

1941-2021: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES
OF THE EU'S EMERGENCE AS AN UNPRECEDENTED POWER
IN A NON-EUROPEAN WORLD

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ABSTRACT

The 'Ventotene spirit' is more alive than in past every decade, notably more than during the decades of the Cold War and in the years of the illusions following 1989.

Prioritizing the objective of a European political unity and methodologically addressing the link between ideational background and institution-building, is the double lesson and the legacy of Spinelli.

Why and how could steps towards a European political unity be made in the coming years? The paper is shared in three parts: firstly, the objective, external, international conditions for the EU as a distinctive kind of international power are emerging in spite of multipolarity, power politics, fragmentation and bifurcation. Secondly, the subjective conditions are listed and critically evaluated. After a literature review about the nature of the EU international actorness, the paper focuses its third section on the multiple necessary features for the 'open strategic autonomy' asserted by the EU authorities since a decade. The institutional conditions are particularly underlined, as well as the alternative scenarios beyond the status quo: either a treaty reform or a political initiative within the current treaty framework.

Keywords: Strategic Autonomy, Objective and Subjective Conditions, Institutional Reforms.

1. THE VENTOTENE SPIRIT AND EUROPE'S ROLE IN THE WORLD

What about reviving the spirit of the *Ventotene Manifesto* in the troubled international environment of 2021? The first step is to place the Manifesto

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in its historical context, which the introductory papers are doing while providing the reader with a synthesis of the wide literature.¹

Before addressing the question of the Manifesto's meaning today, I would like to express my twofold emotion in rereading this exceptional antifascist, militant and passionate call for a "Europa libera e unita".

The reader of 2021 is still impressed by what Einaudi in his 1947² speech at the *Costituente* (in parallel with his famous book)³ defined "the confidence in the strength of ideas" as a fundamental factor of historical change. This applies to my interpretation of the Manifesto, and is both theoretically relevant and politically vital. It is theoretically relevant because constructivist and several neo-institutionalist theories are being revived and applied to contemporary international relations and global politics, bringing innovations in approaches to the role of ideas (see Wendt 1999; Keohane and Goldstein 1993). According to these theories, social and political change must be explained first in terms of epistemic variables focusing on the varying weight of ideas, programs, projects, perceptions and other subjective factors. This is contrary to conventional wisdom and, notably, to the overwhelming domination of rational choice approaches that regard cost-benefit calculations as the sole explanation of human behavior. In the same text, Luigi Einaudi cited Mahatma Gandhi and the victory of nonviolent resistance against the most important empire of that time as an example of the historical efficiency of ideas. The EU institutions are the outcome of powerful ideas, not only of convergent interests.

In some cases, moreover, discourse becomes events, potential might, as two experts in rhetoric like N. Bobbio and C. Perelman (ULB) could confirm, jointly as often they did. Such a belief in ideas as factors that shape history was radically against the realist stream in 1941, paradoxically, the year of the Axis triumph; this very much contributed to making the European idea a leitmotif of the debate on the European resistance, curbing its strongly nationalistic tendencies.⁴

What made (and makes) this particular idea of united Europe so strong? To my eyes, the Manifesto was and still is a perfect example of a creative

¹ See in particular the opening panel with Luca Einaudi, Antonella Braga, Paolo Soddu, Piero S. Graglia.

² EINAUDI 1947. Mention should be made of at least some of the main references: LEVI 2006; BRAGA 2007, PISTONE 2008; GUI 2011; SOLARI 1980; PREDI 2010; MORELLI 2010; as well as NAPOLITANO 2007 and the works by D'ASTOLI, VASSALLO and others. Il Mulino also published the essential reference SPINELLI 1989-1992.

³ EINAUDI 1948.

⁴ BOBBIO 1982: XXVI.

combination of the idea of European unity and a model of progressive modernity. And this interpretation brings me to the second reason it is particularly vital and alive in our own day, even more than in the past. I know that critical analyses maintain that some passages are outdated. I'm also aware that what I'm about to say may be contested: while in the 1920s-40s major European intellectuals considered only the US to be "the great single model of modernity" (either as criticism or praise: Sigfried, Philip, De Man, and, in Italy, Gramsci, Pavese, Vittorini, Mila, Calvino...), the Manifesto asserts the constructive perspective of a distinctive and original European model of modernity: ideas are considered to shape a comprehensive vision of the future common European perspective. This perspective recalls the Hegelian philosophy of history and anticipates Eisenstadt's theory of 'multiple modernities' (where concepts of modernity differ according to the variety of continental cultures): by emphasizing the shaping role of ideas for our common European future. I would like to stress again that this vision of the European future as a socioeconomic and cultural challenge is even more relevant in 2021 than in past decades.

In our day, reading the Manifesto furnishes arguments underpinning Merkel's idea that, in the current post-hegemonic era, we as continental Europeans must increasingly shoulder the defense and development of Western values in a challenging world. Much more than in the past, we are facing two parallel processes. First, China's rise as the predominant global economic power is unprecedented: never has such primacy been in the hands of an authoritarian regime with declining soft power. Second, even the *Financial Times* underscores the crisis of the West's leading English-speaking states. In the new transatlantic dialogue between the allies, the consequences of the 'divided West' (Habermas 2005) are still significant.

As regards this divide, Brexit is the perfect demonstration of what inevitably happens when an approach to the European construction neglects the importance of ideas and is founded only in instrumental rationality. How could Cameron and the Breainers win a referendum with messaging centering on a very critical assessment of the EU's institutional framework and policies, combined with the merely instrumental advantages of EU membership for Britons? How can Britain have any credibility in defending the international liberal order after having weakened it with Brexit? Weak ideas matter when confronting the rhetoric and the myth of reviving 'Global Britain': to win against nationalists, Einaudi said in 1947, one must "essere portatori di un'idea più alta di quella altrui: un ideale umano e moderno nell'Europa di oggi".

On the other side of the Atlantic, the US unfortunately confirmed its long-term decline on January 6th with a very sad spectacle of self-inflicted damage to its democratic process and international moral standing.

