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Common Security and Defence Policy as France's Winning Strategy? Evidence from Recent Experience**

France's status as a conventional power makes Paris an inevitable actor in the context of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Insofar France is considered as a staunch protagonist of the EU/ European strategic autonomy and an opponent against the US/NATO dominance in Europe, the most recent CSDP progress may be expected to belong to the merits of French decision-makers. Based on a closer analytical look, however, CSDP is not reducible to a coherent outcome of French interests. At the EU level, the French influence turns out to be limited. A strong ideological attachment of this EU Member State to sovereign politics and a consequential lack of commitment to common issues of defence and security may be viewed as an impediment to the materialisation of a more significant clout of Paris on the communitarian scale. Yet relevant limits are predominantly a structural consequence, which is a pattern enhanced by the current dynamics in global politics. This makes one consider France's status as a "system-influencing state" more cautiously. In a sense, the paper takes issue with the literature on the recent CSDP progress as an expression of political and policy convergence and re-focuses attention to manners in which inter-European dynamics can shed light on positions of individual members.

Introduction

France's visibility, both at the EU and international levels, has been of no short supply during the recent years. France has obviously been a part of the international landscape as a conventional power of the 20th century, notably by virtue of her status as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and a nuclear power. Yet the country's role has recently been more distinguishable in the context of the European and international politics. President Emmanuel

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Macron contributed to reviving the idea of European army, put much effort to halt the expansion of the populist movement during the 2019 election to the European Parliament, was one of the masterminds of a new composition of the European Commission, and largely contributed to the adoption of the historic EU recovery package deal (2020). On yet other fronts, the French President doubted the relevance of NATO by qualifying it as “experiencing [...] brain death”,¹ took up mediation between the US and Iran, and, among other initiatives, was a part of escalating political and military tensions with Turkey.

These few observations suffice to raise a few questions worthy of deeper analytical interest, notably: Given power concentration in the field of foreign policy in the person of President Macron, to what extent is his policy a harbinger of possible change in France’s interests? More fundamentally, despite France’s status as a conventional power, is this EU Member State *really* powerful?

To suggest response elements to these questions, the paper is interested in security and defence integration. Importantly, France’s mentioned attributes of a conventional power and her military might make Paris an inevitable actor in the context of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Considering that France is viewed as a staunch protagonist of EU/European strategic autonomy² and is known as being sceptical about the dominance of the US/NATO in Europe, the CSDP progress of the recent years³ may be expected to belong to the merits of French decision-makers.⁴ The fact that European capitals tend to consider France as being next to perfectly cognizant of her goals and consistently pursuing them⁵ only supports this conjecture.

Yet a closer look cautions against the appreciation of the relationship

¹ The Economist (2019), *Emmanuel Macron Warns Europe: NATO Is Becoming Brain-dead*, November 7, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/11/07/emmanuel-macron-warns-europe-nato-is-becoming-brain-dead>, accessed 27 10 2020.

² E.g., Maulny, J.-P., Di Bernardini, L. (2019), *Moving PeSCo forward: What are the next steps?* ARES Policy Paper (39), <https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/ARES-39.pdf>, accessed 15 06 2020, p. 12; Howorth, J., Menon, A. (2009), “Still not pushing back: why the European Union is not balancing the United States”, *Journal of conflict resolution* 53(3), p. 727–744, p. 737.

³ Haroche, P. (2018), *The European Defence Fund: How the European Commission Is Becoming a Defence Actor*, IRSEM Research Paper (56), June 15, https://www.pierreharoche.com/uploads/3/1/0/6/31068215/note_edf_haroche.pdf, accessed 09 09 2020; Šešelgytė, M., Indrašiūtė, E. (2020), “European defence version 2.0: What does it offer for Lithuania?” in Česnakas, G., Statkus, N., eds., *Lithuania in the Global Context: National Security and Defence Policy Dilemmas*, Vilnius: Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania, p. 117–130.

⁴ Such an expectation is also supported by preliminary results brought to light by the new tools of CSDP. For instance, France is extremely visible in Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) projects as one of the most active member states. Besides, France assumes her dominance in projects financed by EDIDP and PADR, which are the new instruments in the EU defence field.

⁵ De France, O. (2019), *PeSCo: The French Perspective*, ARES Policy Paper, <https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Ares-37.pdf>, accessed 07 07 2020, p. 2.

between France and CSDP as unproblematic and seamless in the context of the latest policy developments. These are reducible to neither instant nor coherent result of the French interests. At the EU level, the influence of France has recently been limited. A strong ideological attachment of this EU Member State to sovereign politics and a consequential lack of commitment to common issues of defence and security may be viewed as an impediment to the materialisation of France's more significant clout on the communitarian scale. Yet the limits are rather a consequence of international structural shifts, a pattern enhanced by the current dynamics in global politics.

The study converses with research suggesting France's relatively unhindered ability⁶ to translate her political preferences into outcomes in the field of defence and security integration. This role of Paris has a relatively long history – it may be associated with an effort to build an integrated European army since the project of the European Defence Community (EDC).⁷ In the very beginning of the 1950s, the French political and military elites *initiated* “their own German rearmament plan within the framework of a European army” and promoted it among the European partners and the Americans, but it was also the French side that *put an end* to the EDC in 1954.⁸ These few cursory historical facts agree with fuller accounts on European political complexities of the time, in the sense that the EDC trajectory tends to be depicted as *determined* by the French political line. France's centrality in explaining the initial success of the EDC and its ultimate failure comes out through accounts on shifts in the country's domestic factors, specifically, on change in parliamentary alliances and, more recently, in positions of the French military leaders.⁹ References to domestic politics of France are significant theoretically, as they complement, if not tend to rival, powerful realist explanations based on the US role.¹⁰

Furthermore, to the body of evidence in favour of France's decisive role

⁶ This ability implies that, regardless of the structure of the international system, powerful states have “some capacity for choice” and are able to implement them (see Chafer, T., Cumming, G. (2010) “Beyond Fashoda: Anglo-French security cooperation in Africa since Saint-Malo”, *International Affairs* 86(5), p. 1129–1147, p. 1142).

⁷ Haroche, P. (2017) “Interdependence, asymmetric crises, and European defence cooperation”, *European Security* 26(2), p. 226–252, p. 234.

⁸ There was a veto from the French National Assembly (*ibidem*, p. 235).

⁹ Basically, while France wanted to contain Germany's military power thanks to integrated armed forces, dominated by France (in terms of troops and military control), colonial crises made Paris, notably, the country's military elites, fear a lack of capabilities to be simultaneously active in Europe and overseas (*ibidem*; see also, e.g., Parsons, C. (2003) *A Certain Idea of Europe*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press; Koepf, T. (2012) “Interventions françaises en Afrique : la fin de l'europanisation?”, *Politique étrangère* (2), p. 415–426).

