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STRATEGIC AUTONOMY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION'S ENERGY POLICY: ENABLING AND RESTRAINING FACTORS

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Abstract

Deze masterproef biedt een antwoord op de onderzoeksvraag: "Wat zijn faciliterende en beperkende factoren voor strategische autonomie in het EU-energiebeleid?". Dit is een verkennend onderzoek naar de parameters die de strategische autonomie in het EU-energiebeleid vormgeven. Deze studie werd uitgevoerd door middel van een kwalitatieve analyse van zowel primaire als secundaire gegevens en zeven elite interviews. De data tonen aan dat zowel interne als externe factoren de strategische autonomie van het EU-energiebeleid beïnvloeden. Intern spelen de politieke, institutionele en functionele aspecten van strategische autonomie een rol. Meer concreet is het bereiken van strategische autonomie in de Europese energiesector tot een open en incrementeel proces gemaakt door de discrepanties tussen lidstaten in hun nationale belangen en energiebeleid; de gedeelde energiebevoegdheden binnen de EU; en onvoldoende investeringen in energietechnologieën en -infrastructuur in bepaalde lidstaten. Extern is het Europese energiebeleid gevormd door endogene gebeurtenissen en geopolitieke ontwikkelingen. Sinds de jaren 2000 hebben met name het Russische buitenlandse energiebeleid en het Russische gebruik van energie als een strategisch wapen geleid tot Europese actie richting meer strategische autonomie.

Key Words

Strategic autonomy; European energy policy; European Union

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List of abbreviations

ECSC	European Coal and Steal Community
EEAS	European External Action Service
ESA	European Strategic Autonomy
EU	European Union
EURATOM	European Atomic Energy Community
MS	Member States

Preface

Before you lies the dissertation "Strategic Autonomy in the European Energy Sector", the basis of which was a qualitative analysis of academic literature, EU policy documents and seven elite interviews. It has been written to fulfill the graduation requirements of the Master in International Relations and Diplomacy at the University of Antwerp. I was engaged in researching and writing this dissertation during the academic year of 2021-2022.

I wish to thank all of the respondents, without whom I would not have been able to perform this research. In addition, I would like to thank my friends and family for the support and motivation.

I hope you enjoy reading

Jana Caulier

Antwerp, May 30, 2022

1. Introduction

1.1 Problem statement

Energy was identified in the European Union's (EU) 2016 Global Strategy as a sector in which the Union should become strategically autonomous (EEAS, 2016). Following a series of events in recent years that exposed Europe's vulnerability to external shocks, a growing number of politicians and scholars are calling for an increase in the EU's strategic autonomy. This policy concept aims at achieving greater independence, self-reliance, and resilience in a broad array of fields (Grajewski, 2021). The notion of strategic autonomy arose in France after the end of the Cold War and has increasingly become Europeanized (Ryon, 2020). The term "*European*" strategic autonomy was first used with regard to security and defense by the European Union's Foreign Affairs Council in December 2013. However, current debates about strategic autonomy reach beyond security and defense, and call for greater European sovereignty to apply to other policy domains as well (Fiott, 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic and its political, social, and economic consequences have considerably boosted this trend to broaden the concept's sphere of application (Ryon, 2020). While strategic autonomy can apply to security and defense, trade, foreign policy, and more, the focus of this thesis is on European energy policy.

According to Ryon (2020), the European energy sector's strategic stakes and characteristics are similar to those of European defense. In a 2022 statement, Joseph Borrell, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, asserted that energy has always been among the most important geopolitical issues (Borrell, 2022). Present in this sector are objectives of independence of political decisions and actions, giving the energy sector a similar strategic value to that of the defense sector (Ryon, 2020). In 2016, this has been formally acknowledged by the European External Action Service (EEAS) when it identified energy as a sector in which the Union should become strategically autonomous (EEAS, 2016).

Despite the high strategic and value security of the energy sector, the EU has generally struggled to establish strategic autonomy in this sector. This becomes apparent with the increase of current energy prices, boosting inflation. Furthermore, due to the current crisis with Russia, energy policy has become not only a price issue but also a matter of security of supplies and strategic autonomy. Additionally, it is not the first time Europe has faced crises like this, considering the energy crises in the early and mid-2000s and even before that with the oil crisis in 1973/4. Therefore, this dissertation will explore which parameters have influenced strategic EU decision-making in the energy sector.

1.2 Relevance

The recent global energy crisis, in which there is an ongoing shortage of energy across the world, has highlighted the European Union's vulnerability in the energy sector. Europe faced steep increases in gas prices as a result of a combination of adverse conditions, including the rising demand for natural gas, reduced supply from the U.S., Norway, and Russia to the European markets, less power generation by renewable energy sources, and a cold winter that depleted European gas reservoirs (Conway, 2021; Paulsson, Starn, & Taraldsen, 2021). During the writing of this thesis, the subject has become particularly relevant, due to the 2022 invasion of Russia in the Ukraine, in which energy is being used as a strategic weapon. In addition, this issue is intrinsically tied to climate change, making it not only one of the most complex issues but also one of the topics with the highest priority within the EU (Langsdorf, 2011).

Strategic autonomy and energy policy are rarely linked in academic writing, as strategic autonomy literature often focuses solely on defense issues. Additionally, the emphasis on the factors influencing strategic autonomy in energy policy is underdeveloped in current literature. Moreover, this provides analytical insights into political and institutional dynamics, which can enhance future studies on energy policy.

1.3 Research question

The goal of this dissertation is to conduct an explorative study into the parameters that shape strategic autonomy in the context of EU Energy Policy. It aims at providing a historical overview of past energy policy in the European Union, to be able to identify the trends that impeded or facilitated strategic autonomy in this policy domain. This leads to the following research question:

"*What are enabling and restraining factors for strategic autonomy in EU energy policy*?"

1.4 Overview of the Structure

This thesis is structured as follows. In the literature review, I will be looking at how traditional strategic autonomy is defined in academic literature and which factors have previously shown to influence it. This is followed by a methodological framework that discusses the methods used to carry out the research. It also evaluates the reliability and validity of the study. Chapter 4 provides case description, explaining how the concept of strategic autonomy can be transposed to the energy sector. Chapter 5 presents the historical development of energy policy in the

European Union, based on academic literature and supplemented by the elite interviews. Next, a number of general patterns that can be identified by the historical overview and the elite interviews are elaborated on in chapter 6. Finally, this thesis ends with the conclusion, in which the research study is summarized and reflected on, and an answer to the research question is given.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Rise of Strategic Autonomy in Europe

As early as 1950, Jean Monnet, one of the founding fathers of the European Union (EU), spoke of the need for Europe to act autonomously, referring to Europe's responsibility of unity against the influence of American opinion. The idea of "strategic" autonomy originated in France out of the uncertainty produced by the end of the Cold War, a time during which European countries felt the need to reclaim control of their own security and autonomy. Yet, this concept has increasingly become Europeanized (Ryon, 2020). In only a few years, the international environment and the perception of threats and opportunities therein has shifted dramatically as a variety of forces are re-shaping the international system. Consequently, the foundations upon which the EU's security and global power are built, are weakening (Grevi, 2019; Helwig, 2020). While discussions about European Strategic Autonomy (ESA) have been around since the Balkan wars of the 1990s (Järvenpää, Major, & Sakkov, 2019), several broad interconnected developments explain why the concept has gained such traction today. These will be elaborated on in the following sections.

Debates about ESA have primarily resurfaced because of American pressure on Europe to take more responsibility for both defense within NATO and its own security (Fiott, 2018; Zandee, Deen, Kruijver, & Stoetman, 2020). This comes amidst a structural transformation of the Transatlantic Alliance, as US security and defense interests shift away from the European continent toward the Indo-Pacific (Järvenpää, Major, & Sakkov, 2019; Helwig, 2020). As a result, US support for Europe in the field of security and defense is no longer self-evident (Zandee et al., 2020). Doubts about the reliability of the US increased noticeably with the arrival of President Trump (Järvenpää, Major, & Sakkov, 2019).

Another factor in this is the global demise of the liberal rules-based European order, which has been called into question by Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine. This re-emergence of defense and power politics in Europe's neighborhood has triggered a move toward more strategic autonomy (Järvenpää, Major, & Sakkov, 2019; Helwig, 2020). According to Järvenpää, Major, & Sakkov (2019), Russia's increasing meddling in Europe's neighborhood brought collective defense issues and military concerns back to Europe's agenda. Especially Central and Eastern European states, in particular, feel threatened by a revanchist and aggressive Russia. Additionally, China has become increasingly more assertive on the international stage (Zandee et al., 2020). Consequently, the economic success story of trade and

investment relations between China and the EU has been replaced by a negative assessment of Beijing's global intentions (Helwig, 2020; Higgott & Reich, 2022). Finally, the transactional approach from the US under President Trump and his general dislike of multilateralism have also contributed to the undermining of the international rules-based order (Zandee et al., 2020).

Generally, the multilateral system within which the EU built its global influence is increasingly being put under pressure, as great powers, predominantly China, the US, and Russia, seek a relative advantage through competition using political, economic, and military means (Helwig, 2020). They seek to draw wedges between EU Member States (MS) by fostering anti-European narratives, cooperating with nationalist parties, or leveraging their economic clout (Grevi, 2019). Given these challenges, there seems to be a consensus that an increasing level of independence is necessary to avoid that Europe will condemn itself to becoming irrelevant on the geopolitical stage (Zandee et al., 2020).

Additionally, Europe is challenged from within. Although ESA cannot be simply reduced to a call for further European integration, as this would lead to resistance from a multitude of actors (General Secretariat of the European Council, 2021), it can contribute to a more integrated Europe. Yet, the EU is currently faced with internal challenges to its cohesion and solidarity. This is best illustrated by the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union on January 31, 2020. Additionally, Eurosceptic and nationalist governments threaten to weaken the political cohesion and solidarity of the Union. The rise of nationalism has led to a revival of identity politics to defend the national community against the disruptions brought by globalization, further aggravating this trend (Grevi, 2019). Examples of this include the undermining of the European norms and values system by states such as Hungary and Poland (Zandee et al., 2020).

