Calle Håkansson

The New Role of the European Commission in the EU’s Security and Defence Architecture: entrepreneurship, crisis and integration
THE NEW ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION IN THE EU’S SECURITY AND DEFENCE ARCHITECTURE: ENTREPRENEURSHIP, CRISIS AND INTEGRATION
The New Role of the European Commission in the EU’s Security and Defence Architecture: entrepreneurship, crisis and integration

Thesis for Doctoral Degree (Ph.D)
By Calle Håkansson

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The Department of Global Political Studies, Faculty of Culture and Society, Malmö University, is an interdisciplinary department with research on politics, power relations and the construction of identity in local, national, international, and global contexts. It currently offers two doctoral programmes – Global Politics and International Migration and Ethnic Relations (IMER) – that play a central role in the intertwined research environment at the department.

The first five dissertations in the series Malmö Studies in Global Politics were co-published in 2016-18 with Lund University and awarded within Political Science at Lund University. In 2018, Global Politics became a research subject at the department and the theses from then on are published within Global Politics at Malmö University.

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the European Union (EU) has strengthened its foreign, security and defence policy in a remarkable way. Several new supranational security and defence initiatives have been launched and implemented, which have given the European Commission a new and central role in European security and defence policy. These swift developments are puzzling, since foreign policy and security and defence policy have long been understood as the ‘last bastions of sovereignty’ for EU member states and have thus been regarded as the least-likely cases for supranational integration. This thesis shows how the Commission has been the central driver behind these changes; it does so by conducting three focused case studies/articles to explore and explain the evolution of a new and enhanced role for the European Commission in EU security and defence cooperation during the period 2014–2023. By researching the establishment of the European Defence Fund, the EU Military Mobility project and the new policies and initiatives developed after Russia’s full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine in 2022, this dissertation analyses new competences for the European Commission within EU security and defence policy. This dissertation conceptually and analytically builds on diverse strands of integration literature, drawing on neofunctionalism, the Commission’s policy entrepreneurship and agenda setting, and crisis pressure to retrace in detail these three important empirical processes. The main contribution of this dissertation is to show how the European Commission’s initiatives and strategies have been indispensable in the strengthening of EU integration within security and defence.
This thesis consists of an introduction outlining the overall research agenda and three stand-alone articles:


**Keywords:** EU security and defence policy, European Commission, European integration, integration theory, Crisis, Geopolitical Commission.
SAMMANFATTNING

Denna avhandling består av en introduktion/kappa som beskriver den övergripande forskningsagendan och tre fristående artiklar:


**Nyckelord:** EU:s säkerhets- och försvarspolitik, Europeiska Kommissionen, europeisk integration, integrationsteori, Kris, Geopolitisk Kommission.
LIST OF PAPERS

This thesis is based on the following articles:


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There are many people I would like to thank for their help and support throughout this journey. Most importantly, I want to express my gratitude to my two outstanding supervisors. Astrid Hedin has been a steadfast support both intellectually and in navigating the intricate workings of the academic world. Mark Rhinard consistently made time to discuss my work, significantly improving the overall quality of this thesis. Both Astrid and Mark are role models, and I couldn't have asked for a better team to guide my academic development.

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Calle Håkansson
Autumn 2023
LIST OF ACRONYMS

CARD – EU Coordinated Annual Review on Defence
COREPER – EU Committee of Permanent Representatives
CSDP – EU Common Security and Defence Policy
DG DEFIS – European Commission’s Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space
EDA – European Defence Agency
EDAP – European Defence Action Plan
EDF – European Defence Fund
EDIRPA – European Defence Industry Reinforcement through the common Procurement Act
EEAS – European External Action Service
EPF – European Peace Facility
EUGS – EU Global Strategy
EU HR/VP – EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission
EUMC – EU Military Committee
MPCC – EU Military Planning and Conduct Capability
NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
PESCO – EU’s Permanent Structured Cooperation
PSC – EU’s Political and Security Committee
I also believe that we need to work on a stronger Europe when it comes to security and defence matters. Yes, Europe is chiefly a ‘soft power’. But even the strongest soft powers cannot make do in the long run without at least some integrated defence capacities. (European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, Political Guidelines, July 2014)

In three years of common work since the start of my mandate, our European Union of Security and Defence has advanced enormously. I would say we have achieved more in these last three years, in this last year, than in the previous 30 or 60 years. (HR/VP Federica Mogherini, December 2017)

We need further bold steps in the next five years towards a genuine European Defence Union. [...] This will be a Geopolitical Commission. (European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Political Guidelines, October 2019)

When we are resolute, Europe can rise up to the challenge. The same is true on defence. European security and defence has evolved more in the last six days than in the last two decades [...] This is a watershed moment for our Union. (European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, February 2022)
The work on this thesis started with an interest in the new far-reaching rhetoric and fast-moving policy development within EU security and defence policy that has occurred in the post-2016 EU Global Strategy (EUGS) period. As underlined by Fiott and Lindstrom (2021, 4) ‘since 2016, and beyond CSDP missions and operations, the Union has intensified work on a broader set of security and defence tools that include capability development and defence-industrial policy’. The enhanced role of the European Commission is puzzling in this regard, as the field of defence has been seen as one of the ‘last bastions of sovereignty’ for the EU member states. Hence, defence has been viewed as a least-likely case for integration (Besch 2020; Genschel and Jachentfuchs 2014; Haroche 2023; Hoffmann 1966; Menon 2014; Nugent and Rhinard 2015; Riddervold and Trondal 2020; Strikwerda 2019). Nonetheless, as I will demonstrate in this thesis, the Commission has played a crucial role in advancing significant new security and defence initiatives over the past decade.

Furthermore, Russia's illegal full-scale invasion of Ukraine has positioned security and defence at the forefront of the EU's political agenda. Consequently, this thesis has chosen to investigate the new dynamics that have arisen since the onset of the war. This task is challenging but vital for understanding the current state of the EU and the Commission. From a normative perspective, I firmly believe that Europe should do more to support Ukraine in its struggle. In this regard, I view the efforts of the EU and the Commission as significant and commendable.
Since 2014 – first under the Juncker Commission and continuing under the current von der Leyen presidency – the Commission has taken very noticeable steps within the policy domain of security and defence. This thesis aims to outline and investigate how this policy development and integration process has happened. During the work on this thesis, the process of EU integration in security and defence was also accelerated by Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, underscoring the importance of studying these developments.

In the past, studies on EU security and defence cooperation have mainly revolved around the intergovernmental characteristics of the policy field (see e.g. discussions in Bergmann and Müller 2021; Howorth 2014; Sjursen 2011). Moreover, security and defence has often been viewed as a least-likely case for supranational integration. However, this thesis focuses on the efforts by the Commission to strengthen its role within the EU security and defence architecture. Within this compilation thesis, the three articles map and analyse four significant developments. These developments are widely acknowledged as prominent instances where, between 2014 and 2023, the Commission has effectively acted as an entrepreneur and agenda-setter, expanding its competences in the field of security and defence. The four case studies encompass the European Defence Fund (EDF), the EU Military Mobility project, the 2022 strengthening of sanctions coordination, and the new defence industrial initiative launched after the 2022 Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. All of these developments have far-reaching implications for the European Union's security and defence capacity. The cases were also chosen because they represent successful initiatives established by the Commission during the time period of study (for a similar discussion see also Strikwerda 2019).
In 2014, the then-new Commission made the issue of defence a political priority. In his Political Guidelines, Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker argued that ‘we need to work on a stronger Europe when it comes to security and defence matters’ (Juncker 2014). This topic then became a clear political priority for the Juncker Commission and a regular topic in his State of the European Union speeches (see Juncker 2016, 2017, 2018). Since the launch of the influential 2016 EU Global Strategy (EEAS 2016), the EU has rolled out several new (both intergovernmental and supranational) defence initiatives, such as a Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), the Military Mobility project, the European Defence Fund (EDF) and the European Peace Facility (EPF), among others (see e.g. Besch 2020; Fiott 2020). Defence industrial issues have gained in importance since the publication of the EUGS. As Daniel Fiott argued: ‘if defence industrial cooperation is increasingly seen as a foundation basis for CSDP, then much greater focus on this area is required’ (Fiott 2019, 17). Among other purposes, this dissertation is intended to answer these calls. Moreover, as outlined above, the EU has developed several other new security and defence initiatives during the time period of study; however, this thesis has chosen to focus on the most prominent, according to this author, new security and defence initiatives launched by the Commission.

The European Defence Fund (EDF) is a new initiative led by the Commission, with the aim of promoting and supporting defence-industrial cooperation within Europe. The 2021-2027 budget positions the EDF as the third-largest investor in defence research in Europe, making it an important case to investigate and explain. The EDF, which was presented and outlined in President Juncker’s 2016 State of the European Union speech, was moreover seen as a gamechanger for the role of the European Commission in EU defence policy (see e.g. discussions in Calcara 2020a; Ianakiev 2019; Hoeffler 2023; Sabatino 2022). Ianakiev (2019, 15) noted that ‘the introduction of the EDF is an unprecedented initiative’ which ‘relies on financial incentives rather than regulation’. Moreover, this initiative was launched in response to the earlier EU defence initiative that had not ‘triggered a leap forward’ in European cooperation in the field of defence. In turn, Haroche (2020, 854) commented that ‘the EDF is a crucial case to study because it represents an unambiguously supranational initiative in an area that was supposed to be the exclusive domain of the intergovernmental method’. In proposing the EDF, the Juncker Commission
was widely perceived to have taken advantage of the ‘window of opportunity’ presented by Russia’s 2014 annexation of Crimea and the (first) invasion of Ukraine, which created a powerful political ambition to strengthen Europe’s defences. There was also strong demand for EU defence initiatives following the result of the 2016 Brexit referendum on EU membership in the United Kingdom, the launch of the EUGS in the summer of 2016 and the Franco-German push for security and defence integration (Béraud-Sudreau and Pannier 2021; Tocci 2017, 2018). In addition, Haroche (2020) argued that prioritising the issue of defence was a way for the Juncker Commission to demonstrate its ambition to become a ‘political Commission’. Consequently, the launch of the EDF provoked a high level of interest in the academic and think-tank community in Europe and became the focus for the first case study in this dissertation (Håkansson 2021; see also e.g. Besch 2019; Csernati 2021; Csernati and Oliveira Martins 2019; Haroche 2020; Hoeffler 2023; Goxho 2019; Oliveira Martins and Mawdsley 2021; Zandee 2021).

Other earlier studies focused on the deepening of EU and European defence industrial cooperation (e.g. Britz, 2010; Calcara et al. 2020; Fiott 2019; Mörth 2000; Mörth and Britz 2004; Karampekios et al. 2018; Oliveira Martins and Kusters 2019; Strikwerda 2019). This thesis however also aims to go beyond defence industrial cooperation to examine the broader role of the European Commission in foreign, security and defence policy issues. Hence, this thesis expands the discussion by examining other new initiatives, such as the EU Military Mobility project (Håkansson 2023a), which is the ‘flagship project’ for the improved and enhanced cooperation between the EU and NATO in recent years. The EU Military Mobility project is an initiative for discussing, sharing best practices, and implementing reforms in both physical infrastructure and bureaucratic procedures, with the goal of facilitating the unhindered movement of military personnel and equipment across borders within the EU.

As I was writing this dissertation, Russia’s full-scale invasion and second war on Ukraine happened, greatly influencing the direction of this thesis. Consequently, this work also focuses on the initiatives launched and decisions made after Russia’s second invasion and war, with a special emphasis on both the new important defence industrial initiative developed after the 2022 war broke out and the more prominent role of the Commission and its leadership in pushing forward the unprecedented sanctions policy regime towards Russia (Håkansson 2023b). At the time of the 2022 Russo-Ukraine war, the EU was also in the process of finalising its new Strategic Compass for security and defence. The Strategic
Compass is a two-year ‘white book exercise’ that outlines new ambitions for the EU within the field of security and defence for the next decade (EEAS 2022; Fiott and Lindstrom 2021; Lațici and Lazarou 2021; Nováky 2021a; Sweeney and Winn 2022). One of the outcomes of the Strategic Compass is that it has strengthened the role of the European Commission within the policy field of security and defence (see Håkansson 2022a).

A focus on the European Commission’s enhanced role in EU security and defence cooperation was overall selected for this thesis project because of this new and important empirical course of events and the ongoing theoretical debates on European integration. This thesis thus engages with the debate on the political role of the European Commission and the drivers of European integration. Its contribution to the field is that it investigates and explains the new role of the European Commission in EU security and defence policy, and engages with the broader discussion on European integration and the intra-institutional dynamics and developments occurring within the EU. Moreover, this thesis argues that there is a need for more inductive and grounded research on European foreign and security policymaking (see also Howorth 2014, 191). In terms of its empirical findings and contributions, this dissertation investigates, retraces, describes and maps, according to this author, the most important and noticeable initiatives since 2014 through which the Commission has enhanced its role in EU security and defence policymaking. The thesis also shows how crises have been a window of opportunity for the Commission to promote supranational integration and to allow the Commission to strategically align and cooperate with member states to push for further integration. Conceptually and analytically, this dissertation builds on different strands of (integration) literature, drawing on neofunctionalism, the Commission’s policy entrepreneurship and agenda setting, and crisis pressure to explain these important policy processes.

This dissertation is structured as follows. Section 2 outlines the overarching research questions that this thesis seeks to address. It also briefly discusses how the thesis contributes to the literature in this field. Section 3 situates the thesis within a broader context and outlines earlier research within the field. Section 4 offers an overview of the theoretical frameworks used in the thesis, which include neofunctionalism, agenda-setting/policy entrepreneurship and crisis integration. It also provides a short discussion on the connection between these theoretical frameworks and how they can be seen as complementary, at least in part. Section 5 discusses the methodological choices made and the approaches taken in the case studies to explain the new role of the European Commission in the security and
defence policy domain. Section 6 then presents the main results of the three articles, while the final section outlines and provides final conclusions on the overall policy implications. The three stand-alone articles are presented in full in the Appendix.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This thesis uses three focused case studies/articles to explore and explain the new and enhanced role of the European Commission in EU security and defence cooperation between 2014 and 2023. The aim is to address the following overarching research questions:

- What role did the European Commission play in the policy processes leading up to the establishment of the EDF, the EU Military Mobility project and the new decisions made and initiatives taken after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022? How can these new initiatives be explained and understood?

- How have these new policies and initiatives reshaped the role and responsibilities of the European Commission within EU security and defence policy?

To answer these questions, this dissertation project focuses on the period from 2014 to 2023 (from the beginning of the Juncker Commission until the current von der Leyen Commission). It follows and traces the work of two European Commissions that have placed security and defence policy issues high on their political agendas. Although it should be noted that the European Commission has held competences in certain areas of European foreign policy for some time, especially in relation to trade and development issues, the Commission has traditionally held very limited competences in EU security and defence policy (Keukeleire and Delreux 2014; Nugent and Rhinard 2015). This dissertation aims to focus on these ‘hard’ areas to enhance the current understanding of the new role of the Commission within this policy field.
Aims and contributions to the literature

This thesis aims to understand and explain the development of new initiatives such as the EDF, the EU Military Mobility project and the new policy initiatives launched after Russia’s 2022 war on Ukraine. However, it views these initiatives from the broader perspective of the European Commission’s new competences and ambitions within the policy field of security and defence. Therefore, this thesis also seeks to contribute to the literature on the ‘political’ role of the European Commission, European integration and the overall development of the EU’s security and defence cooperation. Furthermore, it contributes to an emerging literature on the (geo)political European Commission.
This section aims to briefly outline, discuss and situate this dissertation within earlier literature and research on EU security and defence policy and the role of the European Commission within this policy domain. It emphasises defence industrial cooperation and outlines the Commission’s earlier initiatives within this policy field. An awareness of these initiatives is important, as this thesis will show, because the defence industrial policy field has provided a ‘way in’ for the Commission. However, since then – as will be elaborated on in the studies within this thesis – the Commission has expanded its competences to other areas connected to the policy field of security and defence. Finally, this section discusses the literature on the political role of the European Commission and situates this thesis in regard to this literature.

**EU security and defence policy**

The EU’s security and defence policy has been the subject matter of numerous lines of scientific inquiry. This section provides a very brief overview of various recent strands of literature on this subject. The policy field is particularly interesting to investigate because security and defence policy has often been seen as a ‘taboo’ since the start of the European project and has been described as the ‘last bastion of sovereignty’ for the member states (Besch 2020; Fiott 2015a; Genschel and Jachentfuchs 2014; Hoffmann 1966; Howorth 2014; Keukeleire and Delreux 2014; Menon 2014; Nugent and Rhinard 2015; Riddervold and Trondal 2020; Strikwerda 2019). Moreover, while the European Commission has developed its foreign policy ambition over time, the Commission has traditionally been seen as side-lined in EU foreign and security and defence policymaking (Keukeleire and Delreux 2014; Nugent and Rhinard 2015). However, as mentioned in the introduction, this thesis challenges these claims and outlines a
more enhanced role for the Commission in EU foreign and security and defence policymaking.

As discussed in the introduction, earlier studies on EU security and defence cooperation have mainly revolved around the intergovernmental characteristics of the policy field (Menon 2014). The ever-growing literature on EU security and defence policy development includes empirical discussions on the development of the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) (e.g. Howorth 2014); constructivist approaches that underline, among other things, the importance of socialisation in these developments (e.g. Bremberg et al. 2022; Howorth 2010; Juncos and Pomorska 2006, 2011, 2021, 2023; Lewis 2007; Michalski and Danielson 2020a, 2020b); studies on the various European strategic security and defence cultures (e.g. Britz 2016; Giegerish 2006; Meyer 2006); works on emerging epistemic communities in the field (e.g. Cross 2011); and empirical and theoretical analyses of the development of the European External Action Service (EEAS) (e.g. Adler-Nissen 2014; Vanhoonacker and Pomorska 2013) and the European Defence Agency (EDA) ( Bátor 2009; Calcara 2017, 2020b; Tyrbus 2006). There is also an increasing literature on the decision-making communities within the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy, such as the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER), the Political and Security Committee (PSC) and the EU Military Committee (EUMC) (e.g. Bremberg et al. 2022; Cross 2011; Howorth 2010; Juncos and Pomorska 2006, 2011, 2021, 2023; Maurer and Wright 2021; Michalski and Danielson 2020a, 2020b). Along with this literature, there has been increased discussion on how EU foreign and security policy now goes ‘beyond intergovernmentalism’ (e.g. Allen 1998; Howorth 2000, 2010, 2012; Riddervold 2016; Riddervold and Trondal 2020; Sjursen 2011; Strikwerda 2019). This thesis aims to contribute to this literature.

On an empirical note, the impetus for and developments within the policy field of EU security and defence have often been connected to exogenous factors and crisis (Howorth 2014), ranging from the end of the Cold War to the war in the Balkans in the 1990s, and from the transatlantic turbulence over the 2003 Iraq war to Russia’s developments and actions in the 2010s and 2020s. As a result of the developments and crises in the 1990s, the EU took on overseas and crisis management missions around the world with great enthusiasm in the early 2000s. Over time, however, the EU entered a phase of crisis-management fatigue during the 2010s (see e.g. Serrano 2020). The emergence of a new phase – or a ‘new era’ in the words of Csernati oni (2021, 3) – of European security and defence policymaking can be seen in the first European Council meeting on Defence in
December 2013 (see also Chappell et al. 2020), which had a clear focus on enhancing the EU defence industrial cooperation. Nevertheless, there were critical voices at that time, both among the member states and within the Barroso Commission on the Commission’s role in defence matters (Béraud-Sudreau and Pannier 2021; Calcara 2020b, 2020c; Cseratoni 2021; James 2018). However, the launch of the 2016 EUGS, along with the political and security turmoil of the past decade, helps to explain the new developments and ‘European activism’ in the field of security and defence in the last couple of years (Calcara 2020a). This activism has been marked by stronger ‘intervention by the Commission’ (Calcara 2020b, 23). Moreover, Tocci has described how the worsened security situation in and around Europe – together with the effects of Brexit, a political Commission and the renewed Franco-German engine – has helped to improve and enhance EU security and defence integration (Tocci 2018). She comments, ‘after decades of peace in Europe, the strategic environment in which the Union navigates has visibly deteriorated and Europe is directly affected by the fall-out’ (Tocci 2018, 132).

The period after the 2016 EUGS has been called the ‘relaunch of the EU CSDP’ (Howorth 2019) and a new ‘second phase for EU security and defence policy developments’ (Serrano 2020). Since 2016, new studies have been published on EU-NATO relations (e.g. Ewers-Peters 2022, 2023; Howorth, 2017, 2018; Pavlov 2021; Schutte 2022; Smith and Gebhard 2017), the EUGS (Barbé and Morillas 2019; Biscop 2021; Dijkstra, 2016; Juncos 2017; Missiroli 2015; Morillas 2019, 2020; Mälksoo, 2016; Tocci 2016, 2017), the Franco-German ‘push’ for European cooperation on defence (e.g. Béraud-Sudreau and Pannier, 2021, see also Chappell et al. 2020), defence cooperation within small EU states (e.g. Weiss, 2020), the role of the EU HR/VP (e.g. Aggestam and Hedling 2020; Calcara 2020c; Sus 2021) and EU institutional development within security and defence (e.g. Besch 2020; Biscop 2018; Blockmans 2018; Fiott et al. 2017; Perot 2023; Reykers 2019; Reykers and Adriaensen 2022; Sus 2023; Sweeney 2021; Sweeney and Winn 2022; Tardy 2017, 2018; Tocci 2018). Another strand of literature covers empirical research on new European defence cooperation outside of formal formats such as NATO or the EU (e.g. Billon-Galland and Quencez 2018; Nováky 2018; Sweeney and Winn 2020; Zandee and Kruijver 2019). Unlike these publications, this dissertation aims to outline and investigate the role of a supranational institution – that is, the European Commission – within the policy field of EU security and defence. In doing so, it contributes to an increasing literature on the subject (see next section).
The European Commission’s role in EU security and defence policy

There is a growing body of literature examining the role of the Commission in EU security and defence policymaking. This section provides a brief overview of recent research exploring these dynamics. One area of study explores the application of neofunctionalism in understanding the recent advancements (Bergmann 2019; Bergmann and Müller 2023; Haroche 2020, 2023; Niemann 2016). This literature includes discussions on the Commission’s policy entrepreneurship and the concept of ‘creeping competences’, which can shed light on the Commission's increased involvement in EU foreign and security policymaking. These developments can also be attributed to significant events and crises (Citi 2014; Edler and James 2015; James 2018).

Another research agenda focuses on the ‘issue linkage’ through which the Commission has connected developments and discussions within the domain of foreign and security policy to policy areas in which it holds competences and expert authority, such as issues related to the internal market. Moreover, the Commission has circumvented formal decision-making processes and built coalitions with supportive member states in order to gain influence and new competences (Chou and Riddervold 2015; Riddervold 2016; Riddervold and Trondal 2020). Other scholars have noted how the increased interconnection and interdependence between areas of internal and external security have implied a greater role for the Commission within EU foreign and security policy (Lavallée 2011; see also Niemann 2016). Similarly, Brandão and Camisão (2022), as well as Mörth and Britz (2004), discuss how connecting issues such as defence industrial cooperation or cyber security to the EU internal market helps to legitimise the Commission’s role. Others have described how different CJEU rulings have created an opportunity to regulate the EU defence industrial cooperation (Blauberger and Weiss 2013; Weiss and Blauberger 2016).

Furthermore, the recent literature has shown that the Commission has worked closely with the most powerful EU member states – namely, France and Germany – to develop new EU defence initiatives within security and defence (Béraud-Sudreau and Pannier 2021; see also Chappell et al. 2020). As discussed in the next section, the Commission’s long-term ambitions within the policy field must also be considered in order to understand the new developments (see Csernatoni 2021; Guay 1997; Martins and Mawdsley 2021).
In sum, the strengthened role played by the European Commission in EU security and defence policy is a result of the Commission’s long-term ambitions, entrepreneurial role and interlinkage between foreign and security policy and other policy areas, such as trade, development and internal policy related to the internal market (see also Keukeleire and Delreux 2014, 326; Nugent and Rhinard 2015, 380). These factors are likely to increase in the future. As shown in the next section, the Commission has tried to enhance its role in the field of defence industrial cooperation, especially since the 1990s. The developments described above have been important in legitimating the Commission’s new and enhanced role within EU security and defence policymaking today.

A historical overview on the Commission’s activities in EU defence industrial governance¹

Given the European Commission’s longstanding aspiration to become a more influential player in European defence industrial cooperation, this section provides an overview of policy developments since the 1990s (see also Citi 2014; Csernatoni 2021; Haroche 2020; Håkansson 2021; James 2018; Mawdsley 2018; Oliveira Martins and Mawdsley 2021). Starting in the mid-1990s, the Commission has consistently emphasised the necessity of strengthening or establishing a European defence market. Although there has been some evolution in the Commission’s approach, transitioning from regulation (stick) to financial contributions (carrot) to some extent, certain arguments have remained consistently present.