¹⁰ The idea of a European army containing the Germans lost its relevance after the US had decided to ensure a significant presence of American troops in Europe (Jones, S. (2003) “The European Union and the security dilemma”, *Security Studies* 12 (3), 114–156, cit. in Haroche, P. (2017), Art. cit., p. 235).

in common defence and security matters has added recent research into the EU military missions, which uncovered prominent French interests – prominent to the point of earning CSDP the name of “the French Africa Korps”.¹¹ Because of other EU Members’ increasing fear of entrapment on the African continent, France ended up stumbling into difficulties in the beginning of the 2010s.¹² However, notwithstanding these troubles, robust outcomes of common security policy in the 2000s seem to have produced systemic consequences, which reflect a bias towards France’s political preferences. That is, it is reasonable to invoke an emerging common defence and security culture, which is increasingly inter-linked with other EU policies.¹³ Importantly, this culture reflects France’s preferences.¹⁴

Issues related to common defence and security are not devoid of interest for Lithuania where decision-makers are encouraged to think about pressing security dilemmas arising from accumulated tensions in transatlantic cooperation more intensely. In other words, Lithuania may be pressed to link her strategic thinking on security and defence to the EU framework more prominently and systematically.¹⁵ There is a need for a better understanding of the dynamics of other EU Member States, including those of France, in order to do this effectively and successfully.

The argument of the paper, based on official documents, secondary sources, publicly available expert insights, as well as available empirical research, is developed in several steps. Section one seeks to substantiate France’s long-lasting pro-Europeanism and the concordance between CSDP and her interests. Section two discusses CSDP as *enfant terrible* to illustrate limitations of recent occurrence of the French influence. The third section looks into whether France’s lacking ideological commitment to defence and security integration may explain these constraints; with a focus on Russia, the study, however, argues in favour of the explanatory power of increased structural limits. Conclusions follow.

¹¹ Haroche, P. (2017), Art. cit., p. 239, see also 242–243; see also Sadoux, A. (2005) “La PESD: un moyen d’assurer la position de la France en Afrique?”, *Défense nationale* (10), p. 67 – 77; Chafer, T., Cumming, G. (2010), Art. cit., p. 1134–1137.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ Palm, T., Crum, B. (2019) “Military operations and the EU’s identity as an international security actor”, *European Security* 28(4), p. 513–534.

¹⁴ Such as the interventionist approach, geographical focus on Africa, or fight against terrorism as the key security challenge (Schilde, K. (2017), “European military capabilities: Enablers and constraints on EU power?”, *Journal of Common Market Studies* 55(1), p. 37–53, p. 48; Palm, T., Crum, B. (2019), Art. cit.).

¹⁵ E.g., Mickus, J. (2019) *Lietuva ir ES gynybos integracija: didžioji strategija ir ateities scenarijai*. Vilniaus politikos analizės institutas, https://vilniusinstitute.lt/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/VIPA_Justino-Micka-us-studija.pdf, accessed 15 05 2020.

1. Constancy of the relationship between France's pro-Europeanism and CSDP

1.1. Beyond Macron's presidency

President Macron has been one of the most prominent political figures to address pressing issues pertaining to the European project, including those in the field of defence and security. Relevant issues have been numerous – notably, Brexit, uncertain and tense transatlantic cooperation, Russia's aggressive foreign policy, migration, as well as terrorism. The concept of European/EU strategic autonomy seems to have become an indispensable element in the official positions of Paris under Macron's Presidency. In this context, France has unambiguously declared her ambition to “build a stronger Europe in the face of multiplying common threats,” whether with NATO's help or without it.¹⁶ The fact that European countries have been cooperating in the defence and security fields more actively, including with the view of developing “more autonomous capabilities to act,” has been appreciated by Paris as a significant advance.¹⁷

According to some experts' opinion, the EU has become a priority framework to think of defence and security for French decision-makers as a result of President Macron's ambitions.¹⁸ The fact that there is a significant European aspect to his every initiative may be viewed as an inflection point in the French Gaullo-Mitterrandist tradition in foreign policy.¹⁹ If in the past this tradition wanted France to assume her independence first and foremost within the national framework, it has been replaced by the one of the EU.²⁰

A vivid empirical illustration in this regard comes from the reaction of the “French strategic community” to developments associated with the French Strategic Review of Defence and National Security (2017).²¹ The document, preceded by the 2013 White Paper on Defence and National Security, distinguished capacity areas, in which France would from now on make the “Euro-

¹⁶ Ministère des Armées (2018), *Projet de loi de programmation militaire 2019 / 2025. Rapport annexé*, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/english/portail-defense/issues2/la-lpm-2019-2025/les-actualites2/loi-deprogrammation-militaire-2019-2025-textes-officiels>, accessed 15 06 2020, p. 20.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 21.

¹⁸ Maulny, J.-P. (2019) “L'initiative européenne d'intervention (IEI). Le désir d'une Europe plus autonome d'Emmanuel Macron”, *Europe en formation : les cahiers du fédéralisme* (389), p. 54–66.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 57–58.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 58.

pean choice,” with the view of developing “future armaments.”²² Such a European “turn” was far from being self-evident in the eyes of military personnel and experts of the Directorate General of Armaments, France’s procurement and technology agency in the defence sector, thus, also responsible for issues pertaining to the acquisition and development of weapon systems at the disposal of the French military; the reference framework for these professionals was still the one of national independence and self-sufficiency.²³

The question arises, however, to what extent Macron’s Presidency can indeed be linked to a line of action or strategic thought, which would testify to a breaking point, also, the “Copernican Revolution,” or “paradigm shift,”²⁴ relative to the country’s political past. In other words, fundamentally, wasn’t the current pro-European stance of Paris really unpredictable? Or, to borrow counterfactual terms,²⁵ wouldn’t the above mentioned European “turn” have happened without the current French executive? If one adheres to a longer-term perspective, an idiosyncratic character of Macron’s Presidency appears in fact mitigated as regards his politico-strategic choices. France’s pro-Europeanism can be read through more stable features of the French foreign and security policy.

To make a historical reference, the political momentum, which provided grounds for closer cooperation of the EU Member States in the field of defence and security, was the Saint-Malo Declaration of 1998 between France and the United Kingdom.²⁶ The fact that the British finally recognised that effective European Security and Defence Policy (predecessor of CSDP) was compatible with a strengthened North Atlantic Alliance amounted to a “revolution in military affairs.”²⁷ Up until 1997 France and the United Kingdom held somewhat irreconcilable positions dating from the late forties. Paris believed that strong European policy on defence and security issues would only strengthen NATO itself; London, on the other hand, was of the opinion that this position would potentially make the US draw into isolation and therefore was heralding NATO’s demise.²⁸

A determining inflection point in the British position has been large-

²² Ibidem.

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Haroche, P. (2020), “Supranationalism strikes back: a neofunctionalist account of the European Defence Fund”, *Journal of European Public Policy* 27(6), p. 853–872, p. 853; Haroche, P. (2018); Maulny J.-P. (2019), p. 58.

²⁵ E.g., Drezner, D.W. (2020), “The Song Remains the Same: International Relations After COVID-19”, *International Organization*, COVID-19 Online Supplemental Issue, doi.org/10.1017/S0020818320000351

²⁶ Ricketts, P. (2017) “The EU and defence. The legacy of Saint-Malo”, *The RUSI Journal* 162(3), p. 30–38.

²⁷ Howorth, J. (2000), “Britain, France and the European defence initiative”, *Survival* 42(2), p. 33–55, p. 33.

