

***The New Role of the European Commission in European Security and Defence Cooperation: Theoretical and Empirical Implications for European Integration***

*(Alternative title: Crisis, defence and geo-economics – how the European Commission is becoming an actor in EU security and defence architecture)*

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Presented at the EUSA 17th Biennial Conference, Miami, May 19-21, 2022.

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**Note to reader:** *This is an extremely early draft of an article that will outline and discuss the European Commission's role in EU security and defence policy. The paper also tries to take into account the very recent developments in the EU security and defence architecture and it is hence a bit 'all over the place' thus far. Similarly, it is still very rough in terms of structure, language etc. I have started to conduct interviews during the spring of 2022, however I hope to continue during the summer and fall to further strengthen my empirical arguments. Hence, I am glad for any comments, criticism, or questions on the paper.*

## 1. Introduction

Jean Monnet (1978: 417) famously wrote that ‘Europe will be forged in crises, and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises’. And nothing could be more true this past decade. Following the financial and euro-crisis the European Union (EU) has among others faced the migration crisis, Brexit, the rule of law crisis, the Trump presidency and the revival of great power competition, the covid-19 pandemic and its health and economic consequences and now the war in Ukraine. And this is something that has been largely debated in the scholarly literature the last couple of years (e.g., Dinan et al. 2017; Caporaso 2018; Schimmelfennig 2018; Alcaro and Tocci 2021). Yet, the Union has arguably in the two most recent crises – the covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine – developed further and taken historical and unprecedented decisions.

This article will focus on the European Commission’s (henceforth the Commission) role in the development of EU security and defence policy in recent years. It does so with a special emphasis on how crises – and now the war in Ukraine – has started to transform the Commission to become a stronger actor in EU security and defence architecture. Yet the long-term ambitions of the Commission within the policy field is also underlined. The article furthermore argues that the Commission has focused on a ‘geo-economical pivot’ to strengthen its role within the policy field of security and defence. Thus, the article asks two overarching research questions: *Firstly*, how can the establishment of new security and defence initiatives and the Commission’s new competences within them be explained? And *secondly*, how can integration theories and ‘crisis integration’ help to explain these developments? The article furthermore aims to contribute to the debate on what this all will mean for the political role of the European Commission as well as overall for the European project.

The literature on the Commission’s role in EU security and defence policy cooperation has also vastly expanded in the last couple of years (see next section). The Commission has however traditionally held a weak position in the policy domain and supranational integration of EU security and defence policy has been seen as a least likely case (Menon 2013; Nugent and Rhinard 2015; Strikwerda 2019; Riddervold and Trondal 2020). Nevertheless, it has since especially 2016 steadily expanded its role and ambition within the field. This process then went into hyper-speed after the war in Ukraine. As the Commission president von der Leyen in a speech before the European Parliament after Russia’s war in Ukraine argued: ‘[w]hen we are resolute, Europe can rise up to the challenge. The same is true on defence. European security and defence has evolved more in the last six days than in the last two decades [...] This is a watershed moment for our Union’ (European Commission 2022a). And the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz furthermore argued that the war in Ukraine implied ‘a turning point in the history of our Continent’ (Politico 2022a).

The past crisis-torn decade has also spurred a discussion on European integration literature (e.g., Schimmelfennig 2018; Hooghe and Marks 2019; Ferrera and Kriesi 2021). Thus, this paper draws on these discussions and argues that the classical integration theories overall could be complementary to each other. The article methodologically draws on an analysis of official documents, statements, media reporting, secondary literature as well as interviews with officials and policymakers in Brussels conducted in the spring of 2022. Thus, it follows a ‘minimalist process tracing’ method to explore these new dynamics and developments (see Beach and Pedersen 2019: 246-252; Bennet and Checkel 2014).

The paper is structured as follows. The first section deals with the existing perspectives on the Commission’s role and competences in EU security and defence policy cooperation. This

is then followed by the theoretical discussions underpinning this article. Thirdly, a section on the most recent policy developments within this field is outlined. This shows how the Commission's competences have both been strengthened by the crisis and war in Ukraine as well as that it followed a long-term ambition of the Commission to become a stronger actor in EU security and defence architecture. This is followed and concluded by a discussion on the broader implications of this development.

