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An Ever-Closer Union of Defense?

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Abstract

Since its foundation the EU has most deeply integrated in economic policy areas. The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) stands out as a notable example of intergovernmentalism within an otherwise largely supranational framework. This thesis argues that, explaining why some member states advocate for deeper integration in the field of CFSP, while others remain reluctant to move beyond intergovernmentalism, requires a comprehensive theoretical approach. To leverage the strengths and mitigate the limitations of individual International Relations Theories, this thesis adopts a composite framework, combining Neoclassical Realism, Liberal Institutionalism, and Constructivism to examine the cases of France and Poland. The findings suggest that, although France ostensibly supports deeper integration in the field of CFSP, its backing for supranationalization is conditional on maintaining its perceived leadership role. Conversely, Poland's reluctance stems from a range of factors that ultimately center on concerns about sovereignty. This research is significant because it demonstrates that no single theory of International Relations can fully account for why states are willing to transfer sovereign competences. Instead, integration is the result of strategic, economic, institutional, and ideational factors. This work proposes and encourages a pluralist approach to EU integration research.

Keywords: European Integration, Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), Supranationalism, France, Poland

Kurzzusammenfassung

Die EU hat sich seit ihrer Gründung am stärksten in wirtschaftlichen Bereichen integriert. Die Gemeinsame Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik (GASP) hingegen bleibt ein Bereich des Intergouvernementalismus. Diese Arbeit untersucht, warum Mitgliedsstaaten, wie Frankreich, eine tiefere Integration in der GASP anstreben, während andere, wie Polen, zurückhaltend bleiben. Dafür wird ein theoretischer Rahmen gewählt, der Neoklassischen Realismus, Liberalen Institutionalismus und Konstruktivismus kombiniert. Die Analyse zeigt, dass Frankreichs Unterstützung für eine supranationale GASP von seiner Führungsrolle abhängig ist, während Polens Skepsis vor allem auf Souveränitätsbedenken zurückzuführen ist. Diese Studie macht deutlich, dass keine einzelne Theorie der Internationalen Beziehungen das Integrationsverhalten von Staaten vollständig erklären kann. Stattdessen ist ein pluralistischer Ansatz erforderlich, der strategische, wirtschaftliche, institutionelle und ideelle Faktoren berücksichtigt.

Schlagwörter: Europäische Integration, Gemeinsame Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik (GASP), Supranationalismus, Frankreich, Polen

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*On my honour as a student of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, I submit this work in good faith
and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.*

1. Research Context and Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

Recognizing the perils of great power competition the European Union is at a crossroad. European states have effectively integrated their economies, yet the Union's foreign and defense policies remain, by and large, member state driven, profiting from the United States' security guarantee. An increasingly isolationist US in the west threatening to withdraw from NATO and a bellicose Russia in the east present a conundrum to European security. Can member states make due with the EU's current security architecture or is there a need to go beyond intergovernmentalism?

This thesis aims to explore the domain of European integration, with its manifold challenges and opportunities. Any advancements or regressions are subject to member states' sense of urgency, utility, or benevolence. Fears of future wars in Europe, and the question of how to prevent them, led to the integration of strategic industries among the founding members of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). This ever-evolving process culminated in the EU as we know it today, a supranational economic and political union of European states.

Among economic, monetary, and social competences the ability to pass legislation in the area of security and defense remains notably absent. On the surface it would therefore appear that member states wish to retain exclusive power over their own defense policies. This is because European states vary in their willingness to integrate their defense policies within CSDP and NATO, as well as in the degree of national autonomy they seek to maintain.

In fact, member states vary in their subjective threat perception and cost-benefit calculations, leading to some favoring a Europeanized security architecture and others preferring the already well-established structures within NATO.

Widely speaking, scholarship on the European Union can only gain from the application of a multi-faceted framework that analyzes an issue of timely relevance. The significance of this thesis lies in its contribution to understanding the factors that drive or hinder European defense and foreign policy integration. By analyzing the contrasting approaches of France and Poland, this study sheds light on how historical legacies, security concerns, and institutional preferences shape national positions on European strategic autonomy.

This thesis furthermore contributes to International Relations scholarship by substantiating theoretical elements with real world examples rooted in the interdisciplinary cross section of political science, European law, as well as historiography.

Given the evolving geopolitical landscape and the EU's ambitions for greater defense cooperation, this research provides valuable insights into the future trajectory of European security policy. Its findings may inform policymakers, scholars, and defense strategists on the challenges and opportunities of moving beyond intergovernmentalism in this critical policy area.

1.2 Literature Review

Scientific literature on binding EU security and defense commitments is extensive and presents a variety of both complementary and distinctive perspectives. The overall academic consensus is that the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) as well as the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) are by and large intergovernmental, as they are not governed by legislative instruments (Menon 2013, 71; Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2011, 295).

Notwithstanding, academic literature observes a notion that the area of security and defense is no longer a purely member state driven domain, but supranational institutions have in fact the ability to impact member states' decisions (Brogger 2024; Fiott 2023). However, literature does not agree whether successful integration and a move towards supranationalism have actually happened or not. This controversy revolves mainly around the establishment of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the European Defense Fund (EDF), the Coordinated Annual Review of Defense (CARD) as well as the European Defense Industry Reinforcement Through Common Procurement Act (EDIRPA). Supporters of the idea that PESCO, the EDF, CARD and EDIRPA fulfill the criteria of supranationalism and successful integration argue that the development of military capabilities has become a common European process. By virtue of having become common, the purpose of resulting commitments cannot simply be reduced to one single state's interest. Instead, the purpose of such commitments follows supranational interests. Furthermore, the EDF together with PESCO have given the Commission a say in members' defense budgets, as they are unable to veto investment decisions, as well as how their contributed funds to the EU budget are allocated through the EDF (Brogger 2024, 5).

Moreover, Riddervold (2016) argues, that the Commission had in the cases of EUMSS and Atalanta more influence on CFSP policies as can reasonably be expected in an intergovernmental system, such as the CFSP. Similarly, Rosén and Raube (2018) argue that the European Parliament (EP) has succeeded in extending its influence to matters of CFSP through inter-institutional processes, suggesting that CFSP is not entirely member state driven.

Critics on the other hand argue, that although the European Commission has been endowed with new tools (PESCO, EDF) and is using them innovatively, they do not fulfill the criteria of being irreversible and exclusive. Following a logic of new intergovernmentalism, critics underline that no substantial progress has been made towards a more supranational structure in the defense sector, because the powers the Commission has been granted by PESCO, CARD, or the EDF do not automatically imply deeper integration (Fiott 2023, 458–59). From a business perspective, Weiss and Biermann (2022) posit, that although defense integration is commonly constrained by sovereignty concerns and national control requirements, the Airbus Group is a rare example of successful defense integration, explained by a combination of high politics and micro-level behavior.

Scholars such as Brattberg (2022) suggest that a combination of factors, such as geopolitical challenges, Brexit, the election of Donald Trump as US president, and economic consideration, can explain a perceived increase in demand for defense integration. Brattberg's claim that Brexit is a contributor to an increased demand for defense integration can be supported by Eichenberg's (2003, 638) conclusion that except for British skepticism of a common EU defense, the European public has largely supported the concept of an integrated defense. Similarly, Monaghan (2022, 11) argues that exogenous factors, such as systemic challenges, dynamics between allies, or shocks prevail as enablers for European defense integration. On the other hand, Fiott (2023) posits that the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine has not prompted a substantial EU wide drive toward more supranationalization, instead referring to initiatives by the European Commission as *policy entrepreneurship*.

