

EU Strategic Autonomy: Views and Positions of Visegrad countries

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Abstract

The policy paper defines the concept of strategic autonomy as a means and process that can help the EU achieve effective foreign policy governance at the EU level, and the interests it pursues are beyond the national interests of each EU member state. The use of the term ‘strategic autonomy’ is still mainstream in China’s domestic academic circles. Chinese academic circles summarize the EU strategic autonomy into five aspects. First, EU strategic autonomy includes not only the autonomy in the military field, but also the autonomy in all fields of foreign affairs. The goal of EU’s strategic autonomy is that the EU can determine which issues are related to its core interests in foreign affairs and take independent actions on these issues, but this does not mean isolationism; Secondly, strategic autonomy is relative. Absolute strategic autonomy does not exist. The EU still needs to rely on partners to achieve its goals in some strategic areas (e.g. intelligence sharing and economic development), which is why the EU has to pursue ‘an appropriate level of strategic autonomy’; Third, strategic autonomy hopes to move away from the EU’s security and defense dependence on the United States, as well as from economic and trade dependence on China, while gaining sovereign

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authority over more member states; Fourthly, the EU strategic autonomy is a means to coordinate EU's essential resources and strengths, which can ensure that the EU will not be marginalized in the future geopolitical game; Fifthly, the EU strategic autonomy requires that the EU foreign policies should proceed from the overall interests of the EU to safeguard its interests and values, which is not only the requirement of external actions, but also the inevitable requirement of promoting European integration. The EU's focus on strategic autonomy has been influenced by three factors. First, the strategic competition between China and the US has raised the EU's awareness of geopolitical competition while it feels its position and interests are threatened. Second, the Russia-Ukraine conflict at the regional level has made the EU's security threat from Russia more tangible. Third, the internal crisis of the European Union in recent years not only shows the problem of EU governance, but also highlights the contradiction between the expansion and deepening of EU integration. The EU has undertaken many practices to enhance its strategic autonomy, including two main areas: defense and economy, with technology becoming an essential area for EU measures in the economy. As the new member states of EU, The V4 countries are more concerned with policy issues that are conducive to their development than the interests of the EU, which makes them more interested in developing dependency relationships with countries outside the EU and therefore contribute less to the EU's strategic autonomy in general. Considering the Visegrad cooperation has always been linked to external factors, it remains to be seen whether the debate on the EU's strategic autonomy is an opportunity to strengthen V4 cooperation or yet another challenge to weaken it. The EU's strategic autonomy is still in the process of development, both in conceptual and practical terms, and it is an excellent challenge for the EU to achieve it in the true sense. The different attitudes of the V4 countries on the issue of EU strategic autonomy illustrate that the realization of EU strategic autonomy ultimately depends on the development of European integration, the most important of which is a unified EU policy.

The Development of EU Strategic Autonomy

1. Concept definition: EU strategic autonomy

Since the slogan and concept of EU strategic autonomy were put forward, the discussion on its connotation and definition has never stopped, and there are multiple understandings of the concept of EU strategic autonomy. Too many similar terms in its discussion also lead to confusion about the definition of EU strategic autonomy. In the discussion of European policy

circles and academic circles, the terms related to ‘Strategic Autonomy’ mainly include ‘European Sovereignty’ and ‘Strategic Sovereignty’¹.

The term ‘European sovereignty’ was first put forward by French President Macron. In September 2017, French President Macron used this concept in a speech at the Sorbonne University in Paris, France. He believed that safeguarding European sovereignty was the only way to guarantee the future of Europe.² On 9 December 2021, Macron stressed at the press conference of the French presidency of the Council of the European Union that the first task of this presidency is to pursue greater European sovereignty. A sovereign Europe should ensure the safety of European people, meet the challenges brought by immigration and avoid crises.³ ‘Strategic autonomy’ implies that the EU can act autonomously in international affairs. This ability is related to political behavior. However, ‘European sovereignty’ embodies political authority.⁴ The scope of autonomous action mentioned in ‘European sovereignty’ involves the fields of security, economy, digital, climate and health.⁵ When people discuss the autonomy in the above fields, they often use it in combination with ‘European sovereignty’, such as ‘technical sovereignty’ and ‘economic sovereignty’. The EU wants to gain political authority through strategic autonomy, that is, the ability to effectively control all aspects of the impact of the internal and external environment on the EU. ‘European sovereignty’ was put forward by the heads of government of member countries, and its essence can't get rid of the idea of power. From this aspect, ‘European sovereignty’ implies that powerful (powerful) groups can truly have sovereignty. Some scholars believe that this concept depicts a Europe with internal authority and external autonomy. Among them, ‘strategic autonomy’ is the second dimension of ‘European sovereignty’, that is, the pursuit of external autonomy.⁶

People who use the term ‘strategic sovereignty’ in the European policy circle have criticized ‘European sovereignty’. Mark Leonard and Jeremy Shapiro, the proponents of ‘strategic sovereignty’, believe that the concept of ‘sovereignty’ is traditionally associated with nation-

¹ **Note:** This paper only analyzes the concept of ‘Strategic Autonomy’ and its parallel concept with similar connotations. In the process of specific use, the terms related to ‘Strategic Autonomy’ include ‘economic sovereignty’, ‘military sovereignty’ and ‘technological sovereignty’. This paper holds that the above terms belong to the extension of ‘Strategic Autonomy’ in a specific policy field. Its connotation and the connotation ‘Strategic Autonomy’ belong to the relationship of inclusion and inclusion. Therefore, it is no longer necessary to distinguish the above terms from ‘Strategic Autonomy’.

² Ambassade de France en Allemagne (Embassy of France in Germany), “Rede von Staatspräsident Macron an der Sorbonne Initiative für Europa”, September 2017, pp.3-11, https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/macron_sorbonne_europe_integral_cle4e8d46.pdf.

³ “Speech by President Emmanuel Macron on the French Presidency of the Council of the EU”, 13 December 2021, <https://presidence-francaise.consilium.europa.eu/de/aktuelles/rede-von-prasident-emmanuel-macron-zur-franzosischen-eu-ratsprasidentschaft/>.

⁴ Daniel Fiott, “The Pathway to a Sovereign Europe,” *Internationale Politik Quarterly*, 6 January 2022, <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/pathway-sovereign-europe>.

⁵ European Council on Foreign Relations, “European Sovereignty,” https://ecfr.eu/europeanpower/european_sovereignty.

⁶ 曾向红,孟祥毅:《愿景政治视角下的“欧洲主权”构想》,载德国研究,2022年第1期,第4-25+129页。Zeng Xianghong, Meng Xiangyi: The Conception of ‘European Sovereignty’ from the Perspective of Vision Politics, in *German Studies*, No.1, 2022, pp. 4-25+129.

states, and the goal of ‘European sovereignty’ can easily be interpreted as that the sovereignty of member states should be transferred to the supranational institutions of European Union. ‘While ‘strategic sovereignty’ will make up for the defects of the term ‘European sovereignty’. Its purpose is not to ask member states to transfer sovereignty to the EU level but to build a Europe with more unified actions and a stronger sense of common goals, to create a more effective governance system for EU foreign policy, and to integrate better and utilize all forms of European influence. In this sense, the word ‘sovereignty’ in ‘strategic sovereignty’ means not taking away the sovereignty of member states but taking back the autonomy of the EU from other big countries.² The report ‘Strategic sovereignty for Europe’ issued by the European Union points out that ‘strategic sovereignty’ means that the EU can act independently, rely on its own capabilities and resources in key strategic areas, and act together with partners when necessary.³ ‘Strategic sovereignty’ mainly emphasizes the EU’s common political will and the ability to act independently.

The goal of ‘strategic autonomy’ is similar to that of ‘strategic sovereignty’, but it was put forward earlier. This concept first appeared in the French defense white paper in 1994. At that time, France believed that to restore its leading position in Europe and its status as a big country, it was first necessary to eliminate France’s dependence on the United States. The original purpose of the EU strategic autonomy is to reduce its reliance on the United States in security and defense. It can be seen that the concept of ‘strategic autonomy’ has been related to the purpose of ‘getting rid of the influence of other countries’ from the very beginning. From the above perspective, the proponents of ‘strategic sovereignty’ think that ‘strategic autonomy’ often implies confrontation with the United States,⁴ Some scholars believe that the focus of ‘strategic autonomy’ is still in the military field,⁵ That is, to get rid of the security dependence on the United States. However, with the development of the concept of ‘strategic autonomy’, its connotation is also richer.