## **2. Existing perspectives: the European Commission and EU security and defence policy cooperation**

Hence while the Commission traditionally has held few competences within the security and defence policy field, it has nonetheless expanded its competences in recent years. Hence, and not surprisingly, there is a growing literature on neofunctionalist dynamics in the development of EU security and defence policy and the nexus between internal-external security (e.g., Guay 1996; 1997; Haroche 2020; Håkansson 2021; Bergmann 2019; Niemann 2016).

The Commission's role in EU security and defence cooperation has also been explained as a form of 'creeping competences' where the Commission has been able to expand its role in European defence cooperation through a long-term historical process which has been strengthened by crisis and salient events (Citi 2014). Somewhat similarly, Edler and James (2015) takes a 'policy entrepreneur approach' while also drawing on neofunctionalism dynamics to explain the establishment of the European Security Research Programme, which served as an important step in stone for new EU defence initiatives such as the European Defence Fund (EDF) (see also James 2018; Mawdsley 2018; Martins and Ahmad 2020). The establishment of the EDF has moreover been explained as an outcome of a long-term process in which a certain technology and innovation discourse have been established and steered the development since the 1960s (Martins and Mawdsley 2021; see also Csernatonni 2021 for a discussion on the long-term ambitions from the Commission). Another strand of research has also focused on the impact and lobbying of the European defence industry in pushing forward new European security and defence initiatives (Martins and Kuster 2019; Gaxho 2019; Weiss and Biermann 2021; Csernatonni 2021).

Chou and Riddervold (2015) have in turn shown that the Commission has been able to expand its role through linking discussions from the foreign and security policy domain to areas where it holds both competences and expert authority. The Commission has also built coalitions and cooperated with Member states that share its integrative approach (Chou and Riddervold 2015). Riddervold (2016) also explains the Commission's influence within EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) through its usage of bargaining tools and building support with (certain) member states, presenting expert-based arguments or by 'circumventing' the formal decision-making processes. She finds support for the Commission's de facto influence in the EU CFSP and argues that the cooperation has moved beyond 'inter-governmental co-operation'. Riddervold moreover argues that 'the Commission's actions, behaviour and informal interaction with other actors may be among the factors that help explain the move towards closer co-operation and integration within the CFSP' (2016: 367; see also Riddervold and Trondal 2020). Similarly, Lavallée (2011) argues that the Commission has expanded its role through acting upon the interdependence between external and internal security as well as increased its interaction with member states within the field of security and defence. Brandão and Camisão (2021) similarly argue that the Commission has enhanced its competences within the traditionally intergovernmental policy domain of security through the usage of a 'market-security nexus' to legitimate its role in EU security

governance. And Mörth and Britz (2004) in turn discuss how European defence-industrial cooperation has been re-framed by the Commission towards the 'market field'.

Other authors have underlined the convergence of interest by large Member states such as France and Germany and institutions such as the Commission and the EEAS. Thus, their deliberate 'usage of Europe' to respond to crisis and strategic changes can explain the establishment of both new supranational and intergovernmental EU defence initiatives since 2016 (Béraud-Sudreau and Pannier 2021). Chappell et al. (2020) have moreover, drawing on role theory, found support for how actors such as the Commission and the EEAS have expanded their competences. Yet this also depended upon the role expectations from the Member states, and especially the three big ones - Germany, France and the UK (as it then was a member of the EU).

Another strand of research has focused on judicial developments and how the Commission used the threat of 'court driven integration' to push the member states to adopt the 2009 defence procurement directive (Blauberger and Weiss 2013). Moreover, this form of judicial politics has been used to explain how the Commission has challenged and thus changed national defence offsets (Weiss and Blauberger 2016). However, the impact of the two directives (which form the 2009 'EU defence package') seems to be limited thus far (Ioannides 2020; Mason et al. 2015; European Commission 2016a; 2016b). Nevertheless, it has been argued that these developments were important for the Commission to legitimate its role in defence (see e.g., Håkansson 2021).

Within the EU CSDP/CFSP there is also a growing literature on how groupings such as the Political and Security Committee (PSC) steers and influence EU foreign policy (Juncos and Pomorska 2011; Michalski and Danielson 2020). This influence has traditionally been seen at the 'expense of the Commission' (Nugent and Rhinard 2015: 379). Yet it has been argued that the role of the PSC over time has started to change and that there is also evidence of how EU foreign policy making today goes beyond intergovernmentalism (Maurer and Wright 2021).

