

“A Sovereign Europe”: Transforming the European Union to “Hard Power”?

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Profound changes unseen in a century, especially the transformation of the international order and global structure, have shattered the foundation of the European Union’s international leverage and reshaped its global status profoundly, forcing it to search for a new foreign strategy. Numerous challenges against multilateralism have undermined the institutional basis on which the EU has relied to exert global influence over time, and the intensification of geopolitical competition among major powers reveals the fragility of the European power structure. Frequent crises of the transatlantic alliance not only undermine the EU’s strategic reliance on it but also threaten its core interests directly. The accumulation of internal crises within the EU has seriously endangered its legitimacy while also critically threatening its power foundation. Consequently, reflecting upon the causes of the potential marginalization of its global status, the EU has reemphasized its “strategic autonomy” by proposing new concepts such as “European sovereignty,” a “sovereign Europe,” etc. Meanwhile, the EU has shifted its domestic and foreign policies and reshaped its means of exerting influence, seeking to wield “hard power” in global geopolitical competition and safeguard its core interests independently. Following the logic of geopolitical competition, the EU has taken a more realistic stance when strategically reshaping its power structure and the ways of leveraging it. Such a shift to realism will not only affect the EU’s various domestic and foreign policies but also influence multilateralism, the transatlantic alliance and the future development of the international order and the global power structure.

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Multiple Challenges in International Order Transformation and World Power Restructuring

With the United Kingdom's exit from the EU (Brexit), the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States, the US withdrawal from the international arena, and its global initiation of trade wars under the "America First" concept, the existing international order and world power structure have witnessed profound transformation, which has an unprecedented impact on the EU. In an article published by a European Commission think tank, it is noted that in a world that experiences rising disorder, structural changes and intensifying great-power competition and where the rule-based international order and liberal democracy are under increasing pressure, the European Union is emerging as the sole remaining defender of cooperative multilateralism and the international order.¹

Relying on multilateral institutions and exerting influence by wielding its "soft power," the EU has long been a "unique pole" among multiple international forces. The transatlantic alliance has not only offered security assurance for the EU but has been the strategic pivot for the EU's leverage under multilateral frameworks. Peace and prosperity accompanying integration within the EU has been the foundation of its overall power. However, the reshaping and transition of the international order have weakened the EU's overall power foundation, propelling it to advocate the idea of "sovereign Europe" and seek for reforming its foreign policy.

Challenges against multilateralism undermine the institutional foundation of the EU's leverage

A well-functioning multilateral system is the fundamental interest of the EU. Strategically and conceptually speaking, the EU's credibility as a multilateral entity rests on effective rules and norms of international cooperation. The crisis

1 European Commission, "Geopolitical Outlook for Europe: Confrontation vs. Cooperation," June 8, 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/epsc/sites/epsc/files/epsc_brief_geopolitical.pdf.

of multilateralism, to a certain degree, threatens the EU's multilateral identity.² Diplomatically, the activities of the EU and its member countries wield greater influence than their actual capacity in organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Bank. Practically, the EU depends heavily on multilateral organizations to ensure security and prosperity.

Multilateralism thus has been the core of the EU's foreign policy and the fundamental foreign policy principle established in the Treaty on European Union.³ The European Security Strategy adopted in 2003 advocated the concept of "effective multilateralism" for the first time and designated the creation of an international order based on effective multilateralism as one of the three strategic objectives of the EU. As stated in the document, "in a world of global threats, global markets and global media, our security and prosperity increasingly depend on an effective multilateral system."⁴ Facing a deteriorating external environment and the threat of power politics, the EU released its latest global strategy in 2016, which not only reiterated the principle of multilateralism but also heightened its linkage with the EU's security and prosperity. It was stated that "as a Union of medium-to-small sized countries ... Through our combined weight, we can promote agreed rules to contain power politics" and "[a] multilateral order grounded in international law ... is the only guarantee for peace and security at home and abroad."⁵ When addressing the European Parliament, the new President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen also indicated that multilateralism was more advantageous for the EU.⁶

However, "multilateralism is in crisis, but the full nature of this crisis is still emerging,"⁷ which will undermine the institutional foundation of the EU's leverage.

2 Anthony Dworkin and Richard Gowan, "Rescuing Multilateralism," June 25, 2019, p.3, https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/rescuing_multilateralism.

3 See the Treaty on European Union, Article 21 (2): 8.

4 European Commission, "European Security Strategy: A Secure Europe in a Better World," December 12, 2003, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents-publications/publications/european-security-strategy-secure-europe-better-world>.

5 European Commission, "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe," June 28, 2016, http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf.

6 Excerpt from speech delivered by Ursula von der Leyen to the European Parliament on July 16, 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_19_4230.

7 Richard Gowan and Anthony Dworkin, "Three Crises and an Opportunity: Europe's Stake in Multilateralism," September 5, 2019, https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/three_crises_and_an_opportunity_europes_stake_in_multilateralism.

With profound changes in international forces and the rise of global challenges, the series of multilateral institutions established after the end of the Second World War (WWII) are no longer effective. However, due to concerns over their own interests, the established forces of the international society lack the will for reforming the multilateral institutions and instead delay their reforming process, leading to the growing crisis of multilateralism in terms of representation and functionality. The deeper challenge comes from the surge of populist forces which call for the return to sovereignty in many Western countries. One typical example is the “America First” policy advocated by President Trump, under which the US has chosen to withdraw from a number of multilateral organizations and agreements, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), etc. Meanwhile, the US has blocked the appointment of WTO appellate judges, leading to its actual paralysis. Against this background, the Foreign Affairs Council of the EU issued a resolution on multilateralism for the first time in June 2019, reiterating that the Union’s interest lay in a multilateral system and that the need to promote multilateral solutions was more urgent than ever.⁸

Rise of geopolitical competition reveals weakness of Europe

European integration started from economic cooperation and was built on the premise that interdependence and cooperation would promote stability and peace. “After the end of the Cold War, many believed that the decline of inter-state conflicts would pave the way for economic interdependence, multilateralism and therefore the triumph of the European model.”⁹ Based on these perceptions, the European Security Strategy released in 2003 highlighted non-confrontation and interdependence in the international society while stressing transnational non-traditional security issues rather than major-power conflicts as the major source of threats. The EU was also ambitious in creating an effective multilateral international order based on

8 Council of the European Union, “EU Action to Strengthen Rules-Based Multilateralism,” June 17, 2019, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/39791/st10341-en19.pdf>.

9 Zaki Laïdi, “Can Europe Learn to Play Power Politics?” November 28, 2019, <https://www.cer.eu/publications/archive/essay/2019/can-europe-learn-play-power-politics>.

multilateral frameworks by relying on partnerships, employing policy tools like trade and economic aid, and taking full advantage of its “soft power.”¹⁰ Even after the outbreak of the euro debt crisis, the EU still refused to view major-power conflicts and the threat of increasing unilateralism as the reality.