When describing the current strategic behavior of the European Union, Chinese academic circles tend to use the term ‘strategic autonomy’⁶. It is not ‘European sovereignty’ or ‘strategic

¹ Mark Leonard, Jeremy Shapiro, “Strategic sovereignty: How Europe can regain the capacity to act,” ECFR, 25 June 2019, https://ecfr.eu/publication/strategic_sovereignty_how_europe_can_regain_the_capacity_to_act/#top.

² Ibid.

³ Suzana Anghel, “Strategic sovereignty for Europe,” European Parliamentary Research Service, September 2020, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/652069/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)652069_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/652069/EPRS_BRI(2020)652069_EN.pdf).

⁴ Mark Leonard, Jeremy Shapiro, “Strategic sovereignty: How Europe can regain the capacity to act,” ECFR, 25 June 2019, https://ecfr.eu/publication/strategic_sovereignty_how_europe_can_regain_the_capacity_to_act/#top.

⁵ 房乐宪,殷佳章:《欧盟战略主权的多维内涵及其国际含义》,载《教学与研究》,2021年第10期,第65-75页。

Le Xian, Yin Jiazhang: Strategic Sovereignty of the EU: Multi-dimensional Connotations and International Implications, in Teaching and Research, No. 10, 2021, pp. 65-75.

⁶ 贺之杲:《后疫情时代的欧洲战略自主对欧美关系的影响》,载《当代世界与社会主义》,2021年第6期,第43-51页;田德文:《欧盟战略自主的困境与出路》,载《当代世界》,2021年第12期,第36-40页;严少华:《欧盟战略自主与中国对欧战略新思维》,载《复旦学报(社会科学版)》,2021年第6期,第126-136+165页;焦莉,严骁骁:《理解中美博

sovereignty’, but some scholars equate ‘strategic autonomy’ with ‘strategic sovereignty’¹. Generally, the use of the term ‘strategic autonomy’ is still mainstream in China's domestic academic circles. In domestic academic circles, ‘strategic autonomy’ has been used in different ways: the first one follows the original connotation of ‘strategic autonomy’ and regards it as the autonomy pursued by the European Union in the field of security and defense;² The second is to expand the connotation of ‘strategic autonomy’ and regard autonomy in the fields of economy, technology and health as a part of EU strategic autonomy. It is worth noting that China scholars tend to embed EU strategic autonomy into more specific areas for analysis, such as ‘technical sovereignty’, ‘digital sovereignty’ and ‘economic sovereignty’.

In order to make the concept more definite, this paper uses the term ‘strategic autonomy’ to describe the current strategic behavior of the European Union. In order to reduce the ambiguity of the concept of ‘strategic autonomy’, it is necessary to define the connotation of EU strategic autonomy first. Although there are many complicated discussions about the concept of EU strategic autonomy, these concepts, whether ‘strategic autonomy’, ‘strategic sovereignty’ or ‘European sovereignty’, have something in common, from which the proper meaning of EU strategic autonomy can be summarized. Therefore, we can define the concept of strategic autonomy as a means and process that can help the EU achieve effective foreign policy governance at the EU level, and the interests it pursues are beyond the national interests of each EU member state.

In this paper, it counts the number of articles published in Chinese core academic journals (CNKI) on EU strategic autonomy since 2016 (see graph 1).

弈下的欧洲战略自主：限度、立场与行为逻辑》，载《国际关系研究》，2021年第5期，第45-69+155-156页；贺之杲：《美国重返中东欧对欧盟战略自主的影响》，载《德国研究》，2020年第3期，第52-70+161-162页。

He Zhigao: The Impact of European Strategic Autonomy on EU-US Relations in the Post COVID-19 Era, in *Contemporary World and Socialism*, No. 6, 2021, pp. 43-51; Tian Dewen: European Strategic Autonomy: Difficulties and the Way Out, in *Contemporary world*, No. 12, 2021, pp. 36-40; Yan Shaohua: European Strategic Autonomy and Chinese Strategic New Thinking Towards the EU, *Fudan Journal (Social Sciences Edition)*, No. 6, 2021, pp. 126-136 + 165; Jiao Li, Yan Xiaoxiao: Understanding the European Strategic Autonomy under the Sino- US Game: Limits, Positions and Behavioral Logic, in *Journal of International Relations*, No. 5, 2021, pp. 45-69 + 155-156; He Zhigao: The Impact of America's Return to Central and Eastern Europe on EU Strategic Autonomy, in *German Studies*, No. 3, 2020, pp. 52-70 + 161-162.

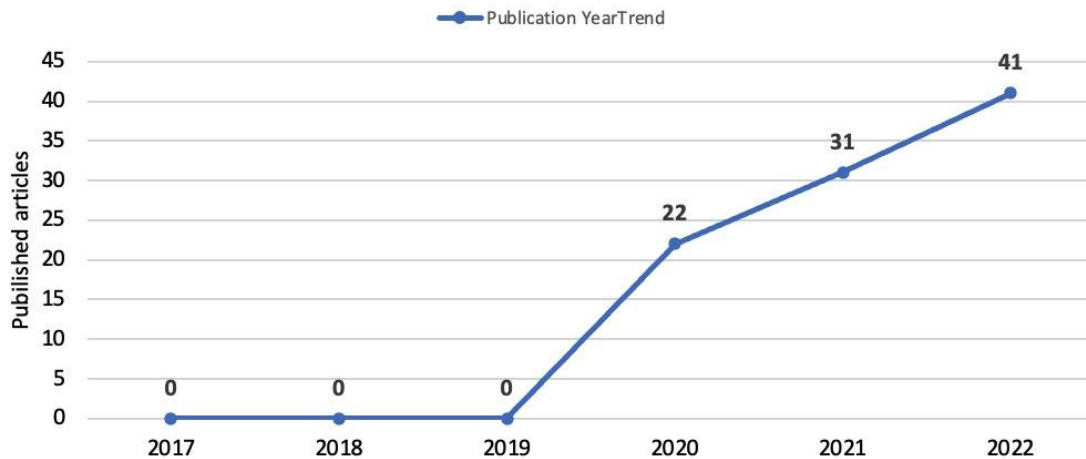
¹ 贺之杲：《争论中的“欧洲主权”》，载《世界知识》，2021年第12期，第46-48页。

He Zhigao: European sovereignty in Dispute, in *World Affairs*, No. 12, 2021, pp. 46-48.

² 金玲：《“主权欧洲”：欧盟向“硬实力”转型？》，载《国际问题研究》，2020年第1期，第67-88+138页；田德文：《解析欧盟“战略自主”困局》，载《欧洲研究》，2021年第5期，第36-52+6页。

‘A Sovereign Europe’: Transforming the European Union to “Hard Power”, in *International Studies*, No. 1, 2020, pp. 67-88 + 138; Tian Dewen: An Analysis of the Predicaments of EU Strategic Autonomy, in *Chinese Journal of European Studies*, No. 5, 2021, pp. 36-52 + 6.

General Trend Analysis



Note: The line graph shows the total number of publications related to "Strategic Autonomy", "European Sovereignty" and "Strategic Sovereignty".

Chinese academic circles summarize the EU strategic autonomy as follows:

First, the EU strategic autonomy includes not only the autonomy in the military field, but also the autonomy in all fields of foreign affairs. The goal of EU's strategic autonomy is that the EU can determine which issues are related to its core interests in foreign affairs and take independent actions on these issues, but this does not mean isolationism; Secondly, strategic autonomy is relative, absolute strategic autonomy does not exist, and the EU still needs to rely on partners to achieve its goals in some strategic regions (e.g. intelligence sharing and economic development), which is why the EU has to pursue 'an appropriate level of strategic autonomy'; Third, strategic autonomy hopes to move away from security and defense dependence on the United States, from economic and trade dependence on China, and to gain sovereign authority over more member states¹; Fourthly, the EU strategic autonomy is a means to coordinate EU's essential resources and strengths, which can ensure that the EU will not be marginalized in the future geopolitical game; Fifthly, the EU strategic autonomy requires that the EU foreign policies should proceed from the overall interests of the EU to safeguard its interests and values, which is not only the requirement of external actions, but also the inevitable requirement of promoting European integration.