Others have however argued that the deepening of security and defence policy cooperation at the EU level is still mainly dependent on the willingness and ambition of the EU Member states. For instance, Strikwerda (2019) has argued that the Member states followed through with the 2009 'EU defence package' as the Member states wanted to 'follow European norms'. Moreover, external events, such as the 2009 economic crisis, also push Member states to accept further supranational involvement in the defence policy field (Strikwerda 2019: 29). Daniel Fiott, drawing on liberal intergovernmentalism, argues that EU institutions, such as the Commission, 'did not play a determining role' in the establishment of the European Defence Agency (EDA) or the adopting of the 2009 'EU defence package' (Fiott 2019: 137). Hoeffler (2012) in turn argues for the importance of 'economic patriotism' from the Member states to understand this development and argued that there were 'no shift of loyalty to the EU level' and that 'supranational market-making regulation is promoted as a means to sustain European firms' (Hoeffler 2012: 436). It has also been argued that the framework of new intergovernmentalism and the Member states' strong influence, in contrast to neofunctionalist approaches (Haroche 2020; Håkansson 2021), can explain the establishment of the EDF (Sabatino 2022).

While these different studies transcend different theoretical approaches, they overall form an expanding literature on the growing role of the Commission in EU security and defence cooperation. And while others have argued that the role of the Commission is in decline (e.g., Bickerton et al. 2015), this study argues for and outlines the growing role of the Commission in security and defence cooperation.

### **3. Theoretical approaches: Understanding the new role of the European Commission**

Hence, how can we explain the development in the security and defence policy domain and the enhanced role of the Commission? This article is foremost grounded in the supranational theoretical school. Yet, this paper also argues for the importance of member states' influence to understand the deepening of security and defence cooperation at the EU level. Moreover, external dynamics and 'crisis integration' should also be taken into account, especially as the EU went through a decade of 'poly-crisis' or is in a phase of 'permacrisis' (Zeitlin et al. 2019; Zuleeg et al. 2021). Hence, the crises of the last decade have also implied a form of permanent crisisification of EU policy making (Rhinard 2019).

While the different schools of European integration are traditionally pinned against each other and 'competitive tested' (Ferrera and Kriesi 2021), the integration literature has however in recent years taken a pragmatic turn and discussed how the grand theories of European integration can complement each other (e.g., Hooghe and Marks 2019; Schimmelfennig 2018; Ferrera and Kriesi 2021). Hooghe and Marks (2019) for instance underlines that intergovernmentalism, neofunctionalism and postfunctionalism focus on different puzzles in the integration process and hence argues that 'these theories are not mutually exclusive but can serve as complementary explanations' (Hooghe and Marks 2019: 1120). Similarly, Jones et al. (2016; 2021) framework of 'failing forward' builds upon the short-term bargaining processes among member states explained by intergovernmentalism as well as the long-term supranational dynamics explained by neofunctionalism. Some have also taken a 'domain of application' approach to bridge the dynamics in liberal intergovernmentalism (LI) and neofunctionalism (Becker and Gehring 2022, see also Ferrera and Kriesi 2021). For instance, as underlined by Becker and Gehring (2022: 9) when explaining the establishment of the Next Generation EU financial package: 'integration did not follow a single theoretical logic. Instead, Neofunctionalism helps to understand the preference changes of key member states, especially Germany's agreement on a transfer mechanism and on direct EU revenues, which is beyond the domain of LI. However, the design of the recovery package is best explained by LI intergovernmental bargaining'.

It has also been outlined that 'while decision-making has a strongly inter-governmental character, a second feature of post-crisis governance is that the implementation of decisions post-crisis is highly supra-nationalized' (Dawson 2015: 981). Furthermore, it has also been argued that the 'new European Council-dominated crisis governance paradoxically has strengthened the role of EU institutions' (Beach and Smeets 2020; see also Bauer and Becker 2014; Niemann and Ioannou 2015). Smeets and Beach (2022: 3) have also shown that the European Council was in the driving seat for crisis decision-making regarding the Next Generation EU package, but that it also then was 'highly dependent on input from the EU institutions, first and foremost the European Commission'.