However, with the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis, the escalation of US-Russia competition in West Asia and North Africa, the US initiation of trade wars across the world, unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA and imposition of secondary sanctions against Iran, Europe’s previous perception of achieving peace through cooperation and interdependence has been fundamentally shattered. In particular, as the US has been pressuring European countries to “take sides” against the backdrop of its trade frictions with China, the EU was prompted to reshape its world outlook. In the view of Europeans, “Russia is willing to weaponize energy supplies, cyber capabilities, and disinformation,” “China uses state capitalism to skew the market,” and “the Trump administration is willing to exploit European dependence on the transatlantic security alliance and the dollar to achieve short-term policy goals.”¹¹ They also believe that “international trade and foreign direct investment have returned to the center stage of geopolitics”¹² and that “the world is approaching a new type of bilateralism and the future is full of uncertainty.”¹³ A widely-held consensus in Europe is that the world is descending into geopolitical competition in which great powers deny the EU’s liberal model of sovereignty pooling, but instead increasingly use their economic connections to gain geopolitical advantage or to serve their geopolitical goals.¹⁴

The mode of governance in Europe and its heavy dependence on a free and open world have become the source of its fragility. French President Emmanuel Macron even warned that “Europe may disappear geopolitically amid an escalating

10 European Commission, “European Security Strategy: A Secure Europe in a Better World.”

11 Mark Leonard and Jeremy Shapiro, “Strategic Sovereignty: How Europe Can Regain the Capacity to Act,” June 25, 2019, https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/strategic_sovereignty_how_europe_can_regain_the_capacity_to_act.

12 European Commission, “Geopolitical Outlook for Europe: Confrontation vs. Cooperation.”

13 The author visited multiple European think tanks between 2018 and 2019, the view noted above reflects the consensus of European scholars.

14 Mark Leonard, Jean Pisani-Ferry, Elina Ribakowa, Jeremy Shapiro and Guntram B. Wolff, “Redefining Europe’s Economic Sovereignty,” June 25, 2019, <https://bruegel.org/2019/06/redefining-europes-economic-sovereignty>.

Sino-American rivalry.”¹⁵ Regarding the Crimea crisis, the EU was incapable when facing Russia’s hard power. As the US and Russia intensified their competition along the EU’s border, the EU could not respond effectively though it was aware of the implications for its security. When the US imposed secondary sanctions against Iran while pressuring the EU to follow suit to withdraw from the JCPOA, the EU’s frailty was exposed in an unprecedented manner.¹⁶ The US-China trade dispute rendered Europe even more suspicious of the credibility of the global value system. Against such a backdrop, the EU concluded that relying purely on its soft power was unsustainable, and it appears that the EU has never been as “sovereign” as it has estimated.¹⁷

Crisis in transatlantic relations undermines the EU’s strategic dependence

Long-term economic interdependence, the security alliance under the framework of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and common values shared by Europe and the US have shaped their special partnership. The US has been the most crucial strategic force upon which European countries rely to exert global influence. “Acting jointly and together with over 40 percent of the world’s total GDP, EU member states and the US once established a series of international rules and regulations managing 80 percent of the world market and formed the de facto G-2 governing structure in international multilateral arrangements.”¹⁸ Despite the fact that the war in Iraq revealed profound strategic divergence between Europe and the US, the EU has nevertheless emphasized the significance of its transatlantic partnership in the 2003 European Security Strategy, indicating that “one of the core elements of the international system is the transatlantic relationship. This is not only in our bilateral interest but strengthens the international community as a whole ... Acting together, the European Union and the United States can be a formidable force for good in the

15 Mark Leonard, “The Makings of a ‘Geopolitical’ Commission,” November 28, 2019, https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_the_makings_of_a_geopolitical_european_commission.

16 Mark Leonard and Jeremy Shapiro, “Strategic Sovereignty: How Europe Can Regain the Capacity to Act.”

17 *Ibid.*

18 Zhou Hong, ed., *European Union as a Power*, Social Sciences Academic Press, December 2008, p.5.

world.”¹⁹ Depicting Europe’s strategic dependence on the US vividly, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte noted that it was “relatively easy for the EU to claim the moral high ground while depending on the United States’ protective umbrella.”²⁰

Javier Solana, then EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, stated in 2009 that “the world is increasingly divided between those who are in the system and the rest,” implying that European countries and the US were those in the system with a “shared destiny.”²¹ In addition, the US has been playing an important role in the development of the EU’s internal governance, where some depict the US-EU ties as a form of “complicated transatlantic governance,” and others even view it as reflecting the potential depth of global governance.²² In its global strategy published in 2016, the EU emphasized that “a solid transatlantic partnership ... helps us strengthen resilience, address conflicts, and contribute to effective global governance.”²³

However, the “America First” policy adopted by the Trump administration has led to US-EU conflicts in multiple areas, and has raised their confrontation to such an unprecedented level that the transatlantic alliance is facing the most severe crisis since the outbreak of the Iraq War.

Apparently the US stays on the opposite position to Europe in terms of safeguarding multilateral institutions. Perceiving international politics with a zero-sum game mentality, the Trump administration uses the centrality of its currency in the global momentary system to enforce secondary sanctions against Iran, abandons multilateral trading systems, and withdraws from the Paris Agreement on climate change, thus inflicting severe damage to the international order²⁴ and posing the most serious challenge for multilateralism. Former President of the European Council Donald Tusk noted that the “rule-based international order is being challenged by its

19 European Commission, “European Security Strategy: A Secure Europe in a Better World.”

20 Peter Teffer, “Rutte Warns EU to Embrace ‘Realpolitik’ Foreign Policy,” February 13, 2019, <https://euobserver.com/foreign/144162>.

21 Javier Solana, “Europe’s Global Role - What Next Steps?,” July 11, 2009, <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/ditchley-foundation-lecture-javier-solana-europes-global-role>.

22 Michael Smith, “The European Union, the USA and Global Governance,” in Jens-Uwe Wunderlich et al., *The European Union and Global Governance*, Routledge, 2011, p.264.

23 European Commission, “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe,” p.40.

24 Mark Leonard, Jean Pisani-Ferry, Elina Ribakova, Jeremy Shapiro and Guntram Wolff, “Securing Europe’s Economic Sovereignty,” *Survival*, Vol.61, 2019, p.75.

main architect and guarantor.”²⁵ In the security domain, the US not only pressures its European allies to increase their share in NATO’s military expenditure but also takes unilateral actions on issues such as Iran and Syria, thus threatening Europe’s security and other core interests. EU leaders are forced to declare that “with friends like that, who needs enemies.”²⁶ On economic and trade issues, the US also threatens to impose tariffs on Europe and even defines Europe as its “enemy.” Facing a series of tariff measures taken unilaterally by the US, Europe does not intend to join the US to promote standards and rules of trade. The EU’s expectation of working with the US to enforce the G-2 mechanism in global economic governance is doomed to fail.

