FROM QUASI-SOVEREIGNTY TO FULL SOVEREIGNTY? THE INTERPRETATIONS OF STRATEGIC AUTONOMY AND SOVEREIGNTY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract The concept of European sovereignty has been in the focus of attention since Emmanuel Macron's speech at Sorbonne in 2017. Our multidisciplinary research provides a chronological overview of the efforts to establish EU strategic autonomy and sovereignty. Concept analysis examines the link between *sovereignty* and *autonomy* and their content in political discourse. Finally, the two concepts are placed in a schema of practical reasoning to explore the future vision outlined. The discourse analysis of strategic documents related to the autonomy and sovereignty of the EU from 1998 to 2023, following the Strategic Compass and the Russian invasion in Ukraine, has revealed the difference between strategic autonomy and sovereignty and the evolution of the idea of European defense as the core of sovereignty. Attempts to make these concepts and related EU actions acceptable are highlighted.

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The concepts of strategic autonomy and European sovereignty have become key issues of the European Union's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). Although the concepts of autonomy and sovereignty are traditionally used in relation to the functioning of states, nowadays they often appear in connection with the supranational institutional system of the European Union (Csernatoni, 2022). It is no coincidence since the EU, because of its specific development, surpassed other international organizations with intergovernmental characteristics and it can be considered a sui generis international actor. However, the EU can neither be considered autonomous nor sovereign in the field of defense, nor has the area of defense become a real common policy. There is no political will to create a European army because it would require a real supranational federal system.

In recent years, in addition to the EU's economic power, there has also been a demand for the EU to become a military power, i.e. for its ability to act independently in the area of European defense. Currently, the EU is a political community that depends on the military power of the US through NATO. That is why its ability to act autonomously is partially limited. Since in Europe only the United Kingdom and France have full spectrum military capabilities, and other European states have only limited national self-defense capabilities, most of them need to be members of a military alliance. Since 1949, NATO, which now has 32 members (with the inclusion of Sweden), has provided this protective umbrella.

The strategic autonomy of the EU can also be interpreted as a limited ability to act; it is the anteroom of European sovereignty. It is important to emphasize that these concepts cover not only defense, but also the fields of economy, digitalization, and technological innovation. Between the concepts of autonomy and sovereignty, the latter is the most controversial in the context of the European Union. Even the issue of strategic autonomy caused concerns and raised the need to settle the relationship with NATO (Borell, 2020). The concept of European sovereignty can be interpreted more broadly. It thus led to legal and constitutional disputes (Bifulco and Nato, 2020). While the 1998 British-French Saint-Malo declaration emphasized the EU's ability to act autonomously (CVCE, 1998), the French-German declaration issued in 2023, on the sixtieth anniversary of the Élysée Treaty, emphasized Europe's strategic sovereignty, digital sovereignty and highlighted the strengthening of European defense (Elysee, 2023).

Taking an interdisciplinary approach, we designed a software assisted discourse analysis of the key documents of the EU to investigate the current meanings of *autonomy* and *sovereignty*. The evolution and transformation of the ideas, highlighted in the sections Chronological overview and Literature review of the next part of the article, requires systematic overview and analysis. In view of the diverse use of the words and their intricate relationship in meaning, we have asked the following research questions after which we briefly explain our approach to answering them:

What is the terminological link between (strategic) *autonomy* and *sovereignty* in the examined documents? To find the answer, we employed concept analysis, also taking into consideration the difference between the general definition of a concept and the peculiarities of abstract political concepts.

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What is the impact of the adjectives that sometimes precede *autonomy* and *sovereignty* on these basic concepts? The question whether the adjectives change the structure of the original concepts represented by the nouns *autonomy* and *sovereignty* was examined from the perspective of cognitive linguistics in terms of collocations and cognitive framing.

Where are the two words (concepts) located in Fairloughs' model of imaginaries? Norman and Isabela Fairclough's models of practical reasoning and of imaginaries served as a theoretical background for our hypothesis about the evolution of the concept of European strategic autonomy.

In the article a chronological overview of the evolution of the concepts of *autonomy* and *sovereignty* is provided, followed by a literature review. Then the methodological background of our research is explained, comprising the discourse analysis of key documents, focusing on the terminological concept analysis and imaginaries related to a schema of practical reasoning. The detailed presentation of our findings is accompanied by a discussion and conclusions.

Strategic Autonomy and European Sovereignty

Chronological overview

The CSDP is the youngest policy area of the European Union. After the experience of the Yugoslav Wars, European leaders set the issue of European defense in motion, stepping over the taboo of closer defense cooperation which developed after the failure of the European Defense Community in 1954 (Vasconcelos, 2009). The wars in the former Yugoslavia became a driving force for deeper cooperation. The milestone in this process was the Saint-Malo declaration by France and the United Kingdom in 1998, which emphasized that the EU must have the capacity to take autonomous action. In the early 2000s, the legal background and the decision-making structures of security and defense policy were developed, and consequently the EU deployed its first CSDP missions and operations.

