomy, which is an economic perspective rather than a military perspective (Appendix E). The first pillar is to enhance the political and economic foundation. This pillar is about the internal market with a strong competitiveness condition where nations can trade with positive welfare effects. The second pillar is the reduction of risky strategic dependencies. Not every dependency is a strategic dependency

which means that it does not have to be reduced or replaced. The third pillar is about strengthening the Union's geopolitical capacity to act. This pillar includes the creation of the strategic compass, but also strengthening ties with other nations and the ability to act towards conflict (Appendix E)

Member states have different perspectives as earlier mentioned. The EU sees strategic autonomy as not being overly reliant on external partners, the Netherlands sees strategic autonomy to safeguard strategic interests while maintaining trading ties. A scope would be put on the Eastern European countries, where there is a more military focus on strategic autonomy (Appendix D; p3, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2022),

The Dutch government has a different definition of strategic autonomy than other member states. Whereas other member states define strategic autonomy as the ability to either produce, buy and share a product within the union, The Netherlands define strategic autonomy as “its ability as a global player, in collaboration with international partners, to safeguard its public interests based on its own decisions and choices and to be resilient in a separate connected world” (p.3; Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2022). The aim of strategic autonomy is for the Netherlands not necessarily to be independent, but to safeguard interests and remain open to trade, as the Netherlands is a trading nation. This definition is relevant because when we look at strategic autonomy from a European perspective, it is more about not being overly reliant on external partners for military, political or strategic purposes (Erlanger, 2020).

There are also challenges to (open) strategic autonomy. As first and foremost the price of strategic autonomy is high. The creation and delving of necessary elements that are required to achieve this goal, the price would be enormous. In that sense, the interview participants see that it is not possible to be fully autonomous, also no need to (there are no criteria for autonomy



defined), but more so that in some areas independence is good to have (Appendix D). Another challenge is environmental standards. The creation of mines would clash with existing environmental regulations that the EU upholds. The last remaining challenge is that while possibly achieving strategic autonomy may be perceived as good, it remains a challenge to not overly turn inwards while being autonomous and remaining a trade partner. Upcoming challenges would be to maintain balance in reaction to the crisis. There is a lot of reflex action when it comes to crisis but a remaining challenge is to maintain balance and keep investing in growth capacity (Appendix F/D; Akgüç & European Trade Union Institute (ETUI), 2021; European Forum, 2023).

#### **4.1.1.3 Unity of interests.**

One element of political cohesion is to have a unity of interests in the union. This is where influence policy comes into play. Influence policy is characterized by an active policy that is meant to influence other entities, whether it is a different nation, an alliance or a union. The nature of interest perception is neutral and is biased by culture, personal perspectives and beliefs (Appendix B). The complexity of influence dynamics requires distance between positions from stakeholders. Strategic autonomy is the process where stakeholders identify their dependencies and interdependencies to determine critical or strategic matters, removing the logic of sovereignty in the debate (Appendix B; Valero, 2020).

Strategic autonomy goes beyond national security and defence matters, such as policies related to countering terrorism, and criminality, Analyzing public affairs in the EU involves economic intelligence, which focuses on collecting and analyzing information to understand the influences and strategies used between stakeholders. The EU's approach to strategic autonomy differs from federal states like the US, as it navigates the intersection between economic interests, liberties, fundamental rights, and energy sectors(Appendix B, C; European Commission, 2024; Valero, 2020).

The strategy of the EU has changed in the last decennia. The narrative put out by Ukraine has influenced change. A change different from the collective response that is crucial to demonstrate strength to Russia. The change lies in the alliances the EU has formed. Another change has occurred in the energy market, where member states gave up their initial interests to stand with Ukraine. Furthermore, influence policy is mainly about the balance of dependencies and interdependencies among member states to strengthen their cooperation and sovereignty, and in turn, enhance political cohesion. (Appendix B; Valero, 20202).

The requirements of strategic autonomy highlighted by the interviewee (stated in chapter 4.1.1) are not met. This has to do with multiple factors. The influencing factors that move strategic autonomy are, for example, the interests of member states (Valero, 2020). The interview candidates also state that there is a difference of interests between the member states, causing a non-autonomous EU. These interests differ in weapon programs (for example: French fighter jets vs F35 program), energy programs (French nuclear energy program vs Germany's reliance on Gazprom) and legislative progress (the ability to build a weapon factory vs reliance on external sources) (Appendix B/C/D/I).

The pursuit of strategic autonomy is influenced by internal factors, such as the interests of the member states, roles of the institutions and specific interests in, for example, energy, military and politics. The most prominent 'internal factor' is the member states interests. Each member state has its priorities in, for example, geopolitics, economics or energy. As stated in the interviews, energy was a very strong interest in this war for Ukraine and Hungary as well as Germany (Nordstrom gas line), while more Western member states were advocating for independence from Russia. European institutions are playing pivotal roles in coordinating and implementing policies and military support (as highlighted in Chapter 4.2). Most notable are the energy interests, given the EU's reliance on Russian energy supplies (European Economic and Social Committee, 2024); Flanagan & Retter, 2021; Franke & Varma, 2023).

Lastly, the EU's support for Ukraine is driven by the need to uphold international law and European values like sovereignty and territorial integrity while also supporting Ukraine's alignment with the EU's long-term goals, such as expansion and integration. In conclusion, the EU's strategic autonomy in supporting Ukraine is influenced by internal factors. All these factors mentioned above contribute to shaping the EU's actions, it is determined by the extent and nature of the support. Which in itself reflects a strategic objective of the EU, maintaining European values and influence on the global stage (Appendix B.; Tenev, 2024)

The pursuit of strategic autonomy is also influenced by external factors, these include policies from major actors, such as the US, China and Russia. The US has been a key player in shaping the EU's response, providing aid to Ukraine which has been crucial in Ukraine's defence. However, the US also has been playing a key actor in the coordination of international efforts in support of sanctions and the EU's development of those. Russia also has been the major driver in the EU's choices in the Ukraine war. The invasion in itself led to a shift in the EU's approach to its security policies. China also had an impact on EU policy. The union aimed to strengthen its ties with China, however, the war has made the EU more aware of the potential risks and challenges this particular relationship has. In a broader geopolitical context, the EU's choices and the war highlighted the importance of stability in the region, and that the EU needs to develop a more robust policy framework (Appendix B; Tenev, 2024).

