

Comment

Hard Power Europe?*

“Hard Power Europe” seems to be *en vogue* with European Union (EU) officials these days. When speaking in New Delhi at the Raisina Dialogue in mid-January, the Union’s new High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy *Josep Borrell* pointed out that, in a world where everything from trade agreements, technology, currency, to devaluation is being converted into a weapon in the quest for power, “[b]eing a soft power is not enough”.¹ He insisted that European nations urgently needed to change course and learn the language of power to prevent their destiny from being shaped by a Sino-American bipolarity. Only some days later, Commission President *Ursula von der Leyen* framed the issue in similar terms at the World Economic Forum in Davos. She argued that “there [was] a European way to foreign and security policy where hard power is an important tool – but is never the only one” and stressed that, besides its standard external action toolkit of diplomacy and conflict prevention, “Europe also needs credible military capabilities”.²

The message that both the European Commission’s head and the EU’s chief diplomat unequivocally communicated is that the world has become a rough place to which the EU ought to adapt rather sooner than later. In other words, both *Borrell* and *von der Leyen* underscored that the Union should become more assertive in defending its political and economic interests and preferences – including by military means – if it does not want the international order to change to its detriment. This verve for enhancing the EU’s military dimension feeds into a bigger political agenda, namely to turn the Union into a geopolitical power.³

While the *habitués* of European security and defense might still remember the clear language of the Union’s first “foreign minister” *Javier Solana*,

* I wish to thank *Matthias Hartwig*, *Michalis Ioannidis*, and *Achilles Skordas* for their insightful feedback on an earlier version of this comment. Likewise, I am grateful to the participants of *Anne Peters’* research seminar for engaging in a stimulating debate on the EU as an international (security) actor.

¹ *J. Borrell*, Speech by the High Representative/Vice-President at the Raisina Dialogue, New Delhi, 19.1.2020.

² *U. von der Leyen*, Opening Speech at the World Economic Forum, Davos, 20.1.2020.

³ *U. von der Leyen*, Speech by the Commission President-Elect at the Paris Peace Forum, Paris, 12.11.2019.

his two successors – *Lady Catherine Ashton* and *Federica Mogherini* – will probably go down in history for their tendency of hiding behind diplomatic parlance. With *Ursula von der Leyen* and especially *Josep Borrell*, the communication pendulum seems to swing back to straightforwardness. Rather than interpreting this development as a linguistic hazard or detail, it is perhaps more suitable to understand this semantic change as the expression of a revised strategy grounded on the realization that Europe needs to stop being naïve about international politics if it does not want to be marginalized by the great powers of our time. Are we thus experiencing a paradigm shift from “peace through integration” to “hard power through integration”? And if so, what are the normative and real world implications of overtly embracing the idea of “Hard Power Europe”?

I. The Context: Breaking Free from the “Force for Good” Image

The recent hard power outspokenness of leading EU bureaucrats is a remarkable discursive development given the narrative antecedents. For many years, the prevailing account was that the Union was but an influential economic entity deprived of military assets or ambitions. With military hard power questions being left to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the EU for decades carried the label of a “civilian power” (in contrast to military power),⁴ or, in less flattering terms, was “an economic giant, a political dwarf and a military earthworm”.⁵

The situation started to change in the 1990s when Member States eventually decided to move forward and integrate foreign affairs, security, and defense at the European level. At least two factors spurred this integration momentum: on the one hand, the Europeans tried to cope with the new geopolitical realities of the post-Cold War era that were no longer shaped by the United States (US)-Soviet bipolarity, and, on the other, wanted to overcome their Yugoslav trauma, that is, their inability to put a halt to the war and prevent atrocities from happening in their backyard. Against this backdrop, the Treaty of Maastricht (1992) established the Common Foreign and

⁴ *F. Duchêne*, *Europe’s Role in World Peace, Europe Tomorrow: Sixteen Europeans Look Ahead*, Fontana 1972; *H. Bull*, *Civilian Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?*, *JCMS* 21 (1982), 149.

