

# Don't Look at Trump: The EU Needs Strategic Autonomy



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**B**ehind the story about the upcoming planetary catastrophe, the Hollywood blockbuster *Don't Look Up* talks a lot about American politics, the role of media in today's world, and difficulties faced by the scientific truths in a battle with fake news and popular beliefs. However, the movie also identifies something else – the absence of the European Union (EU) in fighting the planetary disaster. Apart from the United States, only China, Russia, and India play minor roles in the movie.

In the confrontation with the incoming comet, a united Europe does not exist. This absence shows how Europe is perceived in the U.S. – a lack of agency in the American eyes. On the other hand, it also indicates that Europe's ability to act autonomously is necessary if the EU wants to influence its fate. Europe needs strategic autonomy if it wants to shape its future.

'Strategic autonomy' of the EU shall be deconstructed as an ability in foreign policy, showing its different elements. The autonomous European Union is particularly beneficial for Central and Eastern European (CEE) nations.

### **AUTONOMY FROM WHOM AND FOR WHAT**

In a nutshell, European strategic autonomy is about having the necessary means to achieve foreign policy goals while cooperating with partners – or acting alone if necessary. This concept appeared for the first time in the conclusions of the European Council in December 2013 and was then repeated and defined in the 2016 EU Global Strategy<sup>1</sup>. Securing strategic autonomy

<sup>1</sup>European Union (2016) *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*. Available [online]: [https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top\\_stories/pdf/eugs\\_review\\_web.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf)

## ” EUROPE NEEDS STRATEGIC AUTONOMY IF IT WANTS TO SHAPE ITS FUTURE

took a more prominent role during Donald Trump's presidency, when it became clear that the United States does not share the EU's vision and cannot be treated as a reliable partner – at least for the time being.

*"The times in which we could completely rely on others have somewhat passed"*, declared German Chancellor Angela Merkel in May 2017<sup>2</sup>, expressing feelings of many European leaders advocating for greater autonomy from the U.S. Even if the majority still see Washington as the main ally, the alliance's future remains uncertain. Joe Biden's electoral victory was a relief and a chance to rebuild the alliance with Europe, but, at the same time, a confirmation that American reluctance or inability to be a sole leader of the liberal world is a fact. Donald Trump or a similar populist politician can come to power in the next election, putting America back on track of isolationism and disintegration of the transatlantic community. From this point of view, Europeans think about being less dependent on

<sup>2</sup>Morillas, P. (2021) *An Architecture Fit for Strategic Autonomy*, FEPS POLICY BRIEF, November. Available [online]: [https://www.feps-europe.eu/attachments/publications/211125%20policy%20brief\\_strategic-autonomy2\\_eugs](https://www.feps-europe.eu/attachments/publications/211125%20policy%20brief_strategic-autonomy2_eugs)



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U.S. elections when talking about strategic autonomy.

Furthermore, the EU politicians have started to talk even more. 'The Strategic Autonomy' has become a buzzword in Brussels, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic and the frustrating consequences of being too dependent on outside countries and companies. Trying to secure access – first, to face masks and, later, to vaccines – the EU was forced to compete with selfish states driven by self-interests and looking for an answer to global scare in a suitcase labeled *re-nationalization*.

Even if it quickly turned out that international cooperation is necessary for an efficient fight with the global pandemic and that the nation-state is helpless trying to combat it

Figure 1: Elements of the strategic autonomy



alone<sup>3</sup>, the experience of ruthless international competition at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic has left a trace in the minds of Europeans.

Widespread discussions on *strategic autonomy* detached this term from its original, narrow, military-related meaning. Now, the list of areas where the EU should seek *autonomy* is quite long [See: Figure 1].

Moreover, the experience of sudden lockdowns during the pandemic stressed the value of the ability to control trade – particularly, securing supply chains of key products and components. The domination of U.S.-based big technological companies, the GAFAM (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft), which form a global oligopoly against the public interest<sup>4</sup>, forces Europe to build the Single Digital Market that can control and constrain the power of big tech. The rising geopolitical rivalry between the United States and China and the inward-looking foreign policy of Washington urged the EU to relearn *the language of power* when relating to the rest of the world<sup>5</sup>. The *geopolitical* EU, able to define and defend European interests, seems to be the logical response to more geopolitical world politics.