The cumulative impact of these developments is that the international system is becoming more competitive, unstable, and vulnerable to disruptions (Grevi, 2019), triggering a debate on the need for ESA (Helwig, 2020). The publication of the EU Global Strategy in 2016 kick-started the debate as to how Europe should respond to these various challenges (Järvenpää, Major, & Sakkov, 2019), claiming that "*an appropriate level of ambition and strategic autonomy is important for Europe's ability to promote peace and security within and beyond its borders"* (EEAS, 2016, p. 9). Recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has triggered further discussions on EU dependencies and the need to become more autonomous. The scope of this pandemic has expanded the concept to a level where it is linked not only to security and defense but also to

other relevant policy areas (Shikova, 2021). European states are now increasingly aware of the need to become more independent (Zandee et al., 2020). In this context, the French President, Emmanuel Macron, has been advocating for European strategic autonomy and the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, has been a strong supporter of a larger, more independent role for Europe as a geopolitical player (van Tongerlo & Menger, 2021).

As mentioned above, the conventional perspective in the EU on strategic autonomy, which focused on security and defense, has made way for a new narrative that underlines the need to shape international politics based on a set of European values and interests (Helwig, 2020). As Grevi (2019) argues, a meaningful approach to ESA should encompass an overarching approach to strategic autonomy, assessing how progress in some fields, or lack thereof, impacts others (Grevi, 2019). Increasingly, ESA is seen as embracing all of the EU's economic and political external activities, rather than being limited to a single domain (Helwig, 2020). Today, strategic autonomy does not only apply to security and defense policy but rather covers all the EU policy areas of strategic importance (Shikova, 2021). Consequently, what was once a debate about the need for a self-sufficient EU in the face of a deteriorating European security environment and uncertain transatlantic defense ties, has evolved into a more holistic argument for an EU that must advance a distinct policy agenda on a variety of issues while also contending with broader global transformations (Helwig, 2020).

2.2 Defining Strategic Autonomy

This section attempts to clarify what is meant by "European strategic autonomy", by providing an overview of current definitions for ESA. Before I do this, it is important to note that strategic autonomy should be regarded as a policy term rather than an academic theory.

The above-mentioned developments have shown that strategic autonomy is becoming an ever-increasing indispensability for the EU. However, there is no clear and generally accepted definition of the concept yet (Zandee et al., 2020; Shikova, 2021). Due to it being such an ambiguous concept, the term is surrounded by a lot of controversy and has largely remained a buzzword in the policy debate (Grevi, 2019; Helwig, 2020). In a 2021 issue paper, the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union stated that ESA fulfills many of the criteria for what academics would describe as an essentially contested concept (General Secretariat of the European Council, 2021). This refers to the conceptual confusion resulting from some notions not having a single comprehensive definition, being fundamentally the subject of multiple perspectives (Gallie, 1956).

Notwithstanding the intrinsic ambiguity of the concept and the lack of a common definition of ESA, there seems to be a convergence in the literature with regard to its meaning. The basic components of strategic autonomy have been outlined since the Saint-Malo Declaration (1998), which prompted the creation of the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) as a quest for autonomy (Howorth, 2018; Grevi, 2019). According to the Declaration, "*the Union must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises"* (Saint-Malo Declaration, 1998, p. 1). The term "*European*" strategic autonomy itself was first explicitly used with regard to security and defense by the European Union's Foreign Affairs Council in December 2013. Although not explicitly defined, it was later presented as a broader strategic aim in the 2016 EU Global Strategy and a few months later, a loose description was presented in the EU Implementation Plan on Security and Defense, calling ESA "*the EU's ability to act in security and defense together with partners when it can, alone when it must*" (Tocci, 2021, p. 7; Council of the Europan Union, 2016, p. 4).

Hartley (in Camporini, Hartley, Maulny, & Zandee, 2017) provides a more economic perspective on ESA. As a starting point, he defines strategic autonomy as the availability of domestic military and defense industrial capabilities needed for an independent foreign policy. Other contributions have taken a broader view, applying the idea of strategic autonomy to foreign and security policy, to the whole scope of European external action, and to the power to make defining decisions about one's own destiny (Grevi, 2019; Helwig, 2020). In this context, a study by Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik defined strategic autonomy as "*the ability to set one's own priorities and make one's own decisions in matters of foreign policy and security, together with the institutional, political and material wherewithal to carry these through – in cooperation with third parties, or, if necessary, autonomously*" (Lippert, von Ondarza, & Perthes, 2019, p. 1). This definition generally seems to have been the base for further academic conceptions of the idea of Strategic Autonomy (e.g. Järvenpää, Major, & Sakkov, 2019; Grevi, 2019; Shikova, 2021). In the same way, Zandee et al. (2020) define strategic autonomy in security and defense as "*the ability of Europe to make its own decisions, and to have the necessary means, capacity, and capabilities available to act upon these decisions, in such a manner that it is able to properly function on its own when needed*". Inherent in this definition is the close relationship between the political, institutional, capability and industrial dimensions (Zandee et al., 2020, p. 2), which will be discussed in depth later.

An important part of ESA is decreasing Europe's vulnerability to the power and decisions of others (Youngs, 2021). According to Shikova (2021), ESA is about the desire of a political entity to be autonomous and thus to be able to pursue its own economic, technologic, defense and security policies without depending on external actors. Similarly, Grevi (2019) argues that strategic autonomy requires the ability to set objectives and mobilize resources in ways that do not mainly depend on the decisions and assets of others. However, he also stresses that ESA does not imply that Europeans should operate solely through the EU (Grevi, 2019). Autonomy does not necessarily mean autarchy, isolation or rejection of alliances. In the contrary, partners are often essential for the protection and promotion of EU values and interests (Shikova, 2021), as most of global politics is based on a dynamic of mutual interdependence (Youngs, 2021). Rather, it describes the EU's ability to be self-determined in pursuing and managing its alliances and partnerships (Helwig, 2020).

Hence, effective multilateralism and ESA go hand in hand: the EU can only contribute to effective multilateralism if it develops its own capacity for strategic autonomy, and at the same time, an effective multilateral order is a precondition for Europe to fully develop its strategic autonomy (General Secretariat of the European Council, 2021). Thus, ESA is about having the means and tools to reduce external dependencies in areas that are considered to be strategic, while the European Union continues to work with its partners on a multilateral basis (Shikova, 2021). As Helwig (2020, p. 12) puts it: "*the success of EU strategic autonomy will not be determined by the level of its autonomy, but by the EU's ability to be strategic about its interdependencies*". As such, ESA allows Europeans to decide their policies for themselves and bargain effectively within an interdependent system (Grevi, 2019).

2.3 Classification of European Strategic Autonomy

Recent definitions have mainly focused on four interrelated components of strategic autonomy, namely the political, institutional, capability and industrial dimensions (Järvenpää, Major, & Sakkov, 2019; Zandee et al., 2020), with some authors merging the capability and industrial subcomponents (e.g. Grevi, 2019; Helwig, 2020). In classifying the term, ESA can be defined as "*the political, institutional and material ability of the EU and its member states to manage their interdependence with third parties, with the aim of ensuring the well-being of their citizens and implementing self-determined policy decisions"* (Helwig, 2020, p. 4).

The first aspect, **political autonomy**, is concerned with the EU's capacity to make security decisions, defend common priorities and take actions independently (Grevi, 2019; Helwig, 2020; Zandee, 2020). Järvenpää, Major, & Sakkov (2019) define political autonomy as the EU's capacity to define priorities and establish a common vision for their activities in security and defense. The lack of political cohesion is often seen as one of the biggest obstacles to greater ESA. At a minimum, it becomes evident that MS must seek a shared assessment of difficulties and engage in a common policy response. Aside from that, the creation of a common strategic culture is usually seen as an essential requirement for ESA (Järvenpää, Major, & Sakkov, 2019). Helwig (2020) argues that MS often lack the political will for joint decision-making. He claims that the EU can only achieve ESA on a global scale if MS strengthen their efforts to harmonize their strategic cultures. Currently, MS' perceptions on the major problems and dangers, as well as their responses to them, continue to diverge. As a result, a coordinated reaction to international developments is hampered or prevented (Helwig, 2020).

Institutional autonomy refers to the presence of specific structures and instruments for the planning and implementation of policies. Correspondingly, Zandee et al. (2020, p. 9) refer to institutional autonomy, defining it as "*the availability of the necessary governance structures, in order to prepare and manage the decisions that are taken at the political level*". Helwig (2020) suggests that the EU's institutional autonomy is strong in its core competences concerning trade relationships and regulation of the single market. In other areas, in which the EU shares competences with MS, reaching institutional autonomy remains an open-ended and often incremental process. In this context, Zandee et al. (2020) claim that in the institutional dimension, much like in the political dimension, it is essential to strengthen unity and to accelerate decision-making in crisis situations. At the heart of the problem lies the Member States' unwillingness to pool or transfer sovereignty in security and defense from the domestic to the European level. This often leads to incoherent and ad-hoc decisions by MS (Zandee et al., 2020).

Industrial autonomy has to do with the industrial and technological ability to develop and build the necessary capabilities required for the implementation of the EU's strategic autonomy (Järvenpää, Major, & Sakkov, 2019; Grevi, 2019; Zieliński, 2020). Zandee et al (2020) argue that Europe needs a stronger technological and industrial base in defense to achieve greater ESA. However, there are differing perspectives on what should happen in order to realize this base, in particular between smaller countries on one hand and France and Germany on the other (Zandee et al., 2020). Since the EU is internally fragmented into national economies, it is

limited in realizing its full industrial potential. Politics, rather than efficiency or free market competition, typically define the manufacturing and value chains of important products and military weapons. Externally, there is a remarkable dependence on the US to provide defense products, not only due for technological reasons, but also because of political motives. (Helwig, 2020).

