
Book review: T. Usewicz (2023), *Morskie aspekty bezpieczeństwa i obrony UE* (The Maritime Aspects of EU Security and Defence), Łódź, 289 pages

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Abstract

Objectives: To assess the scholarly contribution, analytical rigor, and relevance of the monograph *Morskie aspekty bezpieczeństwa i obrony UE*; to evaluate the author's argument regarding the EU's developing but limited maritime power; and to situate the work within contemporary research on EU security and defence.

Results: The monograph successfully demonstrates the EU's strong regulatory and institutional capacity in the maritime domain and its leadership in maritime safety standards. It highlights the EU's reliance on coalition frameworks, partner capabilities, and multilateral cooperation, while illustrating operational examples that confirm the Union's limited hard-power projection at sea. Key strengths include conceptual clarity, precise institutional mapping, and original synthesis of maritime aspects of CSDP.

Conclusions: The book provides a valuable, well-documented analysis showing that, despite progress in strategy, regulation, and coordination, the EU remains a militarily constrained maritime actor lacking integrated naval capabilities. Its maritime influence relies on norms, multilateral partnerships, and capacity-building rather than hard power. The study fills a gap in Polish scholarship and offers a foundation for further research on EU maritime security, strategic culture, and capability development.

Introduction

The subject of this review is the monograph by Professor Teresa Usewicz of the Polish Naval Academy, devoted to a comprehensive analysis of the maritime dimension of the European Union's security and defence policy. The book is addressed primarily to scholars and practitioners working on the CFSP/CSDP, maritime studies and strategic naval affairs, as well as to public decision-makers and defence-planning officers. It offers a work that is simultaneously conceptual and empirical, combining the perspective of EU law and institutions with a geopolitical approach and operational experience.

The author sets an ambitious objective: a prognostic diagnosis of the EU's role as a non-state actor in the global maritime domain and an assessment of the significance of maritime safety and security in the evolution of European security and defence policy. The leading hypothesis states that the EU has developed attributes of maritime power in the economic, regulatory, and coalition-building dimensions, but lacks a key component of "hard" maritime power — an integrated naval force — which limits its credibility in deterrence and power projection. This thesis structures the entire narrative and is systematically tested in subsequent chapters.

The monograph is logically organised into four chapters preceded by an introduction. In the first chapter, Teresa Usewicz reconstructs the origins of European strategic autonomy, beginning with the Western European Union (WEU) and the failed EDC, through the "Balkan moment" of the 1990s, to the birth of the CSDP (1999) and its early crisis-management toolkit. The author convincingly demonstrates that the EU's deficit in military agency is historically rooted: the intergovernmental nature of decision-making, the absence of a shared strategic culture, and the dispersion of resources consistently pushed the Union toward civilian tools and auxiliary functions in relation to NATO and the UN.

The central innovation of the second chapter is the application of principal-agent theory (PAT) to analyse relations between the Council, the Commission, the EEAS, and specialised agencies. The author shows how the Lisbon Treaty strengthened coordination (HR/VP, EEAS) but did not eliminate preference asymmetries between member states. A notable added value is a clear mapping of key documents (from the European Security Strategy to the Strategic Compass) and the conclusion that normative and organisational progress does not automatically translate into strategic convergence, particularly in the maritime domain, which requires high investment and rapid decision-making.

Chapter three constitutes the most important and analytically original part of the book. First, the author conducts a critical analysis of terminology, consistently distinguishing maritime safety (the safety of human activity at sea) from maritime security (protection against intentional threats). This conceptual order — often confused in the debate — becomes the backbone for evaluating EU policies. Second, Teresa Usewicz synthesises the maritime dimension of the *acquis*: the "Erika" and "Prestige" packages, standards exceeding IMO requirements, the growing role of EMSA, digitalisation, and surveillance. Third, she demonstrates both the institutional potential (Commission/EMSA/EEAS/EDA) and operational practice: from EU NAVFOR Atalanta (a success and model of coalition capabilities) to IRINI (limited results, *de facto* a policing mandate). The conclusion is balanced:

the EU is a global regulatory leader and coordinator of maritime multilateralism, but a militarily constrained actor.

