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EU DEFENCE POLICY: BETWEEN FUNCTIONALISM, NATIONAL INTERESTS, AND TRANSATLANTIC REALITIES

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ABSTRACT

Existing insights into recent defence integration, including against the backdrop of Russia's war, largely stem from EU governance studies. Although these studies might not explicitly delve into the EU's politico-strategic role, when combined with the broader framework of International Relations (IR), they imply the EU's effective progression, at least relatively, as a defence actor. However, a closer analysis of certain key developments and transatlantic dynamics suggests a persistent lack in the political and strategic dimensions of EU defence policy. This disparity arises when IR concepts are tailored to fit the EU context in integration studies.

KEYWORDS

European Union, NATO, defence integration, EU governance, International Relations.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a growing and systematic scholarly interest in the European Union's (EU) defence policy. This surge in interest largely derives from meaningful policy developments since 2016, such as the establishment of the European Defence Fund (EDF), which has been described as a "game changer," including by scholars.¹ Consistently, yet more recently, it has been argued that "the response of the [EU] as a whole to the brutal war at its border" signifies a "Zeitenwende," a historical turning point.² The EU and its member states' military support to Ukraine, a warring country, markedly diverges from an earlier EU-wide consensus that left unaddressed crucial aspects of defence, such as EU financing for defence-related activities. A marked progress in what seems to be an increased collective push to strengthen EU defence policy arguably enhances the Union's prospects to position itself as a more strategically and politically capable defence actor.³

Much of the knowledge about advancements of EU defence policy derives from EU governance studies. Specifically, empirical analyses tend to align with either inter-governmental or supranational explanations.⁴ Although EU integration accounts do not explicitly address the EU's politico-strategic role,⁵ they inherently relate to considerations about the Union's evolution as a geopolitical actor. Thus, if paired with a wider perspective of International Relations (IR),⁶ these accounts can be instructive in suggesting whether recent progress in defence integration amounts to substantive political and strategic implications for the EU as a geopolitical actor.

To what extent is there evidence to suggest that the EU is better positioned to evolve into a player able to assume its political and strategic actorness? In the evolving international environment, has strengthened military integration effectively bolstered the EU's ability, even relatively, "to influence events beyond its borders"?⁷ Adopting a relative perspective is valuable not just to sidestep absolute assertions. A decade ago, strong arguments were made that EU security was neither strategic nor part of a "political project,"⁸ which provides a relevant reference point for this analysis.

The article examines EU defence policy within its broader institutional framework, as well as politico-strategic context, inclusive of transatlantic cooperation. Regarding specific policy developments, I discuss several pivotal ones, which can be substantiated as the "most likely" cases to embody the EU's politico-strategic evolution. Based on the analysis, which draws on a case-study approach, it is argued that common defence policy remains largely lacking in meaningful political and strategic dimensions. Neither political nor strategic motivations serve as a necessary catalyst for recent defence

¹ Ester Sabatino, "The European Defence Fund: A Step Towards a Single Market for Defence?," *Journal of European Integration* 44, no. 1 (2022).

² Sven Biscop, "European Defence: No Zeitenwende Yet," *Defence and Peace Economics* (2023): 1.

³ Lucie Béraud-Sudreau and Alice Pannier, "An 'Improbable Paris-Berlin-Commission Triangle': Usages of Europe and the Revival of EU Defense Cooperation after 2016," *Journal of European Integration* 43, no. 3 (2021).

⁴ E.g., Daniel Fiott, "In Every Crisis an Opportunity? European Union Integration in Defence and the War on Ukraine," *Journal of European Integration* 45, no. 3 (2023): 447–462; Pierre Haroche, "Supranationalism Strikes Back: A Neofunctionalist Account of the European Defence Fund," *Journal of European Public Policy* 27, no. 6 (2020); Calle Håkansson, "The European Commission's New Role in EU Security and Defence Cooperation: The Case of the European Defence Fund," *European Security* 30, no. 4 (2021).

⁵ The author is indebted to one of the reviewers for making this point, which served as a motivation to rethink the initial argument.

⁶ See Pierre Haroche, "A 'Geopolitical Commission': Supranationalism Meets Global Power Competition," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 61, no. 4 (2023).

⁷ Zachary Selden, "Power is Always in Fashion: State-Centric Realism and the European Security and Defence Policy," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 48, no. 2 (2010): 398.

⁸ Olivier Schmitt, "A Tragic Lack of Ambition: Why EU Security Policy Is No Strategy," *Contemporary Security Policy* 34, no. 2 (2013).

integration. To account for this lack, which is also here to be understood as the absence of a *relative* evolution of the EU as a geopolitical actor as a result of defence integration, the article advances three main arguments. Firstly, on closer examination, the EDF and a few related initiatives are driven by functional considerations, primarily economic.⁹ Secondly, there remains a consistent absence of systematic alignment in national security interests, as exemplified by the European Peace Facility (EPF) and the Strategic Compass, rendering EU-level defence initiatives conditional or even incidental. Thirdly, in relation to Russia's war in particular, the US has reasserted its role as the primary guarantor of Europe's security, which only highlighted European countries' strategic dependence on Washington's military capabilities. Overall, the article tends to confirm a decade-long conclusion on the absence of a "political project" for a strategy of EU security policy more generally.¹⁰ The article's conclusion challenges the EU's effective progression as a defence actor, which can generally be implied from research on defence integration. This disparity arises when IR concepts are tailored to fit the EU context in studies on EU defence policy.

The article is structured as follows. Section one reviews the most recent literature on EU defence policy developments and their causes, bridging this literature with IR studies and teasing out relevant implications. Sections two to four develop the main argument concerning the lack of a meaningful political rationale and the strategic one of EU defence policy. In doing so, the article discusses, respectively, functional underpinnings of defence initiatives, the enduring influence of diverging national preferences, and the US's reasserted role in Europe's security and defence, notably in light of Russia's war against Ukraine. Conclusions follow.

1. BRIDGING ANALYSES OF DEFENCE INTEGRATION WITH THE IR PERSPECTIVE

Comprehensive research, which forms the basis of our understanding of EU defence policy developments, largely originates from EU governance studies, with a focus on either intergovernmentalism or supranationalism. While integration theories and relevant empirical work don't (or, at least, are not supposed to) explicitly tackle the EU's politico-strategic role, defence inherently spans not only low but also high political arenas.¹¹ This latter encompasses "inter-European" dynamics, thus intersecting with the notion of "international politics."¹² As a result, studies on defence integration can tie with discussions on politico-strategic issues, including the EU's evolution as a geopolitical actor. Thus, if we couple existing insights into EU defence policy with the wider IR perspective, it is possible to derive political and strategic implications of recent progress for the EU's role in the geopolitical landscape.

⁹ Kjell Engelbrekt, "Beyond Burdensharing and European Strategic Autonomy: Rebuilding Transatlantic Security after the Ukraine War," *European Foreign Affairs Review* 27, no. 3 (2022); Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 6.

¹⁰ Olivier Schmitt, *supra* note 8.

¹¹ Antonio Calcara, "Cooperation and Conflict in the European Defence-Industrial Field: The Role of Relative Gains," *Defence Studies* 18, no. 4 (2018).

¹² Pierre Haroche, "Interdependence, Asymmetric Crises, and European Defence Cooperation," *European Security* 26, no. 2 (2017): 228; Jolyon Howorth and Anand Menon, "Still Not Pushing Back: Why the European Union Is Not Balancing the United States," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 5 (2009).