The fourth dimension, i.e. **capabilities autonomy**, refers to the availability of the military, civilian, financial, operational, and other capabilities to credibly implement priorities and decisions (Järvenpää, Major, & Sakkov, 2019; Zieliński, 2020). There is a general recognition that Europe currently lacks the required military capabilities to fully act autonomously (Zandee et al., 2020). However, Youngs (2021) argues that in most instances, it is political choice and strategic judgments rather than capacity constraints that has held the EU back from acting autonomously in recent years (Youngs, 2021). Member states could improve their capabilities autonomy through an improved sharing of goods and capabilities. Additionally, outside dependencies can be reduced through measures of supply diversification as well as stockpiling or enhanced capability investments (Helwig, 2020).

Despite there being several descriptions for ESA, the political, institutional and functional components are common to practically all the definitions of ESA and are relevant to all areas where it can be pursued (Grevi, 2019). This way, ESA can be seen as a matter of degree, a spectrum of choices, in which Europe can progressively increase its autonomy to a greater degree in some dimensions rather than in others (Järvenpää, Major, & Sakkov, 2019). Consequently, ESA is not a binary choice which Europe either has or does not have. It should rather be seen as a spectrum reflecting different degrees of autonomy and dependency (Fiott, 2018).

2.4 Influencing factors to European Strategic Autonomy

The previous alinea's already touched on some of the parameters which have (had) an impact on ESA. In what follows, I will go deeper into this and provide an overview of what the academic literature has deemed an influencing factor.

First, there are the external influences. Fiott (2018) reflected on trends that may affect European debates about strategic autonomy. According to him, the obvious driver conditioning European approaches to autonomy is the US's defense strategy. If Washington starts to focus on the Indo-Pacific, there will be greater demands on Europe to take up more of the security burden (Fiott, 2018). Additionally, the EU currently has many favorable and unfavorable political, economic

and security dependencies. The EU should pay more attention to all sorts of potentially harmful dependencies that it has with the US, Russia, China and other countries (Fiott, 2018).

Furthermore, the debate about ESA is ultimately one about Europe's political cohesion. It cannot be separated from an assessment of where the Union stands, and of the domestic challenges that it is facing (Grevi, 2019). In numerous countries, Eurosceptic and nationalist governments threaten to substantially weaken Europe's political cohesion and solidarity, thereby fragmenting the EU. In combination with the external crises, these internal developments put the normative, political and institutional structures of the EU under severe pressure (Järvenpää et al., 2019), whereas the important factors for achieving ESA involve the presence of political will, coupled with a common vision of the actions to be taken (Shikova, 2021). In a political system of 28 countries, this is not self-evident (Grevi, 2019). Underpinning this is the fact that the European Commission's approach to achieving ESA is not unequivocally accepted by all the EU MS (Shikova, 2021).

To illustrate, some Western European countries feel that ESA will improve transatlantic burden-sharing and avoid disengagement from the US, as it would require Europe to pay more and do more to assure its own security. France believes that more ESA would lead to better burden sharing and also to a common European strategic culture. However, due to the historical French background of the concept some countries are reluctant to embrace ESA. Given the vagueness of the notion, Eastern European countries dispute the practicality of ESA and have raised fears that seeking strategic autonomy may offset or even offend the US (Zandee et al., 2020; Järvenpää et al., 2019). In this context, Poland has been very hesitant to take part in initiatives aimed at promoting ESA since it feels that it goes against its defense needs. Nonetheless, the country does recognize that ESA could provide more defense and deterrence against Russia. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania's positions on ESA can generally be characterized as skeptical. (Järvenpää et al., 2019).

Though the term is contested, the embrace of 'strategic autonomy' in the wider political discourse signifies a sincere recognition of certain key vulnerabilities that lie at the heart of the European project and a political will to do something about them (Pohl, 2021). However, even if the EU MS have reached a consensus that the European Union needs ESA, the views on the nature of this autonomy and the instruments for its implementation differ considerably (Shikova, 2021). Currently, MS' perspectives on the main challenges and threats, as well as their strategies to address them, still diverge (Helwig, 2020). Such differences make it difficult to build a common approach on a European Union level to international developments.

Overcoming this is a condition sine qua non for achieving ESA (Helwig, 2020; Shikova, 2021). Finally, according to Pohl (2021), to understand the motivations and agendas of Europe's strategic environment, one must also recognize the intertwining of business interests, desired lifestyles of the elite and broader economic interests, as well as the role of the state as an instrument of furthering such interests (Pohl, 2021).

3. Methodology

To investigate the factors that influence ESA in European energy policy, I have conducted a historical analysis of European energy policy, which allowed me to identify reoccurring patterns that have impeded or facilitated trends towards strategic autonomy in European energy policy. This analysis was based on a qualitative study by means of a triangulation of both deskresearch and fieldresearch. This increases the validity of the study, as the use of different data sources increases internal validity (Baarda, De Goede, & Van der Meer-Middelburg, 2007).

The deskresearch made use of policy documents and academic literature, and for the fieldresearch, I conducted elite interviews with seven policy actors. This allowed me to draw upon their perception of ESA in energy policy, and what influenced it. The term "elite" refers to somebody who has a certain expertise or expertise with regard to a particular theme (Hochschild, 2009). The advantage of an elite interview is that it can be used to investigate specific topics of which there is not much (public) information yet, which is the case when it comes to strategic autonomy in the field of energy policy. Furthermore, it allows to gain deeper insights in the subject, because of the open questions and free structure of the interview (Mortelmans, 2013).

The number of participants needed for elite interviews is a very important aspect. Some scholars have discussed the question of the appropriate choice and numbers of interviewees. Liu (2018) argues that if the interviewer wishes to achieve depth rather than breadth, six to nine interviewees should be enough. In order to select the participants, I aimed at interviewing at least one representative of the most important EU bodies and interest groups. After doing some research, I identified and contacted 20 people by e-mail to schedule a meeting. Of those 20, seven responded positively, five responded negatively and the others never replied. An overview of the interviewees can be found in Annex 1.

The interviews and policy documents were thematically analyzed by means of Nvivo. Firstly, I completed open coding on the data by splitting up the texts into smaller, coherent parts and labelling them. This is generally done to get an overall insight in the gathered data (Mortelmans, 2013). After that, when certain labels occurred several times or when they were related to each other, they were merged under one category. This process is called axial coding. This type of coding is more abstract and allows patterns and relations to emerge. Finally, by means of selective coding, I connected these different categories. This process allowed a deeper, more

detailed analysis based on these codes (Mortelmans, 2013; van Thiel, 2015; Roose & Meuleman, 2014).

3.1 Quality of the research

Securing access to the interviewees did not necessarily lead to an accurate data collection. To ensure the respondents adequately expressed their opinions and to preserve the quality of the data, the following strategies were used, as suggested by Liu (2018): semi-structured interview format, make a recording of the interview, write field notes, and reminding the interviewees that they could withdraw from the research at any time and could decline to answer any question and providing the opportunity to answer the questions anonymously. This last measure was imperative, as the people interviewed in this research had occupied a high-level position in their sector, leading to a degree of sensitivity, which could affect what they felt able to say during the interviews.

Because of the use of a qualitative research method, the quality of this research project is discussed by means of reliability and validity. Paying attention to these criteria strengthens the integrity of the research.

3.1.1 Reliability

Reliability focusses on accuracy by making sure that the correct measuring instruments were used. A second element of reliability is consistency. This relates to the repeatability of the study, i.e. if the research is repeated in the same way, the same results must be found (van Thiel, 2015). In the case of the secondary data used in this thesis, this quality criterion is met as the documents are mainly derived from reliable sources such as the EU and academics. The interviews, however, could present some challenges. In interviews, the interviewer is the measuring instrument. Subsequently, personal opinions and preferences may influence the data collection process. Although this effect was mitigated by formulating the questions as concretely and neutrally as possible and by responding neutrally to the interviewee, these kinds of distortions can never be completely avoided (Baarda, et al. 2007).

To increase the reliability of the study, the interviews were conducted with a semi-structured approach. This ensures that all relevant topics are covered, and it increases the repeatability of the study (Richards, 1996). In addition, the semi-structured interview format allowed for flexibility when exploring the main ideas and gave the interviewees the opportunity not only to

answer the questions but to introduce new ideas on the topic drawing upon their own experiences, beliefs, and perspectives. Using this approach also allowed me to explore the interviewees' opinions on the questions by asking allowed follow-up questions (Liu, 2018). The interviews took an average of 30 minutes to one hour and were recorded to guarantee a correct transcription of what was said. Permission to do this was asked and all recordings were immediately deleted after they were transcribed.

3.1.2 Validity

Not only is it important that the results are reliable, but they must also be valid. Validity means that the information collected correctly reflects reality. Validity can be looked at from an internal and external perspective. Internal validity examines whether the study measures what it aims to measure. The chance of validity is greatest if questions are asked as specific as possible (Baarda, et al. 2007). This is why I opened the interview with a question of the respondents' interpretation of ESA and provided my own definition for it. This way, I ensured that both I and all the respondents were on the talking about the same things.

External validity, on the other hand, refers to the generalizability of the research. It examines whether the results of the research can be generalized to the entire population. Because of the specific configuration of the EU, my findings only apply within the context of the EU. Furthermore, one of the problems related to elite interviews is unrepresentative sampling due to access problems (Richards, 1996). During the selection of respondents, I took this into account by formulating the "types of elites" I wanted to include. Yet, I was only able to interview seven people, which affects the external validity. This means that I cannot draw general conclusions based on the interviews alone. However, the interviews did provide a more in-depth understanding of the actor's perceptions on the topic. In addition, this negative effect is partly alleviated by the use of policy documents from different sources.