One last nuance: according to Spinelli, it is ideas, not functionalist approaches, that shape institution-building. From Article 38 of the EDC Treaty to the 1981 Draft European Act and the numerous presidencies of the EP Constitutional Affairs committee, Italy's focus on this central aspect of the European integration process has always been distinctive feature of the country's contribution, and is still vitally important today: ideas matter only if they are translated into a coherent supranational institutional construction serving as a bulwark against what Spinelli and Einaudi jointly denounced as "the myth of absolute state sovereignty". Right wing populists and sovereigntists lost the European election in 2019 and the US elections in 2020, but the threat and danger they pose for democracy and peace is still there. We urgently need to take stock of this anniversary and, on this solid basis, of the next *Conference on the Future of Europe* to raise the cultural, political and institutional level of the European vision.

2. "UN MOVIMENTO PER UN'EUROPA LIBERA ED UNITA" BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT: BEYOND TWO MISTAKEN INTERPRETATIONS

Constructivist/institutionalist does not mean idealistic. The *Ventotene Manifesto* is not an idealistic plea for Europe. Its message of hope, paradoxically voiced in the worst year of the war, is based on the one hand on the most radical analysis of the dangers of extreme, absolute, expressions of national state sovereignty and, on the other, on an oft-repeated 'research question': "are the conditions ripe for implementing our idea?". Could a "movimento per un'Europa libera e unita" be successful in the current internal and external circumstances? The project's feasibility is subject to rational conditions, like the project presented in Kant's *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795).

In my opinion, this method and research question should be central to our research agenda. My thesis, then, and the thrust of this presentation start by distancing themselves from two opposing answers to this question, which are dialectically stimulating, but substantially wrong:

a) The first answer is defeatist: according to a varied cultural stream, we are witnessing a waning of the European idea, which has degenerated from that of the true Community of the Six, inspired by Spinelli and the grounding fathers, to become a soulless hierarchical bureaucracy, domi-

nated by national egoisms in cahoots with global market rules, the sad outcome of a failed compromise between the internal functionalist logic and the neoliberal global model (see, among others, Mazower 2010). This interpretation is fully compatible with the theory advanced by chief Brexit negotiator David Frost: Europe is moving away from the 20th century revolution of supra-nationality, embodied by Spinelli and the founding fathers to the 21st century revolution of sovereignty, embodied by Boris Johnson (Frost 2020).

Both these variants share a common thesis: European unity, a utopia of the 20th century, is becoming a dystopia.

b) The alternative school of thought is of Gaullist inspiration: if the EU wants to survive the current international and internal transition, it must assume the features of a state: centralization, control of territory, trade protectionism and sovereignty. We understand the domestic political reasons for Macron's embrace of this rhetoric. But not only its language but also its practices risk being ineffective and even dangerous, because it is not appropriate for a post-state, liberal and open entity like the EU.

Of course, there is a modicum of truth in both schools of thought. On the one hand, it is true that the neo-liberal illusion that globalization benefits everyone dominated not only the Thatcher-Reagan era but also the first decade of the new century, influencing some EU leaders and provoking a backlash of nationalist and national sovereigntist revolts against both globalization and the EU. But the first school is forgetting that the EU and the Euro as a political project are weathering the populist wave, Brexit and the devastating impact of the Trump presidency. On the other hand, it is also true that the EU is facing the challenge of a new step forwards towards socioeconomic (New generation EU) and political unity, but its way of facing this test cannot be that of a centralized, sovereign and protectionist state.

The documents produced by the EU during the last years, from the *Rome Declaration* on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the founding Treaty, the Mogherini paper, i.e., the *Global Strategy* of 2016, as well as the joint communications of the Commission on *A New EU-US Agenda for Global Change* of December 2020 and on *Multilateralism* of February 2021 look at using the concept of 'strategic autonomy' to establish a dynamic link between enhancing internal political unity and being proactive in international politics. Is an open 'strategic autonomy' an original answer to both the approaches described above (the Euroscepticism of the first school and the Sovereign Europe misunderstanding of the second)?

The question is therefore: under what conditions can an enhanced political unity and open strategic autonomy enable Europe to cope with the current international challenges? How could this essential part of the Spinelli/Colorni/Rossi design be revived in the multipolar world of the 21st century? The idea is clear: “Un’Europa libera e politicamente unita, come leva per relazioni tali con altri continenti da costruire un ordine mondiale di pace”. That would mean both a development and a revision of Kant’s cosmopolitanism. The answer cannot be reduced to a simple, assertive, yes or no. My answer will be: yes, but only given certain conditions. Under what conditions can the EU become the driving actor of a peaceful global multilateral order?

According to Machiavelli, an author very much appreciated by Spinelli,⁵ a successful politics depends on both objective and subjective conditions: 50% on *Fortuna* (objective circumstances, notably external and international) and 50% on *Virtù* (subjective conditions, mainly internal).

3. FORTUNA: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EXTERNAL (INTERNATIONAL) CONDITIONS FOR THE EMERGENCE OF A “EUROPA PIÙ LIBERA E UNITA”, CHARACTERIZED BY OPEN STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

After 25 years of collective research on the contradictory international developments in the near and far abroad after the end of the Cold War, I think that a more strategically autonomous EU, seen as leverage for a new global multilateralism, is more realistic now than ever before.

a) This perspective was historically impossible in the inter-war transitional period. How would it have been possible to combine democracy, peace and European unity after WW1 and Versailles? Luigi Einaudi was farseeing in his early criticism of the weakness of the League of Nations and, as a consequence, of the *Briand Memorandum* for European unity. After the 1929 economic crisis, the single democratic pathway to recovery, the single de facto alternative to fascism and Stalinism was national Keynesianism:⁶ either in its stronger and progressive form, through the foundation of the Swedish welfare model – as an outcome of Gunnar Myrdal’s theory (see Marchionatti 2020⁷ for the relevance of the Wicksell school in Stockholm), or in its weaker and incipient form, through the British national government cheap money and housing policies of the

⁵ SPINELLI 1993.

⁶ TELÒ 1989; GOUREVITCH 1985.

⁷ MARCHIONATTI 2020.