1.1. What EU Defence Policy Developments?

Both new intergovernmentalism and neofunctionalism (or, more generally, supranationalism) have been employed to elucidate recent advancements in EU defence policy.¹³ Defence can be distinctly characterized as an intergovernmental policy realm, where pivotal choices with respect to national armies, particularly regarding the deployment of troops to potentially hazardous circumstances but also capability development,¹⁴ embody the ultimate assertion of state sovereignty.¹⁵ Consequently, the domain of defence has largely resisted European integration.¹⁶ Lately, however, defence matters have gained prominence in EU discussions, a phenomenon acknowledged by EU defence scholars¹⁷ as part of a broader trend of expanding "EU activity [...] to an unprecedented degree."¹⁸ Supranational studies assert that EU institutions spearhead defence integration, while proponents of the intergovernmental perspective credit the expanding role of collective decision-making in defence policy to the initiative and stewardship of member state (hence, "new" intergovernmentalism).¹⁹

Based on new intergovernmentalism,²⁰ it has been generally confirmed that security and defence policy advancements, including in the context of Russia's war, testify to the fact that "intergovernmental consensus and deliberation [have] effectively sidelined supranational institutions."²¹ Furthermore, issues pertaining to defence policy strategy and defence industrial interests have taken on a more prominent role in deliberations among member states,²² thus indicating a relatively greater degree of cooperation at the political level. Generally, this insight is supported by studying an ever more active role of the European Council, which has become "the key arbiter in foreign policy decision-making," including at the expense of traditional intergovernmental bodies, notably the Political and Security Committee (PSC), a key institutional figure in the pre-Lisbon era.²³

Concretely, one of the main developments following Russia's war against Ukraine has been member states' decision to use the EPF to finance transfers of lethal arms to Kyiv. The functioning of the EPF, an off-budget financial instrument aimed at mitigating security and defence challenges faced by both the EU and its member states, is contingent on consensus-based decisions made by national governments. While subject to intergovernmental governance, the EPF arguably manifests a more robust collective military stance of EU capitals and testifies to an effort to significantly re-think their

¹³ E.g., Raluca Csernatonî, *The EU's Defense Ambitions: Understanding the Emergence of a European Defense Technological and Industrial Complex*, Carnegie Europe Working Paper (December 2021) // https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Csernatonî_EU_Defense_v2.pdf; Daniel Fiott, Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 4; Calle Håkansson, "The Strengthened Role of the European Union in Defence: The Case of the Military Mobility Project," *Defence Studies* (2023); Ester Sabatino, *supra* note 1.

¹⁴ Daniel Fiott, *supra* note 4.

¹⁵ E.g., Ringailė Kuokšytė, "Common Security and Defence Policy as France's Winning Strategy? Evidence from Recent Experience," *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review 2020* 18, no. 1 (2020).

¹⁶ Tanya A. Börzel, "Mind the Gap! European Integration between Level and Scope"; in Tanya A. Börzel, ed., *The Disparity of European Integration* (Routledge, 2013); Zachary Selden, *supra* note 7.

¹⁷ E.g., Daniel Fiott, *supra* note 4.

¹⁸ Christopher J. Bickerton, Dermot Hodson, and Uwe Puetter, "The New Intergovernmentalism: European Integration in the Post-Maastricht Era," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 53, no. 4 (2015).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ See, e.g., Uwe Puetter, "Europe's Deliberative Intergovernmentalism: The Role of the Council and European Council in EU Economic Governance," *Journal of European Public Policy* 19, no. 2 (2012); Sergio Fabbrini and Uwe Puetter, "Integration without Supranationalisation: Studying the Lead Roles of the European Council and the Council in Post-Lisbon EU Politics," *Journal of European Integration* 38, no. 5 (2016).

²¹ Daniel Fiott, *supra* note 4, 453.

²² E.g., *ibid.*

²³ Heidi Maurer and Nicholas Wright, "Still Governing in the Shadows? Member States and the Political and Security Committee in the Post-Lisbon EU Foreign Policy Architecture," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 59, no. 4 (2021): 856.

defence cooperation with partners, that is, within the framework of what has been termed as “defensive weaponisation”.²⁴ Moreover, it is argued that the EU adopted, in 2022 March, its “first-ever dedicated security and defence strategy”, the Strategic Compass.²⁵ In addition to broader security objectives, the document, which was ultimately adopted by member states (contrary, e.g., to the 2016 EU Global Strategy), makes the case for the need to develop EU military capabilities and provide for a more robust “EU military action.”²⁶

Conversely, a different strand of EU defence literature contends that the European Commission’s (Commission) involvement in defence matters, especially concerning defence investment, capability development (and – progressively – joint procurement), has significantly expanded. Indeed, within the framework of EU defence policy, decisions on these issues now follow the Community method.²⁷ Of the recent developments in EU defence, the EDF, aimed at (co-)finance cooperative defence research and capability development, has garnered significant attention due to its embodiment of the supranational rationale.²⁸ For Pierre Haroche, “the EDF is marked by the increasingly political nature of the Commission’s cultivated spillover in the area of defence,”²⁹ which directly contradicts the intergovernmental hypothesis on the EU executive’s self-restraint to expand its control over policy. Whether one considers the origins of the EDF or its governance, the EU executive has played a significant role in developing the fund.³⁰ As the Commission strengthens its sway over defence policy, it challenges prior assumptions about its role in this domain.³¹

Furthermore, a few recently proposed initiatives aimed at fostering joint procurement,³² such as the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP), have equally gone beyond the Commission’s previously held competencies and even caused formal resistance from member states.³³ Another initiative, EDIRPA,³⁴ further contradicts the hypothesis on intergovernmental control of policy activity, as the relevant legislation follows the Community method, with an increased role of both the EU executive and the European Parliament. Moreover, it has been evidenced that the Commission has strengthened its technical expertise as regards defence issues, by expanding its relevant bureaucratic capacity, specifically, through the establishment of the Defence Industry and Space Directorate-General.³⁵ These developments are consistent with the research arguing in favour of (new) supranationalism, which highlights the Commission’s influence on intergovernmental dynamics.³⁶

²⁴ See Daniel Fiott, *supra* note 4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 449.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 450.

²⁷ See Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 4, 858.

²⁸ Pierre Haroche, Calle Håkansson, *supra* note 4; Calle Håkansson, *supra* note 18; Ester Sabatino, *supra* note 1.

²⁹ Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 4, 855.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ E.g., Marianne Riddervold, “(Not) in the Hands of the Member States: How the European Commission Influences EU Security and Defence Policies,” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 54, no. 2 (2016).

³² European Commission (EC), *European Defence Industry: Commission Welcomes Political Agreement on Support for Common Procurement between Member States*, Press Release (28 June 2023) // https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_3554.

³³ Jean-Pierre Maulny, *Salon du Bourget: entre compétition transatlantique et... querelles européennes [Salon du Bourget: Between Transatlantic Competition and European Quarrels]*, IRIS (June 2023) // <https://www.iris-france.org/176540-salon-du-bourget-entre-competition-transatlantique-etquerelles-europeennes/>.

³⁴ European Defence Industry Reinforcement through Common Procurement Act (see, e.g., EC, *supra* note 37).

³⁵ Calle Håkansson, *supra* note, 4.

³⁶ Renaud Dehousse, “Why has EU Macroeconomic Governance Become More Supranational?” *Journal of European Integration* 38, no. 5 (2016); Vivien A. Schmidt, “Rethinking EU Governance: From ‘Old’ to

The natural focus of new intergovernmentalism and supranationalism is intra-EU dynamics, with scholars keen to understand the play of (relative) power shifts in terms of policy control by either national governments or EU institutions. As a result, they do not (or, at least, are not supposed to) explicitly address the political and strategic dimensions of the EU as a defence actor within the global strategic landscape. However, defence is intrinsically linked to high politics, as already alluded to through the references to the political and strategic dimensions.

1.2. Causes and Implications of Defence Integration

Considering that defence integration encompasses high-politics or “inter-European” dynamics, what broader insights can related analyses provide regarding the EU’s relative evolution in strategic and political dimensions? It is important here to consider both causes and implications we can tease out from these analyses. These causes and implications are closely intertwined and, importantly, both hold significance in terms of their relationship with IR studies.

Recent developments generally indicate a deeper and more intense cooperation that has been occurring *specifically* within the EU framework, that is, autonomously from either NATO or national venues,³⁷ including those of bilateral or multilateral nature. This pattern can be understood as the very process of European integration³⁸ or, at the very least, as a catalyst for integration. In terms of causes of such an emerging pattern, analyses of European defence integration briefly refer to systemic transformations, such as the US’s pivoting to East Asia, increasing American isolationism, China’s increasing assertiveness, and Russia’s revisionist policy, notably its war against Ukraine.³⁹ Brexit and the migration crisis, which are somewhat more proximate to the EU,⁴⁰ largely stem from the same systemic shifts.