Crisis of internal order undermines the EU’s power foundation

Prosperity and stability in Europe as a result of regional integration has been the basis for the EU to exist as a global force. The EU has provided the world with a regional model of balanced economic, social and environmental development and demonstrated its conviction by promoting employment and growth simultaneously, facilitating market growth and social development jointly, and emphasizing flexible welfare, social integration and environmental protection. Representing the European way of coordinating and balancing multiple forces, the EU has offered a unique model for medium- and small-sized countries to tackle globalization collectively while safeguarding their own interests.²⁷ Prior to the outbreak of the debt crisis, believing that its economic, political and integration models were the foundation for peace and prosperity, the EU had been confident and optimistic while trying to extend its models to others to enhance its global leverage.

However, since the outbreak of the debt crisis, the EU has been confronted with a series of challenges like the refugee crisis, massive terrorist attacks and Brexit, all of which have profoundly disrupted the EU’s internal order. The debt crisis and the EU’s responses have exposed the Union to intense criticism of its economic competitiveness and its model of economic governance. Terrorist attacks and the

25 Lisbeth Aggestam and Adrian Hyde-Price, “Double Trouble: Trump, Transatlantic Relations and European Strategic Autonomy,” *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol.57, 2019, p.114.

26 Sarantis Michalopoulos, “Tusk: With Friends like Trump, Who Needs Enemies,” May 17, 2017, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/tusk-with-friends-like-trump-who-needs-enemies/>.

27 Zhou Hong, ed., *European Union as a Power*, p.5.

refugee crisis have made the public aware of the EU's insufficient means of providing adequate security. Brexit has further aggravated the EU's credibility crisis. The EU is facing the profound challenge of multiple simultaneous crises, which directly threaten its power basis and make it no longer the role model of prosperity and stability for the world, undermining the leverage of the European model.

First of all, the principle of “unity in diversity” formed in the process of regional integration is called into question. The EU is facing an unprecedented crisis in terms of solidarity and consensus, becoming a “divided” union as EU members increasingly diverge in their interests and values. Secondly, under the “politics of fear and fury,” the European political parties landscape becomes fragmented with the decline of mainstream parties, the surge of populist forces and the sweeping of “referendum politics.” Under the conditions of political division and continuous social protest movements, political instability has become the new normal, making the EU increasingly “unstable.” Finally, facing social segregation resulting from globalization and laissez-faire market competition, the EU not only lacks an EU-level social welfare system to tackle the problem, but their rules also prevent its member states from playing a protective role, thus triggering public criticism against the open and free economic model endorsed by integration and globalization and conveying a “populist” image to the world. Given this, President Macron indicated that the “equilibrium in which individual freedoms, the democratic system and the continued progress of the middle classes thanks to the market economy”²⁸ were guaranteed had been disrupted and that the EU desperately needed to resume its order and balance.

Searching for “European Sovereignty”: a Strategic Shift of the EU

Confronted with the profound shift in the international order and power structure and the risks of internal political and social disorder, the EU has advocated the concepts of “sovereign Europe” and “European sovereignty,” aiming to strengthen the EU's capacity building while reshaping its foreign strategy.

28 “Ambassadors’ Conference - Speech by M. Emmanuel Macron, President of the Republic,” September 9, 2019, <https://lv.ambafrance.org/Ambassadors-conference-Speech-by-M-Emmanuel-Macron-President-of-the-Republic>.

In his speech at Sorbonne in September 2017, President Macron formally put forward the objective of realizing a “sovereign Europe,” noting that faced with multiple challenges, “we cannot allow ourselves to keep the same habits, the same policies, the same vocabulary, the same budgets. We can no longer choose to turn inwards within national borders,” and that the only route out was to “rebuild a sovereign, united and democratic Europe.” Macron also designated six key issues to rebuilding “European sovereignty,” including enhancing defense capacity, coping with the migration challenge, focusing on prioritized foreign policy issues, pursuing sustainable development, building a digital Europe and increasing industrial and monetary economic power.²⁹ When addressing the European Parliament in April 2018, Macron reiterated the idea of “European sovereignty,” deeming that Europe could react to the needs of its fellow citizens and protect them and provide a response to global disorder by building a new European sovereignty. He also advocated European sovereignty in the security, economic, climate and energy, digital and even food and health areas. In fact, the concepts of “sovereign Europe” or “European sovereignty” reflect Macron’s anticipation for European integration. This so-called “sovereignty” has a similar meaning as “integration,” which conforms with his long-held views on integration that “European integration involves not a loss but a recovery of sovereignty.”³⁰

Later, in his 2018 State of the Union Address, then European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker declared that “the time for European sovereignty has come”³¹ and elaborated on the meaning of “European sovereignty.” In his view, the essence of “European sovereignty” was that Europe should take its destiny into its own hands, become a more “sovereign actor” in international relations and develop the capacity of shaping global affairs. It was also noted that “European sovereignty” was born of member states’ national sovereignty and did not replace it. Sharing sovereignty—when and where needed—would make each of the nation states

29 Pierre Briancon, “Five Takeaways from Macron’s Big Speech on Europe’s Future,” September 26, 2017, <https://www.politico.eu/article/5-takeaways-from-macrons-big-speech-on-europes-future/>.

30 Andrés Ortega, “Macron, Champion of European Sovereignty,” September 5, 2017, <https://blog.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/macron-champion-of-european-sovereignty/>.

31 Jean-Claude Juncker, “State of the Union 2018: The Hour of European Sovereignty,” September 12, 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/news/state-union-2018-hour-european-sovereignty-2018-sep-12_en.

stronger. In addition, European countries must overcome differences, stand united and deliver what was promised to the public. In terms of Europe's relations with the world, it was stressed that "European sovereignty" didn't mean it would be isolated from the world, instead it must and will champion multilateralism.³² All of this indicates that "European sovereignty" is different from the traditional "sovereignty of states" in terms of definition, since the former does not intend to turn the EU into a "federal Europe" but emphasizes the EU's ability as an international actor in "protecting" European interests, in ensuring its "autonomy" in the global arena and in "shaping" the international order.