²⁸ Ibidem.

ly attributed to the developments during the 1990s in the Balkans and, consequently, to heightened awareness within the new Labourist Government on Europe's common security interests.²⁹ Troubles in the British former colonies located in the African Great Lakes region, because of complex regional interdependencies, also required coordinated action from both the United Kingdom and France.³⁰

Any such inflection point can hardly be associated with the French perspective. Paris was interested in developing the European dimension in the field of security and defence, notably as a vector of policy action to balance out NATO's strategic weight and the American power in Europe. As for today's political realities, President Macron's policy appears as a testimony to the constancy of France's politico-strategic course of action regarding the EU.

Indeed, President Macron is following in the footsteps of François Hollande's policy.³¹ President Hollande, together with Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian (he is also the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs under Macron's Presidency), initiated an important step forward in integrating defence and security.³² This duo reinvested the Franco-German tandem with much political significance, which is a prominent feature of President Macron's diplomacy; close political relationships with Jean-Claude Juncker, who was then the President of the European Commission, led to the agenda of the European Council of December 2013 being dedicated to defence issues.³³ The representation of French interests at the time may also be linked to Frenchman Michel Barnier, who was then the Commissioner for Internal Market (later on he became Juncker's Special Adviser on the European Defence and Security Policy³⁴) – he had initiated the preparation of a communication for the December 2013 Summit, which already contained a mention of “the possibility of a Preparatory Action for CSDP-related research,”³⁵ a financing programme to advance multi-country defence projects (also see below).

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ Haroche, P. (2017), Art. cit.; Chafer, T., Cumming, G. (2010), Art. cit.

³¹ It may not be forgotten that Macron served under Hollande's presidency, first, as deputy secretary-general of the Elysée (2012–2014) and, later, as minister of the economy, industry and digital affairs (2014–2016).

³² Maulny, J.-P. (2019), Art. cit.

³³ Ibidem; see also Haroche, P. (2020), Art. cit.

³⁴ European Commission (2015), *Press release – President Juncker appoints Michel Barnier as Special Adviser on European Defence and Security Policy*, Brussels, February 17, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-15-4437_en.htm, accessed 09 09 2020 (cit. in Haroche, P. (2018), p. 5).

³⁵ Haroche, P. (2020), Art. cit., p. 858.

A push for European integration in defence and security,³⁶ notably in the form of permanent structured cooperation (PESCO), coordinated annual review on defence (CARD), European Defence Fund (EDF), and Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC),³⁷ was visible from 2016, so, *prior* to Macron's Presidency. Finally, it may be reminded that the PESCO concept already featured the Treaty of Lisbon, or that the common political foundation for these developments – the EU Global Strategy (2016),³⁸ as well as a communication from 2013,³⁹ – made already use of the notion of strategic autonomy.

1.2. Significant policy developments at the service of the French constituency

The relevant CSDP developments as a consequence of the aforementioned push in defence integration are not trivial. Besides, they appear as being aligned with France's interests, insofar the French represent the dominant constituency among the EU Member States to benefit from the new instruments. A somewhat unproblematic causality between Paris and the latter seems thus to be warranted.

As for the politico-institutional and even strategic⁴⁰ significance of these instruments, keen observers have already documented⁴¹ a revolutionary character of financial and institutional implications of the EDF, an instrument to provide funds to transnational defence-related research and to co-finance multi-country development of military capabilities together with national governments.⁴² The fact is that, until recently, the EU's legal basis did not allow for common funds to be directed to “operations having military or defence implications.”⁴³

³⁶ E.g., De France, O. (2019); Šešelgytė, M., Indrašiūtė, E. (2020), *Op. cit.*

³⁷ This structure amounts to the EU command; it has, however, so far been entrusted with training missions, instead of combat and/ or high intensity missions (Deschaux-Dutard, D. (2019), “La coopération militaire franco-allemande et la défense européenne après le Brexit”, *Les Champs de Mars* 1(32), p. 53–76; British Parliament (2019), *Brexit and UK Defence: An Explainer*, Commons Briefing Paper (8676), October 30, <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-8676>, accessed 15 06 2020.

³⁸ E.g., Barbé, E., Morillas, P. (2019) “The EU global strategy: The dynamics of a more politicized and politically integrated foreign policy”, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32(6), p. 753–770.

³⁹ European Commission (2013) “Towards a more competitive and efficient defence and security sector”, COM(2013) 542 final, Brussels, July 24, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52013DC0542&from=en>, accessed 03 09 2020; Haroche, P. (2020), *Art. cit.*, p. 861.

⁴⁰ Haroche, P. (2020), *Art. cit.*, p. 861.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*; Ianakiev, G. (2019), *The European Defence Fund: A game changer for European defence industrial collaboration*, IRIS, November, <https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/ARES-48.pdf>, accessed 15 06 2020.

⁴² Haroche (2020), *Art. cit.*, p. 853; Haroche, P. (2018).

⁴³ *Consolidated version of the Treaty on the European Union*, 41(2), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12016M/TXT>, accessed 15 06 2020; Haroche, P. (2018).

Initiatives aimed at promoting the initial programmes (2017–2020), that is, those which were supposed to run until the new multiannual financial framework (Defence Industrial Development Programme, EDIDP, and Preparatory Action on Defence Research, PADR), were proposed and promoted at the EU level based on the potential of the Union’s industry and research programme.⁴⁴ A successful implementation of these programmes contributed to consolidating the advent of a new institutional and political mind-set, which, importantly, was also made possible by first winning a few legal battles within the Commission, with the view of re-interpreting relevant legal provisions.⁴⁵ Notably, these had to be relaxed for future integration in the field. Once the EDF is included in the multiannual financial framework for the period of 2021–2027, it is here to stay. Its funds can be considered as significant enough⁴⁶ to produce structural consequences for the defence dynamics of EU Members.⁴⁷

Adhering to the intergovernmentalist postulate, which holds that defence and external security may be considered as “the exclusive domain of the intergovernmental method,”⁴⁸ Paris may come up as one of the most prominent winners. France is one of the most active partakers in PESCO projects (together with Italy). The country participates in 30 projects out of almost 50.⁴⁹ Moreover, the country is also a winner concerning financial allocations within the framework of EDIDP and PADR. Based on an approximate analysis,⁵⁰ out

⁴⁴ E.g., Assemblée nationale (2018), pp. 43–44, Haroche, P. (2020), Art. cit.; Ianakiev, G. (2019).

⁴⁵ Haroche, P. (2020), Art. cit.; Haroche, P. (2018); as regards re-interpretation of EU treaties or “backdoor integration” more generally, see also, e.g., The Economist (2020), *Why the EU is Becoming more Like a Chekhov Play*, July 23, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2020/07/23/why-the-eu-is-becoming-more-like-a-chekhov-play>, accessed 25 07 2020.

⁴⁶ Despite a relatively steep reduction in the initial funds proposed by the Commission, subsequent to the completion of the final negotiations (Stroobants, J.-P. (2020), “Le budget de sécurité et de défense européen victime du fonds de relance”, *Lemonde.fr*, July 25, https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2020/07/25/le-budget-de-securite-et-de-defense-europeen-victime-du-fonds-de-relance_6047272_3210.html, accessed 04 09 2020).