To the extent that, in the shifting international environment, national governments appear to have fostered a growing political preference for inter-EU deliberations, recent progress can be argued to produce a “convergence of [EU] member states’ security interests.”⁴¹ Such a political implication intersects with one of the core expectations of bellicist theories, concretely, that external threats will foster cohesion and diminish “the salience of conflicts and divisions,” ultimately leading to enhanced institutional centralization and the emergence of a new political system, a federation.⁴² A more general implication is, then, that the EU acts as a (relatively) more effective conduit for harmonizing member states’ interests and identities,⁴³ suggesting the EU defence policy’s increased capacity in terms of its “transformative influence on national

³⁶ ‘New’ Approaches to Who Steers Integration,” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 56, no. 7 (2018).

³⁷ See Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 12.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ E.g., Esther Barbé, and Pol Morillas, “The EU Global Strategy: The Dynamics of a More Politicized and Politically Integrated Foreign Policy,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32, no. 6 (2019); Martin Chovančík, and Krpec Oldřich, “Cloaked Disintegration—Ukraine War and European Defence-Industrial Co-operation in Central and Eastern Europe,” *Defense & Security Analysis* (2023); Ester Sabatino, *supra* note 1.

⁴⁰ Esther Barbé and Pol Morillas (*supra* note 39, 753), e.g., refer to “the crises of European integration.”

⁴¹ Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 12, 226.

⁴² Philipp Genschel, Lauren Leek, and Jordy Weyns, “War and Integration. The Russian Attack on Ukraine and the Institutional Development of the EU,” *Journal of European Integration* 45, no. 3 (2023).

⁴³ Jocelyn Mawdsley, “France, the UK and the EDA”: 139; in: Nikolaos Karampekio and Iraklis Oikonomou, eds., *The European Defence Agency* (Routledge, 2015).

governments⁴⁴ and therefore of fostering a convergence of national perceptions of shared security challenges.⁴⁵

The perspective of political convergence also resonates well with another IR explanation – the one of strategic interdependence. By applying this explanation to what we learn from analyses of defence integration, we can tease out another important implication. Indeed, one could contend that the backdrop of geopolitical threats, especially in the aftermath of Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine, embodies a "symmetric crisis" for EU member states⁴⁶ and, more generally, EU institutions. In essence, the threats they face are evenly significant for all, which suggests two things: firstly, there is a universal inclination to respond, but actions by one entity can affect the situation or decisions of others; and secondly, there's an amplified need for collaborative assistance.⁴⁷ In other words, the actors find themselves in a situation of security interdependence. As a result, there is a growing inclination towards coordination and a collective response, leading to more efficient European defence cooperation. This is based on pooling military resources (strategic action), which also suggests shared (political) objectives.⁴⁸ Significantly, the current threat posed by Russia can be likened to the historical case of the European Defence Community (EDC). The EDC has been compellingly presented by Pierre Haroche⁴⁹ as an instance that showcased pronounced hard-core security interdependence between France and West Germany in the face of the Soviet threat, which, at least in the beginning of the project, spearheaded an ambitious political plan for defence cooperation (an integrated European army). Strategic interdependence, thus, helps to suggest a distinctly politico-strategic value of recent defence integration.

Moreover, it is worth noting that the theory of strategic interdependence arguably offers a more comprehensive explanation of defence-related progress at the EU level than, notably, neorealism and constructivism.⁵⁰ While the latter largely tends to explain inter-EU convergence dynamics with the focus on "how?" instead of "why?", both the neorealist theory and the one of strategic interdependence posit European defence integration as strategic.⁵¹ Indeed, for neorealists, the CSDP in general conforms to the logic of (soft) balancing against the US hegemon or that of bandwagoning,⁵² which are both strategic acts, yet they remain limited in their approach to EU realities. While not negating the influence of the US, the theory of strategic interdependence questions the exclusive emphasis placed by other approaches on American power – this limited focus overlooks how European nations are also inclined to operate *specifically* within the European framework, as seen, for example, in military operations in Africa.⁵³ Significantly, the bellicist approach and strategic interdependence not only showcase the ways in

⁴⁴ Ringailė Kuokšytė, "Revisiting France's Commitment to Defence Integration: A Case of Political Functionalism": 34; in Giedrius Česnakas and Justinas Juozaitis, eds., *European Strategic Autonomy and Small States' Security* (Routledge, 2022), 15.

⁴⁵ Philipp Genschel, Lauren Leek, and Jordy Weyns, *supra* note 42.

⁴⁶ See Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 12.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ See *ibid.*; Olivier Schmitt, *supra* note 8.

⁴⁹ See Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 12.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*; see also Christoph O. Meyer, and Eva Strickmann, "Solidifying Constructivism: How Material and Ideational Factors Interact in European Defence," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 49, no. 1 (2011).

⁵² Lorenzo Cladi and Andrea Locatelli, "Bandwagoning, Not Balancing: Why Europe Confounds Realism," *Contemporary Security Policy* 33, no. 2 (2012); Barry R. Posen, "European Union Security and Defense Policy: Response to Unipolarity?" *Security Studies* 15, no. 2 (2006): 149-186; Adrian Hyde-Price, "'Normative' Power Europe: A Realist Critique," *Journal of European Public Policy* 13, no. 2 (2006); Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 12.

⁵³ Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 12.

which analyses of defence integration are compatible with IR categories of thinking; they also help to tease out effective politico-strategic ramifications of recent advancements of EU defence policy.

It is also noteworthy that scholars interested in either EU military operations or institutional developments tend to agree that, from the mid-2000s through the beginning of the 2010s, the integration of defence stalled.⁵⁴ Adopting the IR perspective, Olivier Schmitt notes that, in the pre-2005 period, “there seemed to be a political dynamic at play,” as were established the European Defence Agency, the EU battlegroups, and the Military Committee.⁵⁵ During that time, in fact, not only were the first EU military operations initiated, but perhaps more significantly, the CSDP itself came into existence. Arguably, the latter resulted as a consequence of the Balkan crises and the US’s desire to see European countries take on a more robust role in addressing regional security challenges.⁵⁶ These insights further support the idea that current defence integration initiatives arise from a “crisis” scenario, that is, an exceptional situation, potentially requiring exceptional measures.

Yet another IR-based approach can help to further substantiate the implications of recent defence-related progress for the EU’s prospects as a geopolitical actor, as well as the causes thereof. It has been concluded that defence integration contributed to a geopolitically strengthened role of the Commission, stemming, among other things, from an effective transfer of its authority from the economic realm to defence, which is consistent with the theory of state-centrism.⁵⁷ In other words, an institution entrusted with economic powers in terms of a domestic policy matter may be expected to bolster its role in the field of international security.⁵⁸ In the case of the EU executive, the mentioned transfer has been facilitated by the international environment marked by increasing global competition, leading broader international security concerns to feature the Commission’s policy initiatives.⁵⁹ More concretely, with the inclusion of the EDF in the EU budget, the Commission has become an essential player in defence-related research and development at the EU level.

While analyses of defence integration mainly focus on intra-EU dynamics, the very subject matter of *defence* inherently also connects to the inter-EU dimension. Thus, bringing these analyses into direct connection with the IR perspective allows for teasing out their politico-strategic implications for the EU. At a minimum, the EU appears as relatively better poised to develop as an entity capable of asserting its political and strategic role.

However, prior work has challenged the influence of historical crisis situations, on EU defence policy, ultimately concluding that it led to an “institutional make-up” in the absence of strategic thinking within the EU.⁶⁰ Scrutinizing recent progress in defence integration is thus also important in the face of the prevailing global environment.⁶¹ While accounts on defence integration can be associated with meaningful politico-strategic implications, in the following, I challenge this conclusion. It suggests more generally

⁵⁴ E.g., France’s decision to rejoin NATO’s integrated military command can be explained, inter alia, by the fact that “the French [had] become disillusioned by the CSDP” (Olivier Schmitt, *supra* note 8, 414).