The European security strategy of 2003 recommended the creation of a strategic culture that "fosters early, rapid, and when necessary, robust intervention" (Council of the European Union, 2003: 13). After that, the term of strategic autonomy was mentioned for the first time officially by the conclusions of the European Council in 2013. Since the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon (2009), defense policy was discussed for the first time at the level of heads of state and government in 2013. The document considered the strengthening of the European defense industry and the development of defense capabilities as the main conditions for strategic autonomy and for the ability to act with partners (European Council, 2013).

In 2016, the EU's global strategy emphasized the development of European defense capabilities, the promotion of strategic autonomy, and the strengthening of the EU as a security community (European External Action Service, 2016: 14-18). This topic has already become one of the central messages of many official documents and speeches on Member States' and EU levels. In the Council conclusions of November 2016, the concept of strategic autonomy was defined more precisely: "to act autonomously when and where necessary and with partners wherever possible" (Council of The European Union, 2016: 2).

Since 2016, following the adoption of the EU global strategy and the referendum on Brexit, the integration process in the area of the EU CSDP has accelerated. It is important to emphasize that more defense related initiatives have been imple-

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mented in recent years than in the previous two decades. Although the realization of the European army is not on the agenda, there are more and more discussions about the realization of the European Defense Union and strategic autonomy, and many initiatives have been launched to strengthen European defense capabilities: the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the coordinated annual defense review (CARD), the European Defense Fund (EDF) and the Military Planning and Conduct Capabilities (MPCC) etc. However, in terms of its scale and ambitions, none of these initiatives fully met the initial high expectations, and the realization of strategic autonomy was met with numerous criticisms (Molnár, 2022; Camporini et al., 2017).

French President Emmanuel Macron has become one of the most important political supporters of strategic autonomy and European sovereignty. In September 2017, Macron's speech at Sorbonne described the autonomy debate in relation with the rise of "nationalism, identitarianism, protectionism and isolationist sovereignty". Instead of "strategic autonomy", the French president used the terms of autonomous operating capability and European sovereignty was used in a general sense in the field of defense. According to his views there are six key elements for European sovereignty: 1) security and defense, 2) control of borders, 3) partnership with Africa, 4) ecological transition, 5) digital technology and 6) industrial and monetary economic power (Macron, 2017; European Parliament, 2022).

In 2018, during his speech at an ambassadorial conference, Macron highlighted the need to build strategic autonomy at European level. He explained this by making a comparison with the United States or China, as the EU cannot be considered a power with strategic autonomy (Macron, 2018). In recent years, the French president has emphasized the need to strengthen the EU's foreign, security and defense policies in order to protect European civilization and the liberal world order (Staunton, 2022).

The 2018 State of the Union address highlighted that due to the geopolitical situation, the moment of European sovereignty had come. Juncker, President of the Commission stated that it was time for Europe to take its destiny into its own hands and to play a role, as a Union, in shaping global affairs as a more sovereign actor in international relations. According to his vision, European sovereignty is born of Member States' national sovereignty and does not replace it. Sharing sovereignty makes them stronger. He also emphasized that this process does not mean the militarization of the European Union; it means becoming more autonomous and living up to the EU's global responsibilities (Juncker, 2018).

In 2022, the Strategic Compass adopted by the Council highlighted the need to create strategic autonomy and technological sovereignty (Council of The European Union, 2022). Although the 2016 Council Conclusions already provided definitional guidelines, the official definition of the concept of strategic autonomy has not yet been developed at the EU level. The concept can be summarized as enabling the EU to ensure its own security and act autonomously on land, in the air, at sea, in space and in cyberspace. In addition, it needs to be capable of projecting power, responding to external crises, and finally making independent decisions in the field of defense policy (Biscop, 2017; Biscop, 2018; Varga, 2017; Sutter, 2020: 14; Jones, 2020; Fiott, 2018). Member States have different interests and positions regarding the concept (Weitershausen et al., 2020; Grüll and Lawton, 2020; Recchia, 2020; Silva and Zachary, 2020).

Literature review

In a 1991 study, David Held defined the difference between the concepts of sovereignty and autonomy. In his opinion, "sovereignty" corresponds to a legal status (de jure sovereignty), i.e., real legislative power over political processes. And autonomy means the real situation (de facto sovereignty), i.e., the ability to implement policy decisions. Thus, a state can be sovereign in a legal sense even without being strategically autonomous, i.e., truly capable of action (Held 1991).

Extensive literature deals with the concepts of "strategic autonomy" and "sovereignty" both in relation with the states and with the European Union. In the European context, some of the literature related to the topic drew attention to the too wide and symbolic meaning of these concepts, while others drew attention to problems related to the feasibility of the concepts in connection with transatlantic relations (Olsen, 2022; Camporini et al., 2017; Brustlein, 2018). In his 2018 study, Brustlein emphasized that the concept of the strategic autonomy of the EU may cause concern among European partners, as it may remind them of the Gaullist turn, the weakening of transatlantic relations and the strengthening of French influence (Brustlein, 2018).