1930s. The failure of the German 'WTB Plan' (named after the social-democrat economists Woytinsky, Tarnow and Baade), the Weimar democracy's last attempt to cope with mass unemployment and contain the Nazi challenge by combining an innovative growth policy with European cooperation, effectively demonstrated that it was historically impossible for pro-European minorities to propose and jointly implement a European solution to the crisis. And without Keynesian crisis-policy, there was absolutely no chance not only for the League of Nations, but also for European unity as presented in the institutionally confused "Briand Memorandum". Keynesianism and Europeanism diverged in the 1930s, and they may eventually converge precisely in the third decade of the 21st century, with the Next Generation EU plan and the ECB's quantitative easing policy.

b) After WW2, thanks to the grounding fathers, we had the miracle of the European construction, starting only five years after the war (Schuman declaration, May 9, 1950) and surviving France's rejection of EDC ratification in 1954, an existential threat for the tiny baby which was the united Europe of the Six at that time. However, even if the supranational institutions strengthened by the Rome treaties were an extremely innovative creation, a common good for the world, even a fledging European strategic autonomy was impossible against the backdrop of the bipolar world system and the Cold War (Bull 1982).

Many articles and books by major specialists have explained the intriguing significance of the debate of the 1950s-70s. Of course, some signs of the European desire for strategic autonomy emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, even without focusing on the controversial vicissitudes of Gaullism: Brandt's Ostpolitik, the 1975 Helsinki Conference and the CSCE, the liberal Genscher's support for the Central American 'Contadora Group', the Venice declaration on Palestine, the South American policy following the Iberian enlargement. These were some halting first steps by the politically dwarfed EC. Why such a strict limit?

An interesting debate took place between the 1970s and the 1980s, notable for Hedley Bull's lucid reply (Bull 1982) to François Duchêne (Duchêne 1973): Europe as a civilian power was a "contradiction in terms" in the bipolar world based on the nuclear confrontation between the USA and USSR.

c) Until 1989-1991 – when Europe no longer needed to shelter under the United States' nuclear umbrella from the Soviet threat – the whole European debate was limited and conditioned by the rather rigid bipolar global power structure.

By contrast, the conditions that have firmed up during the last 15 years are shaped by a multipolar power distribution combined with a multilevel

network of multilateral cooperation.⁸ It is a strange kind of global multipolarity: first, it is militarily asymmetric in favor of the single military superpower, the US, which still spends 800 billion dollars a year for defense, 4 or 2 times more than the second power China (depending on whether figures are expressed in absolute terms or based on PPP rates). Second, ignoring the huge geo-economic power shifts in favor of the emergent countries would be an act of willful blindness. The economic crisis and the COVID-19 epidemic are strengthening these power shifts, making China – an authoritarian state – the leading global economy.

However, focusing only on the two major states and their power logic of bifurcation would also be a mistake. The world system is post-hegemonic, characterized by a proliferation of multilateral fora, informal civil society networks, intergovernmental regimes and multilateral organizations.

By contrast with the multipolarity of the past (before 1914), the current world system is not Eurocentric, and since 2007 the West has accounted for less than half of global GDP. Emergent economies also mean emergent cultures, power logics and different understandings of national interests and international cooperation. As the most advanced multilateral organization at the regional level, the main question for the EU is as follows: is this non-European multipolarity a threat or is it also an opportunity, not only for the EU's global role as a rule-setting actor, but also for its chances of survival? It would be a serious existential threat for the EU if this multipolarity were at odds with multilateral cooperation.

Research confirms that, both historically and logically, the multipolar power structure is not in itself opposed to multilateralism, as shown by our experience of the period preceding WW1: to some extent it limited wars and civilized national sovereignty by a series of multilateral treaties in several civilian areas (the Rhine Convention on navigation, agreements on posts and telegraphs, the Red Cross, weights and measures, and so forth) signed between 1831 and 1910, providing evidence that the two can coexist. And what about the current period? The combination of multipolarity (power structure) and multilateralism (relations among entities), or in other words, the “multilateralization of the emerging multipolar power structure” is a controversial but central issue in the international debate. Multilateralism is not only matter of discourses (masking various concepts), but of respecting two basic rules: general principle of conduct and reciprocity.⁹

⁸ For an extensive discussion of this topic and the international context in general, see TELÒ 2021a.

⁹ For the definition of multilateralism: RUGGIE 1993 and TELÒ 2014.

Some observers focus on the unprecedented achievement of 75 years of peace after 1945, combining the UN system with the Bretton Woods institutions, the proliferation of new multilateral arrangements: from the Kyoto Protocol to COP21, and to the Glasgow conference of 2021 (COP26), the ICC, the G20, the BRICS declaration in favor of multilateralism, the UNDP, and the current evolution of the IMF, beyond the 1989 'Washington consensus'. Other observers, by contrast, stress the power logic limiting and humiliating the UN and multilateral institutions, provoking or condoning local conflicts in Syria, Libya and Yemen, as well as in Africa, paralyzing the UNSC, and hampering the WHO's work during the pandemic. However, overly vague assessments concluding that there is a general decline of multilateralism and of international regime-building are of no help in conducting the case-by-case analysis needed to show that multilateralism is far from collapsing in every policy field.

Furthermore, the main global powers seem to be as interested, albeit in alternative ways, in regional multilateralism.¹⁰ Multidisciplinary knowledge provides evidence of this new phenomenon, which did not exist in 1945. Of course, major powers understand regionalism in very diverse ways, from top-down intergovernmental cooperation (Eurasian economic union, SCO, GCC) to the opposite example of 'new regionalism', as bottom-up democratic and voluntary integration among neighboring societies and states (EU, ASEAN, MERCOSUR, the African Union, etc.). The spread of multilateral and democratic regional cooperation in every continent is a *conductio sine qua non* for the development of the EU as the most sophisticated example of regional unity. Multidisciplinary research has found that the EU is not an isolated case study: comparative regionalism shows that regional cooperation / integration has multiplied in every continent.

Despite serious challenges, in the current dynamic and heterogeneous global context, the EU has its cards to play, more than ever, and more than both allies and competitors, the USA and China. The prospect of making of a politically united EU the leverage for a new, more legitimate and efficient multilateralism cannot be ruled out as a dystopia. Alliances and convergences with many global and regional actors are possible in the near and far abroad, as is demonstrated by the array of successful EU associations, bilateral and interregional agreements dealing with trade and more.