#### **4.1.1.4 Sub-conclusion political cohesion.**

In Table 4 chapter 3 the operationalisation of cohesion is set. In 4.1.1 grand strategy, interests policy and policy interpretations have been delved into. Across the data from the interviews and from the documents, there is a focus on the EU's need to be autonomous. Both document research highlights geopolitical events (like the Ukraine war) that stress the importance of strategic autonomy. Moreover, both the interview data and the document study state that unity is important for the EU. Initiatives to underscore the need for unity such as the

strategic compass are present. Furthermore, both in the document study and in the interviews, the EU's aspiration to be a geopolitical player comes to the front. It is reinforced by the EU's efforts to assert its role in specific regions and through initiatives like the strategic compass. Lastly, the relationship between the EU and NATO is one important element in this theme (political cohesion). Strategic autonomy focuses on independence, but a balance between different partners (like NATO) is needed.

The EU has set a grand strategy which is seen by the strategic compass and the EUGS. This criterion has been met because for a grand strategy, there is one present and there eventually is enough matter that resembles a strategy. For unity in policy interpretations, multiple member states have different interpretations of strategic autonomy therefore this criterion has not been met. An example of this specific criteria is that the Netherlands has a different interpretation of strategic autonomy than the EU. Lastly, unity in interests. Multiple member states have different interests concerning strategic autonomy. An example is that multiple member states have different weapon systems and buy from external sources, and each supplier is different from each others and not home-made. Therefore this criteria also has not been met. In conclusion, the degree of political cohesion in the union is formulated as "low political cohesion", because only one out of the three criteria is met. In table 10 the initiatives and other topics talked about in 4.1.1 political cohesion are summarised.

**Table 10: Summary of Political Cohesion**

Topic	Details
<b>Grand Strategy</b>	<b>EUGS:</b> Adopted in 2016, it sets the vision of the role of the EU in the world.
	<b>Strategic Compass:</b> Introduced in March 2022. Guides security and defence policies in the EU

Topic	Details
<b>Policy Interpretations</b>	<b>Dutch Government:</b> Strategic autonomy implies safeguarding public interest through global collaboration.
	<b>EU Perspective:</b> Lessening the Union's dependency on partners for military, political, or strategic objectives
	<b>Challenges:</b> high costs, environmental standards, keeping trade partnerships, and crisis responses
<b>Unity of Interests</b>	<b>Influence Policy:</b> Strategic sovereignty are important while removing dependencies and interdependencies. It is driven by member state interests and political dynamics.
	<b>Federal State vs. Association of States:</b> Achieving strategic autonomy is hard to achieve without a federal state structure.
<b>Economic vs. Military Focus</b>	<b>Three Pillars of Open Strategic Autonomy:</b> Strengthen the political and economic basis, reduce risky dependencies, and strengthen geopolitical capacity for action.
	<b>Different Member State Perspectives:</b> The EU's concentration on the reduction of external dependence, vis-à-vis interests that the Netherlands wishes to protect and maintain in terms of trade.
<b>Challenges to Strategic Autonomy</b>	<b>High Costs:</b> Enormous investment to be made for strategic autonomy.
	<b>Environmental Standards:</b> Conflicts with necessary infrastructure developments like mining
	<b>Balancing Autonomy and Trade:</b> Holding partnerships while achieving autonomy.
<b>Influence of External Factors</b>	<b>US, China, and Russia:</b> The external policies and geopolitics of these actors affect the EU's strategic autonomy in the light of the war in Ukraine.

## ***4.1.2 Operational capabilities***

### **4.1.2.1 Operational funds.**

The operational funds specified in this paragraph are PESCO, MPCC and the strategic compass. Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) is a policy framework of the European Union which aims to strengthen defence cooperation in the EU with a higher commitment level.

PESCO was established on 11 December 2017 within the Common Security and Defence Policy by Council Decision (CFSP) 2017/2315. The first aim of PESCO is to enhance defence capabilities. This aim is achieved through projects and raising the level of ambition and operational readiness of the military. To enhance the defence capabilities is to deepen the defence cooperation and have more budget. By having more budget and commitments PESCO aims to increase the operational capabilities of the EU (which in turn affects the strategic autonomy of the EU). One last aim is the commitment to higher criteria. The member states that participate have binding commitments (Council of the European Union, 2017).

Out of every other member state in the EU, there are only two member states that are not a member of PESCO. The aims are broad and go through R&D, training, or supportive initiatives. The impact of PESCO represents also integration. However, there are also challenges to PESCO. The two major challenges are to ensure that the commitment is followed through by the member states and that the initiatives do not duplicate NATO (Council of the European Union, 2017; Retter, et. al, 2021).

Furthermore, PESCO aims to deepen cooperation between member states through differentiated integration between member states, which in turn are linked to political or strategic needs. This initiative has internal and external differentiation. Internal differentiation explains the variation in commitment (and capabilities), whereas external differentiation is about cooperation with non-EU countries and organisations. Either way, PESCO has some

challenges when it comes to its implementation. There is a need for improved governance structures to manage differentiated integration (whereas now it does not exist). Moreover, there needs to more commitment from the member states in these projects (Appendix C; Martill & Gebhard, 2022).

#### **4.1.2.2 R&D initiatives**

The EU has adopted multiple initiatives that enhance R&D, this paragraph focuses on the EDF, EDAP and the EDRP aside from the literature, as these initiatives have the most direct impact on R&D, while other initiatives mainly include funds for other purposes.

