

Международные отношения

УДК-321.8

DOI: 10.17072/2218-1067-2024-1-103-111

CONCEPTS OF STRATEGIC SOVEREIGNTY AND AUTONOMY AND THE IMAGE OF THE FUTURE IN THE OFFICIAL DISCOURSE OF THE EU

G. Kotsur

Gleb Kotsur, Candidate of Sc. (Polit. Sc.), Assistant of the Department of the Theory and History of International Relations,
School of International Relations, Saint Petersburg State University, Saint Petersburg;
Associate Professor of the Department of Political Science and International Affairs,
National Research University Higher School of Economics, Saint Petersburg, Russia.
E-mail: glebk17@gmail.com (ORCID: 0000-0003-4079-264X. ResearcherID: U-6214-2017).

Abstract

The concept of sovereignty has not been popular in the official EU's discourse for a long time, but this has changed in recent years since representatives of the Union have turned to the categories of European sovereignty and strategic autonomy. Through the prism of critical chronopolitics, F. Polak's concept of the image of the future and discourse analysis of EU's official discourse, the author explores how new categories influenced the image of the future in Brussels' worldview. Three points are of particular importance. Firstly, new concepts establish primary focus on the areas of technology/digitalization, environment protection, foreign policy / defense. The development of each of these areas helps to strengthen the sovereignty / autonomy of the EU within such a narrative. Secondly, the new categories work within the framework of transition plot, constituting a symbolic world map of Brussels through a combination of orientalism and historicism. Thirdly, the categories contribute to the optimistic and pessimistic half of the image of the future, representing rather a temporal discursive prolongation of the current status quo than utopia and dystopia.

Keywords: image of the future; European Union; strategic sovereignty; strategic autonomy; critical geopolitics; chronopolitics; discourse; transition plot.

For a long time, the concept of sovereignty has not been popular in the official EU discourse, since sovereignty in its national form has been perceived as something hostile to the supranational project of the Union (Waeber, 1996). However, in recent years the situation has changed dramatically. The annual State of the Union address of 2018 by J.-C. Juncker (then – the head of the European Commission) was entitled "The Hour of European Sovereignty".¹ Soon in 2020, the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, called the concept of strategic autonomy, synonymous/related to European sovereignty, "the goal of our generation".² In the same year, the European Parliamentary Research Service published the policy document "On the path to strategic autonomy"³. Finally, in her 2022 annual message, U. von der Leyen announced the creation of a European Sovereignty Fund.⁴

It is no exaggeration to say that this turn brings some changes in the way how EU elites think about the past, because from now on sovereignty no longer appears as part of a hostile Constitutive Other, and the binary opposition "national sovereignty vs supranational Union" will be modified. After recent turn to sove-

© Коцур Г. В., 2024

¹ President Jean-Claude Juncker's State of the Union Address 2018 // European Commission. 2018. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_18_5808 (accessed: 17 July 2023).

² 'Strategic autonomy for Europe – the aim of our generation' – speech by President Charles Michel to the Bruegel think tank // European Council. Council of the European Union. 2020. URL: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/09/28/1-autonomie-strategique-europeenne-est-l-objectif-de-notre-generation-discours-du-president-charles-michel-au-groupe-de-reflexion-bruegel/> (accessed: 17 July 2023).

³ On the path to "strategic autonomy". The EU in an evolving geopolitical environment // European Parliament. 2020. URL: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/652096/EPRS_STU\(2020\)652096_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/652096/EPRS_STU(2020)652096_EN.pdf) (accessed: 17 July 2023).

⁴ Leyen U. von der. State of the Union address 2022 // European Commission. 2022. URL: https://state-of-the-union.ec.europa.eu/state-union-2022_en (accessed: 17 July 2023).

reignty Europe also has or should have this resource. But such conceptual transformation concerns not only thinking about the past, it also changes the vision of the future: sovereignty/autonomy is described as something that is not yet fully available, but it must be achieved. All this raises questions on how the introduction of new concepts has changed the Union elite's narrative about the future of the world and of the EU. Recently, there has been an increased interest among political and IR scholars in the role of the concepts of EU's strategic autonomy and sovereignty (Howorth, 2019; Cernatoni, 2022), including in the Russian-language segment of science (Shcherbak, 2020; Romanova, 2021). However, we cannot find a study where an analysis of the influence of new categories on ideas about the future would be conducted; rather, in some cases scientists are trying to assess future prospects and the possibility of implementing concepts in reality, which is hardly the function of the academic community at all. The purpose of the paper is not to describe the image of the future of the EU – it would be too complicated task for a short study; but to identify the key elements of image of the future in the EU's official discourse, which are constituted precisely by the emergence of new categories.