4. Case description: European Strategic Autonomy in Energy Policy

While strategic autonomy can apply to trade, foreign policy, security and defense and more, the focus of this Master's thesis is on European energy policy. Recent developments have shown that the energy sector has a similar strategic value to that of the defense sector (Anghel et al., 2020). Indeed, energy is a vital policy domain, as it is increasingly being used as a strategic tool to fight power conflicts and to achieve political aims (Westphal, 2021). States that own and export energy resources use energy not only as an economic factor, but also as a means of political influence. Consequently, energy has become a tactical and strategic weapon in modern politics, as well as a tool for negotiation and a means to impose sanctions (Azimov, 2021). This creates a new geopolitical environment and poses challenges to the EU's capacity to act (Westphal, 2021). In view of current major disruptions in world politics, particularly the war in Ukraine, discussions regarding the EU's ability to establish its strategic goals, prioritize its actions, and shape its options for energy policy are becoming increasingly important (Anghel et al., 2020). This section will discuss what ESA means in the context of energy policy.

Interviewee 5 (personal communication, 14 April 2022), claims that ESA lies in the idea that the EU can pursue its own interests in its policies, without being unduly affected by other actors on the international stage. ESA in strategic autonomy would thus be a subset of that. By being strategically autonomous in the energy domain, the EU and its MS could further decrease their critical external dependencies, thus bolstering their ability to act independently and to protect their interests. Still, the EU has generally struggled to assert strategic autonomy in the energy sector, largely due to its large and increasing dependency on energy imports. Reliance on energy imports is a genuinely EU-wide phenomenon, as all MS are currently net importers of energy, albeit to varying degrees (Anghel et al., 2020).

This reliance is illustrated by the dependency rate, which shows the extent to which an economy relies upon imports in order to meet its energy needs. In 2019, the EU's dependency rate equated to 60.5 %, which means that more than half of the EU's energy needs were met by net imports. This is a general increase from 2000, when the EU was for 56% reliant on energy imports (Eurostat, 2022). This is the result of a steady increase of third countries' imports in tandem with a declining EU energy production over the last two decades. As their offshore reserves in the North Sea grow exhausted, the two primary gas producing nations in the EU, i.e. the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, have suffered substantial drops in output. At the same time, Russia has become the leading supplier of energy to the EU and accounts for around 30%

of oil imports, and close to 40 % of natural gas and hard coal imports. Together with Norway and Algeria, it is responsible for almost 75 % of EU gas imports (Anghel et al., 2020). The high strategic and security value of the European energy sector does not align with the fact that the EU and all its MS are net importers of energy (Ryon, 2020). These asymmetric dependencies in a sector as strategic as energy, could potentially create a harmful situation for ESA, weakening its capacity to freely take political decisions and act on them (Lippert, von Ondarza, & Perthes, 2019).

Due to this heavy reliance on energy imports, autonomy cannot be a goal in itself. High dependence on energy imports does not necessarily constitute a problem for ESA. More importantly, EU MS must be able to obtain energy imports at market rates from a diverse variety of sources, reducing their reliance on a single source (Anghel et al., 2020). Thus, ESA is about diversifying the roots, the suppliers and also the sources of energy in a way that the EU is not impacted in its overall security of supply by geopolitical problems created by one big supplier (Borchardt, personal communication, 28 March 2022). Additionally, in diversifying its energy suppliers, the EU would make itself less dependent on one single country, thus allowing itself to make decisions, freely and independently (Botenga, personal communication, 29 March 2022). Similarly, prices are an important facet to look at when talking about ESA, as there is a political sensitivity to energy costs. European electricity prices are being set by the gas price. As a result, even if the EU were to reduce its gas dependencies, geopolitical developments affecting gas prices could still create political effects in the EU and influence its strategic autonomy (interviewee 5, personal communication, 14 April 2022).

Rather than self-sufficiency, ESA is about having the means and tools to reduce external dependencies in a strategic sector like energy. The more reliant the EU is on external actors, the more vulnerable and powerless it is to uphold its interests and promote its values (Anghel, 2020). According to Westphal (2021), strategic energy autonomy can thus be defined as a situation in which sufficient, reliable, and inexpensive energy supplies and services are given by a variety of suppliers in a way that does not conflict with or threaten a states' values, interests or foreign policy goals. ESA also involves having a system in place that allows the EU to effortlessly switch from one supplier or one source to another. This presupposes having the necessary infrastructure in place so that energy can flow freely to there where it is needed (Borchardt, personal communication, 28 March, 2022; Pietras, personal communication, 31 March 2022). All of this necessitates a technically sound and robust energy system that is durable in crises and protected against political influence (Westphal, 2021).

5. European Energy Policy

European energy policy has been considered as a special case of Europeanization, due to its tardy and patchy development as well as its important but highly contested external dimension. Divergent energy pathways across MS and the sensitivity of this policy domain have militated against a unified European energy policy (Solorio & Bocquillon, 2017). Since the mid-2000s cooperation in this policy area has picked up speed, leading to the adoption of the Energy Union, which is considered to be the most ambitious energy initiative since the European Coal and Steel Community (Solorio & Bocquillon, 2017). Today, there is a comprehensive body of legislative documents that address the security, economic, environmental and climate aspects of energy policy (Vavrek & Chovancova, 2020). To look into the factors which influenced strategic autonomy in European energy policy, this chapter will provide a historical overview of how EU energy policy has evolved over the years, along with the policy- and decision-making concerns that came with it.

5.1 Early beginnings

Energy marked the starting point of European integration, with the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951 (Natorski & Surrallés, 2008). Proposed by Robert Schuman, the ECSC was established with the decision to pool the production of the most important source of energy at the time by creating a common market for coal and steel. The objective was to make another war between France and Germany materially impossible and to ensure the modernization and profitable development of the European coal and steel industries. Additionally, strategic and military concerns were also part of the equation, at a time when the Cold War was beginning to heat up (Planete Energies, 2016). By collectively controlling the two commodities which were essential for warfare and reconstruction, these countries created a common political interest and improved cooperation (Langsdorf, 2011).

With the establishment of the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) six years later, yet another early institution of European cooperation was energy based (Langsdorf, 2011). In the aftermath of the in 1956 Suez Crisis, which threatened to cut off oil supplies, the goal was to increase Europe's energy independence and ensure the supply of raw materials (Planete Energies, 2016). The EURATOM treaty was meant to create favorable conditions for the formation and growth of the European nuclear industries and to establish a special market for nuclear power and fissile materials within the community. For both the ECSC as EURATOM,

the competitiveness frame was crucial, although they also served to establish peaceful cooperation among European MS after WWII (Knodt, 2018).

Despite these early beginnings, the European Community's (EC) competence to act was limited in the first decades of European integration. The 1960s were characterized by a focus on the nation state level and over the following years, European integration in the field of energy policy did not develop too smoothly. Not only did the importance of coal and therefore the ECSC diminish, but the differences in energy mixes, transport routes or energy market structures led to opposing interests of MS, hindering energy policy cooperation. In the following years, some attempts were made, and several smaller steps were taken to formalize European energy policy, but many of the more ambitious plans of the European Commission for a coherent policy often failed in the face of opposition from MS (Langsdorf, 2011).

Nonetheless, a push towards energy cooperation was triggered by the oil crises in 1973-1974. The 1973 oil crisis and consequent OPEC oil embargo undermined the European Community's economy and put Western European countries' economic models at risk. The oil crisis pushed the leaders of the EC to make strategic decisions around energy supplies and to examine low energy technologies and alternative energy sources (Azimov, 2021). Consequently, the Council Resolution of 17 September 1974 concerning a new energy policy strategy for the Community was passed, which was shortly after enhanced with energy goals for 1985 (Langsdorf, 2011). With this, the Council emphasized the added value of close coordination among MS to tackle energy problems, but also adopted guidelines concerning energy supply and energy demand. The resolution focused on the importance of energy-efficiency, energy security, diversification of energy supplies and the development and production of nuclear energy, hydrocarbon and solid fuels (Council of the European Communities, 1974). This marked the beginning of a slow development of a European Energy Policy in the field of hydrocarbons, although this policy would only embrace non-legally binding guidelines and recommendations until the late 1980s (Natorski & Surrallés, 2008).

The oil supply shortage prompted an interpretation of European energy policy as a problem of the security of supply, which was added to the agenda alongside the competitiveness frame (Knodt, 2018). However, despite energy security being high on the European agenda, it remained difficult to forge and implement common energy policy at a union level. As national interest and policies varied, the EU members struggled to agree on common priorities and strategies (Azimov, 2021).

5.2 The Single European Act

The first remarkable leap forward in the process of developing a European Energy Policy was achieved with the Internal Market reforms introduced by the 'Single European Act' of 1987, under the leadership of Jacques Delors, president of the European Commission (Natorski & Surrallés, 2008; Planete Energies, 2016). The goal was to complete the internal market by removing obstacles to the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people (Conference of the Representatives of the Governments of the MS, 1987). As a result, the EU adopted a series of Directives leading to the integration of energy markets at the beginning of the 1990s (Natorski & Surrallés, 2008). These became known as the First Liberalization Directives or the First Energy Package (Ciucci, 2021). The main objective of the Commission was to improve security of supply, reduce costs and improve competitiveness of the European industry (Commission of the European Communities, 1998). Despite this having a big impact on European energy policy, the incentive was not to devise an energy policy, but rather to adapt the general rules of a single market (Planete Energies, 2016).