¹⁰ FAWCETT and HURRELL 1995; MILNER and MANSFIELD 1997; TELÒ 2001, 2007, 2014; HETTNE, INOTAI and SUNKEL 2001; VAN LANGENHOVE 2011; TELÒ 2016; SOLINGEN 2015, RISSE and BÖRZEL 2016; KATZENSTEIN 2005; GUERRIERI and SCHARRER 2000; LEVI, VALLINOTO and FINIZIO 2013; ACHARYA 2013.

In conclusion, and as a bridge to the next section, I would like to add a final point: notwithstanding the continual oscillations between optimistic and pessimist views, the EU not only benefits from windows of opportunity, but also seems to be more conscious of its global role. The EU cannot survive without a more efficient, legitimate and regionalized multilateral framework; and a new multilateralism cannot successfully develop without the EU's driving role. Of course, the challenges are power politics, fragmentation and some of the current legal provisions of the still state-centric international organizations: these challenges must be faced to make it possible for a regional entity to take part in multilateral organizations as a legal entity in its own right,¹¹ a process calling for convergences with other regional entities and alliances with great powers.

During the last three decades, there has been a growing awareness within the EU that its role in defending and extending the multilateral network is essential and indispensable (Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council on strengthening the EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism, February 2021). Combining this gradual process with the waves of enlargement following the 1989-91 turning point was not easy.

However, very much has been done by the previous and current High Representatives for foreign policy, some states, and several think tanks and NGOs. All in all, when it comes to the global transition, the Europeans are less and less inclined to be passive spectators of international affairs, as they were in the years of the bipolar world. If Europeans want to matter as relevant actors having a voice in their own future and the future of the human kind, the EU must become a fully-fledged, though *sui generis*, geopolitical actor. But how? What balance must it strike between its open strategic autonomy and cooperation, between freedom and Member States' voluntary self-constraint through loyalty and consistent commitments to multilateral cooperation?

¹¹ *EU representation in multilateral organizations*

UNSC:	1 permanent + 2 or 3 rotating member
UN General Assembly:	EU observer and 27 MSs
UN agencies:	EU observer and 27 MSs
FAO:	EU member and 27MSs
WTO:	Alternatively, EU full member or 27 MSs
IMF:	ECB observer and 27 MSs
WB:	27 MSs
G7:	EU and 3 MSs
G20:	EU and 3 MSs
OECD:	EU membership and 21 MSs.

4. WHAT ABOUT *VIRTÙ*? IS BUILDING THE SUBJECTIVE CONDITIONS FOR THE EU'S STRATEGIC AUTONOMY A SISYPHEAN TASK?

EU strategic autonomy will inevitably be an ambitious long-term process, needing not only an open and favorable international context but also multiple subjective conditions within the EU. What strategic autonomy means in practice will be the outcome of the interplay between policy-makers (Borrell Fontelles 2021) and free research.

Strategic *autonomy* is opposed to *heteronomy*, dependence on other powers, as Norberto Bobbio would have stressed. This concept, according to Emanuel Kant, is profoundly linked to the concept of freedom. It is extremely significant that the first two lines of the Manifesto mention “*libertà e autonomia*”, reviving Kant’s link between freedom and autonomy. The same principle applies to individuals and to collective entities, like nations and regional unities: no political freedom is possible without international autonomy. It is a basic republican credo. We can be free only if our polity (in whatever city, state or regional organization) is free from international dependency. But will our internal freedoms pay the price of enhanced foreign policy commitments, as some of the US founding fathers feared in the first decades of their history? And what about the authoritarian evolution of Deng Xiaoping’s opening of Chinese policy (1978)? I recently had a discussion with Chinese liberal intellectuals about the opposition between international liberty and internal freedoms that was already present in the thought of the founder of the independent Republic of China in 1911, Sun Yat-sen: they claim that Sun Yat-sen is anticipating the ‘Bandung conference’ platform emphasizing sovereignty, very far from Kant’s idea of a combination between international freedom and internal rule of law (Meyer and Sales-Marques 2018). The essential link between inside and outside was also missing in the first EC treaties and statements, because the domestic rule of law was not yet combined with ‘strategic autonomy’. Why? Because, after the ECD’s failure, during the Cold War decades, the national leaders of the little EC were deeply attached to their comfortable position as the US’s junior partners in NATO, focusing on economic growth rather than on defense.

After the ECD failed, the history of the European construction showed us the strengths and limits of functionalism. The market-focused functionalist Single European Act was successfully opposed to the 1981 Draft Act’s Spinellian political project, in spite of the EP vote of 1984, supported by Mitterrand. It was only after 1989 that Kohl and Mitterrand decided – through a second IGC, parallel to the first focusing on the monetary union and sponsored by Jacques Delors – to take the first timid steps towards

political union based on the Maastricht Treaty's second (CFSP) and third (JHA) pillars. It quickly became clear that, *pace* functionalist optimism, neither the single market nor the single currency were strong enough to foster enhanced political unity. The painful performance of the newborn EU during the tragic wars in the former Yugoslavia and the EU divisions about George W. Bush's Iraqi policy, show the weight of this institutional handicap, which was not really addressed by the treaties of Amsterdam (1997) and Nice (2000).

In spite of the hard times, one of the European Convention's (2002-2003) main successes was in strengthening the EU's international political identity, thanks in no small measure to the convergent endeavors of many activists and leaders, including Joschka Fischer and Dominique de Villepin. In spite of the French and Dutch referenda, the very controversial process of negotiation-ratification in 2004-07 eventually saved some advances that were key to the construction of an open strategic autonomy: the High Representative's 'double hat', a large diplomatic service (EEAS, with 4,500 diplomats and 140 embassies), and the EU's international legal personality (Lisbon Treaties 2009), while maintaining – with a few derogations and passerelle clauses – the paralyzing unanimous voting procedure in the II pillar.

5. THE DIVIDED INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE

According to most of the international literature the EU is an unprecedented power, as far as foreign policy is concerned. However, this analysis is conceptualized in three very different ways, the first two of which are framed in idealistic or in Euro skeptical terms.