Others, such as Bunde (2021) propose that defense integration efforts are symbolic in hopes of spillover effects into other areas of EU integration, going as far as suggesting that security integration is pursued to federalize Europe (Gambles 2022). Haroche (2020) argues, that even though defense policy is an area that has only limited supranational dynamics, the implementation of initiatives of the Commission such as the EDF can, from a neo-functionalist perspective, lead to bureaucratic spillovers that may foster further

initiatives, ultimately becoming an autonomous process. Mérand and Angers (2014, 60) argue that defense integration has seen increased popularity not as a result of strategic demands, but instead because discussion centered around burden sharing, capability development, or common procurement, serve to frame defense integration in a more palatable way than more straight forward proposals, such as the implementation of QMV in security matters.

Mader et al. (2024) find that individuals support EU defense integration more strongly in light of a heightened threat perception. The authors suggest that due to the rally-around-the-flag effect, even Eurosceptic citizens may be convinced to support deeper defense integration because of effectiveness considerations. Fabbrini (2024) observes that the EU, legally speaking, could easily revive the European Defense Community (EDC), however, this does not automatically entail political feasibility, due to domestic factors such as parliamentary majorities.

Maher (2021) argues that International Relations Theories offer distinct as well as complementary perspectives on the nature and development of the EU. There is however considerable debate around which variables are most accurate in characterizing European supranationalism or a lack thereof in certain areas. Whereas realists are seemingly pessimistic about the EU's future, a liberal or constructivist line of argumentation is generally more optimistic.

While previous studies have explored EU institutions' involvement in CSFP, as well as variables that might contribute to the understanding of what prompts states to seek integration, comparative analyses applying multiple theoretical lenses to understand diverging preferences in CFSP remain scarce. This thesis addresses that gap through a comparative case study of France and Poland.

1.3 Historical Context: Development of the CFSP

The evolution of the EU's security and defense policy has been long-winded and intricate. Kaoutrakos (2013) suggests that its development can be conceptualized as a pendulum, oscillating between the concepts of supranationalism and intergovernmentalism. Whereas the European Defense Community (EDC) was originally intended to be about defense integration, applying distinctly supranational logic and rejecting an intergovernmental approach, the end result as we know it today, turned out to be the opposite. The term defense

was replaced with security, consciously relegating relevant provisions, as a reminder of member states' sovereign right to make fundamental decisions in the area. Furthermore, security and defense lost its originally intended autonomy, instead becoming part of a much larger framework, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). This has led to security provisions constantly evolving and changing, as such every amendment of EU primary law has also seen amendments in the area of security and defense (Koutrakos 2013, 19–20).

The following section aims to explore CSDP's idiosyncrasies in an attempt to explain what the framework in its current form permits and to lay the foundation to understand why some EU members seek to (re)invigorate a European defense architecture while others prefer to trustily rely on NATO.

1.3.1 Single European Act

The signing of the Single European Act (SEA) in 1986 ushered in a period of optimism and institutionalism. Especially in light of the failure of the EDC, the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957, and uneventful subsequent years, the late 1970s and early 1980s were characterized by “*Europessimism*” and “*Eurosclerosis*” (Moravcsik 1991, 19–20). Nevertheless, in June 1985 the European Council convoked the first Intergovernmental Conference since the Rome treaty with the purpose of amending the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community (EEC Treaty) and drafting a Treaty on political cooperation and European security (Murphy 1985, 17).

With the signing of the SEA the EEC ventured into new areas of activity. These included especially the extension of powers by creating the internal market and introducing the now well-established freedoms of goods, persons, services, and capital. Among numerous new powers, the SEA notably laid the foundation for cooperation in the field of foreign and security policy. Provisions under Article 30 SEA (Official Journal of the European Communities 1986) underlined foremost the joint nature of what European foreign policy had ought to become. Denmark, Greece, and Ireland, however, noticeably shied away from wanting to incorporate substantive security and defense discussions into the European Political Cooperation (Dinan 2021). As such, for the time being, the SEA, under Title III, only referred to the consideration that closer cooperation on questions of European security would contribute to the development of external policy matters (Single European Act 1986,

Art.30(6)(a)). In spite of its general wording, however, Title III was still a significant step in the Community's development, as it provided consistency in external policies and political cooperation between the Presidency and EC Commission. Nevertheless, to fully achieve its potential, the implementation of a coordinated foreign policy necessitated the successful implementation of the internal market provisions (Schildhaus 1989, 551–52). Over the years to come, this has proven to be true and successful, particularly in light of the Maastricht Treaty instituting the European Union and its Common foreign and security policy.

1.3.2 Treaty of Maastricht

The 1992 Treaty of Maastricht constituted a major reform of the previous treaties, creating the three-pillar structure, thus broadening the scope of European integration, and establishing the European Union. The first pillar was conceptualized as the 'European Community' (EC) which was based on the former European Economic Community (EEC), in its scope, however, more ambitious. The second pillar became, what is now known as the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), while Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) constituted the third pillar. Crucially, solely the EC was supranational in character. The CFSP and the JHA both remained intergovernmental, hence the name 'European Union' referred to the system as a whole, meanwhile the EC remained at the core of European integration (Cuyvers 2017, 30).

On the one hand, the creation of the EU with its pillar structure was a landmark in European integration, on the other hand, however, it also highlighted the skepticism towards the conferral of sovereignty in key areas, which had already existed in the years leading up to the SEA and before Maastricht. This meant that although the three pillars existed within the same framework, each one retained its own policymaking procedures. As member states wanted to retain exclusivity especially over matters of internal and external security, the pillar structure served as a way to drive forward integration while limiting the role of the Commission and the European Parliament (EP). Contrary to the supranational character of the first pillar, intergovernmental cooperation within the second and third pillars necessitated consensus in the Council and debarred ECJ participation (Laursen and Vanhoonacker 2021, 7).

The CFSP was implemented as a successor to the European Political Cooperation (EPC) that had, from 1970 onwards, attempted to harmonize European states' foreign policies on an intergovernmental basis. Within the framework of the CFSP, EU members commit themselves to the implementation of all areas of foreign policy, including security and defense. The CFSP is headed by the High Representative, representing EU foreign policy. Within its institutional framework, both national diplomats as well as EU officials meet to make joint policies based on the principle of consensus (Dijkstra and Vanhoonacker 2021, 1–2). Under the Maastricht TEU the dominant involvement of the European Council and Council reflected the predominately member state driven approach of the CFSP. Additionally, the unanimity principle reigned supreme, the Commission had no monopoly on legislative initiative, the European Parliament had no co-decision powers, and the European Court had no jurisdiction as legislative acts are excluded under the CFSP (Engel 2015, 49–50).

Ultimately, the debate over Europe's security role centered on two opposing perspectives. On one side, Atlanticist countries like the United Kingdom, backed by the Netherlands and Portugal, advocated for strengthening a European pillar within NATO. On the other, Europeanists, led by France and Germany and supported by Belgium and Spain, pushed for the creation of an autonomous European security identity. In the end, the Western European Union (WEU) was entrusted with the implementation of security policies, highlighting its distinct intergovernmental nature compared to the EC as a supranational civilian power. Nevertheless, the modest achievements of the Maastricht treaty in the field of security and defense, created the foundation for future treaties to build upon (Laursen and Vanhoonacker 2021, 10).