However, there is still no clear-cut definition of "European sovereignty." Those in the political and academic circles, each from their own perspective, have put forward different propositions of EU "sovereignty" in various fields. Although defense is the priority of "European sovereignty" advocated by President Macron, no concept like "defense sovereignty" has been used. Instead, "autonomy in defense" has been advocated to stress that the EU should not tie its security interests to transatlantic relations but should become a more self-reliant security actor. Economic sovereignty has been highlighted most frequently, noting that in a world of interdependence, the EU and its member states should protect Europe's economic independence by setting up an economic sovereignty agenda and using a series of policy tools. To achieve these goals the EU should connect its economic policies with geopolitics more closely.³³ In her political guidelines for the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen has emphasized that Europe should "jointly define standards for this new generation of technologies that will become the global norm."³⁴ German Minister of Economic Affairs Peter Altmaier and France's Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire have been stressing digital sovereignty on various occasions, suggesting that Europe should establish critical data infrastructure.³⁵

32 Jean-Claude Juncker, "State of the Union 2018: The Hour of European Sovereignty."

33 Mark Leonard, Jean Pisani-Ferry, Elina Ribakova, Jeremy Shapiro and Guntram Wolff, "Securing Europe's Economic Sovereignty," pp.75-98.

34 Ursula von der Leyen, "Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2019-2024," July 16, 2019, p.13, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/political-guidelines-next-commission_en.pdf.

35 Christian Borggreen, "European Tech Sovereignty or Tech Protectionism," October 30, 2019, <http://www.project-disco.org/european-union/103019-european-tech-sovereignty-or-tech-protectionism>

In comparison, the definition of “European sovereignty” offered by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) is more clear-cut and comprehensive, reflecting the EU’s aspiration of readjusting its international strategy. In the ECFR’s report “Strategic Sovereignty: How Europe Can Regain the Capacity to Act,” the definition of “European sovereignty” is generalized in the following aspects: European “sovereignty is not to be taken from EU member states, but recovered from other great powers such as China, Russia and the US.” Meanwhile, the power of European integration needs to focus on enhancing the capacity of EU member states to compete effectively in a world of harsh geopolitical rivalry. Moreover, sovereignty does not mean trying to end interdependence but to allow Europeans to decide their policies for themselves and bargain effectively in global affairs. It also means to better integrate and leverage all forms of European influence, thereby enhancing member states’ independence from outside powers. In this sense, “European sovereignty” is crucial to rescuing the national sovereignty of EU member states.³⁶

In summary, the strategic readjustment made by the EU to pursue sovereignty could be generalized in the following aspects.

Specifying the new aspiration of being a geopolitical actor

Although the EU has never relied purely upon its “soft power” to leverage the international community, but has frequently employed trade and development policy tools to serve its broader geopolitical objectives, the EU’s influence has been exerted mostly by peaceful means like engagement, cooperation and coordination. Meanwhile, the EU’s internal governing mechanism has also restricted its capacity as a power politics actor, thus forming its long-term identity as a civilian power, a normative power or a soft power.³⁷ Some European analysts believe that the EU is punching below its weight and seems unable to play power politics since the EU’s project of integration was built against the idea of power politics.³⁸ Reflecting on Europe’s relationship with power, President Macron’s European affairs advisor

36 Mark Leonard and Jeremy Shapiro, “Strategic Sovereignty: How Europe Can Regain the Capacity to Act,” pp.13-14.

37 Zhou Hong, ed., *European Union as a Power*, pp. 4-13.

38 Zaki Laïdi, “Can Europe Learn to Play Power Politics.”

Clément Beaune indicated: “Power has been seen in Europe as a kind of woe ... because it was a division of the Europeans, a war of Europeans against each other and a form of auto-destruction ... Europe is the only global bloc that doesn’t think of itself as a power ...”³⁹

The Global Strategy for the EU’s Foreign and Security Policy issued in 2016 still emphasized the “power of attraction” and was committed to promoting agreed rules to contain power politics through Europe’s combined weight, but it was made clear that “soft power” was not enough and Europe must enhance its credibility in security and defense. “Principled pragmatism” thus has become the guide of the EU’s external action, symbolizing the EU’s transition to a realistic foreign strategy.⁴⁰ However, the EU has not openly declared its aspiration to be a geopolitical actor.

With the intensification of geopolitical competition among great powers, the EU has clarified its claim as a geopolitical actor. Enhancing the EU’s power in the world of geopolitics has become the consensus of European countries.⁴¹ Referring to the EU’s future role in the international system, former German Minister of Foreign Affairs Sigmar Gabriel stated that “it is difficult to be a vegetarian in a world of carnivores.”⁴² Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte openly stated that the European Union should be less naive and more realistic about its foreign policy and not be afraid of exercising power. In his view, the EU has leverage it could use geopolitically, like its market access, trade agreements, and development aid, etc.⁴³ Realpolitik must be an essential part of Europe’s foreign policy toolkit, since in a world of geopolitics, if Europe merely advocated the value of principles but shied away from using its power, it would be morally superior but permanently insignificant politically.⁴⁴ Ursula von der Leyen

39 Rym Momtaz, “What Macron Plans for Europe,” December 16, 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-europe-plans>.

40 European Commission, “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe.”

41 Sven Biscop, “A Geopolitical Commission: A Powerful Strategy?” September 16, 2019, <http://www.egmontinstitute.be/a-geopolitical-commission-a-powerful-strategy/>.

42 Niclas Frederic Poitiers, “Multilateralism in Crisis: The EU’s Response to Trade Wars,” in Carlo Altomonte and Antonio Villafranca, eds., *Europe in Identity Crisis, the Future of the EU in the Age of Nationalism*, December 17, 2019, <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publicazione/europe-identity-crisis-future-eu-age-nationalism-24606>.

43 Zaki Laïdi, “Can Europe Learn to Play Power Politics.”

44 Peter Teffer, “Rutte Warns EU to Embrace ‘Realpolitik’ Foreign Policy.”

announced that the creation of a “geopolitical Commission” was Europe’s response to *realpolitik*, implying that the EU should adapt to a world of great powers and achieve its political goals by utilizing its economic might.

Pursuing the new goal of strategic autonomy

Strategic autonomy is not a new concept in Europe. In its initial stage of integration, seeking strategic autonomy was the driving force for European integration in the Cold War era, reflected by its endeavor to promote the development of the European defense and political communities. However, since strategic divergence exceeded strategic consensus among European countries over a long period of time, and as there was no urgent threat of an immediate danger, Europe’s longing for strategic autonomy was long suppressed.