In a 2019 study, Lippert et al. have also extended the concept of strategic autonomy to the areas of economy, energy supply and the eurozone in addition to defense (Lippert et al., 2019). Grevi defined economy, technology, and security and defense as the main areas of European strategic autonomy (Grevi, 2019). Franke and Varma defined it as a concept aimed at promoting a stronger, more independent EU at a time of increasing geopolitical competition (Franke and Varma, 2019). In their 2020 opinion article, Josep Borell and Thierry Breton already emphasized the need for autonomy and sovereignty in relation to the supply chain crisis experienced during the pandemic (Borell and Breton, 2020). In 2021, following the withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan, Charles Michel, the President of the European Council, highlighted the connection between European strategic autonomy and European values (Michel, 2021).

It is important to note that the two terms are often used interchangeably, but there are different meanings of "strategic autonomy" and "strategic sovereignty". According to Fiott, "strategic sovereignty" may sound more positively because it emphasizes what the EU can do, while "autonomy" refers to independence from others. On the other hand, sovereignty is more related to the concept of national sovereignty, with which most people identify it, rather than with the European sovereignty (Fiott, 2021; European Parliament, 2022).

The question of sovereignty is more complex since it is one of the basic principles of international law. The concept of state sovereignty was created by the Peace of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years' War in 1648. In the case of states, sovereignty means self-determination and autonomous action, i.e., the state exercises supreme authority over its own territory and population.[2] De jure sovereignty means the legitimacy of power (that is, agreement with the will of the people, the right to exercise power), and de facto sovereignty means the possession of power, the real ability to act.

According to Brack there are two interpretations of sovereignty: "one is the state-centred and puts forward that sovereignty is located at one particular level

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[2] Stephen Krasner (2001) has examined the concept of sovereignty broadly, and autonomy was mentioned as one pillar of sovereignty. He uses the phrase "Westphalian sovereignty", by which he means the exclusion of external actors from controlling a specific territory.

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of power, the parliament and government emanating from it. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the post-sovereignist understanding conceives the concept in a multi-level approach. It imagines sovereignty through new lenses, arguing from the outset that the concept itself has become outdated, being challenged by globalisation and integration" (Brack et al., 2019: 6).[3] Although there is no reference to the exercise of sovereignty at European level in the founding and amending treaties of the EU, and even the Court of Justice of the EU does not refer to it, there are perceptions that point to shared sovereignty at European level and to a certain extent of limited sovereignty at state level (Wallace, 1999; Brack et al., 2019; Bifulco and Nato, 2020). The classical approach to international law mostly rejects the idea that there could be a real legislative transfer or (constitutional) pluralism between the different decision-making levels in the EU, since the EU's legislative powers are merely transferred, stemming from the will of the states. According to the classical view, sovereignty is not derivative, but original, and true sovereignty is not possible without a federal structure. According to another approach, the concept of supremacy refers to the sovereignty of the EU. Although supremacy is obviously not the same as sovereignty, the primacy of EU law over national law affects the issue of sovereignty (Bifulco and Nato, 2020; Walker, 2013).

The post-sovereignist approach can also be understood as the ability of the EU to make legislative decisions and implement its policies on behalf of the EU as a whole in the areas under its competencies. This essentially includes the autonomy of the EU as a legally unified entity with exclusive competencies in certain areas both externally and internally. While the concept of supranational sovereignty remains a political taboo, the idea of "European sovereignty", as stated in the introduction, has been embraced by Emmanuel Macron, particularly in relation to trade, immigration, and security issues.

In his study, Csernatoni (2022) examined the extent to which EU-level communication related to "strategic autonomy" and "sovereignty" shapes collective thinking for EU-level policy formation in various policy areas. Csernatoni argues that the broad and still not fully defined meaning of these terms helps to create a more unified image of the European Union as a strategically independent and technologically sovereign actor (Csernatoni, 2022).

Methodology

Concept analysis

The general definition of concept emphasizes the link between a concept and the world. Thus, a concept is a tool to think about the world when it is time to make decisions and act. Besides, concepts allow people to have beliefs, develop plans and formulate opinions (Weiskopf, n.d.). Concepts can also be defined as building blocks of word meaning which include the semantic knowledge needed for ver-

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[3]   According to Robert Cooper (2003a, 2003b), the European Union is a postmodern system, which is characterized by the gradual disappearance of the boundaries between domestic and foreign affairs; by mutual interference in internal issues and mutual surveillance; the rejection of use of force for settling disputes and the codification of rules of interaction, which are self-enforced. In this postmodern system, changes of borders are less necessary, and security is based on transparency, mutual openness, interdependence and mutual vulnerability. According to Cooper's definition the EU in itself is based on the rule of law. Cooper has stated that the EU is constituted from postmodern states, sharing part of their sovereignty.

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bal communication (Kiefer and Pulvermüller, 2012: 806). It is assumed that, in the form of concepts, sensory and motoric experiences of humans are summarized in abstractions and, subsequently, concepts are stored in categories that facilitate the storage and processing as well as the elicitation of information. Whether all concepts are grounded in this kind of experience about the physical world is subject to controversy as well as whether concepts have an internal structure suitable for analysis.