⁵⁵ Olivier Schmitt, *supra* note 8, 415

⁵⁶ Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 12.

⁵⁷ Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America’s World Role* (Princeton University Press, 1999); Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 6; Zachary Selden, *supra* note 7.

⁵⁸ Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 6, 971; Zachary Selden, *supra* note 7.

⁵⁹ Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 8.

⁶⁰ Olivier Schmitt, *supra* note 8, 413.

⁶¹ See Oriol Costa and Esther Barbé, “A Moving Target. EU Actorness and the Russian Invasion of Ukraine,” *Journal of European Integration* 45, no. 3 (2023).

the need for defence integration analyses to seriously consider the IR perspective, ensuring a balanced account of the EU's politico-strategic role.

2. FUNCTIONAL UNDERPINNINGS OF THE EDF AND RELATED EU DEFENCE INITIATIVES

Among EU defence initiatives, it is notably the EDF that has been described as a "game changer"⁶² and a "paradigm shift."⁶³ Since 2021, this financial instrument provides project-based funds, through allocations from the EU budget, to cross-national research and capability development in the defence field. Arguably, the fund embodies the resolute commitment of EU institutions and member states to collectively invest in European military capabilities,⁶⁴ essential for safeguarding European security and defence, and ultimately contributing to the advancement of the goal of Europe's strategic autonomy. The decision to establish the EDF has been described as a collective response to the international and regional challenges of the day, notably strained relations with the US during the Trump presidency, Brexit, and Russia's ever more aggressive foreign policy.⁶⁵

However, I contend that the international and regional challenges that may seem to be associated with the EDF's establishment overshadow rather than elucidate the initiative's nature, which rather derives from the economic realm and, as such, has been supported by member states. The EDF primarily contributes to streamlining sound economic principles in the European defence market, which is intricately linked to, yet inherently separate from, the overarching strategic goal of fortifying Europe's defence capabilities, as well as the political agreement on such a goal. More generally, this is consistent with the history of EU integration, marked by economic considerations and absence of security motives.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the argument also challenges the specific thesis of the Commission "geopoliticisation."⁶⁷ It suggests that when making a case for this evolution within the EU executive, IR concepts often get "lost in translation" as they are tailored to fit the EU context.

2.1. Linking Economic Governance and the Commission's Increased Role in EU Defence

Despite the EDF's short existence, it has already been argued that it is indispensable for an effective European defence.⁶⁸ Significantly, the EDF's function to consistently fund projects with defence implications has reversed the EU-wide consensus on refraining from such financing, as this kind of financing was, until recently, a subject of controversy, impeding EU budget allocations toward defence activities.⁶⁹ In light of this, the fund can therefore be regarded as an initiative driven by a distinct common sense of purpose⁷⁰ to strengthen the EU's defence and advance the project of Europe's

⁶² Ester Sabatino, *supra* note 1.

⁶³ Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 4.

⁶⁴ Sven Biscop, *supra* note 2; Thierry Tardy, "Does European Defence Really Matter? Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Common Security and Defence Policy," *European Security* 27, no. 2 (2018).

⁶⁵ E.g., Lucie Béraud-Sudreau and Alice Pannier, *supra* note 3; Calle Håkansson, *supra* note 4; Nathalie Tocci, "Towards a European Security and Defence Union: Was 2017 a Watershed," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 56 (2018).

⁶⁶ Philipp Genschel, Lauren Leek, and Jordy Weyns, *supra* note 42; R. Daniel Kelemen and Kathleen R. McNamara, "State-building and the European Union: Markets, War, and Europe's Uneven political development," *Comparative Political Studies* 55, no. 6 (2022).

⁶⁷ Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 6.

⁶⁸ Sven Biscop, *supra* note 2.

⁶⁹ See Article 41.2 of the Treaty of the EU; see also Thierry Tardy, *supra* note 64.

⁷⁰ Sven Biscop, *supra* note 2, 4.

strategic autonomy. This undertaking, marked by its aforementioned unprecedented nature, along with the international context surrounding it, may suggest a strategic and political common stance of the EU and its member states. However, there exists a more empirically compelling – economic – rationale that underpins the EDF and, notably, the increased role of the Commission in defence affairs.

The origins of the EDF can be traced far back, as the Commission had long sought to broaden its engagement in defence policy. Specifically, the EU executive had undertaken several prior endeavors to enhance its involvement in the European defence market's governance. Relevant efforts were made to address the deficiencies in the European defense market, particularly its fragmentation and inadequate competitiveness. By deploying such efforts, the Commission sought to align member states' activities more closely with sound economic principles, particularly fair(er) competition.

A few episodes may be mentioned to support this "long-standing objective"⁷¹ of the Commission. As the exemption from the single market rules applied to the defence market and therefore the European defence industry, in 1997, the Commission took an initiative to introduce coordination between its research programmes and those dealing with national defence research; yet such an initiative was refused by national governments.⁷² Subsequently, in the 2000s, the EU executive, again, after member states' opposition, had to focus on civilian security research only within the European Security Research Programme (ESRP).⁷³ The Commission's effort to incorporate into this programme defence-related research repeatedly failed.

In 2009, two directives were agreed on, one of which specifically sought to promote more transparency and competition in defence procurement. This directive aligned very much with the Commission's economic orthodoxy.⁷⁴ Finally, in its Communication of 2013, the EU executive introduced a proposal on "a preparatory action for a CSDP-related research,"⁷⁵ inspired by the aforementioned civilian security research programme, which was ultimately approved by member states.⁷⁶

All these undertakings were characterized by their close connection to the Commission's economic competencies,⁷⁷ which supports the notion of functional spillovers. Such spillovers describe policy developments, when the attainment of the objectives of an integrated policy necessitates further integration, including in related areas.⁷⁸

Because of the Commission's significant economic competencies, its initiatives in defence policy equally serve to primarily support European economic activity. As argued by Bruno O. Martins and Jocelyn Mawdsley, the EDF is formally an industrial policy, insofar as its objectives concern "the EU's wide economic, innovation and industrial

⁷¹ Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 4, 858; see also Hanna Ojanen, "The EU and NATO: Two Competing Models for a Common Defence Policy," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 44, no. 1 (2006).

⁷² Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 4.

⁷³ Bruno O. Martins and Jocelyn Mawdsley, "Sociotechnical Imaginaries of EU Defence: The Past and the Future in the European Defence Fund," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 59, no. 6 (2021): 1467.

⁷⁴ Michael Blauburger and Moritz Weiss, "If You Can't Beat Me, Join Me! How the Commission Pushed and Pulled Member States into Legislating Defence Procurement," *Journal of European Public Policy* 20, no. 8 (2013); see also Gueorgui Ianakiev, *The European Defence Fund: A Game Changer for European Defence Industrial Collaboration*, ARES Policy Paper (2019).

⁷⁵ European Commission (EC), *Towards a More Competitive and Efficient Defence and Security Sector*, Communication 542 (2013): 5 // <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX-52013DC0542&>.

⁷⁶ European Council, *Conclusions*, EUCO217/13 (2013) // <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-217-2013-INIT/en/pdf>.

⁷⁷ As described, e.g., by Charles Michel, President of the European Council, that is: "[...] trade agreements, development aid, economic governance, financial market supervision, an industrial strategy, a digital agenda, a space strategy [...]" (cit. in Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 6, 976).

⁷⁸ Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 4.

outlook.”⁷⁹ The possibility to start financing defence-related activities⁸⁰ from the EU budget was made possible by highlighting close linkages between defence and economic issues, notably in terms of the defence sector’s industrial significance and potential.⁸¹

Adhering to the perspective that views industrial and technological innovation as the cornerstone of economic prosperity and overall well-being, the Commission in the 2010s began to increasingly highlight the grave consequences of overlooking effective measures to enhance the competitiveness of the European industrial and technological foundation,⁸² measures such as fostering competition in the defence market. The EDF addresses this concern, as it majorly aims at “enhance[ing] the competitiveness and innovation capacity of the Union’s defence industry,” which, more generally, should lead to “a strong, competitive and innovative EDTIB and complement the Union’s initiatives towards a more integrated European defence market.”⁸³ By securing the Community method in the EDF’s governance,⁸⁴ the Commission was not only successful in expanding its role to the defence field. This advancement equally signified the unprecedented institutionalization of the aforementioned linkages.

