Exploring the relationships between the grand strategies of the Member States and the European Union. The Cases of France and Germany

By

Jacopo Venturi

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Supervisor: Daniel Izsak

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Abstract

This research analyzes the relationships between the grand strategies of the Member States and that of the European Union. The evolution of the literature on grand strategy led to the accepted idea that international organizations can express a grand strategy. Consequently, the academic and political debate on the European Union's grand strategy began, but the relationships between it and the grand strategies of the Member States are still unclear. The analysis of the case studies of France and Germany, concerning two specific goals of the European Union's grand strategy, namely NATO's role in European security and strategic autonomy and enlargement policy, shows that when two or more grand strategies present a strong correlation – which can be the foundation for a potential two-way influence as well –, their assumptions must be compatible and their objectives must be similar, while their interests might differ. The research concludes that there is a strong correlation between the grand strategies of Germany and the EU, while there are incompatibilities at the level of assumptions with France. This is relevant not only for the international relations tradition of grand strategy and the debate on the EU's grand strategy but also to broaden and better understand the concept of EU's actorness.

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1 Introduction

The history of European integration has seen the evolution of the European Communities into the European Union. This process is composed of many relevant changes, but they all went in the same direction: the increase of powers and competencies in the hand of the central institutions and agencies, which have become the core of an ever-stronger international organization, capable of being a relevant international actor. Such an evolution had an impact on the political and academic discussions concerning the European Union, raising the question of whether the EU could express actorness, namely the capability of acting autonomously and coherently in the international arena (Carbone 2013, 242). Even if the question of the EU's actorness has been studied concerning several fields, from environmental policy (Jupille and Caporaso 1998) to aid and neighborhood policy (Carbone 2013; Hoffmann and Niemann, 2017), there is still little understanding of this concept concerning the most complete and complex definition of its external action, namely the grand strategy.

This shortcoming in the literature is due to the peculiar evolution of the field of grand strategy. Indeed, although the classicist tradition of grand strategy, which disproportionately focuses on states and the military instrument, had an uncontested success in the second half of the twentieth century, in the past two decades, the international relations tradition – based on the theories of the founder of the field, Paul Kennedy – has gained more space in the literature. Thanks to this evolution, the relevance of the economic and diplomatic instruments has been reconsidered and non-state actors started to be studied as subjects that can express grand strategy. Therefore, the political debate concerning the European Union's grand strategy started to emerge, and culminated in the first, comprehensive, strategic document of the EU, the Global Strategy (2016). However, the field still presents several gaps, especially concerning the relationships between the grand strategies of the Member States and the grand strategy of the EU. Studying and understanding these relationships is not only a theoretical issue, but it is also

the crucial premise to understand whether the Member States are in a position to influence the grand strategy of the Union, which could represent a formidable means to realize their strategic objectives.

Hence, the present research aims to answer the following question: what are the relationships between the grand strategies of Member States and the grand strategy of the European Union? To answer this question, this research mainly relies on the concepts elaborated by Terry L. Deibel, according to which a grand strategy is based on a state's fundamental assumptions on the world, from which certain interests and objectives stem. The hypothesis here presented is that, when two or more grand strategies present a strong correlation, their assumptions must be compatible and their objectives must be similar, while their interests might differ. This is supposed because there are four categories of interests – physical security, economic prosperity, value preservation at home, and value projection overseas (Deibel 2007, 126) – that are strictly related to domestic preferences and thus can easily vary. Nonetheless, when compatible assumptions signal a strong correlation and not a simple coincidence, objectives are expected to be similar, because they must realize a compatible vision of the world. In order to make the research more feasible and consistent, it is necessary to apply this framework to a limited number of Member States and strategic objectives. Because of demographic, historical, and strategic reasons, the two selected Member States are France and Germany, while the selected strategic objectives are two goals included in the European Union's Global Strategy: NATO's role in European security and strategic autonomy and enlargement policy. The results of this analysis are useful to engage with another theoretical question too, precisely related to EU actorness: do these relationships affect the EU's capability to act autonomously and coherently in the international arena? Understanding the nature of these relationships might be not enough to definitively answer this question, but it would constitute a solid starting point.

The research is divided into four sections. The first section is the literature review, in which the concepts of grand strategy – also concerning the European Union – and the European Union's actorness are analyzed in order to highlight the shortcomings of the literature that this research aims to address. The second section concerns the conceptual framework and the methodology. Here, Deibel's theory on grand strategy and how his concepts are operationalized to serve the purpose of this paper are further explained. Then the choice of France and Germany as case studies is described and justified, and it is also shown how the main method, namely discourse analysis, is used. The third section includes the analyses of the grand strategies of France, Germany, and the European Union, with a focus on assumptions, interests, and objectives. The fourth and last section is dedicated to the analysis, through the conceptual framework previously mentioned, of the positions of the EU, France, and Germany towards the issues of NATO's role in European security and strategic autonomy and enlargement policy, with the final aim of answering the research question.

2 Literature Review: grand strategy, European Union, actorness

2.1 The International Relations Tradition of Grand Strategy: history and development

The concept of grand strategy is relatively new. Its origins trace back to the military strategy, which, starting from the late 18th century, has been understood as "[t]he general's plans and his execution of manoeuvres in the lead-up to battle" (Strachan 2006, 35). Even if this very basic definition already presents some aspects of the grand strategy – mainly the preparatory character –, an essential feature was missing: the political nexus. The first author to make evident the fundamental connection between the political goals of a state and the military strategy has been Carl von Clausewitz, who affirmed, in his book *On War* (1932), that "war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means" (1989, 87). This reconceptualization of war reshaped the concept of strategy in the following century, with several authors stressing the relevance of the organization and the assessment of the economic and political resources of the state during peacetime in order to carry out effective military campaigns (Corbett 1911, 308; Fuller, 1923, 218). However, the first to use the term 'grand strategy' and to fully develop it with a contemporary meaning has been Basil Henry Liddell Hart (van Hooft 2017). Liddell Hart, already in the preface of his book *Strategy*, first published in 1954, makes a clear distinction between "pure military strategy" and "grand strategy" (1991, XVII). After having analyzed many historical examples of strategies and grand strategies, Liddell Hart provides a definition (ibid., 322):

> *"Grand strategy should both calculate and develop the economic resources and man-power of nations in order to sustain the fighting services. Also the moral resources – for to foster the people's willing spirit is often as important as to*

possess the more concrete forms of power. Grand strategy, too, should regulate the distribution of power between the several services, and between the services and industry. Moreover, fighting power is but one of the instruments of grand strategy – which should take account of and apply the power of financial pressure, and, not least of ethical pressure, to weaken the opponent's will. […] Furthermore, while the horizon of strategy is bounded by the war, grand strategy looks beyond the war to the subsequent peace. It should not only combine the various instruments, but so regulate their use as to avoid damage to the future state of peace – for its security and prosperity."