The attempt to define the meaning of the words *autonomy* and *sovereignty* poses further difficulty apart from the issue of the links between word meaning and concept and the possible analysis of their components. Independently of the acceptance or rejection of the theory of grounded concepts, abstract political concepts seem to constitute a special category. Margolis and Laurence (2023) highlight that concepts may be comprising a number of other concepts as their components. In an earlier study (Margolis and Laurence, 2011) they argue that such complex concepts can be learned, for instance, from verbal communication and from associative learning like creating bonds through observation and hypothesis testing. They also underline that the acquisition of a complex concept is dependent on culture and psychological circumstances. Presumably, political concepts, or some aspects of their meaning, are forged, unfolded and "learnt" during political communication. The fact that the "political" or "general" nature of a concept or lexical item is difficult to delineate (Gunnell, 2017) makes close scrutiny even more justifiable.

In the language of politics, concepts are primary means of action in the view of Schedler (2010). When a concept is used, the participants in the communication commit themselves to certain claims (though these often remain implicit) that will constitute the meaning of the concept in question. The formal definition of the concept will reveal these latent commitments. Indeed, the way language users interpret an abstract political concept is impacted by their ideological background (Norberg, 2015) and that is why political concepts are manifestations and tools of the political contests in a community. Adcock (2005) underscores the heterogeneity of the definitions and descriptions of concepts relevant to political science. In a short etymological summary, he explains that the English word "concept" originated from the Latin components *con* (meaning altogether) and *capere* (take, seize) (2005: 5). His statement is especially relevant for our research into the connection between the concepts *sovereignty* and *autonomy,* and political imaginaries (visions) outlined in the next section.

Conceptual analysis attempting to explore the "defining property" of a concept mostly involves philosophical and logical investigation into the components of a concept or those of the meaning of a word. In his seminal work, Sartori (1984) introduces a comprehensive semantic analysis in order to explore the meaning of concepts in social science research. Sartori's methods rely on compiling and classifying explicit definitions. In political discourse, however, explicit definitions are rarely available; on the contrary, if it is considered natural language use, it is equally characterized by conceptual vagueness and conceptual instability. Thus, the examination of the linguistic context and inference of the sense of the words *sovereignty* and *autonomy* in the specific contexts seem to be the way to exploring their meaning in current EU political discourse.

Adcock proposes a distinction between the analysis of political concepts with a cognitive focus and with a linguistic focus pointing out that a cognitive structure primarily belongs to an individual whereas a linguistic structure essentially belongs to a group (Adcock, 2005: 15-16). He remarks that, especially in the social sciences,

all conceptual descriptions are founded on examples of language use, often being unclear about whether the "concept of an individual" or "a concept shared by a community" is discussed. Our current research is rooted in the ideas summarized above: the formulation and negotiation of political concepts takes place in political discourse produced in a community and this involves the evolution, and sometimes the engineering of concepts, that is, word meanings. In the exploration of the relations and meaning of *autonomy* and *sovereignty,* the perspective of lexical concept (Margolis and Laurence, 2023) is applied for practical reasons: because it is used in natural language analysis and, according to its commonsense interpretation, a vocabulary unit of a language (a word, particularly a noun) overlaps with a philosophical unit of thinking (a concept).

In our research a practice-oriented branch of concept analysis associated with terminological analysis and specialized translation seems applicable. According to its general definition, it involves the clarification of the content of concepts and their relationships (Nuopponen, 2010:4) often by the extraction of word meaning from discourse (Cabré, 1999; Temmerman, 2000; Faber, 2009). In fact, under the sociocognitive theory of terminology description, our research can be labelled as the study of the terms *autonomy* and *sovereignty* in various lexical, situational, cognitive and cultural contexts (Temmerman, 2007: 30-31), in the domain of political communication, within the framework of EU institutions, as an example of collective knowledge production. We examine how the terms (that is, words) are used to describe certain aspects of the world in order to shape the referring concepts in the collective and individual minds. According to the sociocognitive theory, the history of a word or term must be explored for a better understanding of the concept it represents. The two key words or concepts have a long history which we can rely on for the conceptual cores of *autonomy* and *sovereignty.* In the literature on political concepts there are some well-known examples for a diachronic study of the development (and possibly the transformation) of a concept: for instance, Rule et al. (2015) have researched the evolution of key concepts and the emergence of modern American political discourse using State of the Union Addresses from 1790 to 2014. Molnár and Jakusné Harnos (2023) have analyzed the conceptualization of the European Union and of Europe in State of the Union Addresses by the Presidents of the European Commission.

In our research we attempt to explore whether there are any differences in the current meaning of the two key words *autonomy* and *sovereignty* from their conceptual core (Schedler, 2010:12) available in previous research and definitions. Our sample texts are key documents from the St. Malo Declaration (1998) to the Declaration on the 60th anniversary of the Élysée Treaty (2023). We have used Atlas ti. and LIWC software for thematic and contextual analysis.

Imaginaries

Political discourse conveys future visions beside describing reality. The development and description of imaginaries is modelled by Fairclough and Fairclough (2012: 103-111) in a schema, which may serve as a base for analyzing the process of practical reasoning (ibid.: 45-51). The theory of practical reasoning tries to explain how people decide about taking action in everyday life. It underlines that in most communicative situations the values of agents rooted in their ideological orientation determine their goals. Then circumstances are assessed (certainly, their perception

and interpretation are also impacted by the agents' values) and a means-goal analysis follows, at the end of which an agent arrives at a conclusion about the necessary course of action, which is formulated as a claim for action.