Among the idealists, we must mention the Eurocentric wave of works on 'EU normative power', 'post-Westphalian entity',¹² 'superpower',¹³ as well as the still-exciting book by Padoa-Schioppa,¹⁴ who proposed the concept of 'gentle power', quite consistently with the utopian cosmopolitan Europe described by Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande in 2004.¹⁵ There are two scientific problems with this literature: first, there is a risk of stopping comparative research with other entities, and second, in International Relations theory, one single case cannot underpin a theory.

¹² COOPER 2004; REID 2004; MANNERS 2002.

¹³ MCCORMICK 2007 and, in popularized terms, LEONARD 2005.

¹⁴ PADOA-SCHIOPPA 2001.

¹⁵ BECK and GRANDE 2004.

Among the realists, the emphasis was on the mostly UK-centered vision of a structurally two-stage foreign policy (the States level and the EU level), inevitably subject to a capability-expectations gap (Hill 1993). The utilitarian interpretation of EU foreign policy was recently revived by C. Bickerton, skeptically focusing on the EU's unavoidably low external effectiveness, explained by exhausting internal rivalries and bargaining.¹⁶ The EU's foreign policy is not a true foreign policy, but an internal bargaining policy: it is and will remain forever shaped by intergovernmental decision-making and conditioned by the emphasis on the state sovereignty typical of larger MSs or minor veto-players.

A third stream which gradually emerged 15 years ago goes beyond both Eurocentrism and Euro-scepticism, idealism and realism, and draws attention to the EU as – whether we like it or not – a *de facto* global actor (Bretherton and Vogler 2006), “the second one in the world”, incapable of initiating and conducting wars, because of low defense budgets and of its decentralized decision-making mechanism, but able to engage in variously efficient external policies, defined as “structural foreign policies” (trade, development aid, humanitarian aid, environment, energy, international crime, peace keeping missions, etc.), typical of a rather ‘civilian’ kind of power, which calls for conceptual innovation (Keukeleire and Delreux 2014; Smith 2003; Telò 2005 and Telò and Ponjaert 2013).

According to this third view, the EU is, first of all, influencing and projecting its rules towards its neighborhood through ‘external governance’ (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2010). Secondly, it is influencing long term processes, like world regionalization and global economy/trade regulation (Nicolaidis and Meunier 2004) based on its ‘market power’ (Damro 2012), research power, cultural power, through its interregional arrangements and policies (Fawcett and Telò 2015), promotion of human rights (Smith 2003) and good governance, conflict prevention, rather than through military intervention in emergency crises. Its conflict prevention makes the EU a significant humanitarian and diplomatic actor (Macedonia, Haiti, Georgia, post-Tsunami Indonesia, etc.) and there is abundant research on the diplomatic influence, policies and the structure of the post-Lisbon EEAS (Balfour, Carta and Raik 2015). By contrast, it seems to have failed in several local military conflicts (Libya, Syria, Yemen, Palestine-Israel, etc.)

Compared with the idealist streams, this new literature is less utopian and more concrete in proposing improvements and does not deny the need to address the persistence of power politics. Compared with the “realist”

¹⁶ BICKERTON 2015.

thesis of structural weakness, the most widely studied institutional tendencies towards enhanced efficiency and unity are: a better horizontal coordination between Council and Commission, an enhanced vertical coherence and loyalty (notably among the 27 MSs and between states and the EU), as well as the consistency of internal and external policies. New tools such as PeSCo or the European Peace facility (EPF) deserve research. De facto, these are the crucial issues at stake for enhanced political unity.

This new literature asserts that, by contrast with the inward-looking approach of the post-WW2 decades, when the EC's primary goal was to organize a stable internal peace among former enemies, the EU is increasing the number and scope of its external relations and wants to matter in global politics.

A Sisyphean task? After the idealistic illusions of the 1990s, the EU eventually discovered that in order to survive, it has to develop and assert its own vision and language of power (Borrell Fontelles 2021), based on market power, research power, trade power, monetary power, external governance, etc. In this perspective, however, the evolution of the EU's international and political role is facing two main challenges: how to further shape and institutionally strengthen its internal unity, coherence and consistency? How to situate itself within a heterogeneous world context and proactively multilateralize and civilize a unprecedented multipolarity?

6. EU "SOVEREIGNTY" OR "STRATEGIC AUTONOMY"?

During the 11 years after the Lisbon treaty, the EU survived the worst financial and economic crisis, the emergence of the multipolar world, and the populist wave and its effects: Brexit and the Trump presidency. However, when it comes to the EU in the 21st century, speaking of 'European sovereignty' seems misguided. Sovereignty as internal and external "potere di comando in ultima istanza" is unfit to cope with the complexity of political communities in this century and in particular with a multinational, decentralized polity like the EU (Matteucci 1990: 1079-1088). My own definition of 'civilian power', unlike others, is based on three realistic and structural points:

- a) the weight of the memory of the past in conditioning an international low profile,
- b) the limits of national defense budgets (and the priority of domestic politics for the welfare state budget), and
- c) the still very decentralized institutional structure.

During the George W. Bush adventures, the former APSA President, Robert O. Keohane, underscored “the paradoxes of sovereignty”: the federalist US was declaring and conducting ‘preventive wars’, a typical behavior of classical sovereign powers (*jus ad bellum*), whereas Europe, the cradle of the Bodin/Machiavelli/Hobbes ideas of a centralized, united, absolute sovereignty was implementing vertical and horizontal power sharing (Keohane 2003), making it impossible to declare war and go beyond the ‘Petersberg tasks’ (humanitarian missions, peace keeping and peace enforcing).

Compared with ‘sovereignty’, the concept of ‘strategic autonomy’ seems more appropriate for realistically conceptualizing the international potential perspective of an incipient civilian power like the EU.

Well, the good news is that since Mogherini and Borrell served as HR for CFSP, this concept has entered into the EU’s narrative and rhetoric (Mogherini in Telò and Viviers 2020, Borrell Fontelles 2021). The scientific question, however, is as follows: under what conditions would this ambitious new objective be realistic in the uncertain context of the 21st century?