This definition, despite being almost seventy years old, is still extremely useful to understand the complexity of grand strategy and its holistic dimension. Essentially, there is not an aspect of the life of the state that falls out of the domain of the grand strategy: the economy, the people's will, the ethics, everything is at the service of the grand strategy. Moreover, and most importantly, the grand strategy does not limit itself to wartime, but it is specifically designed to guarantee peace and prosperity. Even if more conservatives theories on grand strategy – the classicist tradition, of which Barry Posen is one of the most prominent exponents (Balzacq, Dombrowski, and Reich 2019 11-14; Posen 1984, 13) – have been more successful in the second half of the 20th century, bringing back the focus on how "the military instrument should be employed to realize" (Art 2004, 10) a state's interests, starting from the Nineties, Liddell Hart's ideas have been progressively rediscovered and further developed. The most influential scholar – in terms of the evolution of the field – who picked up from Liddell Hart's theories is Paul Kennedy. Kennedy explicitly recognizes that Liddell Hart's definition has been crucial to show how broad and "multilayered" (Kennedy 1991, 4) the concept of grand strategy is, and he affirms that "[t]he crux of grand strategy lies therefore in *policy*, that is, in the capacity

of the nation's leaders to bring together all of the elements, both military and nonmilitary, for the preservation and enhancement of nation's long-term (that is, in wartime *and* peacetime) best interests" (ibid., 5). This definition, despite being very general, constitutes a good introduction to the international relations tradition of grand strategy (Balzacq, Dombrowski, and Reich 2019, 14-19), which sees the military strategy as a subcomponent of the grand strategy (Collins 1973, 15). However, when it comes to identifying what these 'nonmilitary elements' and what the goals of a grand strategy are, there is no agreement in the literature, with scholars prioritizing different aspects. Nevertheless, analyzing some of the most relevant literature in the field (Balzacq, Dombrowski, and Reich 2019; Brands 2015; Brooks and Wohlforth 2016; Deibel 2007; Gaddis, 2018; Kennedy, 1991; Rosecrance and Stein 1993; Silove, 2018), it is possible to identify some core features of the international relations tradition:

- A grand strategy connects values to ends, ways (or instruments), and means (or resources); it is generally accepted that the instruments can be diplomatic, military, and economic (Kugler 2011, 94);
- A grand strategy concerns short-, medium-, and long-term objectives;
- A grand strategy is constituted by policies, which are the final result of a process that balances threats and opportunities, interests, and available resources.

An important consequence of all these assumptions is that the international relations tradition of grand strategy accepts the possibility that "some supra-state or nonstate actors" (Dombrowski and Reich 2021, 8) can develop their grand strategy, and, because of that, it constitutes the fundamental theoretical base of the present research.

2.2 The European Union's grand strategy: an underdeveloped field

Despite the relevant space that the international relations tradition of grand strategy has taken in recent times, its study is still underdeveloped compared to the classicist one, which dominated the field in the past seventy years. Therefore, articles and books on grand strategy disproportionately focus on the United States – and, to a lesser extent, on other powers such as the United Kingdom, USSR/Russia, and the People's Republic of China (Balzacq, Dombrowski, and Reich 2019, 21; Kornprobst 2015, 269-270). This approach resulted in an extremely poor production concerning the grand strategies of non-state actors and international organizations. The European Union makes no exception. Other than being relatively meager, the literature on the EU's grand strategy consists of a few publications and books in which the topic is not comprehensively conceived. Moreover, even these few studies fail in explaining the relationships between the grand strategies of the Member States and that of the European Union. For instance, Szewczyk, in "Europe's Grand Strategy. Navigating a New World Order," manages to reconstruct the priorities of the EU grand strategy, also analyzing the grand strategies of the major Member States (Szewczyk 2021, 35). However, an explanation of the relationships between the national grand strategies and that of the EU is missing. In this regard, Smith does better, precisely acknowledging the existence of a connection between the two levels: "if the units retain some degree of sovereignty over their foreign policies, yet still attempt to support the interests of the collective, then a more 'positive sum' approach to the generation of a collective grand strategy is possible. In this view the collective grand strategy would be greater than the sum of its parts (EU member states) and would provide some clear 'value-added' to the (normal) process of grand strategy conducted by EU member states" (Smith 2011, 146). Nevertheless, in the remainder of the paper, Smith does not delve into the functioning of this system. Therefore, the present research aims to address this shortcoming by investigating what kind of relationships exist between the grand strategies of the Member States and the EU's

grand strategy, thus providing an analytical framework to further study whether the Member States are able to shape the grand strategy of an international organization.

2.3 The European Union's actorness

As has been mentioned in the previous paragraph, the production of literature concerning the EU's grand strategy is relatively scarce. One of the main reasons for that is that the most substantial part of the research on the external dimension of the European Union is focused on understanding whether the EU can behave as a coherent and independent actor in the international arena.

According to Niemann and Bretherton (2013, 265), the concept of EU actorness has been systematically studied for the first time by Gunnar Sjöstedt, who affirmed, already in 1977, that the EU actorness is its ability to work "actively and deliberately in relation to other actors in the international system" (Sjöstedt 1977, 16). Sjöstedt identified two criteria for actorness, namely "delimitation from other actors" and "capacity for autonomous action" (Niemann and Bretherton 2013, 265). Moreover, Sjöstedt maintains that the EU must possess some state-like features in order to be an autonomous actor, "such as having a community of interests, systems for controlling Community resources and for crisis-management, as well as a network of external agents" (ibidem). Moving from the foundations laid by Sjöstedt, other theories in the field have been developed; the one of Jupille and Caporaso is focused on four criteria: recognition, "understood as the acceptance of and interaction with the entity by others;" authority, which is "the legal competence to act;" autonomy, "conceived as institutional distinctiveness and independence from other actors;" cohesion, which constitutes the "the degree to which an entity is able to formulate and articulate internally consistent policy preferences" (Jupille and Caporaso 1998, 214).

As it is possible to understand from these two relevant conceptualizations of the EU actorness, there is no general agreement around what constitutes it. However, Carbone affirms that the major theories in the field generally concern two aspects: autonomy, especially from the Member States, and coherence, which refers to the ability of the EU to define common policies and control the behavior of its members (Carbone 2013, 242). Therefore, the present research refers to these two broad criteria to understand whether the European Union, when it comes to the most complete and complex definition of its external action, namely the grand strategy, is able to behave as an independent actor. Because of that, understanding what relationships exist between the grand strategies of the Member States and that of the European Union is not only relevant to the field of international relation tradition of grand strategy, but it is also useful to expand and better understand the academic debate on the actorness of the European Union.

3 Conceptual Framework and Methodology

3.1 Conceptual Framework

Before starting to explore the relationships between the grand strategies of the Member States and the EU's grand strategy, it is necessary to define the conceptual framework of this research. To have a consistent framework, this research refers to the scheme laid out by Terry L. Deibel in "*Foreign Affairs Strategy. Logic for American Statecraft*" to understand what elements must be taken into account in the analysis of the grand strategy of an international actor. (Deibel 2007)

According to Deibel, the first step to defining a grand strategy is the assessment of the international and domestic environments (Deibel 2007, 25-27). The interpretation of these two environments happens through certain "assumptions" (ibidem) that the state has about them. Indeed, "the strategist's knowledge of the nation and the world should be seen less as a set of facts than of perceptions or 'assumptions'" (ibidem, 35). These fundamental beliefs are essentially related to the historical or collective memory of a state, which can decisively shape how an actor perceives both the external conditions and its role in the international arena (Goddard and Krebs 2015, 23; Markovits and Reich 1997, 14-15).

The assessment of the international environment through fundamental assumptions defines the ends of grand strategy, which are composed of the relation between interests and objectives and are influenced by threats and opportunities (Deibel 2007, 27). Threats and opportunities pertain to the inherent characteristics of the international environment, but they are fundamentally related to interests: if a threat/opportunity does not jeopardize/serve the interests, it is not a threat/opportunity, and the seriousness of the threat/opportunity heavily depends on the value of the interest in question (ibidem, 149-153). Indeed, the role of interests

"in strategic logic is to justify the statesman's action, to provide a standard of judgment against which goals can be measured" (ibidem, 123), and they can be divided into four categories: physical security, economic prosperity, value preservation at home, value projection overseas (ibidem, 126). The prioritization of one kind of interest over another is due both to the domestic preferences (collective memory) and the objectives, which have the function of selecting "what is doable within the wish-list of national interests" (ibidem, 296). On the other hand, the assessment of the domestic environment defines the means of grand strategy, a domain in which "the availability and extent of resources to back statecraft" are analyzed (ibidem, 157-158). The consequence of this analysis is the identification of the instruments of grand strategy, which can be diplomatic, military, and economic (Kugler 2011, 94). The final connection between objectives and instruments results in the production of policies, which will act on the international and domestic environment, reshaping them and creating a circular structure in the grand strategy's formation (Deibel 2007, 29-32).