The goal of military R&D is to achieve technological sovereignty and to maintain these technologies within the EU. The first initiative discussed in this paragraph is the EDF. It is an initiative by the EU which aims to create R&D. The EDF represents a commitment to enhancing the competitiveness and innovation of the industry. The EDF has several objectives. The first one is to support collaborative defence projects. By having funds to invest in projects the EDF aims to encourage cooperation. The second one is about reducing the fragmentation of defence spending. By pooling resources, it ensures that funds are efficiently used and it strengthens the EU's industry base eventually. The fund is designed to give a boost to EU innovation and the competitiveness of the sector (European Commission, n.d.).

Lastly, the focus of this fund is to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and cross-border projects. The EDF has a budget of 8 billion euros for 2021-2027 (European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, 2021). The EDF is expected to have an impact, but it also has challenges. The main challenge is the same with the PESCO fund, the commitment of the member states needs to be sustained. Another challenge would be that national priorities align with the program for example (European Commission, n.d.).

There are previous programs about the EDF. Preparatory Action on Defence Research and the European Defence Industrial Development Programme. The focus of PADR was on financing research programs to create a way for the implementation of the EDF. EDIDP aimed to co-finance projects and R&D. Further, challenges have appeared concerning EDF and its forerunners. There was market fragmentation, different national standards (Appendix I) and processes made integration difficult. Coordination is lacking between member states and industries, whereas their influence remains significant. Lastly, there are budget constraints when it comes to the EDF (Appendix C; Giumelli & Marx, 2023). Giumelli & Marx (2023) also make some recommendations to increase the effectiveness of the EDF. These are to increase the budget of the EDF, harmonize standards and processes of member states and improve government structures for better coordination and implementation.

The European Defence Action Plan (EDAP) was introduced by the European Commission in 2016 as an initiative to support the European defence industry. This plan, again, falls under the effort at improving strategic autonomy for the EU, more specifically via CSDP. The EDAP is structured around a couple of components and objectives. These are meant to help the EU single market for this sector. When the efficiency of the market sector is improved, fragmentation is lessened, mostly around SMEs. The EDF was established under this defence plan. It also has the same purposes as the fund, only the EDAP provides a vision by addressing the inefficiencies in spending of the EU member states (European Commission, 2016).

Moreover, the participation of the European Commission in R&D is new to represent a deeper integration within the EU. However, it aimed to reduce dependence on non-EU technology and military capabilities. Hartley (2017) states that military R&D has a positive impact on the economy, in terms of job creation, spillovers from technology, and growth of the defence industry. Moreover, it fits the trend whereby the EU is slowly militarized, shifting the EU towards a security nation. EDRP is perceived, on the last point, as a mechanism for



integration in EU defence. It serves the goal of the EU to become a strong global actor (Appendix D).

In Meijer and Brooks (2021), the authors discuss potential implications if the US backs away from supporting the EU. Relevant to the R&D side is that the lack of cohesion limits the EU's ability to create an R&D strategy. Each country has different interests (as seen in the political cohesion chapter), and it spills over to R&D. It eventually leads to fragmented efforts that negatively impact the EU's defence potential. Moreover, the authors highlight that there are gaps in the EU's military capability, which in turn are bigger through insufficient investments in R&D. Gap closing would require consistent funding. It highlights the need for investments through the EU to increase operational capabilities. Despite the attempts to create strategic autonomy, the authors indicate that the EU remains reliant on the U.S. for military technology and R&D.

#### **4.1.2.3 Military capacity**

The EU has multiple initiatives concerning creating military force capacity. However, there is no EU military force. This paragraph is mostly about the initiatives taken to enhance defence capacities. The initiatives most relevant are CARD, MPCC and the strategic compass. Coordinated annual review of defence (CARD) identifies areas of agreement to guide collaboration between member states. It may eventually lead to capability development in procedures and military planning cycles (CARD, n.d.). The MPCC (the Military Planning and Conduct Capability) is created to enable the EU to react faster and more effectively to security threats. It will plan and conduct non-executive military missions of the EU. Moreover, it needs a single commando facility for the coordination of those operations. Lastly, the strategic compass. This is a strategy which provides a vision for the safety and defence of the EU. It has multiple elements, whereas for this paragraph the focus is set on capacity development. The compass sets the goals for the creation of a small reaction force (Card, n.d.).

Moreover, in response to the Ukraine war, in the EU there has been increased defence spending and production of military equipment. An increase in production in turn strengthened the EU's military stockpiles. The conflict demanded coordination and integration in the EU, and multiple initiatives (highlighted in 4.1.3, among other initiatives) created joint development of military technologies. Furthermore, the support also indicated that there is a demand for newer military technologies and because of the increase in demand due to the war, more innovations have been created (Defence Industry Europe, 2024b; Wilson Center, n.d.)

#### **4.1.2.4 Sub-conclusion operational capabilities.**

Table 5 in Chapter 3 highlights the criteria of high medium or low operational capabilities of an entity. In chapter 4.1.2 the elements of the current EU were discussed. There was eventually a creation of operational funds as well as the creation of R&D initiatives. PESCO, MPCC, EDA, EDAP, the strategic compass and the EDF, all initiatives influence the funds, R&D and the military capacity of the EU. However, there were only plans for the creation of military forces yet no military forces were present. Lastly, the Ukraine war does influence the EU to increase its operational capabilities, as the Ukraine war demands it, the initiatives lack some aspects to have the impact of its potential.

The challenges remain, there is still market fragmentation, there are still different national standards when it comes to operational capacities of the member states and there are budget restraints when it comes to the initiatives which in turn hinder the effectiveness of the initiatives. . Furthermore, the EU remains reliant on the U.S. as Meijer and Brooks (2021) argue. There were gaps in the EU's military capacity and to close those gaps there is an increase in coordinated investments (among other strategies to close the gaps). Despite the attempts to create autonomy, the authors indicate that the EU remains reliant on the U.S. for military technology and R&D.

The three dimensions when it comes to the operational capabilities of the EU. These are operational funds, R&D initiatives and military forces capacity. Operational funds are present (yet lack budget), there are R&D initiatives (yet also lack budget) and there are no military forces present. In conclusion, the operational capabilities of the EU are set on medium to low. In table 11 the operational capabilities and the initiatives mentioned in 4.1.2 are summarized.