2.2. Acknowledging the Commission’s Distinctive Role among Member States

An interesting and indeed relevant, albeit under-researched, facet of the concept underscoring the economic nature of the Commission’s functional spillovers pertains to the position of member states. One might be inclined to infer that the EU executive’s heightened role in EU defence matters mirrors a broader consensus within the Union and among its member states on a political and strategic posture to be taken in this policy field.⁸⁵ However, while consensus has been reached regarding the Commission’s increased involvement in EU defence policy, the discussion below explains that this shift relates more to the EU executive’s economic responsibilities, especially its control over Union funds, rather than indicating a political-strategic direction for EU defence.

Despite national governments’ initial reluctance to embrace the Commission extended role, they eventually expressed support for its initiative regarding the previously mentioned preparatory action on defence research,⁸⁶ a precursor programme for the EDF.⁸⁷ The shift in European capitals’ position seems to result from the substantial fiscal constraints imposed on their respective national defence budgets due to the aftermath of the Great Recession. In other words, the Commission “put money on the table.”⁸⁸ Generally, in proposing funds, the EU executive is able to provide incentives for member states to adhere to sound economic practices, such as policy harmonization,⁸⁹ cost savings through enhanced cross-border cooperation, greater transparency and, notably, competition. Recognizing the potential of these principles to enhance and strengthen

⁷⁹ Bruno O. Martins and Jocelyn Mawdsley, *supra* note 73.

⁸⁰ Initially, these were constrained to defence research and, specifically, to the Preparatory Action on Defence Research (Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 4), the EDF’s precursor programme (European Commission (EC), *Preparatory Action on Defence Research (PADR)* (n. d.) // https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-defence-industry/preparatory-action-defence-research-padr_en.

⁸¹ Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 4.

⁸² Bruno O. Martins and Jocelyn Mawdsley, *supra* note 73.

⁸³ European Parliament and EU Council, *Regulation 2021/697 Establishing the [EDF]* (29 April 2021): 2 // <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R0697&qid=1694440204014>; Bruno O. Martins and Jocelyn Mawdsley, *supra* note 73.

⁸⁴ Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 4.

⁸⁵ See *ibid.*; Bruno O. Martins and Jocelyn Mawdsley, *supra* note 73.

⁸⁶ EC, *supra* note 75; Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 4.

⁸⁷ EC, *supra* note 80.

⁸⁸ Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 4, 861.

⁸⁹ See Sven Biscop, *supra* note 2.

sectoral economic activity, the Commission has long advocated for their adoption in the defence sector.

Following the establishment of the EDF, subsequent initiatives, notably the EDIR-PA and the ASAP, offer additional empirical evidence of the Commission's augmented involvement in defence matters. These initiatives, furthermore, continue to underscore the significance of its economic competencies and highlight the enduring responsibility of member states in shaping strategic deliberations within the field.

The EDIRPA goes beyond the phases of research and development, as it provides financing for acquiring tangible defence products; its logic, however, continues to conform to the one of an incentive-based financial instrument. By providing funds, it aims to foster joint defence procurement. It has already been documented that the process of examining procurement needs belongs to member states and intergovernmental bodies,⁹⁰ not the Commission. The ASAP is a related initiative in that it also targets the European industry reinforcement (specifically that of ammunitions and missiles).

With this latter initiative, however, the Commission has tried to assert its role beyond that of providing funds and fostering the effectiveness of the European defence market – for instance, the EU executive wanted to be able to “receive detailed information on [...] the total production capacity in the relevant supply-critical defence products,” or, under specific circumstances, to request that a company “prioritise an order of supply-critical defence products.”⁹¹ These are sensitive national issues, which have faced member states' opposition.⁹² Significantly, such a foray by the Commission in the defence realm may risk compromising its status as a guarantor of efficient economic governance based on the single-market principles, which is inextricably linked to the EU executive's embodiment of neutrality.⁹³

Member states continue to be “the main locus of power mobilization”⁹⁴ in the defence field. As such, they have not (yet) expressed their readiness for a push towards delegating “more authority [concerning] critical security issue[s]” to the EU level,⁹⁵ thus significantly limiting the political ambition of EU defence policy. Finally, it is worth noting that this approach differs from the one regarding the Commission's “geopoliticisation.” In the latter case, IR concepts seem tailored to the EU context. Specifically, a “geopolitical” EU executive distinguishes itself from its other iterations by “the enhanced co-ordination of the external aspects of the Commission's work.”⁹⁶ That may be considered too weak of a qualification in IR studies.

3. THE PERSISTENCE OF NATIONAL INTERESTS

Based on the previous discussion, the EDF's activities appear to be lacking in political and strategic dimensions, despite the fund being “a game changer.” This confirms the notion that crucial security interests systematically remain “less open to compromise” among member states.⁹⁷ In fact, intergovernmental defence policy developments,

⁹⁰ Daniel Fiott, *supra* note 4.

⁹¹ European Commission, *Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council on Establishing the Act in Support of Ammunition Production* (3 May 2023) // https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-05/COM_2023_237_1_EN_ACT.pdf; Jean-Pierre Maulny, *supra* note 33.

⁹² Jean-Pierre Maulny, *supra* note 38.

⁹³ *Ibid.*; see also David Cadier, “The Geopoliticisation of the EU's Eastern Partnership,” *Geopolitics* 24, no. 1 (2019).

⁹⁴ Philipp Genschel, Lauren Leek, and Jordy Weyns, *supra* note 42, 344.

⁹⁵ Zchary Selden, *supra* note 7, 412; see also Daniel Fiott, *supra* note 4.

⁹⁶ Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 6, 970.

⁹⁷ Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 4, 2.

notably the Strategic Compass and the EPF,⁹⁸ which may be described as the embodiment of consensus among national governments, also reveal that neither political nor strategic considerations serve as a necessary driving force for these outcomes in the realm of EU defence.

Both the Strategic Compass and the EPF have been regarded, including in the academia, as mirroring European capitals' stronger resolve to address common crucial security concerns. According to Daniel Fiott, the Compass attests to "strategic reorientation" of the EU as a whole,⁹⁹ which is closely linked to Russia's war against Ukraine, a "military emergenc[y]."¹⁰⁰ Indeed, the document was unveiled in March 2022, coinciding with the initially planned completion date of an initiative which had been launched a few years prior. Despite this temporal alignment, the nearly finalized strategy underwent revisions due to Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, thereby reinforcing its rightful claim to the title of "the EU's first-ever dedicated security and defence strategy."¹⁰¹ Relative to the EU Global Strategy (2016), the Compass has been argued to have been "endowed with the highest endorsement" by member states;¹⁰² whereas the European Security Strategy (2003) seemed to have largely lost its relevance in the current geopolitical landscape marked by resurgent global power competition.

The Compass, for instance, condemns Russia's war of aggression and, more generally, makes numerous references to Russia compared to the document's earlier (pre-war) versions,¹⁰³ notably emphasizing this Eastern neighbor as a significant source of security challenges. This perspective could be seen as an attempt to incorporate the consideration of "other powers," an essential element for adopting a geopolitical and therefore strategic posture by EU national governments.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, the strategy innovates in elucidating member states' resolve to further develop EU Battlegroups (EUBG). More concretely, the Compass announces the development of EU Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC), "swiftly deploy[able] modular force of up to 5000 troops, including land, air and maritime components, as well as the required strategic enablers,"¹⁰⁵ whereas the size of a EUBG was that of a battalion. Notably, the document establishes in this context a direct link to national armies, as member states pledged to "increase the readiness and availability of [their] armed forces" to meet the RDC objectives.¹⁰⁶

Regarding the EPF, a recent intergovernmental instrument (2021) which, inter alia, serves to finance military equipment transfers from EU member states to Ukraine, it has become closely associated with the resolve of EU member states to enhance the effective relevance of EU defence in the context of heightened military threats. According to Sven Biscop, "few would have imagined the EU applying it at such a scale, to support a country at war."¹⁰⁷ It has been argued that such a transformation testifies to the EU's shifting mindset with regard to defence matters¹⁰⁸ and conforms to the Union's

⁹⁸ Daniel Fiott, *supra* note 4.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 449.