Moreover, the EU's policy-making process has clearly been in a phase of 'crises policy-making' which has strongly affected the integration outcomes the past decade (Ferrera and Kriesi 2021; Rhinard 2019). While all the crises of the past decade arguably have affected the essence of 'core state powers' (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2018; Bremmer et al. 2020), we can arguably now see a shift in integration. The Covid-19 pandemic created a historical shift in European integration with the establishment of the Next Generation EU financial package as well as the vaccine procurement scheme at its foremost examples (Becker and Gehring 2022; Smeets and Beach 2022; Alcaro and Tocci 2021). And we can now see similar dynamics at the start of and in response to Russia's war in Ukraine. Hence, this paper argues that there is a difference between the crisis in the past and the two most recent – the Covid-19 pandemic

and Russia's war in Ukraine – as we now see a greater willingness for common European solutions.

This paper especially focuses on the Commission's role in pushing forward integration through its entrepreneurial role and cultivated spillover effects (Sandholtz and Stone Sweet 2012; Niemann 2016; Bergmann 2019). Yet, the member states should also be given a larger decision-making role in the theoretical process (see also discussions on this in Nicoli 2020; Håkansson 2021; Niemann 2006). And we should hence account for intergovernmental bargaining to understand the integration dynamics in the Union.

Moreover, crises have often served as an engine of integration (Schimmelfennig 2018). However, while crises can lead to stronger public support for European integration, 'crises do not by themselves launch a reform process. Instead, the process is triggered by a shared understanding that the collective level has a responsibility ('should') act' (Smeets and Beach 2022: 6). We have also seen that crises – spanning from the euro crisis and the migration crisis to the Covid-19 crisis and the war in Ukraine – came as exogenous shocks for the Union (e.g., Schimmelfennig 2018). And while policy change traditionally is seen as a long-term process, we can now see that agenda setting and integration in a crisis is more flexible and dynamic (Smeets and Beach 2022: 21). Building on Rhinard (2019; see also Vaagland 2021) this paper considers crises in the neofunctionalism integration process. Rhinard (2019) argues that the crisis dynamics within the EU often reflect different notions of neofunctionalism spillover. Thus, crises as 'facilitating events' can lead to political spillover effects (where Member states' ask 'the EU' to do more) as well as cultivated spillover effects and policy entrepreneurship from the Commission's side (Rhinard 2019: 620-622).

#### **4. A watershed moment for the Commission in EU security and defence policy cooperation**

*NOTE: This section will be further updated after conducting more interviews in Brussels with officials and policymakers from the Commission, EEAS, MS etc.*

The time after the 2016 EU Global Strategy (EUGS) has often been seen as a watershed moment for European security and defence integration (Tocci 2018). The momentum steaming from the EUGS, as well as a more unstable and hostile world, created a strong impetus for new integration within the field. Yet, in 2022 this development went into hyper-speed. The war in Ukraine spurred new initiatives and decisions to be taken in unprecedented speedy decision-making processes. However, this article also sees these developments in a more long-term process and dynamics.

After Russia's war in Ukraine the EU responded in unprecedented ways. Several initiatives that previously had been unthinkable were adopted in speedy processes. Or as underlined by a Member state EU ambassador, 'decisions that would have been unthinkable just two months ago are now being implemented. And this is in part pushed forward by the Commission, to a lesser degree the EEAS, and at times from some of the Member states' (Interview, EU Member State Ambassador, April 2022). Hence in these processes the Commission has often taken the lead. For instance, the process of taking forward the sanction policy was – to a larger degree than usual – handled by the Commission (c.f. Giumelli 2013a: 10-12; Giumelli et al. 2021: 6; Politico 2022b; 2022c; Financial Times 2022; Interview EEAS official, EU Member State Ambassador, April 2022). Arguably this was done to avoid leaks and increase cohesion within the Union, but it also indicates the more geopolitical Commission setting. The role of the Commission was also emphasised by the EU Member State Ambassador, who stated that 'the Commission has taken a step forward in this domain. And

this has affected the normal working procedures. The sanctions have now first been discussed in small groups at COREPER II level and then in the full group of COREPER II, and it has not really passed through the RELEX group as normally' (Interview, EU Member State Ambassador, April 2022). Moreover, the US seems to have focused its contact with the EU side through von der Leyen (Politico 2022d; Interview, EU Member State Ambassador, April 2022). The EU Ambassador furthermore outlined how the cooperation between the US and the EU leadership meant that 'the US at the beginning knew more about the work on EU sanctions than the EU Member States'. While moreover underlining the importance of personal relations, as Björn Seibert, the head of the von der Leyen cabinet, 'is a personal friend with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and this trust has increased cooperation between the US and the EU' (Interview, EU Member State Ambassador, April 2022). Hence and while the role of the Commission is increased, this development could also be seen as part of a long-term development towards 'a shift of importance in deciding sanctions from European capitals to Brussels-based actors' (Giumelli 2013b: 402).