**Table 11: Summary of operational capabilities**

Topic	Details
<b>Operational Funds</b>	<b>PESCO:</b> established in 2017 for increased defence capabilities through collaborative projects, raising operational readiness, and strategic autonomy. The challenge remains as to how to make the members commit to it and keep free from duplication with NATO.
<b>R&amp;D Initiatives</b>	<b>EDF:</b> focusing on defence research and development underpinning collaborative projects that help reduce fragmentation of defence spending, boost innovation, and be competitive with the following challenges: how to be certain of member state participation, be clear on national priorities (as they are different), and how to best integrate the outcomes.
	<b>EDAP:</b> Launched in 2016 to support the European Defence Industry by enhancing the single market and especially by reducing fragmentation for SMEs. Challenges: Integration is hampered by the fragmentation of markets and by different national standards.
<b>Military Capacity</b>	<b>CARD:</b> Establish areas of consensus as lead for cooperation and capability development. <b>MPCC:</b> Design and conduct the EU's non-executive military missions to enhance fast response to security challenges. <b>Strategic Compass:</b> Give the vision on security and defence; it will establish the targets for the creation of a small response force.
<b>Impact of Ukraine War</b>	Higher expenditure in defence and production of military equipment- therefore helping to reinforce the EU's armed forces. Request for new military technologies and innovations in the wake of the war.

Topic	Details
<b>Challenges to Operational Capabilities</b>	<b>Market Fragmentation:</b> Different national standards and procedures of the member states. <b>Budget Constraints:</b> Inadequate funding for projects such as PESCO and EDF. <b>Dependency on the U.S.:</b> Remaining dependent on U.S. military technology and R&D.

### 4.1.3 Industrial equipment

#### 4.1.3.1 R&D, Cooperation and production capacity.

Two initiatives have an impact on R&D in the EU. These are the EDF and the EDA. Giumelli & Marx (2023) state that the EDA has an important role in the coordination of R&D in the EU. It aims to increase the standardization and interoperability of defence equipment. This initiative aims to improve the industrial base and the efficiency and effectiveness of defence production in the EU.

The EDF is important in enhancing the production capacity by funding R&D. It aims to increase the production capacity by providing support in R&D and other projects. The funds aim to close the gaps between capabilities and innovation in the EU (Giumelli & Marx, 2023). Retter et al. (2021) state that the role of the EDF is to enhance strategic autonomy by supporting R&D. The main emphasis is on collaboration and innovation in the EU defence industry.

PESCO is one main point of cooperation, it aims to enhance defence capacity by cooperation with a range of projects. Furthermore, the EDF helps with the production, and purchase of new systems. The EPF (European Peace Facility) stimulates the demand for advanced technology by cooperation, creating opportunities to increase production capacity. Martill and Gebhard (2022) state that this initiative aims at fostering cooperation, yet seeks to enhance production. It is expected that this initiative will streamline production. Which in turn leads to a reduction in costs and the avoidance of duplication of efforts. Furthermore, Fiott

(2018) states that this initiative also aims to enhance the industrial base and to ensure that member states can produce weapon technologies efficiently.

The European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) represents the efforts to create a vision for the EU's role in the international sphere. The EUGS was created because of geopolitical competition, security challenges and threats like terrorism and climate change.

The EUGS has several objectives and themes and underlines the approach of the union concerning foreign and security policy. The first area is the emphasis on the EU's security. It advocates for the development of integrated approaches and enhancing the EU's resilience by building partnerships (European Union External Action, 2016). The second pillar is about strategic autonomy. The EU's strategy has a goal to increase its strategic autonomy with said partnerships (NATO and other allies). The third pillar is global governance. The EUGS adopts a multilateralism approach. It calls for reform to serve better the addressing of challenges globally. The fourth pillar deals with regional orders. Regional orders acknowledge the requirement of investment in the stability of the neighbourhood regions. The last pillar of the EUGS solicits diplomatic action in promoting the union's values and interests in the global arena (European Union External Action, 2016).

Indeed, the strategy focuses on the need, like many other initiatives, for greater cooperation in the EU. It engages in R&D, industrial production, and programmes. Furthermore, some of the strategic objectives of EUGS include reducing dependence on suppliers from outside the EU. The strategy has been created to redirect demands towards EU suppliers. It also aims to maintain security in status concerning supplies. Nevertheless, there are similar challenges relating to production. The existing capacities are not enough to meet its demand within the required time. For R&D, the EUGS claims to make the EU competitive in the global defence market where the focus on innovation may create positive spillover effects

(Tocci, 2017). Lastly, The EUGS focuses on streamlining existing policies to avoid overlaps and improve coordination. With the European Commission's involvement in the defence market, it is expected that there will be an efficient defence framework created (European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2018).

The EUGS has influenced the EU's approach to all aspects of foreign policy. However, the EUGS also has some critique points. The main critical points of the EUGS are coherence and unity or rather lack thereof. As determined earlier in this thesis, the political cohesion in the EU is rather low. With a spillover effect, the member states national policies must align while maintaining unity on foreign policy. It remains a challenge. Moreover, sufficient funding and resources are another challenge. As mentioned in interview 2 (Appendix C), the budget for the EDF is not enough and likely that is with other initiatives. Implementation of policies (almost the same as interpretation of policies), remains different among member states due to their difference of interests and capacities. Lastly, with these challenges, there is a negative spillover to the adaptation to global dynamics (Tocci, 2017).