¹ 伍慧萍：《欧洲战略自主构想的缘起、内涵与实施路径》，载《德国研究》，2021年第3期，第23-45+152-153页。
Wu Huiping, Origin, Connotation and Implementation Path of the European Strategic Autonomy Concept, in German Studies, No.3, 2021, pp. 23-45+152-153.

2. Policy Objectives and Practice of EU Strategic Autonomy

Strategic autonomy was mentioned by the European Council at its winter summit in 2013 when discussing defense and security matters. In its annual report published during the year, the European Council singled out the European Defense Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) strategy as a way to increase its autonomy and its ability to work with partners.¹ As the international situation and geopolitics change, the EU gradually recognizes the need to reduce external dependence not only in the security field, but also in the fields of science and technology, trade and other areas to reduce external influence and strengthen external autonomy. This recognition also makes the connotation of strategic autonomy richer. The EU Global Strategy released in 2016 proposes that the EU's foreign and security policy must respond to the pressure brought by the external environment. It also has to deal with an increasingly divided identity and explicitly proposes to promote the EU's common interests and values through achieving strategic autonomy.² Three years later, the EU published "A new strategic agenda 2019-2024", which states that the EU wants to act to increase its autonomy to defend its interests.³ As of December 2022, the European Council has repeatedly referred to the EU strategic autonomy, with the European Council stating at its October 2020 meeting that strategic autonomy while maintaining an open economy is a key objective for the EU.⁴ In February 2021, the EU Council published the study "Strategic Autonomy Strategic Choices", which refers to the EU's strategic autonomy as a multifaceted concept that involves developing capabilities, reducing external dependencies, and setting autonomous goals.⁵ In September 2021, the European Commission published its first Strategic Foresight Report entitled "2021 Strategic Foresight Report The EU's capacity and freedom to act", which mentioned that the EU should accelerate its deployment in ten strategic areas in order to achieve the EU's strategic autonomy.⁶ Subsequently, the European Commission published its second EU Strategic Foresight Report, which presents a forward-looking scenario of the EU's global position in 2040 in terms of open strategic autonomy and outlines Europe's existing capabilities, dependencies and vulnerabilities, and highlights the ways in which the EU can build on its existing strengths, address current and upcoming challenges, and establish

¹ Council of the European Union, 'The European Council in 2013,' 2014, p. 71, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2860/73472>.

² European Union Global Strategy, 'Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe- A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy,' June 2016, https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf

³ European Council, 'A new strategic agenda 2019-2024,' June, 2019, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/06/20/a-new-strategic-agenda-2019-2024/>.

⁴ European Parliament, 'Key issues in the European Council- State of play in May 2022,' May 2022, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2022/730319/EPRS_STU\(2022\)730319_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2022/730319/EPRS_STU(2022)730319_EN.pdf)

⁵ Council of the European Union, 'Strategic Autonomy, Strategic Choices,' 5 February 2021, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/49404/strategic-autonomy-issues-paper-5-february-2021-web.pdf>

⁶ European Commission, "2021 Strategic Foresight Report The EU's capacity and freedom to act," 8 September 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/foresight_report_com750_en.pdf.

priorities to shape and secure open strategic autonomy.¹ On 21 March 2022, the EU Council formally approved “A Strategic Compass for Security and Defense” (hereafter referred to as the Strategic Compass), a guide covering all aspects of the EU’s security and defense policy, structured around the four pillars of operations, investment, partnership, and security, to make the EU a stronger and more capable security provider.² In the Strategic Compass, the EU explicitly emphasizes the importance of security and defense autonomy to enhance the EU’s strategic autonomy.³ In July 2022, the European Parliament published a brief entitled “EU strategic autonomy 2013-2023: From concept to capacity”, which analyzes the concept of strategic autonomy as well as its implementation.⁴ It is clear from these documents that the EU’s strategic autonomy has become a key policy objective to be promoted and pursued at the EU level.

The EU has undertaken many practices to enhance its strategic autonomy, including two main areas: defense and economy, with technology becoming an essential area for EU measures in the economy. On the defense front, to address the multiple threats and challenges it faces, the EU has implemented several defense initiatives since 2017 to strengthen its work in the area of security and defense. In December 2017, the EU’s 25 member states established Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) to improve defense cooperation among themselves. This cooperation aims to progressively deepen defense cooperation to increase the EU’s defense forces.⁵ In March 2021, the EU launched the €5 billion European Peace Facility (EPF), which will fund EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) actions in the military and defense fields. It will allow support for military and defense matters outside the EU budget and enable the EU to support global partners through bilateral or multilateral mechanisms, thus filling gaps in the EU’s external action.⁶ In May 2021, the EU announced the creation of the European Defense Fund (EDF) to increase investment and cooperation in advanced defense technology and equipment.⁷ Subsequently, the EU launched its Strategic Compass, highlighting policy directions and specific objectives in four areas: external action, security, investment and partnerships. In external action, the Strategic Compass aims to strengthen the EU’s crisis management role while using military and civilian forces and the European Peace

¹ European Commission: JRC Publications Repository, “Shaping and securing the EU’s Open Strategic Autonomy by 2040 and beyond,” <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC125994>.

² European Union External Action, “A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence,” 24 March 2022, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-0_en

³ Ibid., p.23.

⁴ European Parliament, “EU strategic autonomy 2013-2023 From concept to capacity,” 7 August 2022, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)733589](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2022)733589).

⁵ PESCO, “Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) Deepen defence cooperation between EU Member States,” 11 December 2017, <https://pesco.europa.eu/about/>.

⁶ European Union External Action, “Questions & Answers: The European Peace Facility,” 22 March 2021, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/46286/questions-answers-european-peace-facility_en.

⁷ European Commission, “The European Defence Fund (EDF),” 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/defence-industry-space/eu-defence-industry/european-defence-fund-edf_en.

Fund to achieve its objectives. In the area of security, the EU will enhance its ability to detect threats and challenges.¹ In the Strategic Compass, the EU further plans to establish a 5,000-strong rapid reaction force, including sea, land, air and cyber forces, that can be deployed rapidly in a crisis. Regular training will begin in 2023, and the force will be ready to deploy rapidly in a crisis in 2025.²

The EU's autonomous defense capacity building is also inextricably linked to NATO's support. Seventh progress report on the implementation of the common set of proposal endorsed by EU and NATO notes that the Military Mobility, which is of high importance to all parties, has become a flagship project for EU-NATO cooperation. ³The invitation of the US to participate in the Military Mobility under the EU Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) is also an important step towards a closer partnership between Europe and the US in the security field.

For the EU's security and defense forces at this stage, developments at the EU level are symbolic and leading. In contrast, substantive developments remain at the level of member states such as France and Germany. In the EU's €1.8 trillion 'The 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework adopted', only €13.2 billion is budgeted under security and defense. In contrast, France's recent annual defense budget is over €40 billion and aims to reach €50 billion in the future. In February 2022, Chancellor Scholz announced a €100 billion spending plan for a special fund to modernize the Bundeswehr over the next five years. In July 2022, the German government approved more than €50 billion for defense spending for 2023. The continued development of the security and defense forces of the EU and its member states provides a solid basis for improving the security relationship between Europe and the US.

On the economic front, in March 2020, the European Commission presented its European Industrial Strategy to make the EU industry more globally competitive.⁴ The EU is well aware of its high dependence on foreign industrial products, and of the 5,200 products examined, the EU is highly dependent on 137 of them, with more than half of these imports coming from China.⁵ The EU has taken several measures to reduce external dependence, such as the Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability presented in October 2020 and the Pharmaceutical

¹ European Union External Action, "Questions and answers: a background for the Strategic Compass," https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/97895/questions-and-answers-crisis-management-basket-%E2%80%93-background-strategic-compass_en.