As early as 1996, the Commission drew attention to the issues surrounding the fragmentation of defence markets in Europe, particularly in terms of European defence industry competitiveness compared with US defence companies. The Commission argued the need for a ‘deepening of the European Union, to include a defence policy in the long term…’ and stated that ‘Close cooperation on armaments is a key factor in defence policy’. According to the Commission, such cooperation should be achieved by setting public procurement rules, facilitating intra-community trade, and enhancing synergies between civilian and defence industries, among other means (European Commission 1996). The Commission’s 1997 follow-up communication set a timeline to ‘strengthen the competitiveness

of the European defence industry’ (European Commission 1997). However, the implementation of these proposals remained extremely limited. Therefore, in 2003, the Commission presented a new communication titled 'Towards an EU Defence Equipment Policy', which aimed to strengthen EU defence policy and was influenced by the ongoing Convention on the Future of Europe. This communication included proposals for intra-community transfers and defence procurement regulations, as well as initiatives such as a preparatory action (PA) for advanced research in global security and support for the establishment of an Defence Agency (European Commission 2003; also see Fiott 2015a; Håkansson 2021). In addition, the 2003 communication highlighted the significance of competition policy in the European defence market, emphasising that competition enhances market efficiency and safeguards innovation (European Commission 2003).

In 2004, the Commission released a Green Paper with the aim of advancing the discussion on defence industrial cooperation and achieving the objective of ‘opening up’ the European defence market (European Commission 2004). Subsequently, in 2005, a paper was published to report on the outcomes of the consultation process on the Green Paper (European Commission 2005). In 2007, the Commission issued a new communication that focused on enhancing the state of defence industrial cooperation in Europe. This communication put forth proposals for new legislation concerning intra-EU transfers and defence procurement (European Commission 2007). After more than a decade of effort, these initiatives resulted in the adoption of the 2009 defence package, which encompassed two directives: one on intra-EU transfers of defence products and the other on defence procurement. Moreover, the Commission utilised the concept of ‘court-driven integration’ in the adoption of these directives (Blauberger and Weiss 2013). The 2009 defence package served as a significant milestone for the Commission, establishing a foundation for its future involvement in defence matters. However, the outcomes of the 2009 defence package have been limited thus far (Ioannides 2020; Marrone and Nones 2020).

By 2013, there had been a further shift in focus, as the Commission’s argumentation emphasised the deteriorating security situation. The Commission’s 2013 communication began by highlighting the evolving and dynamic geopolitical landscape, along with the diverse challenges and complex threat environment confronting Europe. The communication emphasised the need for Europe to take responsibility for its own security and contribute to international peace and stability. Notable initiatives included proposals for
potential EU-owned dual-use capabilities and the suggestion to launch a PA focused on research related to the CSDP (European Commission 2013). Although the proposal for EU-owned dual-use capabilities was ultimately discarded by the European Council, the proposal for the PA on CSDP research was adopted during the December 2013 European Council meeting (Fiott 2015a). This PA later became significant for other new initiatives such as the EDF (see also Håkansson 2021).

The 2016 European Defence Action Plan (EDAP) played a significant policy role, as it introduced the EDF. The EDAP followed the 2016 EUGS, which injected fresh momentum into European defence cooperation. The EDAP represented a new ambition on the part of the Commission and revealed the deteriorating security situation, showing the need for Europe to assume greater responsibility for its own security (European Commission 2016). Unsurprisingly, the 2017 communication on the EDF proposal began by stating that ‘the EU is facing increased instability and conflicts in its neighbourhood, and new security threats are emerging’ (European Commission 2017).

Nevertheless, certain of the Commission’s arguments have remained strikingly consistent over time, such as concerns about market fragmentation and the aspiration to strengthen synergies between civilian and military industries. Yet, there has also been a noticeable change in the Commission's argumentation since 2013, as its communications have increasingly focused on the worsening security situation to justify its role in EU security governance. For instance, Daniel Fiott (2015b) identified this shift by the EU – and by the Commission in particular – and noted that the ‘purely economic rationale for defence industrial cooperation is being reformulated to include questions of strategic relevance’ (Fiott 2015b, 159). In light of this observation, the next section will describe the discussion on the Commission’s competences and more ‘political’ role in EU policymaking.

The European Commission: not a unitary actor, but ... a political and presidential one

This thesis takes a close look at the internal dynamics within the EU, with a special focus on the political and practical role of the European Commission in developing the new supranational EU security and defence initiatives. The Commission has always been a central yet controversial actor in European policymaking. It plays a unique role in developing and proposing regulations, as well as overseeing internal negotiations on European policymaking. Moreover,
the Commission is responsible for supervising the implementation of various EU
decisions (Nugent 1995). There is also a ‘widely held view, which is shared by
both most Commission staff and by many influential outsiders, that the
Commission has a duty, a mission almost, to foster the integration process’
(Nugent 1995, 609). The Commission is thus well-known for its policy activism
and is arguably well placed to frame issues towards its field of competences
(Nugent and Rhinard 2015). Thus, the European Commission has often been
described as a purposeful opportunist that will take advantage of ‘windows of
opportunities’ (Cram 1994, 1997; Laffan 1997; Rhinard 2010).

The thesis is generally situated within the debate on the political role of the
European Commission and the drivers of European integration. Scholars of new
intergovernmentalism have emphasised the triumph of intergovernmental
decision-making in the EU, arguing that the political will to delegate to the
Commission markedly waned after the Maastricht treaty (Bickerton et al. 2015a,
2015b; Puetter 2014; for an overall critique, see Schimmelfennig 2015a, and for
a critique within EU foreign policy see e.g. Maurer et al. 2023; Morilas 2019).
These scholars argue that the EU member states now first and foremost empower
de novo bodies rather than the Commission (Bickerton et al. 2015a; see also
discussions in Schmidt 2016, 2018). In turn, Smith (2015) describes the very
strong reluctance of the EU member states to delegate power to the Commission
in the field of security and defence. However, the perspective that the
Commission’s political role is in decline (e.g. Bickerton et al. 2015b; Ponzano et
al. 2012) has been challenged by other scholars, who argue that the Commission
has enhanced its political role in some areas (see e.g. Bauer and Ege 2012; Becker
et al. 2016; de Marcilly 2014; Nugent and Rhinard 2015, 2016, 2019; Peterson
2017), as well as becoming more ‘presidential’ (Bürgin 2018; Kassim et al.
2017). This thesis aligns with and supports the discussion regarding a more
'presidential' Commission.

The ‘presidential’ setting of the Commission is a legacy that has remained since
the 2014–2019 Juncker Commission. It implies a relatively top-down
management and steering of the Commission (see discussions in Becker et al.
2016; Brooks and Bürgin 2021; Nugent and Rhinard 2015). Similarly, the
‘primacy of the President’s cabinet vis-à-vis other Commissioners’ cabinets’ has
continued from the Juncker Commission to the current von der Leyen
Commission (Kassim and Laffan 2019). Since the Juncker Commission, another
development has occurred: the long-term strengthening of the secretariat general
within the Commission (Brooks and Bürgin 2021; Bürgin 2018; Giurcanu and Kostadinova 2022; Kassim and Laffan 2019).

Since the development of a ‘political Commission’, strained relations have been observed between the Commission and the European Council, which has continued under von der Leyen’s ‘geopolitical Commission’ (Haroche 2023; Kassim 2023; Kassim and Laffan 2019; Lorenzani and Szapiro 2023; Nováky 2021b) and with the EEAS and the EDA (see e.g. Haroche 2020; Maurer and Wright 2021). Although Kassim (2023) has discussed the similarities in the policy approaches of President von der Leyen (2019–) and President Juncker (2014–2019), von der Leyen is considered to have a more personal and ‘hands-on’ approach in day-to-day policy development. Kassim (2023) concludes that ‘the fact that von der Leyen has been able to emulate Juncker suggests that the powers of the presidential office have to a large extent become institutionalised’ (p. 188).

There have been longstanding discussions and debates in the literature on the influence and political steering of European integration regarding the roles of both the European Council and the European Commission (see e.g. Bocquillon and Dobbels 2014). Yet, some recent studies have argued that the ‘new European Council-dominated crisis governance paradoxically has strengthened the role of EU institutions’ (Beach and Smeets 2020; see also e.g. discussions in Bauer and Becker 2014, 2016; Niemann and Ioannou 2015; Niemann and Speyer 2018; Smeets and Beach 2022). Hence, while the European Council could be viewed as steering the overall direction of the EU, the Commission is (still) a key actor in the process leading to the EU summits, such as by drafting proposals and initiatives before the meetings (Kassim and Tholoniat 2021; Nugent 2017). It has also been noted that, while EU ‘decision-making has a strongly intergovernmental character, a second feature of post-crisis governance is that the implementation of decisions post-crisis is highly supra-nationalised’ (Dawson 2015, 981).

Moreover, Nugent and Rhinard (2015, 168) comment that ‘when a policy area increases in importance it is likely to result in the creation of a DG’ within the Commission. Thus, in 2019, due to its stronger involvement in the defence (industrial) field, the Commission established the DG Defence Industry and Space (DG DEFIS) to handle the EDF, EU Space policy initiatives, the Military Mobility project (in part) and other new defence-related initiatives (see also Gotkowska 2019; Haroche 2020). Or, as discussed by Cseratoni (2021, 15): ‘in the latest surge of defense supranationalisation, most noticeable is the creation of
the new DG DEFIS and the consolidation of the commission as a nontraditional defense actor to manage and implement the EDF’.

However, the policy field of defence has traditionally been viewed somewhat sceptically within the Commission (see Bergmann 2019; Bergmann and Müller 2021; Mörth 2000). Or, as Tocci (2017, 95) notes, the ‘Commission had been traditionally unwilling to touch defence issues. The “D” word was somewhat of a dirty word in the Berlaymont’. As will be elaborated in the case studies, this unwillingness changed with the Juncker Commission, and the workings of the increasingly political (or geopolitical), presidential and top-down-steered Commission have been important for the development of an enhanced role for the European Commission in the field of security and defence.

To conclude, this section situated this thesis within the broader literature on the role of the Commission in EU policymaking. It also mapped out how the new, increasingly top-down presidential dynamics within the Commission have helped to push forward the work on defence, although defence issues can still be contested within the EU and in the Commission itself. In the subsequent case studies in this dissertation, these dynamics and developments are further elaborated and discussed.
ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS: NEOFUNCTIONAL SPILLOVER EFFECTS, SUPRANATIONAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND CRISIS PRESSURE

The research questions of this dissertation are answered through three focused case studies/articles, which investigate how and why we have seen deeper integration and an enhanced role for the European Commission in the field of EU security and defence policy architecture. As the studies are empirically motivated in part (i.e. these cases were chosen because they feature the most consequential developments of the Commission within European security and defence within the 2014–2023 timespan), I draw on different theoretical frameworks for the different articles in this dissertation. This section explains and outlines the connections between these different strands. However, the aim is not to build and set out a coherent theoretical framework; rather, this dissertation builds on different theoretical frameworks that can (at least in part) be seen as complementary.

In this regard, this thesis utilises *analytic eclecticism* in its analysis, which promotes the use of various theoretical concepts from different research traditions to construct intricate arguments that address significant issues of interest to both scholars and practitioners (Sil and Katzenstein 2010). This stance aligns with a pragmatic approach, as it aims to engage with real-world policy and practice. Utilising analytic eclecticism, it becomes possible to tackle problems that ‘more closely approximate the messiness and complexity of concrete dilemmas facing “real world” actors’ (Sil and Katzenstein 2010, 411). When used to examine such problems, an eclectic approach provides intricate explanations that extract,
interpret and selectively combine analytical elements – particularly causal mechanisms – from explanatory theories, models and narratives embedded in different research traditions (Sil and Katzenstein 2010; for studies within EU foreign and security policy analysis using analytic eclecticism, see also e.g. Amadio Viceré and Sus 2023; Martill and Sus 2018).

In the following sections, I will briefly present the neofunctionalism framework, the agenda-setting/policy entrepreneurship function and the importance of crisis pressure in the EU integration process. Thus, this section elaborates on the basic assumptions and frameworks used in the different studies of this dissertation.

**Neofunctionalism**

In the words of Keukeleire and Delreux, (2014, 325; see also Bergmann 2019), neofunctionalism has received ‘surprisingly little attention in the EU foreign policy literature’. However, as commented by Haroche (2023, 972):

> Whereas some authors have insisted on the relative immunity of international security policies to supranational integration (Börzel 2005), several recent studies have sought to apply the neofunctionalist framework to this area (Bergmann and Niemann 2018; Bergmann 2019; Haroche 2020; Bergmann and Müller 2021; Håkansson 2021).

This thesis draws on and is part of this ‘new approach’ to neofunctionalism and EU foreign and security policy (see also Bergmann and Müller 2023; Niemann 2016; Niemann and Speyer 2018). This section outlines, situates and discusses the neofunctionalism framework and its connection to the studies conducted for this dissertation. The main assumptions of neofunctionalism are that actors are rational and can learn from their experiences and hence change their preferences. Integration is a process that can ‘take on its own dynamics’ over time (Haas 1958, 291; also see Bergmann 2019; Nicoli 2020; Niemann 2006). In addition, regional integration is characterised by ‘multiple, diverse and changing actors’ who build coalitions to spur integration. The proponents of neofunctionalism dismiss the realist assumption that actors always interact in zero-sum games. Instead, interactions are often perceived as a positive-sum game (Niemann 2016, 131–132). Niemann’s (2006) revised neofunctionalism theoretical framework (largely adopted in the first case study in this thesis, Håkansson 2021) takes a constructivist approach and argues that actors’ interests and identities are ‘moulded and constituted by both cognitive and material structures’; hence, this
approach gives equal significance to both structure and agency (Niemann 2006, 2016). In his late work, Haas (2004) expressed that neofunctionalism could be seen as earlier work on – and thus part of – constructivism and hence can ‘become part of a respectable constructivism’.

Neofunctionalism integration dynamics have been described in the notion of ‘spillovers’, especially its subsections of functional, political and cultivated spillover (Tranholm-Mikkelsen 1991). However, the revised neofunctionalism framework also considers countervailing forces (or spillbacks) and exogenous spillover, which can be used to enhance the understanding of the European Commission’s role in the field of European security and defence cooperation. Thus, this study expands on exogenous events as drivers of integration and gives member states a stronger decision-making role in the process (Nicoli 2020, 900). Furthermore, the adoption of the revised neofunctionalism framework implies a rejection of the ‘automatic spillover effects’ in the integration process (Niemann 2006). Below, I describe the different spillover effects. Moreover, areas of ‘high politics’, such as security and defence, comprise a difficult case for neofunctionalism to explain (see Niemann and Ioannou 2015), making this an interesting and important case to focus on.

**Functional spillover** is defined as ‘a situation in which the original goal can be assured only by taking further actions, which in turn create a further condition and need for more action, and so forth’ (Lindberg 1963, 10). The interdependence between different sectors and policy areas can result in integration pressures due to functional spillover (Haas 1958). Consequently, integration efforts in one area may create tension in another, whether intentionally or unintentionally. To understand this spillover effect, it is important to evaluate the significance and urgency of the original integration goal, as this will determine the strength of the functional pressure (Bergmann 2019).

**Political spillover** occurs when national elites face challenges that cannot be effectively resolved at the national level. According to Haas (1958), this phenomenon should initiate a process in which non-governmental national elites shift their expectations and even loyalties to the European level, thereby promoting integration at that level. Niemann (2006) refers to these non-governmental elites as ‘carriers of functional spillover’. In contrast, Lindberg (1963) focuses on governmental elites and how a process of socialisation among

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them can foster consensus and, ultimately, lead to more integrative outcomes. This process promotes socialisation, trust-building, cooperation and the formation of consensus, which in turn contribute to increased integration (Niemann 2006, 37–39).

The concept of a *cultivated spillover* effect refers to how supranational institutions can play a crucial role in promoting integration by seeking to enhance their own influence. In this context, the Commission and other supranational entities such as the European Parliament can act as policy entrepreneurs, utilising strategies such as addressing functional interdependencies, framing issues in a cross-sectoral manner (community framing) and building strategic coalitions (Bergmann 2019; Niemann 2006). Moreover, the Commission's authority – including its power to initiate actions – and its central position within the political system of the EU enable it to expand its influence (Niemann 2006).

The inclusion of *exogenous spillover* effects expands the integration process to account for factors that occur outside of the process itself. While these factors can sometimes impede integration, they more frequently act as catalysts for further integration, thereby influencing the overall demand for integration (Biermann et al. 2019; Nicoli 2020). Exogenous events are often seen as shocks or threats that create incentives for regional integration. The underlying rationale is that member states tend to seek common solutions when faced with threats or crises, as regional integration is perceived to be an effective safeguard against unfavourable or uncertain external developments (Niemann 2006, 33). Ultimately, the indicators of this spillover effect rely on how decision-makers perceive the pressure to increase integration due to various threats, shocks or international competition (Niemann 2006, 62–63).

To further analyse the integration process, the notion of *countervailing forces* should be added to the discussion. These forces can be seen either when integration is being opposed or when the integration process reaches a standstill. The first case study examines two distinct types of countervailing forces: sovereignty-consciousness and domestic constraints. Sovereignty-consciousness countervailing forces emerge when member states resist the transfer of powers and sovereignty to supranational institutions, often due to the states’ respective traditions and identities. On the other hand, domestic constraints hinder member states from acting at the European level due to factors such as the influence of other political actors within the domestic political system (e.g. opposition parties,
lobbying and public opinion) or the structural limitations of a state (e.g. its economy) (Niemann 2006, 47–49).

**Supranational entrepreneurship and agenda setting**

The earlier works of Edler and James (2015) and James (2018) link agenda setting with a neofunctionalist framework (see also discussions in Ackrill and Kay 2011; Bergmann 2019). These scholars discuss the importance of a policy entrepreneurship perspective and how neofunctionalist spillover processes can occur in the agenda-setting phase (Edler and James 2015, 1253–1256). The second case study thus builds on John Kingdon’s (1984/2014) classical and seminal work on agenda setting (the Multiple Streams Framework, MSF) in US politics. Other scholars have discussed similar theoretical framework(s) within the EU context (see e.g. Ackrill and Kay 2011; Ackrill et al. 2013; Camisão and Guimarães 2017; Engl and Evrard 2020; Herweg and Zahariadis 2018; Maltby 2013; Princen 2007, 2009, 2011; Princen and Rhinard 2006; Rhinard 2010; Schön-Quinlivan and Scipioni 2017; Talberg 2003; Vesan et al. 2021; Vesan and Corti 2022; Zahariadis 2008; Zeilinger 2021) and even within the field of EU foreign and security policy (see e.g. Dijkstra 2013; Sus 2021, 2023; Vanhoonacker and Pomorska 2013). The MSF outlines how the policy process is developed through the problem, political and policy streams. Below, I outline the main theoretical discussion from the second case study.

The *problem stream* is characterised by various indicators of problems, such as reports, studies and data, as well as by notable events such as crises or disasters. In addition, influential symbols or feedback processes can draw policymakers’ attention to an issue, making them more inclined to focus on and address it (Kingdon 2014, 90–95). Recognition of a problem is central to the agenda-setting phase, as an issue that is perceived to be important is more likely to take priority in the agenda. However, merely recognising a problem is often insufficient to advance it further on the agenda. Therefore, the process of the problem stream must be connected to the other two streams as well (Kingdon 2014, 113–115).

The *political stream* refers to how ideas and proposals are changed and accepted through, for instance, changes in government and parliament, and the involvement of interest groups or supranational actors (Kingdon 2014, 145). To analyse the political stream within the EU context, it is essential to examine the

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engagement and arguments put forth by different European actors. This examination helps in understanding how relevant ideas are politically debated, are outlined and eventually reach consensus before being adopted. The policy stream in turn focuses on how ideas are transformed into ‘acceptable policy initiatives’ (Engl and Evrard 2020, 919). According to Kingdon (2014), multiple ideas and proposals within policy discussions contend with one another during this process. The policy community then chooses ideas and proposals based on their technical feasibility and alignment with the existing values held by the policy community (Kingdon 2014, 143–144). Policy windows are opened by events in either the political or the problem streams. In the political stream, changes in, for instance, government (or the European Commission leadership, in this case) can create opportunities to address new issues. Changes in the problem stream can also raise the possibility of addressing a new issue. These policy windows can be predictable, as in electoral processes or legislative cycles, or unpredictable, as in the emergence of new problems or crises (Kingdon 2014, 203–204). Finally, policy entrepreneurs are people who are ‘willing to invest their resources in return for future policies they favour’ (Kingdon 2014, 204). Policy entrepreneurs can be elected officials, lobbyists or civil servants, among others (Kingdon 2014, 204). Princen and Rhinard (2006, 1121–1123) outlined how the agenda-setting process in the EU can follow either a high politics route, which is initiated by political leaders and is often linked to a symbolic event or salient issue, or a low politics route, which is initiated from ‘below’ due to professional concerns.

To further account for the entire policy process from idea to implementation, the second case study in this dissertation, which focuses on the EU’s Military Mobility project, draws on the literature of policy transfer to explain how the different ideas and frameworks from the member states and institutions such as NATO were taken up and implemented at the EU level (see also Minstrom and Norman 2009). Building on the work of Dolowitz and March (2000), Bulmer and Padgett (2004) and Bulmer et al. (2007), the second case study investigates how different policies were transferred to the EU level and subsequently implemented. In the EU context, the policy-transfer process can be viewed as ‘a process by which ideas, policy, administrative arrangements or institutions in one political setting influence policy development in another political setting, mediated by the institutional system of the EU’ (Bulmer and Padgett 2004, 105; see also Dolowitz and March 2000).
Crisis pressure for integration

The final case study in this dissertation partially draws on these earlier theoretical discussions to propose a schematic, theoretically informed empirical generalisation of how crisis pressure can create a process of new integrative steps within the EU. This is important, as the EU has been going through a ‘polycrisis’ situation, especially since 2009, or can even be said to have been in a ‘permacrisis’ phase (Dinan et al. 2017; Zeitlin et al. 2019; Zuleeg et al. 2021). As a result, there has been major scholarly discussion in recent years on how crisis affects the European integration process and its theoretical underpinnings (see e.g. Alcaro and Tocci 2021; Anghel and Jones 2023; Bauer and Becker 2014, 2016; Beach and Smeets 2020; Becker and Gehring 2023; Caporaso 2018; Christiansen 2020; Dinan et al. 2017; Ferrera and Kriesi 2022; Genschel 2022; Hooghe and Marks 2019; Jones et al. 2016, 2021; Kassim 2022; Laffan 2016; Niemann and Ioannou 2015; Rhinard 2019; Riddervold et al. 2021; Schimmelfennig 2018; Smeets and Beach 2022, 2023a).

As described by Riddervold et al. (2021), the past decade of EU crises has created a ‘perfect storm’ that must be analysed in greater depth, both empirically and theoretically. Crises can ‘spur the emergence of entirely new policies or institutional arrangements’ (Riddervold et al. 2021, 11). Earlier research has shown that the EU is a ‘reactive power’ in its foreign and security policy and that new policy developments can and have been developed in response to crisis and exogenous factors (Riddervold and Cross 2019). Anderson (2021) similarly discusses how a crisis can be a ‘trigger’ for new integration. In particular, ‘complex crises’ such as a severe economic crisis or war can push forward new policy solutions and initiatives.

The era of EU crises in the 2010s and 2020s led to the transfer of more competences to the Commission as a response to the crises. The crises also led to the internal reshaping of the EU’s institutional actors and their roles and responsibilities (for theoretical and empirical discussions, see e.g. Bauer and Becker 2014, 2016; Beach and Smeets 2020; Christiansen 2020; Kassim 2022; Moloney and Princen 2023; Niemann and Ioannou 2015; Nugent 2017; Smeets and Beach 2022). Thus, crises can be seen as ‘an integral part of the process of European integration’ (Lefkofridi and Schmitter 2015, 4; see also Anderson 2021; Nicoli 2020). And, as noted by Jones et al. (2021, 1527), ‘supranational political entrepreneurs can play an important role applying pressure during EU policy crisis in order to promote deeper integration’ (see also Schimmelfennig
All three articles in this dissertation demonstrate this type of dynamic, in which the European Commission responds to crisis by promoting deeper integration.

Furthermore, on an empirical note, early ambitions within the field of EU security and defence – that is, the proposal on the (failed) European Defence Community – can be seen as having been spurred by the crisis of the 1950 Korean War (Dinan 2017, 19). Similarly, the launch of the EU CSDP in the late 1990s and early 2000s was connected to the Yugoslav crisis (Dinan 2017; Howorth 2014). Crises have often been identified as ‘focusing events’, through which different actors can reframe and push for their policy options (Birkland 1998). As a more recent example, crisis, external threats and other events in the domain of cyber defence have been used to ‘validated the Commission’s narrative’ on the importance of enhancing cooperation, strengthening the Commission’s role in this policy domain (Brandão and Camisão 2022).