<sup>3</sup> Combating global pandemics together with organized crime, climate change, or financial crisis belongs to the long list of areas where a nation state is inefficient acting alone. See, for example: Beck, U. (2005) *Power in the Global Age: A New Global Political Economy*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

<sup>4</sup> Smyrniatos, N. (2016) "The GAFAM Effect: Strategies and Logics of the Internet Oligopoly", [in]: *Communication & Languages*, Vol. 188(2), pp. 61-83. Available [online]: [https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E\\_COMLA\\_188\\_0061--the-gafam-effect-strategies-and-logics.htm](https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E_COMLA_188_0061--the-gafam-effect-strategies-and-logics.htm)

<sup>5</sup> Morillas, P. (2021) *An Architecture Fit for Strategic Autonomy*, FEPS POLICY BRIEF, November. Available [online]: [https://www.feps-europe.eu/attachments/publications/211125%20policy%20brief\\_strategic-autonomy2.pdf](https://www.feps-europe.eu/attachments/publications/211125%20policy%20brief_strategic-autonomy2.pdf)



EVEN IF THE MAJORITY STILL SEE WASHINGTON AS THE MAIN ALLY, THE ALLIANCE'S FUTURE REMAINS UNCERTAIN

Finally, the technological competition and the digital revolution driven by Artificial Intelligence (AI) and quantum computing drive the interest to invest more in research and development (R&D), looking not only for a European alternative to American GPS (system Galileo was launched in 2016), but also other reliable, secure space-related services provided by the European space agency<sup>6</sup>.

There are two reasons why the EU needs an autonomous position in world politics. Firstly, increasing autonomy is intended to reduce dependencies, to make Europe more resilient and less vulnerable in times of crisis. Secondly, it allows the EU to use its political potential, exploit opportunities on the world stage, and be more efficient in defending its interests.

As for dependencies – one cannot forget that the alliance with the United States has been a cornerstone of European policy, and trying to reach strategic independence,

<sup>6</sup> The European Union Agency for the Space Programme (EUSPA) was officially launched on May 12, 2021. See: <https://www.euspa.europa.eu/about/about-euspa>



THE *GEOPOLITICAL* EU, ABLE TO DEFINE AND DEFEND EUROPEAN INTERESTS, SEEMS TO BE THE LOGICAL RESPONSE TO MORE GEOPOLITICAL WORLD POLITICS

the EU should not forget about maintaining transatlantic links. However, the series of crises that Europe had to confront in the last decade has clearly shown that too much dependency on America puts the EU in quite an uncomfortable position.

Donald Trump's presidency made Europeans aware that the U.S. might not want to play the role of responsible leader of the liberal world. Instead of being 'the shining city on a hill,' Trump's America became rather inward-looking and a selfish power, trying to hide its weakness behind harsh patriotic rhetoric. It was particularly visible during the 2020 pandemic crisis when the COVID-19 geo-medical battles between great powers opened the eyes of the European public to its vulnerability<sup>7</sup>. Without its own medical and pharmaceutical supplies production, the EU could not provide security to its citizens.

A similar situation occurs with raw materials, which have strategic value for economic security. The European Raw Materials Alliance (ERMA) aims to make Europe economically more resilient by addressing the challenge of securing access to raw materials, particularly so-called 'rare-earth.' Many of them are controlled by hostile countries outside Europe<sup>8</sup>.

The Biden presidency is giving Europeans some breathing space. In reaction to Russian aggression in Ukraine, Joe Biden mobilized collective action of the liberal world, giving a new hope that the West might be strong and reunited, and able to animate the institutions that advance collective security and prosperity. Biden's cooperative agenda gives the time needed to develop a European strategic turn to sovereignty, but should not delude that it will be a constant mood in American politics. The next president may be much less sensitive to its allies' needs and less prone to consult and coordinate with them than Joe Biden.

As for efficiency in defending European interests, market size and regulatory power give the European Union a big impact on international relations. The EU can set global standards in competition policy, environmental protection, food safety, the protection of privacy, or the regulations of hate speech in social media. It is called the 'Brussels Effect'<sup>9</sup>. Europe should seek to use those instruments more purposefully to defend European interests. Either through

<sup>8</sup> ERMA is an initiative set up in 2020 by the European Commission. It aims to build resilience and strategic autonomy for Europe's rare earth and magnet value chains. It is open to different stakeholders, including business, EU countries and regions, trade unions, civil society, research and technology organizations, investors, and NGOs. See the official website of the European Raw Material Alliance: <https://erma.eu>

<sup>9</sup> Bradford, A. (2020) *The Brussels Effect: How the European Union Rules the World*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

<sup>7</sup> Van Middelaar, L. (2021) *Pandemonium: Saving Europe*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Agenda Publishing.