² European Union External Action, "A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence," 24 March 2022, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-o_en.

³ NATO, "Seventh progress report on the implementation of the common set of proposals endorsed by EU and NATO Councils on 6 December 2016 and 5 December 2017," 20 June 2022, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220620-progress-report-nr7-EU-NATO-eng.pdf.

⁴ European Commission, "Europäische Industriestrategie," March 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/european-industrial-strategy_de.

⁵ European Commission, "Strategic Dependencies and Capacities," 5 May 2021, p.1, <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/strategic-dependencies-capacities.pdf>.

Strategy for Europe launched in November 2020, both of which are important initiatives to promote the resilience of the EU supply chain.¹ In addition, the EU is at a disadvantage in the semiconductor sector, with a share of around 10% of global semiconductor chip revenues and around 6% in computing and communications. Limited capacity, high entry costs and insufficient financing access prevent EU companies from making the digital transition. In particular, the EU is almost entirely dependent on design tools and IP developed by US companies to design general-purpose processing technologies and on Asia (mainly China and Taiwan) to manufacture advanced chips.² These data show that the EU is also at risk of falling behind and developing new external dependencies in key technology areas, particularly the digital ecosystem, which has prompted the EU to start taking measures to address external trade dependencies, such as strengthening cooperation in innovation and increasing the diversity of import sources.³ In December 2020, the EU presented the Digital Europe Programme to support projects in five key areas, such as supercomputing, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and advanced digital skills, a new funding scheme that will help accelerate Europe's digital transformation.⁴ In order to become more competitive in the digital age, the EU has intensified its fight for rule-making power in digital governance. In order to become more competitive in the digital age, the EU has intensified its fight for rule-making power in digital governance. In April 2021, the EU enacted the Artificial Intelligence Bill, which, if passed, will likely become a global benchmark for legislation in the field of artificial intelligence.⁵ In November 2022, EU countries agreed on a €45 billion plan to finance chip production, allowing the 27-member EU to reduce its dependence on US and Asian chipmakers.

The EU, as mentioned earlier practice proves that the EU not only considers strategic autonomy as a slogan but also as a strategic direction for the future, based on which internal and external policies are formulated and external actions are carried out. Overall, the EU's strategic autonomy is still being discussed and developed. However, it is now sure that it cannot be defined based on the common interests of EU member states. The interests pursued by strategic autonomy must go beyond the national interests of each country and form the basis for external action.⁶ At the same time, the EU also emphasizes cooperation

¹ European Commission, "COM(2020)667," 15 October 2020, [https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=COM\(2020\)667&lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=COM(2020)667&lang=en); European Commission, "COM(2020)724", 11 November 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/communication-european-health-union-resilience_en.pdf.

² European Commission, "Strategic Dependencies and Capacities," 5 May 2021, pp.84-86, <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/strategic-dependencies-capacities.pdf>.

³ *Ibid.*, pp.42-51.

⁴ European Commission, "The Digital Europe Programme," <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/activities/digital-programme>.

⁵ 薛岩, 赵柯: 《欧盟数字治理: 理念、实践与影响》, 载《和平与发展》, 2022年第1期, 第80-102+138页。

Xue Yan, Karina Zhao: Digital Governance in the EU: Concept, Practice and Impact, in *Peace and Development*, No.1, 2022, pp. 80-102+138.

⁶ Felix Arteaga, et al., "Appropriate level of European Strategic Autonomy," Armament Industry European Research Group, November 2016.

with partners who share common values and interests to maintain a competitive edge, preserve technological sovereignty, and preserve rules-based multilateralism.

Reasons for the Promotion of EU Strategic Autonomy

In recent years, the EU's emphasis on strategic autonomy has mainly stemmed from concerns about its declining influence and the ambiguity of its global positioning. Specifically, the EU's focus on strategic autonomy has been influenced by three factors. First, the strategic competition between China and the US has raised the EU's awareness of geopolitical competition while it feels its position and interests are threatened. The current dynamics of the great power game have highlighted that the EU's freedom of choice in its foreign policy has been significantly reduced. The EU often needs to consider the US and China's reactions. Although the EU still relies heavily on the US for its security, it is well aware that it cannot entirely fall back on the US in its foreign policy choices. Moreover, China's rapid economic development still attracts the EU to maintain economic and trade cooperation with China. The EU also needs China as a partner in the fight against climate change and in promoting global governance. The EU is unwilling and unable to take sides in the strategic competition between the US and China due to the need to safeguard its own interests. The changing international situation has increased the EU's perception of uncertainty about the future. The EU wants to be able to act as a third force in the process of a comprehensive game between China and the US. The EU is therefore trying to take measures to win the initiative in geopolitical competition, which also requires it to put more and more emphasis on strategic autonomy.

Second, the Russia-Ukraine conflict at the regional level has made the EU's security threat from Russia more tangible. Some Chinese scholars have summarized the threat perceptions of EU member states to Russia: firstly, the perception of EU states regarding Russia's attempts to subvert the existing international order structure; secondly, the threat perception of most European states regarding cyber-attacks from Russia; thirdly, the perception of EU institutions regarding European states' dependence on Russian energy sources; and finally, the perception of geopolitical threats from Russia in Eastern Europe.¹ The conflict between Russia and Ukraine in early 2022 seriously impacted the EU and challenged its energy security. In the fields of natural gas, oil and coal, Russia is the largest importer of the EU. On March 8, 2022, the European Commission released the energy independence plan, namely, "Repower EU: Joint European action for more affordable, secure and sustainable energy" to reduce Russia's

¹ 田德文,吴大辉,项佳谷,张敏,张莉,王展鹏,孟虹,孔田平,史志钦,赵安晴,崔洪建,张利华,赖雪仪,查婷俊,漆海霞,曾敬涵:《“大变局下的欧洲与中欧关系”之专家笔谈》,载《辽宁大学学报(哲学社会科学版)》,第1-29页。
Tian Dewen, Wu Dahui, Xiang Jiagu, Sharla Cheung, Zhang Li, Wang Zhanpeng, Meng Hong, Kong Tianping, Shi Zhiqin, Zhao Anqing, Cui Hongjian, Zhang Lihua, Lai Xueyi, Cha Tingjun, Qi Haixia, Zeng Jinghan: A Europe and China-EU Relations under the Great Changes, in Journal of Liaoning University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition), pp.1-29.

impact on European energy security.¹ The plan aims to make Europe independent from Russian fossil fuels well before 2030. It reflects the EU's determination to pursue strategic autonomy. Reducing energy dependence on Russia has become one aspect of EU strategic autonomy. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has prompted the EU remains dependent on the U.S. military to ensure European security, so NATO's influence in the EU has increased. Finland and Sweden gave up their neutral status and formally submitted their applications to join NATO. German Prime Minister Scholz also said that he would deepen defense cooperation with the United States. Germany decided to spend the 10 billion euro purchase of the F-35 fighter jets produced by the U.S.. It is commented that this decision will strengthen Germany's defense dependence on the United States, which is not conducive to the EU's defense cooperation and the development of strategic autonomy. At the same time, Poland and the Baltic countries regard Russia as a top threat to national security, which increases their dependence on NATO and believe that the EU cannot achieve strategic autonomy in a real sense. The incompatibility in transatlantic relations has been covered since the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Strengthening military and political ties with the United States become the first choice for European countries. The media is also no longer pay attention to the discussion of the EU's strategic autonomy. The security dilemma caused by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict makes European countries put security considerations first. Although the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has raised the EU's overall anxiety about security, it has also highlighted the importance of strengthening strategic autonomy and improving defense capacity construction on the European continent. Therefore, in the long run, strategic autonomy remains one of the priorities of EU development. After the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the EU no longer holds illusions about Russia. "WAR TO END ALL WAR" became a new popular slogan for Europeans. European countries realise that even the United States cannot do much about the security threat Russia poses to Europe.² Despite the NATO security architecture, there is also the possibility of a separate strategic compromise between the US and Russia. The need to strengthen Europe's independent defense forces is urgent, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict has further strengthened the EU's determination to pursue strategic autonomy.