We, as a research community, are committed to interplay with democratic institutions like the EU; however, we must tell the policy-makers not what they want to hear but what they need to hear, whether they like it or not.

7. BETWEEN RESEARCH AND THE NORMATIVE AGENDA FOR THE NEXT DECADE: SEVEN CHALLENGES FOR A TRUE ‘STRATEGIC AUTONOMY’

To contribute to the debate, let’s make a summary of current dilemmas and challenges for the development of a true ‘strategic autonomy’ for the EU in international affairs.

a) First, the ambition to achieve ‘strategic autonomy’ would be a joke in the absence of a higher degree of consistency between internal and external policies: 1. The EU will have strong cards to play only if there is a successful Recovery plan, strengthening its role as a leader in sustainable and social growth combined with digitalization; 2. Second: how could the EU’s promotion of democracy and the rule of law in the near and far abroad be credible, if the EU does not stick to these values and defend them from internal attack by populists, illiberal and far right governments? Forgetting these values, which are the very soul of the EU, would be a disaster in terms of international communication, and perception by partners in the near and far abroad: research is more than clear about how perception matters in today’s, even more than facts; 3. Third, strategic autonomy can only

be credible if the EU shows itself capable of a civilized organization of our neighborhood (and its enlargement policy). Notably, the consistency between fair relations with neighboring Mediterranean countries, migration policy, defense of the rule of law and integration cannot be neglected by a power with ambitions towards strategic autonomy. We are not conscious enough of the disastrous impact of the regrettable portrayals of ‘Fortress Europe’, both on ordinary people and opinion leaders.

All in all, Jacques Delors’ idea of “leading by example” must still be a benchmark for building a credible strategic autonomy, particularly against the backdrop of a post-pandemic crisis.

b) A Security-providing actor. Leading by example, however, is not enough in the current world, not even in our own neighborhood, where we face autocrats such as Putin and Erdogan. Strategic autonomy cannot be taken seriously without a stronger security pillar, including satellite-recognition, transport, and cybersecurity.

Regarding security, a difficult debate has opened and there are two wrong ways to proceed.

In the first case, the ‘Gaullist’ rhetoric of military independence is reviving the French debate about *l’Europe puissance*. Though President Macron’s leading contribution to an enhanced EU strategic autonomy is critical, strategic research has made it more than clear that it is unrealistic for the EU to give up the NATO umbrella for at least the next two decades. Paradoxically, this French rhetoric is being aired at the same time that concessions are being made to domestic pressures: the rejection of German proposals that management of the *force de frappe* and/or the permanent seat in the UNSC be shared with the EU partners. If there is no serious evolution in the French attitude to these two crucial issues for opening the door to a true EU defense and army, the EU’s only option is to look for a new combination of strategic autonomy and transatlantic alliance (still largely relying on NATO’s Article 5).

The second wrong way is represented by the former CDU President and German Minister, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer. This is a kind of ‘back to the future’, returning with Biden to the comfortable condition of being NATO’s junior partner, or in other words the political dwarf of the past. This cultural subordination to the traditional role as the US’s minor ally is deeply rooted in German, Dutch, Italian and other European national political cultures and will be revived in the coming months. Of course, the Trump defeat and the Biden administration in the White House are two excellent preconditions for a new transatlantic alliance. The EU should look with enthusiasm to the unique opportunity of multiple convergences

for the next four years with what has been emphatically defined by many as a 'dream team', with Biden, Harris, Blinken, Thomas-Greenfield, Jake Sullivan and Gary Hart.

However, effectively implementing Kennedy's wish for a 'two-pillar alliance' is difficult. A crisis of expectations is possible and yielding to the temptation to go back to being a junior partner may have higher costs than in the past. International research can help prevent such a scenario: in a country as deeply divided as the post-Trump USA (before and after the January 6th insurrection), taking care of domestic policy and restoring internal consensus will be the No. 1 priority for the new Biden administration even at the cost of international leadership. Second, for decades, an extensive international and American literature has asserted that the US's decline as a constructive hegemonic power is a structural phenomenon, a long-term process, starting in 1971 and now irreversible: decline must not be confused with collapse, and it is clear that the US still has its economic, research (university) and notably military primacy.

Now that we have clarified how far it is from the two wrong ways, we can say that the concept of 'Open Strategic Autonomy' means that the EU will be the first to take the initiative in moving beyond the traditional subordination towards an alliance between equals. If the EU does not advance its own independent proposal for a 'New Transatlantic Deal' it will miss an opportunity. The issues at stake are not only about the revival of a more binding 'Treaty of Paris' with COP26 and beyond, the Iran nuclear deal, and managing the consequences of Brexit, but also about converging on a great project for global health (global vaccination) and economic recovery, fighting poverty and working for serious WTO and WHO reform. This will be a crucial test. The joint Maas-Le Drian paper (November 2020) on an 'Alliance for multilateralism' is a first step in this direction. Of course, the EU Defence Union should be strengthened as called for in the Treaty for the European Union (1981) even if it remains complementary to NATO, as the EU pillar of a renewed alliance. This gradualism, this step-by-step capacity building, is the single realistic path for the next decade, combined with PeSCo and upgrading cybersecurity, and its 30 more strategic and technological projects, with more generous funding for the European Defence Union and European Peace Facility. Without this dynamic towards strategic autonomy, persuading European electorates to accept an increase in defence budgets up to 2% of GDP will be problematic, as Angela Merkel pointed out when she invited Europeans to "take our destiny into our own hands" and adjust our concept of civilian power Europe to the new circumstances. Naturally, a serious industrial policy, research policy and space policy also have direct implications for strategic autonomy, notably in a context of supply chain bifurcation.

c) Every serious study of the EU's external relations in the world emphasizes that the main instruments for EU strategic autonomy are currently the trade arrangements, notably the new regulatory arrangements including not only balanced market access and a level playing field, but also social, environmental and sustainable development issues: market power and trade power are the very soul of my realistic understanding of the civilian power EU in the world, as they are needed to defend and assert our interests, values and way of life.