In its use of the neofunctionalism and agenda-setting frameworks, this thesis draws on how crises – as exogenous spillover pressure or as a problem stream – can push forward integration within the EU. In the final study of this dissertation, this theme is developed further, by outlining and developing a process by which crises affect policymaking in the field of EU security and defence. This integration process is a gradual one in which actors and policymakers build upon already established frameworks and initiatives. In line with functional and cultivated spillover effects, earlier initiatives and decisions serve as a precondition for new initiatives. A crisis can spur new momentum for integration and can serve as a trigger for institutional reform or for the development of new policy initiatives (Andersen 2021; Dinan et al. 2017; Riddervold et al. 2021). Due to the EU crisis(es), specific crisis policymaking patterns have emerged within the Union (Ferrara and Kriesi 2022; Rhinard 2019; Vaagland 2021). In such crisis situations, the EU leaders in the European Council often take the lead (see e.g. Kassim 2023; Smeets and Beach 2023a). However, in these situations, it has been common for member state leaders to then require the ’EU level’ to come up with solutions, which can lead to policy entrepreneurship and a cultivated spillover effect by institutions such as the Commission (see also Rhinard 2019). Anderson (2021) has discussed how the different EU crises of the past decade are interlinked, which has created an opportunity for policy learning for the EU and its institutions. As stated by Radaelli (2022), ‘what the EU learns in a crisis may affect what is learned in the next’; similarly, Ladi and Tsarouhas (2020) discuss how ‘time proximity’ between different crises can contribute to learning and
policy outcomes. For instance, policy learning can clearly be seen from both Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic (see e.g. Maurer et al. 2023; Schutte 2022).

The proposals of EU institutions in crisis situations should thus be seen in light of earlier initiatives and in regard to decisions made in earlier crises. Nevertheless, in line with the ‘pragmatic turn’ within the discussion on European integration theories I draw on the dynamics in both neofunctionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism to explain the decision-making process within the EU. In fact, both supranational entrepreneurship (i.e. neofunctionalism) and short-term bargaining among member states (i.e. liberal intergovernmentalism) are important in understanding the final EU decisions (see e.g. discussions in Alcaro and Tocci 2021; Becker and Gehring 2023; Ferrera and Kriesi 2022; Hooghe and Marks 2019; Jones et al. 2016, 2021; Schimmelfennig 2018).

Theoretical connections and summary

While the different schools of European integration are traditionally held up against each other and ‘competitively tested’ (Becker and Gehring 2023; Ferrera and Kriesi 2022), the integration literature has taken a pragmatic turn in recent years with discussions on how the grand theories of European integration can complement each other (see e.g. Bergmann and Müller 2021; Ferrera and Kriesi 2022; Hooghe and Marks 2019; Schimmelfennig 2018; Schmidt 2018; see also Alcaro and Tocci 2021; Jones et al. 2016, 2021). For instance, Becker and Gehring (2023) discuss and describe recent ambitions within the literature to bridge the dynamics in the different European integration theories. In their study on the EU’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic, they draw on neofunctionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism to explain integration outcomes. In their conclusions, Becker and Gehring (2023) underline the importance of mobilising ‘the explanatory power of different theories to analyse complex phenomena’. Similarly, Weiss and Biernann (2022) draw on the micro-foundations of both neofunctionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism to explain European integration in the field of defence.

Moreover, as the case studies in this dissertation confirm, the EU process is often ‘messier’ and more complex than outlined by the scholars of both new intergovernmentalism and new supranationalism, in part ‘because the [EU] actors themselves are in constant interaction’ (Schmidt 2018, 1554). Thus, European integration scholars should be pragmatic and open to a ‘pluralism of [theoretical] approaches in their research’ (Schmidt 2018, 1558; see also Bocquillon and
Dobbels 2014; Smeets et al. 2019; Smeets and Beach 2022, on the complex EU decision-making process). Over time, largely due to past crises, the EU has started to deal with issues close to ‘heart of national sovereignty’ or ‘core state powers’, such as money and taxation, border issues and security and defence issues (see e.g. Schmidt 2018, 1555; for discussions on core state powers and the EU, see Bremer et al. 2020; Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2014, 2016, 2018). Together with the crises of the past decade, this has spurred a new discussion within European integration literature.

Scholars have long debated and outlined the division between supranationalism and intergovernmentalism in European integration and within the field of security and defence policy developments (Howorth 2012; see also Ojanen 2006; Schmidt 2018). As early as in 2000, Howorth coined the expression ‘supranational-intergovernmentalism’ to describe the overlapping dynamics of the two theoretical schools in EU foreign and security policy (Howorth 2000). While this thesis is more grounded in the supranationalist theoretical school, this thesis underlines the importance of the member states in pushing forward the European integration process. As Antonio Calcara argued, ‘moving beyond the debate between (new) intergovernmentalism and (new) supranationalism, scholars have long emphasised how EU external relations are structured around with hybrid structures’ (Calcara 2020c, 378–379). Or, as noted by Maurer and Wright (2021, 856), ‘European foreign policy remains a complex and hybrid construct’. Thus, this debate implies – or, at least, this thesis argues – that it is necessary to take a pluralist view and account for both supranational and intergovernmental dynamics in order to understand the decisions made at the EU level. For this reason, the neofunctionalism framework this thesis draws and builds upon (in case study one) provides a larger role for the member states in the integration process, in contrast to older forms of neofunctionalism. Similarly, the agenda-setting literature in this thesis emphasises the importance of close relationships between supranational institutions and the member states. Finally, crisis pressure can be a ‘trigger’ for integration, in which input from both supranational institutions and member states is needed.

As mentioned in the section before, the neofunctionalism framework used in this thesis takes crises and exogenous events into account. Nicoli (2020, 897; see also Niemann 2021; Schmitter 1970) argues that ‘neofunctionalism and other related theories, has always postulated that integration advances through crisis’. Nevertheless, there are few neofunctionalism studies on crisis dynamics (Niemann and Ioannou 2015; however, see Anderson 2021; Boin et al. 2013) – a
gap this thesis contributes to filling. Moreover, in the problem stream of the MSF framework, crises are functions alongside supranational entrepreneurship, among other things. Finally, in this thesis, as well as in its theoretical frameworks of neofunctionalism, agenda setting and crisis pressure, the member states are given a larger decision-making role. In sum, I argue that this thesis contributes to the literature on the ‘pragmatic turn’ within European integration theories.
METHODS: CASE STUDY RESEARCH, PROCESS TRACING AND EXPERT/ELITE INTERVIEWS

This section outlines the main methodological approaches used in this dissertation. It begins with an introduction to and discussion of the research puzzle and questions, followed by sections on case study research and the main methodological approach of process tracing. The final section discusses the use of elite and expert interviews in the project.

With regard to research problems, Gustavsson and Hagström (2017) argue that gaps or real-world problems can be a starting point for research but are not sufficient for good research on their own. Therefore, researchers should seek to identify a ‘research puzzle’ to address in their research. These scholars argue that ‘research puzzles pinpoint what is considered deviant or unexpected rather than normal, typical or expected’ (Gustavsson and Hagström 2017, 639). Holes or gaps in the previous literature are important and relevant, but they should not guide us in a ‘mechanical way’ (Gustavsson and Hagström 2017). The development of EU security and defence policy at the supranational level is puzzling in regard to most of the literature (see also Riddervold and Trondal 2020; Strikwerda 2019). This thesis focuses on this research puzzle, which it addresses by means of focused case studies on the new role of the European Commission in the policy field of security and defence. These case studies were selected on empirical, theoretical and methodological grounds.
Case study research

The use of a case study design is arguably well suited for exploring the underlying reasons within an integration process (Cresswell 2014; Yin 2018). As Cresswell notes, a case study is ‘a design of inquiry found in many fields, especially evaluation, in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a programme, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals’ (Cresswell 2014, 367). Furthermore, ‘cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time’ (Cresswell 2014, 85). Others have described case study research as ‘an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context may not be clearly evident’ (Yin 2018, 15; see also Rohlfing 2012). Beach and Pedersen (2016) describe a case as ‘an instance of a causal process playing out, linking a cause (or a set of causes) with an outcome’ (p. 16). This dissertation seeks to explore and examine the phenomena of EU decision-making in security and defence in depth to understand the overlying integration dynamics of the process (Yin 2018). Hence, I seek to explore my proposed research questions through focused case study research. The guiding explanatory research questions – asking ‘how’ and ‘why/what’ – are in line with the typical questions answered in case study research (Yin 2018, 9–10). The research questions are also in line with the theoretical frameworks, which can provide insights into questions such as: ‘how can the outcomes of EU decisions be explained?’ and ‘why and how does European integration take place in certain policy areas?’ (Niemann 2016, 12).

The selection of cases (i.e. the establishment of the EDF, the EU Military Mobility project and the new developments and initiatives launched after the Ukraine war) is linked to the innovation and success of the European Commission in establishing these new initiatives (for a similar discussion see also Strikwerda 2019). That is, these are cases in which the Commission has expanded its competences in the policy field. Although they are success stories, these cases can also be seen as hard cases – or least-likely cases – of defence integration. Thus, if the proposed theorised process functions under such unfavourable circumstances, the external validity of the study will be strengthened (see discussions in Kassim and Tholoniat 2021; Riddervold and Trondal 2020; Schimmelfennig 2015b, 115; Strikwerda 2019, 19).
This dissertation uses a small-N design focused on a few notable cases to explore the research question. Jacobs (2015) argues that small-N studies can provide an ‘opportunity to attend much closer to qualitative features of actors’ decisions, and such scrutiny can sometimes provide evidence with substantial potential to discriminate among possible motives’ (p. 69). Collier et al. (2010) also note that ‘qualitative research routinely utilises thick analysis, in the sense that analysts place great reliance on a detailed knowledge of cases’ (p. 180). Through the use of thick analysis, these studies attempt to identify the underlying integration dynamics.

**Process tracing**

As mentioned earlier, this thesis and its case studies follow a process-tracing logic. Process tracing has been outlined as the use of ‘histories, archival documents, interview transcripts, and other sources to see whether the causal process a theory hypothesises or implies in a case is in fact evident in the sequences and values of the intervening variables [or mechanisms] in that case’ (Bennet and Checkel 2015, 6). This method seeks to trace causal mechanisms or ‘attempts to identify the intervening causal process – the causal chain and causal mechanism – between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent’ (George and Bennett 2005, 206–207; see also Rohlfing 2012). Therefore, I have sought to unpack the causal process that took place between cause and outcome, and to trace all the different parts empirically. The use of process tracing is likely to better enable the identification of problems or logical shortcomings in the theories used. Furthermore, because of our enhanced understanding of the contextual conditions, this process of unpacking in detail is intended to make it possible to better ‘transfer the lessons learned from process-tracing to real world policy situations’.

Finally, as Citi (2014) argues, process tracing is ‘an excellent method for exploring how political phenomena develop over time’ (p. 139), especially in an inductive, back-and-forth process of investigating certain political outcomes. One trade-off of this method, however, is that it is only possible to conduct such in-depth case studies on a small number of cases. Moreover, the contextual settings and the highly case-specific context in process tracing make it necessary to trade higher internal validity for lower external validity (Beach and Pedersen 2019, 38–41, 77–80).
This thesis focuses on ‘typical cases’ in which the cause, outcome and contextual conditions are all present and can affect how the process might work (Beach and Pedersen 2019, 96–100). Following Beach and Pedersen (2019), I developed a process and mechanisms linking the cause and the outcome. This theorisation is expected to lead to a process in which the cause triggers mechanisms that then link these mechanisms with the outcome (Beach and Pedersen 2019, 253–254). After developing this causal process, case-specific propositions are created regarding the kind of empirical fingerprint I expect to find of the activities. This operationalisation process is developed from contextual knowledge of the case and of other studies in the field. After this phase, it is possible to start collecting and assessing the empirical material (Beach and Pedersen 2019, 252–259). In this way, theoretical expectations are developed into case-specific propositions about the kind of empirical fingerprints that should be present if the theoretical process is operating as proposed. While this operationalisation process is developed by working with the case (from the empirical side), it is also influenced by previously published material (both theoretical and empirical) on the subject (Beach and Pedersen 2019, 254–259).

It is important to address the temporal dimension and define the time span used in these types of case studies (Beach and Pedersen 2019, 81–83). My specific cases, as noted above, have a time span from the Juncker Commission in 2014 to the von der Leyen Commission in 2023, albeit with a certain emphasis on the period starting in 2016. As noted above, the process of developing the causal theory and case studies began with an interest in an empirical phenomenon, which led to a theoretical brainstorming and a back-and-forth process between the empirical and the theoretical sides.

To conclude, process-tracing logic has been argued to be especially apt for the analysis of European integration (Schimmelfennig 2015b, 98). Thus, process tracing should be seen as a ‘key technique for capturing the causal mechanisms in action’ (Bennet and Checkel 2015, 9) and thus for capturing the overall integration processes of interest in this dissertation project.
Elite and expert interviews

Interviews have been argued to be especially apt for the process-tracing methodology, as the aim is to ‘reconstruct an event or a set of events’ (Tansey 2007, 766). Moreover, interviews are often one of the most important sources of information in case study research. The advantages of interviews include the ability to target questions and inquiries on specific research topics and to obtain information that is not available from other sources, such as official documents (Aberbach and Rockman 2002; Tansey 2007; Yin 2018). As Tansey (2007, 767) argues:

Elite interviews can shed light on the hidden elements of political action that are not clear from an analysis of political outcomes or other primary sources. By interviewing key participants in the political process, analysts can gain data about the political debates and deliberations that preceded decision making and action taking, and supplement official accounts with first-hand testimony.

Interviewing experts and elites is hence key to understanding how political processes are developed in practice and how decisions are linked together (Tansey 2007; von Soest 2022). Ewers-Peters (2022, 21) emphasises the importance of conducting semi-structured interviews when examining and researching contemporary phenomena. In turn, von Soest (2022) discusses how experts can provide insight into the micro foundation and ‘how decisions were made in practice’. Expert interviews can also help to link the micro and macro levels of analysis. My interviewees were purposely chosen to give insights into and inside knowledge on the development processes of the case studies selected for this dissertation project. They include ‘inside experts’ from both the senior level and the mid-/low-level, comprising civil servants who have been involved in the overall development process. The inclusion of mid-level officials is important, since these officials often work on such issues every day and have insights into the development process (von Soest 2022; see also Deschaux-Beaume 2012, 109; George and Bennet 2005, 103). Following von Soest (2022, 2), I define an expert as ‘any person who has specialised information on or who has been involved in the political or social process of interest’.

In line with Cresswell’s advice (2014, 475), my interview participants were selected from relevant EU and international actors – such as high-level and mid-level officials from the European Commission, the EDA, the EU member states (officials and diplomats), the EEAS, NATO and the European defence industry.
The advantages of working with EU officials include the level of public access and their willingness to participate in interviews and research. The interviews were especially important for gaining access to information and ‘details that would be impossible to delve into, let alone anticipate in for example a standardised survey’ (Gerring 2011, 15). According to Calcara (2019), the policy field of security and defence cooperation is ‘less transparent than other policy areas due to its intimate connection to national security and because of proprietary information and industry competition’ (p. 576; see also Riddervold 2016, 358–359). Calcara (2019) therefore argues that qualitative interviews, together with media reporting and think-tank papers, are essential for collecting empirical material in these types of studies.

I began the interview process following Bleich and Pekkanen’s (2015) advice of setting up a ‘purposive, theoretically motivated set of target interviews’. These were subsequently followed up by the snowball sampling of interviewees (for the second case study in this thesis). Snowball sampling, which refers to ‘the process of seeking additional contacts from one’s interviewees’ (Bleich and Pekkanen 2015, 9), is an efficient way to find key actors in the policy process. To avoid bias, however, I sought to find my interviewees independently to the greatest possible extent. When using elite interviews, it is important to establish whether the interview source can be treated as a primary source or a secondary source. For instance, have the various EU officials and diplomats been directly involved in the negotiations or working groups, or are they drawing their information from other sources? Moreover, as underlined by Bora and Schramm (2023), it is necessary to be ‘aware of the methodological risks when focusing on primary sources, and on elite interviews in particular, [and] we [need to] triangulate our data with secondary academic literature on the respective topics’. Triangulation of the data (i.e. the use of interviews and official documents in addition to secondary literature and media reports) helped to verify information and reduce reliance on one form of data (Bennet and Checkel 2015, 28; Calcara 2020a; Niemann 2006, 59).

In total, 50 interviews were conducted with high- and mid-level officials and diplomats in Brussels and Stockholm, also by means of video communication due to the Covid-19 pandemic. To guide my research, I also conducted a series of informal discussions with around 10 officials – mainly Swedish officials – from the defence and foreign ministries and the defence industry. Before the interviews, I created a question guide of generally open-ended questions to steer the interviews, using a semi-structured format that left room for follow-up
questions and discussions (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015; Cresswell 2014, 479). All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Due to the sensitive policy field, the interviewees were anonymised in the final research results. While the use of video communication for part of the interviews might be seen as a drawback, the online format gave me access to officials and policymakers during the Covid-19 pandemic. Online tools such as MS Teams and Zoom have also become a ‘viable alternative to in-person meetings’ today (von Soest 2022). Nevertheless, the in-person interviews – conducted both before and after the pandemic – have been the most influential for this thesis. However, the ability to meet officials online and conduct interviews during the pandemic was also important for advancing the analysis.
SUMMARY OF ARTICLES AND INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS


The launch of the EDF has been described as a game changer for the role of the European Commission in EU security and defence policy. This article examines and analyses this new EU defence industrial initiative using a revised form of neofunctionalism. The article seeks to understand how and through what steps the EDF came about and how neofunctionalism can explain the dynamics involved in establishing the EDF. The analysis employs a process-tracing method and relies on interviews with relevant policymakers and officials in Brussels, as well as official EU documents, to analyse the policy development. By conducting interviews and analysing official texts, this study offers a unique and in-depth contribution to the entire policy process leading up to the launch of the EDF: from the long-term ambition of the Commission to the EDF proposal and the negotiations process, and on to the final decision regarding the EDF’s overall budget. It traces the European Commission's ambitions in the field of security and defence since the 1990s, particularly within the defence industrial domain. The deteriorating security situation around 2016 and new political ambitions within the Juncker Commission ultimately led to the establishment of the Fund. The EDF thus represents a significant development in the EU's role in the field of security and defence, as it is the first time the European Commission has utilised financial incentives to strengthen European defence. Moreover, in order to launch the Fund, the Commission drew on its earlier initiatives in civilian security research.
There is a general lack of examination of the role of supranational institutions in the policy field of security and defence. Thus, this study aims to deepen the understanding of the Commission’s new and enhanced role in European security and defence cooperation. This article makes two main contributions to the field. Firstly, it traces the empirical process of developing the EDF programme in depth. The findings of this research underscore the increasing involvement of the European Commission in a policy field that has been traditionally associated with national sovereignty, blurring the boundaries between intergovernmental and supranational decision-making processes. As a result, this study contributes to an expanding body of literature that highlights the waning influence of intergovernmentalism within the EU’s security and defence policy domain. By examining the emergence of the EDF and its implications for decision-making, this research sheds light on the transformative dynamics within the EU’s defence landscape, ultimately providing valuable insights into the evolving nature of European security and defence cooperation.

Secondly, this article is part of a new theorisation of neofunctionalism within EU security and defence policy. In terms of theory development, it outlines the importance of external events in the policy process and gives the member states a larger decision-making role in the theoretical framework. Finally, this study challenges the claims by new intergovernmentalism that EU member states first and foremost empower de novo bodies. The study provides evidence of strong political entrepreneurship by the Commission and helps to further revitalise the discussion on supranational decision-making in this policy field.


The European Union’s Military Mobility project is another notable new policy development within its security and defence policy that has been launched in recent years. This initiative is considered to be the flagship project in the enhanced relationship and cooperation between the EU and NATO. This article retraces and explains the establishment of the Military Mobility project from its initial idea to the current implementation phase. The case study presented here utilises a process-tracing method to explore the new dynamics and developments of the EU Military Mobility project in order to outline and understand how the project was established and developed. To analyse this process in depth, semi-
structured elite/expert interviews were conducted with officials and policymakers. The information gathered from these interviews was then cross-checked and validated using official documents, media reporting and think-tank papers.

The findings show that the worsening security situation after Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the start of the (first) war in Ukraine in 2014 was an important catalyst for launching the Military Mobility project. Furthermore, cooperation, input and influence from NATO and policy entrepreneurship from EU institutions such as the European Commission and member states such as the Netherlands helped to position the issue of developing the Military Mobility project and enhancing EU-NATO cooperation high on the European policy agenda. This article also reveals that the EU acquired knowledge on these issues from NATO, and that member states and NATO were able to transfer ideas and practical content to the EU level in order to implement the Military Mobility project. The research demonstrates that EU services have learned and transferred knowledge from NATO in the defence domain. The findings of this paper illustrate the growing significance of the EU in European defence and the evolving relationship and division of labour between NATO and the EU. The article also sheds light on the mechanisms driving these developments by emphasising the crucial role played by the European Commission, as well as the increasing trust fostered between the EU and NATO. It argues that the EU is becoming an enabling actor for work within the NATO alliance.

The article makes three overall contributions to the field. Firstly, it is one of the first articles to comprehensively trace, describe and analyse the detailed process of the EU Military Mobility project at a micro level. By combining the literature on agenda-setting within the EU and policy transfer, this paper elucidates the entire policy and development process of the Military Mobility project up to the present. Secondly, this work enhances our understanding of the evolving role of the European Commission in the realm of EU security and defence policy. The article demonstrates that this policy development is part of a broader trend weakening intergovernmentalism in the architecture of EU security and defence policy. It also argues and presents evidence that the work on Military Mobility plays a significant role in deterrence and defence in Europe.

The third study in this thesis focuses on the new EU security and defence initiatives launched and implemented after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and the role of the European Commission in this process. This article discusses two case studies: one on the development of the EU sanctions policy regime and another on the development of new EU defence initiatives after the outbreak of the war. This study places particular emphasis on how the war in Ukraine has begun to transform the Commission into a stronger actor in EU security and defence architecture. This work constructs a theoretical process in which the earlier defence initiative, the effects of the war and the dynamics between supranational institutions and the member states influence the EU’s new decisions and initiatives. The aim of the article is to reconcile and bridge the arguments of neofunctionalism, liberal intergovernmentalism and crisis integration in order to explain new developments and integration. In this regard, it is part of a broader, new ‘pragmatic’ trend within European integration literature, which aims to combine and discuss different frameworks of integration together.

Traditionally, the European Commission has held a weak position in the policy domain, and supranational integration of EU security and defence policy has been viewed as unlikely. However, since 2016, the European Commission has steadily expanded its role and ambition within this field, as demonstrated in the first two articles of this dissertation. The European Commission has thus been able to build on its earlier initiatives following the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In the development of sanctions policy, similarities can be observed between the Commission’s efforts since 2022 and the policy developed after the 2014 Ukraine crisis, during which EU institutions already played a larger role in preparing and brokering various sanctions packages. However, after the 2022 war, the EU institutions – particularly the Commission – assumed a stronger role in the development process of these packages. The Commission’s coordination role with transatlantic partners is also noteworthy. Furthermore, the EU’s response to the 2022 war was faster and more robust than its response to the 2014 Ukraine war. In the defence field, the European Commission has drawn on earlier EU defence initiatives and benefitted from the dynamics that have emerged during the process of developing the EU’s new Strategic Compass for security and defence.
This article makes two primary contributions to the field. Firstly, it traces new, important empirical development within the EU’s foreign, security and defence policy, thereby promoting a greater understanding of the Commission's role. The findings also feed into the discussion and debate on how the European Commission has become increasingly geopolitical. Secondly, it aligns with and contributes to a new ‘pragmatic trend’ of theorisation within European integration literature, which recognises that the new policy developments are influenced by both the supranational and intergovernmental levels.
Since 2016, the EU’s (and the Commission’s) ambition has clearly gone beyond the scope of EU’s CSDP. The 2016 EUGS makes a clear statement of the EU’s ambition to ‘protect Europe’, and several new initiatives have been launched in line with this ambition since then. This thesis investigated and discussed the role of the European Commission in developing critical new security and defence initiatives: namely, the EDF, the EU Military Mobility project and the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through the common Procurement Act (EDIRPA), as well as the Commission’s role in pushing forward various sanctions packages after Russia’s illegal 2022 war on Ukraine.

This thesis set out to answer the following overarching research questions: *What role did the European Commission play in the policy processes leading up to the establishment of the EDF, the EU Military Mobility project and the new decisions made and initiatives taken after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022? How can these new initiatives be explained and understood? How have these new policies and initiatives reshaped the role and responsibilities of the European Commission within EU security and defence policy?* These questions were answered through the three in-depth studies/articles focusing on the new policy initiatives. This thesis makes two primary contributions. Firstly, it provides a clear empirical contribution. The results of the three case-study articles shed light on the ground-breaking EDF initiative and its development process. Moreover, to the best of my knowledge, the second article in this thesis is the first in-depth academic analysis of the EU’s Military Mobility project. This thesis also contributes to a greater understanding of the strengthened cooperation between the EU and NATO. To the best of my knowledge, the third article in this thesis is
also the first study on the European Commission’s role in and response to the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War (however, see also Baracani 2023; Fiott 2023; Orenstein 2023). In addition, this thesis contributes to the evolving literature on the European Commission’s increasingly (geo)political role. It also strongly argues that there is a need for this type of inductively and empirically driven research in order to understand today’s dynamics within European integration.

Secondly, drawing on neofunctionalism, agenda setting/policy entrepreneurship and crisis pressure, this dissertation makes a unique contribution to explaining the integration and role of the European Commission in the area of security and defence policy. It offers a theoretical contribution by representing a new application of neofunctionalism within European security and defence policy (see also Bergmann and Müller 2023; Haroche 2023). This work gives member states a larger decision-making role within the neofunctionalism framework and considers exogenous events in the integration process. The results of this thesis also contribute to the growing literature that combines dynamics with classical European integration theories. In this regard, I argue that the integration process is often 'messier' than outlined in classical theories, and that it is necessary to take a more pluralistic view in order to understand the integration process today (see also Smeets and Beach 2023b; Sil and Katzenstein 2010; Tsoukalis 2022). Overall, this dissertation makes its foremost contributions to the field of EU studies, through both its empirical contribution and its contribution to neofunctionalism theorisation and pragmatic theorisation within European integration literature. Finally, this dissertation aims to reach practitioners in the EU and member states to inform them about the strengthened role of the EU and the Commission in security and defence.