⁵ Expression first used in 1991 by *Mark Eyskens*, then Belgium’s Foreign Minister, and recalled in an interview of 2010. See *M. Eyskens/É. Deschamps*, Interview(s) conducted in Brussels, CVCE.

Security Policy (CFSP) as the second pillar of the Union edifice, to which the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) added the position of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Under the impression of the Kosovo crisis, Heads of State and Government put in place the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)⁶ in 1999 that went operational in 2003 with the launch of the first extraterritorial civilian and military activities in the Western Balkans.⁷ These institutional and operational developments were difficult to square with the narrative of a civilian power, that is a community *not* designed to use force.

And so a recalibrated frame of reference began to take shape in 2001. The Laeken Declaration on the Future of Europe, which laid the ground for the Convention on the later aborted Constitutional Treaty, paved the way: It depicted Europe as a force for good that would above all use soft power to pursue its foreign policy objectives.⁸ This self-perception resonated well with *Ian Manners'* concept of "normative power Europe", according to which the essential characteristic of the EU as an international actor was not to be a civilian or military player, but to be a "*normative* power of an ideational nature" capable of framing discourses and setting opinions.⁹ In other words, the EU was seen an exemplary *soft* power.¹⁰ The focus on soft power was, already back then, a misconception: Given its economic strength, the Union clearly possessed and used *economic hard* power in its external relations. Be this as it may, the Laeken spirit inspired treaty drafters who enshrined the idea (or ideal) of a normative or soft power Europe in primary law. Hence, promoting and propelling values plays a prominent role in Article 21(1)-(2) Treaty on European Union (TEU) that sets out the principles and objectives of the Union's external action.¹¹ Suffice to mention at this

⁶ The policy was initially termed *European* Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). The denomination changed into *Common* Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009.

⁷ To date, the EU has launched more than 20 civilian missions and 10 military operations in Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. For a detailed overview of all past and most current CSDP activities, see Chapters 5-6 of *P. Koutrakos*, *The EU Common Security and Defence Policy*, 2013.

⁸ Presidency Conclusions of the Laeken European Council, 14.-15.12.2001, Annex I: Laeken Declaration on the Future of the European Union.

⁹ Emphasis added. *I. Manners*, *Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?*, *JCMS* 40 (2002), 235, 239.

¹⁰ For a definition of *hard* and *soft* power, see *J. S. Nye*, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, 2004, 5. Regarding soft power in world politics, see further *R. W. Grant/R. O. Keohane*, *Accountability and Abuses of Power in World Politics*, *Am. Polit. Sci. Rev.* 99 (2005), 29, 37.

¹¹ While Article 21(2) TEU lists democracy, the rule of law or the respect for human rights as "principles", they feature as "foundational values" in Article 2 TEU. On this linguis-

juncture that the protection of interests plays an essential role, too. Article 21(2)(a) TEU stipulates that safeguarding the Union's values *and* fundamental interests is the primary objective of EU external action, together with the protection of its security, independence, and integrity.

The soft power narrative also impregnated the EU's first security strategy, the European Security Strategy (ESS) of 2003.¹² The ESS was above all an "act of self-perception",¹³ by which the EU intended to position itself on the world scene, in particular *vis-à-vis* the United States. Serving both as a guidance for future policy developments and as a narrative intended to reconstruct the rationale for the EU's security and defense dimension,¹⁴ the ESS bore a quite normative flavor. Under the title "A secure Europe in a better world", the document praised extraterritorial governance reforms and capacity building as "the best means of strengthening the international order" and made a clear case for crisis management and conflict prevention.¹⁵ The underlying message was that the Union held soft power while hard power remained with its Member States. Hence, it is fair to state that the ESS read more like a gentle policy brief than a cutting roadmap.