We argued that this transformation power may be also defined as a *framing* power.¹⁷ The CAI (Comprehensive Agreement on Investments) with China (signed on December 30, 2020) is a major test for the EU's third way between normative power and defending interests. It is has currently been suspended in the climate of reciprocal political sanctions between the EU and China, and its controversial ratification will provide an opportunity for deeper public debate about open strategic autonomy.

Which is the best way to improve the human rights record of authoritarian partners such as China? Engagement or containment? The US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan put unusual pressure on the EU to stop it from signing CAI and harshly criticized the agreement as a naïve present to China. However, he did not mention the US-China 'Phase One' trade agreement of January 2020, signed without consulting the allies, or the RCEP (the major trade arrangement with China signed in November 2020 by US allies in the Pacific area: Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Korea and ASEAN). Generally speaking, despite many areas of convergence, full convergence of our trade policy and notably our China policy with the US is less than evident (*cf.* the Airbus issue, GAFA taxation, and so forth). This issue seems to have huge implications for EU strategic autonomy in terms not only of consistency between values and interests, but also of internal horizontal and vertical coordination.

Public debate should address the conditions for a more strategic link between trade policy and foreign policy and specify the issues where an arrangement with the US is needed, starting with WTO reform and also reviving the TTIP. The current very poor coordination of trade policy with CFSP is a step backward from both the Lisbon Treaty's provisions calling for a "comprehensive approach to external relations" and the governance improvements in coordination practice established by Mogherini, after the De Gucht-Ashton shortcomings.

d) Strategic autonomy should not mean a kind of transatlantic division of work between junior and senior partners: the US as the global pow-

¹⁷ TELÒ 2021b.

er and the EU as a regional actor; first, the EU is already an acknowledged global actor, with its own approach to global trade and HR/democracy promotion. For example, as shown during the vacuum provoked by Donald Trump's withdrawal from the Transpacific Trade Partnership (TPP 2015), the EU has broadened and deepened its own Asia-Pacific trade policy and notably, as we emphasized above, its own China policy. It does not coincide with the American Indo/Pacific policy, and not only because the interests differ: often, Western values are implemented in a different way by the US administrations and the EU, given the latter's distinctive approach to relations with authoritarian states. The EU is rooted in the Brandt/Genscher *Ostpolitik* and its political-cultural legacy: changing authoritarian regimes through dialog and engagement rather than through containment (*Wandel durch Annäherung*). This was also the background for functional relations in the framework (framing power) of the CSCE, recently revived by António Guterres. This distinctive cooperative and transformation method has a global scope, rather than a merely regional dimension. Though the main objective is very similar to that of Democratic US administrations – peace, prosperity, and human rights promotion – the EU approach focuses on negotiating, socializing, emphasizing dialog, promoting comprehensive and inclusive bilateral, multilateral and interregional convergence, enhancing the standards of trade and investment negotiations, and making a shared commitment to global common goods possible. The new CAI is part of the EU's very successful Asia-Pacific trade policy, balancing the Trump administration's inward-looking trade war approach on the one hand, and China's assertiveness on the other, notably by RCEP, BRI, AIIB, SCO etc.

However, the current bifurcation challenges the EU to improve its comprehensive approach to foreign relations in order to make its presence felt in this crucial part of the world. Such 'global actorness' by no means incompatible with joint EU-USA initiative, for instance within WTO and WHO, but is at odds with the view that relegates the EU to a limited regional role. Lastly, being a global actor EU means being more collectively aware that without the driving input of interregional endeavours and initiatives (with every continent), no revival of multilateral organizations – most notably the UN, under the leadership of General Secretary António Guterres – would be possible (see footnote 8 and the ongoing research on this crucial issue).

e) What does strategic autonomy mean when it comes to the EU's institutional structure? We know that Josep Borrell, like every HR before him, is often hampered in his initiatives by several veto players on the Foreign Affairs Council (and not only Hungary and Poland...). Reforming the Lisbon treaties to provide a Qualified Majority Voting procedure would be

the best way to eliminate this repeated form of internal extortion, which limits strategic autonomy. In the current setting, however, any insider would tell us that this is nothing but a pipe dream, because a unanimous vote is required for treaty reform (TEU Article 48). As in the past, the EU needs differentiated cooperation. We must consider settling for a second-best solution. Does the Lisbon treaty provide a legal provision offering new opportunities? This should be a priority if integrationist forces really want to increase the EU's strategic autonomy in the coming years. Well, the answer is that Article 20 TEU or Article 46 TEU (differentiated and closer cooperation) are difficult and risky ways of putting Rome Declaration of 2017 into practice because they require a unanimous decision by the Council or a minimum of 9 MSs. Veto players would either stop it or join in boycotting it from within, as they did for PeSCo.

Legal and political research says that implementing the closer cooperation provision would be possible if the political will is there, but only given a kind of "Schengen treaty for foreign policy". A core foreign policy group (started by Eurozone members, open to latecomers, with the same High Representative and with a commitment to re-joining the EU Treaty asap) would break the veto players' stranglehold if an ambitious founding declaration ties membership to domestic respect for human rights. This is essential if the EU is to stop de-credibilization and enhance its capacity. The initiative would also be in the interests of the pro-European public opinion streams in countries whose euro-sceptical governments would not join as core founding members.

The creation of PeSCo ('permanent structured cooperation' in defence policy, according to Article 46 TEU) was disappointing because the veto players decided, much to the dismay of the integrationist states led by France, to become PeSCo members, thus slowing and boycotting the process from within. Structured cooperation (Article 46) and Enhanced cooperation (Article 20) are unfortunately not providing an appropriate legal and conceptual framework for addressing the crucial question of a core EU foreign policy. Finally, this argument also applies to the much-needed EU army and its political framework (Morelli 2020).¹⁸ In 2020, the German SPD parliamentary group proposed to build up a "European army" to complement the national armies. Italy could perhaps promote public debate across willing member states after this important German input and support a Schengen-style provisional treaty as a driver of a new unity.

¹⁸ FINIZIO and MORELLI 2015, in particular, chapter 1 by Morelli on the European Union's defense policy. See MORELLI, ROMEO and SONCIN 2020: 13-35. See also BISCOP and COELMONT 2012.