The representation of the actual world in discourse may become a starting point for developing and presenting a vision of a future possible state of affairs, an imaginary which is in line with the values of the agent. Thus, an imaginary is a guideline for action because it appears in the schema of practical reasoning either as a goal premise or as a circumstantial premise. It can be a goal premise in the sense that it is an objective that should be achieved. But why can it be placed in the position of a circumstantial premise if it is not about the actual world? The answer is given by Searle's theory of institutional facts created by institutional reality (1998: 115). It highlights that institutions have deontic power assigned by the community, so they have the capability to produce "institutional facts" that constitute the social environment in combination with "brute facts" of physical reality. As a result, an institution can exploit its status power and declare an imaginary, then attempt to get it recognized collectively as a factual representation and shift it to the position of a circumstantial premise (that is, use it in practical reasoning to create a basis for action). Collective recognition is crucial because it may authorize the institution to act. What happens from the perspective of political discourse is that, through the negotiation of linguistic meaning, a concept is developed and shared in the community (see the section on concepts above).

Imaginaries are constantly presented in political discourse, also in EU discourse, and recently research interest has turned towards analyzing the imaginaries related to autonomy and sovereignty (Camporini et al., 2017; Martins and Mawdsley, 2021; Csernatoni, 2022). In our research, trying to find the answer to Research question 3, we focus on the place of *autonomy* and *sovereignty* in the model of practical reasoning. As it was said above, the position is linked to the realization of the imaginary because the concepts elicit a frame of action if they are presented as the "vision" of an institution in power. In this case, it generates discourse and it is included in documents; besides, it enables political action. If an imaginary is placed in the position of a goal premise, it is presented as a distant future vision, and, although it will still have a motivating effect, it will not generate deontic power, that is, immediate action.

Findings and discussion

Concept analysis

Concept analysis was used to find the answer to Research Question 1 "What is the terminological link between (strategic) *autonomy* and *sovereignty* as used in the examined documents?" We have recorded and compared the occurrences and the context of *autonomy, autonomous* and *sovereignty, sovereign* with Atlas.ti and LIWC software in all the documents. We have conducted qualitative analysis based on manual coding, also considering the AI based thematic recommendations of Atlas.ti and using LIWC contextualization. In continuation, we present results for each concept (see Tables 1 and 2 for an overview).

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Table 1. Occurrences and meanings of *autonomy* and *autonomous* in the examined documents

Year	Context	Ownership	Reason
1998	autonomous decision-making and action	European Union	To respond to international crises when the Atlantic Alliance is not involved. The Council must be able to take decisions on an inter-governmental basis.
2003	–	–	–
2013	decision-making autonomy	Europe	The strategic and geopolitical environment of the EU is evolving rapidly.
2016	strategic autonomy, Europe's autonomy;	European Union, Europe	To promote the common interest of our citizens, as well as our principles and values.
	decision-making autonomy of the two;	European Union and NATO	
	autonomy, autonomous access to space	our space-based services	
2017	autonomous operating capabilities, autonomy	Europe	The basis for this autonomy has been laid.
2020	more autonomous and sovereign Europe	Europe	Our fellow citizens are fully aware of the need. tensions between the United States and China are growing.
	our autonomy, our sovereignty		
	strategic autonomy		
	autonomous Europe		
2021	European strategic autonomy	Europe	More strategic autonomy is not only good for Europe, but also for the rest of the world and our allies.
2022	decision-making autonomy of the EU	European Union	It is the key to our overall security.
2022	decision-making autonomy;	European Union, NATO	To safeguard European interests and values and maintain the current security order.
	EU's strategic autonomy,	European Union	
	autonomous access to space; autonomous geo-spatial intelligence capacity; autonomous African-led peace operations	European Union European Union Africa	
2023	Europe's autonomous, independent and cost-efficient access to space	Europe	The EU is a community of law and shared values.

Note: The dates in bold refer to EU global strategy documents.

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Based upon our research, in which we have recorded each definition and explanation referring to the concepts in question, first, the concept of *autonomy* can be described as follows. Autonomy is the EU's ability to act as complementary to NATO, especially if the latter is not engaged in a crisis situation. If it is, the decision-making autonomy of both organizations is emphasized. Initially, autonomy is linked to the whole of the EU in general, then its meaning is further shaped with synonyms: assertion, strength, firmness, confidence, independence. Interestingly, autonomy can be attributed to technological services, such as space-based systems in 2016 or African peace operations in 2022. The shift from the general characteristic of autonomy to specific areas of action is in accordance with Held's (1991) explanation that autonomy involves the ability to act independently (de facto sovereignty; see the Literature review above) and Macron's (2017) vision of the EU's "autonomous operating capability" (see the Chronological overview above).