⁴⁷ Ianakiev, G. (2019).

⁴⁸ James, A.D. (2018), “Policy entrepreneurship and agenda setting: Comparing and contrasting the origins of the European research programmes for security and defense” in Karampekios, N., Oikonomou, I., and Caryannis, E.G., eds., *The Emergence of EU Defense Research Policy: From Innovation to Militarization*, Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, p. 15–43, p. 22 (cit. in Haroche, P. (2020), Art. cit., p. 858).

⁴⁹ European Council and Council of the EU (2019), *Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)’s projects - Overview*, November 12, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/41333/pesco-projects-12-nov-2019.pdf>, accessed 16 05 2020; Barigazzi, J. (2019), “France dominant in new flurry of EU military projects”, *Politico.eu*, December 11, <https://www.politico.eu/article/france-european-army-pesco-macron-merkel/>; European Defence Agency, *Current List of PESCO Projects*, [https://www.eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/our-current-priorities/permanent-structured-cooperation-\(PESCO\)/current-list-of-pesco-projects](https://www.eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/our-current-priorities/permanent-structured-cooperation-(PESCO)/current-list-of-pesco-projects), accessed 14 09 2020.

⁵⁰ It is approximate, as it looks at the results published in June 2020 (European Commission (2020), *European Defence Industry – Results of the Calls*, Brussels, June 15, https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/european-defence-industry-results-calls_en, accessed 01 07 2020).

of around 200 entities that were granted EDIDP and PADR funding, almost 23 percent of them were from France (11 percent from Germany, 12–13 percent from Spain and Italy). Given that these programmes are “precursor [...] programmes of a fully-fledged [EDF],”⁵¹ with the fund in place, Paris can expect to receive even more funds to develop the country’s defence industry.

One may also observe that from 2017 the value of French exports in armaments towards the EU Member States have notably increased. In 2019, for instance, they accounted for 42 percent of all export value (see Figure 2). Whereas this pattern was determined by exports to only a few countries (Belgium, Hungary, and Spain),⁵² mobilising Europe through defence integration reveals itself as a logical strategic direction for Paris.⁵³

Cursory examples suggesting France’s winning strategy with regard to CSDP can be multiplied. Notably, the European Peace Facility, an instrument to finance the EU military operations and to provide military support for partners,⁵⁴ appears as an inevitable reference. The fact is that France’s military activism provides substantial grounds for discussions at the national level as to whether Paris is capable of pursuing its numerous commitments both in terms of finances and capability; the military anti-terrorist operation “Sentinelle” adds a significant extra burden to France’s extensive overseas activities (the operation contributed to increasing the number of deployed personnel by a factor of 1.5, up to 30 thousand⁵⁵). The EPF contains the promise to somewhat alleviate France’s burden, given that contributions by Paris to the EU military missions and operations have been notable, relative to those of other EU Members (in particular, as regards to EUFOR Tchad/RCA (2008–2009), Artemis (EUFOR DRC, 2003), and EUFOR RD Congo (2006)).⁵⁶

⁵¹ European Commission (2020), *European Defence Fund: €205 million to boost the EU’s strategic autonomy and industrial competitiveness*, Brussels, June 15, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1053, accessed 03 09 2020.

⁵² Ministère des Armées (2019), *Exportations d’armement : le rapport au Parlement 2019*, June 4, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/articles/exportations-d-armement-le-rapport-au-parlement-2019>, accessed 05 05 2020, p. 67.

⁵³ In particular, the defence sector may evolve to impose restrictions on EU member states as to purchases of armaments within the single market (e.g., because of standards of technical compatibility). (See, e.g., Haroche, P. (2020), Art. cit., as regards the significance of organic functional connections that develop at the EU level, without the possibility for EU member states to make use of the intergovernmental method.)

⁵⁴ Haroche, P. (2020), Art. cit., p. 865.

⁵⁵ Ministère des Armées (2020), *Carte des opérations et missions militaires*, July 2, https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/rubriques_complementaires/carte-des-operations-et-missions-militaires, accessed 14 09 2020.

⁵⁶ Global Governance Programme, *EU’s Global Engagement: A Database of the EU Common Security and Defence Policy Military Operations and Civilian Missions Worldwide* [data file], <https://globalgovernanceprogramme.eui.eu/research-project/eu-global-engagement-database/>, accessed 04 07 2020; see also Haroche, P. (2017), Art. cit., p. 242–243; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, M. (2014), “Europe’s defence dilemma”, *The International Spectator* 49(2), p. 83–116.

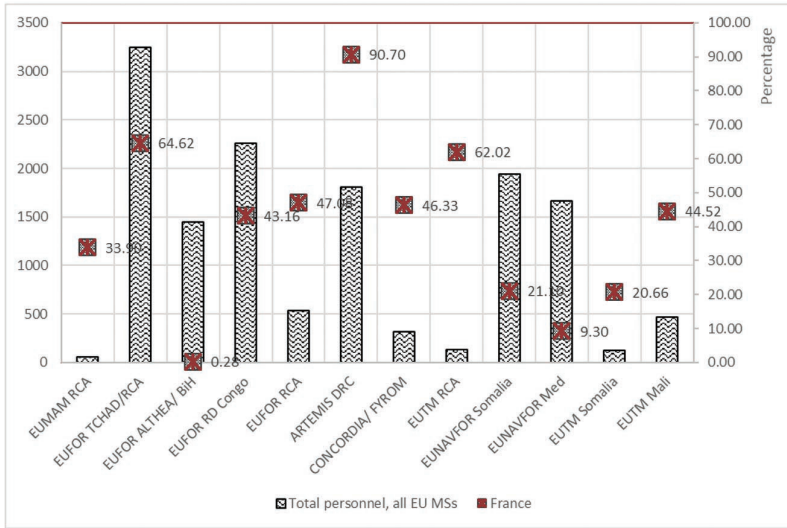


Figure 1. Total (in numbers) and France's (in %) personnel contributions to the EU military missions

Note: compiled by the author based on relevant sources.⁵⁷

2. Identifying limits of the French influence

France's pro-Europeanism described above, on the one hand, and gains in the CSDP, on the other hand, seem to be largely consistent to enable inferring that defence and security integration consists of coherent, if not logical, outcomes of the French politico-strategic and policy preferences. Yet a closer analytical look at the recent period imposes a less certain conclusion, which cautions against overestimating the French political influence on issues of defence integration.

It has been known that the French approach to PESCO differed from the German one. Paris was in favour of a constrained format of cooperation, with certain requirements set to be met by the Member States willing to participate, and wanted cooperation projects to be subject to strict assessment criteria.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ The last mission included is the EUTM RCA (2016) (Palm, T., Crum, B. (2019), Art. cit.; Global Governance Programme, *EU's Global Engagement: A Database of the EU Common Security and Defence Policy Military Operations and Civilian Missions Worldwide*, <https://globalgovernanceprogramme.eui.eu/research-project/eu-global-engagement-database/>, accessed 04 09 2020).

⁵⁸ Fiott, D., Missiroli, A., Tardy, T. (2017), *Permanent Structured Cooperation: What's in a name?* Chaillot Papers (142), https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/CP_142_ONLINE.pdf, accessed 15 06 2020, p. 21.