However, when the EU released its second security strategy in 2016 – the EU Global Strategy (EUGS)¹⁶ – the context was quite different: Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and the drastic increase in migratory pressures of 2015 were still fresh. The EUGS therefore took a far more realist turn as it made apparent the so far implicit *realpolitik* underpinning European foreign policy.¹⁷ Under the maxim of "principled pragmatism", values and interests were not merely juxtaposed as in previous documents, but presented

tic difference and its normative implications, see *I. Vianello*, Guiding the Exercise of Union's Administrative Power in the EU Wider Neighbourhood. The Rule of Law from Paper to Operationalisation, EUI Working Paper LAW 2015/08 (EUI 2015), 3; *M. Cremona*, Structural Principles and Their Role in EU External Relations Law, *Current Legal Probs.* 69 (2016), 35, 47.

¹² A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy (ESS), endorsed by the European Council, Brussels, 11.-12.12.2004, 1 et seq.

¹³ *P. Koutrakos* (note 7).

¹⁴ *P. Koutrakos* (note 7); *P. M. Norheim-Martinsen*, The European Union and Military Force: Governance and Strategy, 2013, 35 et seq.

¹⁵ *P. M. Norheim-Martinsen* (note 14), 47.

¹⁶ Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS), presented by the High Representative *Federica Mogherini* on 28.6.2016.

¹⁷ *C. Moser*, Accountability in EU Security and Defence. The Law and Practice of Peacebuilding, forthcoming 2020; *A. Skordas*, The European Union as a Post-National Realist Power, in: *S. Blockmans/P. Koutrakos* (eds.), *Research Handbook on the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy*, 2018, 403 et seq.; *S. Biscop*, *European Strategy in the 21st Century. New Future for Old Power*, 2019, 30 et seq.

as an indivisible whole.¹⁸ In comparison to the Laeken Declaration or the ESS, the EUGS stands out in its assertion of interests and its explicit mention of troop deployments (in conformity with United Nations [UN] Charter provisions).

Coinciding with the adoption of a more assertive frame of reference for EU external action, hard power topics gained weight in Brussels. Security and defense indeed experienced an unprecedented integration boost – with Brexit certainly playing a crucial role as the United Kingdom (UK) has been known for blocking defense integration for decades.¹⁹ The launch of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) that occurred in late 2017 is part of this boost (even though it remains to be seen how helpful the new cooperation format actually is). Another essential element for the enhancement of EU security and defense is the provision of funds for joint defense industrial projects by the Commission through the European Defence Fund (EDF) amounting to € 13 billion for the next six years (2021-2027).²⁰ Although in different ways, both initiatives aim for the EU's strategic autonomy – a concept that enjoys growing popularity in EU circles.²¹ This is rather unsurprising given the fading of the US security guarantees for Europe, Russia's confrontational stance at Europe's Eastern doors, Turkey's Janus-faced posture on a range of security dossiers, and China's increasingly assertive foreign policy, including in military matters.²²

As hard power rhetoric has gained traction in Brussels due to the increasingly tense international climate, we witness a gradual shift from a fairly normative to a more assertive stance. Yet, this shift does by no means imply

¹⁸ EUGS (note 16), 8, 13.

¹⁹ For an intriguing analysis of the UK's stance on the CSDP before and after Brexit, see *F. Santopinto/L. Villafranca Izquierdo*, CSDP after Brexit: The Way Forward, European Parliament Study PE 603.852, European Parliament 2018.

²⁰ In the absence of an adopted budget for the period 2021-27, the € 13 billion correspond to the amount proposed by the Commission in 2018. See the relevant press release of the Commission, EU Budget: Stepping up the EU's Role as a Security and Defence Provider (Press Release of 13.6.2018).