Theory and method of the research

The theoretical and methodological framework of the study includes several levels. First, we use social constructivism with its specific focus on study of collective identities and norms; inside such an ontology we consider human interaction as being determined by ideas and non-material factors in general (Wendt, 1999: 1). Thus, in this work we do not turn to futurology or, on the other hand, to psychology of individual consciousness, but study the collective ideas on the future of a certain social group.

Next, we turn to the particular field of knowledge to fulfill such an analysis – critical chronopolitics as part of critical geopolitics, a discipline where the scholars aim to study political ideas about space. According to I. Klinke, critical chronopolitics focuses on the fact that “geopolitical writing does not merely construct the spaces of world politics, but it also maps understandings of time... [it presupposes the account of how] political time operates in geopolitical discourse” (Klinke, 2013: 673, 685).

The key concept of our research is the “image of the future”, a popular term among applied sociologists involved in public opinion polls (Chadaeva, 2013; Petrova, 2009). At the same time, initially this concept was coined in political thought; it appeared in the classic eponymous book of Fred Polak in 1973 (Polak, 1973). For our research it is useful to pay attention to the following theoretical provisions from Polak's work. Firstly, according to the author, the image of the future is a part of the Other in certain discourse (Polak, 1973: 1). It is noteworthy that the focus on the Other is also important for approaches in critical chronopolitics (Klinke, 2013). With regard to the EU, we should mention the remarkable discussion between T. Diez and S. Prozorov, devoted to the influence of spatio-temporal thinking on the identity of the European Union. T. Diez focused almost exclusively on temporality, showing how the positive EU's ideas about itself are constituted out of the opposition to the negative past (Diez, 2004). On the contrary, S. Prozorov argued that identity always implies a combination of temporal and spatial exclusion (Prozorov, 2011). Although both scholars refer to temporal dimension, the past occupies the central place in their models. Diez briefly touches the problem of the future only once, while Prozorov confines himself to the passage that “...every historical action must be oriented towards the fulfilment of some future-oriented project through the negation of the present reality into the past...” (Prozorov, 2011: 1281). Thus, the researchers of the EU identity have an intention to take into account the temporal dimension, but keep the ongoing focus rather on the past than on the future in this process.

Another aspect, important for Polak's framework, is a two-part nature of the image of the future. On the one hand, the author mentioned the interaction between “optimistic and pessimistic attitudes” inside every particular image of the future (Polak, 1973: 17). Ultimately, they appear in the form of utopia and dystopia, although in the most cases political thinking about the future does not reach these limits. On the other hand, Polak emphasized the dialectic between the ideal image (how does society imagine a kind of “golden age”) and the real image (“normal” expected scenario). For the latter, the factor of purposeful human intervention becomes a fundamental point. As Polak notes, the image of the future reflects the values of society; therefore, a person makes efforts to ensure that the real image of the future and the ideal one coincide or, at least, come closer (Polak, 1973: 9-10).

The last key point in our model is connected with the transition plot. This is a discursive and, broadly speaking, cultural construction conventional for all the polities since the beginning of Modernity, which presupposes the view and description of reality through the prism of continuity – doing, making, going to, becoming, etc. (Kotsur, 2020) Transition plot is based on modern progressivism and represents the point of

intersection between two non-inclusive views on time and space – historicism and orientalism. According to E. Said, orientalism is “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident”, which presupposes different kinds of Western domination over “the Orient” (Said, 1995: 3-4). Being the cultural heritage of the colonial system, such a worldview does not differentiate the Eastern countries and regions, which are doomed to bear the imprint of barbarism, incivility and backwardness. Historicism acts as an equivalent and supplement of orientalism in the temporal dimension. The postcolonial researcher D. Chakrabarty defined historicism as “the idea that to understand anything it has to be seen both as a unity and in its historical development”, accompanied by a common leitmotif “first in the West, and then elsewhere” (Chakrabarty, 2000: 6). Such an orientalist historicism, when the entire non-Western world is labeled as “not yet” (Chakrabarty, 2000: 8), Chakrabarty calls the central axis of Eurocentrism today; and scholars of this field discover its elements in current EU foreign policy (Onar & Nicolaidis, 2013). Through the combination of orientalism and historicism inside transition plot, the European Union draws up a symbolic map of the world, representing itself as a model, because it has already passed the historical path to market liberal democracy, while the rest are still on the road.