Somewhat contrariwise, Germany was interested in a model allowing inclusive participation and recognized the relevance of commonly agreed guidelines for project implementation.⁵⁹ Berlin's victory has not been in question. At the same time, however, it was a source of certain contentment for Paris, insofar the outcome promised Germany's interest in PESCO specifically and in issues of defence integration more generally.⁶⁰

Regardless, the issue of PESCO implementation and, specifically, the French-German opposition are a testimony to limitations of France's influence. It is constrained both externally and internally. Importantly, the fact that France is ahead of Germany in terms of real defence expenditure is only temporary. In 2019 the difference between military spending of these two European powers was the smallest since 1992.⁶¹ The French are unable to compete with the Germans because of their floundering economy. From 2010 to 2019 Germany's economic growth was on average 40 percent higher than France's.⁶² Military spending per capita in Germany in 2019 amounted to 84 percent of the French equivalent; yet France's economic well-being, measured in terms of GDP per capita, was only 89 percent of Germany's during the same period.⁶³ Military power of the French reveals itself as an ambition of the political elite, first and foremost, of the executive, and is situated at a distance from the socio-political and economic realities.

Furthermore, a relatively homogeneous façade of the French external policy reveals itself as multi-actor, which implies contested political and policy positions. The country's approach to the EU integration in defence and external affairs more generally indeed results from contrary views, notably, those held by "bilateralists," on the one hand, and "eurolateralists," on the other hand.⁶⁴ A solid and still powerful constituency of the former is rooted cross-institutionally and views cooperation at the EU level on sovereign issues as an impediment to France's foreign policy and military action.⁶⁵

As already suggested, Macron's efforts to invest in the French defence and security policy with a more significant European dimension can indeed be

⁵⁹ Ibidem.

⁶⁰ De France, O. (2019).

⁶¹ Compared with national performances in 2018, Germany had outspent the UK and Japan (SIPRI, *Data for all countries 1949–2019* [data file], <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>, accessed 15 06 2020).

⁶² Calculations are based on the World Bank data (World Bank, *GDP growth (annual %)*, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG>, accessed 02 07 2020).

⁶³ NATO (2019), *Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2013-2019)*, Press release PR.CO(2019)123, November, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2019_11/20191129_pr-2019-123-en.pdf, accessed 02 07 2020, p. 11.

⁶⁴ De France, O. (2019).

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

viewed as a “eurolateralist” initiative. But the question whether the President’s efforts will be successful still remains unanswered. From the point of view of “bilateralists”, PESCO has failed institutionally, financially, and operatively, as well as in terms of capabilities.⁶⁶ Representatives from both camps of the French security community are concerned over bureaucratisation of the relevant processes, which include a panoply of actors motivated by different politico-institutional and strategic logics (e.g., the Member States, the European External Action Service, the European Defence Agency, PESCO Secretariat); the bureaucratic aspect tends to overshadow effective differences between structured cooperation and other cooperative formats, such as informal meetings of defence ministers.⁶⁷

Furthermore, France was not able to impose her vision concerning the EDIDP during the negotiations. Paris was in favour of an intergovernmental body to supervise the EDIDP governance, especially regarding the constitution of the instrument’s work of programme.⁶⁸ France not only was unfavourable with respect to entrusting the Commission with this task, but she wanted to seize this opportunity to strengthen the role of the Member States.⁶⁹ Other members, however, feared France’s dominance and formed an opposition, which made them eventually take up the defence of the comitology rules, “reduc[ing] the Member States’ margin of manoeuvre.”⁷⁰ They found themselves as a consequence aligned with the Commission’s preference.

The lack of a clear vision by French decision-makers regarding the EU integration in the field of defence and security may also be read through unresolved issues related to the new instruments. One of such notable issues has been participation of third countries. On the one hand, Paris is interested in the national defence industry being the main driving force of capability development at the EU level. Consequently, for France, actual or potential competition from external actors should only be avoided.⁷¹ The EU financial instruments, which aim at bolstering multinational research and development activities, are of interest to Paris, insofar they are viewed, at the country level, as being able to contribute to developing and strengthening the potential of the national defence sector. In this regard the EU’s role appears as unambiguously

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁸ Haroche, P. (2020), Art. cit.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 864.

⁷¹ GRIP (2020), *La participation des pays tiers au sein de la PESCO*, March 30, <https://www.grip.org/fr/node/2942>, accessed 04 09 2020.

instrumental, in the sense that additional funds would serve as a multiplier for the French industry to strengthen its position on the global market. Such France's ambitions may have been motivated by her recent experience in the field. Exports of armaments produced by France during the period of 2015–2019, in terms of value, accounted for almost 8 percent of the global export market, whereas from 2010 to 2014 France's share was less than 5 percent.⁷² Although this EU Member State is far behind the US (36 percent) and Russia (21 percent; Germany – 5.8 percent; China – 5.5 percent),⁷³ her recent performance testifies to the country's potential (see Figure 2). However, Paris also continues to appreciate bilaterally developed cooperation, especially with the United Kingdom, but also the US, which makes the issue of participation of third countries in the EU instruments more of a dilemma.

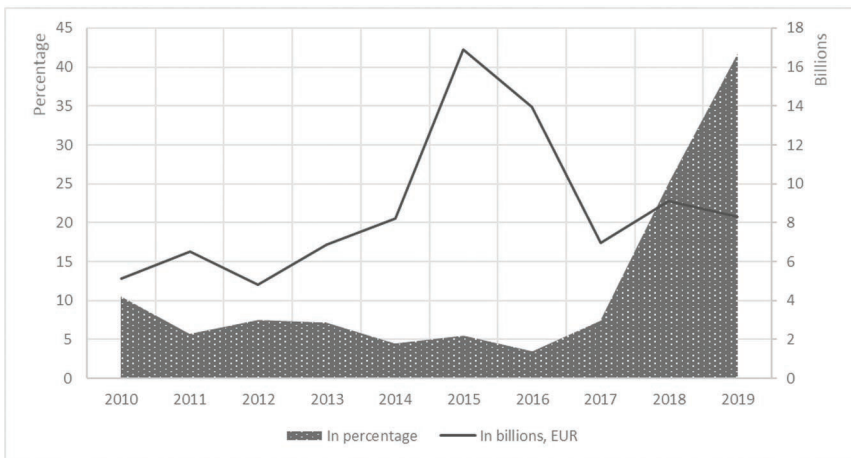


Figure 2. Share of France's armament export orders going to the EU Member States (in % of total value of exports) and the total value of export orders (in billions, EUR)

Note: compiled by the author based on data from the French Defence Ministry.⁷⁴

The relationship between France and CSDP can be paralleled with the

⁷² Chaperon, I. (2020), "La France devient le troisième exportateur mondial d'armement", *Lemonde.fr*, March 9, https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2020/03/09/la-france-s-affirme-comme-le-troisieme-exportateur-mondial-d-armement_6032277_3210.html, accessed 21 05 2020.

⁷³ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁴ Ministère des Armées (2020), *Exportations d'armement: le rapport au Parlement 2020*, June 2, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/articles/exportations-d-armement-le-rapport-au-parlement-2020>, accessed 14 09 2020, p. 65.