All in all, no strategic autonomy will be possible without institutional reform: a reform strategy fit for the EU should include both a best option and a second-best option.

f) Sixth condition. I want to emphasise that the consensus in the international literature is that no strategic autonomy is realistic without a deeper, gradual convergence of national “strategic cultures”, towards the construction of a shared European strategic culture, potentially the very soul of a European political unification as well as of strategic autonomy (Katzenstein 1996; Tonra and Christiansen 2004; Biava 2011). The current profound differences in strategic cultures, threat perception and memories of the past are huge obstacles for a true strategic autonomy. This issue should have been addressed before the enlargement waves as a ‘fourth Copenhagen criterion’ (in 1993). However, if is not too late, credible new instruments must be created to gradually underpin this process in concrete terms by building up an autonomous, common strategic culture. Redrafting the EU strategic paper every five years is not enough. The outcomes of the work of joint bi-national and multilateral expert committees must be socialized throughout the media and the national school systems. New approaches and new tools at both the central and decentralized levels must be deployed in order to set up a deeper systematic and institutionalized mechanism of communication and research that will make it possible to engage in a structured internal multilateral dialog about memories, transparent confrontation, mutual listening and gradual convergence.

g) Lastly, advancing towards open strategic autonomy calls for greater internal legitimacy. By contrast with past diplomatic practices, the EU’s strategic autonomy can be a subject of public debate and of mobilization by NGOs as well as a driver of wider consensus for the EU’s political union. Legitimacy through outputs comes first. However, it chiefly depends on the transparency of the EU institutions and on the political initiatives of European and national political parties. Naturally, public foreign policy debate is not a matter for everyday politics: many foreign policy issues may be boring for ordinary people and often call for technical competence, as de Tocqueville emphasized. However, on the biggest issues at stake, the common goods of public health, peace, environment, justice and mobilization, open debate is not only possible but needed. We have seen too many paradoxes stemming from party inertia and media misinformation, manipulation and post-truth practices. For example, trade policy politicization had an enormous impact in opposing TTIP and CETA, while the parties and media did nothing about Trump’s trade wars and protectionism against the EU. The integrationist and progressive forces at national and transnational

level bear considerable responsibility for this possible alternative evolution of the European public sphere.

No strategic autonomy will be possible without patient internal debate and persuasion, pursuing both input and output legitimacy. Adversarial debate can be useful in building up a democratic transnational public sphere, a multilevel democratic system, provided that correct information about facts can be expressed. As future EU crises are inevitable, all the forms of a multilevel democracy at local, national, transnational and supranational levels must be strengthened, even if this makes the decision process slower. Domestic factors matter increasingly, in the US as well: what varies is the way they matter. The profoundly divided US seems to be shifting towards ambiguous new combinations of the 'January 6th controversy', 'America first' and internationalism (Ikenberry 2020). For the EU, by contrast, consistently asserting strategic autonomy is possible, but only granted both *fortuna* and *virtù*: external conditions and new supranational and national endeavors mobilizing the internationalism of public opinion and civil society associations for the common good and peace.

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A 'SPINELLIAN MOMENT'?

The *Manifesto di Ventotene* is not only a historically significant milestone for the federalist and militant movement: it is a classic text on the future of Europe's role in the world, providing all European citizens with a larger and open message. I like the definition of a classic text by Italo Calvino: a classic text is an universal reference, for everybody, remaining alive for decades and to which leaders and ordinary people come back on a regular basis for inspiration. Of course, some parts of the Manifesto are outdated. However, this is not very relevant: if you allow me, I would like to conclude with a personal note as Calvino suggests, in memory of the privilege I had of coming to know and interact with Altiero Spinelli during the last two years of his life, in Roman restaurants and in his residence in Rome, where we were kindly welcomed by Ursula Hirschmann.

I feel that Spinelli's unshaking confidence in the strength of ideas and of the ideal struggle (mentioned in the opening part of this paper) is still important for a revived European political commitment. And I also treasure the memory of his vital dialectic between idealism and realism. The two poles of the dialectic in these particular years of hope (1984-86) were, first, the federalist perspective, revived by the Draft Treaty between 1981 and 1984, and the primacy of institutional reform, including the criticisms of functionalism – which prevailed with the Single European Act and later with the single currency. (It was precisely for this reason that the Université

Libre de Bruxelles welcomed the proposal of my Institut d'Etudes Européennes to honor Spinelli with a *laurea honoris causa*). The second pole of the dialectic was his extraordinary political openness, ductility, and flexibility in coalition-building. I would avoid using the vague term pragmatism, and focus on the extremely wise idea of politics as the gradual persuasion of the largest possible array of leaders and people of the need to pursue European political unity in all possible ways: as a militant, a European Commissioner, a member of Parliament, and successful advisor or inspiration for such different personalities as De Gasperi, Nenni, Mitterrand, Fernand Herman and the other Crocodile Club members, as well as Napolitano and Berlinguer (and their parties and movements). The vote of the European parliament of 1984 and (under his inspiration) the Italian referendum of 1989, still matter as two examples of this rare openness and coalition-building. By this effective combination of idealism and realism, in my modest opinion, the main author of the Manifesto emerges in the context of European federalism as a unique leader, especially when compared with other, very promising, national streams, like the British federalists, whose slight political impact became all too clear in 2016 and on December 31, 2020 with Brexit.

The Manifesto's open message and this method are still alive, even more now than in the past. I would like to conclude by stressing that, with the dramatic changes that have taken place in the geopolitical context, the EU has a rare chance to assert its model and values despite the post COVID-19 crisis. However, seriously pursuing true strategic autonomy requires certain preconditions which I have tried to analyze in this paper. The first is a vision of Europe as a distinctive model of 'modernity' and of 'democracy', both within the states and between the states. And, while we are fully aware that combining the revived alliance with robust steps towards strategic autonomy will be a very difficult agenda, the EU has little choice but to make essential progress towards its deeper political unity, even by means of a transitional core group. Is this possible? The research community is divided on this issue. We have analyzed both external and internal preconditions for a successful actualization of the Ventotene Manifesto's main message. Actuality, yes, but with a collective determination, not for what *The Economist* and Schäuble have called a 'Hamiltonian moment', but rather for a 'Spinellian moment', making the EU a united geopolitical, cultural and political actor.

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