In the fourth chapter, the author introduces the concept of inclusive multilateralism as the primary channel of EU influence at sea (partnerships with the UN, NATO, AU, ASEAN; capacity-building programmes such as CMR). She discusses maritime spaces of vital importance (the Baltic, the Black Sea, the Mediterranean hub, the Gulf of Guinea, oceanic sea lines of communication) as well as the debate over the EU's strategic culture: does it exist at all, or is it merely wishful thinking? Her answer is conditional — the EU's strategic culture is emerging in practice, yet without “hard” maritime attributes it will remain incomplete. The inventory of attributes (maritime economy, law and standards, partnership networks) versus deficits (lack of an integrated fleet, limited power projection, unanimity requirement) leads to the key conclusion: the current model does not allow the EU to become a fully complementary maritime power.

The monograph combines historical, institutional-legal and conceptual analysis with case studies supported by expert consultations (Brussels, EU and NATO structures). The use of PAT and references to the concepts of maritime power and strategic culture enhance the theoretical value of the work. The bibliography includes Polish maritime literature (Szubrycht, Makowski, Mickiewicz), Polish strategic documents, and leading works within the “maritime turn” in EU studies (Germond, Riddervold), placing the book firmly within a vibrant research debate while simultaneously filling a gap in Polish-language studies on the maritime aspects of the CSDP. Key findings emerging from the monograph include: (1) The safety/security dualism: the EU is a regulatory powerhouse in maritime safety (standards exceeding IMO, EMSA's role), but in maritime security it remains a coordinator and donor of capabilities rather than a full guarantor; (2) The absence of an integrated navy and the unanimity requirement limit deterrence credibility and response speed at sea; (3) Inclusive multilateralism is the primary mechanism of influence (partnerships, capacity-building, external operations), yet its effectiveness often depends on political context and partners' readiness; (4) The Strategic Compass strengthens the maritime component at the declaratory level, but real capability convergence remains limited; the war in Ukraine has not produced a breakthrough in the maritime dimension of the CSDP; (5) EU maritime power attributes include a strong maritime economy and global regulatory leadership, contrasted with “hard” deficits (power projection, sea control, integrated maritime command).

Professor Teresa Usewicz's monograph is a mature, rigorous, and much The greatest strength of the monograph lies undoubtedly in its systematisation of the research field: precise clarification of the safety/security distinction, an analytical map of institutions and documents, and an original inventory of EU maritime power attributes. The book reconciles perspectives previously operating in separate scholarly streams (EU law, strategic studies, policy design, maritime operations), making it a point of reference for further Polish research on the maritime dimension of the CSDP. A relative weakness concerns limited comparative treatment of command architecture and lessons learned from Atalanta, IRINI,

and training missions (e.g., EUTM in supporting maritime domain awareness of partners), which could further illuminate the practical divide between safety and security. Likewise,

the industrial-defence cooperation dimension (EDF, PESCO) and its implications for maritime capabilities could be elaborated as a potential driver of future change. These remarks are suggestions for expansion and do not undermine the core conclusions.-needed synthesis of the maritime aspects of EU security and defence. The author convincingly demonstrates that although the Union is growing as a norm-setter and organiser of maritime multilateralism, it remains constrained as a military actor at sea. As a result, its maritime power ambitions diverge from available “hard” instruments, and the EU’s credibility in maritime security depends on partners’ capabilities and member-state will. In the context of eroding multilateral order, major-power rivalry, and turbulence along key maritime routes, the book constitutes both an important analytical warning and a roadmap for further research — on capability modernisation, interoperability, strategic culture, and decision-making coherence. For Polish scholarship and security practice, this is essential reading: well-documented, institutionally grounded, and opening avenues for comparative studies and policy recommendations.