Thus, the EU can be seen utilising its economic power in global politics and it launched the toughest sanctions packages ever towards Russia (European Commission 2022a). And this development is part of a more long-term process of the Commission in the economic sphere (Helwig and Wigell 2022; see also Biscop et al. 2022). Another new initiative, in regard to energy policy, was the Commission's proposal – REPowerEU – to reduce Europe's energy dependencies on Russian gas and oil (European Commission 2022b). The EU also took historical decisions to deliver weapons through the European Peace Facility to Ukraine (Council of the European Union 2022). The overall adoption of the European Peace Facility in 2021 can in part also be seen as a functional pressure to respond to the (then) worsening security situation around Europe (Bergmann and Müller 2021).

While the war in Ukraine started, the EU was also set to adopt its new Strategic Compass in Security and Defence after a two-year development process (EEAS 2022; Sweeney and Winn 2022). The war in Ukraine however sparked some discussions among the Member States if the Compass should be postponed. However, the EEAS argued that the Compass was even more necessary than before and highlighted the importance of a speedy implementation process. Consequently, the EEAS strongly focused on the first few years of implementation of the new security and defence initiatives outlined in the Compass (Interview, EEAS official, April 2022). An early assessment of the Compass also outlined how this will imply a stronger role for the Commission in the security and defence policy field (Håkansson 2022). Hence it has been argued that the Commission's ambitions in recent years have been to seek 'to shift the focus of European security and defense policy from a policy field dominated by member states to a supranational one' (Kaim and Kempin 2022: 5). And as underlined by an EEAS official: 'the Commission has been extremely constructive and supportive (...) We waited for their defence package in February which strongly fitted into the work of the Compass, and we worked closely with them in that regard'. And that 'the cooperation with the Commission has been spectacular if I should be honest' (Interview, EEAS official, April 2022). The Commission's main 'input' to the Compass process was hence their new defence communication as well as the roadmap on defence technologies which to a large degree were incorporated in the Strategic Compass in the end (European Commission 2022d; 2022e; Interviews European Commission Officials, April 2022). These dimensions were outlined in the 'Investment chapter' of the Compass which included among others the urgency to spend more and better together, to mitigate strategic dependencies and developing strategic capabilities in critical and strategic military domains. It also outlined new Commission proposals to further incentivise joint

procurement through the possibility of a VAT waiver to support joint procurement, create new financing solutions and a possible reinforced Bonus system in the European Defence Fund (EEAS 2022). The VAT waiver proposal had also earlier been outlined as a prioritised issue in President von der Leyen's 2021 State of the European Union address (von der Leyen 2021).

While some Member States were somewhat hesitant towards the Commission's defence communication and roadmap they were nevertheless strongly incorporated in the Strategic Compass (Interview Member State representative; European Commission officials, April 2022). However, both the communication and roadmap also outline more initiatives that the Commission will seek to adopt in the coming years. Moreover, both the defence communication and the Strategic Compass outlines that the EU will adopt a new EU Space Strategy for security and defence in 2023. Here we can expect that the Commission and its DG Defence Industry and Space will take the lead and develop this proposal. Especially as security and defence dimensions of space have been increasingly important in the EU (Klimburg-Witjes 2021). Another outcome of the Strategic Compass process is the increased notion and ambition of European Resilience. This could be seen in for instance its ambition to respond to and deal with Cyber security issues and hybrid threats issues at the EU level, which also will entail an enhanced role for the Commission as well (see Håkansson 2022).

DG DEFIS and the Commission also launched in 2021 a 'spin-in communication' to strengthen cooperation between civilian, defence and space industries in Europe (European Commission 2021c). In this regard, Commission officials strongly argued that it is about reducing critical dependencies and underlined how today's geopolitical situation makes this even more urgent. They furthermore argued that 'we see that a lot of the technologies of today are coming from the civilian side, and we need to think about this in regard to our defence industry. And we are clearly in a time of technological warfare and actors such as China or Russia are very clear about their ambitions, and we hence need to think how this will affect Europe (...) And this is what we try to start to address with our defence communication, roadmap and the spin-in communication' (Interview European Commission official, April 2022). Thus, the Commission is strongly trying to outline its case for more European cooperation in light of the current crisis.