The particular method of research is post-Marxist discourse analysis based on the framework by C. Mouffe and E. Laclau (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). Here politics is considered as a set of relationships between signifiers. Various social forces strive to sediment their interpretations of empty and floating signifiers, that is, of the main categories of contemporary politics. In our case, these are signifiers associated with the temporal dimension, first of all, “the future” and various derivatives from it. In essence, such discourse analysis is an identification of the work of equivalence and difference that connects or separates one signifier from another (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 63). In this paper, we do not aim to study all aspects of the image of the future in the ideas of European elite, therefore there is no methodological objective to include as many sources as possible in the sample. We focus on one certain narrative, on one line of discourse, related to the temporal dimension and to the concepts of strategic autonomy and sovereignty. That is why we focus on the utterances of key EU public officials (U. von der Leyen, C. Michel, J. Borrell, etc.) and key documents located at the nodal points of discourse in terms of Mouffe and Laclau. Although E. Macron is one of the main supporters of “Sovereignty of Europe”, we did not include his statements in the sample in order to study the views of precisely EU elite. The combination of utterances with key documents in this area as a source base of research will ensure diversity of the sample and prove that collective perceptions have an intersubjective status among target audience.

European image of the future

There are three key aspects where the categories of strategic sovereignty and autonomy touch the image of the future in the EU official discourse and contribute to its transformation: the major areas of development of the Union; modification of the transition plot; the role of new categories in the dialectic of two parts of the image of the future (optimistic and pessimistic). Let's start with the first aspect.

Major areas.

The enumeration of the areas of future development that sovereignty and autonomy affect is the most extensive aspect to study. As part of the large-scale project “Conference on the Future of Europe”, the following key areas of development were identified: climate change and environment, health, a stronger economy, social justice and jobs, EU in the world, values and rights, rule of law, security, digital transformation, European democracy, migration, education, culture, youth and sports.¹ However, if we focus on the two considered categories, then this extremely broad list narrows down to three main areas. The first one is the sphere of digitalization and technology. Here is what the President of the European Council, C. Michel, said in his 2021 pivotal speech linking the digital area with strategic autonomy:

“Today I want to focus on why our Digital Agenda is crucial to our European strategic autonomy... First, we have to focus on developing secure and high-speed connectivity. This means significantly enhancing our broadband capacities, notably in 5G. And we have to look beyond 5G to 6G. And to my friend Thierry Breton’s idea of a low earth orbit satellite project...”

... to this list of ambitious projects he added:

¹ Topics // Conference on the Future of Europe. 2022. URL: <https://futureu.europa.eu/en/> (accessed 17 July 2023).

“We also have to ramp up our plan for chips and microprocessors – from design to advanced manufacturing – that will equip the interconnected “things” in our daily lives... We want to develop a human- and values-based approach to our digital, data, and artificial intelligence industry...”¹

As we can see from the speech, Michel highlights specific areas in which the EU should develop in order to strengthen its strategic autonomy in the future and become more successful in technological field. And this list is very extensive: from satellite project to 6G and artificial intelligence. A year earlier, U. von der Leyen presented her own vision of key innovations, stating that “it is about Europe's digital sovereignty” and announcing an €8 billion investment to create a new generation of supercomputers and microprocessors.² Finally, von der Leyen concludes her speech with the notable for our research slogan “This is about giving Europe more control over its future”,³ connecting signifiers of technological progress with temporal dimension and new categories through the work of equivalence. In many ways, von der Leyen and Michel express similar ideas about promising areas for the development of the Union.

All this is expectedly reflected in the main EU documents in this field. For example, in the European strategy for data of 2020, the issue of personal data protection raises again in relation to the new categories of sovereignty and autonomy. In strategy it is written that “the functioning of the European data space” is closely connected with investment in “next-generation technologies and infrastructures” and in “digital competences” to “increase Europe’s technological sovereignty”.⁴ Thus, the EU discursive actors establish the following narrative: if the Union wants to be sovereign/autonomous in the future world, this can only be done through the development of technology and the digital sphere, without compromising the principles of liberal democracy in terms of data protection. Within this narrative, the EU's sovereignty literally increases with the advent and development of every new useful technology thanks to the work of equivalence between aforementioned signifiers.

The next important topic for the European Union is environment protection. C. Michel says: “In 2018, a few pioneering countries committed themselves to carbon neutrality by 2050... And in December 2019, with the support of Ursula von der Leyen's Green Deal, the 27 member states made the 2050 commitment for the entire European Union”.⁵ In other words, the European Union has clear future goals on environment, member-states have already confirmed their commitment to this course and take certain steps in such a direction. All of the objectives are discursively connected to the strengthening of European autonomy and sovereignty, which is especially evident in the issue of energy transition:

“Declining EU production of energy from fossil fuels could even prove advantageous in terms of its future strategic autonomy. Europe is now less wedded to polluting forms of energy than other parts of the world, and may therefore face fewer difficulties in phasing out the use of fossil fuels and investing in renewable or other low carbon energies. This should allow the EU to reach its objective of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050...”⁶