²¹ The concept features prominently in the latest annual report of the European Parliament on the implementation of the CSDP. See European Parliament, Annual Report on the Implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy (2019/2135(INI)), A9-0052/2019, presented by rapporteur *Arnauld Danjean* on 11.12.2019. In addition, many scholars have shown an interest in Europe's strategic autonomy. See, *inter alia*, *M. Drent*, European Strategic Autonomy: Going It Alone?, Clingendael Policy Brief, 2018; *D. Fiott*, Strategic Autonomy: Towards "European Sovereignty" in Defence?, EUISS Brief. Issue 12/2018, 2018; *B. Lippert/N. von Ondarza/V. Perthes* (eds.), European Strategic Autonomy. Actors, Issues, Conflicts of Interests', SWP Research Paper 4, 2019.

²² In its 2019 strategic outlook on EU-China relations, the Commission and the High Representatives left no doubt that China's military ambitions represented "a challenge to the EU's security". See JOIN(2019) 5 final, EU-China – A Strategic Outlook, 12.3.2019, 4.

that the paradigm of “peace through integration” that drove European integration has been replaced by a “hard power through integration” leitmotif. Rather, the soft power dimension of the Union has, eventually, been complemented by a hard power aspiration. This process has been described as the normalization of European external action: At last, the Union starts to think and talk of foreign policy as any other big international player, namely in terms of interests.²³ This does not mean that the EU will turn into an unscrupulous adherent to and user of military force abroad. But the normalization of European foreign policy entails that the use of force is seen as a credible external action option – next to a panoply of non-coercive tools – to maintain the international order and to uphold European values and interests.²⁴

II. The Law: Who Speaks the Language of Power on Behalf of Europe?

But (how) can the Union actually conduct interest-driven hard power politics under the current legal and institutional framework? In the context of security and defense, the EU has both civilian and military assets at its disposal to engage in peace-keeping, conflict prevention, and strengthening international security in accordance with UN Charter principles (Article 42(1) TEU). The Union’s operational spectrum comprises thus both non-coercive and coercive activities (Article 43(1) TEU). In other words, the EU can have recourse to hard power in its external relations, provided that the use of force is in line with international law – and provided that the envisaged activities “protect the Union’s values and serve its interests” (Article 42(5) TEU). The juxtaposition of values and interests is indeed a core feature of the legal stipulations on the Union’s action on the international scene.²⁵ Both Article 3(5) TEU and Article 21(2)(a) TEU define upholding and promoting its values and interests as one of the Union’s core objectives in its relation with the wider world.

But who decides on the appropriate means – including the use of force – to protect the EU’s values and interests in the pursuit of its international

²³ For an analysis of the “normalization” of the EU as an international actor, see *F. Tereszkiewicz, The European Union as a Normal International Actor: An Analysis of the EU Global Strategy*, *International Politics* 57 (2020), 95.

²⁴ In this direction also points the statement of *von der Leyen* in Davos. See *U. von der Leyen* (note 2).

²⁵ On this point, see also *A. Skordas* (note 17), 404.

relations? Given the distinctively intergovernmental character of the CFSP and the CSDP, the answer is straightforward (and leaves no room for Brussels-blaming): Member States' governments. The European Council shapes the broader framework by defining strategic interests and setting objectives (Article 26(1) TEU), while decision-making on concrete activities, including deployments, falls to the Council of the EU (Articles 28(1) and 43(2) TEU). The usual supranational suspects – the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the Court of Justice of the EU – are kept at a safe distance (Article 24(1) TEU). Although the Parliament has *de jure* severely limited prerogatives – it has not even a consultative role but solely a right to information²⁶ – it tries to keep up the appearance of performing a thorough parliamentary scrutiny.²⁷ The Commission's remit is also quite small, even if the institution has recently improved its standing in security and defense by injecting massive amounts of funds for defense industrial projects through the EDF, whose implementation the newly created Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space (DG DEFIS) under the incoming Internal Market Commissioner *Thierry Breton* will have to oversee. The Court of Justice, finally, lacks general jurisdiction over foreign and security policy dossiers, with the exception of sanctions and policy delimitation (Article 24(1) TEU, read in conjunction with Article 275(2) Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union [TFEU]). Despite the judges' manifest discontentment with this adjudicatory arrangement,²⁸ and notwithstanding their perseverant jurisprudential efforts to enlarge their jurisdiction,²⁹ their judicial review of CFSP dossiers remains limited.