As early as in 2014, the ‘Ukraine crisis’ and war led to a more united and integrated EU foreign and security policy (see e.g. Natorski and Pomorska 2017; Riddervold et al. 2021; Sjursen and Rosén 2017). It can also be clearly seen that the Trump years created a push for additional EU security and defence integration (Anderson 2021; Riddervold and Newsome 2018). These dynamics have been strongly reinforced and strengthened during the second crisis and war on Ukraine in 2022. However, while the 2022 war on Ukraine has created new momentum for strengthening EU defence integration, it is still uncertain whether the political ambition from the member states is present to take a ‘quantum leap forward’ in defence, as outlined by the 2022 EU Strategic Compass for security and defence (see also discussions in Besch 2022; Tocci 2023). Witney (2022) has argued that it is possible that ‘the shock of the Ukraine war, rising national defence budgets,
and a European Commission in the driving seat could finally bring about true European defence integration and consolidation’. This thesis echoes these discussions, while emphasising the need for increased political willingness from the member states. Nevertheless, as Herman Van Rompuy and Brigid Laffan (2022) note, ‘the European Union has reacted faster, more decisively, and with greater unity to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine than to any previous crisis’ (see also Radaelli 2022).

All the initiatives outlined in this thesis show the new added value of the EU and the Commission’s involvement in defence. Needless to say, the European Commission is not solely responsible for the new initiatives; however, I argue that the Commission and its leadership have been instrumental in setting up these new initiatives. Moreover, these new initiatives are creating a new enabling role for the EU for NATO. Under the NATO article 5 threshold, the EU has a very important role to play in regard to hybrid threats, cyber threats and economic coercion (see next section on future studies). It can also be seen that the 2022 war on Ukraine has reinforced NATO’s position as the cornerstone of collective defence in Europe and in the transatlantic community. However, the war has also strengthened the EU’s role in defence (see also Besch 2022; Financial Times 2023; Maurer et al. 2023; Scuzzieri 2022; Simón 2023; Tocci 2023; Whitman 2023). As Simón (2023) argues, while NATO is in the lead of collective defence in Europe, ‘the European Union can still play an indirect but critical contribution by helping to resource and enable deterrence and defense’ (Simón 2023; see also Financial Times 2023 on the EU’s new defence push after Russia’s war on Ukraine). Overall, this thesis argues that the work of the Commission and the EU can strengthen NATO’s overall efforts.

As recently as in 2014, Howorth (2014) concluded that ‘the EU per se does not have a relationship with NATO’ and that ‘any direct EU-NATO bilateral agenda is difficult to imagine’ (p. 130). Since then, this relationship has been institutionalised, and there have been three EU-NATO declarations strengthening this cooperation (EU-NATO 2016, 2018, 2023; see also e.g. Ewers-Peters 2022; Lațiçi 2019 for a longer discussion on EU-NATO relations). This thesis describes one of the success stories from this deepened and enhanced relationship: the EU Military Mobility project. Finally, although the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian war has reinforced the US commitment to NATO and European defence, the US will focus its military capabilities on the Indo-Pacific region and towards China in the longer run. Therefore, European states must – and should – take on greater
responsibility for deterrence and the defence of Europe, through both NATO and the EU (see also Binnendijk et al. 2022; Simón 2023).

**Future studies**

These results create follow-up questions that also need to be addressed. Firstly, how will the EU’s – and the Commission’s in particular – strengthened ambitions within the field of security and defence and the effects of crisis integration influence the EU’s normative role in world politics (Manners 2002; Whitman 2013)? For instance, in response to the recent crisis in the domain of foreign and security policy, the EU ‘seems to have developed a pattern of behaviour where its immediate crisis response has become increasingly focused on interests, whereas in its overarching strategies it continues to promote a norm- and value-based policy’ (Rieker and Riddervold 2022, 460). How will this affect the Union and its internal and external role going forward? The more ambitious initiatives within the EU security and defence policy also lead to questions on democratic accountability and scrutiny (see e.g. Besch 2020; Csernatoni and Reykers 2021; Herranz-Surrallés 2019; Håkansson 2022a; Lațić and Cseratoni 2020), such as in regard to the oversight of both national and European Parliament of the new supranational EU security and defence initiatives. Future studies should research and analyse these questions in greater depth.

Another line of inquiry should focus on the institutional dynamics within the EU. This thesis has outlined the greater involvement of the European Commission in defence matters. Similarly, the Covid-19 pandemic could be seen as strengthening the Commission’s political role (e.g. Kassim 2022, 2023; Lehne 2023). Or, as described by Lehne (2022):

> While the member states still call the shots, the European Commission has assumed a greater role in crisis management […] the president of the commission (supported by its Secretariat-General) has emerged as the central actor. In recent years, it has been the commission president and the heads of government of the EU’s larger member states who have shaped the union’s response to crises.

Thus, as outlined in this thesis, there are several perspectives on inter-institutional relationships and the institutions political ambitions (see also recent discussions in news media, e.g. *Politico* 2022; *Euractive* 2023). Further studies should focus on whether the dynamics stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic and the 2022 war on Ukraine will continue under the new Commission and EU leadership after 2024.
In terms of theoretical development, this thesis argues that we need to adopt a pragmatic and pluralistic theoretical approach to better understand and explain European integration in the present day. However, future studies should explore this point in greater depth, either empirically through hybrid cases or theoretically by examining how a pragmatic approach to theorising European integration functions. While this work advocates for the utilisation of analytic eclecticism in the analysis and study of the contemporary EU, there is a potential risk of theoretical overstretch. These issues should be further developed and outlined in future studies. Furthermore, these studies should also investigate policy areas beyond security and defence.

It can also be seen that the Commission’s strengthened ambitions in the foreign and security policy domain are currently playing out in the geo-economical field. There is also a blurring of policy fields, as security policy issues become increasingly entangled with trade, technology and economic issues, for example. Or, as emphasised by Wolff et al. (2021, 16), ‘economic interests are blurred with military or security goals, especially in strategic sectors such as cyberspace, finance, strategic materials and components, and control of critical digital infrastructure’. Consequently, a ‘geo-economic Commission’ can be observed in its making (see also Helwig 2019). Geo-economics can be defined as ‘the use of economic instruments to promote and defend national interests, and to produce beneficial geopolitical results; and the effects of other nations’ economic actions on a country's geopolitical goals’ (Blackwill and Harris 2016, 20). Thus, the Commission’s geo-economic turn is noteworthy. A range of new initiatives and proposals have been announced in the last couple of years (see also Gehrke 2022; Olsen 2022), including, inter alia, both strategic and defensive measures. Fägersten and Rühlig (2021) and Helwig and Wigell (2022) have described different measures the EU has taken, such as the implementation of a foreign direct investment (FDI) screening mechanism, export control measures and trade defence instruments. Internal reforms such as the 2022 proposal of a European Chips Act, the work of updating the EU’s industrial policy, the deepening of the single market, and the launch of Important Projects of Common European Interests (IPCEI) can be examined in light of this development. While the EU – and the Commission in particular – has only started to hedge and prepare for the risk of (economic) dependencies in recent years, it could be argued that the EU is somewhat well prepared to engage in this type of statecraft (see also Bradford 2020; Christiansen 2020; Damro 2015; Helwig and Wigell 2022; McNamara 2023).
The Covid-19 pandemic, the increasing Sino-American rivalry, and Russia’s war on Ukraine have only strengthened the current geopolitical and geo-economic tensions in world politics. Hence, the EU needs to be ready to address and mitigate these tensions. In its 2021 trade policy review, the Commission described how geo-economic tensions, global uncertainties, the rise of China and the fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic imply that the EU must enhance its resilience and use its trade policy in support of the EU’s geopolitical interests (European Commission 2021). Hence, as argued by Helwig and Wigeland (2022), ‘the new geoeconomics reality is changing the European Commission’s mindset, as shown by its stronger willingness to throw the EU’s economic and regulatory weight behind its actions in global politics’ (p. 3). Similarly, the new EU Global Gateway initiative can arguably be viewed as one of the EU’s more strategic developments, illustrating the EU’s increased focus on and usage of connectivity in response to increased tensions in global geopolitics (see also discussions in Biscop 2020; Håkansson 2022b). Along with the ongoing (at the time of writing) war in Ukraine, these new geopolitical rivalries are putting increasing pressure on the EU and the international system. Thus, future studies must focus on these developments in more depth and on their implications for Europe and the EU.
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APPENDIX: ARTICLES
The European Commission’s new role in EU security and defence cooperation: the case of the European Defence Fund

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ABSTRACT

European Defence is in a new and formative phase in which the European Union’s long list of defence acronyms has steadily grown. One of the most noticeable new policy initiatives is the European Commission’s European Defence Fund (EDF). This article consequently investigates and outlines the establishment of the European Defence Fund and the European Commission’s new role within the field of security and defence through the lens of revised neofunctionalism. This article thus asks how and through what steps did the EDF come about; and secondly how can neofunctionalism explain the dynamics involved in the establishment of the European Defence Fund. The analysis uses a process-tracing method and draws on interviews with relevant policymakers and officials in Brussels as well as official EU documents. The conclusions argue that the ever-increasing involvement of the European Commission in a policy field close to national sovereignty is starting to blur the traditional dichotomy between intergovernmental and supranational decision-making. In this way, this study contributes to the growing literature on the weakening of intergovernmentalism within the EU security and defence policy field.

Introduction

Following the publication of the European Union (EU) Global Strategy in 2016, the EU has rolled out a number of new initiatives in the field of security and defence, including the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), a Military Mobility project and the European Defence Fund (EDF) (Béraud-Sudreau and Pannier 2021, Besch 2020). Most of these are intergovernmental initiatives; however, both the Military Mobility project and the EDF have enhanced and transformed the role of the European Commission in the area of European security and defence cooperation. Moreover, when the new Commission took office in 2019, a new Directorate-General for the Defence Industry and Space (DG DEFIS) was created in order to – among other tasks – implement the EDF and the Action Plan on Military Mobility (European Commission 2019a).
Since the publication of the EU Global Strategy and the “relaunch of the EU CSDP” (Howorth 2019), studies have been published on EU-NATO relations (e.g. Howorth 2018), the EU Global Strategy (e.g. Tocci 2017), the Franco-German push for European cooperation in defence (e.g. Béraud-Sudreau and Pannier 2021), small states and EU defence cooperation (e.g. Weiss 2020) and EU institutional development (e.g. Reykers 2019). Another strand of research has focused on new European defence cooperation outside of formal formats such as NATO and the EU (e.g. Billon-Galland and Quencez 2018). With a few exceptions (e.g. Ridderwold 2016, Karampekios et al. 2018, Bergmann 2019, Haroche 2020), however, there has been a general lack of an examination of the new and enhanced role of supranational institutions in the policy field of security and defence. This study consequently aims to deepen the understanding of the Commission’s new and enhanced role in European security and defence cooperation by attempting to answer the following two key questions: (1) Through what steps did the EDF come about; and (2) how can neofunctionalism explain the dynamics involved in the establishment of the European Defence Fund.

While neofunctionalism is arguably one of the most criticised theories in the European integration literature, it has continued to be relevant and is still widely discussed in the academic debate (Niemann 2016, Hooghe and Marks 2019, Nicoli 2020). The perspective that the political role of the Commission is in decline (e.g. Bickerton et al. 2015) has also been challenged by scholars who argue that the Commission has actually increased its political role in some policy areas (Becker et al. 2016, Peterson 2017, Nugent and Rhinard 2019). In addition, following Jean-Claude Juncker’s “political Commission”, the new Commission, according to President von der Leyen, is focused on becoming a geopolitical one. Her political guidelines also underline the ambition to take “bold steps in the next five years towards a genuine European Defence Union” (von der Leyen 2019).

The contribution of this article is mainly twofold. Drawing on elite interviews with officials and policymakers in the European Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU member states, the European Defence Agency (EDA), the European Parliament and European defence industries this article has empirically traced the crucial steps in the development process of the European Defence Fund. By doing so, the article shed light on the increasingly supranational security and defence policy field in the EU. From a theoretical perspective it makes a contribution to the discussions on neofunctionalism and European security and defence policy. It moreover outlines the importance of external events in the policy process as well as gives the member states a larger decision-making role in the theoretical framework.

This article is structured as follows. The first section deals with the theoretical approach of revised neofunctionalism, and the second section presents the method and the material that the case study will build upon. The third section presents and analyses the crucial steps involved in the development of the European Defence Fund. The last section discusses the results of the case study and reflects upon the theoretical and empirical implications; it also suggests some further research.

Theory: revised neofunctionalism

This article uses the framework of revised neofunctionalism to explain integration within EU security and defence cooperation. In neofunctionalism, integration dynamics have traditionally been described using the notion of “spillovers”, especially in terms of functional, political
and cultivated spillovers (Tranholm-Mikkelsen 1991). In addition to these three forms of spillover, this article discusses countervailing forces and exogenous spillover. In other words, neofunctionalism is viewed herein as a partial but far-reaching theory in which integration is no longer seen as an automatic process (Niemann 2016, p. 137).

Functional spillover is characterised as “a situation in which the original goal can be assured only by taking further actions, which in turn create a further condition and need for more action, and so forth” (Lindberg 1963, p. 10). Due to functional spillover, the interdependence between different sectors and policy fields can cause further integration pressures (Haas 1958). Thus, integration in one area can create tensions in another, such that functional spillover can be both intended and unintended. To examine this spillover effect, it is necessary to assess how important and urgent the original integration goal is. This will affect and determine the strength of the functional pressure (Bergmann 2019). In order to assess these dynamics, the case study presented herein focuses on the connections between already launched policy initiatives and the establishment of the EDF.

Political spillover occurs when national elites encounter problems that cannot be substantially addressed at the national level. According to Haas (1958), political spillover should lead to a process in which (non-governmental) national elites switch their expectations – and even loyalties – to the European level, thereby promoting integration at that level. These non-governmental elites would thus, in Niemann’s words, “become carriers of functional spillover” (Niemann 2006, p. 35). Lindberg (1963) focused on governmental elites instead, and on how a process of socialisation among them might foster consensus and, eventually, more integrative results. This process would further promote socialisation and the development of trust, thereby encouraging cooperation and consensus formation, which should, in turn, lead to more integrative outcomes (Niemann 2006, pp. 37–39). This article foremost addresses the involvement of European defence industries (the non-governmental national elites) in the EDF’s development process. However, it also discusses the dynamics of the member states in regard to the Commission’s EDF proposal and in the legislative negotiations.

The cultivated spillover effect emphasises how supranational institutions can become agents of integration with the salient goal of empowering themselves. The Commission and other supranational institutions, such as the European Parliament, can therefore foster integration by acting as policy entrepreneurs, such as by acting on functional interdependencies, framing issues as cross-sectoral (community framing) or acting as a strategic coalition builder (Niemann 2006, Bergmann 2019). Furthermore, the Commission is able to extend its power because of its authority (e.g. its initiative powers) and its central position in the EU’s political system (Niemann 2006). In the context of the EDF, this study will focus on the Commission’s (agenda-setting) role in developing and launching the proposal, and on its interaction with other key stakeholders including the industry, European Parliament and member states. This study also examines the role of the European Parliament and the different instruments and initiatives used by both the parliament and the Commission to expand their competences within the policy field.

The inclusion of exogenous spillover effects expands the integration process to account for factors that occur outside of the process itself. Although these factors can be obstacles to integration, they more often serve as an engine for more integration and thus affect the overall demand conditions for integration (c.f. also Biermann et al. 2019, Nicoli 2020). Exogenous events are often perceived as shocks or threats that can create incentives for regional
integration. The logic behind this reasoning is that member states tend to find common solutions when threats or crises occur, since “regional integration is often viewed as a more effective buffer against disadvantageous or uncertain external development” (Niemann 2006, p. 33). In the end, the indicators of this spillover effect will be based on how decision-makers perceive the pressure for further integration due to different threats, shocks or international competition (Niemann 2006, pp. 62–63). Thus, in order to examine this effect, it is necessary to examine how external events affected the process of developing the EDF, both in regard to how the member states viewed and were affected by external events, and how the Commission (and parliament) viewed and acted upon these events.

To further analyse the EDF process, the notion of countervailing forces should be added to the discussion. These forces can be seen either when integration is being opposed or when the integration process reaches a standstill. In this article two different types of countervailing forces can be discussed: sovereignty-consciousness and domestic constraints. Sovereignty-consciousness countervailing forces arise when member states oppose the delegation of powers and sovereignty to, for example, supranational institutions. This opposition tends to be connected to member states’ traditions and identities. Domestic constraints, in turn, reduce the ability of member states to act at the European level, due to the effects of other political actors in the domestic political system (i.e. opposition parties, lobbying, public opinion) or to a state’s structural limitations (e.g. its economy) (Niemann 2006, pp. 47–49). This paper focuses on political, economic and military interest from the member states in order to examine whether and why the EDF proposal was met by resistance. The article in that sense argues that national governments play a larger role in regard to the theoretical framework (see also Nicoli 2020, pp. 900–901).

**Case study: the European Defence Fund**

This case study follows the logic of process-tracing and therefore seeks to trace and unpack the process of developing the new EDF. The analysis in this case study follows the theory-testing process-tracing method (Beach and Pedersen 2019).

The data used for this case study is primarily based on 23 semi-structured elite interviews that were conducted in person with officials and diplomats from the European Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU member states, the European Defence Agency (EDA), the European Parliament and European defence industries between December 2019 and February 2020. Official documents, secondary literature, media reports and think-tank reports were also used in the analysis. It is important to note that the policy field of security and defence cooperation can be “less transparent than other policy areas due to its intimate connection to national security”. This factor makes interviews, media reporting and think-tank papers essential for collecting empirical material (Calcara 2019, p. 576). The triangulation of this data in the study helped to verify the information that was obtained and reduced reliance on a single form of data (Bennett and Checkel 2015, p. 28).

**Long-term ambition**

After the failed attempt to create a supranational European Defence Community (EDC) in the 1950s, the EU avoided integration within the security and defence policy field for a
long time. However, over time, the EU has increased its capabilities and competencies in relation to these policies. Nevertheless, the Commission has held a weak position in the field of defence and security, which has been linked to member states’ reluctance to empower a supranational institution in a policy field so crucial to national sovereignty and high politics (Menon 2013). Nonetheless, Mawdsley (2018) has shown that the Commission’s discussions and ambitions within this policy field date back to the 1960s and 1980s, and that the pathway of today’s defence initiatives closely follows the earlier arguments and work of the Commission.

In particular, since the late 1990s, the Commission has tried more actively and in various ways to establish itself as an actor in the area of security and defence. In 1990, the Commission unsuccessfully argued that article 223 EEC (formerly article 296 TEC and now Article 346 TFEU), which states that “any member state may take such measures as it considers necessary for the protection of the essential interests of its security which are connected with the production of or trade in arms, munitions and war material”, should be scrapped (Strikwerda 2019, p. 52).

In 1996 and 1997, the Commission argued through its defence communications that member states should use community instruments and the Commission’s DGs to develop their defence industries (Fiott 2015, Strikwerda 2019). The 1996 Defence Communication even emphasised that “the Commission should consider its possible contribution to establishing [an] agency and to defining its tasks and carrying out its activities” (European Commission 1996, p. 1). The member states, however, were sceptical about the idea of the Commission and supranational decision-making entering the field, and instead opted for an intergovernmental agency to deal with defence industrial development. Furthermore, at that time, there were strong internal divisions between departments within the Commission on the role of security and defence research and a more “militarised” Commission (Mörth 2000). Therefore, the Commission supported the establishment of an intergovernmental EU defence agency, as it feared that member states might further detach defence industrial activities from the EU if the Commission continued to push for a supranational agency. Thus, the intergovernmental EDA was established in 2004, and the member states safeguarded their position towards the Commission. Following the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, the member states also gave the EDA the exclusive task of supporting joint development and defence research (Fiott 2015, pp. 449–450).

In 2004, however, the Commission issued a Communication on Security Research, established a Group of Personalities on Security Research (GoP) and ultimately launched a Preparatory Action (PA) on Security Research. These activities prepared the ground for a civilian European Security Research Programme (ESRP) to be established in 2007 (Mauro and Thoma, 2016, p. 24). This was a crucial step, as it implied that the Commission could invest in dual-use technology. At that point, there began to be a blurring of boundaries between the civilian and the military side at the EU level (Martins and Ahmad 2020). Consequently, it has been argued the ESRP “paved the way for the Commission’s recent explicit engagement with direct defence research funding” (Martins and Küsters 2019, p. 294). In relation to the process from the civilian European Security Research Programme to the EDF, a member state official argued that it was clear that the Commission had been
… a very long-term player, and that they had had their eyes on the defence policy field for quite some time. The Commission started with the civilian security research programme and the next step was then a defence research programme that did not need to be negotiated with the member states and parliament, and then the Commission had expertise in this policy field. (Interview, member state official, February 2020)

The official then went on to explain that the EDF “was, of course, a pretty bold proposal, but since they had prepared the ground with several initiatives before, they did not encounter too much resistance”. Thus, the role of the civilian research programme must be recognised in this process, as it created new competences for the Commission and strengthened the Commission’s connections to European defence industries – something that was important towards the EDF, as will be discussed later.

Moreover, by 2009, the Commission had launched a new defence package with the aim of regulating the European defence procurement market (Fiott 2017). Through its 2009 defence package, the Commission used the threat of the ECJ and “court-driven integration” – as well as a strategy of framing the package as representing the middle ground between the member states and the Commission – to have Directive 2009/81/EC agreed upon, as the first supranational legal act in the area of defence procurement in the EU (Blauberger and Weiss 2013, pp. 1129–1131, Weiss 2013). Although other researchers have focused on the influence of the member states in this process (e.g. Hoeffler 2012, Strikwerda 2019), this article puts a strong emphasis on the Commission’s role in this phase. Thus, the defence package and its objectives were an important argumentation from the Commission to legitimise its new role with the EDF, as will be shown in this article.

Following the 2009 defence package, Michel Barnier, who was then the Commissioner for the Internal Market, established a Defence Task Force in 2011 to improve the Commission’s coordination of defence-related issues – which notably included the implementation of Directive 2009/81/EC and Directive 2009/43/EC – and to engage in the debate on the future of European defence (Fiott 2015). The Defence Task Force issued the Commission’s 2013 Defence Communication ahead of the December 2013 European Council, which was entirely devoted to the issue of defence for the first time. The communication suggested the launch of “a Preparatory Action for [Common Security and Defence Policy] CSDP-related research” (European Commission 2013, pp. 4–5). Officials consequently emphasised how the Commission, following the ECJ rulings in the early 2000s, was able to “push itself” into the defence market with the 2009 defence directives. Thus, the big impact of the 2009 defence package was that it broke the “taboo” regarding the Commission and defence-related issues, which in turn helped Barnier to “smuggle a Preparatory Action on CSDP-related research into the 2013 communication” (Interview, former European Commission official, February 2020).

The December 2013 European Council welcomed the Commission’s communication and agreed in its conclusions that a “Preparatory Action on CSDP-related research will be set up” (European Council 2013). These ambitions were then echoed by the June 2015 European Council, which emphasised a focus on defence research for the first time; moreover, it highlighted the need for “appropriate funding” for the PA (European Council 2015). This action is notable, as there had been strong push back earlier from some of the member states and from the European Parliament against the possibility of defence research in the process of developing the ESRP (James 2018, pp. 24–25).
The European Council conclusions were thus very important and strengthened the Commission’s ambition to push its proposals forward (Interviews, European Commission officials, February 2020).

In June 2014, the Commission announced that a PA would be implemented in accordance with the multiannual financial framework (MFF) to 2020, while arguing that “if successful, this PA would prepare the ground for a possible CSDP-related research theme which could be funded under the next multiannual financial framework” (European Commission 2014). Moreover, as will be shown, the process to develop the PA (and, later on, the EDF) closely followed the work of the ESRP.

This overall began a process that would be strengthened by external events, further Commission activities and strong political ambitions from within, as well as by support from the European Parliament, European defence industries and some of the most influential EU member states.

**The catalyst: exogenous spillover**

The first paragraph of the 2017 Communication on the EDF emphasises that

… the EU is facing increased instability and conflicts in its neighbourhood and new security threats are emerging. This situation is unlikely to change in the near future. Citizens increasingly look to Europe for protection within and beyond its borders because the scale of these challenges is such that no member state can successfully address them on their own. (European Commission 2017a)

Several Commission officials explained that external shocks and events such as the crisis and war in Ukraine, the terrorist attacks in Europe of 2015–2017, the migration crisis, the UK leaving the EU, the election of Donald Trump and the changed geopolitical situation following the revival of great power competition were all pivotal for the development of the new EU initiatives. The situation created a strong demand for more EU activities in the field of security and defence. The Juncker Commission clearly used this window of opportunity to propose the EDF and, later on, the Military Mobility project (Interviews, European Commission Officials, February 2020; Interview, European Parliament official, February 2020; Interview, member state official, February 2020). This was similar to the process of establishing the ESRP, in which the Commission used the 9/11 attacks “as a window of opportunity to place the idea of EU defense research onto the policy agenda” (James 2018, p. 23).