At the informal March 2022 Versailles European Council meeting the EU heads of states and government also stressed that Russia's war in Ukraine 'constitutes a tectonic shift in European history' and argued for enhancing Europe's defence capabilities, reducing energy dependencies and 'make Europe's economic base more resilient'. Hence, they outline the importance of reducing strategic dependencies in areas such as semiconductors, critical raw materials, health products and food security among others. The EU leaders then also tasked the Commission and the European Defence Agency (EDA) to put forward an analysis of defence investment gaps as well as propose any further new initiatives to strengthen the defence industrial and technological base in Europe (European Council 2022; *Note there will be another - possible key - European Council meeting in late May that will address this further, so I hope to develop these discussions*).

The strengthening of the Commission defence competences in recent years is also foremost connected to the defence-industrial domain, with the launch of the EDF and the establishment of the new DG for Defence industry and Space (DG DEFIS) within the Commission (Håkansson 2021; Haroche 2020). As Csernaton (2021: 16) describes the impact of the EDF:

[w]hat actually matters is the fact that the EDF truly represents a fundamental change in the European defense communitarization process. Namely, this



financial instrument marks an important shift in the commission's institutional role as an empowered, nontraditional defense actor [...] as well as a strong intervention on a sector that was the exclusive preserve of the intergovernmental method and member states.

Likewise, the Commission has also launched and is (co-)handling a Military Mobility project to enhance and improve movements of military troops in Europe. In its 2022 defence package and communication on critical defence technologies the Commission also outlines the importance of mitigating strategic dependencies in line with its geoeconomics pivot. Commission officials working on the packages also emphasised how the Covid-19 crisis only made these dynamics stronger in their work (Interviews, European Commission officials, EEAS official April 2022). Thus, these dynamics of both strengthening its competences in the 'regular' field of security and defence as well as meeting and mitigating new threats from the geoeconomics field is clearly changing the role of the Commission and the EU.

While the crisis has led to new initiative and (in part) competences, we can also see a more long-term ambition from the Commission which is largely playing out in the geo-economical field. Hence, this article argues for the blurring of policy fields, where security policy issues become increasingly entangled with for instance trade, technology, and economic issues. Or as emphasised by Wolff et al. (2021: 16) 'economic interests are blurred with military or security goals, especially in strategic sectors such as cyberspace, finance, strategic materials and components, and control of critical digital infrastructure'. Consequently, this article argues that we can see a geo-economic Commission in its making (see also Helwig 2019). Geo-economics could here be defined as 'the use of economic instruments to promote and defend national interests, and to produce beneficial geopolitical results; and the effects of other nations' economic actions on a country's geopolitical goals' (Blackwill and Harris 2016: 20). Thus, this geo-economic turn or pivot from the Commission side is noteworthy and a range of different new initiatives and proposals has been announced in the last couple of years (see also Olsen 2022). This includes, inter alia, both strategic and more defensive measures. Fägersten and Rühlig (2021) as well as Helwig and Wigell (2022) outline different defensive measures the EU has taken, such as for instance the implementation of a foreign direct investment (FDI) screening mechanism, export control measures, and trade defence instruments. Internal reforms such as the proposed European Chips Act, the work of updating the EU's industrial policy as well as deepening the single market and launching Important Projects of Common European Interests (IPCEI) could be seen in light of this development. Moreover, utilising its 'Brussels effect' (or Market power) as well as launching the new Global Gateway initiative could be seen as work towards more strategic policies as well (Helwig and Wigell 2022).

While the EU – and the Commission in particular – only in recent years has started to hedge and prepare for the risk of (economic) dependencies it could be argued that the Union is somewhat well prepared to engage in this type of statecraft (see also Christiansen 2020). Yet the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences only strengthened the current geopolitical tensions and the geoeconomic dynamics in world politics (Interviews, European Commission officials, EEAS official, April 2022). Hence, the Union needs to be opted to address and mitigate these tensions. A sign of this new development is the Commission's mapping exercise of critical areas/materials to 'identify strategic dependencies, particularly in the most sensitive industrial ecosystems' (European Commission 2021a). This is also part of the overarching goal of strategic autonomy, or as underlined in the 2020 EU industrial strategy, 'Europe's strategic

autonomy is about reducing dependence on others for things we need the most: critical materials and technologies, food, infrastructure, security and other strategic areas (European Commission 2020: 13). In its 2021 Trade policy review the Commission also underlined how geo-economic tensions, global uncertainties, the rise of China and the fallouts from the Covid-19 pandemic implied that the EU needed to enhance its resilience and use its trade policy in support of the EU's geopolitical interests (European Commission 2021b). Hence and as argued by Helwig and Wigal, 'the new geoeconomics reality is changing the European Commission's mindset, as shown by its stronger willingness to throw the EU's economic and regulatory weight behind its actions in global politics' (2022: 3).