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multilateral agreements or, if it proves impossible, by unilateral action, the EU should try to impose its regulations globally, particularly in the areas of digital economy, environment, market competition, and consumer health and safety.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine reinvigorated the discussion on European strategic autonomy and focused it on the security dimension. Building the ability to defend Europe has become a pressing need, and the question of how to do it is more important than ever.

#### **AUTONOMOUS SECURITY PROVIDER**

The traditional approach to security has been very much concentrated on military issues and confronting military threats. It is still a crucial security area, as the Russian invasion of Ukraine has shown. However,

Figure 2: The most important dimensions of European security



the Ukrainian war and the COVID-19 crisis exposed other dimensions of European security or rather, Europeans' security. If only we change the security referent from *territory and state* to *people*, we see a much more complex picture of what makes people insecure.

Everyday threats are related to topics such as health security (COVID-19 is a great example), climate change, access to food and energy, cyber-attacks that may affect our privacy, disinformation undermining our democracy, or migration flows, which may also cause some security challenges. In other words, sometimes, from the people's perspective, the number of beds in hospitals might be more important for their security than the number of tanks, and the number of doctors and nurses is more important than the number of soldiers<sup>10</sup>. There are, however, no *less or more* important security areas – they are all intersected.

Europe should be ready to provide security in all critical areas [See: Figure 2]), building a comprehensive defense system that connects military and non-military areas, respond to external and internal threats. This system should be autonomous as much as possible in the globalized world driven by complex interdependencies<sup>11</sup>.

## MILITARY SECURITY

The need for Europe's military autonomy is a long-discussed topic. It started during the Balkan Wars in the 1990s, when the European Union turned out to be incapable of dealing even with a relatively small security crisis in its neighborhood. Then, the debate was heated a few times when America

<sup>10</sup> Kamiński, T. (2021) "Foreign and Security Policy", [in]: *Liberal White Book Europe 2030*, European Liberal Forum, p. 202.

<sup>11</sup> Keohane, R. and J. Nye (2001) *Power and Interdependence*, New York, NY: Longman.



## THE UKRAINIAN WAR AND THE COVID-19 CRISIS EXPOSED OTHER DIMENSIONS OF EUROPEAN SECURITY OR RATHER, EUROPEANS' SECURITY

announced a "pivot to Asia", during the Arab Spring, the first Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014, and, finally, during the second invasion in 2022. All those events signaled that the era of the so-called 'peace dividend'<sup>12</sup> was over.

Europe is, and has always been, a military power. Even if European military capabilities are limited due to the current fragmentation of defense markets, problems with interoperability, and lack of the European Army<sup>13</sup>, Europe is no longer a "military worm" – as Mark Eyskens, Belgium's foreign minister, summed it up in 1991<sup>14</sup>. The year 2020 was the sixth year to have seen an increase in defense spending by European NATO members, whose military expenditures

<sup>12</sup> After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many Western countries cut their military spending. It allowed them to redirected public money flows to social programs or decreased taxation rates.

<sup>13</sup> Belhay, S. (2019) *A European Army by and For Europeans*, Initiative Policy Document, May.

<sup>14</sup> Kamiński, T. (2021) "Foreign and Security Policy", [in]: *Liberal White Book Europe 2030*, European Liberal Forum, p. 202.

are comparable to Chinese, and which far exceed Russian spending in this area. Announcements of big increases in defense budgets (e.g., in Germany and Poland) in reaction to the Russian aggression signaled that this trend would accelerate.

Even more important is the fact that European citizens are not against further European integration in security and defense. Public support for it remained unchanged, at the level of 75% over the past thirty years. Europeans tend to express support for reducing government spending, but at the same time they counterintuitively prefer cutting civilian expenditures over the defense<sup>15</sup>. The Russian threat and fresh memories of Trump's reluctance to "pay for a European defense"<sup>16</sup> create a favorable environment for profound changes in European defense policy and fostering European security cooperation.