Therefore, the analysis of the grand strategies of the selected Member States and the European Union proceeds in two steps:

- Domestic and external environments, in which the assumptions deriving from collective memory, as well as threats and opportunities, are analyzed.
- Ends, in which interests and objectives are analyzed.

The decision to leave out the analysis of the means, namely of the available resources and the instruments, concerns how the presented framework is expected to function in this research.

International actors understand the world through assumptions. Hence, if assumptions are at least compatible, there might be a correlation between the grand strategies of two or more actors. However, compatibility at the level of assumptions might be coincidental, and to understand how strong the correlation between the grand strategies is, is necessary to move to the second level of analysis: interests and objectives. As has been mentioned before, there are four categories of interests, which are subject to a high degree of variation between different actors, because they are strongly influenced by domestic preferences. For instance, two actors that believe in diplomacy as the main driver for peace (fundamental assumption) might prioritize either value projection overseas or economic prosperity (interests) because from compatible assumptions might stem different interests. Nonetheless, when compatible assumptions signal a strong correlation and not a simple coincidence, objectives are expected to be similar. Indeed, even if objectives are obviously related to interests, they are also meant to realize the vision of the world of a certain actor – which is expressed through assumptions. Therefore, it is assumed that, when two or more grand strategies present a strong correlation – which can be the foundation for a potential two-way influence as well –, their assumptions must be compatible and their objectives must be similar, while their interests might differ. According to this hypothesis, assumptions, interests, and objectives are useful to answer the research question, while available resources and means, even if they are relevant in a comprehensive analysis of a grand strategy, are secondarily relevant.

3.2 Case selection: France and Germany

The main goal of this research is to study the relationships between the grand strategies of the Member States and the European Union's grand strategy. In order to make the research feasible and consistent, it is necessary to analyze a limited number of grand strategies of the

Member States. Therefore, Germany and France have been chosen, for three orders of reasons: demographic – which has economic and diplomatic consequences – historical, and strategic.

Having the two largest populations of the European Union, Germany and France are respectively the first and second economies of the Union in terms of GDP. This aspect itself would be sufficient to explain how powerful these two countries are, but what is even more relevant in the context of the European Union is how much they contribute to the EU budget: according to the figures provided by the European Commission, Germany and France – in line with the numbers of their GDPs – have been the first and second contributors to the EU budget in 2021 (European Commission). France and Germany have also the strongest *de iure* influence on the European decision-making process thanks to their populations, which makes them the most represented countries in the European Parliament (Germany 96, France 79; European Parliament, 2021) and the most decisive in the qualified majority vote in the European Council and the Council of the European Union. Furthermore, given their economic dimensions, the two countries can also exercise a *de facto* influence on the European institutions and Member States. Lastly, the demographic and economic dimensions of the two countries make them the EU Member States with the highest number of diplomatic missions, 264 for France and 220 for Germany (Global Diplomacy Index 2021). These numbers make it more likely that France's and Germany's grand strategies have significant relationships with that of the EU.

The second reason to study France and Germany in this research is essentially historical. France and Germany are not only in the restricted group of founding members, but they are first and foremost the nations around which European integration started. In Paris, on April 18, 1951, France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, The Netherlands, and Luxembourg signed the treaty that established the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), which was designed to radically prevent a new German rise and to tie the economic and political fates of the two European giants inextricably and progressively. Hence, one can affirm that the relationship between these

two states and their cultures and ideas has decisively shaped the European institutions and their norms since the beginning, thus defining them more deeply than any other Member State.

Lastly, on a purely strategic level, the two actors are extremely different. On the one hand, Germany is a "[c]ivilian Power", which attempts "to replace the military enforcement of rules (politics based on power) with the internalization of socially accepted norms (politics based on legitimacy)" (Harnisch, Maull 2001, 4). This approach led Germany to a very post-historic and economistic approach to international relations (Franke 2021), which disproportionately prioritized economic wealth over military power. On the other hand, France, "for the past two centuries," tried "to exploit both its soft and hard power and its British, German, Russian, American, Southern-European, Polish and colonial connections to leverage itself into a position of strength in Europe and beyond" (Simón 2013, 410). Therefore, France has been and still is a traditional power much more than Germany. The two almost opposite dimensions of French and German power make them two good cases since they allow to examine a broader range of assumptions, interests, and goals.

3.3 Method: Discourse Analysis

The main method that is used in this research to answer the research question is discourse analysis. A discourse can be defined as "a group of ideas or patterned way of thinking which both can be identified in textual and verbal communication and located in wider social structures" (Lupton 1992, 145). Therefore, analyzing discourse is useful to understand how and why assumptions on the international and domestic environments are produced and reproduced, and what the main interests of the analyzed actors and the objectives of their grand strategies are. Uncovering such structures is useful when it comes to the comprehension of how different actors and their grand strategies interplay. For instance, it is evident that France and Germany have different positions concerning strategic autonomy, and that the European institutions have

a third position that is likely to be composed of elements of both national positions. However, to understand the correlations between the fundamental assumptions, interests, and objectives of the two Member States and the power structures that connect them to the European position a discourse analysis is needed, because it is through discourse that these actors explicitly signal, reproduce, and consolidate those concepts.

The research engages with three broad categories of sources for discourse: official documents, public statements, and speeches. Official documents are mainly strategic ones, namely the "National strategic review" for France, the "White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr" for Germany, and the "European Union Global Strategy (EUGS)." Concerning public statements and speeches for France and Germany, this research takes into account those coming from the President and his office and the Chancellor and his office; at a European level, statements and speeches of the President of the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and his office are analyzed.

The last aspect to cover is how discourse analysis is used in the two steps of this research. First, an explanation of the grand strategies of France, Germany, and the European Union – through the scheme laid out in the conceptual framework – is needed. In order to do so, the research mainly relies on existing literature and blogs, integrating them with discourse analysis, so that the concepts in the literature can be applied to the latest developments. For instance, to reconstruct and explain the grand strategy of France, some key texts in the field are taken into account, such as "*The Spider in Europe's Web? French Grand Strategy From Iraq to Libya*" by Simón (Simón 2013). Then, to contextualize these analyses in the current international scenario, documents such as the "*National Strategic Review*" are critically relevant. The second and crucial step of the research, in which two different issues of the European Union's grand strategy are chosen and studied in relation to the positions of France

and Germany, relies instead much more on discourse analysis. Indeed, through discourse analysis, it is possible to observe how the selected Member States relate the main concepts of their grand strategies to a specific issue. Moreover, studying their discourses and that of the European Union, the relations between them – through the compatibility at the level of the assumptions and the similarity at the level of the objectives – emerge. In order to understand these aspects, and eventually answer the research question, the research attempts to investigate, out of converging or diverging positions, what the underlying assumptions, interests, and objectives are. For instance, the analysis might reveal that Germany has a much more cautious approach toward strategic autonomy than France and that the European Union's position is closer to that of Berlin. However, to comprehend the relations between these positions, a reflection on their roots is needed. Germany, because of its assumptions, interests, and objectives, has an essentially diplomatic and economic approach to international affairs. If some of these assumptions are compatible with those of the EU and their strategic objectives at least partially overlap, it can be affirmed that Germany's grand strategy, concerning strategic autonomy, has a solid relationship with that of the European Union.