After Macron's claims in 2017 that its foundations have been laid, "more autonomous" (2020) and "more autonomy" (2021) are used assuming that the autonomy of the EU already exists. This shift will be interpreted in the analysis of the imaginary of autonomy/sovereignty in the next section. However, the delineation of the concept from *sovereignty* proves challenging, especially when they co-occur in texts. The adjective "strategic" may confirm the limited and complementary nature of actions because "strategic" means "done as part of a plan that is meant to achieve a particular purpose or to gain an advantage" and "connected with getting an advantage in a war or other military situation" (Oxford Learner's Dictionares, n.d.). Thus, the concept of strategic autonomy would involve limited capability to act in specific fields and circumstances.

Second, the concept of *sovereignty* seems to be gradually replacing *autonomy.* In fact, by now *sovereignty* extends the concept of *autonomy* in the sense Fiott (2021) underscores: contrary to autonomy, which only emphasizes independence from others, sovereignty sounds more attractive, implying the ability to act (see the Literature review above). The idea of s*overeignty* involves the ambition that the EU should be a global player able to act independently and defend its values. A sovereign Europe has a vision about its future, which may be the reason why the adjective "strategic" sometimes combines with *sovereignty,* beside others like "genuine" and "food". The latter reflects that the concept of *sovereignty* is more developed than that of autonomy: it has more pragmatic aspects linked to real economy and specific dimensions of the functioning of states and alliances (see the section on the imaginaries of *autonomy/sovereignty* below). Nevertheless, it has started to combine in the same context with other, less transparent concepts in phrases like "resilient Europe" and "sustainable European Union".

The history of the concept of *sovereignty* and its usage in international law still connect it with statehood, in particular with authority over the territory and population of a state. This is clear from the examples above. However, as Brack et al. (2019) point it out, conventional interpretations of sovereignty are tied to states and located at one level of power. Although Brack et al. argue that sovereignty could be interpreted through a multi-level approach due to globalization and integration, the creation of EU sovereignty is not possible by transfer, only by establishing a federal state. Consequently, the EU does not have supranational sovereignty at present (see the Literature review). Since the EU is not a state, it seems that the area in which territoriality could be ignored is the digital dimension: digital sovereignty or technological sovereignty may be the fields in which territoriality could be transcended.

Table 2. Occurrences and meanings of *sovereignty* and *sovereign* in the examined documents

Year	Context	Ownership	Reason
1998	–	–	–
2003	–	–	–
2013	The right of all sovereign states to make their own foreign policy decisions. Budgetary sovereignty of the Member States	(member) states	The rules-based international system.
2016	sovereign, sovereignty	member states	Member states have the right to make their own decisions.
2017	genuine sovereignty, European sovereignty, food safety and sovereignty, Europe's food sovereignty	Europe	European sovereignty requires constructing and we must do it.
2020	more autonomous and sovereign Europe	Europe	Europe should be a player in world politics.
2021	this sovereign and legitimate decision made by the United States;	USA	legitimacy
	Europe was a sum of different nations, each with its own vision, expressed within the context of its own sovereignty.	Europe	history
2022	sovereign equality; sovereign rights; sovereign decisions; sovereign national prerogative;	member states	To enhance their security and defence.
	sovereignty	Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Bosnia	To defend independence.
	technological sovereignty	European Union	To reduce dependencies; be more resilient.
2022	Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence;	Ukraine	
	our European sovereignty	Europe	growing instability, strategic competition and security threats
2023	genuine European sovereignty; strategic sovereignty; European digital sovereignty	Europe	The Versailles Declaration of March 2022

Note: The dates in bold refer to EU global strategy documents.

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This is in line with the hybrid nature of the EU, in which there are controversies over the location of (types of) power, so it seems practical that the idea of sovereignty should be detached from levels of power. The relocation of such deterritorialized sovereignty would conserve the ambiguity of Europe because this floating concept sometimes has unclear reference in EU discourse: for example, the European Union, the European Continent, the founding states of the European Union, European culture, European people, among others. At the same time, sovereignty has another interpretation deriving from its origin: digital sovereignty or technological sovereignty may refer to a concentration of power when Europe is controlled through technological systems from above.

Concerning our second research question ("What is the impact of the adjectives that sometimes precede *autonomy* and *sovereignty* on the basic concepts?"), whether the adjectives change the structure of the original concepts represented by the nouns *autonomy* and *sovereignty* can be discussed from the perspective of cognitive linguistics.

According to cognitive linguistics theory, adjectives generally specify an intrinsic or permanent property of the word which they precede (Langacker, 2008: 319-323). However, in natural language use, they may impact the meaning of the noun which they modify in diverse ways. Obviously, adjectives are used when a standard word or phrase seems inadequate for the description of what is meant; this may be the case regarding the phrases *strategic autonomy, technological sovereignty or digital sovereignty.* The meaning (concept) of autonomy is too broad and complex, and it is clear from the texts analyzed that "independence" can only be partial for the European Union, so the meaning of *autonomy* is restricted by the adjective "strategic", which suggests that long-term options or specific areas of consideration may be available. Besides, *sovereignty* is linked to states and statehood even in the EU documents analyzed, so its meaning must be restricted to the domain of digital technology, which also eliminates confusion and member state anxiety, suggesting that this type of sovereignty is not identical with the traditional concept. These solutions confirm the floating character of the concepts of sovereignty and autonomy while retaining their original core meaning, to which users may return when it is appropriate for their purposes.