Achieving “honorable” goals of saving the planet’s environment as part of the energy transition is conveniently combined with reducing economic dependence on hydrocarbon suppliers that makes the EU increasingly sovereign and autonomous within this narrative. The European Commissioner for Internal Market, T. Breton, said on the occasion of the opening of the European Sovereignty Fund in 2022 that “the twin transition” (to green and digital economy) does not presume replacement of “dependency on Russian fossil fuels with a dependency on Chinese solar energy”⁷; moreover, Brussels launches industrial alliance for solar energy to make European economy more resilient and green at the same time. Breton concluded that the cre-

¹ Digital Sovereignty is Central to European Strategic Autonomy – Speech by President Charles Michel at “Masters of Digital 2021” // European Commission. 2021. URL: https://europa.eu/newsroom/content/digital-sovereignty-central-european-strategic-autonomy-speech-president-charles-michel_en (accessed: 17 July 2023).

² State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament Plenary // European Commission. 2020. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_20_1655 (accessed: 17 July 2023).

³ Ibid.

⁴ A European Strategy for Data EUR-Lex. 2020. URL: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1593073685620&uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0066> (accessed: 17 July 2023).

⁵ ‘Strategic autonomy for Europe – the aim of our generation’ – speech by President Charles Michel to the Bruegel think tank // European Council. Council of the European Union. 2020. URL: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/09/28/1-autonomie-strategique-europeenne-est-l-objectif-de-notre-generation-discours-du-president-charles-michel-au-groupe-de-reflexion-bruegel/> (accessed: 17 July 2023).

⁶ On the path to “strategic autonomy”. The EU in an evolving geopolitical environment // European Parliament. 2020. URL: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/652096/EPRS_STU\(2020\)652096_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/652096/EPRS_STU(2020)652096_EN.pdf) (accessed: 17 July 2023).

⁷ A European Sovereignty Fund for an industry “Made in Europe” // Blog of Commissioner Thierry Breton European Commission. 2022. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_22_5543 (accessed: 17 July 2023).

ation of an EU Sovereignty Fund provides the ground for “the future of industry is made in Europe”.¹ That is, according to this line of discourse, being sovereign/autonomous in the future means switching to a “green” economy, since reliance on hydrocarbons not only lead to dependence on supplies from external players (reduce autonomy – here we are witnessing the work of difference), but also pollute the environment, bringing an environmental apocalypse closer.

Another topic concerns foreign policy. According to the official EU narrative, many challenges lie precisely in the sphere of international relations that are already threatening the autonomy/sovereignty of Europe, and in the future the situation may turn out to be even more catastrophic. The document of the European Parliamentary Research Service with the self-explanatory title “On the path to strategic autonomy” indicates that “...a continent that believes in its future as a strategic autonomous global actor should... be ready to accept a higher level of risk. In an increasingly complex world driven by geopolitics... it is important for the EU to also speak the “language of power”² It is notable that such “geopolitical” rhetoric was not something conventional for the language of the European bureaucracy, but in recent years it has become increasingly common. High Representative of the Union J. Borrell puts it even more directly in his 2020 article “Why European Strategic Autonomy Matters”, writing that in the changing world it is impossible to be “global player” or “geopolitical Commission” without being “autonomous”.³ According to Borrell, strategic autonomy today is not just a new project in the field of foreign policy but a “process of political survival”.⁴

From 2022, the Ukrainian crisis comes to the forefront of the agenda. Under current conditions “...we are also working to adapt our defence industry to the realities of the return of high-intensity conflict on our continent. This means massively increasing our manufacturing capacity for key defence capabilities...”⁵, - says T. Breton and European Sovereignty Fund has been established precisely for such the purposes. The head of the European Commission, U. von der Leyen, directly links its creation with a certain temporality through the work of equivalence: “And for the future, I will push to create a new European Sovereignty Fund. Let’s make sure that the future of industry is made in Europe. This is not only a war⁶ unleashed by Russia against Ukraine. This is a war on our energy, a war on our economy, a war on our values and a war on our future”.⁷

Finally, the abovementioned J. Borrell in his article “The future of Europe is being defined now” (2022) writes that “to become a hard power” we [the EU] will have to “stop theological discussions about strategic autonomy” and conduct assertive and independent policy in the field of security.⁸ In other words, the European Union will have to become more sovereign/autonomous in the future world (regardless of its wishes), relying on its own strengths more than now, because international relations are becoming more dangerous and turbulent. In practical terms, this means building up its own defense capabilities without weakening ties with key allies like the United States.

Transition plot. The second important aspect, which connects new categories with the future dimension in the EU discourse is transition plot and its transformation. This discursive construction, being a conventional basis of European symbolic mapping, presupposes that Brussels had already reached the point of destination (liberal democracy with a market economy), while the rest of the countries and whole regions of the planet are still moving towards the goal under the supervision of the EU. We are witnessing the same narrative with the emergence of new categories but with some adjustments. First of all, achieving or strengthening European sovereignty/autonomy is nearly always described as a process. “Strategic autonomy is not a magic wand but a process, a long-term one, intended to ensure that Europeans increasingly take charge of themselves”⁹, – writes J. Borrell.