This tendency to focus on economic objectives was underlined when the Commission failed in their attempt to include a separate energy chapter into the "Treaty of Maastricht" in 1992 (Langsdorf, 2011). The European Commission proposed the inclusion of an entire chapter in the Treaty of the European Union (TFUE) on a 'Common Energy Policy,' pursuing security of supply in the EU; the stability of the energy market; progress towards the internal energy market; adoption of measures to be taken for all energy sources in the event of a crisis; and a high degree of environmental protection (Natorski & Surrallés, 2008). However, several MS, and especially those that had fairly high energy reserves, vetoed this proposal as they did not want to give away autonomy in this field (Langsdorf, 2011). Although the EU wished to pursue a common energy policy, MS preferred bilateral negotiations to ensure energy supply in accordance with their national interests and depending on their geostrategic needs (Azimov, 2021).

During these years, the issue of environmental protection became more prominent in Europe. As climate change came strong on the global agenda the 90s, a growing number of policy makers were convinced that energy and climate issues could not be solved on the nation state level, leading the European Union to take a leading role in the fight against climate change, creating a common goal (Langsdorf, 2011). Consequently, in 1994, the Commission introduced a Green Paper in which, for the first time, the triangle of energy frames was spelled out

explicitly, starting with overall competitiveness, followed by security of supply and environment. The sustainability frame was particularly promoted by the Parliament, while the council was more concerned with the completion of the internal market and the security of supply. The internal market and competitiveness were prioritized, while environmental protection was more of a secondary goal, interlinked with the competitiveness frame. Nonetheless, the sustainability frame secured a permanent place in the European discourses since then (Knodt, 2018).

5.3 Energy crises and the Hampton Court

By the year 2000, the EU's external import dependency rate had increased up to 50%. At the time, the EU imported 45% of oil from the Middle East, and 40 % of its natural gas from Russia. The European Commission responded to this increasing dependency on external energy in a Green Paper on energy security. In it, the Commission launched a discussion on energy security, emphasizing the importance of the security frame for European energy policy. However, the Council and European Parliament were unwilling to see the issue in the same way. This was reflected in the debate on a Commission proposal in 2002 on the strengthened stock regulation to secure oil and gas supplies. MS and parliamentarians criticized the Commission's plan, arguing that there was a minimal danger of supply interruptions. As a result, the proposal of the Commission was rejected by both the Council and the European Parliament (Knodt, 2018).

However, the EU entered a new crucial stage in energy policy during the informal European Council meeting at Hampton Court in 2005, when MS launched new initiatives on energy policy and the internal energy market (Azimov, 2021). A coordinated European energy policy remained largely underdeveloped in the years preceding the Hampton Court summit, as energy was only brought to the attention of EU leaders when it was presented as a necessary component for completing other initiatives, especially the internal market. In this context, it was the United Kingdom in particular that remained a fierce critic of a common approach to energy. They were cautious of supranational intervention in the domestic energy market since the country was mostly self-sufficient in oil and gas. Nevertheless, this firm stance began to soften as concern arose over decreasing offshore reserves and growing dependence on imports. As a result, European leaders agreed for the first time at Hampton Court not simply to complete the internal energy market, but also to develop a long-term, comprehensive energy policy for Europe (Thaler, 2016).

This was formalized in 2006 in the Commission's Green paper: "A European Strategy for Sustainable, Competitive and Secure Energy". This report described the state of European energy markets as well as the actions required to achieve fully competitive energy markets. It outlined the advantages of flexible energy markets, such as security of supply and lower pricing. It also encouraged the development of interconnections, the establishment of efficient legislative and regulatory frameworks, and the enforcement of EU-wide competition rules. Additionally, the rapport put emphasis on import dependencies and diversification of the energy mix and proposed the need for a coherent external energy policy to enable Europe to play a more effective international role in tackling common problems with energy partners worldwide (Commission of the European Communities, 2006). The green paper also introduced the strategic EU energy review, intended to offer a clear European Framework for national decisions on the energy mix to avoid supply crises and to ensure the energy security of the EU (Knodt, 2018).

These developments towards a more autonomous and strategic energy policy took place in a context of crisis-driven EU policy making. Between 2005 and 2007 the EU's political agenda prominently featured debates over energy security, as a conjunction of political and economic factors critically affected the security of supply in most EU MS (Natorski & Surrallés, 2008). These debates started primarily after the accessions of the Central and Eastern European MS to the EU, who were strongly dependent on Russian gas (Knodt, Ringel, & Müller, 2020). After the 2004 enlargement, the gas relationship with Russia became very divisive within the EU. Central and eastern EU MS felt isolated from more diversified Western markets. As Russia appeared increasingly threatening, they felt that Western European gas companies that were major clients and partners of Gazprom were betraying the European solidarity (Noël, 2019). These tensions were further exacerbated by the oil and gas disputes between Belarus-Russia in 2007 and between Ukraine-Russia in 2006 and 2008 (Knodt, Ringel, & Müller, 2020). As a consequence, and despite earlier claims from MS and the European Parliament, the EU had to face the "unlikely" scenario of potential interruptions of supply (Knodt, 2018). Although the Russian-Ukrainian gas dispute was resolved after several days with EU mediation, it revealed the need for a common energy policy within the EU (Azimov, 2021).

In response to these developments, a wide range of actors called for the establishment of a "Common Energy Policy", based on a fully operational Internal Energy Market and equipped with an external dimension, enabling the EU to speak with one voice in the world. The EU institutions and even MS put forward their proposals for a more integrated energy policy and

made a case for the development of an external dimension of the European Energy Policy in order to enhance the external security of energy supplies to the EU. In this regard, the European Parliament even spoke in favor of a 'Common foreign energy policy strategy'. This was essentially a recognition of the fact that energy supply could not be dealt with only within the market sphere, but also needed a strategic, foreign policy approach, enabling the EU to maintain a unitary position in international energy relations (Natorski & Surrallés, 2008).

However, the outcomes of this debate fell short of the objectives. The framing of energy as a security issue did not attract enough support for ground-breaking steps to address what was widely recognized as a unique and extremely dangerous situation. Surprisingly, this widespread agreement on the need for a more integrated energy strategy coincided with the EU Member States' reinforced tendency of affirming their respective national energy policies. Natorski and Surrallés (2008) argue that the framing of energy as a security problem paradoxically contributed to the further legitimization of EU MS' unwillingness to cede energy sovereignty. The bilateral efforts of MS to guarantee their energy supplies prompted huge intra-EU tensions and mutual allegations of lack of solidarity (Natorski & Surrallés, 2008).

Additionally, Borchardt (personal communication, 28 March 2022) claims that the EU's reaction wasn't more robust, as it was not considered to be necessary due to the long-standing relationships and long-terms contracts with Russia on gas deliveries at the time. This is in line with Umbach's (2020) long-standing assumptions underlying European energy policies. According to him, it was assumed that Russia's need to export its oil and gas to the European market led to an interdependence that impeded the instrumentalization of Russian energy policy as a factor of foreign policy. Additionally, the EU and its MS thought that, despite these problems, Russia would continue to prove to be a reliable energy partner for Europe. Although the Russian cutbacks in gas deliveries did make EU MS question these long-standing assumptions (Umbach, 2010), ultimately nothing much was done about it.

5.4 The Lisbon Treaty

It wasn't until March 2007 that EU heads of state and governments endorsed the first "EU energy action plan", based on the Commission's Communication "An energy policy for Europe" (Council of the European Union, 2007). In the Communication, the Commission was aware of the political and economic risks of dependencies on a small number of third countries. The commission argued that the mechanisms to ensure solidarity between MS in the event of an energy crisis were not yet in place and reminded MS of the importance of diversifying

sources, suppliers, transport routes and transport methods. Linked to the security frame, the communication also stressed the need to focus on the external dimension of the EU's energy policy, highlighting relations with Russia, Central Asia, Africa and the BIC countries (Knodt, 2018). This Communication clearly was the result of the combination of growing global energy demand, declining European energy production, dependence on Russian energy sources, increasing energy prices, threats to energy pipelines, and the need for ensuring energy security (Azimov, 2021).

The Action Plan marked the beginning of a more integrated European energy policy. The plan laid out the three major challenges for European energy policy, which form the core of the common energy policy till today: sustainability, security of supply, and competitiveness (Langsdorf, 2011). The initial stage was a push regarding crisis-response mechanisms based on cooperation, effective diversification of energy sources as well as prevention of possible future energy crisis (Azimov, 2021). Thus, the Commission tried to handle the crisis-situation with Russia by building a more resilient energy system, through strengthening the EU's security of supply mechanisms (Borchardt, personal communication, 28 March 2020).

The Action Plan was complemented with changes in EU legislation shortly afterwards, by including a title on energy in the Lisbon Treaty (Langsdorf, 2011). Article 194 of the TFUE on energy policy refers to the "functioning of the internal market", but also lists some innovations concerning energy, i.e. "*ensure the functioning of the energy market; ensure security of energy supply in the Union; promote energy efficiency and energy saving and the development of new and renewable forms of energy; promote the interconnection of energy networks*". The Lisbon Treaty made energy policy a shared competence between the European Union and MS, based on the ordinary legislative procedure. The most innovative point refers to ensuring energy security in the EU, which was traditionally the territory of MS (Langsdorf, 2011). However, article 194 is a careful balancing act between EU-level policymaking and the preservation of national sovereignty (Solorio & Bocquillon, 2017). It maintained each Member's right to choose between different energy sources, to determine the conditions for exploiting them and to establish the general structure of its energy supply (art. 194.2 TFEU). As a result, MS remain sovereign in many decisive areas of energy policy. This is still reflected in the major differences in the energy mix in MS and varying views with regard to nuclear energy (Planete Energies, 2016). Consequently, the extent of coordination and integration of energy policy at EU level is not that much a matter of formal competence, but the result of a constant tug-of-war between the Commission and the Parliament on one hand and topic-dependent majorities in the Council

on the other (Solorio & Bocquillon, 2017). Apart from the new energy title, the Lisbon Treaty maintained status quo of the use of internal market and environment regulations as sources for energy policies (Langsdorf, 2011).