Full military autonomy of Europe is both impossible and unnecessary. As Joseph Borell, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, a kind of EU Minister of Foreign Affairs, said: "*no one advocates the development of a fully autonomous European force outside NATO, which remains the only viable framework to ensure the territorial defense of Europe.*"<sup>17</sup> What is needed is the European Army at the disposal of the EU, the internal defense market integrated around the

<sup>15</sup> Schilde, K., Anderson S. B., and A. D. Garner (2019) "A More Martial Europe? Public Opinion, Permissive Consensus, and EU Defence Policy", [in]: *European Security*, No. 2, April 3, pp. 153–72.

<sup>16</sup> Stupp C. (2017) "Trump Demands NATO Payment – But Makes No Defence Pledge", [in]: *Euroactive.com*, May 26. Available [online]: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/trump-issues-ferocious-demand-for-nato-payments-but-makes-no-defence-pledge/>

<sup>17</sup> Borell, J. (2020) Why European Strategic Autonomy Matters. Available [online]: [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89865/why-europe-an-strategic-autonomy-matters\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89865/why-europe-an-strategic-autonomy-matters_en)

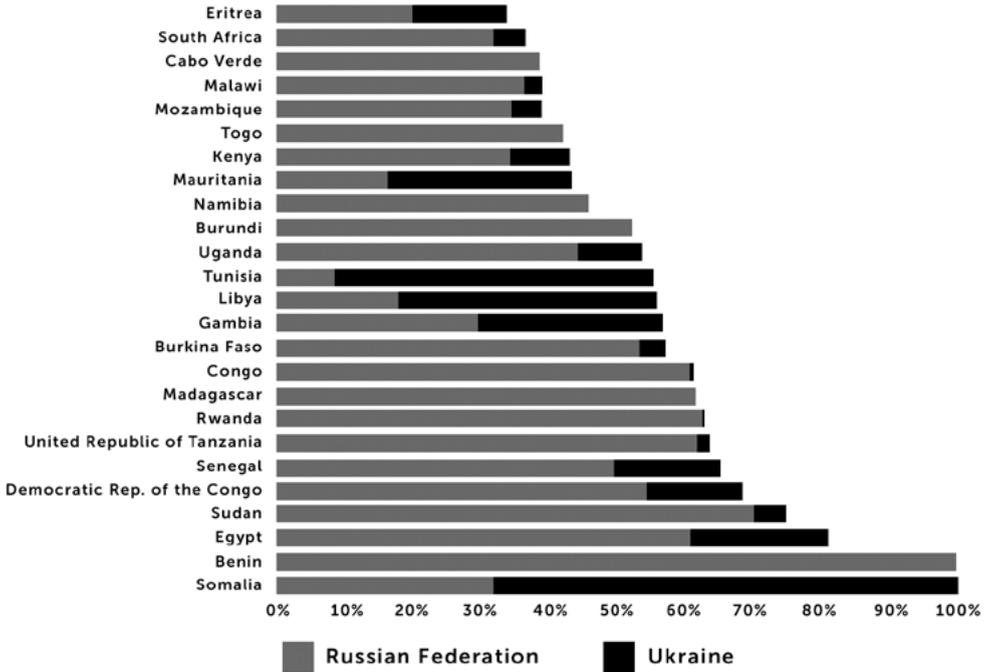


CONSIDER THE FACT THAT BEFORE THE WAR, RUSSIA AND UKRAINE TOGETHER EXPORTED MORE THAN A QUARTER OF THE WORLD'S WHEAT, THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE FOOD INDUSTRY MIGHT BE LIFE-THREATENING FOR MILLIONS OF PEOPLE

European Defense Agency, and close political and military cooperation with the United States, which ensures coherence between the EU and NATO.

From the CEE perspective, directly endangered by Russian aggressive policy, the development of European military capabilities is welcomed. For many years, experts and politicians from the region have been warning of the risk of Russian aggression, advocating for an increase in defense spending that would make Europe better prepared for

Figure 3: African dependence on wheat from Russia and Ukraine



Source: UNCTAD

war. The history proved that those voices, often dismissed as paranoid, were right<sup>18</sup>.