Strong demand for EU defence activities also followed the result of the British referendum and the launch of the EU Global Strategy in the summer of 2016 (Tocci 2017). One senior European Commission official explained that “the shock of Brexit opens an opportunity to move forward […]. The Brexit crisis coupled with security challenges calls for a European ambition on defence” (cited in (Béraud-Sudreau and Pannier 2021, p. 300)). Moreover, with regard to this process, a diplomat from one of the larger EU member states described the situation after the Brexit vote:

From the political top, we were now given the task of developing new and bold ideas, because we needed to show new momentum for the Union […] and, in parallel, Barnier, who was working as a special advisor on defence for Juncker, was also drafting some papers on defence issues. The main ideas then were for instance something similar to
what later became CARD, to start up PESCO as well as to have the Commission do something. However, we could never have dreamed of a European Defence Fund in this way. Hence in September, it was an incredible surprise when the Commission came [forward] with their proposal on the European Defence Fund [...]. And it was not Paris that got the Commission to act; instead, the ideas came from the inside, and we could not believe that they would act as fast and as ambitious as they did. (Interview, member state diplomat, January 2020)

Commission officials also emphasised that this process was accelerated because of Brexit (Interview, European Commission officials, February 2020). The UK had long opposed a stronger role for the Commission within the field of security and defence; however, after the Brexit referendum, the UK dropped its objections. Moreover, the UK now actually supported the PA, as the PA could benefit the UK’s defence industry (Interview, European Commission officials, February 2020; Interview, member state officials, February 2020, Chappell et al. 2020).

Another external pressure was connected to international competition and the deteriorating international security environment, as the Commission argued that reduced defence spending by EU member states together with increased spending by other international actors posed a clear threat towards the EU (European Commission 2016a, Interviews, European Commission officials, February 2020). This situation served as a clear window of opportunity to expand and legitimise the Commission’s involvement in defence policy.

Political ambition: cultivated spillover

Jean-Claude Juncker had already made security and defence a strong political priority in his 2014 campaign to be elected President of the Commission. Consequently, he emphasised that defence should be a priority issue and argued for greater competence for the Commission. Furthermore, the fact that Juncker was elected through the Spitzenkandidat process made it possible for Juncker and the Commission to act in a more political way (Interview, member state official, February 2020). The new Juncker Commission therefore made defence one of its ten strategic priorities (Juncker 2014).

Although the subject of defence was traditionally seen as “something of a dirty word in the Berlaymont [the European Commission building]” (Tocci 2017, p. 95), Juncker now strongly argued that the Commission should take on greater responsibilities with regard to defence issues (Interview, Commission officials, February 2020). Juncker also worked in tandem with the new High Representative/Vice President (HR/VP) of the Commission, Federica Mogherini, to emphasise the need to integrate defence issues at the EU level (Interview, EEAS and Commission officials, February 2020). The launch and adoption of the EU Global Strategy and the Commission’s November 2016 European Defence Action Plan (EDAP) created strong momentum for further EU defence integration. To further create momentum and debate on the European security and defence policy, the Commission published a reflection paper in June 2017 on the future of European defence (European Commission 2017b). Moreover, already in 2015, Commissioner Bienkowska had set up a Group of Personalities (GoP) to work on a proposal for a PA for CSDP-related research. This approach was also used when the Commission wanted to set up the ESRP, as shown earlier. In this way, the GoP once again served as a way of building a strategic coalition with the defence industry and of creating political support for the
initiatives. As a result, it made it possible for the Commission to position the subject of defence high on the political agenda and demonstrate the added value of its involvement (c.f. Citi 2014, Niemann 2016).

The topic of defence was thus a clear priority for the new Commission and was widely referenced in Juncker’s State of the Union speeches (Juncker 2016, 2017, 2018). The idea of an EDF was floated in the 2016 State of the Union speech (Juncker 2016). The ideas behind the EDF and the decision to present these in the State of the Union speech came from the very top of the Commission. As a senior official in the EEAS put it,

… in one sense, we had discussed the Preparatory Action on defence research before, so there was already an opening. […] But when Juncker presented the EDF in the 2016 State of the Union, it came as rather a surprise, even to some in the college of Commissioners. So, after that, we started to think about “what do we do” and started to look at the treaties to see what was possible. (Interview, EEAS official, February 2020)

Thus, clear top-down dynamics were involved in pushing forward the EDF proposal, in which President Juncker in particular – in addition to Bieńkowska, her cabinet and Barnier – had a pivotal role (Interview, defence industry officials, February 2020; Interview, European Commission officials, February 2020).

Moreover, a defence industry official explained that the industry, having been involved in the GoP, was expecting a “defence research window” to be funded by the Commission, which the industry saw as a game-changer in itself. But then, after the State of the Union, defence industry officials were summoned to a meeting at the Commission, where they were presented with the new “capability window” of the Fund. This was something that the industry had not expected, and it raised many questions about how the Commission would handle this larger portfolio within the defence industry domain (Interview, defence industry official, February 2020). The Commission’s right of initiative and its strong political ambition were therefore important with regard to the EDF proposal.

With regard to the budget, the overall level of funding had been raised early on by the Juncker Commission from around €10 billion to €13 billion, because the Commission expected the member states to reduce this amount during the negotiations on the MFF (Interview, member state official, February 2020). This was a rather large budget – especially in comparison with those of the small pilot project on CSDP research (see below) and the PA, which became the Preparatory Action on Defence Research (PADR) in 2017–2019, and the overall budget discussed within the GoP. The Commission used this large budget as a strong incentive towards the member states (Interview, European Commission officials, February 2020; Interview, member state official, February 2020, see also Gahler 2016).

The European Parliament has been a strong supporter of the Commission’s new role and of the overall ambition to strengthen the EU’s capabilities in security and defence (Interview, European Parliament officials, February 2020). This support should be seen from the perspective of the European Parliament seeking to enhance its role in EU foreign and security policy-making over time (Rosén and Raube 2018). Following the Commission’s 2013 Defence Communication and its proposal for a PA, the European Parliament adopted a resolution in November 2013 that strongly “welcome(d) the Commission’s intention to launch a Preparatory Action for EU-funded research in support of CSDP missions” (European Parliament 2013).
The first pilot project on CSDP research was initiated by the European Parliament after a group of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), led by Michel Gahler from the European People’s Party, launched the first CSDP-related research project in the 2015 EU budget (Gahler 2016). Although the pilot project had a limited budget of €1.5 million in 2015 and 2016, it was a very important step, since this was the first time the word “defence” had been used in the EU budget (Mauro and Thoma 2016, p. 30). The pilot project also created strong momentum for the GoP and the work on the PA (EUISS 2016). The project likewise pushed forward the work of the Commission and emphasised that the future programme should focus on defence research (Gahler 2016, p. 53). MEPs also strongly supported the Commission’s budget proposals for the EDF and tried to defend both the EDF and the Military Mobility project from budget cuts (Brzozowski 2020).

Moreover, in its 2017 annual CSDP report, the European Parliament called for the establishment of a Directorate-General for Defence (DG Defence) within the Commission (European Parliament 2017). By 2019, the new DG DEFIS had been set up by the Commission in order to handle, among other things, the EDF and the implementation of the Military Mobility programme and the space programme (European Commission 2019a). This was politically notable, since it showed that the Commission was becoming an increasingly important actor in defence policy.

The “authorisation process”: functional spillover

Despite the goals of the 2009 defence directives, the European defence industry and market are still largely driven by national concerns and are thus still highly fragmented (Besch 2019). This is clearly evident from the Commission’s own evaluations of both Directive 2009/81/EC and Directive 2009/43/EC (European Commission 2016b, 2016c). Hence, in its communication on launching the EDF, the Commission stated that the “European defence industry is characterised by insufficient levels and quality of investment in development” and argued that member states are not cooperating sufficiently, which can be seen in the fragmentation and duplication of weapon systems in Europe (European Commission 2017a, pp. 2–3).

In its quest for greater involvement in the policy field, the Commission argued that this high degree of fragmentation and duplication meant that it should step in to restructure the market (Interview, European Commission officials, February 2020). Moreover, the Commission’s arguments are clearly connected to the ambitions set out by the 2009 defence directives, which emphasised the goal of establishing a European defence market (European Commission 2016a, pp. 4–7). Accordingly, Commission officials have argued that, because the results of the 2009 directives have been so limited, the best alternative is to create greater financial incentives through the EDF, in order for member states and the industry to work together (Interviews, European Commission officials, February 2020). Hence, by building on the goals of the 2009 defence directives, the Commission has been able to strongly legitimise its new role in the EDF. The connections between different policy initiatives, such as the ESRP, the defence directives and the EDF, also reinforce these structures (c.f. Citi 2014). Moreover, the Commission strengthened its ambitions when the December 2016 European Council supported the EDAP (European Council 2016).
The inability to establish any larger industrial projects at the EDA was another argument for the Commission to act in this field (Interview, European Commission officials, February 2020; Interview, member state officials, February 2020). The member states’ cuts to defence budgets and the decline in investment in defence-related research and development were another pressure (Ianakiev 2019). Finally, the process was reinforced by the increasingly interlinked internal and external security and defence policies after the EU Global Strategy (c.f. Bergmann 2019).

The development processes for the EDF proposal and its forerunner, the European Defence Industrial Programme (EDIDP), were also extremely rapid. Since the December 2016 European Council asked for the EDF proposal to be presented in the first quarter of 2017, the Commission had to rely on the staff working document instead of a regular impact assessment of the EDIDP (Scheinert 2018). The EDIDP was also negotiated very quickly compared with similar EU programmes because of the pressure to “get it going” in the 2019–2020 budget (Interview, member state official, February 2020). This rapid progression echoes neofunctionalism’s assumptions that decisions are often made urgently under pressure from approaching deadlines (Haas 1970).

“Coalition building”: political spillover

The European defence industries have contributed strong additional pressure towards integration. Although there was at first some mistrust from parts of the industry in regard to the Commission’s new role in defence research, this mistrust soon disappeared due to the possibility of new funding (Interview, defence industry officials, February 2020). Both the declining defence budgets and the cost of industrial development created pressure in this regard; or, as one defence industry official put it, “the increasing cost of new products and a history of declining defence budgets now means that no single European country can afford the next-generation defence platforms” (Interview, defence industry official, February 2020). The European defence industry has therefore urgently sought and strongly supported new initiatives at the EU level to act as catalyst for defence research and development. As a result, the EDF proposal met with great excitement (Interview, defence industry official, February 2020, see also ASD 2018). Another senior defence industry official explained involvement in the EDF processes as follows:

We have been incredibly integrated into this process, and we have worked in various forms and groups to provide input to the Commission. We have done this during the GoP, the PADR, the EDIDP and now during the development of the EDF, and we have done it in all areas, for instance in regard to the economics at play and how regulations should look for the Fund to work ahead. (Interview, defence industry official, February 2020)

The 2015–2016 GoP also had very strong industrial participation, with six representatives from large European defence industries as well as three representatives from research organisations (EUISS 2016). Consequently, the industry was able to influence this process and the development of new initiatives such as the EDF.

The industry also saw the new initiatives in light of the limited progress in developing new bilateral and/or EDA defence industry projects. Moreover, they observed increasing international competition, especially from the BRICS countries, which brought the risk of lagging behind in industrial development (Interviews, defence industry officials, February 2020).
Furthermore, because of the limited number of staff members working on these issues at the Commission, the Commission viewed the industry as a key partner that could provide important input during the development phase (Interviews, defence industry official, February 2020, European Commission official, February 2020). Thus, the industry’s strong participation and influence in the GoP and in the Commission’s development process of the PADR, EDIDIP and EDF strengthened the industry’s support for the Commission’s new role (Interview, defence industry official, February 2020). The industry has also traditionally had a strong influence on the development process of similar initiatives, such as the ESRP and at least in part, in the 2009 defence directives (Weiss 2013, Edler and James 2015).

Some member states have strongly supported new EU initiatives in this field. In particular, France and Germany have pushed for more EU initiatives on security and defence, especially after Brexit, since both perceived EU defence policy as a way of displaying important new momentum for the EU (Interview, member state diplomat, January 2020, Béraud-Sudreau and Pannier 2021). Moreover, although the Commission is often viewed as an ally of small states, it had earlier allied itself with the larger states in the field of security and defence (Weiss 2013). For Germany, it was also important to create a strong link between the EDF and PESCO, as PESCO had been a strong political priority of Ursula von der Leyen when she was Germany’s defence minister (Interview, member state official, February 2020).

Other member states viewed the initiative positively because of the possibility of financial benefit, especially since defence budgets had been cut across Europe. In particular, representatives from the member states’ Ministries of Defence viewed the proposals on the EDIDP and the EDF positively, as they perceived these initiatives to be a source of “free money”, in some sense, for defence issues (Interview, member state officials, February 2020). The Commission could also incentivise member states – and consequently build coalitions – through the suggested “bonus system” in the EDF. For example, many member states asked for the Fund to involve incentives for small and medium-sized enterprises, mid-cap companies, and so on. Including these different incentive systems in the EDF/EDIDP increased support for the Fund, but also made the framework more complex in the end (Interview, member state official, February 2020).

The Commission’s long-term trust-building process, in addition to strong support from the industry, the political backing of important member states and the incentive system, helped the Commission at this stage. There are also some clear examples of a socialisation process within the negotiations. As one official put it, “even though they have been very tough negotiations, we have always worked towards finding compromises and consensus within these negotiations” (Interview, member state official, February 2020). While economic reasoning mainly motivated the member states, this consensus and compromise culture was important in regard to the development of the EDF. Moreover, the Commission’s trust building process – through its earlier initiatives – were likewise important in this phase (Interview, member state official, February 2020, Interview, European Commission officials, February 2020).

**Governance rules and financing: countervailing forces**

Having proposed the EDF, the next step in the process was to negotiate the EDF with the Council and the European Parliament. This step mostly involved the EDIDP negotiations,
since large parts of these rules were later adapted for the EDF framework (Interview, European Commission officials, February 2020).

A member state official explained the process as:

During the EDIDP process, the Commission even had to explain to people from different member state defence ministries how the decision-making process and comitology worked and what it meant in practice. This is a group that often is socialised within NATO and they are used to having control and being able to stop proposals. (Interview, member state official, February 2020)

Thus, it was sometimes difficult for the member states’ defence ministry officials to deal with the comitology process and with the fact that the Commission was “master of the clock and pen” in the negotiations (Interviews, EDA official, February 2020, member state official, February 2020). The Commission, in turn, strongly emphasised the role of qualified majority voting (QMV) and the community method in the EDF negotiations (Interview, European Commission officials, February 2020). The use of QMV generally tended to enhance and favour the Commission’s proposals, since QMV increases the power of the European Parliament and reduces the number of veto players in the Council (Niemann 2016, p. 147).

Nonetheless, some member states were reluctant to give up too much power to the Commission, while also being sceptical about the relatively large funding scheme. For example, Sweden emphasised the fact that defence was still – and should remain – an intergovernmental area (Interview, member state diplomat, January 2020, Interview, EEAS official, February 2020).

Some member states’ deep industrial, political and security ties to countries such as the United States and the UK also created issues affecting the process. These connections acted as a form of “domestic constraint” (Niemann 2006) because some member states saw new Commission and EU competences in the defence field as a threat to their bilateral relations with the United States and UK, as well as a possible threat to NATO (Interviews, member states, February 2020). Immediately after the launch of the EDAP, some member states thus expressed strong concerns about the Commission’s new role and powers in the field (Interview, European Commission officials, February 2020). However, the EDF’s legal basis enabled the Commission to fight off member states’ attempts to decrease its governance role.

At the start of this process, the U.S. defence industry also tried to influence the development of the EDF (American Chamber of Commerce to the European Union 2018). However, the U.S. administration acted surprisingly late; or, as one member state official put it, “the US acted in a rather careless way, since they acted when, in principle, the whole regulation had already been negotiated and decided on” (Interview, member state official, February 2020). Nonetheless, in May 2019, high-ranking U.S. officials, Ellen Lord and Andrea Thompson, expressed their concerns about the EDF regulations and over third-state participation in PESCO. They argued that the new EU initiatives could act as “poison pills” (Fiott 2019). The late U.S. intervention, however, meant that member states did not want to reopen the negotiations with the European Parliament at this phase (Interview, member state official, February 2020).

There were also discussions among the member states about the connection between PESCO and the EDF. Some member states wanted the PESCO project to be given a form of
“automatic affirmative action”, while others supported a more neutral assessment of projects. Moreover, the Council’s legal service initially had problems with the “PESCO bonus”, since it could be seen as discriminatory against Denmark and Malta, which are outside of the PESCO framework. In the end, however, states such as Denmark accepted the incentive system because of the strong political backing of some member states for connecting the EDF and PESCO (Interview, member state official, January 2020, Interview, member state official, February 2020).

In the end, the Commission’s proposals on the EDIDP/EDF were largely maintained, with changes mainly being made to the activities eligible for EU funding and to the different bonuses within the two programmes. The European Parliament preferred tougher regulations on eligible entities, for example, but an agreement was eventually forged (Scheinert 2018, Interview, member state official, February 2020, European Commission, 2019b). The European Parliament however succeeded in obtaining stiffer regulations in regard to, for example, autonomous weapons systems and ethical concerns in the Fund (Brzozowski 2019, Council of the European Union 2020).

Nonetheless, some member states estimated that they would receive less from the Fund than they put into it and thus argued in favour of reducing the overall funding for the EDF, while other member states took a budget-restrictive approach to the 2021–2027 MFF as a whole (Interview, member state officials, February 2020). Thus, the overall situation served as a domestic constraint for some member states in regard to the EDF, which consequently created pressures to reduce the funding for the EDF and other new EU defence initiatives. The COVID-19 pandemic and the strong economic downturn also created pressure to reduce the overall level of funding. However, even before the pandemic, the EDF’s budget was being reduced, as was the funding for the Military Mobility project and the new off-budget European Peace Facility. In December 2019, the Finnish Council Presidency proposed a €6.014 billion budget for the EDF (Finland EU Council Presidency 2019). This proposal was in line with a more budget-restrictive approach. However, other member states – especially France – wanted to keep the budget as large as possible and argued that the EDF budget should be at least €10 billion (European Parliament 2020). In a letter to HR/VP Josep Borell in May 2020, the defence ministers of France, Germany, Italy and Spain argued for an “ambitious EDF budget as a priority in the defence area and a swift adoption of the EDF regulation” (Government of France 2020). Nonetheless, during this final phase, the biggest change was in connection with the overall EDF budget, which was finally set at €7.953 billion (Council of the European Union 2020). This allocated budget should be seen in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic downturn, as well as in relation to the economic and domestic constraints of some EU member states.

**Concluding remarks**

The main aim of this article was twofold: to explain the establishment of the EDF and the Commission’s new role within the field and, to a lesser degree, to outline the role of revised neofunctionalism within this policy field. To achieve its aim, this article empirically traced the development of the EDF and the new and ambitious role of the European Commission in a highly political and sensitive policy field (for a critical take on the EDF, see also Goxho 2019).
While others have used similar theoretical approaches (e.g. Haroche 2020) to explain the establishment of the EDF, this article is one of the first dealing with the whole policy process of the EDF – from the long-term ambition of the Commission to the EDF proposal and the negotiations process, and on to the final decision regarding the EDF’s overall budget. Consequently, this article contributes to an emerging literature on the EDF and on the European Commission’s new role within the field of security and defence. This article also outlined the importance of exogenous events in the decision-making process and in the theoretical framework of revised neofunctionalism. Thus far, classical neofunctionalism has mainly focused on internal dynamics, and has often missed how external factors can affect the policy process and therefore often serve as a catalyst. Finally, it suggested a larger role for the member states within the process, and thereby presented integration within the neofunctionalism framework as a non-automatic or deterministic process.

This study moreover challenges the claims by new intergovernmentalism that EU member states first and foremost empower de novo bodies (Bickerton et al. 2015), especially since we are now witnessing integration within a policy field of high politics. The study also provides evidence of strong political entrepreneurship by the Commission and helps to further revitalise the discussion on supranational decision-making in this policy field.

Another implication of the EDF and the work of other EU defence initiatives is the impact on the EU’s role, both internal and external, as a “soft” or “normative” power. With all of the new security and defence initiatives occurring after the EU Global Strategy, the EU’s role is clearly changing. However, as Arnout Molenaar of the EEAS put it, “there is still a learning curve for the Union to develop a ‘hard power’ mentality” (Molenar 2021). Nevertheless, new initiatives such as the EDF, PESCO and CARD could serve as strong and necessary stepping-stones for the EU and its member states to develop greater capabilities within the field.

The Commission’s new role in the field is also important from the broader perspective of European integration. As Karampekios et al. note, the EDF affects the “very nature and the orientation of the European project” (Karampekios et al. 2018, p. 377). Hence, the ever-increasing involvement of the Commission in a policy field close to national sovereignty is starting to blur the traditional dichotomy between intergovernmental and supranational decision-making within the policy field. This article is thus part of the growing literature on the weakening of intergovernmentalism within the EU security and defence field (Howorth 2012, Chappell et al. 2020).

The EDF and the Commission’s enhanced role also create new questions that need to be further addressed. One strand of research should focus on the implementation of the EDF; for example, what will it mean for defence industry development at the European level? Another prioritised area for the new DG DEFIS will be the connection between space and defence (e.g. Fiott 2020), which will require further research. Moreover, how will the Commission develop and handle other new initiatives, such as Military Mobility? Finally, there is still a great deal of unclarity in regard to Brexit and the new momentum in defence industry cooperation at the EU level (Mawdsley 2020). With the new trade and cooperation agreement with the UK in place, even though it does not address security and defence aspects (The Guardian 2020), more research needs to be done on possible
cooperation between the EU and the UK within the field of security and defence, and especially in regard to defence industry dimensions.

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The strengthened role of the European Union in defence: the case of the Military Mobility project

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ABSTRACT
This article retraces and reconstructs the process of developing and launching the European Union’s Military Mobility project. Situated in the agenda-setting and policy-transfer literature, this article explicates the establishment and implementation of the Military Mobility project and helps to explain the entire policy and development process around the Military Mobility initiative to date. By drawing on process tracing, this article methodologically unpacks the process surrounding this policy development at the EU level. The results show that the European Commission has expanded its competences within the defence field by purposefully and politically acting upon the worsened security situation in and around Europe, while actively building coalitions and managing good working relations with the actors involved in the project. Moreover, the findings show that the EU services have learned from NATO in the defence domain. Thus, this analysis contributes to a greater understanding of the new role of the European Commission in the field of EU security and defence policy.

1. Introduction

Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine has confirmed the urgent need to substantially enhance the Military Mobility of our armed forces within and beyond the Union. (Council of the European Union 2022b, 18)

Russia’s second invasion and war on Ukraine in 2022 has spurred new developments within European Union (EU) security and defence policy (see e.g. Scazzieri 2022; Besch 2022). Moreover, after a two-year working period, the EU has adopted its Strategic Compass on security and defence to further create impetus for its security and defence policy thinking for the next five to ten years (Council of the European Union 2022b; Sweeney and Winn 2022). Consequently, the EU can be seen to be slowly adapting to become a more capable actor within the security and defence policy domain.
And already in his 2017 State of the Union address, the then President of the European Commission, Jean Claude Juncker, outlined the ambition of the European Union to establish a full-fledged European Defence Union by 2025 (Juncker 2017) – a goal that was later echoed by President von der Leyen (von der Leyen 2019). One of the building blocks of this new ambition and the underlying objective to “protect Europe,” as outlined in the 2016 EU Global Strategy, is the initiative on EU Military Mobility. This initiative was presented in a Joint Communication from the European Commission and the High Representative/Vice President (HR/VP) in November 2017 and was later adopted as an Action Plan on Military Mobility in March 2018 (European Commission 2017, 2018). This article seeks to retrace and explain the establishment of the Military Mobility project from the initial idea to the current implementation phase (see also Appendix 1 for an outlined timeline). The findings of this paper demonstrate the growing significance of the EU in European Defence and the evolving relationship and division of labour between NATO and the EU. Additionally, it sheds light on the mechanisms driving these developments by highlighting the crucial role played by the European Commission, as well as the increasing trust being fostered between the EU and NATO. Moreover, it argues that the EU is becoming an enabling actor for work within the NATO alliance. As the Military Mobility project has been the “flagship program” of this cooperation, it makes a good case for underlining and explaining this new and enhanced dynamic between the organisations.

This article moreover argues that the work on Military Mobility is an important aspect of deterrence and defence in Europe. As underscored by Brauss, Hodges, and Lindley-French (2021, 18), “Military Mobility has always been seen as a force and combat multiplier enabling commanders to choose the space in which to fight.” In turn, Larsen (2022, 8) underlines that “strengthening Military Mobility to allow swift reinforcement of the exposed eastern territory in the case of war” is an important task for the European Union, aspects of which have been reinforced by Russia’s 2022 war on Ukraine (see also Siebold, Deutsch, and Sytas 2022; Michaels 2023).