3.4 Limitations

The described approach has some limitations. First, it takes into account just two of the strategic goals of the European Union's grand strategy. However, this research aims to investigate the relationships between the grand strategies of the Member States and that of the EU, and, to reach this goal, is more important to select relevant and comprehensive strategic goals than to analyze the broadest number of them. Therefore, to make the results of the analysis as reliable as possible, the selected goals entail military, diplomatic, and economic aspects – not necessarily to the same extent – so that the more strategic nature of France and the more economistic one of Germany do not distort the conclusions. The second limitation of the

approach to this research is the restricted number of countries taken into account. As previously explained, assuming that France and Germany are the EU Member States whose grand strategies are more strongly related to the grand strategy of the Union has several valid reasons. Nevertheless, there are other 25 Member States, and they likely have some kind of relationship with the EU's grand strategy as well. This aspect is not included in the present research since it is believed to be of secondary relevance. Lastly, the Russian invasion of Ukraine is changing and it is going to change substantially some aspects of the grand strategies of France, Germany, and the EU. For instance, the German approach towards Russia has already evolved because of the invasion, and other relevant aspects of its foreign and defense policy are expected to adapt to the extremely fluid international context. The same is expected for France and the EU. Since this research considers strategic developments of France, Germany, and the European Union from the end of World War II until today and studies official documents, public statements, and speeches from 2016 to 2023, the ongoing conflict might trigger further evolutions, which are necessarily not included in the present analysis.

4 The grand strategies: assumptions, interests, and objectives

In this section, the grand strategies of France, Germany, and the European Union are analyzed according to the conceptual framework previously laid out. Especially, the analysis is focused on highlighting assumptions, interests, and goals since these are the levels of the grand strategies on which the most relevant relationships are believed to exist. Thanks to the analysis of the grand strategy of the European Union, two issues that will be the object of the next section are identified.

4.1 France

4.1.1 Domestic environment: collective memory

France is one of the most ancient nation-states in Europe. Its history is dense with historical events that have influenced the character of the French people. However, it can be affirmed that their important collective experiences contributed to constructing and solidifying two concepts that are decisive in French political discourse: exceptionalism and *grandeur*, which are essentially interconnected. In the literature, the concept of exceptionalism is usually related to the United States, but it has been recently applied to other middle powers and superpowers as well. Because of the tight connection between the history of France and the United States – and especially between the two revolutions – France's exceptionalism has found relevant space in the literature. In a comparative study of the foreign policy of France, the United States, and the Soviet Union, Holsti identifies five main characteristics of exceptionalism in foreign policy (Holsti 2010, 384):

- "A responsibility, obligation, and mission to 'liberate' others, usually defined as entire societies suffering from some evil, exploitation, or fallen status."

- "Because of these special responsibilities, the exceptionalist state is or should be free from external constraints such as rules or norms that govern or influence the relations between 'ordinary' states".
- "Exceptionalist states usually see themselves existing in a hostile world. Threats are universalized."
- "Governments and societies of exceptionalist states develop a need to have external enemies."
- "Exceptionalist states portray themselves as innocent victims. They are never the sources of international insecurity, but only the targets of malign forces."

These aspects, while with different proportions and relevance, have been relevant in French foreign policy. This is because France is the country of the Revolution: the values of the Revolution and the Enlightenment, which led to civil liberties and popular sovereignty were and are thought to be superior (Holsti 2010, 396). Indeed, "[t]he obligation to bring the blessings of liberty arose not from being French, but from being free" (ibidem). After a period of decline, which usually nourishes references to exceptionalism (Rieker 2017, 16), De Gaulle stressed "the added value of French culture and history for the European continent" to legitimize "the ambitions of restoring the country's status and greatness in the post-war period" (ibidem, 17). He affirmed: "France cannot be France without *grandeur*" (De Gaulle 1954, Translation). Even if France had not the position and the dimension to engage in the super-power competition, what was most important for De Gaulle was to restore status, which is a "collective belief about a given state's ranking on valued attributes" (Paul, Larson and Wohlforth 2014, 7). Even if, since the end of the Cold War, *grandeur* is not a strategy per se for France anymore (Balzacq 2019, 107), Paris "remains obsessed with its 'position' in the world" (Vernet 1992, 663). Indeed, it is still alive in the French character, well represented by the words of contemporary

leaders. For instance, former President François Hollande, in relation to terrorism, affirmed: "we're guardians of this great idea of progress, or I could say this great idea of France for the world, that many countries signal their solidarity with us and many peoples express their gratitude to us" (Hollande 2015).

4.1.2 External Environment: threats and opportunities

France is the second most populated country and the second richest country of the European continent. Consequently, Europe constitutes the first dimension of its external environment. However, its imperial past and its convictions about its role in the world make France a relevant actor also in other continents, especially Africa and Asia.

The European continent has always been a land on which one power tries to impose its hegemony. More recently, after World War II, it has been contented between the United States and the Soviet Union, and, after the end of the Cold War, with the reunification of Germany, Berlin attempted to get back its central position through economic means. Therefore, in the last seventy years, France has tried to keep an equilibrium on the continent. During the Cold War, it helped to make the "USSR strong enough to keep US and German power at bay, but not so strong as to bend the West" and "America strong enough to block a Soviet run on Western Europe, but not so strong as to turn France into a satellite in Europe" (Simón 2013, 413-414). This effort still lasts – especially after the Russian invasion of Ukraine –, and, additionally, France has pushed for European integration to contain the German rise and balance the influence of Washington on European affairs (ibidem). Therefore, the competition for the control – either military or economic – of Europe constitutes at the same a threat and an opportunity for Paris. Indeed, on the one hand, failing in balancing these forces would most likely relegate France to a position of secondary relevance for the affairs of the continent. On

the other hand, if France manages to maintain the balance of power, it becomes a crucial actor to deal with for all the major powers, from the United States to Germany and China.

Grandeur imposes on the French to care for extra-European affairs, because, for an exceptionalist state, threats are universal (Holsti 2010, 384). However, having the ambition of influencing extra-European affairs is not only related to strategic threats but also to opportunities. Indeed, the "mission to 'liberate' others" (ibidem) represents a way to extend French influence on other continents – especially in Maghreb and Sahel, where the legacy of colonialism is still visible. Therefore, in the first section of the National strategic review, which is dedicated to the assessment of the strategic environment, the analysis is not limited to the European continent, and it takes into account the ever-stronger competition with China and the "revisionist ambitions" which "have intensified, giving rise to numerous displays of naked opportunism from the eastern Mediterranean to the Sahel and the Pacific" (National Strategic Review 2022, 9).

4.1.3 Ends: interests and objectives

In its National strategic review, France identifies, among the many, four main interests: the protection of national territory; the security of the EU's Member States and the euro-Atlantic space; the stability of neighboring countries; freedom of access to common spaces, such as cyber and outer space (National Strategic Review 2022, 19). However, it is also explicitly mentioned that there is a fundamental premise to the French action, namely strategic autonomy (ibidem). Indeed, strategic autonomy is defined as "a prerequisite for protecting our fundamental interests" (ibidem, 20), because it is only through strategic autonomy that France can guarantee the balance of power on the European continent, which provides the essential stability to carry on the French ecumenical mission.

Out of these broader interests, France selects 10 strategic objectives that aims to realize by 2030: "a robust and credible nuclear deterrent; a united and resilient France; an economy contributing to a defence mindset; first class cyber resilience; to be exemplary ally in the Euro-Atlantic area; to be a driving force behind European strategic autonomy; to be a reliable sovereignty partner and a credible provider of security; guaranteed autonomy of assessment and decision-making sovereignty; the capacity to defend and act in hybrid fields; freedom of action and the capacity to conduct military operations, including high-intensity operations, autonomously or in a coalition, in all fields" (ibidem, 27-28).

4.2 Germany

4.2.1 Domestic environment: collective memory

"Our identity and the way we see security is influenced by the lessons we have learned from our history" (The White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr 2016). This is the first sentence of the first section of Germany's White Paper of 2016, the main document of Berlin's grand strategy, and it shows how contemporary history inevitably informs German understanding of the world. Especially, Markovits and Reich identify four clusters, of which two are relevant for the purpose of this research (Markovits and Reich 1997, 35-42):

- The Nazi cluster, which accounts for the different understanding of this period by the Germans, who see themselves as perpetrators but as victims as well.
- The Bundesrepublik cluster, which refers to the perception of the Federal Republic as a democratic, economic, and international success.