#### **4.1.3.2 The Connectivity Strategy**

The EU has recognized that cybersecurity and digital policies are part of strategic autonomy. The connectivity strategy is one key element of the basis of the industry. The initiatives of the EU are the Cybersecurity Strategy for the Digital Decade (European Commission, 2020a), The Network and Information Systems (NIS) Directive, 2016 (European Union, 2016b), The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (European Union, 2016a), The Cybersecurity Act, 2019 (European Union, 2019) and the Digital Services Act / Digital Market Act 20202 (DSA)(European Commission, 2020b). The first one highlights the vision the EU has to ensure safe internet access following EU values. It highlights that there should be an operational capacity built to prevent, deter and respond to cyber threats (European Commission, 2020a). The NIS is the first legislation that is EU-wide in the area of

cybersecurity. It mandates operators to take security measures and report incidents (European Union, 2016b)

The GDPR is a data protection tool, with cybersecurity implications as it requires organisations to implement measures to protect personal data when incidents occur (European Union 2016b). The Cybersecurity Act provides for the certification of products and reinforces ENISA, which is the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity. Ultimately, the DSA and DMA were proposed in 2020 to establish a digital space where the rights of users are put first and a level playing field is established among market participants (European Commission, 2020b).

The European Union's Connectivity Strategy, known as the Global Gateway, represents an initiative aimed at enhancing global connections across a range of sectors. Launched in December 2021, the Global Gateway strategy outlines the EU's vision for boosting sustainable, comprehensive, and secure connections worldwide, positioning the EU as an important actor in the international sphere. It has several objectives, namely to promote sustainable and high-quality infrastructure, enhance digital connectivity, improve energy connections, develop transport corridors and lastly strengthen R&D. The Connectivity strategy has the EU's commitment to mobilize up to 300 billion euros in the period 2021-2027. The main challenge (and success) of this initiative is set on the mobilization of funds and partnerships with third countries (European Commission, 2021).

#### **4.1.3.3 Defence production and industrial cooperation**

The EU has increased its defence production to support Ukraine. Initiatives like the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP) and the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) provide increased production in the EU. For its part, the EU has promised to deliver, among other things, ammunition to Ukraine. Which in turn led to an increase in demand for

ammunition. Furthermore, The EU created closer ties with the member states concerning the defence sector. The collaboration has been encouraged by the initiative European Defence Industrial Program (EDIP), which in itself led to the joint development of technologies. Moreover, the funds in this program were used to increase competitiveness in this sector, leading to a stable supply of defence equipment (Defence Industry Europe, 2024; European Union, n.d.; Wilson Center, n.d.).

Moreover, the EU Defence Innovation Scheme (EUDIS) has been set by the EDF to enhance innovation. It provides the tools for SMEs and other types of actors to provide chances and access to the EU programs. Furthermore, the aim is to create competition and therefore enable more innovation (European Union, n.d.). Further aims for the EU in this industry are to provide a positive impact on the sector in terms of job creation. Investments provide the opportunity for technological advancements in time. (European Commission, 2024). Despite the efforts, challenges remain in this industry. Supply chain vulnerabilities are the primary challenge. Wolf (2024) states that the EU's strategy is to increase industry production while also reducing reliance on external partners. However, the current EU production capacities do not meet the demand (for example on ammunition). This point likely remains for the time being. Another point is that there are regulatory blockages. Strict laws on various topics (environmental, safety, treaties etc.) delay and increase the costs of production.

#### **4.1.3.4 Sub-conclusion industrial equipment**

Table 6 in Chapter 3 states that three elements indicate the variable industrial equipment. The first one is the creation of R&D funds. In 4.1.3 the EDA's and the EDF's influence on R&D has been highlighted as well as cooperation under PESCO. Initiatives that are implemented have been fruitful in different ways. PESCO's main point was cooperation while increasing the defence capacity with projects. The EDF helps with funding, for projects, productions and innovation. The EDF stimulated demand for advanced cooperation. The



connectivity strategy aims to be a baseline for the EU (as it influences the industry as well). Furthermore, the EUGS was introduced. It represents a vision which also includes steps for R&D and other relevant parts of this industry. The strategy is built to redirect the demands to EU suppliers, it also intends to make the EU maintain its security status in terms of supplies.

However, the EU also faces challenges. The production capacity of the EU is estimated to not meet its demand (especially in terms of ammunition for example). Another challenge is supply chain vulnerabilities in the world, which can disrupt EU production. The literature (and interviews) states that there are certain hurdles when it comes to the EU defence industry. There are budget constraints, low political cohesion (which in turn lead to lowered commitment of member states to projects) and a difference in member states' capacity which all influence the EU's adaptation to global security threats. All in all, it concludes that the EU does have an emerging industrial base which this thesis will characterise as medium (Medium industrial equipment as per operationalisation in Chapter 3). In Table 12 the industrial equipment initiatives (4.1.3) are summarized.

**Table 12: Summary of industrial equipment**

Topic	Details
<b>R&amp;D, Cooperation, and Production Capacity</b>	<b>EDF:</b> R&D and other project financing increase production capacity, enabling more innovation and closing gaps in capabilities; <b>EDA:</b> coordinates R&D, standardization, and interoperability of defence equipment; <b>PESCO:</b> cooperative projects enhance defence capacity, stimulate demand for advanced technology, and increase production.
<b>Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS)</b>	Introduced in 2016, the <b>EUGS</b> focuses on enhancing the EU's security, strategic autonomy, global governance, regional stability, and promoting EU values globally <b>Challenges:</b> coherence and unity among member states, sufficient funding, and proper implementation of policies.

<b>The Connectivity Strategy</b>	<b>Cybersecurity and Digital Policies:</b> This is a set of initiatives in the fields of the Cybersecurity Strategy for the Digital Decade, NIS Directive, GDPR, Cybersecurity Act, and Digital Services/Market Act. Objectives are to ensure safe internet access, counter cyber threats, and act on levelling the playing field in the digital market. <b>Global Gateway:</b> Improvement in global connections through infrastructure, digital, energy, transport, education, etc., using a budget of 300 billion euros.
<b>Defence Production and Industrial Cooperation</b>	- <b>Increased Defence Production:</b> ASAP and EDIS increase production and turnover in Ukraine by helping to develop technologies and competitiveness in the defence sector. <b>EU Defence Innovation Scheme (EUDIS):</b> Provides tools for innovation that further stimulates competition to SMEs. Challenges: Supply chain vulnerabilities and regulatory blockages delay and raise the costs of production.