1.3.3 Treaty of Amsterdam

The 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam amended the Treaty on European Union previously signed in Maastricht in 1992. Its core objectives were enhancing Europe's relevance to its citizens, improving its functioning, preparing it for enlargement toward the east, and strengthening its ability to act on the global stage. Particularly the inability to manage the Yugoslav crisis cast serious doubts on the EU's self-perception as an effective civilian power. As a consequence, discussions on a potential European security architecture, including the

formation of military capabilities, were becoming relevant again (Vanhoonacker 2021, 1–2).

During the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) leading up to the signing of the Amsterdam treaty, the main foreign policy discourse revolved around the creation of a more efficient decision-making process and the build-up of the CFSP's security dimension. The discussion around reforming decision making in the CFSP was marked by disagreement between France and Germany. While Germany proposed to introduce quality majority voting (QMV) in foreign policy decisions, France was opposed to this. In the end, QMV was introduced for the implementation of decisions, while unanimity remained the rule for policy formation. Additionally, the same held true for decisions implementing common strategies—a newly introduced instrument by the European Council designed to establish a general policy framework toward a specific country or region. Lastly, as far as decision-making is concerned, the Treaty of Amsterdam introduced the use of constructive abstention, allowing members to abstain from a decision without blocking it (Vanhoonacker 2021, 7–8).

The introduction of the post of High Representative (HR) was certainly the most significant alteration of the previous treaties. The position of the Secretary-General of the Council was assigned the role of HR, thereafter responsible for abetting the Council in foreign and security policy matters. Additionally, he was also empowered to act on behalf of the Council, at the request of the Presidency, to engage with third parties and represent the Union (Publications Office of the European Union n.d.). Under Art. J.16 of the Treaty of Amsterdam the HR had the mandate to contribute to the “formulation, preparation, and implementation of policy decisions”, however, he was not an autonomous player capable of initiative (Vanhoonacker 2021, 7–8). Furthermore, to improve coherence and coordinate foreign policy positions among member states, the Treaty of Amsterdam established a policy planning and early warning unit under the High Representative. Made up of experts from EU institutions and the WEU, the unit's responsibilities comprise the monitoring of global developments, the assessment of EU interests, the identification of priority areas, the issuance of early warnings, and the preparation of policy briefs for the Council (Publications Office of the European Union n.d.).

Finally, the Treaty of Amsterdam saw the incorporation of the WEU's “Petersberg tasks” under Title V of the TEU. Developing a European security identity remained highly sensitive, with divisions between Atlanticists and Europeanists persisting. Europeanists—

led by France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Spain—pushed for a gradual integration of the Western European Union (WEU) into the EU, as envisioned in Maastricht. However, the UK, prioritizing NATO's primacy, opposed this move and was backed by neutral countries that favored limiting the EU's role to peacekeeping. Incorporating the WEU's Petersberg tasks – humanitarian and peacekeeping missions – into the treaty gained broad support, including from Atlanticists, as it implicitly preserved NATO's lead on collective defense (Pagani 1998, 738–40).

Overall, the Amsterdam TEU was received with limited enthusiasm. Criticism ranges from “limited but not negligible significance for the system” (Philippart 1999, 105) to “modest” (Moravcsik and Nicolaïdis 1999) and “demonstrating a lack of conviction among the Member States” (Neuwahl 1998, 194). As far as the CFSP is concerned, the pillar system was revisited, however, not fundamentally reformed, leading to a blurring of the Maastricht pillar distinctions (Moravcsik and Nicolaïdis 1999, 76).

1.3.4 Treaty of Nice

The Treaty of Nice was drafted with the objective in mind to prepare the EU for its eastern enlargement, planning to welcome ten new member states. It was signed in 2001 and entered into force in February 2003. It was aimed at reforming unresolved institutional issues, the so-called ‘Amsterdam leftovers,’ because if unchanged, the eastern enlargement would have significantly shifted the weighting of votes in favor of smaller countries. Overall, the signatories agreed on institutional reforms of the composition and organization of the Commission, reform of the judicial system, an augmented role of the EP, and crucially, reforms to the weighting of votes in the Council (Mariusz Maciejewski 2024, 1–3).

Until the Nice reforms, voting in the Council had followed weighted decision rules, where each state had been assigned a number of bloc-votes. For adopting an act proposed by the commission the total weight of the votes had to pass a certain quota, while for acts not proposed by the Commission, additionally two-thirds of member states had to vote in favor (Felsenthal and Machover 2001, 431–32). Under the system introduced in the Treaty of Nice, the new voting procedure in the Council changed, to become in essence a system of triple-majority. For Council decisions to be adopted a majority of 74% of member states' weighted votes, cast by a majority of member states, and the representation of 62% of the

EU's total population were needed. The Nice system was criticized for its high thresholds, making ambitious proposals unlikely to be adopted. Larger EU members, such as France or Germany were considered to profit the most from the voting reform (Conall Devaney and Eva-Maria Poptcheva 2014).

Lastly, the Nice Treaty augmented the CFSP by introducing the role of special representatives and establishing the principle that the Council could act as a unified voice in international negotiations (Malovec 2025). It also added reforms aimed at improving decision-making efficiency. Furthermore, the role of the Political and Security Committee was formalized by assigning it responsibility for providing political oversight and strategic guidance in EU crisis management (James 2005).

1.3.5 Treaty of Lisbon

The Treaty of Lisbon Amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty Establishing the European Community, signed in 2007, entered into force in December 2009. It amalgamated the EC, that up to this point had been the sole international organization with legal personality, with the EU, which had been an intergovernmental structure, creating a shared institutional framework. This created the EU as we know it today, a supranational institution, endowed with international legal personality. The Pillar system was replaced in favor of a formal categorization of competences, differentiating between exclusive competences of the EU, shared competences between members and the EU, and competences to support, complement, or coordinate member states actions by the EU. The CFSP saw important reforms as the former position of the High Representative, who was at the same time secretary general of the council, has been replaced by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR). As a Vice-President (VP) of the Commission, the new HR has since been responsible to the European Council and the European Parliament. Additionally, the EU External Action Service was established in support of the HR, independent from the Commission and the General Secretariat of the Council (Ziller 2021, 4–5). The Lisbon Treaty has, furthermore, introduced a Solidary Clause and Mutual Assistance Clause (Howorth 2013, 69).

One of the key reforms of the Lisbon Treaty was the introduction of QMV in form of a double majority vote. This had already been proposed in the European Convention, however, the Lisbon Treaty achieved its implementation. The Lisbon system, as it is still in

place to this day, requires a 55% majority of member states and the representation of 65% of the EU's population. If an act has not been proposed by the Commission or the high representative a so called reinforced qualified majority is needed, this requires the approval of 72% of member states and 65% of the EU population (Conall Devaney and Eva-Maria Poptcheva 2014).

Crucially, for this thesis, the Treaty of Lisbon formalized the CSDP, that had originally been established as the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) at the Cologne European Council in 1999 (Duke 2016, 2–3). Before exploring its initiatives, it is first necessary to briefly characterize CFSP and CSDP with regards to their scope and legal basis. CSDP is a component of CFSP and thus falls under its umbrella. While the CFSP can be considered the overarching policy framework for security and foreign affairs, the CSDP specifically focuses on missions and operations. From a legal point of view, the CFSP falls under Title V, Art. 21-46 TEU. Its main goal is to enable EU member states to speak and act together in foreign and security policy matters.