¹ Ibid.

² On the path to “strategic autonomy”. The EU in an evolving geopolitical environment // European Parliament. 2020. URL: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/652096/EPRS_STU\(2020\)652096_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/652096/EPRS_STU(2020)652096_EN.pdf) (accessed: 17 July 2023).

³ Borrell J. Why European strategic autonomy matters // EEAS. 2020. URL: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/why-european-strategic-autonomy-matters_en (accessed: 17 July 2023).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ A European Sovereignty Fund for an industry “Made in Europe” // Blog of Commissioner Thierry Breton European Commission. 2022. URL: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_22_5543 (accessed: 17 July 2023).

⁶ Russian Federation does not recognize the term “war” in relation to special military operation.

⁷ Leyen U. von der. State of the Union address 2022 // European Commission. 2022. URL: https://state-of-the-union.ec.europa.eu/state-union-2022_en (accessed: 17 July 2023).

⁸ Borrell J. The future of Europe is being defined now // EEAS. 2022. URL: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/future-europe-being-defined-now_0_en (accessed: 17 July 2023).

⁹ Borrell J. Why European strategic autonomy matters // EEAS. 2020. URL: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/why-european-strategic-autonomy-matters_en (accessed: 17 July 2023).

Almost everywhere in such speech acts we find verbs that refer to continuity, incompleteness, and becoming. What is new in recent years, however, is that the EU no longer sees itself as the perfect model. Inside its own previous narrative, Brussels was an example for other countries with the historic path being completely passed. In the 2009 review of the 2003 EU Security Strategy we read:

“The EU remains an anchor of stability. Enlargement has spread democracy and prosperity across our continent... The EU has made substantial progress over the last five years. We are recognised as an important contributor to a better world”.¹

Today the situation has changed. According to the official discourse, the EU is not at the point of destination along the sovereignty / autonomy axis – Brussels is also on the way. Everywhere we find ideas what precisely the European Union needs to do to become more sovereign/autonomous: “...the EU needs to improve its open strategic autonomy in key areas... We have to become a hard power... We need to develop the international role of the euro...”² But does this mean that the EU has humbled its normative arrogance, and the very structure of orientalist historicism has changed? No, since the axis of transition remains the same, the EU still determine the vector of movement, and Brussels is still ahead of all countries and regions in certain aspects (except for defense). C. Michel stated in his 2020 speech:

“We are at the vanguard of the fight against climate change... This inspires me to say: Europe is a major player, but doesn’t yet know that it is... Each of these stages has strengthened the European Union and its autonomy. These developments have given us a huge market, and an area of freedoms which has become the world’s largest trading bloc...”³

... he continued this line of argumentation in his another speech:

“Europe has enormous potential in the fields of data, artificial intelligence and the internet of things. Our industrial data, for instance, represents a massive resource. And the move towards edge computing will put Europe in a much more favourable position, than in the previous stage...”⁴

So, we can state that the general structure of the discursive figure has been preserved. The EU no longer sees itself as perfect model, this is an important change in the narrative, but it is necessary to note the earlier genesis of such modification. This shift begins even before the introduction of the new categories in official discourse and can be considered as manifestation of anxiety of the EU elites. The 2016 Global Strategy still opens with the words “The purpose, even existence, of our Union is being questioned.”⁵ First, the signifier “resilience” (Romanova, 2017) emerges in the discourse to manage this anxiety, and the categories of sovereignty and autonomy appear at the current stage in order to comprehend the ongoing crisis and the new role of the EU in today's world.

Positive and negative half of the image of the future. The final third aspect concerns the role of European sovereignty and autonomy in relation to positive and negative half of the image of the future in the EU official discourse. The positive part, a kind of “bright future”, is described with the focus on aforementioned key areas, for example, on technological and environmental ones:

“Data-driven innovation will bring enormous benefits for citizens, for example through improved personalised medicine... Data will reshape the way we produce, consume and live. Benefits will be felt in every single aspect of our lives, ranging from more conscious energy consumption and product, material and food traceability, to healthier lives and better health-care”.⁶

¹ Report on the implementation of the European Security Strategy – providing security in a changing world // European Commission. 2009. P. 7-9. URL: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/30823/qc7809568enc.pdf> (accessed: 17 July 2023).