Moreover, the development of EU policies on Military Mobility is a pertinent case to study how the underlying dynamics behind EU integration are shifting. The strengthened involvement of the European Commission and other EU institutions in defence matters shows how current EU security and defence policy development is moving beyond intergovernmentalism. As Helene Sjursen argued, “[w]hile European foreign and security policy has not become supranational, it is equally problematic to claim that it remains intergovernmental” (Sjursen 2011, 1089). Others have similarly emphasised the “creeping supranationalisation of EU foreign and security policies” in recent years (Bergmann and Müller 2021, 1682; see also Riddervold 2016; Haroche 2020; Chappell, Exadaktylos, and Petrov 2020; Håkansson 2021; Béraud-Sudreau and Pannier 2021). This article builds and draws on these discussions on the weakening of intergovernmentalism in EU security and defence policy to understand the development of the EU Military Mobility framework.

From the start, the Military Mobility project has had a clear connection to the ongoing work on improving and enhancing EU-NATO relations. Early on, the project was seen as an excellent example of the complementary nature of the two organisations (Juncker 2018). Despite being dubbed the “flagship” of EU-NATO cooperation, however, with some exceptions among the think-tank community (see e.g. Drent, Kruijver, and Zandee...
Theoretical observed underlines architecture security regarding and processes. Hence, this article focusses on a key military project in strengthening deterrence and defence in Europe. It also outlines the enhanced role of the European Commission in defence matters. This shift in the European Commission’s role is especially puzzling, as the supranational integration of EU defence policy has been seen as a “least likely” case in the past (Strikwerda 2019; Riddervold and Trondal 2020), and as the European Commission’s competences – as outlined in the treaties – are very limited in the field of defence (de Ojeda 2021). The key contributions of this article are threefold. First, this is one of the first articles to retrace, describe and analyse the detailed, micro-level process behind the EU Military Mobility project. By combining the literature on agenda-setting and policy transfer, this paper explains the entire policy and development process regarding the Military Mobility project to date. Second, this work contributes to a better understanding of the new role of the European Commission in the field of EU security and defence policy. The article shows that this policy development is part of an observed trend of weakening intergovernmentalism in EU security and defence policy architecture (Sjursen 2011; Riddervold 2016; Håkansson 2021). Moreover, this article underlines the importance of strengthening Military Mobility in order to improve deterrence and defence in Europe.

This paper is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses theoretical approaches in the agenda-setting and policy-transfer literature. Section 3 analyses the agenda-setting phase of the process and discusses policy transfer and the implementation of the project. Section 4 discusses various challenges and future developments in the project. Finally, the concluding section outlines and discusses the broader implications of this policy development.

2. Theoretical framework: agenda setting and policy transfers

The integration of policy areas within the field of security and defence in the EU has always been a sensitive matter. Therefore, it is essential to emphasise the agenda setting functions within the EU to gain a comprehensive understanding of new decisions and developments. Thus, Kingdon’s (1984/2014) seminal work on agenda setting through the problem, political and policy streams serves as the starting point for this paper. Kingdon emphasises the importance of policy windows and policy entrepreneurs in these processes. While Kingdon’s work is on US politics, other authors have discussed similar frameworks in the EU context (e.g. Schön-Quinlivan and Scipioni 2017; Engl and Evrard 2020; Vesan and Corti 2021; Sus 2021; Brandão and Camisão 2022). This article follows this literature on how agenda-setting dynamics affect the establishment and implementation of new initiatives at the EU level.
The problem stream is characterised by indicators of problems through reports, studies, data and so on; by focus events, such as crises or disasters; or by powerful symbols or feedback processes that make policymakers more inclined to focus on and address an issue (Kingdon 2014, 90–95; in EU foreign and security policy see also Sus 2021). Moreover, recognition of a problem is central to the agenda-setting phase, as an issue that is perceived as important is more likely to take priority in the agenda. Nonetheless, recognition of a problem is often insufficient to move an issue up in the agenda; therefore, the problem stream process must be connected to the other two streams as well (Kingdon 2014, 113–115). To operationalise this process in the study of the EU Military Mobility project, a special emphasis is placed on how the relevant problems were seen, outlined and defined by the involved officials and policymakers.

The political stream refers to how ideas and proposals are changed and accepted through, for instance, changes of government and parliament, and the involvement of interest groups or supranational actors (Kingdon 2014, 145). To analyse the political stream at the EU level, it is necessary to examine the involvement and arguments of various actors – namely, the European Commission, EU member states, the European External Action Service (EEAS), the European Defence Agency (EDA) and NATO – in order to map how the relevant ideas were politically discussed, outlined and later agreed upon and adopted.

The policy stream focuses on how ideas are transformed into “acceptable policy initiatives” (Engl and Evrard 2020, 919). In regard to this process, Kingdon argues that many different ideas in policy discussions compete with each other, and that the policy community selects ideas and proposals based on their technical feasibility and their resonance with the policy community’s existing values (Kingdom 2014, 143–144). Partially based on the work of Engl and Evrard (2020), this paper operationalises the policy stream process by examining which solutions and policy ideas were outlined in the work on EU Military Mobility and by focusing on how the proposals were described in terms of technical feasibility and resonance with the policy community’s existing values and ideas.

Policy windows are opened by events in either the political or the problem streams. In the political stream, changes in, for instance, government (or the European Commission leadership, in this case) can create opportunities to address new issues. Changes in the problem stream can also raise the possibility of addressing a new issue. These policy windows can be predictable, as in electoral processes or legislative cycles, or unpredictable, as in the emergence of new problems or crises (Kingdon 2014, 203–204).

Policy entrepreneurs are people who are “willing to invest their resources in return for future policies they favour” (Kingdon 2014, 204). Policy entrepreneurs can be elected officials, lobbyists or civil servants, among others (Kingdon 2014, 204). In the case of the EU Military Mobility project, this paper focuses on the role of European Commission officials, both elected and unelected; the EU member states, including both politicians and civil servants, other EU institutions, such as the EDA and the EEAS; and other important actors, such as NATO. Princen and Rhinard (2006, 1121–1123) outlined how the agenda-setting process in the EU can follow either a high politics route, which is initiated by political leaders and is often linked to a symbolic event or salient issue, or a low politics route, which is initiated from “below” due to professional concerns.
This article also draws on the policy transfer literature to understand the establishment and implementation of the Military Mobility project, and views the policy-transfer process as a part of the policy stream (Mintrom and Norman 2009). More specifically, in the EU context, the policy-transfer process can be viewed as “a process by which ideas, policy, administrative arrangements or institutions in one political setting influence policy development in another political setting, mediated by the institutional system of the EU” (Bulmer and Padgett 2004, 105; see also Dolowitz and March 2000). In fact, there have been discussions within the EU on how issues can be uploaded, in which policy from one or more member states is taken up at the EU level, and downloaded, in which EU rules are incorporated either directly by supranational institutions or indirectly at the national level (Bulmer et al. 2007).

With regard to EU Military Mobility, this paper seeks to trace how different policy ideas, frameworks, standards and so on were incorporated into the project. In particular, it focuses on the process of transferring ideas, knowledge and practical policy content/instruments from actors such as the EU member states and NATO to the EU level. This study aims to understand and answer questions on what has been transferred, who the actors involved in the policy transfer process were, why they were involved, what the restrictions on or facilitators of the policy transfer process were, and whether policies were successfully transferred.

3. Case study: the development and implementation of the EU Military Mobility project

This case study uses a process-tracing method to explore the new dynamics and developments of the EU Military Mobility project in order to outline and understand how the project was established and developed. It aims to unpack the process surrounding this policy development at the EU level (Schimmelfennig 2014; Beach and Pedersen 2019). Hence, this study focuses on the key milestones in the development and implementation of the EU Military Mobility framework. To outline and unpack this process, in-depth, semi-structured elite/expert interviews were conducted with 21 officials and policymakers from the European Commission (and the departments DG MOVE, SEC GEN and DG DEFIS), the EEAS, NATO, the EU Military Staff (EUMS), the EDA and various EU member states, all of which were very active and closely involved in the process of developing and launching the EU Military Mobility project (see Appendix 2 for a full list of actors and abbreviations). Given the wide spread of the interviews, it can be argued that all of the key actors involved from the EU side have been interviewed. The information obtained in the interviews was triangulated and cross-checked using official documents, media reporting and think-tank papers (Bennett and Checkel 2014, 28). This article traces the policy development of the EU Military Mobility project and focuses on key developments in the articulation of the project (see Appendix 1 for an outlined timeline).

The problem stream

After the shock of Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the start of the (first) war in Ukraine in 2014, the EU and its member states were presented with a new and pressing
security situation stemming from Europe’s more unstable neighbourhood and new security risks. As the 2016 EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy put it: “we live in times of existential crisis, within and beyond the European Union. Our Union is under threat” (EEAS 2016, 13). The EU Global Strategy also outlined – for the first time in an EU strategy – the ambition of “protecting Europe.” Moreover, Brexit, the Trump Presidency and the Franco-German “engine” contributed to positioning EU security and defence policy high on the Union’s policy agenda at this time (Tocci 2018; Sweeney and Winn 2020; Hákansson 2021; Béraud-Sudreau and Pannier 2021; Sus 2021).

The EU’s Military Mobility initiative, however, largely originated from NATO discussions and exercises in which infrastructure and legal problems presented obstacles to the movement of troops (Interviews, European Commission official, February 2020; NATO official, April 2022; EU official, May 2021; former senior NATO official, December 2022; member state official, January 2023). Moreover, Russia’s annexation of Crimea had led to more intensive discussions within NATO about the difficulties of moving troops around Europe, linked to infrastructural, procedural and legal problems (Drent, Kruijver, and Zandee 2019; see also the 2016 NATO Warsaw Summit Communiqué and especially §37 and §44; NATO 2016). A senior NATO and US official emphasised that, after Russia’s annexation of Crimea, that NATO decided that they needed to show force and the ability to react. The official stated:

We now needed to have more exercises in moving troops, because this is part of deterrence, as it shows Russia that we have the ability of reinforcing NATO allies and show that we are prepared (…) but then we discovered the problem in the day-to-day business in these exercises. (Interview, former senior NATO official, December 2022)

As early as in 2015, Ben Hodges, at that time the commander of US Army Europe, argued for the establishment of a “military Schengen zone” inside NATO (Manea 2015). Following these developments, NATO officials emphasised the necessity of improving these matters. Hence, they noted:

…we needed to communicate this problem to the European leaders, so we thought that we should use a concept that everyone knows. Hence, we started to use the “military Schengen” concept in our dialogue (…) Then the Dutch Minister of Defence eventually started to use the concept as well. (Interview, former senior NATO official, December 2022)

One European Commission official who had worked in NATO earlier similarly explained:

In NATO, we started these discussions on military mobility in the deterrence and defence efforts, so we can see that the NATO member states, and in particular those from the Eastern parts started these discussions (…) soon, NATO officials understood that they did not have resources or legislative powers and that the EU had these competences. And they reached out to EU officials to get this going. (Interview, Commission official, May 2021)

Furthermore, it was noted that US systems such as the heavy equipment transport system did not adhere to EU standards in transport, which undermined NATO’s efforts. Consequently, the issue began to gain traction within the alliance. In discussion with their counterparts in the EU Military Committee and the EDA, NATO officials understood how the EU could help to improve these issues (Interviews, European Commission officials, May 2021; former senior NATO official, December 2022; see also Michaels
Moreover, US officials supported the development of the Military Mobility framework due to the worsening security situation in Europe (Interview, EU official, May 2021). Following these developments, in a June 2017 letter addressed to both the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP) and the NATO Secretary General, the then Dutch Minister of Defence, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, asked the organisations to take measures to improve the issue of Military Mobility in Europe (Interviews, European Commission official, February 2020; member state official, April 2021; EU official, May 2021). She argued that “obstacles to cross-border military transport in Europe must disappear” and emphasised the need for more EU-NATO cooperation on the subject (Drent, Kruijver, and Zandee 2019, 2). These problems clearly resonated, and the subsequent joint Commission-HR/VP Communication on Military Mobility of November 2017 noted:

... the rapid and swift movement of military personnel and equipment across the EU is currently hampered by a number of physical, legal and regulatory barriers, such as infrastructure that cannot support the weight of a military vehicle or cumbersome customs and other procedures. As experienced during recent major military exercises, such barriers can thus lead to delays, disruptions, higher costs and increased vulnerability. (European Commission 2017, 1)

The work on Military Mobility issues is thus clearly linked to the deteriorating security situation in and around Europe since 2014 (Interviews, European Commission official, February 2020; EU official, May 2021; European Commission officials, May 2021; member state official, January 2023; member state officials, January 2023; European Commission officials February 2023; see also Mattelaer 2018). These developments follow the problem stream, with focusing events – that is, Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the worsening security situation around Europe – as the starting point. Consequently, as underlined by Camisão and Guimarães (2017, 225) “crises can open windows of opportunity, prompting major policy and institutional change.” Moreover, problems in military exercises, efforts to work on the issue within NATO, and external factors such as Brexit and the Trump Presidency made these issues more pressing.

The political stream

EU institutions, such as the European Commission, and the Netherlands acted as policy entrepreneurs when putting the issue of Military Mobility and enhanced EU-NATO cooperation high on the agenda (as elaborated on below). Thus, this process followed the high politics route in the agenda-setting process, as outlined by Princen and Rhinard (2006), as the then European Commission President Jean Claude Juncker, the Dutch Minister of Defence and senior NATO officials spearheaded and strongly supported this work.

In a first response to the letter from the Dutch Minister of Defence Hennis-Plasschaert, the EU HR/VP outlined a number of elements that the EDA was already working on to improve troop movement and cross-border military transport. The EDA also set up an ad hoc working group on cross-border military transportation within Europe in September 2017 (European Commission 2018). At the same time, the European Commission was keen to work more closely on security and defence issues,
as President Juncker had already outlined in his campaign to become European Commission president (Juncker 2014). Together, the new security situation, the 2016 EU Global Strategy and the 2016 European Commission European Defence Action Plan created new momentum for security and defence policy integration (European Commission 2016; Béraud-Sudreau and Pannier 2021; Håkansson 2021; Sus 2021). These ambitions were clearly expressed in the 2017 State of the Union speech, which outlined ambitions to build a full-fledged European Defence Union by 2025 (Juncker 2017).

Senior Commission officials explained that, during this time, there were divisions within the European Commission regarding their defence ambitions. They commented that “we had lot of people within the Commission saying that we cannot work on military matters, but then we were told from the highest level of the President – through his chief of cabinet Selmayr – that we should write the Communication on Military Mobility” (Interview, European Commission officials, May 2021). This comment underlines the importance of a top-down political policy entrepreneurship (Kingdon 2014; see Mörth 2000; Tocci 2017; Haroche 2022 on how defence and other policies could be internally contested within the Commission). Building on the European Commission’s (2016) European Defence Action Plan, which “committed the Commission to work with other EU relevant actors to increase coherence and synergies between defence issues and other Union policies where an EU added-value exists,” the HR/VP and the EU Commissioner for Transport were tasked with developing a proposal on Military Mobility (European Commission 2016; Interview, European Commission official, February 2020). On the issue of Military Mobility, President Juncker argued that, in order to make progress in the field of defence, it was better to build on existing civilian EU policies (Interview, Commission official, February 2020).

At that point, the European Commission, the EEAS and the EUMS had already been serving on an EDA working group on the issue of Military Mobility (Interview, EDA official, May 2021). The early involvement of the European Commission and EEAS officials fed into the work on developing both the Joint Communication and the Commission-HR/VPs’ March 2018 Action Plan on Military Mobility (European Commission 2017, 2018). The EDA presented the work of the ad hoc work group to its steering board in February 2018 as a Roadmap on Military Mobility. This was then sent to the group working on the EU’s Action Plan on Military Mobility and had a strong influence on this document (Interview, EDA official, May 2021; European Commission 2018, 2).

Commission officials also emphasised that it was important to be able to deliver results quickly and in a tangible way, in order to demonstrate its added value (Interview, Commission official, February 2020). Hence, the Action Plan on Military Mobility focussed on outlining the infrastructure and legal and procedural issues on which the EU could prove its added value. In May 2018, the European Commission presented a proposal to spend €6.5 billion as part of the 2021–2027 EU budget to fund civilian-military, dual-use projects to promote the Military Mobility project (European Commission 2019a).

The Netherlands also made Military Mobility a top political priority in the establishment of the EU Permanent Structured Cooperation on defence (PESCO) in 2017–2018. Hence, the Netherlands pushed the problem up to the EU level, underlining that nation’s
role as the “gateway to Europe” and as a “transit country” for military troops in Europe (The Netherlands Ministry of Defence 2021). Several of the interviewees outlined the importance of this initiative, how the Netherlands was able to influence the EU policy agenda and how the EU institutions then reacted strongly (Interviews, European Commission official, April 2021; member state official, April 2021; EEAS official, May 2021; EDA official, May 2021; member state official, January 2023). As an EEAS official put it, “the member states in a sense triggered it, but the institutions were willing to act, and especially the European Commission. There is also a very important EU-NATO connection” (Interview, EEAS official, February 2020). The PESCO framework was established in December 2017, and the 25 participating EU member states made improving Military Mobility one of the binding commitments (§12, PESCO secretariat n.d..). The PESCO project Military Mobility was then established in March 2018, with 24 participating member states and one observer (Council of the European Union 2018b). The key added value of the PESCO project is that it places Military Mobility high on the political agenda. Other, more practical, work is often done in other fora; nevertheless, the work in the PESCO project can create an impetus for the work by the Commission or the EDA (Interviews, member state official, January 2023; member state officials, January 2023).

Moreover, the positive response to and, later, the implementation of the EU Action Plan on Military Mobility should be viewed in the light of the strong support of the member states. As one EU member state official put it:

All the EU member states saw this as something positive, and it was not so politically decisive. It isn’t about, for instance, defence-industrial cooperation, where you always have national interests. This was clearly an issue where the member states saw it as positive, as a win-win and as low-hanging fruit, so to speak.

The official added that there was a “political opportunity to make it happen, and the Juncker Commission was finally the tipping point, together with the changing security environment” (Interview, member state official, April 2021). Consequently, the leadership of the European Commission, together with the momentum of PESCO – and especially the strong political support of the Netherlands – created this new opening in the political stream. Moreover, Dutch officials were working on these issues early on, in the EDA, the EUMS and at the Commission (Interview, member state official, January 2023). Thus, as argued by Mintrom and Norman, “policy entrepreneurs recognize the importance of developing and working with coalitions to promote policy change” (2009, 635; Riddervold and Trondal 2020; Vesan and Corti 2021; see also Riddervold 2016; Chappell, Exadaktylos, and Petrov 2020; Béraud-Sudreau and Pannier 2021 on how EU institutions together with member states can push policy initiatives within the field of security and defence). Furthermore, good working relations were established between different EU actors, which helped move the project forward (c. f. Fiott 2015; Haroche 2020). As one senior EEAS official put it: “We from the EEAS, now, for the first time, needed to engage with [the transport department] DG MOVE. From the beginning, they had no clue about defence issues, and we had no clue about infrastructure and transport issues. But it worked out very well” (Interview, EEAS official, February 2020).
**The policy stream and policy transfers**

The first step in the implementation process of the Military Mobility project was to identify the military requirements. As the Action Plan outlines:

The identification and agreement of the military requirements, reflecting the needs of the EU and its Member States, will be the starting point for an effective approach across the EU (...). These requirements should include also the definition of the infrastructure needed for military mobility. (European Commission 2018)

The task of developing the EU military requirements was given to the EUMS and the EEAS in close coordination with the member states, the Commission and other relevant actors, such as the EDA and NATO. NATO had already been involved in the process of developing the EDA ad hoc working group’s roadmap (Interviews, EDA official, May 2021; EUMS official, May 2021). While NATO had been involved in these processes, and while Military Mobility had been added to the EU-NATO actions set to implement the 2016 (and later the 2018) EU-NATO declaration, there were some difficulties at the beginning in aligning the EU’s work with NATO’s. At first, NATO did not share its technical standards for military requirements with the EU side in order to align these standards at the European level. This was in part due to political problems between the two entities, with Turkey, Greece and Cyprus blocking cooperation. Similarly, some of the neutral EU member states had some problems with this cooperation at first (Interviews, European Commission official, February 2020; NATO official, April 2022; European Commission officials, February 2023; see also Smith and Gebhard 2017; Schuette 2022). Consequently, some EU member states (and NATO members) had to work hard to establish cooperation. As one member state official noted:

what really helped was that we got people together – people from NATO international staff, people from SHAPE and so on, together with the Commission, EUMS, the EDA, and us from the member states, and we closed the doors. We never publicly said that this was an EU-NATO meeting, as we were not “allowed” to do this. But we said that we need to work this out, and this really helped; and the NATO people understood that what the EU was doing could help them, and this helped to get documents available for the EU in the end. (Interview, member state official, April 2021)

In the end, this became the big success story of EU-NATO cooperation, as the NATO Secretary General shared NATO’s requirements with the EU side in May 2018 (Interview, EUMS, May 2021; European Commission 2019b, 2). This text was later developed by the EUMS in cooperation with the EU member states to be adopted as the EU military requirements. A EUMS official emphasised that: “the requirements are really similar and overlap with NATO. By getting this information from NATO, we were able to adopt this as our own EU requirements” (Interview, EUMS, May 2021). The EU military requirements were then adopted, first by the EU Military Committee and then by the Council in June 2018, and were later updated in 2019 (Latiçi 2020, 7; Starling et al. 2020, 21).

The EU military requirements then served as the building block for a gap analysis conducted by the European Commission to outline gaps between the military standards, military requirements and geographical scope of Europe’s civilian infrastructure (the
TEN-T network; for a longer discussion, see Latiči 2020). The analysis showed a 93% overlap between military and civilian geographical scope and served as a way to identify dual-use synergies and funding opportunities, as the EU can only fund dual-use infrastructure projects (European Commission 2019b, 2022b).

After the structured EU-NATO dialogue, NATO also provided its updated generic infrastructure parameters to the EU side in March 2019 (European Commission 2019b, 3). These processes now inform the work of funding infrastructure projects under the 2021–2027 EU budget. The importance of this exchange with NATO was noted by a European Commission official:

The EU shared its military requirements, including the geographical data, with NATO. And NATO recently shared parts of its military maps with us. So, little by little, we are opening up and sharing this very sensitive information between each other at staff level. (Interview, European Commission official, May 2021)

On regulatory and procedural issues, the Action Plan emphasised the importance of improving and simplifying the transport of dangerous goods, aligning and improving issues of customs and Value Added Tax (VAT) in the EU with regard to Military Mobility, and improving cross-border movement permissions (European Commission 2018, 5–7). These regulatory and procedural issues derived from discussions within the EDA ad hoc working group. Within this group, the EU institutions and member states had very open and frank discussions on problems regarding the movement of troops in Europe, which were clearly reflected in the Action Plan (Interviews, EEAS official, May 2021; European Commission official, May 2021). The ideas were mainly those for which tangible results could be achieved. Consequently, the proposals were technically feasible and had an important EU-NATO connection – something that member states had called for (Interviews, member states official, April 2021; EDA official, May 2021; European Commission official, April 2021). Linking them to EU civilian policies and not to “building a new policy field,” as outlined by Juncker, was also an important factor. In sum, the ideas outlined were technically feasible and corresponded to the values of the EU member states – especially with regard to the importance of strengthening EU-NATO relations (Engl and Evrard 2020).

In these processes on regulatory and procedural issues, the EU and NATO developed a close working relationship through both staff-to-staff talks and the structured dialogue process, which takes place twice a year. One of the problems outlined in the Action Plan was the transport of dangerous goods and the need for greater alignment of rules at the European level. In 2019, NATO declassified its Allied Movement Publication 6 (AMovP6 NATO Standardisation Agreement) to inform this process, and the transport of dangerous goods in the military domain has now been harmonised in Europe (Starling et al. 2020, 20; European Commission 2020, 6; European Commission 2022b, 2). The importance of the declassification of AMovP6 was also emphasised in the two European Commission-HR/VP communications on the implementation of the EU Action Plan (European Commission 2019b, 2020). Some of the documents requested from NATO by the EU were not shared, however, due to classification levels and political problems between the two entities (i.e. the Turkey, Greece and Cyprus issue). To mitigate these problems, NATO adopted a process to develop new, unclassified reports for the discussion of issues in a staff-to-staff format between the EU and NATO (Starling et al. 2020,
21; Interviews, Commission official, May 2021; member state official, April 2021; EEAS official, May 2021).

Another issue that was addressed was that of customs and VAT issues, which had been identified as an area with problems and differences between the EU and NATO. The Action Plan outlines the importance of streamlining and simplifying “customs formalities for cross-border military movements, while ensuring synergies with NATO” (European Commission 2020, 7). One result was the establishment by the EU of Form 302, which largely builds on and mirrors NATO form 302 (Interviews, member state official, April 2021; EEAS official, May 2021; EU official, May 2021). The form was developed by the EDA and the member states, together with Commission services. Since then, these developments have been taken up in amendments to existing EU regulations (European Commission 2020, 7). Another issue that was resolved was that of VAT exemption, where militaries were exempt in a NATO context but not under the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy framework. This was resolved through Council Directive 2019/2235, which directs that defence efforts under the EU and NATO frameworks are now treated equally (European Commission 2020, 8; Interview, EEAS, May 2021).