## FOOD SECURITY

The war in Ukraine also stressed the value of European independence as far as food production is concerned. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine not only provoked a major humanitarian crisis in Europe, with millions of refugees, rising unemployment, and the devastated economies of both countries, but also disturbed global supply chains. Consider the fact that before the war, Russia and Ukraine together exported more than

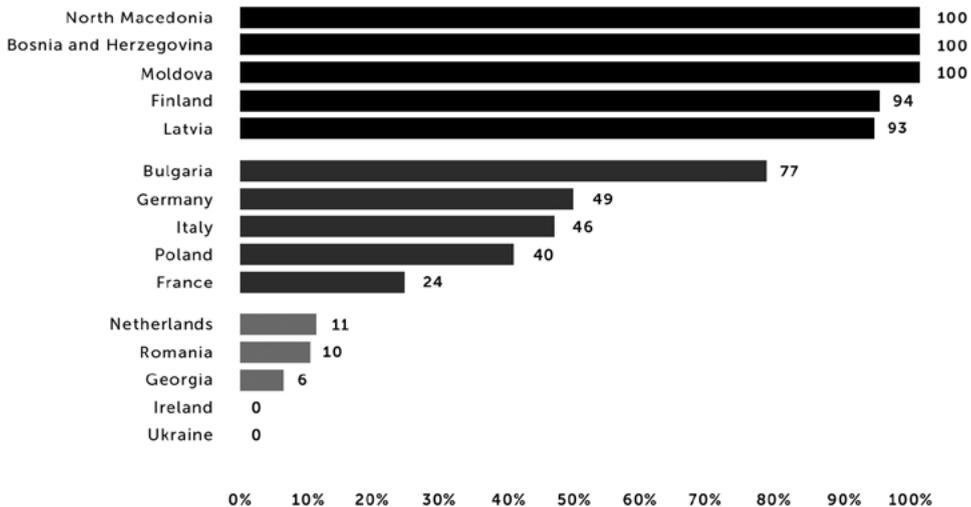
a quarter of the world's wheat, the consequences for the food industry might be life-threatening for millions of people. Opposite to the Middle East and many African countries [See: Figure 3], the EU is not dependent on food imported from abroad, which is why its food security is not endangered.



AUTONOMY  
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<sup>18</sup> *The Economist* (2020) "Why Poland Has Become NATO's Linchpin in the War in Ukraine", March 12. Available [online]: <https://www.economist.com/europe/poland-will-play-an-outsized-role-in-western-efforts-to-assist-ukraine/21808064>

Figure 4: European dependence on Russian gas



Source: Statista. Available [online]: <https://www.statista.com/chart/26768/dependence-on-russian-gas-by-european-country/>

This case clearly shows the benefits from years of investments in European autonomy in this domain. The EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has been much contested for years as expensive, wasteful, ignoring the rules of supply and demand, and undermining farmers' livelihoods in developing countries<sup>19</sup>. Against all of this, the European Union has provided farmers with funds to encourage them to produce food in Europe, even if buying food from abroad looked like a much cheaper option to feed the citizens of Europe. In case of a major security crisis, the investments in CAP paid back – autonomy has brought food security in Europe.

For CEE countries, further investment in food autonomy might be economically beneficial, considering the fact that 25% of the rural population in the EU live in Poland

and Romania. Those two countries are also important food producers, employing more than 3 million people in agriculture<sup>20</sup>.

## ENERGY SECURITY

The opposite picture emerges when analyzing the impact of the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces on energy security. Highly dependent on Russian resources, Europe is at risk of sliding into an energy crisis. In particular, disturbances in the natural gas supply might bring troubles to many European countries that rely on it [See: Figure 4]. Contrary to the oil supplies, they cannot be easily and quickly replaced by other countries' imports.

Dependence on energy supplies from Russia is very costly in times of economic war with this country, waged by the West in

<sup>19</sup> The list of the main arguments *for* and *against* the CAP may be found here: <https://www.debatingeurope.eu/focus/arguments-for-and-against-the-common-agricultural-policy/#:YjXWYerMLrc>

<sup>20</sup> Eurostat (2021) *Statistical Factsheet European Union*, June. Available [online]: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/food-farming-fisheries/farming/documents/agri-statistical-factsheet-eu\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/food-farming-fisheries/farming/documents/agri-statistical-factsheet-eu_en.pdf)

response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It makes sanctions imposed on Moscow costly, and limits the eagerness of some member states to enforce even higher economic pressure on Russia. Obviously, it also has political implications, limiting the space for efficient European foreign policy. It is particularly important for the CEE states which are highly dependent on Russian energy sources, but also interested in containing this country.