Right after its foundation, the Federal Republic started to deal with its heavy and very recent past. The desire for normalization, together with the interpretation of the 1933-1945 period "as a lesson in the evils of geopolitics and militarism," (Franke 2022) tangibly influenced West Germany's international behavior throughout the Cold War. Indeed, the German interpretation of the Western victory in the Cold War is that engagement, diplomacy, and attempts at mutual understanding led to the end of the tensions and the reunification (Dirsus 2022). This principle of engagement over confrontation is therefore central in the definition of Maull of Germany as a "Civilian Power", that tries "to replace the military enforcement of rules (politics based on power) with the internalization of socially accepted norms (politics based on legitimacy)," (Harnisch and Maull 2001, 4) and it makes Germany the country that has better embraced the "end of history" (Fukuyama 1989, 4)

The peculiar approach of Germany towards international affairs, combined with a perception of unerodable safety, resulted in a genuine belief of the Germans in Fukuyama's idea. The words of Ulrike Franke, who tried to explain how millennial Germans perceive the world, precisely express this concept: "Since 1989, very little has happened in Germany. Of course, the world has not stood completely still during the last 30 years. But from 9/11 to the Global War on Terror to the financial crisis, these events did not happen *to us*" (Franke 2021). This way of understanding its security led Germany to prioritize economic interests over geostrategic ones in its international relations. However, current events, especially Russia's invasion of Ukraine, are revealing that this attitude can change when the survival of the liberal international order is at stake.

4.2.2 External Environment: threats and opportunities

Germany has a peculiar position in the international scenario. It is the political and economic leader of the European Union, and, because of that, it understands the external

environment and its strategic priorities in relation to this position. It has both to respond to the concerns of the EU countries and to keep balanced relations with the superpowers. Therefore, there are three dimensions of Germany's external environment: the European Union, the United States, and China and Russia (Speck 2017).

The European Union is the reality in which Germany is immersed. Hence, the EU's laws and institutions represent the first and most relevant playing field for German interests and ends. Germany is by far the strongest EU economy, and it benefits from the single market and common currency (just to name the most visible and relevant aspects) more than anyone else in the European Union (DW 2021). In general, the German population embraces ordoliberalism and, consequently, is intolerant of expansive monetary policies and debt increases when dealing with economic issues (Jessop 2019, 969-972). However, when the existence of the European Union and the Eurozone is at stake, German governments have demonstrated to be able to take even unpopular decisions to preserve them and to maintain the stability of the main playing fields for their economy.

Another key to Germany's economic success is the fact that the security of European soil, since the end of World War II, has been guaranteed by the United States, directly or through NATO. Indeed, Germans still trust the US on major issues, such as the promotion of free trade, the protection of democracy and human rights, and, obviously and most importantly, the protection of European security. The importance of American protection is further confirmed in some interesting polls about the military involvement to protect Germany (83% favorable) and its allies (79% favorable), and the US is seen by far as the most important foreign policy partner (44%) (Pew Research Center, 2021). Therefore, Germans still see positive relations with Washington and the role of the United States as the main security provider for the European continent as crucial.

Lastly, there are relations with China and Russia, the challengers of the status quo (Speck 2017). China is a top trading partner with a strong economic view of international relations (German: Trade Statistics 2023), and, considering the German approach to international relations, it is an actor that needs to be dealt with. German strategy concerning Russia is less intuitive. The importance of dealing with Russia is mainly related to geographical constraints since Russia is a Eurasian power with its political and economic core in Europe. Therefore, dealing with Moscow is necessary. However, even if Russia – similarly to China – challenges the international status quo, it has done so in the past two decades with explicit military assertiveness, which aims to "reverse some of the losses of the 1990s" (Lehne 2023). This is a crucial difference: even if Berlin has tried to mitigate Russian assertiveness through economic ties, in line with an approach to the relations with Moscow that is deeply rooted in the German elites (Spanger 2020, 1057), the failure of this system culminated in the invasion of Ukraine, which forced Germany to take tougher positions.

4.2.3 Ends: Interests and Objectives

Considering the domestic and external environments and the assumptions that Germany has about them, it is possible to identify one main interest that encompasses the different objectives: protecting the liberal international order (LIO). Referring to Deibel's four categories of interests, protecting the LIO is obviously and mostly related to economic prosperity, but it has also a non-negligible connection with physical security. Indeed, the peace provided by the US-led liberal international order is functional to economic prosperity, which is founded on positive relations between countries. Therefore, Germany's approach to international relations should be understood essentially in economic terms, but bearing in mind that the broader goal of this approach is not only to satisfy the post-historic belief of its population but also to enhance its physical security.

The big picture enables us to understand the specific objectives of Germany's grand strategy in relation to the external environment. First, Berlin must keep the United States engaged in Europe (Speck 2017), since the role of the hegemon has been the key to the peace of the continent for 70 years and, consequently, to German economic success. Second, Germany must keep the European Union intact (ibidem). As it has been shown, Germany's economic success is strongly dependent on the European Union and the Euro, the stability and integrity of which are thus necessary. Lastly, Germany must engage with the challengers of the status quo, namely China and Russia (ibidem). These two countries are extremely different, and they are differently approached by Germany – especially since February 2022. However, they are both threatening the stability of the LIO, and, consequently, Germany needs to react to this.

4.3 The European Union

4.3.1 Domestic environment: collective memory

Understanding the collective memory of the European Union is a complicated exercise, for at least two reasons. First, the European Union, despite its unique characteristics led the academic and political debate to define it as a Federal State or a Confederation of States (Elazar 1998), is formally an international organization. This means that collective identity and individual national identities coexist, and these two levels must be equally taken into account. Second, the European Union, in its current 27 Member States formation is relatively recent. The first form of European integration, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was formed by France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, The Netherlands, and Luxembourg, and almost half of the current Member States have joined the European Union in the past 20 years. These aspects must be considered to understand the complexity of the European Union's collective memory, which is deeply connected with European diversity and enlarging nature.

The collective memory of the European Union is necessarily related to its foundation. More precisely, it is related to the first step of European integration, namely the ECSC, which, as it has been already mentioned earlier, was designed to radically prevent a new German rise and to tie the economic and political fates of France and Germany inextricably and progressively. Even if the function of the Community was extremely concrete – putting in common the production of coal and steel – the broader aim was ambitious and would have defined the future of European integration. Indeed, in the preamble of the Treaty on the European Coal and Steel Community, there are three fundamental statements: "world peace can only be safeguarded by efforts commensurate with the dangers that threaten it;" "the contribution that an organized and living Europe can make to civilization is indispensable to the maintenance of peaceful relations;" "Europe can only be built through concrete achievements that create de facto solidarity in the first place, and through the establishment of common foundations of economic development" (Treaty on the European Coal and Steel Community 1951). As it is evident, the preamble contains already the deepest meaning of European integration: peace is the first goal, and a common effort is needed; a peaceful Europe is the key to a peaceful world; European peace can only be built through economic prosperity. These ideas constituted the base on which European integration started, and they have consolidated throughout the decades thanks to their success. Moreover, another possible path to European peace, namely the European army, failed in 1954 because of the French opposition to the establishment of the European Defence Community (EDC), and this reinforced the necessity of strengthening economic integration.

The idea of peace through economic prosperity is essentially connected with another relevant aspect of European integration: enlargement. Since the establishment of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957, the European Communities had provisions, in articles 237 and 238, for the admission of new members. According to Article 237 of the Treaty on the

EEC, "[a]ny European state may apply to become a member of the Community" (Treaty establishing the European Economic Community, Art. 237, Translation). Neglecting the discussion of the actual meaning of "European," the article betrays the aspiration of the Communities to welcome the broader membership possible. Indeed, if the European project is a vehicle for economic prosperity, and economic prosperity is the best way to peace, the enlargement of the European Communities is desirable. However, this enlarging nature still creates an ambiguous tension that informs the EU's grand strategy. On the one hand, the European Union embraces diversity. The Treaty on the European Union (TEU), in article 3(3) states that the EU "shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced" (Treaty on European Union, Art. 3(3)). On the other hand, the EU presents some exceptionalist features. Indeed, according to Nolte and Aust, the European Union can be seen as an exceptionalist power because it does not always "live up to his standards" and, most importantly, because of how it "projects its identity and its underlying normative understandings onto the global level" (Nolte and Aust 2012, 2). Confirming this idea, in the same article 3 of the TEU is affirmed that "[i]n its relations with the wider world, the Union shall uphold and promote its values and interests and contribute to the protection of its citizens" (Treaty on the European Union).