Hence, the EU side has relied on NATO policies and standards and has heavily integrated these into its work on Military Mobility. NATO standards, requirements and forms have all been incorporated into the EU context. The EU side has relied on copying – for instance, regarding VAT issues and, to a large extent, Form 302 – and the emulation of ideas behind policy or programmes with respect to military requirements (see Dolowitz and Marsh 2000). The main actors involved in the process were the staff in both organisations. Political appointees in the European Commission and NATO, as well as politicians among the member states, have also pushed this work forward. The motives behind the project are largely linked to the deteriorating security situation but are also related to the entrepreneurial role of member states such as the Netherlands and the political ambitions of the European Commission in the policy field of security and defence. Therefore, the security situation and this political momentum facilitated the policy process.

The EU Foreign Affairs Council (Defence) also underscored the importance of Military Mobility in June 2018 and developed a number of “Military Mobility pledges” (§18, Council of the European Union 2018a). Similar language was adopted by NATO in the July 2018 Brussels Summit Declaration (§17–18, NATO 2018; Mattelaer 2018). This strong overlap between the EU and NATO wording was due to the work of EU member states and NATO members on echoing the work of the EU in NATO (Interviews, EU member state official, April 2021; EEAS official, May 2021). Thus, the EU member states have been able to “upload” their ideas – first into the EU context and later in the NATO setting (Bulmer et al. 2007).

4. **Challenges and future developments**

In regard to the EU Military Mobility project, some questions remain. First, the funding for Military Mobility infrastructure projects has been greatly reduced, from the €6.5 billion proposal to €1.69 (in 2018 prices) following the negotiations on the 2021–2027 EU budget (European Council 2020). At one point in the negotiation on the EU
budget, the Military Mobility funding was completely scrapped; however, member states from the Baltic states, among others, voiced very critical concerns about these budget cuts (Interviews, member state official, January 2023; European Commission officials, February 2023). Commission officials working on the Military Mobility portfolio had hoped for at least €4 billion and have expressed disappointment and concern about the project (Interview, European Commission official, February 2020). Similarly, members of the European Parliament and some EU member states – especially those from Eastern Europe – wanted to protect the budget for the project (Brzozowski 2020a, 2020b). In the end, the budget for Military Mobility was not scrapped but was heavily reduced from the original Commission proposal, mainly due to efforts from various budget-restricting member states, Brexit, the economic downturn caused by the pandemic and low political willingness (Håkansson 2021; Larsen 2022; Sweeney and Winn 2022; Interviews, member state official, February 2020; member state official, January 2023; European Commission officials, February 2023). Even so, member state co-financing (where the EU finances up to 50% of a project) still means that over €3 billion will be spent on improving infrastructure for military purposes. Nevertheless, senior member state officials have commented that the current funding for Military Mobility is “almost nothing” and that it will “never be enough” (Siebold, Deutsch, and Sytas 2022). Moreover, several interviewees described disappointment with the allocated funding (Interviews, former senior NATO official, December 2022; member states official, April 2021; member state official, January 2023; European Commission officials, February 2023).

In 2022, the two first tranches of funding for infrastructure projects for EU Military Mobility were adopted. In May 2022, the first wave of projects worth €339 million were adopted, and the Commission frontloaded and increased the funding for the second tranche, worth €616 million, in December 2022. The adoption of the second wave of projects was both accelerated and reinforced by Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine (EEAS 2022; European Commission 2022a). Consequently, almost €1 billion of the €1.69 billion budget was spent in the first two tranches. The European Commission has also referred to the possibility of strengthening the budget for both the European Defence Fund and the EU Military Mobility project in 2023 (European Commission 2022c, 13). Nevertheless, this is a political decision that the EU capitals must agree upon, which will illustrate the political willingness in Europe on defence matters.

In 2022, the EU also adopted a new 2.0 Action Plan on Military Mobility, which aims to outline a new ambition for the framework between 2022–2026 (European Commission 2022b). The process of developing a new Action Plan was in place before the Russo-Ukrainian 2022 war; yet the war accelerated the importance of improving this work (Interviews, European Commission official, April 2021; European Commission officials, February 2023; European Commission 2021). New developments include improving civilian technical standards in order to improve the movement of troops in Europe and updating the EU military requirements. In light of the war in Ukraine and the new geopolitical context, the Commission has also adopted an amendment on the current regulations (European Commission 2022b, 4–7). With the new Action Plan 2.0, we are likely to see new transfers of NATO’s standards to the EU. For instance, the Action Plan recommends aligning the EU’s “military pledges” with NATO’s standards on the operational-level planning timeline, among other recommendations (European Commission 2022b, 11; see also Brauss, Hodges, and Lindley-French 2021).
The lessons from the 2022 war on Ukraine must be considered in European Defence planning. It can be seen how important logistics are in the war efforts, which only underlines the importance of improving Military Mobility in Europe (Interview, former NATO official, December 2022; member state official, January 2023; member state officials, January 2023). Moreover, as one interviewee argued: “deterrence requires military capabilities and speed. Speed of recognition, speed of decisions, and speed of assembly, and that is why Military Mobility is so important” (Interview, former senior NATO official, December 2022).

The EU-NATO implementation reports have emphasised the progress and deepening of relations between the organisations, especially within the domain of Military Mobility (e.g. NATO 2021, 2022; European Commission 2021). Although Military Mobility is viewed as the flagship of EU-NATO relations, and despite this article’s demonstration that cooperation between the two organisations has been enhanced and deepened in recent years, problems in cooperation still exist between EU and NATO (Interviews, member state official, April 2021; EEAS official, May 2021; European Commission official, May 2021; NATO official, April 2022; former senior NATO official, December 2022). As noted by interviewees, “Military Mobility is one of the few areas where cooperation is working between EU and NATO” (Interview, member states officials, January 2023). Consequently, ambitions to take forward the work on Military Mobility and the broader EU-NATO cooperation are likely to suffer from the ongoing difficulties and problems between the two actors (see also Starling et al. 2020). It is likely that cooperation will have to continue to rely on individual member states and NATO members to mitigate these problems. Moreover, Schuette (2022) has shown that NATO has both supported the EU’s efforts towards defence integration and “selectively resisted” some developments. Pavlov (2021) has discussed and outlined some of the difficulties in transferring ideas and concepts from NATO to the EU. However, both the EU’s new Strategic Compass and the NATO’s 2022 Strategic Concept clearly outline the importance of strengthening the EU-NATO cooperation going forward (Council of the European Union 2022b; NATO 2022a). Moreover, in regard to Military Mobility, the EU Strategic Compass stresses:

We will strengthen dual use transport infrastructure across the trans-European transport network in order to promote rapid and seamless movement of military personnel, material and equipment for operational deployments and exercises, working in close cooperation with NATO. (Council of the European Union 2022, 18)

In regard to the Strategic Compass, and as noted by Sweeney and Winn (2022, 198), the enhanced role of the European Commission can be seen as a reason for optimism in the implementation process of the Compass. Moreover, in January 2023, a new (third) EU-NATO declaration was signed, underlining the importance of further strengthening EU-NATO cooperation (NATO 2023). Finally, while there have been concerns in the past from the United States and NATO on the EU’s development within the field of security and defence, the United States joined the PESCO project on Military Mobility in 2021, together with Norway and Canada, and the EU and United States have set up a new US-EU dialogue on security and defence (Council of the European Union 2021; US Department of State 2021; Schuette 2022). In 2022, the UK also joined the EU’s PESCO project on Military Mobility (Council of the European Union 2022a).
Moreover, NATO strongly lobbied the EU to allow third-party participation in PESCO (Schuette 2022). All these factors could strengthen the transatlantic coordination and the cooperation between EU and NATO. As member states officials commented: “the PESCO project on Military Mobility will also increase in importance with the decisions on the third-party participation by key actors such as the United States and United Kingdom. This could also improve the EU-NATO coordination” (Interviews, member state officials, January 2023; also underlined by a former NATO official, December 2022). Similarly, Russia’s war in Ukraine has enhanced and improved the coordination and cooperation between EU and NATO (Interviews, NATO official, April 2022; member state official, January 2023).

5. Concluding remarks

This article has shown that the Military Mobility project is an example of a policy initiative through which the European Commission has expanded its competences within the defence field by purposefully and politically acting upon the worsening security situation in and around Europe, while actively building coalitions and managing good working relations with the involved actors, such as the EDA, EEAS and member states. Moreover, this study shows that the EU services have learned and transferred knowledge from NATO in the defence domain.

In sum, this article responds to Brandão’s and Camisão (2022, 1350) discussion on the need for more research on how the “Commission graduated from being a negligible actor to an influential player” within the EU security and defence policy. Furthermore, it can be argued that the development within this policy field in recent years is starting to change the overall role of the European Union. With the Military Mobility project, the EU – and the Commission – are slowly moving towards issues that are close to territorial defence (see also Engberg 2021). Moreover, some scholars have argued that the Commission’s ambition in recent years has been to seek “to shift the focus of European security and defense policy from a policy field dominated by member states to a supranational one” (Kaim and Kempin 2022, 5; see also Riddervold 2016; Riddervold and Trondal 2020; Håkansson 2021). This article has outlined and discussed the development of the Military Mobility project and argues that this project is part of a weakening of intergovernmentalism in EU security and defence policy. In this article, we followed the initial and internal processes of the EU in developing the Military Mobility framework. Hence, future studies should focus more on the NATO side and on its cooperation with the EU (see also, e.g. Smith and Gebhard 2017; Lindstrom and Tardy 2019; Pavlov 2021; Schuette 2022).

To conclude, a more active role for the Commission in the field of EU security and defence policy can be expected, especially after Russia’s 2022 war on Ukraine (see also European Commission 2022c). As underlined by Morillas (2020, 240), the European Commission’s new involvement in defence matters – and the usage of the EU budget for defence – has been viewed as a ‘big shift’ which was ‘previously unthinkable.’ Nevertheless, with regard to Military Mobility, the current “obstacles to military movements [still] hamper European deterrence and credibility” (Bessems 2021, 28). This is an issue that must be addressed, especially regarding new funding for the Military Mobility project. Nevertheless, this article has outlined the very technical yet important policy
development within the domain thus far. Moreover, with the United States focussed on the Indo-Pacific theatre in the long term, the EU and European NATO allies must take on greater responsibility for security in Europe (Brauss, Hodges, and Lindley-French 2021; Larsen 2022; Besch 2022; Simón 2023). The Military Mobility project is thus a key initiative to strengthen readiness, deterrence and defence in Europe. Moreover, with the adoption and establishment of NATO’s new Force Model (with over 300,000 troops in high readiness when fully implemented), issues of Military Mobility could become even more important (Biscop 2022; NATO 2022b). Therefore, it can be argued that the EU and its institutions, with its new security and defence initiatives, can and will become a better enabler of defence of Europe.

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The Ukraine war and the emergence of the European commission as a geopolitical actor

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ABSTRACT
The European Commission has traditionally held a weak position in the policy domain of EU security and defence policy and has been seen as a 'least likely' case of supranational integration. Nevertheless, in recent years, the Commission has steadily expanded its role and ambition within this policy field – a process which gained in momentum after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Thus, this article investigates how the war in Ukraine has led to the establishment of new security and defence initiatives and to a stronger geopolitical role for the Commission. This paper theorises that the war in Ukraine is serving as an engine of integration. The article traces how the Commission seizes the windows of opportunity created by crises to strategically expand its mandate on security and defence policy and in the development of the sanctions policy regime.

KEYWORDS
EU defence; European Commission; European integration; crisis; EU Strategic Compass; EU sanctions; geopolitical commission

1. Introduction

Jean Monnet (1978, 417) famously wrote that ‘Europe will be forged in crises, and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises’. Nothing could be more true during this past decade. Following the financial and Euro crisis, the European Union (EU) has faced numerous other crises, including the migration crisis, Brexit, the rule-of-law crisis, the Trump presidency, the COVID-19 pandemic and its health and economic consequences, and now the (second) war in Ukraine. Thus, EU crises have been widely debated in the scholarly literature in the last couple of years (e.g. Alcaro and Tocci 2021; Bauer and Becker 2014; Caporaso 2018; Cross 2017; Dinan, Nugent, and Paterson 2017; Riddervold, Newsome, and Trondal 2021; Schimmelfennig 2018). However, in the two most recent crises – namely, the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia’s 2022 war in Ukraine – the Union has arguably developed further and made historical and unprecedented decisions (Laffan 2023).

This article focuses on the role of the European Commission (henceforth ‘the Commission’) in the development of EU security and defence policy, with a special emphasis on how the war in Ukraine has begun to transform the Commission into a stronger actor in EU security and defence architecture. Hence, this work constructs
a theoretical process in which the earlier defence initiative, the effects of the war, and the dynamics between supranational institutions and the member states influence the EU’s new decisions and initiatives. This article thus aims to reconcile and bridge the arguments of neofunctionalism, liberal intergovernmentalism, and crisis integration, in order to explain new developments and integration. As such, it represents and is part of a new ‘pragmatic turn’ within European integration literature. To illustrate this process, two case studies are outlined: one on the development of the EU sanctions policy regime and another on the development of new EU defence initiatives after the outbreak of the war.

Traditionally, the Commission has held a weak position in the policy domain, and supranational integration of EU security and defence policy has been seen as a ‘least likely’ case (Nugent and Rhinard 2015; Riddervold and Trondal 2020; Strikwerda 2019). Nevertheless, especially since 2016, the Commission has steadily expanded its role and ambition within the field. Moreover, the literature on the Commission’s role in EU security and defence policy cooperation has greatly expanded in the last couple of years (see Section 2). Since the start of Russia’s (second) war in Ukraine, this development has also sped up significantly. As in a speech before the European Parliament after the start of Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the Commission President von der Leyen argued: ‘[w]hen we are resolute, Europe can rise up to the challenge. The same is true on defence. European security and defence has evolved more in the last six days than in the last two decades […] This is a watershed moment for our Union’ (European Commission 2022d).

The paper is structured as follows. The first section deals with the existing perspectives on the Commission’s role and competences in EU security and defence policy cooperation. This is followed by the theoretical discussions that underpin this article. Next, the two case studies are presented – one on the development of the EU sanctions policy regime and another on the development of EU security and defence policy. The case studies illustrate how the Commission’s competences have been strengthened by the war in Ukraine. Finally, a discussion on the broader implications of this development concludes this paper.

2. State of the art: the European commission and EU security and defence policy cooperation

This article zooms in on the internal dynamics within the European Union, with the special focus on the political and practical role of the European Commission. The Commission is moreover well-known for its policy activism and is arguably well placed to frame issues towards its field of competences (Nugent and Rhinard 2015). Thus, it has often been outlined as a purposeful opportunist which will take advantage of ‘windows of opportunities’ (Cram 1997). However, the Commission has traditionally been seen as largely sidelined in EU foreign, security and defence policy making (Nugent and Rhinard 2015; Riddervold 2016).

Nevertheless, while the Commission has traditionally held limited competences within the security and defence policy field, it has expanded its influence in recent years. This section aims to review the existing explanations for the Commission’s expansion into security and defence and underline the plurality of approaches that have been employed. Earlier studies have drawn on a broad spectrum of integration theories, concepts, and approaches to explain the expansion of the Commission’s role. As the next section argues,
this state of the art suggests that a theoretical and methodological eclecticism may be warranted as a research strategy to leverage and integrate the complex causalities behind this substantive development.

Among these perspectives, there is a growing literature on neofunctionalist dynamics in the development of EU security and defence policy and the nexus between internal and external security (e.g. Bergmann 2019; Bergmann and Müller 2023; Håkansson 2021; Haroche 2020, 2022; Niemann 2016). The Commission’s role in EU security and defence cooperation has been explained by some researchers as a form of ‘creeping competences’, in which the Commission has been able to expand its role in European defence cooperation through a long-term historical process that has been strengthened by crisis and salient events (Citi 2014). Somewhat similarly, Edler and James (2015) take a policy entrepreneur approach, while drawing on neofunctionalism dynamics, to explain the establishment of the European Security Research Programme, which served as an important stepping stone for new EU defence initiatives such as the European Defence Fund (EDF). Moreover, the establishment of the EDF has been explained as the outcome of a long-term process in which certain technology and innovation discourses have been established and steered policy development since the 1960s (Csernatoni 2021; Martins and Mawdsley 2021).

Chou and Riddervold (2015) have in turn shown that the Commission has been able to expand its role by linking foreign and security policy discussions to areas in which the Commission holds both competence and expert authority. The Commission has also built coalitions and cooperated with member states that share its integrative approach (Chou and Riddervold 2015). Riddervold (2016) explains the Commission’s influence within EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) as being gained through the Commission’s usage of bargaining tools and building support with (certain) member states, presenting expert-based arguments and ‘circumventing’ formal decision-making processes. She finds support for the Commission’s de facto influence in the EU CFSP and argues that the cooperation has moved beyond ‘inter-governmental co-operation’ (Riddervold 2016; see also Riddervold and Trondal 2020). Similarly, Lavallée (2011) argues that the Commission has expanded its role by acting upon the interdependence between external and internal security and by increasing its interaction with member states within the field of security and defence. Likewise, Brandão and Camisão (2022) argue that the Commission has enhanced its competences within the traditional intergovernmental policy domain of security through the usage of a ‘market-security nexus’.

Other authors have pointed out the convergence of interest between large member states such as France and Germany and institutions such as the Commission and the EEAS. The deliberate ‘usage of Europe’ to respond to crises and strategic changes can explain the establishment of both new supranational and intergovernmental EU defence initiatives since 2016 (Béraud-Sudreau and Pannier 2021). Drawing on role theory, Chappell, Exadaktylos, and Petrov (2020) have found support for the argument that actors such as the Commission and the EEAS have expanded their competences in EU security and defence. Yet this depends on the ‘role expectations’ from the member states, and especially the biggest member states – Germany and France.

Another strand of research has focused on judicial developments and how the Commission used the threat of ‘court-driven integration’ to push the member states to adopt the 2009 defence procurement directive (Blauberger and Weiss 2013). This form of
judicial politics has been used to explain how the Commission has challenged and changed national defence offsets (Weiss and Blauberger 2016). However, the impact of the two directives – on defence procurement (2009/81) and on intra EU-transfers (2009/43) – which serves as the 2009 ‘defence package’ seems to be limited thus far (Ioannides 2020). Nevertheless, it has been argued that these developments were important in allowing the Commission to legitimate its role in defence (Håkansson 2021).

Within the EU CSDP/CFSP, there is a growing literature on how groupings such as the Political and Security Committee (PSC) steer and influence EU foreign and security policy (Juncos and Pomorska 2011; Michalski and Danielson 2020). This influence has traditionally been seen as being at the ‘expense of the Commission’ (Nugent and Rhinar 2015, 379). Others have argued that the strengthening of security and defence policy cooperation at the EU level is still mainly dependent on the willingness and ambition of the EU member states. For instance, Strikwerda (2019) has argued that the member states followed through with the 2009 ‘EU defence package’ because they wanted to ‘follow European norms’. Fiott, drawing on liberal intergovernmentalism, argues that EU institutions such as the Commission ‘did not play a determining role’ in the establishment of the European Defence Agency, nor in the adoption of the 2009 EU defence package (Fiott 2019, 137). Moreover, Hoeffler (2012) notes that the importance of ‘economic patriotism’ from the member states must be considered in order to understand this development and argues that there was ‘no shift of loyalty to the EU level’ and that ‘supranational market-making regulation is promoted as a means to sustain European firms’ (Hoeffler 2012, 436). It has however also been argued that the framework of new intergovernmentalism in combination with the Commission’s growing policy role can explain the establishment of the EDF (Sabatino 2022).

3. Theorising the role of the commission in EU security and defence architecture

This study follows a pragmatic and problem-driven methodological and theoretical approach. The article can hence be seen as utilising analytic eclecticism in the study. It could be argued to be an ‘intellectual stance that supports efforts to complement, engage, and selectively utilize theoretical constructs embedded in contending research traditions to build complex arguments that bear on substantive problems of interest to both scholars and practitioners.’ Furthermore, ‘eclectic approaches offer complex causal stories that extricate, translate, and selectively recombine analytic components – most notably, causal mechanisms – from explanatory theories, models, and narratives embedded in competing research traditions’ (Sil and Katzenstein 2010, 411). In line with this pragmatic and holistic approach the article follows an explaining-outcome process-tracing method which could be seen as a form of problem-oriented research, and which is a ‘more pragmatic strategy for capturing the multiplicity of causes and linking them to outcomes that produce particular historical outcomes’ (Beach and Pedersen 2019, 283; see also Haroche 2022). Thus, this study relies on in-depth analysis, wherein we heavily depend on detailed case knowledge. By employing this method of thick analysis, the aim of this study is to uncover the inherent dynamics of the integration process (Collier, Brady, and Seawright 2010). The article in that regard draws on different strands of European integration and crisis literature to explore and explain the decisions taken after the 2022
The Russian-Ukraine war. This is also part of a broader ‘pragmatic’ trend within European integration literature to combine and discuss different framework of integration together (e.g. Becker and Gehring 2023; Ferrara and Kriesi 2022; Hooghe and Marks 2019; Jones, Kelemen, and Meunier 2021; Schimmelfennig 2018).

In line with this ‘pragmatic approach’, it draws on dynamics from both neofunctionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism to explain the new developments and decisions. Moreover, external dynamics and ‘crisis integration’ must be taken into account, especially as the EU has gone through a decade of ‘poly-crisis’ or is in a phase of ‘permacrisis’ (Zeitlin, Nicoli, and Laffan 2019; Zuleeg, Emmanouilidis, and Borges de Castro 2021). The crises of the last decade have been argued to result in a permanent ‘crisisification’ of EU policymaking (Rhinard 2019). Consequently, this paper develops a theoretical process explaining how the war in Ukraine has led to a process of ‘crisis policymaking’ by the Union. Nevertheless, the final decisions in this integration process were heavily influenced by the member states. Moreover, the earlier EU (security and defence) initiatives must be emphasised, as they served as a starting point for new ambitious ideas and initiatives, in line with functional and cultivated spill-over effects. Therefore, this paper aligns with recent supranational theorising that considers a wider range of contextual and internal variables.

To understand the current development since the war in Ukraine began, this paper theorises that earlier decisions and initiatives within the field of security and defence served as a precondition for the new initiatives launched in 2022, especially as the time after the 2016 EU Global Strategy (EUGS) has often been seen as a watershed moment for European security and defence integration (Tocci 2018). The momentum from the EUGS, as well as the pressure from a more unstable and hostile world – including the worsening security situation after Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014, the fall-out of the Trump years, Brexit, the migration crisis, terrorist attacks in Europe from 2015 to 2017 – then created a strong impetus for new integration within the field (Béraud-Sudreau and Pannier 2021; Häkansson 2021). Therefore, this context – with the already launched initiatives and tools – was an important precondition for the decisions that had to be taken after the 2022 war in Ukraine broke out. As Coticchia (2022, 27) argues, ‘the external shock of the war has further shaped a European political scenario that was already “under construction” regarding defence policy, after decades of immobility’.

It can be argued that crises have ‘been catalysts for major breakthroughs and for advancements of the integration process’ (Dinan, Nugent, and Paterson 2017, 9). While policy change is traditionally seen as a long-term process, it is now clear that agenda setting and integration in a crisis are more flexible and dynamic (Smeets and Beach 2023). This paper therefore argues that the war in Ukraine has served as a ‘trigger’ for new integration, especially as crises can lead to ‘pressure for rapid change’ in political organisations (Riddervold, Newsome, and Trondal 2021, 8).

In the past decade, the EU’s policymaking process has clearly been in a phase of ‘crisis policymaking’, which arguably affected the integration outcomes (Ferrara and Kriesi 2022; Rhinard 2019). While all the crises of the past decade can be considered to have affected the essence of ‘core state powers’ (Genschel and Jachtenfuch 2018), a shift in integration can now be seen. The COVID-19 pandemic created a historical shift in European integration, with the establishment of the Next-Generation EU financial package and the vaccine procurement scheme as its foremost examples (Alcaro and Tocci 2021; Becker and
Gehring 2023; Smeets and Beach 2023). Similar dynamics are now visible in response to Russia’s war in Ukraine. Hence, this paper argues that there is a difference between the crisis in the past and the two most recent crises – that is, the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia’s war in Ukraine – as there is now a greater willingness to accept common European solutions. Furthermore, the Union has gone through a process of policy learning from the earlier crises that affects the integration outcomes (Ladi and Tsarouhas 2020; Radaelli 2022). Building on the work of Rhinard (2019), this paper considers crisis policymaking and argues that crises as ‘facilitating events’ can lead to political spill-over effects (where member states ask ‘the EU’ to do more) as well as to cultivated spill-over effects and policy entrepreneurship from the Commission’s side (Rhinard 2019, 620–622). In these types of crisis situations, policymaking is quicker, more exclusive, and based on different rationales than ‘normal’ policymaking, and thus is more likely to lead to change. Moreover, in the context of EU crisis policy and decision-making, EU institutions and leaders have shown a greater willingness to exceed legal and political constraints (Cross 2017; White 2023, 781). As a result, supranational institutions such as the Commission are able to advance their policy agendas and enhance their political role.