Third, the internal crisis of the European Union in recent years not only shows the problem of EU governance, but also highlights the contradiction between the expansion and deepening of EU integration. After many times of enlargements, the European Union has absorbed Central and Eastern European countries. There are differences of interests between new and old member countries, and the contradictions caused by different national demands are

¹ European Commission, March 2022, "REPowerEU: Joint European Action for more affordable, secure and sustainable energy", https://energy.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-03/REPowerEU_Communication_with_Annexes_EN.pdf

² Piotr Buras, et al., "Survive and thrive: A European plan to support Ukraine in the long war against Russia," ECFR, 9 September 2022, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/survive-and-thrive-a-european-plan-to-support-ukraine-in-the-long-war-against-russia/>.

gradually increasing. It is difficult for the EU to coordinate the contradictions among its member states. The Brexit and 'multi-speed Europe' initiatives make the future of the EU more uncertain, and the legitimacy of the EU will also be damaged. The European public's recognition of the EU still comes from its 'functionality'. In other words, the public's recognition of the EU is mainly driven by interests rather than emotions.¹ When it is difficult for the EU to provide satisfactory results or sufficient benefits for the public, the trust of the European public in the EU will soon decline. This decline is reflected in the public response after the crisis. After the refugee crisis, the Spanish people's trust in the European Union dropped from 65% in 2007 to about 20% in 2013.² After a series of events, such as the European debt crisis, the refugee crisis, the new crown epidemic situation, the strong Euroscepticism and populism within the European Union are flooding again, which further reduces the legitimacy and cohesion of the EU. To improve the situation of the EU, the EU has begun to emphasize the importance of the overall interests. They hope to enhance the cohesion of the EU through strategic autonomy and promote the development of European integration.

In short, from the continuation of the European debt crisis to the frequent terrorist attacks, from the expansion of the refugee crisis to the inadequate response to the COVID-19 epidemic, this series of shocks has led to a decline in the convergence of policy preferences between the EU and its member states. Also undermined the further development of the EU's common foreign policy and stalled the process of European integration. Although the European debt crisis, the refugee crisis and the COVID-19 epidemic have put the development of European integration in a plight, the multiple internal and external challenges have also stimulated the EU's determination to pursue strategic autonomy to a certain extent.

Obstacles to EU strategic autonomy

1. Kidnap value and lack of flexibility

European Union is devoted to developing EU values into universal values. EU values used to be something behind a series of policy propositions, but now these values have become principles with priority. In areas of strategic importance e.g., technology and trade, the EU emphasizes the need to work with so-called "like-minded" countries. In this way, the EU's

¹ [英]安东尼·吉登斯《动荡而强大的大陆：欧洲的未来何在？》，陈志杰译，北京大学出版社 2019 年版，第 3 页。
Anthony Giddens: Turbulent and Mighty Continent: What Future for Europe? Translated by Chen Zhijie, Peking University Publishing House, 2019, p. 3.

² Ian Traynor, "Crisis for Europe as trust hits record low," The Guardian, 24 April 2013, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/survive-and-thrive-a-european-plan-to-support-ukraine-in-the-long-war-against-russia/>.

strategic autonomy not only gives itself a rather distinct political label, but also affects to some extent the scope for strategically autonomous cooperation and the flexibility of the policy.

2. The gap between willingness and ability

The European Union, founded with a quarter of the world's wealth and was the world's largest economy, has now slipped to third place in the world in terms of economic output and is on an irreversible downward trend in its gross national product over the next 20 years. However, it is lagging behind the US and China in areas such as digitalization, green energy and trade and investment. After the end of World War II, the EU countries enjoyed a defense dividend for many years by relying on NATO and the US for security and defense. But as a result, defense security has become a major shortcoming of the EU. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has exposed the EU's weakness in military defense, its diplomatic passivity and its economic constraints. The term 'EU strategic autonomy' first appeared in the defense industry to advance Europe's defense building and common security building. The EU defense industry was generally small and unevenly developed across the countries, with arms development and procurement being even more fragmented, with around 80% of arms procurement being done at the national level in the member states. As a result, there are between 50 and 60 different weapons systems in the United States, and up to 160 different weapons systems in European countries with much smaller armies, which are disorganized and mixed. Duplicate purchases of armaments in EU countries have become the norm and this behavior has resulted in a huge waste of resources.

3. Under the shadow of United States

The US has encouraged the EU countries to strengthen their defense. Still, with the proviso that it must be within the framework of NATO and under US control, or rather, the US has always maintained a wary attitude towards the strategic autonomy of Europe. The US idea of controlling Europe has remained unchanged since the end of the Second World War to the present day. After the end of the Cold War, in order to maintain the presence of NATO, the US continuously created imaginary enemies for European countries to create a sense of security anxiety for Europe. To date, the US still has a military presence in Europe. In recent years, however, the Obama administration's 'Rebalance to Asia and the Pacific', the Trump administration's 'America First' principle and the Biden administration's emphasis on the 'Indo-Pacific Strategy' has all made the EU realize that the era of total dependence on the US is over. The US is generally happy to see the EU and other European countries invest more in defense. But if the purpose of the increased defense investment by European countries is to expand their strategic autonomy, or even to break away from US control, that is something the US cannot allow. In the military sphere, the former US Secretary of Defense the three 'Ds' (no decoupling, no duplication, and no discrimination) to EU defense cooperation in addition, the

US Department of Defense's letter to the EU questioning the EU's PESCO and the US attempts to embed US equipment in the European military industrial system are all indicative of US attempts to take control of Europe in defense and security.

4. Deep divisions within the EU

The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Borrelli, admits that for historical and geographical reasons, European countries have widely divergent world views and lack a common strategic culture. Does strategic autonomy mean a path to 'European sovereignty' and a further cession of power from member states to EU institutions? This is a question of great concern to the new EU member states.

Regarding strategic autonomy, there are many contradictions between France and Germany, the major EU countries. France wants to turn the EU into a strong geopolitical entity through strategic autonomy so that it can be more involved in great power games and foreign interventions. On the other hand, Germany believes that strategic autonomy needs to be based on European integration, bringing EU member states closer together and opposing too much involvement of EU troops in extraterritorial interventions. In addition, the generalization of the EU's security concept into other areas has led to new conflicts within the EU. There are two views on industry, investment, technology reviews within the EU: the first believes that it is better to go back to commercial rules and market rules and not to put too much emphasis on the concept of security generalization. Another view is that all issues become security issues and that market opening and freedom of investment cannot be left to chance. The EU wants to integrate its internal resources and strengthen its internal cohesion through strategic autonomy. However, there are many contradictions between the new Europe and the 'Old Europe' regarding their own interests. Both Russia and the United States are consciously using these contradictions to divide the so-called 'New Europe' from the 'Old Europe'.

Differences among Visegrad Member States on Strategic Autonomy¹

The European Sovereignty Index, published by the European Council on Foreign Relations in June 2022, reveals a clear division within the EU, assessing the contribution of member states to the EU's strategic autonomy in six dimensions: climate, defense, economy, health, migration, technology. The Sovereign Index also classifies these member countries according to four identity dimensions: Leaders, Strivers, One-hit wonders, Underperformers. The criteria

¹ On December 12, 2022, the seminar on "The EU's Strategic Autonomy - The perception of V4 Countries" organized by IFAT for V4 scholars and me was suddenly cancelled for unknown reasons. It's a pity I have not been able to obtain first-hand materials to revise supplement the views in this report.

for ‘Leaders’ are countries that scored 8 or 6.4 overall in at least one area, ‘Strivers’ are countries that scored 6 and above in at least three areas, ‘One-hit wonders’ is defined as countries with a score of 6 and above in at least one domain, and ‘underperformers’ includes the worst performers as well as those with overall mediocre performance.¹

The European Sovereignty Index analyses the contribution of individual member states to strategic autonomy in terms of capacity and willingness. In general, the ‘New European’ countries have not contributed as much as the ‘Old European’ countries to the strategic autonomy of the EU, either in terms of their willingness or their ability to do so. However, the ‘New Europe’ are comparable to the ‘Old Europe’ in terms of Climate, Migration and Technology, while in terms of Defense and Health, the ‘Old Europe’ significantly more.