¹⁰⁰ Philipp Genschel, Lauren Leek, and Jordy Weyns, *supra* note 42, 343.

¹⁰¹ Daniel Fiott, *supra* note 4, 449.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 450.

¹⁰³ Council of the EU, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence* (21 March 2022) // <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7371-2022-INIT/en/pdf>; Daniel Fiott, *supra* note 4.

¹⁰⁴ David Cadier, *supra* note 93, 78.

¹⁰⁵ Council of the EU, *supra* note 103, 14.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Sven Biscop, *supra* note 2, 1.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

geopolitical ambitions¹⁰⁹ more generally. Daniel Fiott, furthermore, characterizes the instrument as an embodiment of the EU's "defensive weaponisation," which expresses the notion that the EU has become relatively at ease with delivering lethal equipment to its partners, notably Ukraine, a warring country.¹¹⁰ The fact that decisions concerning the EPF are made unanimously among member states establishes the facility as a manifestation of converging national strategic perspectives on how to collectively contribute to EU security. Besides, the financial ceiling of the EPF has been time and again raised to accommodate Ukraine's needs, which may also serve as a "political signal of the EU's enduring commitment to military support for Ukraine"¹¹¹ and, arguably, to a convergence of strategic perceptions of national governments.

Nevertheless, these initiatives have not succeeded in steering member states towards a shift in their security and defence priorities from the national or NATO level to the EU level.¹¹² They play a rather secondary role in member states' defence policy and military support for Ukraine more specifically. Regarding the Compass, for example, it introduces the notion of deterrence, yet this latter proves to be limited, as it pertains solely to countering cyberattacks.¹¹³ The geopolitical and therefore necessarily strategic connotation of deterrence encompasses the hard power element and "territoriality."¹¹⁴ These facets are absent from the Compass, in contrast to national and NATO security doctrines.

Moreover, one may be tempted to draw a parallel between the RDC concept and that of EUBG. This latter, despite its practical feasibility since 2007, has not yet been activated primarily due to the absence of political consensus among member states. Besides, among member states, there had been much skepticism about scaling-up the EUBG concept.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, considering that NATO has decided to proceed with a "new force model of 300,000 troops," the question whether those EU member states that also belong to the Alliance will equally be willing to contribute to the RDC¹¹⁶ remains unanswered and, at the very least, implies a conditional character (in the sense that contributions may be expected to depend on those to NATO). Another critical obstacle to the operationalization of RDC will persist in the unaltered decision-making process concerning the deployment of this capacity – any member state will retain the ability to veto by casting a "no" vote.¹¹⁷

Furthermore, the EPF can be largely seen as a symptom of member states' attempts to limit any potential supranationalization of EU defence policy. These efforts often lead to the creation of incomplete policy instruments, resulting in a noticeable absence of politico-strategic substance. In different words, the EPF is an outcome of such

¹⁰⁹ European Commission (EC), *The von der Leyen Commission: For a Union that Strives for More*, Press Release (10 September 2019) // https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/von-der-leyen-commission-union-strives-more-2019-09-10_en.

¹¹⁰ Daniel Fiott, *supra* note 4, 451.

¹¹¹ Council of the EU, *European Peace Facility: Council Agrees on Second Top-up of the Overall Financial Ceiling by €3.5 Billion*, Press Release (26 June 2023) // <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/06/26/european-peace-facility-council-agrees-on-second-top-up-of-the-overall-financial-ceiling-by-3-5-billion/>.

¹¹² See Sven Biscop, *supra* note 2.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Based on David Cadier's literature review, these elements are part of what may be termed as a "realist" or "classic" definition (David Cadier, *supra* note 94, 78).

¹¹⁵ E.g., BNS, *Ministras ragina ES šalis didinti lėšas gynybai, užuot svarsčius apie bendras pajėgas* ([Defence] Minister Encourages EU Member States to Increase Their Defence Spending, Instead of Debating about EU Force) (21 September 2021) // https://www.vz.lt/apps/pbcs.dll/artikkel?AID=/20210912/ARTICLE/210919887&template=api_article.

¹¹⁶ Laura Chappel, *The EU's Rapid Deployment Capability: Enhanced Reaction, Same Problems?* (2023) // <https://eaworldview.com/2023/06/eu-rapid-deployment-capability-enhanced-reaction-same-problems/>.

¹¹⁷ E.g., *ibid.*

incomplete efforts. When EU training missions were started (2010), there was soon a realization that the existing instruments, notably the Athena mechanism, the African Peace Facility, and the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), were not apt for providing needed means for successfully implementing mission mandates.¹¹⁸ This compromised the very effectiveness of EU external action.¹¹⁹ The EPF improved on this situation as an institutional fix; however, it has neither eliminated national divergences in national security perspectives¹²⁰ nor offered additional incentives to member states to seek convergence of views.¹²¹ The EPF therefore appears as a continuation of the aforementioned intergovernmental efforts to provide a policy instead of political solution.

Yet another example underscoring the entrenched nature of national interests comes from defence procurement. Despite the substantial rise in defence budgets, the expenditure patterns of member states persist in displaying separate acquisitions instead of efforts of coordination.¹²² In the context of war, the lack of coordination only contributed to driving up prices of defence-related products, such a trend having resisted “a strong push to coordinate and align Member States’ additional defence efforts” from the EU institutions.¹²³ Hence, a significant opportunity has been overlooked to foster synergies and capitalize on economies of scale, which could have bolstered the European defence market and, by extension, EU defence (e.g., by means of developing European strategic enablers).

A concrete piece of evidence of the role of national interests further comes from a mid-2023 episode, when France and Poland “clashed” over the origin of joint acquisitions of ammunition promised to Kyiv.¹²⁴ The debate over whether new contracts should exclusively benefit EU firms or extend to those outside the Union sparked a dispute. This contention, beyond France’s aim to safeguard its national defence industry, underscored more broadly varying strategic perspectives on European security. Poland saw urgency in providing Ukraine with needed ammunition and, consequently, helping Kyiv to fight the Russian forces today rather than tomorrow; France, however, considered that a more important goal was that of a longer term, – that is, to contribute to fostering the EU defence industry in order to strengthen its industrial base and, in a broader sense, EU defence.

Yet another interesting episode refers to the initiative Sky Shield, which was launched in October 2022 at Germany’s initiative, with the aim of strengthening European air defence capabilities.¹²⁵ Interested NATO European allies committed to proceed with “common acquisition of air defence equipment and missiles.”¹²⁶ This German-led

¹¹⁸ Julian Bergmann and Patrick Müller, “Failing forward in the EU’s Common Security and Defense Policy: The Integration of EU Crisis Management,” *Journal of European Public Policy* 28, no. 10 (2021).

¹¹⁹ See also Denis M. Tull, *The European Union Training Mission and the Struggle for a New Model Army in Mali*, Institut de Recherche Stratégique de l’École Militaire (IRSEM) Research Paper 89 (2020) // https://www.irsem.fr/data/files/irsem/documents/document/file/3233/RP_IRSEM_89.pdf.

¹²⁰ E.g., Jacopo Barigazzi, *Hungary Doesn’t Want €20B Fund for Ukraine Military – For Now* (20 July 2023) // <https://www.politico.eu/article/hungary-doesnt-want-20-billion-euro-fund-ukraine-military/>.

¹²¹ E.g., Mark Furness and Julian Bergmann, *A European Peace Facility Could Make a Pragmatic Contribution to Peacebuilding around the World*, DIE Briefing no 6 (2018) // https://www.idos-research.de/uploads/media/BP_6.2018.pdf.

¹²² Sven Biscop, *supra* note 2; Martin Chovančík and Oldřich Krpec, “Cloaked Disintegration–Ukraine War and European Defence-Industrial Co-operation in Central and Eastern Europe,” *Defense & Security Analysis* (2023).