5.5 Third Energy Package

Following requests of the Council in 2007, the Commission drafted a list of proposals, among them the third "Internal Energy Market Package" (Langsdorf, 2011). This energy package aimed at improving the functioning of the internal energy market and resolving certain structural problems (Anghel et al, 2020). The Third Energy Package was ultimately adopted in 2009 for the period 2009-2014, as a way to further liberalize the internal electricity and gas markets and providing the cornerstone for the implementation of an internal energy market (Ciucci, 2021). Since the third EU energy package was adopted, MS have connected their energy markets more closely and built some of the infrastructure needed to achieve deeper interconnection. This reduced their dependence on a single supply source for their gas or electricity and allowed the EU to mitigate the negative consequences of another supply disruption more effectively, for example through reverse gas flows (Anghel et al, 2020).

The Third Energy Package tried to increase competitiveness and to create conditions that promoted investment, diversity, and security of supply. However, according to the Commission (2008), complementary measures were needed to attain all three underlying objectives of the EU's energy policy, i.e. sustainability, competitiveness, and security of supply. Political incidents in supplier and transit countries, accidents or natural disasters, and the impacts of climate change, reminded the EU of the vulnerability of its immediate energy supply. Given these global developments, the EU wanted to take action to secure its energy future and to protect its essential energy interests. The EU's primary priority in this respect was to ensure the adoption and implementation of the 20-20-20 package (Commission of the European Communities, 2008). This package consisted of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20% compared to 1990 levels, increasing the share of renewable energy use to 20%, and improving energy efficiency by 20 % by 2020 (EEA, 2021). To achieve this, the European Commission publicized a review of its strategy in the field of energy at the end of 2008, called the "Energy Security and Solidarity Action Plan" (Azimov, 2021). This action plan focused on energy efficiency; external energy relations; oil and gas stocks and crisis response mechanisms; the use of EU indigenous energy resources; and emphasized the need to introduce significant changes

to the energy infrastructure to increase interconnectedness and to diversify energy supplies (Commission of the European Communities, 2008).

5.6 The European Energy Union

The approval of the Energy Union by the MS in the European Council in March 2015 was a substantial step towards European energy integration. At one hand, the Energy Union was regarded as a tool to provide longer-term policy coherence between energy and climate policies. On the other hand, in the aftermath of the 2014 Ukraine crisis, energy had once again become a policy area requiring not only technical expertise but also a comprehensive, political and strategic approach (Solorio & Bocquillon, 2017). Indeed, one of the primary reasons for the creation of the Energy Union was, once again, the understanding of European states' strong dependence on Russian supplies of energy raw materials (Vavrek & Chovancova, 2020). In April 2014, following the crisis in Ukraine and the Russian intervention in Crimea, the then-Prime Minister of Poland, Donald Tusk, called for the creation of an Energy Union to combat Europe's energy dependence on Russia and return the European project to its roots (Herranz-Surrallés, Solorio, & Fairbrass, 2020). He argued that this dependence made the EU weak. Much of the emphasis of Tusk's project involved the security of supply in the gas sector (Vavrek & Chovancova, 2020).

In this context, the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, made the Energy Union a top priority on his agenda, including negotiating powers with third countries, as proposed by Tusk and broadening the range of objectives to include a greater role for renewable energy (Herranz-Surrallés, Solorio, & Fairbrass, 2020). The European Commission suggested developing a uniform EU energy strategy with internal (market and environmental) and external (import dependence) dimensions (Vavrek & Chovancova, 2020). In Februari 2015, the European Commission unveiled its "Framework Strategy for a Resilient Energy Union with a Forward-Looking Climate Change Policy" as part of the Energy Union Package. The Commission's proposal was an attempt to unify European energy policy and overcome fragmentation in national regulatory energy frameworks. It had the ambition to overcome the long-standing challenge of a fragmented European energy system characterized by uncoordinated national policies and states (Szulecki et al, 2016; European Commission, 2015; Vavrek & Chovancova, 2020).

Other elements of the package were a Communication on electricity interconnections, and on the EU's contribution to the international climate change negotiations (Ciucci, 2021). Thus,

despite energy security being the original intention of the Energy Union, it is only one of the building blocks of the final Energy Union Package, covering a whole spectrum of energy topics such as the internal energy market, energy efficiency, decarbonization of the economy and research, innovation and competitiveness (Gurzu, 2015; European Commission, 2015; Szulecki et al, 2016; Vavrek & Chovancova, 2020).

Though the Commission's goals were similar to Tusk's plan in several aspects, there were some notable differences. Like Tusk's idea, the Commission Communication included stronger solidarity mechanisms, diversification and increasing internal production, but it also aligned the Energy Union with the 2030 Framework. In contradiction to what Tusk claimed, the Energy Union Package stated that diversification of supply first means looking for different energy sources, and only then alternate providers or supply channels. This is consistent with the commission's emphasis on renewables, which would increase import independence (Szulecki et al, 2016).

How was the proposal received by the legislative institutions? The European Parliament had previously urged for the establishment of a European Energy Community (Erbach, 2015). Consequently, it welcomed the Commission's proposal for an Energy Union (Committee on Industry, Research, and Energy, 2015). This is compatible with the parliament's broader support for European cooperation, which the Energy Union underlines (Berendsen, personal communication, 5 May 2022).

On 19 March 2015, the European Council convened to examine the Energy Union Package, with Tusk serving as President of the European Council. The Council's conclusions were almost entirely concerned with the security of supply as well as the possibility of recourse to indigenous resources along with sustainable low carbon technology. Additionally, Member State sovereignty over energy policy was reiterated twice. Szulecki et al. (2016) argue that this disagreement between the Commission's plan and the Council's findings illustrates the so called 'competitive cooperation' between the two institutions. The European Council pursued agenda setting via a high politics method, reminding people that the friction between a pan-European strategy and national energy politics remain, and that the EU heads of states will play a key role in establishing the Energy Union (Szulecki at al., 2016).

According to Borchardt, the Energy Union initiative did succeed this time, because it was more of a technically driven exercise to see how to manage suppliers, roots, and sources of energy,

rather than a political exercise. In his view, the Energy Union was a second step toward ensuring energy security, delving deeper into concrete measures such as infrastructure and LNG alternatives, while still not questioning the supply from Russia (Borchardt, personal communication, 28 March 2022). This is corroborated by Riley (2015), who claims that the EU's key energy security risk, i.e. the supply threat from Russia and Gazprom, was not prioritized amid the Commissions' broader objectives (Riley, 2015).

Despite it being called the "*most significant policy idea that seeks to reform European energy governance, policy and regional cooperation*" (Szulecki at al., 2016, p. 1), the Energy Union has not led to any additional transfers of competence from the MS to the EU level or the development of new institutions. On the contrary, in some dimensions of EU energy policy the efforts have been in the opposite direction, as MS strive to retain or re-claim authority (Herranz-Surrallés, Solorio, & Fairbrass, 2020). Moreover, full implementation of the Energy Union is in contradiction with the energy policies of some MS, mainly the big players (Zajączkowska, 2018). However, notwithstanding the absence of new formal institutions or acts to delegate powers, the development of the Energy Union resulted in the first comprehensive renegotiation of capacities, expectations, and roles in the broad area of energy policy after the formal competence was granted to the EU (Herranz-Surrallés, Solorio, & Fairbrass, 2020).

5.7 Current state of Affairs

Since President Ursula von der Leyen took office at the end of 2019, the Commission has implemented a number of key clean energy transition initiatives. The European Green Deal was the pivotal initiative in this respect (Simson, 2022). The current EU energy policy framework is based on the Clean Energy for All Europeans package, which seeks to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 by promoting a shift away from fossil fuels and toward cleaner energy (Wach, Głodowska, Maciejewski, & Sieja, 2021). The package was adopted to help to decarbonize the EU's energy system in line with the European Green Deal objectives and it identified a new comprehensive strategy, representing a significant step in implementing the Energy Union strategy (European Commission, n.d.). The package consists of eight legislatives and is mainly focused on energy efficiency, reduced energy consumption and CO_2 emissions, increasing renewable energy, establishing integrated 10-year national energy and climate plans, and designing a modern and more flexible electricity market (Wach et al., 2021). Meeting this climate ambition would enable the EU to reduce the share of conventional energy sources, which continue to be the primary source of external dependency in the energy sector. As a

consequence, the EU would be able to uphold its Paris Agreement commitments while also acting more autonomously and protecting its interests and values across the world (Anghel et al, 2020).

Energy is now a cross-sectoral policy domain and area of competence, ranging from EU exclusive competence (competition policy) to shared competence (climate policy, single market), and intergovernmental domains (security of supply), with both an internal and external dimension (Herranz-Surrallés, Solorio, & Fairbrass, 2020). Current energy policy still aims to define, ensure and implement three long-term objectives, i.e. security of supply, sustainability, and maintaining the EU's international competitiveness. However, achieving all three objectives at the same time is impossible. In Europe, there is a tremendous need for energy. Without new supply breakthroughs, increased energy demand will result in higher and more regulated prices in the long run, endangering the EU's energy security. Russia meets the bulk of the EU's energy demands, allowing Moscow to use this strategic advantage as a political weapon in a variety of situations. Furthermore, government-regulated investment policy influences the extent and effectiveness of prospective future systems. Some nations' technologies still do not reach modern standards and will take many years to improve due to physical conditions, economic instability, and (lack of) investments (Azimov, 2021).

6. Patterns in Energy Policymaking

At the beginning, the priorities of European energy policy were focused primarily on energy security, reducing energy dependency, and the liberalization of the energy market. Recently, EU energy policy has comprised rules concerning energy sources, technology and innovation, renewables, energy efficiency, a single market for gas and electricity, energy dependence, energy infrastructure and the environmental issues of energy production, consumption and transit (Herranz-Surrallés, Solorio, & Fairbrass, 2020). Several trends can be observed from the preceding historical overview, and further supported by the interviews. This is elaborated on more in depth in the following sections.