Furthermore, the EU and the Commission have launched a proposal to counter economic coercion against EU member states (European Commission 2021d). The European Trade Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis underlined the importance of this when he told the European Parliament that 'the weaponization of trade shows no signs of abating. We have no choice but to face up to this reality' (European Parliament 2022). Similarly, European Economic Commissioner Paolo Gentiloni in light of the war in Ukraine argued that 'the notion of 'Wandel durch Handel', of bringing about change through trade, has shown its limitations', and added that 'we need to rethink our relations with autocratic regimes and strengthen our ties with like-minded partners'. Commissioner Gentiloni furthermore argued that 'this crisis will also spell the end of globalisation as we have known it and reshape global alliances'. To meet these new challenges the fiscal rules are set to be updated. We could also see new tools at the European level such as new common borrowing to address issues of energy dependencies or defence spending (Reuters 2022).

Another clear sign of this development is the European Chips Act, which already in the communication's introduction outlines how 'semiconductors are the centre of strong geostrategic interests, and of the global technological race' and that 'faced with growing geopolitical tensions (...) and the possibility of further disruptions in the supply chain, Europe must use its strength and put in place effective mechanisms to establish greater leadership positions and ensure security of supply' (European Commission 2022c: 2; see also von der Leyen 2021; Politico 2022e). Similarly, the EU's more strategic developments could arguably be seen with the new EU Global Gateway initiative (European Commission and HR/VP 2021). This shows the increased focus on and usage of connectivity from the EU's side in response to the increased tensions in global geopolitics (see also discussions in Biscop 2020; *note: I also hope to conduct more interviews on these issues, and hence to develop these ideas further*). Thus, the von der Leyen Commission's ambition towards this type of geopolitical (or geo-economical) Commission could also be seen as part of the development of a more 'political' and presidential Commission workings.

## **5. Conclusions: Broader implications in Brussels and beyond**

*Note: tentative ideas that I could discuss among others...*

Yet, this development also creates questions for the internal and external workings of the Union as well as creates new research agendas. As the outcomes and developments of both the Covid-19 crisis and the war in Ukraine can be seen as a new form of willingness for more collective action within the EU. However, these developments within the security and defence policy domain creates a range of different questions to be addressed;

The work towards the European Defence Union – implications: Democratic accountability? And scrutiny (oversight from EP, National Parliaments?), implications of a geopolitical Commission (Com in decline or not?).

Bremer, Genschel and Jachtenfuch (2020) have also found some support among the European public for more integration of core state powers (Bremer et al. 2020: 71-72). Consequently, the current crisis has created an opportunity to take new steps in the European integration process. However, since Lisbon there has also been a discussion on the 're-nationalisation' or 'de-Europeanisation' of European foreign policy (see discussions in Muller et al. 2021). Yet, these new dynamics could indicate a new form of 'Brusselisation process' of European security and defence policy (in broad terms). And already in 2011 Helene Sjursen argued that '[w]hile European foreign and security policy has not become supranational, it is equally problematic to claim that it remains intergovernmental' (Sjursen 2011: 1089). Similarly, Howorth (2012) has discussed the increasing 'supranational-intergovernmentalism' in EU foreign and security policy. There have also been discussions on the changed foreign policy approach of the European Union towards a more interest driven approach due to the perceived urgency and threats towards the Union (Rieker and Riddervold 2021). The tentative results of this article would support those claims.

Implications for integration literature...

Further discuss the implications of the results of this paper...

To conclude this article argues that the Commission is becoming a more active and normal actor within the EU security and defence policy architecture. Yet this creates new questions and research agendas that needs to be followed-up and analysed.

## 6. References

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**Interviews:**

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EEAS official, Brussels April 2022

EDA official, Brussels April 2022

NATO official, Brussels April 2022

Member State official, Brussels April 2022

Member State EU Ambassador, Brussels April 2022

European Commission (DG DEFIS) official, VTC April 2022