¹²³ Sven Biscop, *supra* note 2, 2.

¹²⁴ Jacopo Barigazzi, *France and Poland Spar as EU Plan to Buy Ukraine Ammo Idles in Legal Limbo* (19 April 2023) // <https://www.politico.eu/article/france-poland-eu-plan-buy-ukraine-ammunition-war/>.

¹²⁵ NATO, *14 NATO Allies and Finland Agree to Boost European Air Defence Capabilities* (13 October 2022) // https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_208103.htm.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

initiative to boost Europe's air defences has been challenged by France, a non-participant nation, whose perspective on European defence and any threat emanating from Russia is strategically different.¹²⁷ Governments participating in Sky Shield, as in the previous case, seem to prefer the urgency of the matter, hence, a rapid conclusion of acquisitions and/or contracts, including those regarding the US system Patriot, as well as the initiative's planned interoperability with the NATO air and missile defence.¹²⁸ The NATO allies on the Eastern flank are more vulnerable not only due to their proximity to Moscow, but also because, as newer allies, they "have been denied the full benefits of membership, in the form of substantial conventional deployments, permanent basing, and participation in NATO's nuclear-sharing program."¹²⁹ Yet Paris encourages a "discussion over a broader strategy of how to protect European skies":¹³⁰ for France, the roles of NATO and the EU, as well as the nuclear-based deterrence capabilities should be part of such a discussion. Considering France's long-term objective of Europe as an independent actor and therefore more resistant to "external hegemonies,"¹³¹ including the US, the mentioned episode points to deep-rooted strategic differences among European capitals regarding the best ways to strengthen Europe's security and defence, based on their heterogeneous strategic cultures and threat perception.¹³²

The role of national interests helps to challenge the idea that EU defence policy has developed a more effective ability to harmonize member states' interests and identities. In terms of observable implications, the EU level has not gained in relative prominence to serve as an effective systematic arena for political deliberation on defence matters. This lacking political dimension persistently weakens the EU defence policy's influence on national governments' perceptions of security challenges. Furthermore, the EU level has not gained prominence as a platform for strategic discussion either, as, for example, the answer to the decade-long question "Where do the discussions on missile defence [...] take place?" remains the same: "NATO, not the EU."¹³³

4. REASSERTION OF THE UNITED STATES

Indeed, Russia's war against Ukraine offers yet another significant empirical angle to underscore the lack of the EU's growing role as a defence actor, notably in strategic terms. Policy advancements pertaining to EU defence have not only fallen short of marking a shift in member states' political focus on the EU level; instead, European countries' security and defence have become *further* strategically aligned with NATO and its largest ally, including thanks to the accession of Finland and Sweden. Because of its military might and geopolitical weight, the US has reasserted its role as the primary guarantor of Europe's security, which only highlighted European countries' strategic dependence on Washington's capabilities, including deterrence. The resulting strategic imbalance between the Alliance and the EU as a platform for politico-strategic coordination and

¹²⁷ Leila Abboud, Laura Pitel, and Henry Foy, *France Summons Allies in Challenge to German-led Air Defence Plan* (19 June 2023) // <https://www.ft.com/content/6fdcc9e6-969b-4f07-aaed-d3702790b926>.

¹²⁸ NATO, *supra* note 125.

¹²⁹ A. Wess Mitchell, *Western Europe Is Still Falling Short in NATO's East* (5 July 2023) // <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/europe/falling-short-nato-east-deterring-russia>.

¹³⁰ Leila Abboud, Laura Pitel, and Henry Foy, *supra* note 123.

¹³¹ David Cadier, "Continuity and Change in France's Policies towards Russia: A Milieu Goals Explanation," *International Affairs* 94, no. 6 (2018): 1352; David Cadier and Martin Quencez, *France's Policy Shift on Ukraine's NATO Membership* (10 August 2023) // <https://warontherocks.com/2023/08/frances-policy-shift-on-ukraines-nato-membership/>; Ringailė Kuokštytė, *supra* note 44.

¹³² A. Wess Mitchell, *supra* note 129.

¹³³ Olivier Schmitt, *supra* note 8, 414.

cooperation on defence issues only further weakens the drive for EU integration, as this latter process, functionally, has failed in offering sufficient policy benefits.¹³⁴

Minimal transformation has occurred to bestow any semblance of autonomous policy upon EU defence.¹³⁵ Although, throughout the existence of the Common Security and Defence policy (CSDP), the announcement of a breakthrough has occurred a few times already, "[t]he urgency to strengthen Europe's capacity to defend itself" remains unchanged.¹³⁶ The case of Russia's war holds much relevance in this regard. That is, it is hardly doubtful that Ukraine's effort to defend itself against Russia unequivocally depends on the support it receives from the US. Thus, considering that Ukraine, by fighting Russia, is also "protecting Europe,"¹³⁷ the EU's defence also depends on Washington.

In terms of military commitments, the US ranks first, with 42.84bn€, ¹³⁸ while Germany comes second, with 7.5bn, and the United Kingdom third, with 6.6bn. As regards total commitments, the US still outperforms EU member states and EU institutions, which, together, have committed 68.4bn compared to Washington's 70.7bn. Even with their actual funds, European capitals have found it difficult to send to Ukraine "needed heavy weaponry."¹³⁹ It has been documented that, after one year since Russia started its war, the presence of German troops on the Eastern flank increased from 653 to 2,225; the figure of France's troops rose to almost 1,000, up from 350; and the Netherlands' from 270 to almost 600.¹⁴⁰ Yet the US enhanced its presence from 5,000 to 24,000 in Eastern Europe.¹⁴¹ The US, furthermore, has "taken the lead in upgrading its eFP battle group in Poland."¹⁴² While some movement to strengthen the respective eFP troops has been observed in Germany's case in Lithuania (more so than regarding the French troops in Romania¹⁴³), the situation still holds an air of uncertainty. The US leadership has been argued to have "weakened the movement toward more European autonomy,"¹⁴⁴ which undermines the EU as a credible defence actor.

More generally, Russia's war has only underscored European armies' shortcomings, for instance, low readiness of indispensable equipment such as tanks, as well as levels of military stockpiles (such as ammunition), needed for conventional warfare, which had been neglected for too long on the continent.¹⁴⁵ European defence industries have been described as not "fit for purpose";¹⁴⁶ and the relationship between governments and defence industries appears somewhat broken, which hinders European efforts to strengthen the defence market.¹⁴⁷

¹³⁴ See Philipp Genschel, Lauren Leek, and Jordy Weyns, *supra* note 42.

¹³⁵ See Max Bergmann and Sophia Besch, *Why European Defense Still Depends on America* (7 March 2023) // <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/why-european-defense-still-depends-america>.

¹³⁶ Sven Biscop, *supra* note 2, 5.

¹³⁷ Emmanuel Macron, *Speech at the Globsec Conference* (31 May 2023): 4, 6 // <https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-21303-en.pdf>.

¹³⁸ Data since 24 January 2022 through 31 May 2023 (Kiel Institute for the World Economy, *Ukraine Support Tracker* (6 July 2023) // <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/>).

¹³⁹ Max Bergmann, Colin Wall, Sean Monaghan, and Pierre Morcos, *Transforming European Defense* (18 August 2022) // <https://www.csis.org/analysis/transforming-european-defense>.

¹⁴⁰ A. Wess Mitchell, *supra* note 129.

¹⁴¹ Max Bergmann and Sophia Besch, *supra* note 135; A. Wess Mitchell, *supra* note 129.

¹⁴² A. Wess Mitchell, *supra* note 129.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Max Bergmann, Colin Wall, Sean Monaghan, and Pierre Morcos, *supra* note 140.

¹⁴⁵ Max Bergmann and Sophia Besch (*supra* note 135) give an example of Germany, which, "on paper," possesses 300 Leopard 2 tanks, with only 130 being operational.

¹⁴⁶ Max Bergmann and Sophia Besch, *supra* note 135.