In this area, the call for European autonomy is not only for greater diversification of energy suppliers, but also for a change in the European energy mix. The role of atomic and renewable energy in the European Green Deal, a flagship EU initiative that aims to put the European Union firmly on the path towards climate neutrality by 2050, has to be rethought. Greater autonomy in securing European energy needs to be at the forefront of climate policy.

## HEALTH SECURITY

Probably in no other security-related sector, the experience of dependency has been so alarming for Europeans as in public health during the COVID-19 crisis. At the pandemic's beginning, ruthless international competition revealed medical vulnerability

and pharmaceutical dependency. Rich Europeans had no sufficient access to some medicines or medical treatments, or even simple protective masks. It was scary, but also sobering. As Luuk van Middelaar put it in his great book describing EU policy during the COVID-19 crisis:

*"The Covid crisis has reinforced the desire for a "strategic" economic, competition and industrial policy. The realization is dawning that the safeguarding of interests demands more than a free-market framework. This is clearly felt not just in Paris (where such thinking was never absent) but in Berlin, Brussels and even The Hague (traditionally reliant on the market's invisible hand). A historic turning point."<sup>21</sup>*

The necessity of being self-reliant in health security emerged as a public matter. European politicians, feeling pressure from citizens, have been forced to reconsider the role of the EU in health policy. Health has been put at the heart of Europe's priorities, and Europe's research-based pharmaceutical industry, which employs 830,000 people, started to be perceived as a strategic asset.

The European industry must be able to develop ground-breaking science to secure Europeans' health needs. In other words, it should be used to advance the European technological sovereignty in R&D<sup>22</sup>.

## ECONOMIC SECURITY

Economic autonomy in an interdependent, globalized world is not possible. As Mark Leonard rightly observed in this domain, the



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<sup>21</sup> Van Middelaar, L. (2021) *Pandemonium: Saving Europe*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Agenda Publishing, p. 161.

<sup>22</sup> Politico Studio (2022) "Can Europe Act in Time to Secure Its Strategic Autonomy in Health?", [in]: *Politico*, February 7. Available [online]: <https://www.politico.eu/sponsored-content/can-europe-act-in-time-to-secure-its-strategic-autonomy-in-health/>



## ECONOMIC AUTONOMY IN IN- TERDEPENDENT, GLOBALIZED WORLD IS NOT POSSIBLE

Europeans should rather aim at being “able to decide for ourselves about our interests and bargain effectively within an interdependent system through credible counter-threats against threats and hostile actions.”<sup>23</sup>

This means that the European Union needs to be more assertive and politically capable of using economic statecraft in its foreign policy. Being the defender of an open economy and the rules-based international order requires having a toolbox of instruments to be used against rule-breakers.

And the rules are broken not only by autocrats from Russia or China, but also by democrats from the United States. Donald Trump’s administration did not hesitate to threaten European companies with sanctions in cases involving Iran, Cuba, the Nord Stream pipeline, or the International Criminal Court<sup>24</sup>. President Biden likes to stress the West’s unity, but the dynamics of

<sup>23</sup> Hackenbroich, J., Oertel, J., Sander, P., and P. Zerka (2020) *Defending Europe’s Economic Sovereignty: New Ways to Resist Economic Coercion*, ECFR Policy Brief, October 20. Available [online]: [https://ecfr.eu/publication/defending\\_europe\\_economic\\_sovereignty\\_new\\_ways\\_to\\_resist\\_economic\\_coercion/](https://ecfr.eu/publication/defending_europe_economic_sovereignty_new_ways_to_resist_economic_coercion/)

<sup>24</sup> Barigazzi, J. (2020) “Borrell Has ‘Serious Concern’ over US Sanctions against International Criminal Court”, [in]: *Politico*, June 11. Available [online]: <https://www.politico.eu/article/josep-borrell-serious-concern-us-sanctions-international-criminal-court/>

great power rivalry today indicate that the economy *is* the main battlefield.

Economic interdependencies are being weaponized, and the economic war of the West with Russia may serve as a good illustration of this phenomenon. Europe has to be ready to face extraterritorial sanctions, forced sensitive data transfers, or extraterritorial export controls, having an ability to introduce countermeasures to secure the well-being of its citizens. The mere acquisition of such tools may have a deterrent effect on Europe’s rivals<sup>25</sup>.

Greater economic autonomy will mean moving some production processes back to Europe, which might be beneficial for the CEE countries. Being competitive in terms of labor costs and with quite a big potential of labor force (which, together with Ukraine, accounts for approximately 160 million people), the countries between the Baltic and Adriatic Seas may become a new production hub for Europe<sup>26</sup>.