Although this paper particularly focuses and investigates the Commission’s activity in pushing forward integration through its entrepreneurial role and cultivated spill-over effects (Bergmann 2019; Niemann 2016), the member states play a significant decision-making role in the process (Håkansson 2021; Nicoli 2020; Niemann 2006). This paper in that regard builds upon research on the ‘pragmatic turn’ in European integration literature. In recent years, we have seen a growing discussion on how the grand theories of European integration can complement each other (e.g. Ferrara and Kriesi 2022; Hooghe and Marks 2019; Schimmelfennig 2018). For instance, Hooghe and Marks (2019) note that intergovernmentalism, neofunctionalism and postfunctionalism focus on different puzzles in the integration process and argue that ‘these theories are not mutually exclusive but can serve as complementary explanations’ (p. 1120). Similarly, Jones, Kelemen, and Meunier (2021) framework of ‘failing forward’ builds upon the short-term bargaining processes among member states that are explained by intergovernmentalism, as well as the long-term supranational dynamics explained by neofunctionalism (see also Bergmann and Müller 2021 for a discussion on EU security and defence policy). Others have taken a ‘domain of application’ approach to bridge the dynamics in liberal intergovernmentalism (LI) and neofunctionalism (Becker and Gehring 2023; Ferrara and Kriesi 2022).

To sum up, this paper theorises the integration process since the onset of the war in Ukraine as one in which the Commission can build upon its earlier defence initiatives. After the war (the crisis trigger) broke out, the Union went into ‘crisis policymaking mode’ and the EU institutions could advance its policy agenda and presented several new initiatives. However, in the end, the integration outcome is controlled by both the supranational entrepreneurship and the overall political will of the member states. In this regard, it takes into account the concerns of member states within a framework in which existing legislation and triggering events tend to prompt new actions.
4. A watershed moment for the commission in EU security and defence policy development?

The 2022 war in Ukraine spurred new initiatives and decisions to be taken in unprecedentedly speedy decision-making processes. The EU’s response to the war is therefore an ‘important focusing event’ in our study of EU foreign, security and defence policy (Maurer, Whitman, and Wright 2023, 222). To outline and explain the new role of the Commission in EU security and defence architecture, two case studies are presented below. Firstly, the paper presents and outlines the Commission’s role in developing and launching the toughest-ever sanctions packages to date. Secondly, this article investigates the steps taken in the field of defence and security after the onset of the war. These cases were selected because they represent policies traditionally guided by member states. This article builds on an analysis of official documents, statements, media reporting, secondary literature and semi-structured elite/expert interviews with centrally placed officials and policymakers in Brussels from the Commission, European External Action Service (EEAS), European Defence Agency (EDA), NATO, and member states. These interviews are especially important, as this article aims to trace the development of different policy initiatives. Furthermore, the field of security and defence is often less transparent than other policy areas. Hence, specialised news media and think-tank reporting is important in order to triangulate and strengthen the overall findings (Calcara 2019). In line with the overall methodological approach, we examine and consider various types of evidence in a systematic manner to evaluate and connect them to our theoretical framework (Bergmann and Müller 2023; Smeets and Beach 2023).

4.1. Sanctions policy

The focus on the development and launch of the sanction packages, and the interplay between the EU institutions and the member states, is important from several perspectives. Firstly, the EU’s unity and collective action is noteworthy, given the different historical views on Russia among member states (Bosse 2022). Secondly, the EU institutions, particularly the Commission, have taken a stronger role in the development process of the packages, as will be elaborated on. Moreover, the Commissions transatlantic coordination role is noticeable. Finally, the EU’s response to the 2022 war was much faster and stronger than its response to the 2014 Ukraine war (cf. Maurer, Whitman, and Wright 2023; Natorski and Pomorska 2017; Olsen 2022; Sjursen and Rosén 2017).

However, following the 2014 Ukraine crisis, the EU institutions already took a larger role in preparing and brokering the different sanctions packages (Natorski and Pomorska 2017; interview, member state representative, September 2022). Thus, in 2022, the Commission could build upon this experience when it took the lead in developing the sanctions measures. In accordance with the theoretical preconceptions that actors will build on earlier initiatives and experiences (cf. Cross 2017; White 2023). Additionally, the 2022 war led to a ‘significant reformulation’ of member states’ views on and threat perception from Russia (Bosse 2022, 534). The shock of the full-scale Russian invasion resulted in a more joint and shared threat perception among member states, which is reflected in the 2022 EU Strategic Compass (EEAS 2022). The war served as a clear ‘crisis
trigger’ for a response from the Union. However, issues such as ousting Russian banks from the SWIFT system, as well as energy sanctions on coal and crude oil, were politically very sensitive for member states. Thus, the EU responded in a step-by-step approach in launching the different sanctions packages. Nevertheless, we can also observe a qualitative difference between the first ones and later EU sanctions packages (Bosse 2022). This was due, as will be elaborated, to the role of the Commission, the transatlantic coordination, and events happening in Ukraine.

The process of developing the sanction policy regime was handled by the Commission to a greater degree than usual (Politico 2022b; 2022e; Financial Times 2022b; interview, EEAS official, April 2022; interview, EU member state ambassador, April 2022; interview, member state representative, September 2022). This was done to avoid leaks and increase cohesion within the Union; however, it also indicates a more geopolitical setting for the Commission. The member states generally supported the stronger political role of the Commission. However, this process resulted in von der Leyen and her cabinet being the ‘only actors with an overview of the overall sanctions discussions’ (Olsen 2022; see also Financial Times 2022b). Thus, while the Commission and the HR/VP have a formal role in proposing EU sanctions, their role was strongly enhanced in 2022 (see Giumelli 2013; Olsen 2022 on the normal discussion-making process). Portela (2022, 3) for instance underscored that the 2022 sanctions are ‘exceptional in that it deviates from general [sanctions] pattern’. The role of the Commission was also emphasised by an EU member state ambassador, who stated:

The Commission has taken a clear step forward in this domain. And this has affected the normal working procedures. The [Commission’s] sanctions [proposals] have now first been discussed in small groups at [the] COREPER II level and then in the full group of COREPER II, and it has not really passed through the RELEX group as normally. (Interview, EU member state ambassador, April 2022)

After the outbreak of the 2022 war, the RELEX delegates thus played a rather limited formal role in the sanctions process. Underscoring the importance of the speedy decision-making in crisis (cf. Bergmann and Müller 2023; Cross 2017; White 2023). However, one member state representative described how member states could influence the different packages, stating:

COREPER II ambassadors were called to confessionals in smaller groups, and this was an opportunity for the Commission to present its plans, and also an opportunity to hear if there were problems or red lines (….) there are member states that have brought in their own thoughts and presented non-papers that have been included in the packages. (Interview, member state representative, September 2022)

Olsen (2022, 32–33) in turn describes how ‘the immense political pressure furthermore meant that in the first month after the Russian invasion, member states would accept almost any sanctions measures proposed’. While adding that ‘in the period from late February to early April, ‘hawkish’ frontline governments would send “their wildest sanctions dreams” to the Commission, who would then, more often than not, include them directly into the proposed sanctions package’. These dynamics underline the crisis-trigger and policymaking in the Union. The need for swift decision-making processes has thus led to the circumvention of normal working procedures, thereby reinforcing the Commission’s role in the process. Furthermore, particularly the more hawkish member
states have regarded the Commission’s role positively (Olsen 2022; interview, member state representative, September 2022). Underscoring how the process was developed back-and-forth between the Commission and the member states. The highest level of the Commission was very closely involved in this process; as underlined by a Commission official, ‘the Commission and President von der Leyen and her cabinet have really taken charge and have been extremely involved in the different details in the packages’ (interview, European Commission official, September 2022). A member state representative involved in the work on the sanctions process similarly commented:

The Commission are definitely the ones who have been in the driver’s seat for new actions, especially in the beginning, and then in close collaboration with the U.S. leadership. The Commission has managed to use both the power of von der Leyen’s leadership but also to use its administrative capacity as leverage. (Interview, member state representative, September 2022)

The transatlantic coordination was also very important in the overall development process. As its contact with the EU, the U.S. leadership has focused on von der Leyen (Politico 2022e; 2022d; interview, EU member state ambassador, April 2022; interview, member state representative, September 2022; interview, European Commission official, September 2022). Moreover, the Commission leadership early on took the US intelligence warnings more seriously than most of the member states, and more than two months before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, President von der Leyen instructed Commission officials to start working on the sanction packages (The Guardian. 2023b). However, US sanctions chief Daleep Singh expressed the sensitives before the war broke out, underscoring that:

the Europeans were participating fully in the sanctions design effort, but when I would have conversations with my counterparts — Björn Seibert, at the European Commission (…) the Europeans emphasized many times that the visuals would matter. In other words, this invasion had to actually be something that political leaders could see on screen. (Politico. 2023a)

An EU ambassador noted that the cooperation between the United States and the EU leadership meant that ‘the US at the beginning knew more about the work on EU sanctions than the EU member states’. Moreover, the ambassador emphasised the importance of personal relations, as Björn Seibert, the head of the von der Leyen cabinet, ‘is a personal friend of U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, and this trust has increased cooperation between the U.S. and the EU’ (interview, EU member state ambassador, April 2022). As the Financial Times reported, ‘in a departure from previous practices, the EU effort was co-ordinated directly from von der Leyen’s office through Bjørn Seibert’ (Financial Times 2022b; see also Kassim 2023 on the role of Björn Seibert in the von der Leyen Commission). While the personal relationship between Siebert and Sullivan was important, this also follows a longer trend of enhancing and strengthening the political role of the President’s cabinet. As underscored by Kassim (2023, 188), ‘the fact that von der Leyen has been able to emulate Juncker suggests that the powers of the presidential office have to a large extent become institutionalised’. Consequently, a very top-down procedure can be observed, which has strengthened the role of the President (Politico 2022d). This also follows the trend of more political, presidential and top-down-steered Commission workings (Brooks and Bürgin 2021; Kassim et al. 2017). Overall, the US’s focus
and coordination with the Commission leadership rather than the larger EU member states represents a new important policy development.

The developments in Ukraine heavily influenced the pace and content of the various packages. After images of Russia’s war crimes in Bucha surfaced, Commission President von der Leyen announced at a press conference that the EU would adopt new strong sanctions measures against Russia. While the Commission had discussed some of the new measures with member states beforehand, these remarks took the member states by surprise, and some felt that von der Leyen and her staff had pushed the issue too far (interview, member state representative, September 2022; Olsen 2022). This development process demonstrates the cultivated spill-over effects and policy and political entrepreneurship of the Commission (cf. Rhinard 2019). Additionally, it underscores how the decision-making process can be more flexible and speedy in crisis situations. Echoing the assumptions within neofunctionalism that decisions are often taken under time pressure, but where supranational actors can act as policy entrepreneurs under these conditions (Bergmann and Müller 2023). The process is also in line with von der Leyen’s more personal and ‘hands-on approach’ to day-to-day policy development (Kassim 2023). The Russian atrocities in Bucha nevertheless created strong political pressure for the EU to deliver stronger measures, and member states speedily decided upon the 5th package of sanctions. This is also supported by empirical data gathered by both Olsen (2022) and Bosse (2022), highlighting how the Bucha massacre was a catalyst for more powerful EU sanctions on Russia. It moreover underlines the political role the Commission and its leadership took in this process. However, the later packages were more difficult to pass, underscoring the dynamics within liberal intergovernmentalism and the member states’ different negotiation positions.

Thus, while the Commission took a stronger political lead in the development of the different sanctions packages – in line with the theoretical preconceptions of neofunctionalism, as well as in line with the faster decision-making processes during crises (see also Radaelli 2022) –, the member states in COREPER II went through tough negotiations on the substance of the packages. The negotiations on the sixth sanctions package were especially difficult, as Hungary blocked this package for a long time. In the end, Hungary received an exemption from the ban on Russian crude oil (European Council 2022b; Politico 2022a; interview, member state representative, September 2022). There were similar dynamics with the ninth sanctions package, where Western European member states argued for exceptions in the package while Poland and Baltic states argued for more restrictive measures. In the end, and at the margins of the December 2022 European Council, a compromise deal could be found on the sanctions package (Euractive 2022). Thus, the EU’s decisions on the sanctions policy – and especially on the sixth and the ninth packages – follow the theoretical dynamics of Li and the process of short-term bargaining, which can explain the dynamics among member states such as Hungary. The Commission’s actions can in turn be seen in the light of longer term supranational dynamics and the Commission’s policy entrepreneurship (Becker and Gehring 2023; Jones, Kelemen, and Meunier 2021; Rhinard 2019). Thus, as outlined in Figure 1, the crisis triggered the need for speedy decision making, which opened for the Commission to take on a strong leadership role. On the other hand, the Commission exercised a certain amount of caution by proceeding step by step and keeping each sanction package open for input by the member states.
That the sanction policy proposal was first handled and negotiated by COREPER II (rather than on a lower council level) and some packages was later resolved in the European Council, follows the trend of how crisis decision-making has been dealt with at the highest political level (Smeets and Beach 2023). Moreover, in the development of the sanctions package on the Russian central bank, the Commission and US leadership worked extremely closely with Italian PM Mario Draghi to put forward the proposal (Financial Times 2022b; Politico. 2023a). These results are indicative of the pragmatic approach one must take when theorising and explaining the Commission’s role within EU foreign policymaking. These results are also consistent with recent theorising emphasising the importance of more collaborative leadership within the Union (Beach and Smeets 2020; Kassim 2022; Smeets and Beach 2023).

4.2. Security and defence policy

At the time the war in Ukraine started, the EU was also on the verge of adopting its new Strategic Compass in Security and Defence after a two-year development process (EEAS 2022). The Strategic Compass process revealed a closer working relationship between the EU institutions (interview, European Commission officials, May 2021). An EEAS official very closely involved in the Strategic Compass process argued that they

... both needed the member state buy-in but also institutional buy-in. So, we did it very closely with the Commission, and we had all versions of the Compass looked at by the Commission, and the first draft of the Compass actually went to all of the Commissioners and to the college for approval despite being a HR/VP document. (Interview, EEAS official, September 2022)

This was further underlined by a senior European Commission official, who stated:

The big change is that earlier, for instance with the Global Strategy, the EEAS did not work with the Commission. It was then an EEAS product (…) but now the people at the EEAS have started to work with us. The colleagues at the EEAS argued that this Compass will become much stronger if it includes issues such as defence investment, hybrid-threats, military mobility [and] cyber defence; and then, they must work with us, as we own those policies. (Interview, European Commission official, September 2022)

Similarly, the EU institutions tried to closely inform and coordinate with their counterparts in NATO (interview, NATO official, September 2022). The Commission’s input to the Compass process was their February 2022 ‘defence communications’ (European Commission 2022a; 2022c, interviews, European Commission Officials, April 2022). As described by an EEAS official working closely with the process of moving the Compass forward: ‘we waited for their defence package in February, which strongly fitted into the work of the Compass’ (interview, EEAS official, April 2022). Moreover, a Commission
official noted that ‘the Compass was led by the EEAS, but the Commission leadership was very keen to make it work’. Officials also argued that the Commission has used the Compass to launch initiatives, for instance on space and defence, cyber defence, and defence investment (interview, European Commission official, September 2022; interview, EDA official, April 2022). In addition, an EEAS official emphasised that the new initiatives developed after the war were built on the ambitions within the Compass (interview, EEAS official, September 2022). Aligned with the theoretical assumptions that the institutions have the ability to build upon declarations and initiatives that have already been launched. Moreover, member states such as France, which held the EU presidency in the spring of 2022, had a clear ambition to put security and defence high on the policy agenda. Thus, the Commission and the EEAS had clear support from the French EU presidency, which worked well to push the defence industry dimension in the Strategic Compass (interview, EEAS official, September 2022). As in the past, large member states and the EU institutions can come together to push forward the agenda on defence (Béraud-Sudreau and Pannier 2021). While some member states were somewhat hesitant about the Commission’s defence communications, both were nevertheless strongly incorporated in the Strategic Compass in the end (interview, member state representative, April 2022; interview, European Commission officials, April 2022; interview, EEAS official, September 2022).

It was also within this policy context that the Ukraine war broke out (the crisis trigger) and the war put security and defence policy firmly at the top of the political agenda for the EU. At the March 2022 special European Council meeting in Versailles, the EU heads of state and government stressed that Russia’s war in Ukraine ‘constitutes a tectonic shift in European history’ and argued for enhancing Europe’s defence capabilities. The EU leaders then tasked the Commission and the EDA to put forward an analysis of defence investment gaps and to propose further new initiatives to strengthen the defence industrial and technological base in Europe. This task was integrated in the final EU Strategic Compass (EEAS 2022; European Council 2022a).

In May 2022, the Commission and the EDA came back with their analysis and new proposals outlining the need for more European collaborative projects and joint procurements. These proposals were described as a ‘big step forward’, as they opened up the possibility of jointly procuring material. Commission officials explained that ideas about supporting joint procurement earlier ‘had legally been seen to take one step too far by the Commission itself, but this is now a clear example where there is a rethinking’ (interview, European Commission official, September 2022). A senior member state official similarly argued that the Commission’s changed approach and interpretation of art 41.2 TEU was ‘rather revolutionary’ (Angelet 2022). Or as underlined by Zande (2022, 2) ‘until recently, it was unthinkable that the Union budget would be allocated for defence procurement’.

The Commission outlined a proposal for a short-term instrument – the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through the common Procurement Act (EDIRPA) – to reinforce defence industry capabilities in Europe and support joint procurement. This new short-term instrument is intended to run from 2023 to 2024, with a limited budget of EUR 500 million (European Commission 2022b). Officials explained the process and dynamics with the proposals as follows: ‘we came out with this new tool of 500 million Euro to spend on joint procurement, which was the best we could get, as our budget is completely stretched after Covid and Ukraine’ (interview, European Commission official,
Nevertheless, to officials, promote agenda addition, proposals (of member (Council weapons now issues). Commission EDIDP as European Defence Fund’ (interview, European Commission official, September 2022).

Hence, this development process follows a clear trend in EU policymaking in which member states in crises ask the ‘EU level’ and the institutions to ‘do more’ (Rhinard 2019). The special European Council March 2022 meeting in Versailles followed this trend, as the heads of state and government tasked the Commission and the EDA to put forward new proposals to strengthen European defence considering the pressing security situation. In addition, the Commission (and other EU institutions) is seeking to advance its political agenda in these situations – using the declarations and conclusions from the EU leaders to promote and advance its policy ambitions. Therefore, the Commission can act as a policy entrepreneur to further enhance its political ambitions. The outlined initiatives were issues that the Commission had worked on previously, but its level of ambition was now clearly increased. Echoing the assessment of Fiott (2023, 455) who emphasises that ‘the Commission has seized on the opportunity of advancing EU policy in the area of common defence procurement. Yet it has only done so with the express consent and direct tasking of the European Council.’ This is essential to understanding the new policy development, which is guided by both the supranational and intergovernmental levels. These results are also in line with Bergmann and Müller (2023) who have shown that external events can lead to neofunctionalism spill-over effects which in turn can create inter-institutional dynamics (and a back-and-forth process between the supranational and intergovernmental level) which in turn leads to new decisions.

Moreover, the successful experiences from the use of the European Peace Facility and weapons support for Ukraine have helped to push forward the agenda (interview, EEAS official, September 2022; interview, European Commission official, April 2022). Nevertheless, and in line with the bargaining dynamics in LI, the member states appear to be watering down the proposed regulations during the negotiations of the EDIRPA (Council of the EU 2022; Financial Times 2022a). One of the most significant reasons why the process has been both prolonged and watered down from the original Commission proposal is due to the divergent interests, strategic cultures, and threat perceptions of the member states (as well as among the MEPs). This is particularly relevant to the possibility of opening the instrument to industries from third countries. For example, Schnitzler (2023, 4–5) describes that member states significantly relaxed the initial criteria proposed by the Commission during their negotiation positions on EDIRPA (see also discussions in Biscop 2023; Clapp 2023). This is also consistent with a recent study by Hoeffler (2023), which shows that member states have diluted earlier defence initiatives proposed by the Commission.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the experience gained from it have been used to push forward the policy agenda. Here, the Commission can be seen to be using crises and its policy learning to expand its political role (Kassim et al. 2021; Radaelli 2022). In its argument to push the member states to invest more together in defence, the Commission highlighted the ‘similarities with the COVID vaccine [procurement] situation’
(European Commission and HR/VP 2022, 2). An official involved in the process of developing the May 2022 communication explained this as a situation in which the Commission officials learned from how other departments of the Commission had dealt with the crisis and that they ‘clearly used the Covid paradigm in our arguments towards the member states’ (interview, European Commission official, September 2022). In a letter addressed to the member states Commissioner Bretton and HR/VP Borrell also underlined the similarity with the COVID-19 situation, in which the Commission’s strong involvement led to the ‘production ramp-up for vaccines’, and argued that the Union should learn and build from this experience (Politico 2022c).

Nevertheless, the area of defence is still sensitive, and some new ideas have not yet been realised. For instance, one idea that was suggested but not incorporated in the May 2022 communication was to have an ‘open trust fund’ co-funded by the Commission and member states for defence. This idea was pushed forward by some Commission officials but also met with resistance from within the Commission (interview, European Commission official, September 2022). Similarly, there were discussions about the idea of a new form of ground-breaking jointly issued bonds to fund energy and defence spending (Bloomberg 2022). As one official explained:

... there was a stage and situation where we looked at all different ideas (...) but there are different reasons why it did not work. For once, we have other big crises to deal with, for instance the reconstruction of Ukraine, and now the energy crisis. We will see if it will come back in the future, as it was one of the test balloons that were tested out in this crisis.

(Interview, European Commission official, September 2022)

These comments show how officials, both at the political and at the bureaucratic level, try to push for more integration (Rhinard 2019). It also demonstrates how this new ‘defence push’ may face internal opposition within the Commission and among the member states, highlighting that the final decisions still lie with the member states. As noted by Anghel and Jones (2022, 12), ‘where common borrowing was the major innovation in the pandemic, so far it remains unavailable in response to the war’.

5. Concluding remarks

The EU’s response to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine is noteworthy. As Bosse (2022, 531) highlights, ‘the EU’s response to the 2022 Russian war against Ukraine has been widely described as unprecedented in scope and unexpected speed, displaying rare unity among its member states’. Therefore, the decisions and initiatives taken are an important focus area in our analysis of the Union today. This article analyses the role that the Commission played in response to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. It shows that the Commission was instrumental in developing different sanctions packages in response to the war. Moreover, the transatlantic coordination process was unprecedented in scope. The article also demonstrates that the Commission used the war to strengthen its role in European defence. However, in the end, the integration outcome is controlled by both the supranational entrepreneurship and the overall political will among the member states.
Both the case of the sanction policy regime and the development within security and defence, including supporting joint procurement of material, are sensitive policy areas where member states have traditionally been hesitant to grant the EU and its institutions a greater policy role. The new developments outlined in this article can, in that regard, be seen as a step forward in the integration process. These findings also resonate with the increasing literature on the weakening of intergovernmentalism within EU security and defence policy development (Bergmann and Müller 2023; Håkansson 2021; Riddervold 2016). Importantly, the findings of this article underline and contribute to a greater understanding of the Commission’s role in EU foreign, security and defence policymaking. And they also feed into the discussion and debate on the more geopolitical European Commission (Haroche 2022).

In the introduction we highlighted the watershed moment for the EU in terms of security and defence. Along with the developments and the Commission’s role outlined in this article, the EU has also taken several new significant steps in its foreign, security and defence policy. For instance, the European Peace Facility (EPF) has been used to provide weapons to a country at war for the first time ever. Furthermore, the EPF has been used, in an unprecedented move, to fund new joint artillery procurement for Ukraine (see also Biscop 2023; Financial Times 2023; Fiott 2023). Underlining that the Union is becoming a more mature foreign, security and defence policy actor. The current crisis has in that regard created an opportunity for new steps to be taken in the European integration process. Since Lisbon, there has however been a discussion on the ‘renationalisation’ or ‘de-Europeanisation’ of European foreign and security policy (Müller, Pomorska, and Tonra 2021). Yet, these new developments and initiatives could indicate a new form of ‘Brusselisation process’ of European security and defence policy.

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Palgrave Studies in European Union Politics


Interviews

European Commission officials (3), VTC, May 2021
European Commission (DG DEFIS) official, Brussels, April 2022
EEAS official, Brussels, April 2022 EDA official, Brussels, April 2022
NATO official, Brussels, April 2022
Member state official, Brussels, April 2022
Member state EU ambassador, Brussels, April 2022
European Commission (DG DEFIS) official, VTC, April 2022
European Commission (SEC-GEN) official, Brussels, September 2022
EEAS official, Brussels, September 2022
Member state representative, Brussels, September 2022
European Commission official, Brussels, September 2022
Starting in 2014 – first under the Juncker Commission, continuing under the current von der Leyen presidency, and into the era of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 – the European Commission has taken unprecedented steps to strengthen European cooperation on security and defence. This thesis analyses in detail the efforts by the Commission to strengthen its role within the EU’s security and defence architecture. The supranationalist approach taken by this set of studies contrasts with earlier studies, which have mainly revolved around the intergovernmental characteristics of the policy field. Within this compilation thesis, three articles map and analyse four significant developments: The European Defence Fund (EDF), the EU Military Mobility project, the 2022 strengthening of sanctions coordination policy, and the new defence industrial initiative launched after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Conceptually and analytically, this dissertation draws on various strands of integration literature, including neofunctionalism, the European Commission’s policy entrepreneurship and agenda setting, and crisis pressure, to explain these policy processes. The thesis concludes that crises have opened windows of opportunity for the European Commission’s supranational policy entrepreneurship within security and defence. These developments, which reveal the conditions under which supranational actors can exert policy influence, have far-reaching implications for cooperation in this increasingly central area of European integration.