## 4.2 Mediating Variable: EU-Ukraine support

### 4.2.1 Military support

The EU has a couple of dimensions of military and defensive support towards Ukraine. The first thing the EU did was to create the European Peace Facility (EPF). This fund was designed to increase the EU's ability to prevent conflict and build peace. Through the EPF, the EU has provided funding for military equipment to Ukraine (Council of the European Union, 2022b). The EU also committed to providing training missions to Ukrainian armed forces. It enhances military mobility and reinforces defence efforts. Last but not least, the EU recognizes the importance of cyber threats so the EU also aims to support Ukraine in expertise, technology and resources (Council of the European Union, 2022c).

As indicated, the EU provided emergency aid to support the people with basic human needs (European Commission 2022c). In light of displacement because of the war, the EU provided also financial support to host countries. There has been a mechanism activated, the EU civil protection mechanism. It aims to coordinate and finance assistance funds flowing to

East Europe. The Temporary Protection mechanism is to grant immediate protection to refugees from Ukraine. It gave residence rights, access to the labour market and other societal services (European Commission, 2022b).

In paragraph 4.1 there was a distinction made between different types of strategic autonomy, in this paragraph, we include a new part to the support towards Ukraine and its impact towards strategic autonomy. The EU supports Ukraine also with the reconstruction of the nation after the war. In this instance, the Dutch government aids Ukraine with Agriculture, Healthcare and water. Strategic autonomy also includes innovation and more importantly, protection of said innovation (Appendix F). Investment in Ukraine has its benefits and possible chances for upcoming businesses in and outside of Ukraine. Currently, Ukraine is still at war, but it has potential for Agriculture businesses due to the big farm areas Ukraine possesses. Aside from Agriculture, Ukraine also has a unique position with the harbour of Odesa and strategically is a point between east and west, therefore in the long term there is a good perspective for Ukraine (Appendix F).

The word strategic autonomy is not something that is being used in policy areas when it comes to Ukraine, because currently, the aim for Ukraine is to reform it into an economically stable nation. Ukraine may have an impact towards EU strategic autonomy when it is in the future, but that is not a current discussion. Currently, the aims towards Ukraine are more highlighted on the political aspects instead. There are also challenges, like insurance. But also opportunities for Ukraine. Ukraine has a high corruption rate but shows a steady decline in corruption. The harmonisation of EU laws and regulations in Ukraine is another hurdle for Ukraine when it aims to be a member state in the future (Appendix F).

One major point in agriculture is the difference in regulation between Ukraine and EU member states, grain is here an example, whereas grain in Ukraine is very cheap while in the

EU the price is higher (Appendix F). This is an example of different interests in policy. While support for Ukraine and its reconstruction after the war has great support from the member states, conflicts may arise when Ukraine starts entrance procedures with the EU and member states where different member state sensitivities may be exposed. EU Support for Ukraine is also in the form of finance, the continuation of government personnel salaries and keeping the economy from collapsing. There are 50 Billion euros present in this fund (Appendix F).

#### ***4.2.2 Political efforts and economic efforts***

In response to the Ukraine war, the EU has employed diplomatic efforts with the aim of de-escalating and also supporting Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. It involves direct action, coordination with partners and engagement in forums.

The first action the EU took was to condemn the actions of Russia in Ukraine as violations of international law and Ukraine's sovereignty. This has been publicized through statements, resolutions and direct commutations. Moreover, the EU has taken Ukraine's side in the international case against Russia at the European Court of Human Rights and the International Court of Justice. Although the EU may not be a party to the Normandy, the EU has supported the negotiation process aiming to achieve peace in the East. Moreover, the EU played an integral role in facilitating dialogue between the parties. Coordination between NATO and the US is important, as the EU coordinated its response with NATO and the US. Lastly, the EU sought to isolate Russia. Despite measures that the EU has taken, some challenges remain. For instance, creating a balance between responding strongly to its energy dependencies (European Council, 2022; European External Action Service, 2022).

The EU has provided Ukraine with Macro Financial Assistance (MFA) over the years. They consist of loans to stabilize the economy and have reforms imposed. The EU also proposed substantial packages to meet the Ukrainian needs after the invasion (European

Commission, 2022b). The EU mobilized emergency financial aid for Ukraine and its people (humanitarian aid). With regards to the economy, the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine helps Ukraine to integrate the EU and Ukrainian economies. There have also been imposed sanctions against Russia, which hit some significant sectors of the Russian economy. These were sanctions against the aggressive actions taken by Russia. The EU pledged to support the recovery, reconstruction, and modernization of Ukraine; lastly, it is the initiatives provided by the EU in terms of the European Investment Plan for Ukraine to attract investments that help Ukraine integrate into the EU Single Market (Council of the European Union, 2022b).

The EU launched in 2022 REPowerEU. This is a strategy aimed at ending the EU's dependence on Russian fossil fuels, accelerating access to renewable energy, and creating new energy infrastructure. This includes gas terminals, connectors and imports. The EU implemented sanctions on the Russian energy sector, and targeted bans on coal, oil and other technology transfer restrictions (Council of the European Union, 2022e). Aside from creating a strategy and imposing sanctions, the EU adopted emergency measures (such as mandatory reductions in electricity use, plans for gas rationing and financial support for households and businesses. Moreover, investments in renewable energy are part of the EU's objective to achieve strategic autonomy. Lastly, To diversify its energy supplies, the EU partners with other countries and regions. This includes LNG from the US and Qatar (Council of the European Union, 2022e). There is a distinction made, the difference of interests is more present with the military side of strategic autonomy(which is expensive to be autonomous, thus member states stay reliant), while on economic strategic autonomy, the member states are more unified (seeing the importance of trade).

The response to the war tested the EU's strategic autonomy. It revealed its capacity for independent action and impacted its future strategy. Moreover, the war has prompted the EU to reconsider military cooperation and capabilities.