The imaginary of European sovereignty

Macron's 2017 Sorbonne speech said that European sovereignty has to be constructed (see Table 2 above), which offers a hint how the concept should be formulated in political discourse and action. As the concept is evolving, more and more of its structural components are revealed. It has also become clear that sovereignty is not an objective for itself, but rather a means of transforming the EU into a security provider and a global player. In fact, the need for sovereignty seems to be interconnected with the perception of security threats. In 2022, in the Versailles Declaration, the means of "building our European sovereignty" is specified as "reducing our dependencies". Namely, bolstering defense capabilities, reducing energy dependencies and building a more robust economic base are mentioned. It is in accordance with Macron's components of autonomous operating capability (2017), as it was discussed before. The process of reasoning for action to be taken for European sovereignty is summarized in Figure 1. In our view there is a contradiction between the actual concerns (perception of physical or existential threats, demanding hard power) and

Figure 1. The imaginary of European sovereignty in the framework of practical reasoning (based on Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012: 48).
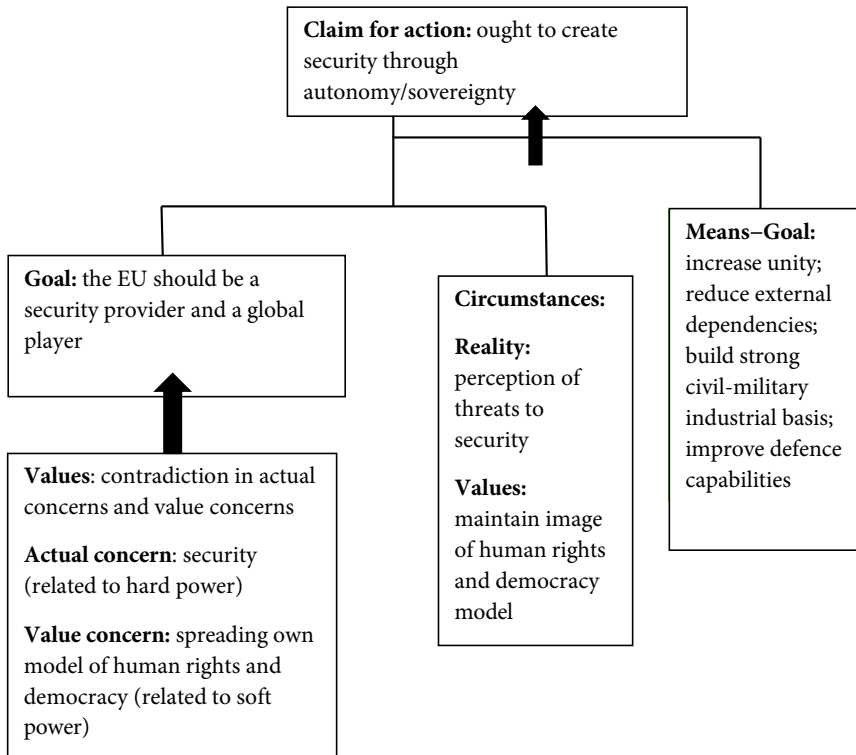

value concerns (being a model of human rights and democracy, using soft power) of the EU. This results from the fact that its values, which originate from its institutional reality, are threatened by external factors. The way to become a security provider and a global player is to achieve sovereignty.

The tension between actual circumstances and EU values leads to a mixture of diverse means in attaining sovereignty as a goal. The French–German Declaration of 22 January 2023, for instance, includes the following: strengthening ties in all fields, especially in European foreign and security policy; strengthening European defense; strong industrial, technological and digital policy; economic strength; energy security; transition to a green economy; consolidation of the European democratic mode. All of them could be interpreted as conditions to achieving EU sovereignty: "If European defence is strengthened, the EU will be (more) sovereign."

Figure 2 below illustrates how the concept of European sovereignty, working as an imaginary, can become a part of our reality. If it is shared collectively, because institutions talk and write about it (for instance, the French–German Declaration of 22 January 2023 refers to the Versailles Declaration of March 2022), European sovereignty will transform into a goal and concrete actions will be proposed to achieve it.

However, the claims for action involve the elicitation of complex conceptual frames, which may hinder the collective sharing of the ideas and objectives. This is highlighted by the thematic clusters wheel of the components of the concept of *stra-*