At the EU level, strategic autonomy was first mentioned in the 2010 annual report of the European Parliament on the enforcement of the European Security Strategy and the Common Security and Defense Policy. The report stressed that “the Union must enhance its strategic autonomy through a strong and effective foreign, security and defense policy.”⁴⁵ However, the concept did not arouse extensive attention or discussion throughout Europe until 2012, when the Obama administration’s strategy of “Asia-Pacific rebalancing” led to strategic anxiety in Europe. The issue of strategic autonomy was then brought up again in relevant resolutions passed by the European Commission and the European Council in 2013, which sought to strengthen the EU’s strategic autonomy and its capacity in acting with its partners through enhancing a sustainable, innovative and competitive defense technology and industry base as well as developing and sustaining its defense capability. The goal of achieving strategic autonomy was now set to become a credible and reliable partner in the transatlantic partnership, as a response to the Obama administration’s call for Europe to assume more responsibilities. A report issued by the European Commission indicated that “to be a credible and reliable partner, Europe must be able to decide and to act without

45 European Parliament, “Implementation of the European Security Strategy and the Common Security and Defense Policy,” March 10, 2010, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2010-0061+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>.

always depending on the capabilities of third parties.”⁴⁶

Nevertheless, the EU was not truly alerted, strategically speaking, until Donald Trump’s election. Although the 2016 Global Strategy for the EU’s Foreign and Security Policy referred to strategic autonomy several times, it kept the EU’s previous objective, which was to enhance the EU’s credibility by operating autonomously when necessary and cooperating with partners wherever possible,⁴⁷ and to seek a delicate balance between maintaining the Atlantic partnership framework and achieving strategic autonomy. In addition, discussions of strategic autonomy were confined to a narrow perspective, i.e. that of security and defense, instead of being extended to the area of foreign policy.

Changes in transatlantic relations, however, have reshaped the EU’s view of strategic autonomy and have renewed its aspiration of expanding its strategic autonomy from the areas of security and defense to the broader domain of foreign policy, while incorporating a new goal of being independent from the US foreign and security policies. If previously the US pressuring of Europe for taking more responsibilities within the framework of NATO was consistent with the EU’s own goal of becoming a “more credible and reliable partner” to ensure its strategic autonomy, then now the EU, merely as a “reliable partner,” is no longer able to achieve its foreign policy goals when the US is questioning the value of NATO as an ally and even takes unilateral actions to threaten Europe’s core security interests, signifying that the interests and values of the two sides currently stand opposed to each other.

Under such circumstances, both German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron have declared that “Europe could no longer count on the United States for its defense” and that as a consequence a true EU army should be created.⁴⁸ When calling for the creation of a genuine European army, Macron even

46 European Commission, “Towards a More Competitive and Efficient Defense and Security Sector,” July 24, 2013, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_13_722.

47 Council of the European Union, “Implementation Plan on Security and Defense,” November 14, 2016, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eugs_implementation_plan_st14392.en16_0.pdf.

48 Maïa de La Baume and David M. Herszenhorn, “Merkel Joins Macron in Calling for EU Army to Complement NATO,” November 14, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/angela-merkel-emmanuel-macron-eu-army-to-complement-nato>.

took the US as one of Europe's defense targets.⁴⁹ In a certain sense, the remarks by German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas may better reflect the EU's new objective for achieving strategic autonomy, that is, Europe should be "acting as a counterweight when the United States crossed red lines."⁵⁰ In addition, the EU "needs to maintain the transatlantic alliance—and try to restrain the US at the same time."⁵¹ At present, on issues such as the Iran nuclear deal and Huawei's 5G technology, the EU's pursuit of a "third path" has to some extent demonstrated its strategic autonomy, which is the logical consequence of its claim to become a more independent geopolitical actor.

Forcefully promoting new strategies to safeguard multilateralism

Though aspiring to be a geopolitical actor and seeking strategic autonomy, the EU is fully aware of its limitations as a singular international force and believes that its interests are rooted mainly in a rule-based multilateral system. Given this, the EU has reiterated that its pursuit of strategic autonomy does not mean insulation or opposition to multilateralism. Instead, the EU seeks to safeguard multilateralism in a flexible way through building flexible coalitions, pursuing innovative multilateral agendas, actively promoting reforms, using policy tools more efficiently and coupling the EU's bilateral and multilateral foreign policy actions.

In fact, due to the stalemate of the Doha Round of WTO negotiations and the awkward situation the EU had faced during the Copenhagen climate change conference, the EU has been pursuing more flexible and pragmatic strategies regarding multilateral issues, including creating issue-specific coalitions in multilateral affairs, promoting multilateralism through bilateral efforts, or even taking unilateral measures to promote a multilateral agenda to such an extent that some warned that "effective multilateralism had more or less disappeared from the

49 "Macron Calls for 'True European Army' to Defend against Russia, US, China," Euractiv, November 7, 2018, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence-and-security/news/macron-calls-for-european-army-to-defend-against-russia-us-china>.

50 Moritz Luetgerath, "Why the Vision of European Strategic Autonomy Remains a Mirage," March 30, 2019, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/03/why-the-vision-of-european-strategic-autonomy-remains-a-mirage>.

51 Sven Biscop, "The EU and Multilateralism in an Age of Great Powers," July 2, 2018, http://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2018/07/The-EU-and-Multilateralism-in-an-age-of-great-powers-Sven_Biscop.pdf.

radar screen.”⁵² Having to deal with multiple challenges against multilateralism, the EU is taking exceptional steps to highlight the importance of multilateralism and is committed to playing the leading role in safeguarding multilateralism in the absence of the US. The EU Foreign Affairs Council passed a resolution in June 2019 on what actions the EU should take to protect multilateralism. The new measures advocated were more proactive, forceful and flexible than the practical means previously adopted. The resolution states that “the EU and its Member States will demonstrate leadership in pursuing an innovative agenda in areas in need of strengthened multilateral governance ... taking advantage of the EU’s normative capacity, autonomy and influence.” It calls for them to “strengthen the EU’s existing network of partnerships and diversify it to new partnerships,” “to advance EU interests in maximizing cooperative solutions to common challenges,” and advance “stronger synergies between the EU’s bilateral and multilateral diplomatic action ... including by making better use of the EU’s leverage in terms of access to the internal market and financial aid.”⁵³

Since the US withdrawal from a series of multilateral arrangements, European countries have launched various initiatives promoting multilateralism, among which both the Paris Peace Forum and the Alliance for Multilateralism seek to forge partnerships as extensive as possible to safeguard multilateralism in joint efforts. Co-advocated by France and Germany, the Alliance for Multilateralism is an informal and flexible cooperation network with defined goals, which include compensating for the insufficient involvement of states in multilateral mechanisms and reforming and modernizing the international institutions.⁵⁴ So far it has attracted the participation of over 50 states. As the Alliance’s proponents, France and Germany deem that although the Alliance is open, its major partners are medium-sized powers, intending to advance Europe’s leverage as a unique pole against the background of major-power competition.

In addition, pursuing innovative agendas by taking advantage of the EU’s normative capacity, influence and policy tools has become the Union’s policy

52 Sven Biscop, “The EU and Multilateralism in an Age of Great Powers.”

53 Council of the European Union, “EU Action to Strengthen Rules-Based Multilateralism.”

54 France Diplomatie, “Alliance for Multilateralism,” <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/united-nations/alliance-for-multilateralism-63158>.

practice. Guided by the goal of becoming a geopolitical actor, the EU is determined to employ its economic might to accomplish political goals. Throughout 2019, from the release of the General Data Protection Regulation and the initiation of digital taxes in countries represented by France, to promoting global governance to tackle climate change and the discussion among EU members of imposing carbon tariffs, all indications are that the EU endeavors to employ its normative capacity and market scale to set global standards for relevant industries.