¹⁴⁷ The Economist, *War in Ukraine Has Triggered a Boom in Europe's Defence Industry* (17 August 2023) // <https://www.economist.com/business/2023/08/17/war-in-ukraine-has-triggered-a-boom-in-europes-defence-industry>.

Furthermore, conventional warfare needs, with the focus on Russia, including plans to reinforce eastern defences, were debated in NATO's summit in Madrid in 2022.¹⁴⁸ During the summit the ambitious goal of expanding high-readiness forces to 300,000 (up from 40,000) was agreed. As noted by Sven Biscop, this force will be European, which inevitably makes this "first line of conventional deterrence and defence [...] increasingly [...] European."¹⁴⁹ For the author, this is "de facto Europeanisation of the European theatre," which is consistent with the US longer-term strategic stance and the global strategic context.¹⁵⁰ The noteworthy point is that discussions and decisions leading to "Europeanization" of Europe's territorial defence continue taking place *within* the NATO framework, not the EU. Briefly returning to the example of France and keeping in mind the long-standing position of Paris on Europe as an "independent power,"¹⁵¹ Macron's (2023) recent mention of "a Europe of Defence [as] a European pillar within NATO," as has been noted by experts,¹⁵² equally serves as an important indicator of NATO's continued if not reinforced strategic significance for Europe.

Consistently, discussions on the use of European national assets to counter military threats inform deliberations within NATO (e.g., Sky Shield), not the EU, which makes the Alliance (again, not the EU) an effective security community, notably viewed from the grand strategy point of view.¹⁵³ In other words, a security community decides on its objectives, which are then pursued based on the use of its assets.¹⁵⁴ A prominent feature of this community remains the US leadership, which acts as a force for unifying security perceptions.

An interesting issue remains, though. The implication of strengthened EU defence cooperation has been supported, among other approaches, by the security interdependence thesis. The threatening geopolitical context should have placed EU countries in a symmetric security crisis, meaning that most national governments or at least those of the largest EU member states "fe[lt] vulnerable to roughly the same extent."¹⁵⁵ Hence, it may appear that, for EU countries, despite their increasing defence budgets, Russia's war has not constituted a scenario of a "military emergency" that would necessitate the formulation of a bolder political aspiration for EU security and defence policy. Indeed, as noted by Max Bergmann, Colin Wall, Sean Monaghan, and Pierre Morcos,¹⁵⁶ European countries seem to "disagree on the urgency for Europe to become capable of defending itself alone." Another perspective suggests that the US's role in the context of Russia's war served as a pivotal force, relieving EU countries from intensifying their collective efforts specifically towards EU defence. A third viewpoint, which is crucial for discussions bridging EU governance and International Relations, posits that the "strategic" dimension that features security interdependence does not align directly with concepts in IR studies, including as regards bandwagoning and balancing strategies. For the latter to materialize, an effective security community is essential. Significantly, the

¹⁴⁸ Max Bergmann and Sophia Besch, *supra* note 135; A. Wess Mitchell, *supra* note 129.

¹⁴⁹ Sven Biscop, *supra* note 2, 4.

¹⁵⁰ Whether and, if so, when this objective can be attained is beyond the scope of this contribution (Sven Biscop, *supra* note 2; see Max Bergman and Sophia Besch, *supra* note 135).

¹⁵¹ David Cadier, *supra* note 131, 1357.

¹⁵² E.g., Géopolitique, *Les enjeux du prochain sommet de l'Otan* (26 June 2023) // <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/podcasts/g%C3%A9opolitique/20230625-les-enjeux-du-prochain-sommet-de-l-otan>.

¹⁵³ E.g., Olivier Schmitt, *supra* note 8.

¹⁵⁴ See Olivier Schmitt (*supra* note 8, 415), who refers to Hans J. Morgenthau's, *The Concept of the Political* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2012).

¹⁵⁵ Philipp Genschel, Lauren Leek, and Jordy Weyns, *supra* note 42, 346; see also Pierre Haroche, *supra* note 12; Federico Maria Ferrara and Hanspeter Kriesi, "Crisis Pressures and European Integration," *Journal of European Public Policy* 29, no. 9 (2022).

¹⁵⁶ *Supra* note 139.

operationalization of this concept goes beyond conditional or even sporadic instances of defence integration.

Ultimately, however, European security continues to equate with NATO and, by extension, the US, not EU security and defence policy, notably considering that security primarily means territorial defence. Such a situation has already been described as the prevalence of a “broken status quo,” which is hardly sustainable.¹⁵⁷

CONCLUSIONS

Recently, including against the backdrop of Russia’s war against Ukraine, the EU and its member states spearheaded meaningful defence policy initiatives, including the EDF, EPF, and the Strategic Compass. Most analyses of these developments are rooted in EU governance literature. While integration approaches do not (or, at least, are not supposed to) directly delve into the political and strategic dimensions of the EU as a defence actor, when viewed through the broader lens of International Relations, relevant empirical studies can illuminate the EU’s evolution as a geopolitical player thanks to recent progress on the defence front. A decade ago, strong arguments were made that EU security was neither strategic nor a “political project” but merely an institutional facade.¹⁵⁸ Whether there is now evidence indicating the EU is better positioned to evolve into a more politically and strategically active actor is the focus of this article.

Based on the examination of a few key developments, notably the EDF, EPF, and the Strategic Compass, which align with different integration approaches, within their broader institutional framework, as well as political and strategic contexts, inclusive of transatlantic relationships, the article argues that EU defence remains largely lacking in meaningful political and strategic dimensions. This lack is also to be understood here as the absence of a *relative* evolution of the EU as a defence actor. More specifically, the EU does not act as a vehicle for harmonizing member states’ interests and identities. As a consequence, the EU lacks political potential in promoting convergence of national perceptions of security challenges. Strategically, the EU has not gained in prominence as a meaningful platform for relevant deliberations either. These two features are what characterize an effective security community. Thus, the EU has not improved its ability to effectively address substantial security challenges that arise both regionally and internationally.

As I argue more specifically, the EDF, which has been recognized as the most supranational EU defence policy instrument, as well as the related initiatives, the EDIR-PA and the ASAP, when looked upon more closely, manifest as being motivated by a functional logic, notably that of economic nature, rather than by political and strategic considerations. These initiatives aim to enhance the European defence industry, a rationale that substantiates the Commission’s heightened involvement in EU defence matters. However, it is its role as a guardian of efficient economic governance that remains pivotal in this context, a position that national governments also acknowledge. Yet, consistently with this first argument, national governments continue to resist the materialization of a political ambition of EU defence policy. This perpetuates the status quo, by preventing European capitals from shifting their security and defence priorities from the national or NATO level to the EU level.

¹⁵⁷ Max Bergmann and Sophia Besch, *supra* note 135.

¹⁵⁸ Olivier Schmitt, *supra* note 8, 413, 415.

Furthermore, Russia's war against Ukraine is significant in yet another regard. It underscored the role of the US as the principal guarantor of Europe's security and emphasized the strategic reliance of European nations on Washington. Whether one considers military support provided by the US to Kyiv, the American presence in Europe, or its political leadership in NATO more generally, the concept of European strategic autonomy has been largely undermined. Significantly, EU defence policy does not feature territorial defence, which continues to be exclusively addressed within NATO's framework. Given that Russia's aggressive actions have once again emphasized the strong connection between security and territorial defence, it is still NATO that guarantees European security, not EU defence policy.¹⁵⁹

Last but not least, conversing EU governance studies with the IR perspective is instructive in two major ways. First, the latter helps to tease out the politico-strategic implications related to recent defence integration and the EU's role as a defence actor. At the risk of repetition, based on this approach the EU seems better positioned, at least relatively, to evolve as an entity emphasizing its political and strategic stance. Yet – and this is a second contribution – the conclusion that neither political nor strategic motivations serve as a genuine catalyst for recent defence integration presents a notable contrast to what can be deduced from defence integration research. This disparity, as is argued in the article, emerges when meaningful IR concepts are tailored to align with the EU context in integration studies. It is therefore crucial for scholarship on defence integration to more seriously engage with International Relations.

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¹⁵⁹ See also Olivier Schmitt, *supra* note 8.

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