Figure 2. The realization of the imaginary of European sovereignty (based on Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012: 107).
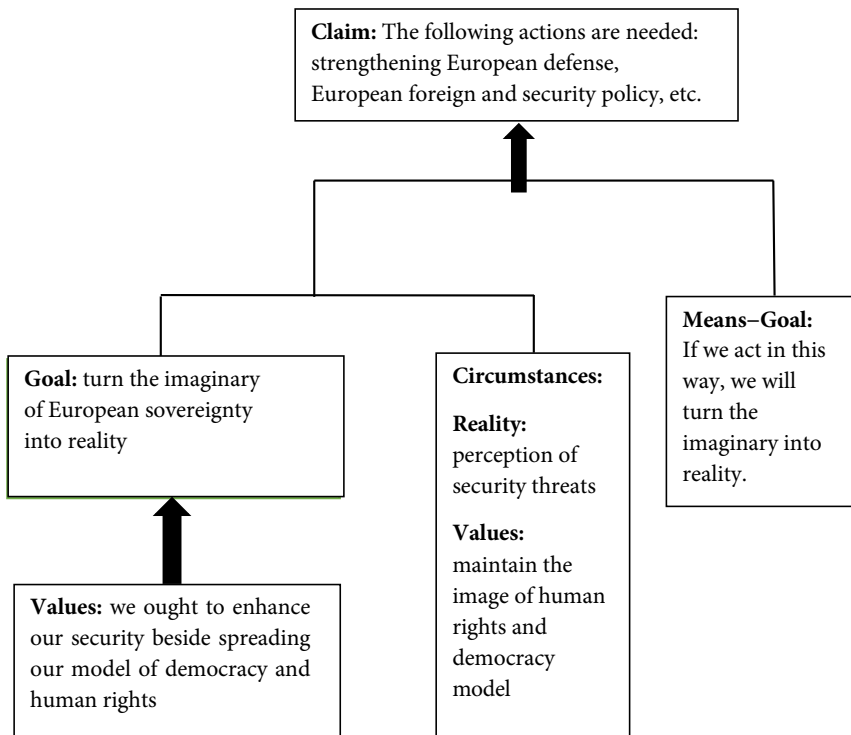
tegic autonomy in a research briefing prepared for the European Parliament (2022: 11). The interpretation of *European sovereignty* is possible as a synonym of *autonomy,* but also, in the original sense of sovereignty, "supreme power over a body politic" or generally, "controlling influence" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The development of the concept discussed above reveals the same options.

Conclusion

We have traced the occurrences and meanings of *autonomy, autonomous* and *sovereignty, sovereign* in key documents since 1998. With the methods of political discourse analysis, we have compared the appearance of the words and their contexts. Based in the analysis of context, we have highlighted changes in the components of each concept. Since both concepts are historically and legally complex, and still evolving in the EU context, they do not display a fixed structure. In addition, they can be used as synonyms although with different legal and historical implications. *Sovereignty* involves *autonomy* at the current stage of development, but the latter does not seem to be appropriate for outlining a common vision. To make it more attractive and create a broader prospect, *strategic autonomy* is used, where the adjective extends the meaning of the noun. The concept of *sovereignty* is more elaborate and is gradually replacing *autonomy.* When the adjectives *digital* and *technological* are added, they restrict the meaning of *sovereignty* while making it more precise

and attempting to introduce it outside the conventional framework of statehood. The deterritorialization of sovereignty can make EU sovereignty more acceptable to member states. Because concepts provide a basis for action, it may launch a process of relocation of power and move the quasi-sovereignty of the EU towards full sovereignty. Besides, *sovereignty* is associated with the desirable status of a global power that can shape the global future.

The components of the concept of *sovereignty* have appeared in the EU discourse as a result of establishing the imaginary of European sovereignty and an effort to find the path to its realization: for instance, common security and defense policy, a strong defense industry and economy, fewer dependencies and capabilities to spread European values and democracy. We have pointed out the contradiction between the self-image of the EU as a wielder of soft power and its ambition to become a security provider with considerable military power. The two can be linked to our findings during the scrutiny of the concepts. *Autonomy*, especially *strategic autonomy* is associated with the soft power characteristics of the EU: it may act as a complementary to NATO, in limited areas, only if needed. *Sovereignty* would involve attaining the global player and security provider status by developing and using hard power tools. Placing the development of dual-purpose industry in the center may reduce this tension, offering opportunity for focusing on economic benefits in communication. Nevertheless, which aspect of European quasi-sovereignty will be central in the evolving concept is dependent on the political trends emerging from joint action: a European Union with limited capacity to act, one with centralized leadership exercised through technology, or one completely independent and a global player.

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Od kvazisuverenosti do pune suverenosti? Tumačenja strateške autonomije i suverenosti u Europskoj uniji

Sažetak Koncept europske suverenosti u središtu je pozornosti od govora Emmanuela Macrona na Sorboni 2017. Naše multidisciplinarno istraživanje daje kronološki pregled napora da se uspostave strateška autonomija i suverenost EU-a. Konceptualna analiza ispituje vezu između *suverenosti* i *autonomije* i njihov sadržaj u političkom diskursu. Konačno, dva se koncepta smješta u shemu praktičnog razmišljanja kako bi se istražila ocrtana vizija budućnosti. Analiza diskursa strateških dokumenata vezanih uz autonomiju i suverenost EU-a od 1998. do 2023., nakon Strateškog kompasa i ruske invazije na Ukrajinu, otkrila je razliku između strateške autonomije i suverenosti te evoluciju ideje europske obrane kao srži suverenosti. Naglašavaju se pokušaji da se ti koncepti i s njima povezani postupci EU-a učine prihvatljivima.

Ključne riječi Europska unija, ZSOP, suverenost, strateška autonomija, konceptualna analiza, analiza diskursa