Table 1. Score for Visegrad Group contribution²

Counties	Score in Defense, Economy, Technology		
	Defense	Economy	Technology
Czech Republic	3.3	4.4	1.9
Hungary	2.4	4.6	1.8
Slovakia	2.3	3.4	1.5
Poland	3.4	4.1	1.7
Counties	Score in Defense, Economy, Technology		
	Defense	Economy	Technology
Czech Republic	5.0	6.0	5.2
Hungary	3.4	2.3	4.8
Slovakia	3.9	5.3	5.3
Poland	6.3	7.1	5.5
Counties	Score in Defense, Economy, Technology		
	Defense	Economy	Technology
Czech Republic	4.2	5.2	3.6
Hungary	2.9	3.5	3.3

¹ Jana Puglieri and Pawel Zerka, eds., “European Sovereignty Index,” ECFR, June 2022, <https://ecfr.eu/special/sovereignty-index/#terrain-economy>.

² Source from the European Council on Foreign Relations study on the European Sovereign Index. For details see: <https://ecfr.eu/special/sovereignty-index/#by-country>.

Slovakia	3.1	4.4	3.4
Poland	4.9	5.6	3.6

The European Sovereignty Index analyses each member state's contribution to strategic autonomy in terms of capacity and willingness. As seen in Table 1, the Visegrad Group contribute relatively little to the EU strategic autonomy in terms of willingness and capacity. This report analyses the attitudes and contributions of the Visegrad Group to the EU strategic autonomy by selecting data on the three areas most important to the EU strategic autonomy: security and defense, the economy and technology.

1. Defense Sovereignty

Overall, the V4's contribution to the EU strategic autonomy in security and defense is not high, and all four countries are underperforming. Underperformers' include the poorest performers and those that are mediocre overall and do not excel in any area. They have Insufficient resources and commitment in several areas of sovereignty and no role in strengthening European sovereignty. However, there are also differences in the level of contribution between the four countries. Regarding capacity scores, the Czech Republic and Poland scored comparably and much higher than Hungary and Slovakia. This is due to the Czech Republic's and Poland's efforts to modernize their defense, with some success. Both countries are actively engaged in foreign operations in the framework of the UN, the EU, NATO. According to the report 'Military Balance 2022' published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), the Czech Republic is involved in ten foreign operations in the framework of the UN, NATO and the EU. The Czech Republic has also made many efforts to modernize its military, such as acquiring weapons such as CAESAR self-propelled howitzers, short-range air-defense systems and UAVs.¹ Poland, which has made the defense of its territory one of the central pillars of its defense policy, has generally improved its defense capabilities by deepening its cooperation with other countries, particularly the United States. A number of international defense giants have subsidiaries in Poland. Poland has some capacity to independently deploy forces beyond national borders.² V4 EU Battlegroup is an EU Battlegroup led by Poland. Both in terms of the number of troops provided and the tasks undertaken, Poland play an essential role in the V4 battle group.³ Compared to the Czech

¹ "The Military Balance 2022," IISS, February 2022, p.97, <https://www.iiss.org/publications/the-military-balance/the-military-balance-2022>.

² Ibid. p.135, <https://www.iiss.org/publications/the-military-balance/the-military-balance-2022>.

³ 鞠维伟：《维谢格拉德集团军事防务合作初探——从欧盟战斗群的视角》，《俄罗斯东欧中亚研究》，载 2019 年第 1 期，第 141-154+158 页。

Jv Weiwei: A Preliminary Study on the Military Defense Cooperation of the Visegrad Group: From the Perspective of the EU Battle Group, in Russian, East European & Central Asian Studies, No. 1, 2019, pp.141-154+158.

Republic and Poland, Slovakia is less involved in operations abroad in the framework of the UN, the EU, NATO. Some of the pilot projects to upgrade military capabilities have not lived up to expectations.¹ Although Hungary is also pursuing a defense modernization program, its defense industrial base is limited, and its ability to deploy troops outside its borders is inadequate.²

Poland and the Czech Republic also scored much higher than the other two countries in commitments scores. Poland has always seen Russia as the primary threat to its national security.³ Although Czech security perceptions of Russia were not as strong as Poland's prior to the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, the 2017 Czech defense strategy still identifies Russia as one of its national security challenges.⁴ At the same time, both countries have actively sought the help of the EU. Taking cooperation in the PESCO framework as an example, in 2018, the EU Council published a list of 17 projects for PESCO, in which the EU Medium Altitude Long Endurance Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (Eurodrone), the Counter-Unmanned Aerial System (c-UAS) and the Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance System (JISR) all have Czech participation.⁵ As of 2020, Poland, for its part, is participating in 12 ongoing projects in the framework of PESCO.⁶ The above actions indicate that both countries actively seek to join the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy program. Influenced by domestic politics, Slovakia has maintained a smooth relationship with Russia until 2020. However, after the change of government, Slovakia's perception of Russia as a threat deepened, and its military spending increased to 2% of GDP. In the future, Slovakia will support security and defense sovereignty more in the aftermath of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. However, unlike most Central and Eastern European countries, which consider Russia a security threat, Hungary does not feel particularly anxious about Russia. Hungary's National Security Strategy still declares that Hungary does not consider any country an enemy, reflecting the peaceful nature of Hungarian strategic thinking.⁷ As a result, Hungary scores relatively low in terms of commitments in the area of security and defense.

¹ "The Military Balance 2022," IISS, February 2022, p.144, <https://www.iiss.org/publications/the-military-balance/the-military-balance-2022>.

² Ibid. p.115, <https://www.iiss.org/publications/the-military-balance/the-military-balance-2022>.

³ National Security Bureau (Poland) :Publications, "National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland," 2020, <https://en.bbn.gov.pl/en/publications/publications/769,National-Security-Strategy-of-the-Republic-of-Poland.html>.

⁴ Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic, "The Defence Strategy of the Czech Republic," April 2017, <https://www.army.cz/assets/en/ministry-of-defence/strategy-and-doctrine/defencestrategy2017.pdf>

⁵ European Council, "Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)'s projects – Overview," 6 March 2018, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/39664/table-pesco-projects.pdf>

⁶ European Council, "COUNCIL DECISION (CFSP) 2020/1746 of 20 November 2020 amending and updating Decision (CFSP) 2018/340 establishing the list of projects to be developed under PESCO," 20 November 2020, <https://www.pesco.europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020-11-23-Council-Decision-PESCO-projects-list-2020.pdf>

⁷ Tamas Csiki Varga, "Hungary's New National Security Strategy – A critical analysis," Institute for Defence and Strategic Studies, 14 January 2021, p.3, [https://svkk.uni-nke.hu/document/svkk-uni-nke-hu-1506332684763/ISDS_Analyses_2021_1_Hungary_s%20new%20National%20Security%20Strategy%20%E2%80%93%20A%20critical%20analysis%20\(Tamas%20Csiki%20Varga\).pdf](https://svkk.uni-nke.hu/document/svkk-uni-nke-hu-1506332684763/ISDS_Analyses_2021_1_Hungary_s%20new%20National%20Security%20Strategy%20%E2%80%93%20A%20critical%20analysis%20(Tamas%20Csiki%20Varga).pdf).

The overall performance of the V4 countries in the area of security and defense sovereignty is unsatisfactory. There are two main reasons for this, one is government and public suspicion that the EU can develop its own defense and a desire to strengthen military ties with the US. The Slovak public is concerned and skeptical about the EU's ability to guarantee peace and believes that only a stronger synergy and complementarity between the EU and NATO can promote the EU's common security and defense policy and that the strategic partnership between the EU and the US should therefore be supported and strengthened.¹ A report published by the Polish government on the discussion of the concept of EU strategic autonomy states that the EU's strategic autonomy should be based on promoting and deepening the values of the transatlantic community and strengthening cooperation with like-minded partners, mainly the US.² Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, which see Russia as a threat, are suspicious of the EU's strategic autonomy and fear it will affect their relations with NATO. Another reason is the low level of domestic military modernization and autonomous innovation. According to the Military Balance 2022 report, the Czech Republic, Slovakia still use Soviet-era equipment such as BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicles and T72 main battle tanks for their tanks and anti-aircraft missiles. The v4 countries are less able to innovate on their own militarily, some old arsenals have not been phased out and there is a high level of foreign dependence on armaments.