Although the pillar structure was reformed in favor of conferral of competences, the CFSP has remained intergovernmental. The European Council is stronger involved and has more immediate responsibilities in the area of CSFP than in many other EU policies. Heads of state and government have the last word on any policy decisions, by requiring a unanimous vote. Under the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Council holds responsibility for setting the strategic priorities and goals guiding the EU's external action as a whole, and the CFSP in particular. It also defines the overall policy direction, makes key decisions related to CFSP including those involving defense matters and establishes the EU's common positions on foreign and security policy issues. Additionally, it outlines the EU's strategic response to major international developments and plays a central role in shaping a common defense policy (Devuyst 2012, 329–30).

The CSDP, as mentioned above, is a sub-area within the greater CFSP framework. Its legal basis is rooted in Title V, Section 2, Art. 42-46 TEU, 'Provisions on the Common Security and Defence Policy'. Article 42(1) TEU establishes that the CSDP 'shall provide the Union with an operational capacity drawing on civilian and military assets'. This means that the CSDP equips the Union with the capacity to conduct civilian and military operations beyond its borders, aimed at conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and strengthening international security. Decision-making remains, in line with the CFSP umbrella, intergovernmental, with the Council acting by unanimity on proposals, typically initiated

by the HR. While the European Commission and Parliament have limited formal roles, the Member States retain sovereignty over their armed forces. CSDP initiatives include a growing portfolio of civilian missions and military operations, and mechanisms like Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the European Defence Agency (EDA) support deeper collaboration and capability development among willing states (Krentz 2024).

Lastly, the Lisbon Treaty introduced two types of *passerelle* clause designed to increase flexibility in EU decision-making without requiring formal treaty revisions. The term *passerelle* refers to mechanisms that allow a shift from unanimity to QMV under certain conditions. The Treaty distinguishes between a general *passerelle* clause, which permits this shift in areas requiring unanimity and a legislative procedure, excluding matters related to defense and military, and specific *passerelle* clause, which apply to six predefined policy areas, including CFSP, and involve a simplified procedure (Publications Office of the European Union 2025).

To conclude, decision making within the framework of CFSP would formally allow for QMV in certain areas, but in practice, these provisions remain largely unused. As a result unanimity continues to dominate as the default procedure, effectively preserving the possibility for individual members to exercise veto power and stall collective action (Pomorska and Wessel 2021, 352–53).

2. Analytical Framework and Research Design

2.1 Theoretical Concepts

2.1.1 Realism

From a realist perspective states long for power and will challenge one another in its pursuit (Mearsheimer 2014; Morgenthau 1948). In his approach to international theory, Morgenthau, critically acclaimed as the founding father of classical realism, proposes that armed strength is the decisive material factor for nations' political power. Accordingly, international politics revolve around a never ending struggle to dominate, as states intrinsically seek ever greater power (Morgenthau 1948, 14–17). Another key realist

characteristic is the state system's inherently anarchic nature. To survive states are pressed to seek greater power. In a nuanced disagreement to Morgenthau's perception, Kenneth Waltz's neorealism proposes that the anarchic system makes states, all of whom are in a constant state of survival, hungry for power (Waltz 2010, 111). In classical and neorealist world politics, states are considered to be the main actors, and special emphasis is placed on so called "great powers", i.e. states that possess the ability to bend the international system to their will. Offensive realists, like Mearsheimer, argue that state behavior is predominantly shaped by their surroundings, as opposed to their internal characteristics, such as for example, form of government or normative based thinking. Consequently, realist thinking does not render judgment on the morality of a state. Be it a democracy, be it an autocracy, irrespective of their culture or identity, states follow the same rational. Lastly, power is always the core consideration of states. In this sense going to war is but a tool among a vast repertoire of statecraft-instruments (Mearsheimer 2014, 50).

Classical and neorealism are often being criticized by scholars for their inability to comprehend the roots of international conflict. Critics refer to the notion that classical and structural realism champion universal application, irrespective of time, culture, or geography (Acharya 2014; Foulon and Meibauer 2020). In an attempt to balance classical and structural elements of realism, neoclassical realism broadens its parameters to combine systemic and unit level variables. Neoclassical realism agrees with the realist rationale, that the behavior of states is subject to material power capabilities and relative standing in the international system. However, in a neoclassical perspective foreign policy decisions are impacted by politicians' and elites' perceptions of relative power. Accordingly, neoclassical realism closely examines the political situation of states and how this impacts their foreign policy (Rose 1998, 146–47). In spite of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the EU and NATO both persisted and thrived, contrary to structural realist expectations that integration and alliances end due to the lack of a common enemy. Accordingly, to analyze EU integration in a modern context and in light of normative behavior, a multi-layered approach has to be favored. Going beyond the realist core assumptions of relative power and primacy of the anarchical international system, neoclassical realism offers an extended analysis by including state-level variables that can incentivize state behavior, but not dictate it (Foulon 2015, 639). However, great power competition and uncertainty remain central concepts of neoclassical realism. Additionally, it is important to remember not to confuse constructivism as a subordinate school of thought within neoclassical realism, as this would

both undermine constructivism's theoretical distinctiveness, as well as ignore key conceptual differences between the two theories (Dyson 2013, 134–35).

As states are primarily concerned with their own survival, sovereignty should be considered a core principle. Losing the ability to exercise power over its territory and people would mean that a state failed in achieving its primary interests: survival. Yet states join alliances and create supranational entities upon who they willingly confer sovereign competences. According to Waltz' neorealism, states are willing to cede power only when it is in line with their national interests. Thus, states will join alliances or organizations to improve their relative position in an anarchic international system, as a means of self-help (Waltz 2010, 111). Furthermore, states will join alliances or cede sovereignty in search of power maximization when faced with a strong rival (Mearsheimer 2014, 266–67). A more nuanced argument proposes that states differentiate between “high” and “low” politics, allowing for integration in the latter while retaining sovereignty over the former. Whether a particular policy area falls into one or the other category is decided by how essential it is considered to be by a state's government. Hence, from a realist viewpoint economic and monetary policies are considered to be “low” politics and European states are consequently willing to cede competences in these areas, meanwhile foreign and defense policies are understood as “high” politics, inherent to the states survival (Hoffman and Tsoukalis 1982, 29–30). Conversely, states might make sovereignty concessions in areas such as defense, if this better guarantees their survival. Additionally, states make use of international organizations to maximize their relative power (Dyson 2013, 138).

In sum realism focuses on power dynamics, national interests, and survival in an anarchic international system. Consequently, following a realist rationale we can expect that (Expectation 1):

- *France may seek to move beyond intergovernmentalism in foreign and defense policy to increase its power and security, only while retaining its leadership and gaining international influence.*
- *Poland may resist deeper integration due to its existing relative power capabilities, and the perceived importance of defense as “high” politics, in light of its geopolitical location and threats.*

2.1.2 Liberalism

Liberalism is a vast field of international relations and should not be seen as a single theory but instead as an ensemble of various overlapping perspectives that emphasize different aspects of international cooperation. While disagreements between different liberal schools of thought exist, a common and simplified liberal core binds them together. Liberalism generally acknowledges the primacy of individuals and private groups, it considers both anarchy and interdependence to be critical characteristics of the state system and it argues that international institutions are key in handling state interaction (Maher 2021, 92).