6.1 Competition

The advancement of common energy policies historically came via economic routes (Langsdorf, 2011). An important factor for decisions in Parliament and the Commission has been competition and liberalization, thereby leaving as much as possible to the market (Berendsen, personal communication, 5 May 2022). The European Commission has adopted this market-based approach, believing that MS should to be able to obtain energy imports at market rates from a diverse variety of potential suppliers, reducing their dependence on a single supplier and thus becoming more strategically autonomous. This is currently the case for oil and coal supplies, which are bought at competitive prices based on international benchmarks from a variety of third countries, and where supply security is not a particular concern for the EU (Anghel et al., 2020). For gas and electricity, however, this liberalization is more difficult, mainly because there is a need for specific infrastructure, such as pipelines, which is not up to par in all MS. This technical aspect can render it difficult for the EU to reach strategic autonomy (Pietras, personal communication, 31 March 2022).

Despite the perceived benefits of liberalization, it also poses some problems. The market-based approach does not incentivize strategic autonomy (Pietras, personal communication, 31 March 2022) and many strategic interests, including in energy and climate policy, are hindered by vested interest actors such as energy giants (Botenga, personal communication, 29 March 2022). Up until 2005-2006, energy policies in EU MS were frequently left to the industry, whose business interests are primarily guided by short-term economic benefits. At the same time, mid- and long-term national interests of energy supply security were being neglected by both energy companies and national governments, as there was no single actor that would

assume overall responsibility for the security of gas supply. As a consequence, although energy security had forced its way up the European energy and foreign policy agendas by 2007, the EU MS largely failed to create a coherent European energy security strategy. Though EU MS increasingly recognized the need to envisage a clear response to the growing risks of oil and gas dependency over time, they followed narrow-minded national interests by supporting their national energy champions at the expense of other EU MS and the EU's ''Energy Action Plan'' (Umbach, 2010).

This trend has also been observed more recently by several actors in the field. With the liberalization, private economic operators started to realize on market conditions. The commission assumed that when the market would be vibrant and competition relatively strong, there would always be someone willing to deliver, and consequently the prices of the gas would go down. Eventually, the liberalization of the market has succeeded in reducing energy prices, but the long-term aspect of security of supply was lost in the EU (Pietras, personal communication, 31 March 2022). The production, supply and import of energy is now mainly decided by the market, with prices being a very important stimulant (Berendsen, personal communication, 5 May 2022).

Like Umbach, Botenga (personal communication, 29 March 2022) claims that the contradiction of short-term business interests and long-term solutions, ultimately leads to sub-optimal solutions in energy policy. Since the fundamental objective of the EU was to put the competitiveness of companies first and not to affect companies' profit margins, certain desirable measures were not taken. This can be illustrated with energy relations with Russia. Russian gas was the cheapest and easy to import through the existing pipelines. Since all went well in economic terms, the EU did not act too much on this dependency, despite prior problems with Russia (Berendsen, personal communication, 5 May 2022).

6.2 Security of Supply

Since the Lisbon Treaty, security of supply became an EU level competence, and the principle of solidarity and gas sharing in case of an emergency has become an integral part of the EU policy framework. Since the third EU energy package was adopted in 2009, MS have connected their energy markets more closely and built some of the infrastructure needed to achieve deeper interconnection. This, along with reverse flow capacity, reduced the risks of physical interruption of supplies and their dependence on a single supply source for their gas or

electricity. Furthermore, MS are building more terminals to import liquefied natural gas (LNG) from a range of third countries, and are improving their gas storage capacity, in line with the 2016 EU strategy. LNG gives the EU a better negotiating position with pipeline suppliers, because it has an alternative source of supply. Additionally, the European Commission has gained a growing role in scrutinizing energy supply contracts between MS and third countries to ensure their compatibility with the EU single market (Anghel et al., 2020). With the Energy Union, the EU has imposed the Risk Preparedness Regulation, which introduces important rules for the cooperation between MS with the aim to prevent, prepare for, and manage electricity disruptions. It also establishes common provisions for risk assessment, risk preparedness plans, managing electricity crises, evaluation and monitoring (ACER, 2021).

As mentioned before, oil and coal supplies are bought at competitive rates based on international benchmarks from a variety of other countries, due to which there are no particular concerns for the security of supply in these sources. In terms of gas, however, concerns regarding the security of gas supply of MS has traditionally grown due to external shocks. Energy security has been heavily impacted in the past by the difficult relations between Russia and its neighboring countries, as well as political instability in supplier and transit countries, the dependence of EU MS on few external suppliers, and depleting domestic resources. Because EU countries access their gas from different suppliers and supply routes, they are exposed to different degrees of risk (Thaler, 2016; Anghel et al., 2020).

This problem also has a geographical dimension, with some countries in eastern and south-eastern Europe being more dependent on Russian pipeline supplies, whereas northern and western Europe tend to have more diversified supply routes and countries. Because MS have very different political and economic relations with Russia, an effective EU response to security of energy supply risks is hampered. Some see potential benefit in maintaining political dialogue and stable economic relations and may additionally see this as a way to ensure reliable energy supplies. Other countries favor a different approach by supporting a more distant economic relationship and taking active steps to reduce their energy dependence. Reconciling these positions is necessary if the EU wants to take a clear strategic position on the geopolitical dimensions of its energy policies (Anghel et al., 2020).

6.3 Sustainability

Climate and environmental challenges, as well as the recent ambitions to decarbonize the EU economy and focus on sustainability, have additionally influenced ESA in energy policy (Franza, van der Linde, & Stapersma, 2018). Strategic autonomy and climate goals have become almost inseparable. It has prompted discussions about the phasing out of gas (Borchardt, personal communication, 28 March 2022), the increase of efficiency and the use of alternative sustainable energy sources. Moreover, green energy contributes to security of supply and is a gradual way to achieve greater independence from third countries (Pietras, personal communication, 31 March 2022; Simons, personal communication, 30 March 2022).

In terms of developing renewable energy technologies, the EU is already a world leader. To maintain global leadership in clean energy and ensure strategic autonomy, the EU should tighten control over its technologies and prevent production from shifting to third countries. A more active EU industrial policy may be required to ensure that the full value of these technologies is realized and that the EU does not become completely reliant on third-country technologies and production in these emerging and critical sectors (Anghel et al., 2020).

6.4 Member State Incoherency

These three strands of the EU's energy policy, i.e. competition, security of supply and sustainability, require increased coordination. However, rather than forming a common European energy policy, they form a hybrid of coexisting elements (Thaler, 2016). Because of very different national situations, divergent decisions are being taken by national politicians (Pietras, personal communication, 31 March 2022). As a result, this has led to a mixture of different energy technology combinations and import dependencies (Franza, van der Linde, & Stapersma, 2018). To illustrate, France's energy policy is fundamentally determined by nuclear energy and the country is mainly focused on competitiveness and sustainability. The de-politicization and commercialization of energy relations was an important part of German energy policy for decades, especially towards Russia. The Polish economy is dominated by coal, mostly from indigenous sources. The market paradigm is not dominant in Poland, where energy is seen as a domain of politics and security rather than policy (Szulecki et al., 2016).

Despite the benefits of a common approach, some EU MS have repeatedly hindered supranational initiatives (Thaler, 2016). The import dependence of Eastern MS on oil and gas supplies from Russia plays a major role in this (Franza, van der Linde, & Stapersma, 2018).

Eastern MS favor common EU action to overcome dependence on Russia, while larger MS prefer an individual policies for the security of supply based on their domestic needs (Thaler, 2016). Additionally, as East Europe's economies are not as wealthy and are more dependent on coal, and renewable energy sources are not very popular, these countries generally favor liberalizing the energy market to strengthen their energy security, rather than focus on the sustainability strand of EU energy policy (Wach et al., 2021). Even in Eurelectric, these enormous differences between Western and Eastern European countries can be observed, making a comprehensive common EU policy difficult (interviewee 4, personal communication, 6 April 2022).

It thus becomes clear that energy policy is one of the most sensitive areas of Europeanization. In this domain, the domestic interests of individual countries regularly clash with the ambitions of the EU as a whole (Wach et al., 2021). Different national interests dictate domestic policy decisions and also influence choices made at EU level (Franza, van der Linde, & Stapersma, 2018; Pietras, personal communication, 31 March 2022). Consequently, energy policy continues to be dominated by national policies and remains within the control of MS although a hesitant supranational turn has been visible, with EU institutions playing an increasing role following the Lisbon treaty (Szulecki et al., 2016). Nonetheless, Zajączkowska (2018) claims that an increasing number of EU countries are pursuing energy policy primarily based on their national policies, due to the existing divergences of the socio-economic interests of individual MS, and shaped by geographical location, national legacies and long-standing political economic relations with external energy suppliers (Zajączkowska, 2018; Franza, van der Linde, & Stapersma, 2018; Wach et al., 2021; Botenga, personal communication, 29 March 2022). The different MS therefore view European energy policy from their national policy and perspective (Botenga, personal communication, 29 March 2022). This often makes the attempt to reach a consensus impossible (Zajączkowska, 2018).

6.5 Exogenous factors and Crisis-Driven EU policy making

The EU and its MS generally have not used energy as a power political system, unlike Russia and the US (Simons, personal communication, 30 March 2022). Russia has repeatedly used energy as a strategic tool and a political weapon in numerous conflicts over the past decades (Azimov, 2021). In this context, the EUs policy approach towards Russia has been at best naïve (Borchardt, personal communication, 28 March 2022; Berendsen, personal communication, 5 May 2022; Interviewee 4, 6 April 2022; Interviewee 5, personal communication, 14 April

2022). At one hand, cheap gas supply from Russia contributed to soft positioning against Russia (Simons, personal communication, 30 March 2022; Berendsen, personal communication, 5 May 2022). On the other hand, Europe expected Russia to adopt European approaches to liberalization and competition. The Europeans have urged that Russia allows third-party access to its pipelines and allows for flexibility in upstream investment within Russia. This has not only been naïve and ineffective, but by focusing on telling Russia how to handle its domestic energy market, the EU neglected to address the steps that would enhance its own market and hence its negotiating power (Franza, van der Linde, & Stapersma, 2018).