For their security, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia have had to seek security guarantees and strengthen their security cooperation in the framework of the European Union, and therefore contribute more than Hungary. The main reason for this variability lies in the different threat perceptions of Russia in the V4 countries. Hungary does not perceive Russia as a national security threat and lacks the factors that would prompt it to strengthen its security and defense capabilities. The domestic public is also not concerned about the threat from Russia, and the national activity report that emerged from the Conference on the Future of Europe lacked a discussion of the country's military security and focused more on the issue of illegal immigration.³ Hungary's level of threat perception makes it the country with the lowest contribution in the area of security and defense sovereignty among the v4 countries.

2. Economy Sovereignty and Technology Sovereignty

¹ Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic, "The Conference on the Future of Europe in the Slovak Republic," 2022, <https://futureu.europa.eu/pages/slovakia>.

² Kancelaria Prezesa Rady Ministrów (Office of the Prime Minister of Poland), "SILNIEJSZA UE W NIESTABILNYM ŚWIECIE WKŁAD DO DYSKUSJI NA TEMAT KONCEPCJI AUTONOMII STRATEGICZNEJ UE," 16 September 2021, <https://www.gov.pl/web/premier/wydarzenia-krajowe>.

³ Ministry of Justice Hungary, "National Activity Report," <https://futureu.europa.eu/cs/pages/hungary?locale=cs>.

The current rapid development of the digital economy has made economy and technology inseparable. The EU has also made many efforts in the technology field to gain greater economic sovereignty, which is analyzed in this paper in an integrated way. In terms of economic sovereignty, with the exception of Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia are all more supportive of EU economic sovereignty. The reasons for this are twofold: on the one hand, the V4 countries have all experienced significant economic growth since joining the EU. In Poland, for example, GDP growth reached 4.6% in 2017, which is more than twice the EU average growth rate.¹ The GDP growth rate in Poland decreases due to the impact of the new crown outbreak in 2020, but it picks up to 5.7% in 2021.² Poland is also the country that has received the most EU funding funds. The Czech Republic and Slovakia have also received significant amounts of EU structural funds. Poland is also the country that has received the most EU funding funds. The Czech Republic and Slovakia have also received significant amounts of EU structural funds, and Czech believes that EU economic aid will fundamentally stimulate the Czech economy. The Czech Pirate Party MP noted that the Czech economy is very dependent on exports, so it is vital for us that the European economy as a whole remains well-functioning, otherwise the Czech Republic too will soon fall into recession.³

On the other hand, the public in these countries is more supportive of relying on the EU to develop its economy. Slovakia believes that it should strengthen its ability to finance EU funds to achieve business profitability and improve public service quality.⁴ The Polish public stresses the need to deepen the development of the EU single market.⁵ One of the most discussed topics among the public at the Czech government's discussion event about Conference on the Future of Europe was the 'EU in the world'. They see the need to invest in the digital economy in order for the EU to remain competitive in an international environment.⁶ This shows public support for the EU's pursuit of economic sovereignty, which also makes the three countries much more willing to enhance the EU's economic sovereignty than Hungary.

¹ 姬文刚,《波兰的经济转型及社会发展:阶段、成就与挑战》,载《欧亚经济》,2018年第4期,第57-78+126+128页。

Ji Wengang: Economic transition and social development in Poland: stages, achievements and challenges, in Journal of Eurasian Economy, No. 4, 2018, pp. 57-78+126+128.

² 《波兰GDP增长率(百分比)》,世界银行, https://data.worldbank.org.cn/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=PL&name_desc=false.
“GDP growth (annual %) - Poland,” World Bank, https://data.worldbank.org.cn/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=PL&name_desc=false.

³ 《“捷克在欧盟中的利益”调查显示:欧盟经济救助方案将使捷克经济受益》,中国—中东欧国家智库交流与合作网络,2020年12月23日, https://www.17plus1-thinktank.com/article/1126.html?source=article_link.

“Czech interests in the EU’ shows that the Czech economy will benefit from the EU economic rescue package,” China-CEE Think Tank Network, 23 December 2022, https://www.17plus1-thinktank.com/article/1126.html?source=article_link.

⁴ Affairs of the Slovak Republic, “Národný konvent o EÚ - Pracovná skupina pre jednotný trh - Prvé stretnutie,” 26 November 2021, <https://futureu.europa.eu/processes/Economy/f/13/meetings/93820>.

⁵ Conference on the Future of Europe, “Contributions per Member State on the Multilingual Digital Platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe,” February 2022, <https://futureu.europa.eu/pages/ms-section>.

⁶ Jarolim Antal, “Průběžná hodnotící konference v rámci KOBE „Jakým směrem chceme řídit Evropu?“, 11 November 2022, <https://futureu.europa.eu/cs/processes/OtherIdeas/f/7/meetings/83392>.

Hungary considers the economic model of Western European to be flawed. Therefore, it prefers economic cooperation with countries other than the EU.¹ Hungary's economic development mainly depends on exports, and its economy is highly open to the outside world. The export income accounts for 80% - 95% of GDP. Hungary does not have natural resources that are easy to export. Its exports are mainly based on manufacturing and service industries related to foreign direct investment. Hungary's domestic purchasing power is limited. Therefore, it is necessary to maintain an export-oriented development strategy for a long time in the future. As Hungary cannot compete with low-wage countries (although its wage level is not high in Europe), maintaining a long-term sustainable development strategy must upgrade the technology level to maintain or increase the current export level. At the same time, the search for new markets to promote the internationalization of more and more domestic SMEs or attract more foreign investment, which is a long-standing demand for Hungary. Actively cooperating with eastern countries with rapid economic development will help reduce dependence on Germany and EU domestic economic and trade cooperation. Hungary's 'Opening to the East' policy is an important part of the country's diversified and pragmatic diplomacy. The policy is not a short-term speculative policy of the Orban government but a long-term strategy based on the judgement that global power is transferring from the west to the east. Hungary actively develops foreign trade with some countries and regions, including Turkey, China, East Asia, Central Asia, Southeast Asia and South Caucasus region. For Hungary, stronger trade and technology ties with countries such as China and India are more beneficial for its future development.² China's 'Belt and Road Initiative' is in line with the strategic needs of the Hungary's 'Opening up to the East'. In 2020, China has become the largest source of foreign investment in Hungary.³ Based on the above analysis, it is clear to see that the economic benefits offered by China coincide with Hungary's foreign economic objectives and that Hungary can derive greater economic benefits from its economic and trade relations with China. From a public perspective, the Hungarian participants in the Conference on the Future of Europe emphasized that a strong EU can only be built on cooperation between member states based on sovereignty, that the EU should not interfere excessively in the internal affairs of member states and that the EU should not criticize member states for pursuing their own national interests.⁴ From this perspective, Hungary is more concerned with its interests and,

¹ Simeon Djankov, "Hungary under Orbán: Can Central Planning Revive Its Economy?" *Peterson Institute for International Economics Policy Brief*, 2015, pp.15-11.

² 贺婷：《欧尔班政府的经济政策及其前景》，《欧亚经济》2017年第3期，第54-58+127页。

He Ting: The Orbán government's economic policy and its prospects, in *Journal of Eurasian Economy*, No.3, 2017, pp. 54-58+127.

³ 中华人民共和国商务部：《2020年度中国首次成为匈牙利最大外资来源国》，2021年4月29日，<http://hu.mofcom.gov.cn/article/tzzn/202104/20210403056683.shtml>.

"China becomes the largest source of foreign investment in Hungary for the first time in 2020," Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, 29 April 2021, <http://hu.mofcom.gov.cn/article/tzzn/202104/20210403056683.shtml>.

⁴ Ministry of Justice Hungary, "National Activity Report," <https://futureu.europa.eu/cs/pages/hungary?locale=cs>.

for this reason, remains very willing to develop close economic ties with China and is not interested in EU economic sovereignty.