4.3.2 External Environment: threats and opportunities

The European Union's external environment has two dimensions: its neighborhood and the superpower competition between the United States and China.

The EU, especially thanks to the substantial enlargement of 2004, now covers most of geographical Europe. Hence, what happens in the neighboring countries and regions highly impacts Brussels' strategic priorities. The Russian war in Ukraine has broken the long-lasting peace of the European continent, bringing a feeling of immediate danger that was forgotten. On

the other hand, the war, which has been defined as a "geopolitical wake-up call" (Borrell 2023) by the High Representative Borrell, is constituting an occasion for the EU countries to modernize their militaries and to increase their efforts for an actual and effective common defense. Another important source, at the same time, of destabilization and opportunities is the Mediterranean, which separates – or connects – the European Union with unstable governments, civil wars, and huge migration routes. Therefore, there is space for Brussels to play a relevant role in the area, stabilizing and developing those countries to contain the negative externalities of protracted instability and build more profitable partnerships (European Commission 2015, 3-7).

The position of the European Union in the superpower competition between the United States and China is less obvious than what one can expect. On the website of the EEAS is stated that "the EU and the United States [are] natural partners for tackling today's global challenges" and that their partnership is founded on sharing "common values, including a commitment to the rule of law, the democratic process, free enterprise, human rights, and alleviating poverty" (EEAS 2021). The same cannot be said concerning China, towards which the EEAS aims to have "a more realistic, assertive and multi-faceted approach" which must entail "not only a principled defence of interests and values, but also the achievement of concrete results, particularly in areas such as trade and investment, climate change, biodiversity, response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and international affairs" (EEAS 2023). Therefore, Brussels is aware of its unique relationship with Washington and the challenges that the Chinese rise poses to the liberal international order. However, it also acknowledges the crucial role of Beijing in dealing with the most pressuring issues of the present century and does not want to renounce such a massive trading partner.

4.3.3 Ends: interests and objectives

The EU's interests are broadly defined in the European Union Global Strategy: "Peace and security, prosperity, democracy and a rules-based global order are the vital interests underpinning our external action" (European Union Global Strategy 2016, 13). These interests are essentially intertwined. Peace and security can be achieved only if "the root causes of instability" (ibidem, 14) are addressed, and, according to the EU's assumptions about the world, economic prosperity and liberal values are the medicines to cure instability.

To promote its interest the EU sets five priorities (ibidem, 18-44):

- The Security of our Union: the EU aims to become more autonomous when it comes to its own security and has the ambition to reach an "appropriate level […] strategic autonomy" (ibidem, 19). To do so, a renovated effort in the fields of counter-terrorism, cyber security, and energy security is needed.
- State and Societal Resilience to our East and South: the EU aims to "invest in the resilience of states and societies to the east stretching into Central Asia, and south down to Central Africa" (ibidem, 23), acting in different ways, from the membership's enlargement to trade agreements and more effective migration policies.
- An Integrated Approach to Conflicts and Crises: the EU aims to implement a "*multi-dimensional* approach" (ibidem, 28) to prevent, manage, and resolve conflicts. The approach must be also "multi-phased", avoiding "premature disengagement when a new crisis erupts elsewhere" (ibidem, 29).
- Cooperative Regional Orders: the EU aims "promote and support cooperative regional orders worldwide" (ibidem, 32), working on their own development and improving their relations with Brussels. This approach entails, among the others, "selective engagement" with Russia for a safer Europe, "contribut[ing] to effective global

governance" with NATO and the United States, and deepening economic ties and diplomatic presence in Asia since "peace and stability in Asia are a prerequisite for our prosperity" (ibidem, 33-37).

- Global Governance for the 21st Century: the EU "is committed to a global order based on international law, including the principles of the UN Charter" (ibidem, 39), and this commitment is translated in the aim to reform and develop the current system.

5 France, Germany, and the European Union's grand strategy

Having identified assumptions, interests, and objectives of the grand strategies of France, Germany, and the European Union, it is now possible to study the relationships between the grand strategies of the two countries and that of the EU. To answer the research question, in this section, the analysis focuses on two specific goals of the European Union's grand strategy, namely NATO's role in European security and strategic autonomy and enlargement policy. Taking into account the positions of the three actors towards these goals, it is assessed how compatible assumptions lead to similar objectives, even if interests might differ. If a similarity at the objectives' level is found, it is confirmed that compatible assumptions constitute a significant connection between the grand strategies, which can be the foundation for a potential two-way influence as well. In this section, to study the positions of France, Germany, and the EU, three strategic documents are analyzed: the "National strategic review" for France, the "White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr" for Germany, and the "European Union Global Strategy" (EUGS). Moreover, speeches and statements of French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell and their offices are used to further expand the concepts and the goals expressed in the strategic documents.

5.1 NATO's role in European security and strategic autonomy: finding the balance

In the European Union's global strategy, two objectives present an apparent contradiction. On the one hand, the EU aims to "deepen its partnership with NATO through coordinate defence capability development, parallel and syncronised exercises," (European Union Global Strategy 2016, 36), because – and this is the most relevant part – "[w]hen it comes

to collective defence, NATO remains the primary framework for most Member States" (ibidem, 20). On the other hand, in the same section in which NATO's primacy is stated, the EU also declares that "[a]n appropriate level of ambition and strategic autonomy is important for Europe's ability to foster peace and safeguard security within and beyond its borders" (ibidem, 19). This ambiguity is rooted in the EU assumptions about international relations because NATO has been the security provider for the European continent since the end of World War II and its presence on the Old Continent was one of the keys to its peace and development. Moreover, the European Union believes in the role of economic prosperity as the main driver for stability and peace, thus having an external security provider allows Brussels to focus its resources on economic rather than security issues. However, as it affirmed in the EUGS, a reasonable degree of strategic autonomy is functional to the pursuit of the Union's interests, hence is desirable.

The validity of this rationale has been confirmed by recent events. The Russian invasion of Ukraine reaffirmed and reinforced the crucial role of NATO for the security of Europe, while there have not been significant steps forward concerning common European defense. However, current circumstances also pushed the EU to redefine and broaden the concept of strategic autonomy. According to the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen "strategic autonomy is not only limited to defence, it includes of course defence. And strategic autonomy does not say that you do not cooperate. You cooperate with like-minded partners" (von der Leyen 2023). This cooperation was crucial to getting rid of the EU's "toxic dependency on Russian fossil fuels. We have basically completely gotten rid of it during this year, coal completely. […] We have been able and that's strategic autonomy to diversify our supply chains to trusted and like-minded partners" (ibidem). Hence, having accepted the impossibility in the short-/medium-term to build autonomous defense capabilities for the European Union, the goal

becomes to be more independent in other strategic domains, such as energy supplies and, as has been mentioned by von der Leyen in the same press conference, vaccines.

At this stage, the question is: is this the same idea of strategic autonomy of France and Germany? And, most importantly, do their positions signal something about the relationships between their grand strategies and that of the EU?