### 4.2.3 Sub-conclusion EU-Ukraine support

Chapters three table seven and eight highlight the operationalisation of this variable (EU-Ukraine support). For military support, there is joint EU policy, operational alliances and defence spending towards Ukraine. The EPF provides military equipment, aside that the EU provides training missions. Moreover, they provide cyber support emergency aid, financial support and rights for residency in Ukraine. In terms of active missions, the Dutch government aid to Ukraine is in sectors of agriculture, healthcare and water. There is an opportunity for investments for companies. Furthermore, the aim of the reforms and support (MFA, DCFTA) is to help Ukraine become an economically stable nation (while the focus does not lie in strategic autonomy). REPowerEU aims to end the dependency on Russia by accelerating renewable energy with diversification (European Commission, 2022d).

There is consolidated policy and internal cooperation when it comes to diplomatic and political support towards Ukraine. There are missions (such as rebuilding Ukraine) on track, which also include infrastructure support. Most notably the EU tries to keep the production chains intact in Ukraine. In conclusion, this thesis marks the EU's support towards Ukraine as strong. In Table 13 the initiatives are summarized of EU's support towards Ukraine.

**Table 13: Summary of EU support initiatives**

Topic	Details
<b>Military Support</b>	<b>European Peace Facility (EPF)</b> military equipment for Ukraine; this will include training missions to enhance military mobility and the capabilities of Ukraine in defence. Boosting support in terms of skills, technology, and resources in dealing with (cyber)threats.
	<b>Immediate relief supplies:</b> water, food, shelter, medical assistance and other services for the internally displaced. Financial assistance, appropriate funds, handed over to the host countries or even through closer coordination of the EU civil protection mechanism. Provision of

Topic	Details
	temporary protection mechanisms for rights of residence, access to the labour markets, and the services of the society for the refugees.
<b>Reconstruction Support</b>	<b>Agriculture, Health and Water. Dutch government aid in Ukraine. Investment Potential:</b> Regions promising for investment like in agriculture, and strategic points like Odesa's port. Obstacles: Insurance issues, high corruption rate, and harmonization of EU legislation.
	<b>Economic Stability:</b> Ultimatum targeting to refocus Ukraine as an economically stable state, not at the moment focusing towards strategic autonomy.
<b>Political Efforts and Economic Efforts</b>	<b>Condemnation of Russia:</b> Public statements; support of the international cases about Russia. <b>Diplomatic support:</b> mediating the dialogue; and coordinating among NATO and the US. <b>Sanctions on Russia:</b> affecting crucial sectors, restrictions on energy
	<b>MFA:</b> in the form of stabilization loans for economic recovery, with imposed reforms <b>DCFTA:</b> economic integration in the single market of the EU <b>EFAs:</b> humanitarian aid to Ukraine and its people
	<b>REPowerEU:</b> Ending our dependency on Russian fossil fuels; step up renewable energy; and strengthen infrastructure. Energy Diversification: such as the US and Qatar, in LNG.
<b>Impact on Strategic Autonomy</b>	<b>Military vs. Economic Strategic Autonomy:</b> More member-state differences are evident in the interests over military support; comparatively less in economic strategic autonomy. <b>Testing strategic autonomy:</b> Capacity for independent action of the EU and impacts on future strategy Enhanced defence integration: Necessity of better military cooperation and capabilities

### **4.3 Dependent Variable: Strategic Autonomy**

The first major aspect of strategic autonomy is political cohesion. In this thesis, it has been determined that there is low political cohesion in the EU concerning strategic autonomy. In 4.1.1 this thesis elaborated on political cohesion as to why the EU's political cohesion is low. Both document research and the interview highlight the need for the EU to be more autonomous. The EU's aspiration to become a global player is also at the forefront. Tons of initiatives have been put out to increase strategic autonomy through political cohesion. This has been done in the forms of a grand strategy, interests and interpretations. For the grand strategy part, the EUGS and the strategic compass are introduced. However, through research, it became apparent that there are differences in policy interpretations due to differences in national interests. Differences in standardization, interests in external suppliers of weapons and other types of non-unity activity are present in the EU and therefore the effects remain little as to the EU unity led by the Ukraine war. The effect of political cohesion (even with the impact of the Ukraine war) on strategic autonomy does by far not meet its potential due to these internal deficiencies.

The second aspect of strategic autonomy is operational capabilities. In 4.1.2 this thesis elaborated on the operational capabilities of the EU and whether or not the current initiatives are on a high, medium or lowly scale. The first part of operational capabilities (to strategic autonomy) is R&D initiatives. The EU has co-initialized many initiatives (for example: PESCO, MPCC, EDA). This indicated that there is enough R&D in the EU. However, for the operational capabilities of the EU, there is also military capacity. In the current plans, there is no existing military (or rapid response team) present, while the challenges remain (such as market fragmentation and U.S. reliance). Lastly, there are operational funds (which also are not enough, as indicated earlier in this thesis) and therefore all criteria have been analysed and the operational capabilities of the EU have been set to medium to low. With these findings, the



effect of the current initiatives (which include the initiatives deployed after the invasion) on strategic autonomy is low.

And the last element is the industrial equipment of the EU. The EU has a medium industrial base, concluded in 4.1.3. The industrial base is characterised by three elements. These are R&D, cooperation advancements and production capacity. There are initiatives (which lack funding), that stimulate demands for cooperation and demand for production (while it is still in short supply). Strategies were built to redirect demands to EU supply. There were also challenges, the production capacity was not enough and there were weaknesses in supply chains in the world. Moreover, the effect of the Ukraine war on the industrial base is present, yet deficiencies remain and therefore the effect is not considered strong. The effect of industrial equipment on strategic autonomy is set to medium due to the insufficiencies. The effect is present but more can be done to meet its potential.

In conclusion, there is low political cohesion, medium to low operational capabilities and medium industrial equipment. That marks the EU's strategic autonomy as medium to low.

The question remains what the effect is of the EU's support towards Ukraine and its effect on strategic autonomy. The support the EU has given to Ukraine was marked as strong. This was marked by different types of support the EU has provided to Ukraine (Political, economic, humanitarian, reconstruction and military support). The EU's support does not have a strong enough impact on either of the variables, especially political cohesion. In the political cohesion sphere, the member states lacked internal unity and had differences of interests when it came to for example defence matters. For operational capabilities, the EU is simply not ready (forces not ready, insufficient funding, non-committal member states etc.) and therefore the effect cannot be strong. Lastly the industrial equipment dimension, EU support did increase the demand on the industrial base, yet there were still vulnerability points. In conclusion, based on

the previous effects of political cohesion, industrial equipment and operational capabilities the effect of EU support on EU strategic autonomy is weak.