However, Poland, Czech, Slovakia all score much higher in terms of commitments than the capabilities for economic sovereignty, meaning that despite strong government and public support for European economic sovereignty, all three countries cannot make a significant economic contribution to it.¹ The low scores of the V4 countries in terms of economic sovereignty are largely related to the slow development of their economies. During the Cold War, most of the V4 countries' domestic economic systems were based on the Soviet model, but the economic model's gradual rigidity slowed the V4 countries' economic growth. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the V4 countries began to follow a Western-style economic development path. In the last decade or so, these countries have made great economic progress, but their level and speed of economic development are still somewhat different from that of the "old Europe" countries.

In terms of technical sovereignty, the V4 countries score relatively similarly in terms of both commitments and capabilities. Overall, all four countries contribute less to technological sovereignty, but their commitments to pursue it is generally higher than in other areas of sovereignty. The importance of digital technology to a country's position in the global industrial chain cannot be overstated, so V4 countries score higher in commitments to be technologically sovereign than in other areas of sovereignty. The Czech Republic believes that for Europe to become a technology leader, it is necessary not only to ensure quality regulation but also to strengthen support for innovation and close cooperation with like-minded partners, especially the United States, is necessary to advance this vision.² The European innovation scoreboard, published by the European Commission in 2022, shows that the Czech Republic performs well in terms of innovation performance and is among the moderate innovators. But the remaining three countries are still among the emerging innovators. Overall, the technological development of the V4 countries is not satisfactory. In addition to the overall low level of technological development, the lack of telecommunication companies with leading technologies, such as Ericsson and Nokia, in the V4 countries also contributes to their low level of contribution in technological sovereignty. Technological development needs economic support, and Czech economist Tomáš Prouza says that investment in advanced technology is costly.³ As new member states of the EU, the V4 countries are developing

¹ Jana Puglieri and Pawel Zerka, eds., "European Sovereignty Index," ECFR, June 2022, <https://ecfr.eu/special/sovereignty-index/#terrain-economy>.

² Lucie Schneiderová, "EU chce být technologicky nezávislá, nesmí se však uzavírat do sebe, říká Ivan Bartoš," Euractiv, 9 November 2022, <https://euractiv.cz/section/prumysl-a-inovace/news/eu-chce-byt-technologicky-nezavisla-nesmi-se-vsak-uzavirat-do-sebe-rika-ivan-bartos/>.

³ Ibid.

economically slower than the ‘old Europe’. The V4 countries’ level of economic development affects their ability to exercise technical sovereignty.

On the whole, influenced by national development, threat perceptions, and domestic public perceptions, the V4 countries are not interested in the exact level of EU strategic autonomy, they want to achieve, preferring to obtain opportunities for security and economic development from countries outside the EU. In order to maintain the EU’s geopolitical position in the world in the context of the competition between the great powers, one of the main objectives of the EU’s strategic autonomy is to reduce or even get rid of its dependence on countries outside the EU, such as China, the US, and Russia. The interests pursued by the EU’s strategic autonomy are not the sum of the interests of the member states but go beyond the individual national interests of the member states and are a reflection of the interests of the EU as a whole. However, the V4 countries are more concerned with policy issues that are conducive to their development than the interests of the EU, which makes them more interested in developing dependency relationships with countries outside the EU and therefore contribute less to the EU’s strategic autonomy in general. In conclusion, to achieve EU strategic autonomy, the V4 countries and even the Central and Eastern European countries still need to accept the EU’s overall interests and work together with the ‘Old Europe’ to achieve it, which makes them willing to develop dependent relationships with countries outside the EU and therefore contribute less to the EU strategic autonomy overall. In conclusion, to achieve EU strategic autonomy, the V4 countries and even the Central and Eastern European countries need to accept the EU’s overall interests and work together with the ‘Old Europe’ to achieve it.

The importance of the Visegrad Group is reflected in mutual respect, geographical location, and Central European identity. Mutual respect means that these four countries will never force themselves to stand on the same footing as others. At the same time, the strength of cooperation between v4 lies in its flexibility. This flexibility allows countries to coordinate and collaborate further in areas where common interests exist. The Visegrad Group countries are better suited to a lesser degree of institutionalization so they can freely choose to address the issues they wish to work on together. To this day, this resilience of the group is seen as one of its greatest values.

Although the V4 has been more effective in political and economic cooperation than military security. However, the Visegrad Group has also made some progress in the area of security and defense cooperation. In November 2017, the establishment of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) by V4 countries and 19 other member states has raised cooperation on defense among the participating EU Member States to a new level. The most successful examples are the creation of the EU V4 Battlegroup and the rotating military presence of the

V4 countries in the Baltic States in 2017. The importance of geopolitical factors cannot be overstated. There are always common interests between the region's countries, from infrastructure development to economic integration. Although Visegrad cooperation cannot replace the national interests of countries, cooperation between them can be used as a tool to promote better the common goals of the Visegrad Group member countries. A Central European identity is not only not contrary to European identity, but it is also complementary to it and contributes to the enrichment of European culture and society. Visegrad Group's cooperation is an example of the principle of pluralism.¹

Visegrad cooperation has always been linked to external factors (mainly international organizations that all V4 countries want to join, such as the EU and NATO). Due to the informal nature of the V4, the political environment of the EU has always had a significant impact on it. The crisis in Ukraine, the refugee crisis, and Brexit (including previous attempts to reform the EU and subsequent debates on its future) have affected the content, development prospects, and external image of V4 cooperation. It remains to be seen whether the debate on the EU's strategic autonomy is an opportunity to strengthen V4 cooperation or yet another challenge to weaken it.

Conclusion

The EU's strategic autonomy is still in the process of development, both in conceptual and practical terms, and it is an excellent challenge for the EU to achieve it in the true sense. The competition among major powers, geopolitical threats, the EU's own capabilities and the attitudes of individual member states toward strategic autonomy all impact it to different degrees. While the strategic competition between China and the United States has reduced the EU's space for policy choices, it has also intensified the EU's idea of pursuing strategic autonomy. The U.S. once criticized the EU's pursuit of autonomy as a betrayal of the transatlantic relationship. However, a series of 'America First' policies introduced by the U.S. Trump administration have increased the rift in U.S.-EU relations, and the EU finds it difficult to believe that the U.S. will fulfill its commitments to its allies as it did in the past. As a result, the EU has strengthened its resolve to pursue strategic autonomy.

The outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict has led to a certain degree of suppression of the EU's strategic autonomy. The EU has always been divided on strategic autonomy. Poland, Lithuania and the Baltic states, which see Russia as an essential national security threat, have put the EU strategic autonomy in opposition to NATO. After the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the

¹ Szabolcs Takacs, "The Future of Europe and the Position of the Visegrad Group", Edited by Péter Stepper, Central Europe and the Visegrad Cooperation: Historical and Policy Perspectives, 2018, pp.140-143.

EU, feeling unprecedented fear, began to encourage the United States to join the EU's security and defense program. People are starting to claim that 'EU strategic autonomy is dead'¹. While the US responds to the needs of its European allies, it is more focused on the interests of the Indo-Pacific region. So, the EU strategic autonomy will continue to develop.

The different attitudes of the V4 countries on the issue of EU strategic autonomy illustrate that the realization of EU strategic autonomy ultimately depends on the development of European integration, the most important of which is a unified EU policy. The economic relations between the EU members and China influence the progress of the EU strategic autonomy. At the same time, the security relations between EU members and the US also influence the development of strategic autonomy. However, strategic autonomy in the true sense of the word can only be achieved if the EU acts for the most part in a unified manner externally, free from the influence of external states. Such unified action involves a cession of sovereignty by the member states, cooperation within the EU lead country and cooperation between EU member states.

The last not least, to achieve strategic autonomy for the EU, it is necessary to use the strategic tools currently available to the EU, in particular its economic strength. As one of the three largest economies in the world, the EU's influence on the global economy is enormous. The EU needs to grasp the single market and its ability to set economic rules and work together to promote the development of the slower-developing member states. The future direction of the EU strategic autonomy will only become clearer when economic instruments are used to develop other areas of autonomy further.

¹ Jason W. Davidson, "European Strategic Autonomy Is Dead," National Interest, 28 June 2022, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/european-strategic-autonomy-dead-203222>.

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