To highlight some of the differences between key liberal schools of thought institutionalism argues that the international system is more stable thanks to a common ruleset and international organizations. That is, because cooperation between states is a highly political process that requires planning and negotiation (Keohane 2011, 10; Katzenstein et al. 1998, 662–63), especially in regards to the dilemma of how cooperation can exist without hegemony (Keohane 2005, 11). Commercial liberalism focuses on how economic interdependence reduces the likelihood of war because states benefit more from trade than they would from conflict. Complex interdependence, as characterized by Joseph Nye, recognizes that the current international organizations, such as the UN, “*favor coalitions of the small and powerless*”, meaning especially smaller states should seek economic linkage strategies (Keohane and Nye 2001, 30–31). Another liberalist theory worth mentioning is the Democratic Peace Theory. It argues that democracies rarely, if ever, go to war with each other because they share norms of peaceful conflict resolution and political accountability. On the other hand alliances between liberal and non-liberal states, solely on the pretext of common strategic interests, have proven ephemeral, and economic ties for the most part feeble (Doyle 1986, 1162). Furthermore, Democratic Peace Theory highlights the importance of domestic structures. These are important as they translate liberal preferences into foreign policy, thus giving the people leverage over international relations (Owen 1994, 99). Lastly, Liberal Intergovernmentalism is a notable theory in the context of European integration. Andrew Moravcsik (1993, 1995, 1997) characterizes Liberal Intergovernmentalism as state centric based on domestic interests. Cooperation between states results from negotiation between them, institutions are not independent actors, but they are instead seen as a tool by states that serves their interests. Preferences arise from domestic social and economic pressures. By and large, Liberal Intergovernmentalism focuses on how internal political dynamics end up shaping external preferences. However,

as opposed to constructivist theory, domestic preferences are based on material interests and they are fixed or pre-formed through domestic competition (Moravcsik 1997, 517).

Liberal Institutionalism, on the other hand, focuses on the question of institutional dynamics and how states cooperate once their preferences are known. Institutional theory takes preferences as exogenously given and focuses on the systemic level. It attempts to explain how in spite of preferential differences states can engage in cooperation. Keohane (2005, 51–52) notes that *'intergovernmental cooperation takes place when the policies actually followed by one government are regarded by its partners as facilitating realization of their own objectives, as the result of a process of policy coordination.'*

While Liberal Intergovernmentalism is powerful in explaining how the shaping of preferences influences international negotiations it views institutions as passive arenas for state interaction. In the context of this thesis liberal institutionalism provides a stronger theoretical framework for understanding European integration, as it focuses on how the EU as an institution shapes and constrains state behavior. Furthermore, the EU embodies Liberal Institutionalism by having created supranational institutions, such as the European Commission that can act independently from any single member state's will. Eliminating trade barriers, using a common currency, and encouraging investment have led to a deeply rooted interdependence between European states.

European integration is a prime example of how states chose to give up some of their sovereign powers in favor of material cost-benefit calculations (Moravcsik 1993). Cooperation is facilitated by interdependence, on the one hand serving the prime goal of making war between European states unthinkable, and on the other hand allowing for the realization of additional material gains for member-states. Therefore, states cooperate to maximize their economic interests within the framework of global economic interdependence. One such instance can be observed in the establishment of the European Defense Fund (EDF) and the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). While these were initially established as platforms for common funding and procurement, a spillover effect can also be observed as the European Commission, through these mechanisms, can influence member-states defense spendings (Brogger 2024).

In the area of CSDP, institutionalists argue that European institutions facilitate the potential of the EU to be a significant actor in international security. According to Menon (2011) institutionalism provides a more convincing explanation of the CSFP than other approaches

that may underestimate the significance of institutions. Importantly, the CFSP seen as an institution may play a role in preventing “great” European powers, such as France and Germany, to dominate security and defense policies. Nonetheless, Menon also proposes that an institutional approach should not neglect the importance of conflict in institutional evolution. He argues furthermore, that the impact of institutions may also be negative, impeding initially intended change on the domestic level (Menon 2011, 96).

The liberal institutionalist expectation is notably different from the realist expectation, as it focuses to a larger extent on institutional dynamics as well as economic incentives rather than security, strategy, and survival.

Following an institutional perspective, we can expect that (Expectation 2):

- *Larger and more powerful states, such as France, want to go beyond intergovernmentalism because the institutional structure would favor them and allow them to retain a comparative leadership position within a supranational framework.*
- *Smaller and less powerful states may not want to integrate further because they fear that such an institutional structure would potentially lead to the loss of influence and leverage an intergovernmental structure provides.*
- *States that see an opportunity to realize economic gains want to integrate further.*

2.1.3 Constructivism

In its essence constructivism challenges materialist assumptions of liberalism and realism. Constructivism attempts to go beyond traditional core principles such as power, institutions, and economics, and rather focuses on how identities and norms shape international politics (Checkel 2004, 230–31). Key assumptions of Constructivism are, on the one hand, that the international environment is both social and material, but material structures are meaningful only because of their social context. On the other hand, Constructivism assumes that the international system can be represented by both states and other actors. Crucially, socialization may result in the creation of a shared identity among states and can then lead to mutually beneficial cooperation (Maher 2021, 93).

Importantly, Constructivism holds that state identities and interests are not fixed or given, but are instead socially constructed through historical experience, norms, and interaction. This is a crucial difference to rationalist theories such as realism, which tends to treat state

interests as objective and largely determined by the anarchic structure of the international system. Similarly, institutionalist theories often conveniently assume that identities are stable or exogenously given, and thus disregard more profound processes through which preferences are actually formed. By focusing on the constitutive role of social norms, discourse, and identity, constructivism offers a more nuanced theoretical framework to understand how states behave (Ruggie 1998, 879–80).

Constructivism also argues, that security and foreign policy may be strongly influenced by factors outside rational interest (Wendt 1992, 406–7; Katzenstein 1996, 65). Dyson (2013) argues, that as far as the CSDP is concerned, constructivist accounts assume that European states are able to escape the pervasive effects of international relations anarchy by establishing supranational institutions, a proposition that is also acceptable from an institutionalist perspective. The author furthermore suggest that military operations, taking place under the guise of supranational institutions encourage convergence in national strategic and military cultures (Dyson 2013, 132–33).

Critics of constructivism argue that norms and identity shape international politics only insofar as there are also tangible material or strategic benefits. Examples commonly provided are the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) that heavily subsidizes European farming, at the cost of pushing farmers from developing countries into poverty due to distorted world market prices (Dyson 2013, 118). Hyde-Price (2008, 43) concludes that EU foreign and security policy that is rooted in second-order normative concerns will render the EU a victim to international security competition.

Additionally, constructivist assumptions may be prone to domestic political volatility. In their research Memoli and Di Mauro (2016) found that when people are concerned, they tend to reject EU policies as well as the EU system as a whole. While Europeans seldomly contemplate changing their domestic regime, faced with a dramatic crisis they find it easier to discard the European system (Memoli and Di Mauro 2016, 67–68).

Notwithstanding, constructivism also has practical limitations and challenges. Houghton (2007, 39–41), criticizes that Constructivism faces epistemological tensions, ontological problems, and empirical limitations that keep it from functioning as a comprehensive framework. Moreover, Sterling-Folker and Badie (2012, 105–6) posit that '*constructivism is not simply the claim that ideas matter.*' it offers a broader theoretical framework that emphasizes the analytical interconnection between interaction, identity, ideas, materialism,

social meaning, agency, and structure. Overall, the critique of constructivism doesn't invalidate its insights but rather suggests that there is a need for integration with other analytical approaches.

Consequently, for this work constructivism is of interest, because it offers an opportunity to analyze variables that rationalist theories simply assume as exogenously given. Assuming that norms and identity indeed influence decisionmakers, public opinion ought to be crucial in explaining security and foreign policy behaviors of states.