The intergovernmental fabric of the CFSP does not end at institutional arrangements, but extends to procedural matters, that is to *how* decisions are taken: As repeatedly stressed in primary law, decision-making in foreign affairs and security matters, including defense, requires – with some minor exceptions – unanimity (Articles 24(1), 31(1)-(2), and 42(4) TEU). In other words, *all* Member States have to agree for a civilian mission or a military operation to be set up and deployed. While constructive abstention is possible under Article 31(2) TEU, it has only been used once in the last two de-

²⁶ See Case C-263/14 *European Parliament v. Council* [2016] EU:C:2016:2436; Case C-658/11 *European Parliament v. Council* [2014] EU:C:2014:2025.

²⁷ *Daniel Thym* referred to this situation as “virtual parliamentary reality”. See *D. Thym, Beyond Parliament's Reach? The Role of the European Parliament in the CFSP*, *European Foreign Affairs Review* 11 (2006), 109, 120.

²⁸ Opinion 2/13 of the Court of 18.12.2014 [2014] EU:C:2014:2454 paras. 249-257.

²⁹ For an analysis of the incremental expansion of the Court's jurisdiction over CFSP and CSDP matters on the basis of “implied” and “contingent” jurisdictional competences, see the in-depth study provided in *C. Moser* (note 17).

caes.³⁰ In the event of disagreement, Member States have preferred to use their “veto” to engage in bargaining. Consequently, the unanimity requirement risks slowing down or even impeding decision-making which, in turn, reduces the EU’s responsiveness to crises.

It is therefore not astonishing that the growing hard power aspirations at the EU level has been accompanied by calls for extending majoritarian decision-making in EU diplomacy and security matters to make the Union “*weltpolitikfähig*”.³¹ First attempts in this direction were made in 2017 by *Jean-Claude Juncker*, then Commission President, who suggested to consider moving from unanimity to qualified majority voting (QMV) for some foreign policy questions (not yet covered by QMV according to Article 31(2) TEU).³² Instead of an agreement between all Member States, decisions could be adopted under the QMV scheme with the positive vote of at least 55 % of the participating Member States representing at least 65 % of the population of those States.³³ The idea of QMV was taken up by *Emmanuel Macron* and *Angela Merkel* in the Franco-German Meseberg Declaration of June 2018.³⁴ Only some months later, *Juncker* identified three topics to which majoritarian decision-making may henceforth apply, namely (1) positions on human rights issues in international *fora*; (2) sanctions; and (3) civilian missions.³⁵ His proposal was flanked by a Commission communication that *inter alia* specified that this shift would not require a Treaty change, but could be implemented on the basis of the so-called *clause passerrelle* contained in Article 31(3) TEU according to which the European Council may by unanimity authorize the Council to act by qualified majority on foreign and security issues without military or defense implications.³⁶ The Commission document furthermore clarified that the “emergency break” contained in Article 31(2) TEU, foreseeing that a Member State can call a halt to a vote according to QMV if “vital and stated reasons of nation-

³⁰ COM(2018) 647 final (12.9.2018), A Stronger Global Actor: A More Efficient Decision-Making for EU Common Foreign and Security Policy, 8.

³¹ *J.-C. Juncker*, Speech by the Commission President at the 54th Munich Security Conference (German language version), Munich, 17.2.2018.

³² *J.-C. Juncker*, State of the Union Address 2017, Strasbourg, 13.9.2017.

³³ These conditions were laid down in Article 238(3)(a) TFEU. Next to what constitutes a “qualified majority”, the provision defines a “blocking minority” which must include four participating Council members representing more than 35 % of the population of the participating Member States.