Readjusting direction and priorities of European integration

Internal and external potential challenges are prompting the EU to reconsider the developing direction and priorities of European integration. Internally, with increasing discrepancies among EU member states and their rejection of a further transfer of sovereignty, the 60-year process of deepening and extending integration can no longer persist. With the rise of external pressure, the EU's new status as a "sovereign Europe" requires it to change its logic of integration. At present, led by the principle of strategic autonomy or "sovereign Europe," the EU is reflecting on the goals and priorities of European integration. The previous objective of European integration was to tame sovereignty within the European space. However, Europe should fundamentally rethink the purpose of integration since in the coming decades many of the biggest dangers to Europeans will emerge from outside the European space. The power of European integration needs to focus on enhancing the capacity of EU member states to compete effectively in a world of harsh geopolitical competition and enhancing member states' independence from outside powers. "Strategic sovereignty is not simply a call for greater unity of action and a stronger sense of shared purpose. Rather the intent is to create a mixed governance system for foreign policy that better integrates and leverage all forms of European influence."⁵⁵

A comparison of the European Council's five-year strategic agendas at different eras may help us understand such shifts mentioned above. In the five-year agenda issued by the European Council in 2014, four fields were highly inward-oriented. "Jobs, growth and competitiveness" focused on fully exploiting

55 Mark Leonard and Jeremy Shapiro, "Strategic Sovereignty: How Europe Can Regain the Capacity to Act," p.14.

the potential of the single market and promoting a climate of entrepreneurship and job creation. “Empowering and protecting all citizens” served as the social foundation of integration, aiming to help develop skills, unlock talents, guarantee fairness and reverse inequalities. The fields regarding “climate change” and “freedom, security and justice” also took internal capacity building as the priority.⁵⁶ However, of the four pillars outlined in the European Council’s 2019 strategic agenda, three are obviously outward-oriented. Regarding the priority of “protecting citizens and freedoms” in particular, it is stressed that the EU should protect its citizens against existing and emerging threats and even “ensure the integrity of our territory, control external borders effectively and uphold law and order,” demonstrating a clear attribute of sovereign states. Even for the same goal of promoting growth, the new strategic agenda presents a more prominent outward feature than previous ones, which is dedicated to designing a globally competitive industrial policy and ensuring fair competition. In addition, to highlight its goal of pursuing strategic autonomy, the new strategy also stresses that the EU will be more determined and effective in exerting its influence, and will safeguard European interests forcefully while better using policy tools at its disposal, particularly trade, and enhancing defense capacity investment.⁵⁷

In fact, the essential feature of the EU Global Strategy issued in 2016 was defensive, centralizing the security of the Union and citizens. Among the six keys to “European sovereignty” advocated by Macron, the first three were defense building, migration administration and a forceful policy towards West Asia and North Africa, which highlighted the mission of offering protection through integration. France and Germany have proposed to reform the competition law within the framework of the EU and emphasized that the focus of the competition law should be shifted from ensuring fair competition within the EU to protecting the global competitiveness of European enterprises. The creation of the new Directorate-General for Defense Industry and Space in the EU also aims at strengthening the Union’s capacity building. Using the rhetoric

56 European Council, “A Strategic Agenda for the Union in Time of Change,” June 26/27, 2014, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/39245/143477.pdf>.

57 European Council, “A New Strategic Agenda: 2019-2024,” June 20, 2019, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/39914/a-new-strategic-agenda-2019-2024.pdf>.

of “strategic autonomy” and “a sovereign Europe,” European integration will proceed to establish a “European fortress,” stressing the “protection” function and highlighting the outward-looking tendency of European integration.

Europe Heading for “Protectionism”: Implications for Policies

The core objective of achieving a “sovereign Europe” is to integrate Europe’s power to accomplish the mission of protection, and to obtain autonomous power and competitive advantage. It emphasizes economic, technical and digital sovereignty and defense autonomy, etc. Therefore, the promotion of a “sovereign Europe” is manifested in the above-mentioned policy areas.

Geo-economic policy: further instrumentalization of the EU’s market force

As the world’s largest trading entity, the EU has always employed its market power as an instrument. The Union has used the area of trade in particular to export its values and standards to developing countries. With the EU’s aspiration to be a geopolitical actor, the unified big market serves not only as its power basis but also as the major policy tool to pursue its geopolitical objectives. The EU will further employ its market leverage to serve its more extensive economic, political and strategic demands. Ursula von der Leyen stated that as the largest and wealthiest internal market, the EU is appealing to all exporting countries and should better employ its strategic leverage as the world’s trading superpower,⁵⁸ implying an even further instrumentalization of the EU’s market force. In a report on Europe’s geopolitical outlook issued by the official European Commission think-tank, it was noted that “even in Europe, openness cannot come at the cost of strategic interests, in particular where there is a lack of reciprocity,”⁵⁹ implying that concerns over strategic interests takes precedence over the principle of open market upheld previously by the EU.

Taking advantage of its market scale to promote reciprocal openness with its trading partners has been the core component of the EU’s trade policy. Over a long

58 Ursula von der Leyen, “Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2019-2024.”

59 The European Commission, “Geopolitical Outlook for Europe: Confrontation vs. Cooperation.”

time, EU member states have not reached any consensus on using the unified market to push for the principle of reciprocity in ensuring market access. France played the leading role in advocating the principle of reciprocity in public procurement in 2012, but met opposition from Germany. A similar proposal put forward by the European Commission in 2016 was rejected by Germany again. However, Germany and France are now jointly relaunching a decree on government procurement, trying to block Chinese enterprises from entering the public procurement market of the EU. The European Commission is committed to pushing EU member states to reach consensus on the “strategy of reciprocity.” In fact, the EU has been pursuing competitive advantage in recent years by passing legislation to upgrade trade remedy measures, promote investment review within EU borders, pressure its trading partners to open markets on a reciprocal basis and to achieve so-called “fair competition.” The EU has expedited the revision of its anti-subsidy regulation and competition law to help “European enterprises engage in fair competition with others in the world.” Such a policy orientation is reflected clearly in its China strategy released in 2019. Among the ten proposed actions, many were related to revising relevant laws to pressure China to “open markets in a reciprocal way.”