French position towards NATO, which is treated as an *instrument*.⁷⁵ To give an example, in the eyes of the French political elites, a more active participation of France in NATO activities in Europe, notably, sending troops to NATO's Multinational Enhanced Forward Presence Battalion in the Baltic Region, provides Paris with more weight in terms of credibility when trying to convince Eastern European countries to contribute to the EU missions.⁷⁶ Despite related material costs, France is believed to benefit from her efforts to strengthen the NATO battalion, in that Paris will gain support from the European capitals to implement its "proposals in the defence field at the European level."⁷⁷

Importantly, France's instrumental approach to both NATO and CSDP reveals their lack of significance as *political* projects. Therefore, a failing ideological commitment to them by the French elites appears consequential. Whether a shift in this set of underlying circumstances might be able to compensate for the above-described empirical constraints and tilt France's ideological preferences towards defence and security integration remains an open question. As argued in the next section, these effective limitations are rather structural and therefore can hardly be overcome by a more pro-European ideological commitment.

3. Facing structurally constrained national independence

France is strongly attached to the idea of sovereign action⁷⁸ in international politics as "an irreducible national value."⁷⁹ Therefore, the European dimension in the French position on issues of defence and external security

⁷⁵ Relative to NATO, however, CSDP, in the eyes of French political elites, offers more advantages, such as better know-how pertaining to complex security situations necessitating knowledge and skills not only in the military domain but also in the areas of peace-building, conflict-prevention, state-building, etc. Such know-how is required to tackle modern threats, such as terrorism (e.g., Assemblée nationale (2018), *Rapport d'information sur l'Europe de la Défense et son articulation avec l'OTAN*, Paris, February 22, http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/rapports/duel115b0719_rapport-information, accessed 15 06 2020, p. 50–57).

⁷⁶ LRT.lt, BNS (2020), *French troops join NATO battalion in Lithuania*, July 3, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1194558/french-troops-join-nato-battalion-in-lithuania>, accessed 11 09 2020.

⁷⁷ Wieder, T., Kauffmann, S. (2020), "Dialogue, divergences et coups d'éclat : entre la France et l'Allemagne, une entente sous tensions", *Lemonde.fr*, February 13, https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2020/02/13/entre-paris-et-berlin-une-entente-sous-tensions_6029483_3210.html, accessed 12 05 2020.

⁷⁸ E.g., Maulny, J.-P. (2019), Art. cit., p. 54.

⁷⁹ Paul, T. V. (2005), "Soft balancing in the age of U.S. Primacy", *International Security* 30(1), p. 46–71, p. 52; see also Howorth, J., Menon, A. (2009), Art. cit., p. 741.

appears to be imbued with a significant rhetorical aspect.⁸⁰ This ideological attachment continues to inform strategic efforts of Paris to seek to maintain the autonomy of the French defence sector. One is thus prompted to ponder over the possibility that a strengthened commitment on behalf of the French political elites to defence and security integration might be able to reduce the previously revealed limitations.⁸¹ However, a broader empirical perspective contributes to revealing a rather consistent pattern of ever more pressing structural⁸² constraints to France's action beyond her borders.

3.1. Reaffirming the ideological attachment to national defence autonomy

France's nuclear power and deterrence policy in particular continue to unambiguously represent as well as nourish the country's ambitions of national independence in the field of defence and security. In February 2020 Macron delivered a long-awaited speech on the issue of deterrence. The President was expected to present his political vision on the security of Europe and the world. Europe was in particular concerned with the interdependencies Macron was to envisage if not establish between France's deterrence strategy and the security of her allies in Europe, considering increasing doubts on the US nuclear umbrella on the continent.⁸³ Yet the French head of state was nothing short of conservative. He offered a vision, which, in terms of ideas, was hardly distinguishable from his predecessors and had already been heard as the official position of Paris in international fora.⁸⁴

Macron remained essentially loyal to the principles of the *livre blanc* on national defence and security of 1972, notably: "France lives in a web of interests which go beyond her borders. She is not isolated. Thus Western Europe, as a whole, cannot fail to benefit indirectly from the French strategy, which constitutes a stable and determining factor of the security in Europe."⁸⁵ In his speech, by which Macron linked his political course of action to France's past

⁸⁰ Howorth, J., Menon, A. (2009), Art. cit., p. 737.

⁸¹ E.g., Ministère des Armées (2019), p. 16 et sq.

⁸² That is, pertaining to conventionally understood power distribution within the international system.

⁸³ Hautecouverture, B., Maitre, E. (2020), "La France et la dissuasion nucléaire : le discours de l'École de Guerre du président Macron", *Fondation pour la recherche stratégique* (03/20), February 11, <https://www.frstrategie.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/notes/2020/202003.pdf>, accessed 15 06 2020, p. 1-3.

⁸⁴ Some elements had even featured president Chirac's speech in 2001 (ibidem, p. 1-2).

⁸⁵ *Le Livre blanc sur la défense de 1972*, <http://www.livreblancdefenseetsecurite.gouv.fr/pdf/le-livre-blanc-sur-la-defense-1972.pdf>, accessed 15 06 2020, p. 5; Hautecouverture, B., Maitre, E. (2020), Art. cit., p. 3.

in yet another way – by reminding of the significance of General Charles de Gaulle’s speech of 1959, in which he had announced the creation of the *force de frappe* –, the French head of state did not provide any detail as to the conditions of deterrence, as they were to apply to the European allies of France.

In fact, Macron’s speech was an echo of France’s more distant political past than the aforementioned *livre blanc*, insofar it was indeed reminiscent of De Gaulle’s position.⁸⁶ As for a more general framing of France’s nuclear strategy, ultimately, the speech might be rather understood as conveying the message that France, in pursuit of a more global security and peace, is committed to leading by example in the area of disarmament and, in this regard, is assuming her international responsibilities as a nuclear power.⁸⁷

Yet when talking about France’s vital interests, President Macron reminded the following: “Should the leader of any State underestimate France’s deep-rooted attachment to its freedom and consider threatening our vital interests, whatever they may be, that leader must realise that our nuclear forces are capable of inflicting absolutely unacceptable damages upon that State’s centres of power: its political, economic, and military nerve centres.”⁸⁸ Thus, the emphasis in the speech was in fact put on the function of the nuclear weapon as a defensive means to protect the core national interests. In this manner, and ideologically-wise, the French head of state was able to make the world, including the European allies of France, remember the national independence of the French nuclear capabilities.

The reference framework of deterrence, understood, first and foremost, with respect to the national boundaries of France, structures the scope of possibilities of the French security community more generally. Indeed, another prominent example of France’s national ambitions may be suggested based on the fact that her defence industry is capable of providing armaments to the French military forces and maintain them thanks to national capabilities – that is, without the help from foreign providers –, to the extent of 95 percent; also importantly, this reality continues to be a source of national pride for the French decision-makers.⁸⁹ Acquisitions from abroad are permitted only in exceptional

⁸⁶ In 1959 De Gaulle declared as follows: “Naturally, French defence has to be, when necessary, conjugated with defence of other states. Such is the nature of things.” (*Allocution de Charles de Gaulle à l’Ecole militaire, 3 novembre 1959*, <https://mjp.univ-perp.fr/textes/degaulle03111959.htm>, accessed 12 09 2020).