France's aversion to NATO is not new. Already in 1967, President de Gaulle decided to pull out the country from NATO's integrated military structure – and France rejoined just in 2009. More recently, Macron has not hidden French skepticism concerning the current relevance of the organization, defining it "brain-dead" (Macron 2019) in 2019. This sentiment is strictly related to France's exceptionalism, according to which the "state is or should be free from external constraints." Because of this fundamental assumption and the interest in maintaining its balancing role in Europe, France has always attempted to carry out a strategy that had to be the most autonomous possible from the interests of the two blocks of the Cold War, and it is trying to have the same approach to the superpower competition between the United States and China. Most importantly, France's goal is now to have a strategic autonomous EU. Indeed, if Brussels is more autonomous from the interests of the superpowers, it is easier for Paris as well to be more independent since its decisions are partially limited by the framework of the European Union's foreign and security policy. This approach is confirmed by the National Strategic Review published in late 2022, in which NATO, despite being defined as "the foundation and essential framework for Europe's collective security" (Secrétariat général de la défense et de la sécurité nationale 2022, 14), is seen essentially as an instrument to build strategic autonomy: "Closer cooperation between the EU and NATO will be essential to further strengthen European strategic autonomy and the transatlantic relationship" (ibidem, 14). Moreover, in a recent interview with POLITICO, President Macron, discussing the Taiwan

issue, affirmed: “The paradox would be that, overcome with panic, we believe we are just America’s followers. The question Europeans need to answer… is it in our interest to accelerate [a crisis] on Taiwan? No. The worse thing would be to think that we Europeans must become followers on this topic and take our cue from the U.S. agenda and a Chinese overreaction” (Macron 2023). The meaning is very explicit: the EU and the US have different interests and objectives, and we should not stand by Washington’s side regardless of the issue, but we must act autonomously.

Germany’s position is more nuanced. Germany, similarly to the European Union, still believes that the United States and NATO should play a central role in maintaining and enforcing peace in Europe. As has been shown in the previous sections, Germans are still extremely favorable to American protection, because it has historically been one of the keys to the stability of the continent, which has been the foundation of German economic success. Moreover, in order to maintain its economic supremacy and the wealth of its population, is preferable for Berlin to maintain its security costs to the minimum necessary. In line with this view, in the White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of Bundeswehr, it is affirmed: “the United States will continue to have a profound influence on international security policy. […] Germany has a long-standing partnership with the United States which is deeply rooted in our society and is reflected by a broad spectrum of common security policy interests” (The Federal Government 2016, 31). Moreover, NATO is defined as “vital to the security of Europe” and “strengthening the cohesion and capacity to act of NATO and the EU is of paramount importance for Germany” (ibidem, 49). Even if this position has not changed, in the past few months it has become more complex. In a speech at the Charles University in Prague – called by the Chancellor’s office “Europe is our future” – Olaf Scholz enunciated his views on the future of Europe and the European Union. Among the many topics treated by the Chancellor, the question of strategic autonomy – even if under different labels – emerges as one

of the most relevant. According to Scholz, "NATO remains the guarantor of our security," and it "stands more united today than ever before" (Scholz 2022). However, he acknowledges that "[m]any people have rightly called for a stronger, more sovereign and geopolitical European Union in recent years" and that "[t]he historic decisions taken in the past months have brought us closer to this goal" (ibidem). This idea of a "geopolitical European Union" might seem in contrast with the conviction of NATO's primacy, but Scholz manages to clearly explain his understanding of a geopolitical Europe: "Together, we stand the very best chance of helping to form and shape the 21st century in our own, European, vein – as a European Union of 27, 30 or 36 countries, which will then have over 500 million free citizens enjoying equal rights, with the biggest internal market in the world, with leading research institutes, innovations and innovative companies, with stable democracies, with social welfare and a public infrastructure that is without parallel around the world. That is the ambition that I associate with a geopolitical Europe" (ibidem). This understanding seems very close to that of von der Leyen, and it is more related to what Scholz, in the same speech, defines as "European sovereignty" which "means in essence is that we grow more autonomous in all fields; that we assume greater responsibility for our own security; that we work more closely together and stand yet more united in defence of our values and interests around the world" (ibidem).

This first case shows two different positions, which stem from different assumptions. France's exceptionalism constitutes the base on which Paris builds its aversion to NATO and preference for strategic autonomy, while Germany, as an economic power, understands strategic autonomy as a broader European sovereignty, in a context in which NATO remains the 'guarantor' of European security. In this case, Germany's assumptions are more compatible with those of the European Union. Indeed, both actors are convinced that NATO's security shield is functional to allow Europe to pursue its primary interest, namely economic prosperity.

Therefore, Germany and the European Union have the same goal: keeping the United States and NATO engaged in Europe. In this case, compatibility at the level of the assumptions is confirmed both at levels of interests and objectives thus is possible to affirm that there is a solid correlation between the grand strategy of Germany and the European Union – at least concerning the engagement of the United States and NATO in Europe. Contrarily, France's grand strategy, while it shares some aspects at the level of interests, is far from the EU's assumptions and objectives. These conclusions already suggest something relevant concerning the grand strategy of international organizations: it is not necessarily the sum of the grand strategies of the member states, but it can be an expression of assumptions of the organization itself, even though it might be influenced more easily by member states with compatible assumptions in shaping its strategic goals.

5.2 Enlargement policy: security and prosperity

As has been mentioned in the previous sections, the history of the European Communities began with the ambition of overlapping with geographical Europe. This ambition has not been lost in the evolution of the Communities into the Union. Indeed, the fundamental assumption has not changed: the European project is a vehicle for economic prosperity, and economic prosperity is the best way to peace; hence, the enlargement of the European Communities is desirable. This approach is confirmed by the EU's Global Strategy, according to which "[a]ny European state which respects and promotes the values enshrined in our Treaties may apply to become a Member of the Union" (European External Action Service 2016, 24). Moreover, the EUGS points out that "[a] credible enlargement policy represents a strategic investment in Europe's security and prosperity, and has already contributed greatly to peace in formerly war-torn areas" (ibidem, 24), confirming once again the broader, 'strategic', goals of enlargement. Another relevant aspect that emerges from the Enlargement policy

section of the EUGS is the concept of a 'credible enlargement policy,' which is "grounded on strict and fair conditionality" (ibidem, 24). Conditionality is primarily important. Indeed, even if extending the 'EU way' to other European countries is surely an advantage for those countries in terms of security and economic prosperity, for Brussels the enlargement of the membership might be a source of internal instability. This is why the High Representative Josep Borrell declared that "the new methodology is a merit-based approach" which "puts a stronger focus on fundamental reforms, such as rule of law, fundamental freedoms, economy and functioning of democratic institutions." (Borrell 2021). Borrell correctly mentions a 'stronger focus' instead of a 'new focus' because these criteria – called the 'Copenhagen criteria' – have been regulating the possibility to apply for EU membership for the whole existence of the Union. However, the post-Cold War enthusiasm led to the conviction that, even if the new members were lacking certain reasonably solid economies and democratic institutions, the EU membership could have filled these gaps, making those criteria much looser (Asmus 2008, 97-100). The various crises that have hit the European Union in the past two decades have deepened the divisions between the Western Bloc, in which all the founding members are included, and the Eastern Bloc, which joined the EU in 2004. Because of that, nowadays the EU believes that in order to carry out the primary goal of enlargement, namely ensuring stability and prosperity for the whole continent, it is necessary to be stable and prosperous at home first.

Once again, it is necessary to understand what the positions of France and Germany towards the question of enlargement are and what kind of relation exists between their positions and that of the EU.

Germany's position is essentially in line with that of the European Union. As has been shown in the previous sections, since the end of World War II, Germany strived for the stability of the liberal international order, and a peaceful Europe is an essential condition for it. Germany

fundamentally believes in the role of economic prosperity as a driver for peace, and, because of this reason, is a firm supporter of the European project and the enlargement of the membership. Moreover, being Germany the country that economically benefits the most from European integration, the enlargement of the EU's membership means expanding the German economic sphere and, consequently, favoring German interests as well.