³⁴ Meseberg Declaration, Renewing Europe’s promises of security and prosperity’, joint Franco-German declaration adopted during the Franco-German Council of Ministers, Meseberg, 19.6.2018.

³⁵ *J.-C. Juncker*, State of the Union Address 2018, Strasbourg, 12.9.2018.

³⁶ Commission proposal (note 30), 10 et seq.

al policy” are at stake, would equally apply to the three identified topics.³⁷ When still a candidate to the post of the Commission President, *Ursula von der Leyen* made clear that she supported taking foreign policy decisions by majority³⁸ – a position she had already espoused in her previous role as German Defence Minister.³⁹

It is worth noting that the claims for the (re)adjustment of voting procedures on foreign and security policy issues in favor of qualified majority were all made in isolation from related institutional questions. As previously mentioned, EU security and defense constitutes a distinctively intergovernmental playfield. The veto is an emblematic feature of this intergovernmental setting as is the tiny room for manoeuvre for the Commission or the European Parliament, and the curtailed role of the EU judicature. The expansion of majoritarian decision-making would, obviously, reduce the veto scope. This, in turn, would somewhat jeopardize the intergovernmental constitutional foundations of the policy, including the channelling of accountability through national institutions (in particular parliaments) according to the constitutional specificities of each Member State.⁴⁰ Would a weakening of intergovernmental characteristics thus automatically lead to supranational institutions getting a bigger say over EU diplomacy and security issues to counter potential accountability and legitimacy gaps?

III. The Reality: Hard Power Aspirations Defied by Division and Hesitation

Whether the distinctive intergovernmental decision-making mode of the CFSP enriched by a modicum of majoritarian decision-making would sooner or later give way to the Community method has so far not been addressed. The reason for this omission is, most likely, that the EU is for now too busy with fixing itself, including its largely deficient foreign and security policy. The failure of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran is a sad illustration of the EU’s currently frail position in world politics.

³⁷ Commission proposal (note 30), 9 et seq.

³⁸ *U. von der Leyen*, Opening Statement in the European Parliament Plenary Session by the Candidate for President of the European Commission, Strasbourg, 16.7.2019.

³⁹ *U. von der Leyen*, Rede der Verteidigungsministerin zur Eröffnung der Berlin Security Conference, Berlin, 27.11.2018.

⁴⁰ Criticism regarding the democratic credentials of enhanced QMV without institutional reforms were voiced in *A. Bendiek*, Democratization First. The Community Method in CFSP as a Precondition for a European Defense Policy, *Editoriaux de l’Ifri*, 2019.

A persisting (and profound) deficit is the incapacity to shape a common European position. There is ample evidence that, when push comes to shove, national governments prefer to pull the strings. The Union's foreign and security policy is indeed marked by a constant intergovernmental cacophony that is regularly intensified by external influence.⁴¹ Therefore, EU Member States stand more often divided than united on the international scene. It is true that the EU does not have an army; but it is even more true that it continues to lack the necessary political will (and discipline) to militarily back up its foreign policy if required.

The contrast to the second dimension of hard power, namely economic dossiers, is striking. The EU is indisputably an economic giant and acts as such on the world scene. Anecdotal in this regard are the EU's protracted World Trade Organization (WTO) disputes with the United States, including the famous beef hormone controversy or the endless Airbus – Boeing saga. In the wake of the annexation of Crimea, the Union inflicted severe economic losses on Russia by adopting (and maintaining) sanctions. Another, quite recent instance of the EU flexing its economic muscles relates to China. The EU-China strategy jointly released by the Commission and the High Representative in March 2019 just before the EU-China summit bore an astonishingly sharp tone.⁴² With a view to preparing the ground for trade agreement negotiations, the document repeatedly denounced that China engaged in unfair competition and called for more “robust” steps on the EU side to reach a level playing field.⁴³ In other words, when it comes to economic issues, we are used to the EU employing its legal and economic arsenal to fight hard for European interests.