Using the might of the market to force on others the EU’s standards and principles has been its strategic objective. Following the failure of the Doha Round negotiations, the EU has been seeking to employ its advantageous status in bilateral trade agreements to push forward the EU agenda, including its standards and values, with the ultimate goal of transferring from bilateral to multilateral arrangements. In recent free trade negotiations, the EU imposes its framework to a large extent in the regulatory field,⁶⁰ and the Union will continue pursuing the above-mentioned policy. In the strategic agenda for 2019-2024, Ursula von der Leyen indicated: “Trade is not an end in itself. It is a means to deliver prosperity at home and to export our values across the world. I will ensure that every new agreement concluded will have a dedicated sustainable-development chapter and the highest standards of climate, environmental and labor protection.”⁶¹ In addition, the EU has made it clear that

60 Sébastien Jean, Philippe Martin and André Sapir, “International Trade under Attack: What Strategy for Europe?” August 28, 2018, <https://bruegel.org/2018/08/international-trade-under-attack-what-strategy-for-europe>.

61 Ursula von der Leyen, “Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2019-2024.”

it would apply its market power to promote standards for new industries so as to avoid any disadvantage in competition with China and the US. In the field of green economy, the EU announces that market access would be a part of the European Green Deal and it will set up European standards and frameworks to protect the market, given that its electric automobile and artificial intelligence (AI) industries are in a competitive disadvantage.⁶²

The EU has also demonstrated a clearer tendency of exporting its values with its market power. Safeguarding the Union's human rights, rule of law and other values has always been maintained as the EU's overall foreign policy goal. It has also taken the Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP) as a primary instrument to export values to its trading partners. The EU's foreign policy became increasingly practical with the decline of its capacity to export the European model. However, as the EU is experiencing an identity crisis both within the Union and in its relationship to the outside, engaging in a "competition over models" has been emphasized in the EU's foreign policy, resulting in the rise of such values as human rights and democracy in its foreign policy agenda. In von der Leyen's European strategy, it was stated clearly that trade would work as a means to export European values across the world.

Industrial policy: an increasing return to protectionism and "strategic isolation"

Facing China and the United States' competition over 5G networks, the EU perceives industrial policy as the key to achieving economic sovereignty. Seeking to obtain independence and comparative advantage in emerging industries and strategic value chains, the EU has increased its support and protection of industrial policies. France and Germany advocated the adoption of a true European industrial policy in February 2019. The European Commission submitted the "Vision for EU's Industrial Future" in March 2019 at the request of the European Council, which designated sustaining Europe's global competitiveness in key technologies and strategic value chains as the priority. The EU will launch its new industrial policy soon. Based on the current debate in the European political and industrial circles

62 Gerardo Fortuna, "A 'Startup Mindset' is behind Battery Strategy, Says EU Official," December 16, 2019, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/batteries/news/a-startup-mindset-is-behind-battery-strategy-says-eu-official>.

and the EU's policy practices in the past years, it is clear that increasing support and protection of strategic value chains while sustaining sovereignty over strategic value chains would be its key policy orientation.

On the one hand, the EU will upgrade its legislative framework and create new financial instruments to enhance capital and institutional support for its strategic industries. The EU passed a new regulation in 2014, allowing to support “Important Projects of Common European Interest” (IPCEI) with public funds. No project was ever approved in the initial four years, until December 2018 when the European Commission appropriated 1.75 billion euros of public funds to support the research, development and innovation of microelectronic products. Later, several billion euros were approved to support an electric vehicle battery project, and a third project is now under review to support European battery enterprises' competition with their Asian counterparts. Regarding this, Vice President of the European Commission Maroš Šefčovič noted that “we have found the right recipe for our 21st century industrial policy.”⁶³ At present, the European Commission is formulating more flexible criteria to assess programs potentially qualifying for IPCEI while planning to review existing regulations on competition so as to develop an industrial policy which fosters “European champion enterprises” and assists European enterprises in their global competition. Such policies would be applied to EU-designated strategic industries, including 5G networks, artificial intelligence and green technology, etc.

On the other hand, the EU will increase its protection of strategic industries in the name of ensuring security. It is increasingly apparent that the EU has taken security into consideration when reviewing foreign investment. In the renewed EU Industrial Policy Strategy of 2017, the EU declared foreign investors' takeover of key European technology companies a challenge, particularly those conducted by state-owned enterprises for strategic reasons, since they may pose a threat to security and public order.⁶⁴ In its latest evaluation documents on strategic value chains, the EU also seeks to achieve technical independence in

63 Joshua Posaner and Hanne Cokelaere, “Commission Approves Pan-EU Battery Project,” December 9, 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/commission-approves-pan-eu-battery-project/>.

64 European Commission, “Investing in a Smart, Innovative and Sustainable Industry: Renewed EU Industrial Policy Strategy,” September 13, 2017, <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2017/EN/COM-2017-479-F1-EN-MAIN-PART-1.PDF>.

obtaining key technologies and their property rights in order to ensure economic security. Given this, the EU has expedited the legislative process and adopted the Regulation on the Screening of Foreign Direct Investments to reinforce the scrutiny of foreign investments entering the EU. Since its introduction, Germany alone has blocked two Chinese proposals in 2018 for taking over European enterprises. The EU's adoption of investment screening mechanisms demonstrates that it has in fact abandoned the principle of ensuring "free flow of capital" endorsed in the EU formation treaty and started implementing a policy of selective protectionism instead.⁶⁵

The EU also pursues the goal of covering the entire value chain of strategic industries. Due to its concern over the "weaponization" of economic instruments, the EU contends that for those industries with strategic significance for European economic transition, it should possess manufacturing capacity along the entire industrial chain, indicating the EU's distrust of division of labor based on complementary advantages. The current debate across Europe over the development of electric vehicle batteries demonstrates its aspiration of building the entire manufacturing chain. French Minister of the Economy and Finance Bruno Le Maire made it clear that it was dangerous to depend on foreign suppliers, particularly from Asia, and that what Europeans favored was to keep the whole value chain European.⁶⁶ In its report on the Implementation of the Strategic Action Plan on Batteries, the European Commission also pointed out that "if no action is taken to support the creation of a viable battery manufacturing sector, there is a risk that Europe falls irreversibly behind its competitors in the global batteries market ... The Commission is working together with many Member States ... to build a competitive, sustainable and innovative battery ecosystem in Europe, covering the entire value chain."⁶⁷

65 Ye Bin, "Incompatibility of the EU Regulation on Screening Foreign Direct Investment with the Principle of Free Movement of Capital," *Chinese Journal of European Studies*, No.5, 2019, p.84.

66 Claire Stam, "France, Germany Call for a Change of European Regulatory Rules," February 19, 2019, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/competition/news/france-germany-call-for-a-change-of-european-regulatory-rules/>.

67 European Commission, "Report on the Implementation of the Strategic Action Plan on Batteries: Building a Strategic Battery Value Chain in Europe," April 9, 2019, pp.1-2, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/report-building-strategic-battery-value-chain-april2019_en.pdf.