The White Paper dedicates little space to the issue. The word 'enlargement' is mentioned just once, in the broad section "Germany and the European Union," in which enlargement has a secondary role (The Federal Government 2016, 70-77). However, in these few lines, Germany expresses a vision of enlargement that echoes the principles of the EU's Global Strategy: "The prospect of one day being able to join the EU has had a stabilizing effect over many decades. It is in Germany's fundamental interest to strengthen this enhanced security and to maintain the momentum of EU enlargement. This will depend not least on whether the European Union can remain attractive. This requires not only strengthening the EU's internal cohesion but also strict adherence to the accession criteria (Copenhagen criteria). The appeal and drawing power of the European peace project is the key to global influence and respect" (ibidem, 70). The idea is simple and extremely compatible with the assumptions of the EU: enlarging the membership is necessary to enhance the security of the continent, but, if enlargement happens without 'strict adherence to the accession criteria,' it might eventually weaken the EU. In the aforementioned speech by Scholz at the Charles University in Prague, the Chancellor reaffirmed and further explained this position: "I'm committed to the enlargement of the European Union to include the countries of the Western Balkans, as well as Ukraine, Moldova and, down the line, also Georgia. […] First and foremost, the candidate countries are required to fulfil the criteria for accession. We will support them in this endeavour to the best of our abilities" (Scholz 2022). Moreover, Scholz listed several reforms that the EU should realize in order to facilitate new accessions, from the expansion of majority voting to

reshaping the Parliament and the Commission (ibidem). This clear demonstration of support for enlargement shows how crucial the issue of enlargement is for Germany, which, on the government's website, explicitly states the advantages of a broader membership: political, security, and environmental advantages are mentioned, but the predominant ones are economic, signaling where the major Berlin's interests are (The Federal Government).

France's position on the issue of enlargement is fundamentally different from that of Germany. In order to understand why, it is useful to analyze once again the fundamental assumptions of the European Union – and Germany – concerning the enlargement of the membership: the European project is a vehicle for economic prosperity, and economic prosperity is the best way to peace; hence, the enlargement of the European Communities is desirable. These fundamental assumptions are not shared by France. As it has been previously explained, France believes in the balance of power to provide Europe with peace: as long as there is not a hegemon, the old continent is safe. In this framework, France, which cannot be anymore a superpower capable of contrasting the United States, Russia, China, or even Germany (in terms of economy), must find ways to prevent one of them to prevail. In the first phase, the way to prevent a new German rise was through European integration. However, since Germany wisely used the Union's structures to extend its economic power on the whole continent, now France is trying to slow down the process, hoping that maintaining the current membership is a way to limit German economic supremacy in Europe.

This vision is reflected in the National Strategic Review and the words of the President. The National Strategic Review does not even mention enlargement. While Europe and the European Union are central topics in the document, the word 'enlargement' never appears, signaling that the issue is not a priority for the French administration. This is further confirmed by the words of President Macron, which enunciated his vision for the enlargement at the closing ceremony of the Conference on the Future of Europe: "Let's be clear: the European

Union, considering its level of integration and ambition, cannot, in the short term, be the only way to structure the European continent. […] Faced with this new geopolitical context, we very clearly need to find a way to think about our Europe, its unity, and its stability, without weakening the closeness built inside our European Union. […] [H]ow can we organize Europe from a political perspective and with a broader scope than that of the European Union? It is our historic obligation to respond to that question today and create what I would describe here before you as 'a European political community'" (Macron 2022). Macron's intentions are evident: we cannot expand the membership of the European Union, but, at the same time, we cannot fail to address the new challenges of the 'geopolitical context.' Therefore, further European integration – but not necessarily a larger European Union – is needed. The organization imagined by the French President would be a "new space for political and security cooperation, cooperation in the energy sector, in transport, investments, infrastructures, the free movement of persons and in particular of our youth" (ibidem). It would be essentially political, preventing in this way Germany to expand its economic sphere. This proposal is not necessarily realistic – and the President is probably aware of it. However, it represents a way to show that France is not opposed to the existence of a broader European community, but it is opposed to an enlargement of the European Union that could reinforce a potential regional hegemon.

In this second case, it is possible to observe two radically different positions. As has been already shown in NATO's case, the roots of these differences are in the fundamental assumptions: Germany believes that enlargement is the best way to peace, while France believes that enlargement would favor German hegemony in Europe and that only maintaining the balance of power in the old continent would guarantee stability. In both cases, Germany and France pursue their interests. On the one hand, Germany wants to extend its economic influence on Europe, on the other hand, France tries to avoid it. Hence, their strategic interests are not

related to those of the EU. However, Berlin's and Brussels' assumptions are extremely compatible, and, because of this compatibility even different interests converge on a similar strategic objective – in this case, the enlargement of the membership of the European Union –, while France's objective – realizing a European political community next to the EU – is dissimilar, if not opposite. Thus, even concerning this second case, it is possible to affirm that compatible assumptions and similar objectives show a strong correlation between the grand strategies of Germany and the EU. Other than confirming what has been previously affirmed concerning the grand strategies of international organizations, these conclusions also open a political case. Indeed, concerning the two extremely important strategic objectives analyzed in this research, not only France's objectives are different, but also – and most importantly – its assumptions are not compatible with those of the EU. Hence, it is important to understand how these differences, which did not prevent the European Union to identify its goals and priorities in the EUGS, affect the EU's ability to pursue these goals in the future.

6 Conclusions

This research attempted to answer a question: what are the relationships between the grand strategies of Member States and the grand strategy of the European Union? Studying the cases of France and Germany and the strategic objectives concerning NATO's role in European security and enlargement policy provided some relevant elements to engage with this question.

First, the hypothesis – according to which when two or more grand strategies present a strong correlation their assumptions must be compatible and their objectives must be similar, while their interests might differ – has been confirmed by the case studies. Indeed, on the one hand, the incompatibility between the grand strategies of France and the EU at the level of the assumptions resulted – in both cases – in a scarce similarity at the levels of interests and objectives. On the other hand, the compatibility between the grand strategies of Germany and the EU at the level of assumptions resulted in similarity at the levels of interests and objectives concerning NATO and strategic autonomy, while the case of enlargement policy has precisely shown how, having compatible assumptions, interests can differ, but objectives must be similar.

Second, the confirmation of the hypothesis leads to a possible answer to the research question: the grand strategies of member states can present a strong correlation with that of the European Union, and the minimum necessary precondition for that is compatibility at the level of the assumptions. Understanding this correlation and its nature has three relevant implications for future research. First, it makes the framework of this research a valid instrument to further investigate the relationships between the grand strategies of the member states and that of the EU, considering new countries and new strategic objectives. Second, given the very general character of the hypothesis, it opens the field to further research concerning the relationships between the grand strategies of the member states and that of an international organization, which would constitute a solid contribution to the evolution and consolidation of the

international relations tradition of grand strategy. Indeed, it has been shown that the grand strategy of an international organization is not the simple sum of the member states' grand strategies and is the expression of original assumptions, although a member state with compatible assumptions is in a good position to shape the grand strategy of the organization. Third, understanding this correlation and its nature lays the foundations to engage with another relevant question concerning the European Union: how do the member states shape the grand strategy of the EU? Or, vice versa, how are their grand strategies shaped by the grand strategy of the EU? Researching this two-way influence is academically and politically relevant, and it could not be done without a clear comprehension of the fundamental dynamics that regulate the relationships between the grand strategies.

Lastly, the results of this research are also useful to engage with the secondary question presented in the introduction: do the relationships between the grand strategies of the member states and that of the European Union affect the EU's capability to act autonomously and coherently in the international arena? According to the two criteria previously mentioned and concerning at least the capability of expressing a grand strategy, is possible to affirm that the European Union is partially able to act autonomously and coherently in the international arena since the analyzed strategic goals of the Global Strategy are – to different extents – in contrast with those of France, but this did not prevent the European External Action Service to define a grand strategy with objectives that serve the common interests. However, it is still important to understand how and if France compresses the EU's capability to realize these objectives. Moreover, the similarities between the grand strategies of Germany and the EU might be a signal of a German influence, which could be further studied thanks to the findings of this paper and might affect the European Union's autonomous and coherent action.

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