Following a constructivist perspective, we can expect that (Expectation 3):

- *France, seeing itself as a deeply European country is more willing to integrate.*
- *Poland, placing heavy emphasis on national sovereignty is resisting deeper integration.*

2.2 Research Question

The main objective of this thesis is to explore European integration in the field of security and defense. The guiding research question at the heart of this thesis is: Why do some European states seek to move beyond intergovernmentalism in foreign and security policy, while others resist deeper integration?

Historically, development in the area of foreign and security policy has drastically differed compared to the economic sector. While economic unification has been the key characteristic of the European Union ever since its creation, military unification failed due to several factors, the most prominent being the French rejection of the European Defense Community (EDC) in 1954. CFSP has consequently remained intergovernmental in nature ever since.

This thesis attempts to answer how different variables such as national sovereignty, the transatlantic security architecture, divergent threat perceptions, economic incentives, institutional commitments, political identity, and social norms can explain different member states' reluctance or willingness to confer sovereign powers upon supranational entities, and to what extent these variables are interconnected or mutually exclusive.

2.3 Methodology

The research presented in this thesis is qualitative in nature and will be conducted in form of a case-study (Bennet and George 2005). Where relevant, quantitative data, such as economic indicators, is used to contextualize findings, however, these data points are not used for statistical analysis, but rather to deepen the case-based analysis of this thesis. To account for the complexity of European integration and address the limitations inherent in any single theoretical perspective, this study adopts a composite theoretical framework. By complementarily employing neoclassical realism, liberal institutionalism, and constructivism, this work attempts to leverage the theories' respective strengths, while minimizing their individual shortcomings. To answer the research question, analytical expectations derived from neoclassical realism, liberal institutionalism, and constructivism serve as the theoretical backbone. The aim is to analyze whether these expectations can be substantiated and if so, to what extent.

The cases of France and Poland serve as the main objects of analysis. I chose to utilize a multi-dimensional model to study the interconnectedness of strategic, economic, and domestic variables. The composite theoretical framework provides a comprehensive approach to international relations theory, necessary to appropriately assess the intricate subject of state sovereignty in continental Europe. A case by base approach is used to bridge discrepancies between theory and actuality, the aim being, to show how divergent variables impact the European integration process in a field that is considered to be "high" politics.

The selection of France and Poland as case study subjects is grounded in the differences between the two countries. France could arguably be considered the epitome of a western European state due to its history as a founding member of the European community and its geographical location. Although France has historically opposed unifying European military capabilities, it has now become a leading figure in the Europeanization of security and defense policy. Poland on the other hand, is a prime example of what some scholars refer to as 'new Europe' (Bialasiewicz and Minca 2005; Sedivy and Zaborowski 2004). Being a major NATO frontline state and former member of the Warsaw Pact, Poland's approach to European security strongly favors the transatlantic aegis over a potential European way. In light of the Russo-Ukrainian war and changing US strategic priorities, France and Poland advocate for different security architectures, making them particularly interesting for this case study.

The case study focuses on the geopolitical events in the wake of the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea and the subsequent developments in international politics. Where applicable reference to historic events will be made.

This thesis is interdisciplinary in nature, focusing on international relations theory and its application, while also incorporating legal and historical elements. Besides the focus on theory and the examination of the case studies in light of the constructed analytical expectations I will analyze and interpret EU initiatives and legislation, domestic level politics and historically relevant events to substantiate my expectations.

2.4 Key Concepts

Intergovernmentalism and *supranationalism* are crucial concepts this thesis will build upon. Before attempting to unpack any substantive issues on the matter, it is first necessary to define these two terms. According to Helene Sjursen (2011, 1081–82) intergovernmentalism follows four complementary criteria: (1) exclusively sovereign states may possess decision making powers; (2) states have the right to veto any decision they disagree with; (3) powers are only ever delegated and can be revoked; (4) the intergovernmental system is established to serve member state interests first and foremost.

Conversely, supranationalism may be characterized by (1) supranational institutions' involvement in decision making that affects member states; (2) an inability of states to veto decisions; (3) conferral of powers that cannot simply be reversed; (4) commitments made do not reflect the interests of any single state (Brogger 2024, 5). Additionally, supranationalism may be characterized by (5) “*the ability to wield regulatory, legislative, or judicial authority without first securing member-state consent (nonconsensual authority)*”; (6) *over matters that are typically within the exclusive jurisdiction of states (jurisdictional primacy)*” (Oates 2020, 5).

Deeper integration, as understood in this study, refers primarily to the process of procedural integration, more specifically, the process of shifting decision-making in the CFSP from intergovernmental toward more centralized, flexible, and potentially supranational mechanisms. As such, this work focuses primarily on the adoption of QMV for CFSP decisions in the Council of the European Union. Such a procedural change would illustrate a broader trend towards unity in EU foreign policy, however, it remains contentious due to its implications for national sovereignty.

3. Case Study Analysis

The selection of France and Poland as case study subjects is deliberate. Despite their different historical trajectories, they offer valuable insights into how theoretical frameworks apply across contrasting contexts. Their differences in size, geopolitical positioning, and historical experience allow for broad theory testing, particularly in examining rationalist and constructivist approaches. At the same time, these differences represent a limitation of the study, as the cases are not directly comparable in all respects. This trade-off highlights the friction between generalizability and contextual specificity in case-based research.

3.1 Case Study France

This chapter seeks to explore France's position and approach to deeper integration in the field of CFSP, focusing particularly on the European sovereignty discourse that got popularized by French President Emmanuel Macron. Ostensibly, Macronist France's strong advocacy for a stronger and more united Europe (Macron 2017) appears to have broken with its traditional Gaullist philosophy of national sovereignty. But behind the veneer of pro-European rhetoric, Macron's agenda for Europe has been criticized for its vagueness and imprecise explanation of what is actually meant by closer integration or Strategic Autonomy (Vallée 2022).

3.1.1 Historical Perspective and Transatlantic Relations

To understand France's position on transatlantic relations and consequently its ambitions within Europe, it is crucial to acknowledge the pervasive influence of Gaullism on French national identity and strategic culture. Gaullism constitutes not merely a historical political movement but a foundational element of France's conception of itself as a sovereign and exceptional actor on the international stage. Within the context of cold war bi-polarity, de Gaulle developed national greatness '*grandeur*' and the pursuit of global standing '*rang*' as key pillars '*grandes lignes*' of French foreign policy. Above all, these key principles of Gaullism were developed as a claim of non-dependence on both the US and the Soviet Union and a proposal for an alternative, independent bid for global influence (Treacher 2020, 96–97).

In the wake of the Fifth Republic, French foreign policy has continued to build upon the aforementioned Gaullist principles, arguably incorporating four key elements: *(1) historical legitimacy for its role; (2) powerful national institutions; (3) representation at the core of key global and regional institutions; (4) strong instruments for power projection that cover both hard power and soft power* (Rieker 2017, 18).

Allin (2011) describes de Gaulle's perception of the US as: "*De Gaulle's essential view was that America had more power than was good for the world, more than it sometimes understood and yet less than it often imagined.*" This way of thinking would go on to constitute the leitmotif for Franco-US relations even decades later under President Jacques Chirac (Allin 2011, 99).