Migration policy: safeguarding the security of the “European fortress”

Migration policy has been a key part of building a “sovereign Europe,” with its focus on border control, assimilation of migrants and adopting a common refugee policy. Since migrant assimilation measures are within the jurisdiction of EU member states, and since reaching a unified position on a refugee policy has been stuck due to profound divergence among member states, border management has become the primary method for the EU to accomplish its sovereignty.

The EU’s previous migration policy was able to strike a rough balance between ensuring development and security, restricting illegal migrants, supporting free mobility of migrants, and protecting refugee rights. However, since the outbreak of the refugee crisis, the EU’s attention has shifted primarily to a policy of “containment,” which aims to unilaterally pressure migrants’ countries of origin to accept the “return” and “readmission” of illegal migrants. The EU’s migration agenda is dominated by the General Secretariat of the European Council and the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, the priorities of which have been controlling migration and safeguarding security. To take EU-Africa cooperation on migration as an example, since the EU’s policy concerns towards African migrants has shifted from development to security, the EU trust fund for tackling the migrant crisis as well as the migration agreements it has advocated with African countries have all laid their emphasis mostly on the connection between migration and security rather than development.⁶⁸ In her initial appointment of European Commission officials, Ursula von der Leyen even sought to give the EU commissioner on migration the title “protecting our European way of life.” The increasing stress on “security” indicates that the EU’s migration policy will cater to its needs of deterring migration threats and safeguarding the security of the “European fortress” in the long run.

68 European Commission, “Action Plan of the Immigration, Mobility and Employment Partnership (2008-2010),” October 2007, http://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/sites/default/files/documents/jaes_action_plan_2008-2010.pdf.

Security and defense policies: reducing strategic reliance on the US

Security and defense policies are the key to achieving the EU's strategic autonomy and to building a "sovereign Europe." Even though EU member states have profound differences of opinion on security and defense policies, the EU, facing increasing pressure and the threat of unilateralism from the US, has sped up its integration in both of these fields and has achieved goals within two years which it could never have done in the past. Certainly, Europe does not aim at pursuing a completely independent defense capacity through defense cooperation, instead it intends to reduce strategic dependence on the US while promoting a more balanced transatlantic relationship.

Establishing a "European army" is no longer a taboo. In 2016, then President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker called for the creation of a "European army" to cope with pressure from Russia, but his call has not resonated extensively within the Union. However, as the US withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, France and Germany publicly called for the establishment of a "European army" successively. When attending a gathering marking the centenary of the First World War armistice, French President Macron noted that "Europeans cannot be protected without a true, European army."⁶⁹ Later, in a speech before the European Parliament, German Chancellor Merkel articulated more clearly on the concept of "European defense," contending that a European army should be created. She voiced her support for the creation of a European military force for rapid deployment and the adoption of a joint military procurement policy. She also proposed to establish a European Security Council so that foreign policy could be more swiftly prepared. She even suggested lifting the unanimity requirement in security policy areas when this was permitted by the treaties.⁷⁰ To promote strategic autonomy in the defense area, the new European Commission has established a new Directorate-General for Defense Industry and Space to facilitate the coordinated development of the European defense industry.

69 "France's Macron Pushes for 'True European Army'," BBC, November 13, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46108633>.

70 Angela Merkel, "Speech in front of the European Parliament," November 15, 2018, <https://bruessel-eu.diplo.de/eu-en/-/2161514>.

In defense building, the EU now aims much higher than its previous goal of crisis management but seeks to strengthen capacity development in defense. With respect to cooperation mechanisms, the EU has not only initiated the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) with 25 participating member states but also set up the European Defense Fund (EDF) as well as the Coordinated Annual Review on Defense (CARD) among its member states. Through coordination and cooperation, such joint measures aim at enhancing the EU's capacity in defense industry investment, capacity development and military operations, reducing duplicate production of weapon systems and increasing the compatibility of military operations among EU member states so as to raise the efficiency of European defense and the EU's strategic autonomy. In terms of practice, 47 projects have been approved in the context of PESCO, covering areas like military training, cyber security, disaster relief, unmanned combating and special operations. The EDF has also reached successive agreements to fund nine projects. The European Intervention Initiative proposed by France to enhance the European capability of action has been supported by 11 countries. The French Foreign Minister declared that the Initiative may well eventually develop into a "European army."

Aiming at "operating autonomously when necessary and cooperating with partners wherever possible," European defense cooperation is not fundamentally in conflict with the US goal of pushing European countries to share more security responsibilities, although this has incurred worry and discontent from the US. The US may be concerned about Europe's pursuit of strategic autonomy, since this not only means an increasing say for Europe when confronting pressure from the US in the security domain, but also more future independence for Europe in related defense industries, which will reduce its dependence on American products while squeezing them out of the European market. The US has openly voiced dissatisfaction with its potential exclusion from PESCO and EDF. Trump took Macron's vision of creating a "European army" as "an insult" to America.

Conclusion

Under the discourse of pursuing a "sovereign Europe," the EU will reshape its

foreign policy behavior, regardless of whether it is seeking to be a geopolitical actor or pursuing the new objective of strategic autonomy, whether it is forcefully promoting new strategies to safeguard multilateralism or rethinking the new directions of integration. All of these topics will eventually influence the future of the international power structure and the global order.

Although the EU's journey to become a "hard power" is long and arduous due to its feature of involving multilevel governance, divergence among EU member states and a decentralized governance mode, the world will nevertheless witness a "more forceful" EU. If the EU's pursuit of relative independence from the US is conducive to counterbalancing America's unilateral policies, the EU's foreign policy transition to the logic of power requires us to reexamine its international status of being a unique pole with its "soft power" in the multipolar world.

Whether the EU is able to strike a balance between obtaining its economic interests and upholding the principle of market openness when employing its market power as an instrument to safeguard its overall strategic objectives, will exert significant influence on the world economic order. If the unified European market no longer conveys the message of openness, and does not demonstrate the power of cooperation or acts as the model of integration for the world, but instead becomes an instrument catering to the need of "Europe first," turns increasingly to protectionism or even enforces a "politicized" and "security-oriented" foreign economic policy, the global economic governance, which is already plagued with crises, will be further undermined and the prospect of openness, liberalization and cooperation pioneered by globalization will be further dimmed. When Europe pursues an innovative agenda and uses unilateral and bilateral means skillfully to safeguard multilateralism, it should face the fact of uneven development among different countries. If the EU does not act on the basis of international consensus but starts from its own strategic interests and standards and takes actions forcefully, the fragmented multilateral global order will not be mended and the EU would turn out to be an additional challenge for it. Similarly, if Europe continues tackling the migrant crisis with a "security-focused" mentality, hoping only to take measures to ensure the security of the "European fortress," neither any long-term security will be realized nor will its identity crisis and the global humanitarian crisis be eliminated. 🇪🇺