### DIGITAL SECURITY

Last but not least, the European Union must try to strengthen its digital sovereignty. Like in the whole economy, in the fast-developing digital sector, the autonomy is neither possible nor desirable. China has been trying it for years, not without some success, but paying the high price of having a state-controlled, closed internet system – only for Chinese and without prospects for future development beyond the country. The EU

<sup>25</sup> Hackenbroich, J., Oertel, J., Sander, P., and P. Zerka (2020) *Defending Europe’s Economic Sovereignty: New Ways to Resist Economic Coercion*, ECFR Policy Brief, October 20. Available [online]: [https://ecfr.eu/publication/defending\\_europe\\_economic\\_sovereignty\\_new\\_ways\\_to\\_resist\\_economic\\_coercion/](https://ecfr.eu/publication/defending_europe_economic_sovereignty_new_ways_to_resist_economic_coercion/)

<sup>26</sup> Czubkowska, S. (2022) “Oś Pekin-Moskwa to już jawny układ. Skoro odcięliśmy Rosję, to czy jesteśmy gotowi na koszty odciążenia się od Chin?”, [in]: *SpidersWeb.com*. Available [online]: <https://spidersweb.pl/plus/2022/03/os-pekin-moskwa-wojna-ukraina-co-na-to-chiny> [in Polish]



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RESPECTING  
FUNDAMENTAL  
RIGHTS AND VALUES

is obviously not interested in building anything similar. On the contrary, as European Council President Charles Michel said: “We must use our new digital resources wisely to protect the ‘environment’ of our fundamental values – democracy and individual freedoms”<sup>27</sup>.

Digital security means that the EU aims at setting fair rules and ensuring that big tech online companies will operate on the European market respecting fundamental rights

<sup>27</sup> Michel, C. (2021) *Digital Sovereignty Is Central to European Strategic Autonomy – Speech by President Charles Michel at “Masters of Digital 2021” Online Event*, February 3. Available [online]: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/pl/press/press-releases/2021/02/03/speech-by-president-charles-michel-at-the-digitaleurope-masters-of-digital-online-event/>

and values. Digital security signifies also using European regulatory power to project those high standards across the world, to make European standards global. Digital security means that advanced equipment, such as chips and microprocessors, will be produced in Europe, which make supply chains less vulnerable to external crises.

The United States and U.S.-based big tech companies will not be always supportive of the European way to digital security. Therefore, the European Union has to remain in dialogue with them. Nevertheless, there will be a clash of different interests. However, autonomy in the digital sphere will allow the EU to become efficient in defending its stance.

## CONCLUSIONS

The strategic autonomy means taking action to reduce the EU’s dependencies from the United States, China, Russia, or multinational companies. Achieving it will give Europe power to defend its interests in clashes or dialogues with friends and enemies, with allies and competitors.

When talking about autonomy, one talks about power politics. For many years, the European Union has been unable to act as geopolitical player, being rather the rule-making factory not set up to deal with sudden events<sup>28</sup>. In the last few years, however, forced by various crises it had to confront, the new European politics has emerged, and visible efforts to build the strategic autonomy are the best evidence of this profound metamorphosis.

In some areas, such as food security, the EU is independent, which gives it power to act – including helping others. In other sectors, such as energy security, the recent events

<sup>28</sup> Van Middelaar, L. (2021) *Pandemonium: Saving Europe*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Agenda Publishing.

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– such as Russian aggression in Ukraine, – proved that over-dependence reduces the European ability to act and increases the costs of political actions. It seems that the majority of European elites are now fully aware of the fact that the EU needs more resilience, influence, and autonomy.

From the perspective of Central and Eastern European countries, this long process of building the strategic autonomy of Europe is of crucial importance and potentially very beneficial. In an increasingly harsh world, they can defend their interests only through European integration, counting on allies and their support. Their security against aggressive Russia, assertive China, or algorithm-driven big techs depends on common European actions. Being over-dependent on

Europe, they have to advocate for greater sovereignty of the European Union.

However, the CEE countries know that while searching for greater autonomy, the EU cannot turn its back from the United States. American engagement in Europe is beneficiary for both sides, and a united West is the one that is the scariest to its enemies. Therefore, reducing dependencies from the U.S. should not be done *against* America, but rather to make transatlantic alliance stronger.



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