⁸⁷ *Speech of the President of the Republic on the Defense and Deterrence Strategy* (2020), Paris, February 7, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2020/02/07/speech-of-the-president-of-the-republic-on-the-defense-and-deterrence-strategy.en>, accessed 11 09 2020.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁹ To the category of national capabilities also belong those developed within the framework of bilateral cooperation (Ministère des Armées (2020), *Exportations d’armement...*, p. 17).

cases, such as those which would result in too high costs for the realisation of a sovereign option.⁹⁰ It is officially recognised that acquiring production from foreign countries, even if allies, can indeed lead to constraints regarding the autonomy of employing armaments, which contradicts the notion of sovereignty.⁹¹

However, the focus on France's strong ideological attachment to the autonomy of national defence only tends to bias the analysis, insofar it is a part of a broader politico-strategic commitment of Paris, that is, the French commitment to maintaining the independence of the country's foreign policy. Thus, defence should be regarded as a tool of foreign policy in the French case,⁹² which highlights a significant hierarchical policy *relationship*. Importantly, defence policy may be one of the last bastions of France's effective sovereignty. It is therefore a broader scope of France's external action that needs a discussion to test the empirical relevance of the notion of ideological commitment.

3.2. Limits of France's foreign policy in light of cooperation with Russia

A prominent and recent illustration, consistent with the thesis emphasising France's ambitions to pursue national politics in the area of foreign policy,⁹³ is the relationship of Paris with Moscow. However, based on the latest developments pertaining to France's approach to Russia, the paper suggests ever more pressing structural constraints to France's action beyond her borders. These constraints tend to appear as largely independent in terms of precedence, in particular, from the ideological preferences of Paris.

In mid-2019 President Macron initiated a seemingly independent course of political action when he declared about his intention to "give a new impetus to the strategic dialogue with Moscow,"⁹⁴ despite, in particular, the lack of progress in the "Minsk implementation'[,] the avowed goal of Western policy

⁹⁰ Ibidem.

⁹¹ Ministère des Armées (2019), p. 17.

⁹² See ibidem. The current paper, however, does not suggest that this hierarchical feature is unique for France.

⁹³ Vaïsse, J. (2017), "Le passé d'un oxymore. Le débat français de politique étrangère", *ESPRIT*, November, <https://esprit.presse.fr/article/justin-vaïsse/le-passe-d-un-oxymore-le-debat-francais-de-politique-etrangere-39714>, accessed 12 05 2020.

⁹⁴ IRIS, *Emmanuel Macron Wants to Give a New Impetus to the Strategic Dialogue with Russia* (2019), June 24, <https://www.iris-france.org/138685-emmanuel-macron-wants-to-give-a-new-impetus-to-the-strategic-dialogue-with-russia/>, accessed 11 09 2020.

since 2015.”⁹⁵ France’s affirmation of her sovereign course is especially suggestive, based on overall reactions to this course by other EU Members.⁹⁶ The strategic dialogue was an addition to the diplomatic talks within the Normandy Format, which provides grounds to question France’s “policy of firmness” towards Russia.⁹⁷

In August of 2019 Vladimir Putin paid a solemn visit to France.⁹⁸ Signs of symbolic significance as harbingers of improving Franco-Russian relationships have been quite a few: for instance, the practice of bilateral meetings of defence ministers has been renewed (it had been discontinued since 2014); the French and Russian presidents have been promoters of an initiative to convene a meeting of the permanent members of the UN Security Council to discuss issues pertaining to the international order. Back in 2019 President Macron accepted the invitation from his Russian counterpart to come to Moscow for the celebration of the 9th of May in the following year.⁹⁹ Furthermore, there had been support from France for Russia’s move back to the Council of Europe as a full-fledged member.¹⁰⁰

These developments, which attest to a loosening “policy of firmness” of France with regard to Russia, seem to be consistent with a general pattern of Post-Cold War Russo-French cooperation. As argued by Perchoc, France seeks “support of big and middle-range powers, such as Russia,” to remain an influential state on the international stage, or a “system-influencing state.”¹⁰¹ This argument, however, turns out somewhat problematic, insofar it is predicated on non-existence of contrary interests, Russia being seen “as a potential ally, or at least a power that will not impede French action in Africa and the Mediterranean Sea region.”¹⁰²

⁹⁵ Allan, D. (2020), *The Minsk Conundrum: Western Policy and Russia’s War in Eastern Ukraine*, Research Paper, May, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-05-22-minsk-conundrum-allan.pdf>, accessed 12 09 2020, p. 15

⁹⁶ E.g., Mallet et al. (2019), “Emmanuel Macron’s pivot to Russia sparks EU unease”, *Ft.com*, September 11, <https://www.ft.com/content/00ac54f4-d30f-11e9-8367-807ebd53ab77>, accessed 12 09 2020.

⁹⁷ French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (2019), *France’s Position on the Situation in Ukraine*, December, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/ukraine/situation-in-ukraine-what-is/>, accessed 12 09 2020.

⁹⁸ E.g., Nexon, M. (2019), “A Brégançon, Emmanuel Macron et Vladimir Poutine peinent à s’entendre.” *Lepoint.fr*, 20 August, https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/a-bregancon-emmanuel-macron-et-vladimir-poutine-peinent-a-s-entendre-20-08-2019-2330533_24.php, accessed 11 09 2020.

⁹⁹ Le Figaro, AFP (2019), *Macron à Moscou en 2020 pour le 75e anniversaire de la victoire sur l’Allemagne nazie*, August 19, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/macron-a-moscou-en-mai-2020-pour-le-75e-anniversaire-de-la-victoire-sur-l-allemande-nazie-20190819>, accessed 11 09 2020.

¹⁰⁰ E.g., Erlanger, S. (2019), “Council of Europe Restores Russia’s Voting Rights”, *Nytimes.com*, June 25, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/25/world/europe/council-of-europe-russia-crimea.html>, accessed 11 09 2020.

¹⁰¹ Perchoc, P. (2015), “Paris, Moscow, and “Europe out of the EU””, *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*, 13(1), p. 47–60, p. 48.

¹⁰² *Ibidem*, p. 59.

Yet in recent years Russia has been expanding her clout in Africa, precisely in the zone of the French influence.¹⁰³ Furthermore, France recognises that Russia is seeking to weaken the transatlantic relationship and divide the EU, as well as is pursuing the strategy of intimidation in her neighbouring regions.¹⁰⁴ Paris remains attentive to the modernising of Russia's army and concludes that the renewal of Russian defence capabilities, as well as Moscow's strategy to emphasise its military edge, threaten the neighbourhood, thus, including Europe, and are equally a cause for tensions beyond the proximate region, notably, in Syria.¹⁰⁵ Briefly, there are empirical indications of *conflicting* interests between Moscow and Paris.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, this raises the question in regards to what may explain France's seeking of a dialogue with Russia.