Nonetheless, Gaullist philosophy has arguably evolved over time. During de Gaulle's presidency Gaullism recognized the superiority of the nation state compared to any constraints on autonomy, both supranational and alliance based. Gaullist philosophy was furthermore markedly focused on *rang* and power in global politics, as well as an equidistant relationship to bipolar superpower confrontation, underlining its differences from US hegemony whenever the occasion would allow so. Chiefly, the rejection of US dominance, and the pursuit of autonomy and national *grandeur* were transformed by de Gaulle into a consistent foreign policy, which eventually led to France's withdrawal from NATO's integrated command structure in 1966/67. This symbolized a broader Gaullist commitment to independence and a belief in France's unique global role. Overall, French security and defense policy has evolved by balancing autonomist and integrative policies on the one hand, and commitments to the EU and NATO on the other. This culminated in an EU favoring national identity with reservation towards the US (Ostermann 2019, 4–5).

While France is formally allied with the US, scholarly arguments suggest that France has often defined itself in contrast to American power, especially US unilateralism. French skepticism toward the US has frequently been fueled by disagreements over trade, international influence, global governance, military intervention strategies, and broader concerns about US political and cultural dominance. Particularly the ongoing rivalry for global influence has been identified as a key source for bilateral tension. Franco-US relations have, furthermore, been volatile over the years. There have both been times where France has set aside its traditional *rang* and *grandeur* in favor of closer transatlantic cooperation, and times where France has experienced renewed periods of adherence to Gaullist philosophy and strategic independence (Hellman 2024, 207).

The above-mentioned volatility in Franco-American relations is especially well reflected at the turn of the century, with the French participation in the military operations in Afghanistan 2001, the Gulf of Aden (Atalanta) 2007, Libya 2011, and the non-participation in Iraq 2003. While the former, crucially Atalanta and Libya, were manifested European attempts at US-independent crisis management, the latter, Iraq, saw no French participation, on the grounds of a lack of a clear UN mandate and international legitimacy, as argued by then president Jacques Chirac (Hellman 2016, 40–43). The French non-intervention in Iraq was also fueled by longstanding skepticism toward American unilateralism as well as a commitment to multilateral diplomacy as a means of maintaining international order. France's objection was not only strategic, but also symbolic, as it sought to assert the French way as an alternative to the US dominant vision of international relations. Thus France attempted to act as a moral counterweight to US dominance, engaging in a delicate balancing act (Rieker 2017, 89–91). Nevertheless, France's refusal to follow the US into battle created friction with Washington and particularly Eastern European allies, who saw the US and NATO as essential to their security architecture (*The Irish Times*, 2003).

The presidency of Jacques Chirac was an important chapter in the development of France's foreign and defense policies. The role of Gaullist autonomy was, again, seen as central to national identity and Gaullist philosophy dictated the discourse of politics and policies. Yet, Gaullism under Jacques Chirac was also interpreted and implemented plially. Although France remained outside NATO's integrated military command structure during Chirac's tenure (1995-2007), it played nonetheless an active role in the alliance's political and military missions. France's integrative pursuits in the realm of European foreign and security policy remained intergovernmental during this time, owing to Gaullist traditional thinking. Notwithstanding, France kept pushing strongly in favor of EU institutionalization and actorship capabilities, such as the integration of the WEU into the EU, standing headquarters, and common headline goals. Conversely, Chirac's failure to reintegrate France into NATO's command structure did not lead to an end of French cooperation with NATO. In fact, France continued its participation in NATO missions such as Kosovo. Thus, Chirac tried to carefully balance France's position in the new, post-cold war, multipolar world order, in which France could assert itself independently of American dominance. Rather than isolating France, Chirac, along with German help, saw success in pushing forward key ESDP initiatives during this period (Ostermann 2019, 88–90).

Having briefly explored Jacques Chirac's Gaullist approach to French foreign and defense policy, it is also necessary to examine France's shift back to Atlanticism under President Nicolas Sarkozy (2007-2012), in order to attempt to paint the whole picture of France's foreign relations volatility. By contrast to Chirac's presidency, Sarkozy initiated a shift toward what could be described as pragmatic Atlanticism, without entirely discarding Gaullist principles. Sarkozy's arrival into office marked a thawing period of Franco-US relations, especially on strategic questions (Treacher 2020, 112).

In 2009 Sarkozy reintegrated France into NATO's military command structure, reversing de Gaulle's 1966 withdrawal, and achieving what Chirac had not been able to during his presidency. The decision was presented as a practical move, designed to increase France's influence within NATO, particularly at a time when NATO was engaged in major operations in Afghanistan. Sarkozy's main rationale was the idea of developing European defense and France's position in NATO in parallel. Consequently, this rapprochement was necessary as a way to ensure France would have a seat at the table where key decisions were being made. Importantly, France retained control over its nuclear deterrent (Ostermann 2019, 95–96). The Sarkozy years were, furthermore, a key time period in which the discourse on European defense moved away from an abstract, Gaullist understanding of autonomy toward an integrative interpretation, guided by pragmatism and effectiveness, which began to replace the prior social logic of traditional autonomy. The signing of the Lisbon treaty and the formalization of the CSDP also led to a stronger emphasis on European defense integration, than in the years before (Ostermann 2019, 112).

In summary, this section has delineated, although succinctly and only scratching the surface, the historical foundations of France's approach to both its transatlantic relationship with the US and its role in European integration. It highlighted Gaullism – with its emphasis on *grandeur*, *autonomy*, and *rang* – as the central philosophical framework guiding French foreign policy in the Cold War era and beyond. It is crucial to keep in mind that the principle of intergovernmentalism was a leitmotif in France's position on European integration, thus closer European integration can be interpreted to refer to closer cooperation within Europe rather than supranationalization. While Gaullism, in principle serves to understand France's longstanding support for a more integrated European defense, this thesis argues that this alone is insufficient to fully explain the reasons behind France's behavior. Chiefly, the evolving discourse on European strategic autonomy, combined with geopolitical shocks such as Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022,

and Donald Trump's increasingly isolationist US, point to deeper structural and normative drivers. These global developments suggest a need for a more detailed explanation, that engages with a more diverse set of qualitative variables, looking beyond merely historical arguments.

The following sections will connect theory and recent developments, in an attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis and substantive arguments.

3.1.2 The Neoclassical Argument

Core Assumption

- *France may seek to move beyond intergovernmentalism in foreign and defense policy to increase its power and security, only while retaining its leadership and gaining international influence.*

I. Macron's Strategic Autonomy

Gaullism embodies key elements of realist theory: it is grounded in a pragmatic pursuit of power, wherein France seeks to enhance its influence through all available means, including the instrumentalization of European integration projects. French initiatives within the European Union, such as its leadership in PESCO and advocacy for European "strategic autonomy," are arguably less about collective European empowerment than about reinforcing France's position within a multipolar world order.

The 2013 French White Paper on Defense and National Security established, for the first time, strategic autonomy as the principle pillar of its external intervention strategy and defense industry (French Ministry of Defense 2013). A clear continuation of Gaullist autonomy, French strategic autonomy is conditional on its nuclear deterrent, referencing autonomy of decision and action rooted in control of capabilities vital to national security and defense (Lefebvre 2021, 8).

In 2013, France's pursuit of the newly defined 'strategic' autonomy remained primarily centered on national sovereignty, rather than a broader European project. At that time, trust in NATO persisted at a relatively stable level, and while France maintained its traditional skepticism toward the Alliance, there were not extraordinary tensions or ruptures, especially considering that France had reintegrated into NATO's unified command structure merely four years ago. France, under President François Hollande, committed

'wholeheartedly' (French Ministry of Defense 2013, 20) to NATO and its collective security commitments while crucially upholding its independent defense and security capabilities.