The same cannot be said for security and even less for defense issues. The core reason is that Member States remain the masters of their military hard power, meaning that the EU lacks competences and leverage. This situation creates, in turn, a puzzling paradox: While Europeans like to think of the EU as a gentile soft power, they overlook that its Member States have not been shy to use force abroad, especially in the NATO context. There is thus plenty of military hard power in Europe – but not with the Union. So why bother about adding a hard power dimension to the soft power EU? Be-

⁴¹ See, for instance, the analysis of Russia's influence over CFSP decisions in *M. A. Orenstein/R. D. Kelemen*, Trojan Horses in EU Foreign Policy, *JCMS* 55 (2017), 87. China's increasing assertiveness towards the EU was scrutinized in *T. Benner/J. Gaspers/M. Ohlberg/L. Poggetti/K. Shi-Kupfer*, Authoritarian Advance. Responding to China's Growing Political Influence in Europe, GPPi and MericS Report (Global Public Policy Institute; Mercator Institute for China Studies 2018).

⁴² EU-China Strategic Outlook (note 22).

⁴³ EU-China strategic Outlook (note 22), 7 et seq.

cause times have changed. A geostrategic shift undermining the post-1945 international order is happening – and Europe needs to adequately react to a less supportive US ally within NATO and an ever more powerful China.

To paraphrase *Josep Borrell*, Europeans need to take their destiny in their own hands if they do not want to be submerged by the superpowers of the 21st century, namely the United States and China.⁴⁴ The EU has its own values and interests that are different from those of other big players. Suffice to mention the globally varying significance accorded to protecting human rights, promoting liberal democracy, halting climate change, or upholding multilateralism. If Europeans want to jointly protect and defend their common interests and values, including the maintenance of a rules-based international order, they will have to make an immense integration effort. Next to forging a common diplomatic routine, Member States will have to develop a common strategic culture. This seems to be the hardest part of Hard Power Europe as national governments profoundly disagree on the importance of military might (compared to civilian strength) and, importantly, diverge in their stances on the legality and legitimacy of the use of force. In other words, Member States can neither agree on *whether* they want to speak the language of power nor on *how* they want to speak this language.

The potential of (future) clashes is particularly high between France and Germany that have contrasting – not to say conflicting – foreign and security policy views. A Franco-German entente is, however, crucial if the EU wants to overcome its hard power conundrum, not least because the two countries constitute the EU's core players after Brexit. But dissonances exist with regard to many current security and defense dossiers, including Syria, Libya, and the Sahel region. Only recently, tensions between Paris and Berlin have led to a heated diplomatic exchange in Brussels. When debating a mandate readjustment of the EU's military training mission in Mali (EUTM Mali) in the Political and Security Committee, the German and French diplomats vehemently disagreed in public – an unprecedented episode.⁴⁵ So far a training mission, France wishes to strengthen the military dimension of EUTM Mali with a view to consolidating European military presence in the fragile Sahel region – a proposal that does not enchant Germany. And while Berlin remains reluctant to engage in military activities in the Sahel region (and beyond), Paris is tired of fighting battles alone and feels let down by its German partner.

⁴⁴ *J. Borrell* (note 1).

⁴⁵ *N. Gros-Verheyde*, *Le Sahel, une plaie ouverte entre Français et Allemands. Le sommet de Pau en travers de la gorge de Berlin*, 20.1.2020, Bruxelles2.

Yet, as long as the profound Franco-German discord on the direction of EU security and defense is not overcome, meaningful defense cooperation or integration is out of sight. Procedural fine-tuning of voting arrangements might help to attenuate some dysfunctional aspects of the EU's soft power action on the international scene. But as long as there is no long-lasting consensus on the future course of the Union in security and defense matters, Hard Power Europe remains but a rhetoric figure devoid of any real world implications.

Carolyn Moser