In fact, Russia may still turn out to be a useful partner on certain issues of global concern, such as the nuclear deal with Iran or fight against Daesh.¹⁰⁷ Importantly, however, it is necessary to appreciate this argument in light of President Macron's efforts to maintain a solid transatlantic relationship, by way of reaching out to President Donald Trump through means of bilateral diplomacy as well as such initiatives as an attempt to mediate between the US and Iran after the American ally had withdrawn from the multi-party nuclear deal with Teheran in May 2018. However, Macron's initiatives were turned down by the American side. The realisation of impossible constructive cooperation with the current administration of the US made France *fall back* on the Russian option.

Tensions inherent to this strategy *by default* of the French executive have been highlighted in the context of two recent moments of major political significance for Europe: the poisoning of President Putin's prominent opponent Alexei Navalny and pro-democratic protests in Belarus against President Alexander Lukashenko, who has the support of his Russian counterpart. That is, by virtue of her national history as well as her steadfast membership in the transatlantic community, France is committed to the promotion of democracy

¹⁰³ PISM (2020), *France and the Russian Presence in Africa*, Bulletin (47), March 17, https://pism.pl/publications/France_and_the_Russian_Presence_in_Africa, accessed 15 06 2020.

¹⁰⁴ Ministère des Armées (2017), *Revue stratégique de défense et de sécurité nationale 2017*, December 4, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/dgris/presentation/evenements-archives/revue-strategique-de-defense-et-de securite-nationale-2017>, accessed 15 06 2020, p. 42.

¹⁰⁵ Ministère des Armées (2018), *Projet de loi de programmation militaire 2019 / 2025. Rapport annexé*, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/english/portail-defense/issues2/la-lpm-2019-2025/les-actualites2/loideprogrammation-militaire-2019-2025-textes-officiels>, accessed 15 06 2020, p. 5.

¹⁰⁶ Delanoë, I. (2014), "Le retour de la Russie en Méditerranée", *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* 89, p. 23–35. doi.org/10.4000/cdlm.7652; Marginedas, M. (2015/2016), *La Russie revient en force en Méditerranée*, https://www.iemed.org/observatori/arees-danalisi/arxiu-adjunts/afkar/afkar-48/Russie_Mediterranee%20Marc%20Marginedas%20afkar48fr.pdf, accessed 14 09 2020, p. 26–27.

¹⁰⁷ Assemblée nationale (2018), p. 50.

and human rights.¹⁰⁸ Paris condemned the poisoning as a criminal act and called for a swift and transparent investigation into the matter by Russian authorities in addition to initiation of extra targeted EU sanctions against Russia; together with the EU, Paris refused to recognise Lukashenko as a legitimate president.¹⁰⁹ Yet in the immediate aftermath, these political moments were not sufficient to result in any significant shift in France's strategy of rapprochement with Russia.¹¹⁰ While foreign policy is essentially reactive and therefore pragmatic, which makes a too principled position impracticable, an absence of guiding values introduces a risk of inconsistent action.¹¹¹ Such a risk has been imposed on France by external influences.

Although the relationship with Moscow enables France to render her political influence internationally somewhat more effective in concrete instances,¹¹² such cooperation itself lacks constancy. Therefore, it is far from certain that the current Franco-Russian relationship will allow Paris to remain within the ranks of the guardians of the (multilateral) international system, viewed from the perspective of the international relations scholarship. As put by Drezner, “[m]uch of the international relations discipline [...] is concerned about patterns and regularities that persist for longer than a few years.”¹¹³

The temporal dimension is therefore of the essence. Insofar cooperation between Paris and Moscow in the current international context reveals itself as opportunistic, that is, devoid of any guiding principles, it contributes to testifying to increasing challenges that France has been facing in order to uphold her status as a “system-influencing state.” This amounts to a qualitatively different situation, compared to the one when, back in 2003, France's opposition to the US over the “Iraqi crisis”, at least in the eyes of some observers, equalled to a “founding moment of France's new vision and ambition in the world.”¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ E.g., Charillon, F. (2005), “La politique étrangère de la France. D'une puissance de blocage a une puissance de proposition ?”, *Etudes*, (4), p. 449–459, p. 452.

¹⁰⁹ E.g., Le Figaro, AFP (2020), “Empoisonnement de l'opposant russe Alexei Navalny : la France dénonce un « acte criminel »”, August 25, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/empoisonnement-de-navalny-la-france-denonce-un-acte-criminel-20200825>, accessed 30 10 2020 ; News Wires (2020), “EU refuses to acknowledge Lukashenko as Belarus's president”, France24.com, September 24, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200924-eu-refuses-to-acknowledge-lukashenko-as-belarus-s-president>, accessed 30 10 2020.

¹¹⁰ A planned meeting of foreign and defence ministers, e.g., was cancelled (AFP (2020), “Navalny poisoning shatters Macron's Russia reset dream”, *France24.com*, September 9, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200909-navalny-poisoning-shatters-lukashenko-as-belarus-s-russia-reset-dream>, accessed 30 10 2020).

¹¹¹ Charillon, F. (2005), Art. cit., p. 452.

¹¹² E.g., Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères (2019), *Ambassadors' conference–Speech by M. Emmanuel Macron, President of the Republic*, August 27, <https://lv.ambafrance.org/Ambassadors-conference-Speech-by-M-Emmanuel-Macron-President-of-the-Republic>, accessed 13 09 2020.

¹¹³ Drezner, D.W. (2020), Art. cit., p. 3.

¹¹⁴ Charillon, F. (2005), Art. cit., p. 449.

Conclusions

A recent push towards increased defence and security integration has served to emphasise seemingly more common grounds between the EU Member States. However, somewhat newly discovered points of commonality have left unattended by scholars the manner (or manners) in which these *heightened* inter-European dynamics could shed light on political and policy positions of individual members. The paper tries to demystify the role of France with regard to the CSDP developments, as this EU Member State is prominently linked to common initiatives in the field.¹¹⁵

Such a contextual framing of France's political strategy in relation to common issues of defence and security is relevant, because it helps to integrate both President Macron's current course of political action and a longer-term status of France as an influential nation. These aspects of interest to both decision-makers and scholars specifically relate to the questions raised in the beginning of the paper, that is: To what extent Macron's policy, being imbued with a strengthened European dimension, is a harbinger of possible change in France's interests? More fundamentally, could France be considered as a powerful state, in the sense that the French decision-making, being based on national preferences in defence and security, easily translates into policy outcomes at the extra-national level?

As for the European dimension, President Macron appears as an adept of France's long-term pro-Europeanism. Yet in light of recent history, the relationship of Paris with CSDP cannot be appreciated as unproblematic and seamless, insofar the influence of France turns out to be limited. One should be doubtful about whether a strong ideological commitment of France to common defence and security issues, instead of her attachment to a sovereign course of action, might be a factor of change. Limits are structural, which makes one reconsider France's status as a "system-influencing state" more cautiously.

The EU framework may be expected to reduce uncertainty surrounding the strategic bilateral initiatives of France (e.g., with respect to Russia). Significantly, considering the empirical limits of France's influence in the recent CSDP developments, integration tends to suggest the occurrence of a more *europeanised* policy. These are the conditions pointing to the need for a constructive policy approach to be developed by individual Member States to the EU-level issues of defence and security. In other words, today a non-policy option seems hardly possible.

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¹¹⁵ E.g., Haroche, P. (2017), Art. cit.