² Updating the 2020 New Industrial Strategy: Building a stronger Single Market for Europe’s recovery // European Commission. 2021. URL: https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2021-05/communication-industrial-strategy-update-2020_en.pdf (accessed 17 July 2023); Borrell J. The future of Europe is being defined now // EEAS. 2022. URL: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/future-europe-being-defined-now-0_en (accessed: 17 July 2023); Borrell J. Why European strategic autonomy matters // EEAS. 2020. URL: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/why-european-strategic-autonomy-matters_en (accessed: 17 July 2023).

³ ‘Strategic autonomy for Europe – the aim of our generation’ – speech by President Charles Michel to the Bruegel think tank // European Council. Council of the European Union. 2020. URL: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/09/28/l-autonomie-strategique-europeenne-est-l-objectif-de-notre-generation-discours-du-president-charles-michel-a-groupe-de-reflexion-bruegel/> (accessed: 17 July 2023).

⁴ Digital Sovereignty is Central to European Strategic Autonomy – Speech by President Charles Michel at “Masters of Digital 2021” Online Event // European Commission. 2021. URL: https://europa.eu/newsroom/content/digital-sovereignty-central-european-strategic-autonomy-speech-president-charles-michel_en (accessed: 17 July 2023).

⁵ Shared vision, common action: a stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy // European Union External Action Service. 2016. P. 3. URL: http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf (accessed: 17 July 2023).

⁶ A European Strategy for Data EUR-Lex 2020. URL: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1593073685620&uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0066> (accessed 17 July 2023).

In other words, (signifiers of) technology, environment, freedom, consumption – all this will interweave a single picture of prosperity in the future in the common chain of equivalence; but only in the case when correct reforms would be carried out and current responsible course would be maintained. At the same time, for a researcher, the optimistic half of the image of the future is not as intriguing as its negative pessimistic part. Here we see the same three key thematic areas. First, international relations are described as a source of constant challenges and risks:

“The EU is at risk of becoming a 'playground' for other global powers unless it develops both 'soft' and 'hard' power tools, allowing it to speak the 'language of power'... The geopolitical developments during the Conference, and especially the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, have also shown that the EU needs to be more assertive, taking a leading global role in promoting its values and standards in a world increasingly in turmoil... Because the world has changed...”¹

This is followed by potential environmental problems and difficulties of the energy transition, for example, C. Michel talks about the danger of repeating old mistakes of “the over-exploitation of our natural resources”.² According to him, “we have abused these resources and brought our planet... to the edge of disaster”.³ The work of difference helps Michel to separate signifiers related to “old” or non-European environment-unfriendly policy from today’s responsible course. The digital sphere also offers humanity not only wide opportunities, but also generates constant risks. Michel claims that we “must not abuse data” and defines two major ways of how this abuse is taking place in today’s world. On the one hand, big digital corporations often tend to use their position “in pursuit of profit”. On the other, authoritarian regimes like China collect data “for the purpose of controlling their citizens...”⁴

In addition, other recent challenges from economic decline/crises to pandemic risks are also mentioned by J. Borrell in his article of 2020. He writes that “the weight of Europe in the world is shrinking”⁵, and the economic trend remains unfavorable compared to the growth dynamics of the US, China and India. Moreover, Covid-19 revealed vulnerability of Europe in a number of fields. In this new world “science, technology, trade, data, investments are becoming sources and instruments of force in international politics”, and the EU should be ready to face the reality of such turbulent future.⁶

Thus, the image of the future in the EU official discourse is composed of two parts, and European sovereignty/autonomy plays a common role in them. Both in a future world of prosperity/green economy/digitalization, and in a geopolitical world with a reduced role of the EU and constant crises, only sovereignty and autonomy will ensure the survival of the Union, since they will come to the fore in the key future areas. To put simply, we can say that sovereignty and autonomy are becoming a kind of synonym for survival and success in this world, the chain of equivalence between these signifiers always remains constant. Note that in division into an optimistic and pessimistic half in the EU discourse, there is no separation into the ideal and real part of the image. The positive and negative parts of the future are seen as reality, but the degree of its inevitability varies. As Polak stated in his book, people (in our case – the EU elite) tend to declare a desire to change the future in the name of their ideals. “We want to be strong, independent and confident to look outwards, beyond our borders – to contribute to a better, fairer and greener world”⁷, – said C. Michel in his speech of 2021.

* * *

Even our brief research of the EU normative structures provides us with the ground to state: the European image of the future is built on approximation – discursive extension of certain optimistic trends into the future and the reversal of pessimistic ones. This approach differs from the biggest temporal constructions of the 20th century, when the image of the future was often based on utopias with ideas about radical trans-

¹ On the path to “strategic autonomy”. The EU in an evolving geopolitical environment // European Parliament. 2020. URL: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/652096/EPRS_STU\(2020\)652096_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/652096/EPRS_STU(2020)652096_EN.pdf) (accessed 17 July 2023); Borrell J. Why European strategic autonomy matters // EEAS. 2020. URL: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/why-european-strategic-autonomy-matters_en (accessed: 17 July 2023).