It is therefore that the extent of EU support towards Ukraine influences EU strategic autonomy is determined by the strengthened industrial base firstly and secondly by achieved targets on operational capabilities, to the limitation of the existing political cohesion. As the industrial base of the EU is medium, operational capabilities are medium to low and political cohesion is low.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1 Research question and hypothesis

The central research question of this thesis is: To what extent will EU support for the Ukraine war influence European strategic autonomy on security in the world?

There were essentially three hypotheses. The first one is that increased EU support for Ukraine will enhance political cohesion in the EU. This hypothesis is not adopted, the EU support did enhance political cohesion in the EU on the topic of Ukraine support. It has led to unity among member states' cooperation in policy-making (for example with sanctions) but did not enhance political cohesion as a whole in the union. The member states have too many differences of interests and EU support does not have a significant enough impact to change that. Therefore the effect of EU support on EU strategic autonomy is low.

The second hypothesis states that EU support for Ukraine will improve the EU's operational capabilities. This hypothesis is not adopted. The EU introduced initiatives alongside member states aspirations to increase spending and to help achieve targets. However, the challenges remained and the operational capabilities of the EU were medium to low (on the scale). Therefore, the effect of the current initiatives on strategic autonomy is low.

The last hypothesis states that EU support for Ukraine will stimulate the development of the EU's industrial base. This hypothesis is adopted. EU support towards Ukraine has eventually led to increased defence production, increased collaboration between member states in the defence sector and helped to gather financial resources for Ukraine to increase competitiveness in the industrial base. However, the effect of industrial equipment on strategic autonomy is set to medium due to insufficiencies. The effect is present but more can be done to meet its potential.

The answer to the research question is therefore that the extent of EU support towards Ukraine influences EU strategic autonomy (on security in this world) is determined by the strengthened industrial base firstly and secondly by achieved targets on operational capabilities, to the limitation of the existing political cohesion.

## **5.2 Link conceptual model & methodology**

This thesis has a certain amount of strengths and weaknesses. The experts were of great value in shaping the image of strategic autonomy in the current world. This thesis had the opportunity to make use of a very diverse set of experts, allowing different perspectives to shape this thesis. Good examples are “influence policies” as well as “open strategic autonomy”. That is the main strength of this thesis. Another strong point is that this thesis used two methods, desk research and interview conduction to analyse strategic autonomy.

Furthermore, to measure concisely the impact of the support given to Ukraine towards European strategic autonomy, the measurement period of the research needs to be larger, as certain events and upcoming legislation may have an impact and passed legislation may leave marks to measure. To measure strategic autonomy, research may very well be conducted after the war, as only then there is room for negotiations for Ukrainian EU membership and it would be more measurable what EU support may had an impact. This thesis made a new conceptual model on existing theory, however, the timing marks the most vulnerable part of this thesis, not being able to determine the exact effect of European support due to the ongoing war.

Another vulnerability of this thesis is not being able to conduct expert interviews of people in Eastern European countries, as that perspective towards strategic autonomy is only perceived through the lens of the Western countries and not directly from the people who are dealing with the war from close-by.

### 5.3 Policy recommendations

As highlighted in the interviews, the EU member states had different interests and subscribed to those interests (weapon programs for example), lowering the political cohesion between the member states. Therefore the first recommendation is about strengthening the political cohesion in the European Union. To enhance political unity, a differentiated integration approach may help. It is about creating narratives on targets with the member states. These narratives may help the member states integrate with their perspective while also taking risk management into account (Tekin et al., 2019).

The second recommendation is about defence integration. This recommendation has three elements. The first element is to establish a defence union. To overcome the fragmentation in defence capabilities, a defence union may be created. This includes a unified defence strategy, joint programs and funding to support those projects (Howorth, 2014; Biscop, 2016). Following this recommendation, the promotion of the development of joint military units and capabilities may be created, such as a permanent EU military headquarters (Fiott, 2017). Lastly, the recommendation for defence integration is to enhance EU-NATO collaboration, dual approaches ensure that the EU may act autonomously while benefiting from NATO infrastructure (Ringsmose & Webber, 2011).

The last recommendation is to harmonize and renew legislative and policy frameworks. The first of two elements calls for a promotion of harmonization of defence-related legislation across member states. It includes standardizing regulations on arms exports, military training and contracts (Kaim, 2013). But it also includes the renewal of the legislative war handbook the EU has to uphold. The last element is about the creation of a unified energy policy, that aligns national energy strategies with collective EU goals (Andersen, Goldthau, & Sitter, 2017).

## 5.4 Further study

One main point of weakness in this thesis is the time of research. Not being able to look from a historical perspective (as if the war ended), makes a more precise conclusion not possible. This leads to a future research proposal: “What effect did the EU support have on European strategic autonomy?”

This thesis identified another weakness of the EU. That is the low political cohesion the current union has. Many member states have different interests and differences in interpretations. While the member states remain unified with their stances towards Ukraine, the political cohesion as a whole is low. A possible research proposal would be: “What could lead to stronger political unity in the EU?”

There is one relevant perspective on IR in the EU concerning the findings of this thesis. It is the neorealism. This perspective is relevant to why the individual member states prioritize their interests (for example, security or power). The difference of interests can be seen as the consequence of this phenomenon. The lack of political cohesion as well as insufficient funding and member states that are not committed to projects may be seen as power struggles in the EU. Isolationist trends and populist trends in the EU create more challenges for strategic autonomy. Isolationist viewpoints undermine the efforts of the EU to promote cooperation, as member states adopt more of such policies, consensus on EU-wide policies becomes harder. Lastly, these trends weaken the cooperation with external partners (such as the U.S.).

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