In the past, the US has frequently urged Europe to become less reliant on Russian gas. However, it should not be assumed that this was done solely for altruistic reasons, as the US primarily encouraged the EU to import LNG, which is obtained in the US through fracking. In US energy policy, these financial and economic factors for export were decisive (Simons, personal communication, 30 March 2022).

Several authors and interviewees also pointed to the fact that European energy policymaking has often been a reaction to single events and geopolitical developments (Franza, van der Linde, & Stapersma, 2018; Pietras, personal communication, 31 March 2022; Berendsen, personal communication, 5 May 2022). In the recent past, a number of events have shaped European energy policy both internally as externally, such as the oil crises of the 1970s, conflicts in the Middle East, the gas crises in the 2000s between Russia and Ukraine and the Annexation of the Crimea (Franza, van der Linde, & Stapersma, 2018; Pietras, personal communication, 31 March 2022; Simson, 2022). When crises occurred, there was plenty of willingness to move forward. However, when the intensity of the crises diminishes or the crisis was of short duration, subsequently the willingness and determination for a radical solution also diminished (Pietras, personal communication, 31 March 2022).

Furthermore, the global demand for urgent action on climate change as well as the EU's ambition to be a global leader, further urged the need for coordinated energy action. Moreover, due to international competitiveness pressures, the completion of the internal energy market became a priority for the EU. Collectively, these factors enabled a "supranational turn" in energy policy. As a result, the EU institutions have gradually gained a central role in securing energy supply, which has traditionally been a closely guarded sphere of state sovereignty (Herranz-Surrallés, Solorio, & Fairbrass, 2020).

7. Conclusion

This master dissertation sought to provide an answer to the research question: "What are enabling and restraining factors for strategic autonomy in EU energy policy?". More concretely, to objective of the paper was to conduct an explorative study into the parameters that shape strategic autonomy in EU energy policy. It aimed at providing a historical overview of past energy policy in the European Union, to identify the general patterns that impeded or facilitated strategic autonomy in this policy domain. The recent global energy crisis has highlighted the EU's vulnerability in the energy sector and this has now become increasingly relevant, due to the 2022 invasion of Russia in the Ukraine, in which energy is being used as a strategic weapon. Furthermore, few studies have linked strategic autonomy and energy policy, as strategic autonomy literature traditionally focuses on defense issues. Based on a qualitative study of both deskresearch and elite interviews, the data suggest that both internal and external factors enabled and hindered strategic autonomy in European energy policy. This is in line with previous findings on strategic autonomy in the defense sector.

Strategic autonomy was used far too little as a guiding principle and energy was not looked at sufficiently strategically. The focus was rather on sustainability and free market competition, where there is little concern for strategic thinking, as a result of which the focus on security of supply and price stability decreased. However, occasionally, a push toward a more strategically autonomous energy policy was given. The impetus for this was given by different actors throughout the EU's history, usually coming from either the European Council, the European Commission or individual MS. The European Parliament was typically supportive, which is in line with its tendency towards more comprehensive policymaking in the EU. It has generally has been an advocate of a common EU approach with common instruments. The more problematic institution in this context was the Council of the European Union. Many of the more ambitious plans of the European Commission for a coherent policy often failed due to opposition from MS. As national interest and policies varied, the EU members struggled to agree on common priorities and strategies.

Divergent national interests not only dictate domestic policy decisions, but also influence choices made at EU level. This has led to tension between the domestic interests of individual countries and the ambitions of the EU as a whole. The existing divergences in the socio-economic interests of individual MS are shaped by their geographical location, national legacies and long-standing political economic relations with external energy suppliers. The EU MS

therefore view European energy policy from their national policy and perspective, which regularly makes make it difficult to reach a consensus. These discrepancies between MS and consequent inability to form a common unified energy policy falls under what the literature calls political strategic autonomy. As in the defence sector, the energy policy has difficulties forming a common vision of problems and solutions, due to which political cohesion is low.

Furthermore, the EU has historically lacked the competencies to form a coherent, coordinated, strategically autonomous energy policy. Up until 2009, the Commission based its energy proposals on the internal market and environmental provisions of the treaties, putting limitations on its ability to act. Over the past decade, the growing need for improved cooperation has gradually overcome some of the traditional opposition from national governments to give up sovereignty over energy issues. However, despite a supranational turn being present in the last decade, the EU is still missing some of the most crucial competencies when it comes to energy. Following the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, the EU became responsible for the functioning of the energy market, security of energy supply in the Union, energy efficiency and energy saving and the development of new and renewable forms of energy. However, the MS remain in charge of their energy mix, the conditions for exploiting their energy sources, and the general structure of their energy supply.

It could be argued that the institutional frame of strategic autonomy in and of itself is not underdeveloped. The necessary governance structures and competencies are present in order to prepare and implement the decisions that are taken at the political level. However, the extent of coordination and integration of energy policy at EU level is not that much a matter of formal competence, but the result of a constant tug-of-war between the Commission and the Parliament on one hand and the Council on the other. As mentioned in the literature review, in areas in which the EU shares competences with MS, reaching institutional autonomy remains an open-ended and often incremental process. This observation also applies to European energy policy.

Additionally, the crucial role of the more technical aspects of strategic autonomy cannot be ignored. The energy domain is not a domain in which one can switch easily from provider or source. It typically requires certain infrastructure to be in place. Some nations' technologies still do not reach modern standards and will take many years to improve due to physical conditions, economic instability, and (lack of) investments. On the flipside, the EU had become a world leader in the development of renewable energy technologies. A more active EU industrial policy may be required to ensure that the full potential of these technologies is realized and that the EU does not become fully reliant on third-countries in this sector.

As in European defence, strategic energy autonomy also has an external dimension. European energy policy has been generally shaped by endogenous events and geopolitical developments, such as the World War, Suez Crisis, Oil embargo of the 70s, disputes with Russia over gas in de early 2000s and 2014, and climate and environmental issues. Following these crises the political cohesion was high and MS wanted to do something, but as these crises lasted longer or when they were solved, the political will for radical solutions also diminished. Thus, the path ahead for ESA in energy is one of incrementalism.

As Europe tends to be built through crises, a systemic jolt would be needed to turn strategic autonomy into reality. This could be the case with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Once more, energy is being used as a strategic tool and a political weapon by Russia, resulting in overall higher energy costs and uncertainties about energy security. This crisis compels the EU and its MS to rethink the energy system and national energy policies, making the understanding and implementation of strategic autonomy increasingly important. In only three months' time, the Commission has launched its REPowerEU initiative in an effort to reduce the EUs dependency from Russian fossil fuels. Time will tell whether this crisis will lead to the paradigm shift needed to establish strategic autonomy in Europe: will it lead to a common and comprehensive energy policy or will opposition of MS guided by their national interest hamper this once again?

It is important to note that while this research project provides an overview of the factors that have influenced strategic autonomy in EU energy policy, it is an explorative study, meaning that further research on the topic is needed. Future studies might confirm, build on or enrich the conclusions put forward in this dissertation. Another point of attention is related to the fact that the study includes elite-interviews of only seven actors, which affects the external validity of the research. This means that I cannot draw general conclusions based on the interviews alone. However, the interviews did provide a more in-depth understanding of the actor's perceptions on the topic. Additionally, this negative effect is partly alleviated by the use of policy documents and academic literature from different sources. Furthermore, because of the specific configuration of the EU, my findings only apply within the context of the EU. Further research might look at influencing factors for strategic energy autonomy in individual EU MSs or even in the US or other countries.

8. Recommendations

Hereunder a set of recommendations can be found that might mitigate the current energy crisis. The main focus should be a European-wide shift toward renewable energy and the start of a strategic EU debate about the knowledge, technologies and production on/of energy, for example by means of a more active industrial energy policy. In addition to that, European Member States should improve their interconnectedness, especially countries such as Portugal and Spain, which are currently considered as “Energy Islands”. This measure is said to boost the EU’s security of electricity supply. Furthermore, the EU should fund and invest in energy infrastructures across the board, particularly in Member States where there has been little or no investment in recent years. Another measure could be to replenishing the EU’s energy reserves during less energy-intensive moments (e.g. during summer).

It is crucial that the EU develops a clear EU-wide strategic plan in the energy sector, emphasizing its importance in order to establish a political synergy where the various EU Member States have a common goal and vision of what needs to be achieved. This is the only way for the EU to become an international actor that can safeguard its interests in the global energy arena. It is imperative that the EU act now rather than later, as the implications of the energy crisis are felt throughout all layers of society, including industry, economy, poverty, inflation, and so on.

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Annex 1. List of interviews

Nr	Naam	Functie	Date
1.	**Klaus-Dieter Borchardt**	Former Deputy Director General for Energy of the European Commission	March 28, 2022
2.	**Jaroslaw Pietras**	Former Director General in the DG TREE of the EU Council of Ministers	March 30, 2022
3.	**Maria-Antoinette Simons**	Diplomatic advisor to the Belgian Federal Minister of Energy	March 31, 2022
4.	**Interviewee 4**	Member of a national interest group which is part of Eurelectric	April 6, 2022
5.	**Interviewee 5**	Member of a European interest group	March 14, 2022
6.	**Marc Botenga**	Member of the ITRE committee of the European Parliament	March 29, 2022
7.	**Tom Berendsen**	Member of the ITRE committee of the European Parliament	May 5, 2022