² Digital Sovereignty is Central to European Strategic Autonomy – Speech by President Charles Michel at “Masters of Digital 2021” Online Event // European Commission. 2021. URL: https://europa.eu/newsroom/content/digital-sovereignty-central-european-strategic-autonomy-speech-president-charles-michel_en (accessed: 17 July 2023).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Borrell J. Why European strategic autonomy matters // EEAS. 2020. URL: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/why-european-strategic-autonomy-matters_en (accessed: 17 July 2023).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Digital Sovereignty is Central to European Strategic Autonomy – Speech by President Charles Michel at “Masters of Digital 2021” Online Event // European Commission. 2021. URL: https://europa.eu/newsroom/content/digital-sovereignty-central-european-strategic-autonomy-speech-president-charles-michel_en (accessed: 17 July 2023).

formations of reality. This does not mean that current polities do not have image of the future at all; it is defined, but varies significantly compared to models of the utopian type.

It is possible to identify three key aspects of the image of the future in the European official discourse, which are constituted by the emergence of new categories. First, main areas of future development: technology / digitalization, environment protection / energy transition, foreign policy / defense. New categories are discursively linked mostly to these fields, and progressive evolution of aforementioned spheres helps to strengthen European sovereignty and autonomy within such a narrative. Secondly, the new categories work entirely in the framework of conventional for the EU (but modified) transition plot with its modus of continuity, becoming and incompleteness. The European Union no longer considers itself as a perfect model, which, nevertheless, is at the forefront of transition. However, this discursive modification can be seen as logical continuation of the earlier trend where Brussels has been trying to manage collective anxiety in the narrative of the Union for the last 10-15 years. Thirdly, new categories contribute to the optimistic and pessimistic half of the image of the future, which, as we noted above, presuppose rather an approximation of the current status quo than utopia and dystopia. In both parts, sovereignty and autonomy are perceived as equally important for the prosperous life or survival of the EU (depending on optimistic / pessimistic scenario).

Финансовая поддержка

Исследование выполнено за счет гранта Российского научного фонда № 22-28-00682, <https://rscf.ru/project/22-28-00682/>.

Список литературы / References

- Коцур, Г. В. (2020) 'Дискурсивная фигура «движения» и стрессоустойчивость как элементы организации символической карты мира: пример нормативного взаимодействия России и ЕС', *Вестник Пермского университета. Серия: Политология*, 14 (3), сс. 73–81. [Kotsur, G. V. (2020) 'The discursive figure of "transition" and resilience as the pillars of symbolic mapping: the case of the normative interaction between Russia and the EU' [Diskursivnaja figura «dvizhenija» i stressoustojchivost' kak jelementy organizacii simvolicheskoi karty mira: primer normativnogo vzaimodejstvija Rossii i ES], *Bulletin of Perm University. Political Science*, 14 (3), pp. 73–81. (In Russ.)].
- Петрова, В. Н. (2009) 'Изучение образа будущего: методологические проблемы и пути их решения', *Сибирский психологический журнал*, 32, сс. 6–10. [Petrova, V. N. (2009) 'Studying the image of the future: methodological problems and ways to solve them' [Izuchenie obraza budushhego: metodologicheskie problemy i puti ih reshenija], *Syberian Journal of Psychology*, 32, pp. 6–10. (In Russ.)].
- Романова, Т. А. (2017) 'Категория "стрессоустойчивость" в Европейском союзе', *Современная Европа*, 4 (76), сс. 17–28. [Romanova, T. A. (2017) 'Resilience category in the European Union' [Kategorija "stressoustojchivost'" v Evropejskom sojuze], *Contemporary Europe*, 4 (76), pp. 17–28. (In Russ.)].
- Романова, Т. А. (2021) 'Дискурс о суверенитете Европейского союза: содержание и последствия', *Современная Европа*, 5, сс. 32–44. [Romanova, T. A. (2021) 'The EU's Discourse on Sovereignty: Content and Consequences' [Diskurs o suverenitete Evropejskogo sojuza: sodержanie i posledstvija], *Contemporary Europe*, 5, pp. 32–44. (In Russ.)].
- Чадаева, К. Д. (2013) 'Образ будущего в разных возрастах', *Известия Тульского государственного университета. Гуманитарные науки*, 2, сс. 294–305. [Chadaeva, K. D. (2013) 'Image of the future at different ages' [Obraz budushhego v raznyh vozrastah], *Izvestiya Tula State University. Humanitarian sciences*, 2, pp. 294–305. (In Russ.)].
- Щербак, И. Н. (2020) 'Стратегическая автономия ЕС и проблемы формирования внешнеполитической повестки в эпоху пандемии', *Современная Европа*, 6, сс. 29–40. [Shcherbak, I. N. (2020) 'Strategic Autonomy of the EU and Problems of Formation of the Foreign Policy Agenda in the Time of the Pandemic' [Strategicheskaja avtonomija ES i problemy formirovanija vneshnepoliticheskoi povestki v jepohu pandemii], *Contemporary Europe*, 6, pp. 29–40. (In Russ.)].
- Chakrabarty, D. (2000) *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial thought and historical difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Csernaton, R. (2022) 'The EU's hegemonic imaginaries: from European strategic autonomy in defence to technological sovereignty',

- European Security*, 31 (3), pp. 395–414.
DOI: 10.1080/09662839.2022.2103370
- Diez, T. (2004) 'Europe's Others and the return of geopolitics', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 17 (2), pp. 319–335, DOI: 10.1080/0955757042000245924
- Howorth, J. (2019) 'Strategic autonomy: Why it's not about Europe going it alone', *European View*, 18 (2), pp. 254–254, DOI: 10.1177/1781685819883195
- Klinke, I. (2013) 'Chronopolitics: A conceptual matrix', *Progress in Human Geography*, 37 (5), pp. 673–690, DOI: 10.1177/0309132512472094
- Laclau, E., Mouffe, C. (2001) *Hegemony and socialist strategy: towards a radical democratic politics*. London: Verso.
- Onar, N. F., Nicolaïdis, K. (2013) 'The Decentring agenda: Europe as a post-colonial power', Статья поступила в редакцию: 19.09.2023
Статья поступила в редакцию повторно, после доработки: 15.11.2023
Статья принята к печати: 15.01.2024
- Cooperation and Conflict*, 48 (2), pp. 283–303, DOI:10.1177/0010836713485384
- Polak, F. (1973) *The image of the future*. Amsterdam: Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company.
- Prozorov, S. (2011) 'The Other as past and present: Beyond the logic of 'temporal othering' in IR theory', *Review of International Studies*, 37 (3), pp. 1273–1293, DOI: 10.1017/S0260210510000586
- Said, E. W. (1995) *Orientalism: Western conceptions of the Orient*. London: Penguin.
- Waeber, O. (1996) 'European security identities', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 34 (1), pp. 103–132, DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-5965.1996.tb00562.x
- Wendt, A. (1999) *Social theory of international politics*. London: Cambridge University Press.

ОБРАЗ БУДУЩЕГО В ОФИЦИАЛЬНОМ ДИСКУРСЕ ЕВРОПЕЙСКОГО СОЮЗА В СВЯЗИ С КАТЕГОРИЯМИ СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКОГО СУВЕРЕНИТЕТА И АВТОНОМИИ

Г. В. Коцур

Коцур Глеб Владиславович, кандидат политических наук, ассистент кафедры теории и истории международных отношений, факультет международных отношений, Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет, Санкт-Петербург; доцент Департамента политологии и международных отношений, Национальный исследовательский университет «Высшая школа экономики» в Санкт-Петербурге, Россия.
E-mail: glebk17@gmail.com (ORCID: 0000-0003-4079-264X. ResearcherID: U-6214-2017).

Аннотация

Традиционно понятие суверенитета не пользовалось популярностью внутри официального дискурса Европейского союза, однако ситуация изменилась в последние годы, когда представители Союза начали говорить о суверенитете Европы и европейской стратегической автономии. Все это оказывает воздействие на представления элиты ЕС о будущем Союза, конституируя определенные аспекты идентичности уже сегодня. Через призму критической хронополитики, концепции образа будущего Ф. Полака и дискурс-анализа выступлений первых лиц ЕС и ключевых внешнеполитических документов автор выявляет, как новые категории повлияли на образ будущего в картине мира Брюсселя. Во-первых, они задают определенный тематический контур, включающий в себя фокус на сферах технологий / цифровизации, экологии, внешней политики / обороны. Суверенитет и автономия увязываются именно с ними, и развитие каждой из данных сфер способствует укреплению суверенитета / автономии ЕС внутри подобного нарратива. Во-вторых, новые категории функционируют целиком в рамках традиционной для ЕС фигуры движения, формирующей символическую карту мира Брюсселя через комбинацию ориентализма и историцизма. Здесь Евросоюз уже не видит себя совершенным образцом, но тем не менее полагает, что находится в авангарде движения. В-третьих, категории вносят вклад в оптимистическую и пессимистическую половины образа будущего, которые являют собой скорее проекцию нынешнего статуса-кво, нежели утопию и антиутопию.

Ключевые слова: образ будущего; Европейский союз; стратегический суверенитет; стратегическая автономия; критическая геополитика; хронополитика; дискурс; фигура движения.