From a neoclassical perspective, France was still predominantly preoccupied with consolidating its own power, influence, and autonomy within existing structures. As such, there was little impetus to push beyond intergovernmentalism toward deeper supranational integration. Enhancing capabilities through intergovernmental mechanisms and maintaining strategic leeway was considered to be sufficient to meet its security requirements.

In contrast, Macron's 2017 Sorbonne speech presented a landmark in the way France framed European security. Delivered in the wake of Donald Trump's election as US president and growing doubts about the reliability of US security guarantees (Macron 2017, 4), the speech responded to mounting concern over whether the US would continue to uphold European defense. It was in this context that Macron introduced the goal of building European sovereignty by establishing a more assertive EU defense policy, strategic autonomy, and overall greater weakening of the state in favor of more supranational governance (Bora 2023, 1287–88).

The call for strategic autonomy can also be observed in the 2017 Strategic Review, highlighting the fact that France remained the only nuclear power and permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in the EU. Particularly, the report underlines the need to preserve France's strategic autonomy, as well as help to build a stronger Europe (French Ministry of Defense 2017b). The Defence and National Security Strategic Review, furthermore, highlighted France's commitments to security, focusing *'first on Europe, bilateral European cooperation agreements, and the transatlantic relationship'* (French Ministry of Defense 2017a, 56). Although the report acknowledges NATO as *'a key component of European security'* it nevertheless recognizes a growing divergence of the European and American political landscapes as well as *'recent political changes'* and *'serious concerns in Europe, more so than in the past'* (French Ministry of Defense 2017a, 58).

Within the framework of neoclassical realism, Macron's 2017 speech and developments thereafter provide a compelling case for the theory's relevance. Neoclassical realism emphasizes the constraints and pressures of the international system, while also acknowledging the significant role that domestic politics and leadership play in shaping a

state's foreign policy (Lobell et al. 2009, 280). In contrast to 2013, we can observe that on the one hand, the global political landscape has changed. On the other hand, the domestic discourse and perception of leaders has shifted. Scholarship has argued that discursive practices may be consequential in influencing foreign policy debates, especially in regard to European integration (Bora 2023, 1281). The 2017 Sorbonne speech was important inasmuch as it led to the mainstreaming of the European sovereignty and strategic autonomy discussions. However, it is essential to keep in mind, that the pursuit of European sovereignty and closer integration is not owing to French goodwill towards its European peers. In fact, realist tradition would suggest that it serves its own survival first and foremost. France thus sees European sovereignty and strategic autonomy as a means of expanding its own sovereignty and global clout. Consequently, it is only willing to do so, if it retains leadership and an improved platform to advocate its '*grandeur*' in the international arena.

While strategic autonomy makes a strong case within the neoclassical framework, particularly when it comes to domestic-level factors, it's only part of the bigger picture. To fully flesh out the neoclassical argument, other dimensions still need to be considered.

II. Threat Perception - France's response to Russia (2014, 2022)

Attempting to explain European integration with realist theories of international relations has notoriously presented a challenge to IR scholars. One controversial attempt to do so was made by Rosato (2011). He proposed that the EC can be best understood as a strategic response by major Western European powers, particularly France and Germany, to manage their own historic rivalries, but importantly, to balance against the Soviet Union. Faced with the sheer magnitude of the Soviet threat, Western European leaders recognized that individual efforts would be insufficient to protect against the communist threat. As a result, they intended to pool their sovereignty and build a shared economic and political framework, capable of coordinating military and economic strength under a central authority (Rosato 2011, 2–4).

Now, Rosato's realist approach has been criticized for being unpersuasive in showing that realist factors indeed dominated in the creation of the EC, for mischaracterizing existing scholarly arguments, and for its inability to advance either new arguments or new evidence supporting its claim (Moravcsik 2013, 775–77). Nonetheless, the idea that states choose to integrate in the face of a rapidly changing international system and an overwhelming

external threat is a line of reasoning worth exploring for the purposes of this argument. This is especially timely, as debate on the topic of closer integration, saw an increase in the wake of Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine (Drachenberg and Bacal 2024).

Certainly, Russia’s annexation of Crimea and its invasion of Ukraine, can be seen as a challenges to US unipolarity. They can also be seen as a challenge to the EU’s regional predominance, and consequently a threat to French *grandeur*. Yet, the difference to the early cold war period, I argue, is that Russia doesn’t present an overwhelming threat. Whereas the Soviet Union was a military and industrial powerhouse, vastly outnumbering French and German militaries, Russia isn’t anymore. Even when comparing EU members individually to Russia, we can observe that although smaller in population and territory, the GDP of Germany, France, and Italy is greater than Russia’s. Furthermore, although numbers suggest that Russian active military forces outnumber both Germany’s and France’s by 6 to 1 and 4 to 1 respectively, this is, in military terms, not drastic. However, when taking EU members cumulatively, we can observe that the balance of power shifts in the EU’s favor. Numbers suggest that the EU’s total number of active military personnel actually outnumbers Russia’s. Paired with a population that is approximately three times higher, and an economy that is ten times as productive, it would be irrational to consider Russia an overwhelming threat to European security.

Table1

Power Indicators

State/Bloc	Population (mil)	GDP (bil \$)	Forces (2024, active)	Defense Spending total (2024, bil of \$)
EU-27	448.3	19.99 thousand	1,470,000*	326
Germany	84.1	4.74 thousand	183,500	88.5
France	66.7	3.21 thousand	270,000	64.7
Russia	143,9	2.08 thousand	1,100,000	149

*including UK (Burilkov and Wolff 2025)
Sources: (IMF 2025); (Worldometer 2025); (Statista Research Department 2025b); (World Population Review 2025a, 2025b); (Trading Economics 2025c, 2025b, 2025a)

Does this imply that Russia poses no threat to Europe? Certainly not, as threat perception is, by virtue of being a perception, subjective and varies across states and contexts. Crucially, neoclassical realism accounts for domestic-level variables, including the influence of political leaders. As fallible actors, these leaders may behave in ways that

deviate from the rationality assumed by structural realism, potentially shaping foreign policy outcomes in unpredictable or non-strategic ways.

III. Perceived weakness in defense capabilities

Another argument to put forward, that ties closely into threat perception, is that France perceives a weakness in its own and European defense and accordingly sees closer integration as a solution to this problem. This perceived weakness is in response to a plurality of emerging threats that exist along a continuum and fall below NATO's Article V threshold. Consequently, France might perceive the EU to have the potential to be better equipped with issues of homeland and cyber security, terrorism, energy security etc. (Brogger 2024, 411).

In fact, Heofler et al. (2024) suggest, that the EU has a comparative advantage in dealing with arms transfers to Ukraine and military capacity-building, where NATO has so far been absent. As such, a division of labor between the two organizations can be observed (Hoeffler et al. 2024, 3240–41). Conversely, however, Hoeffler et al. also argue, that the CSDP has never sought to replace NATO and even France realized, that in the face of crisis cooperating within the framework of existing structures presents itself as the more effective option (Hoeffler et al. 2024, 3241). While a realist perspective would thus suggest that European integration is driven by power dynamics and the need for security, faced with recent Crisis, both the EU and NATO saw strengthening. As France has not been existentially threatened in recent years, a full-on push to replace existing NATO structures seems unlikely, as perceived weaknesses in defense capabilities could be better improved by focusing on each institution's respective strengths.

Dyson (2016) proposes, that '*executive autonomy*' plays an important role in shaping the European security landscape. Whereas high executive autonomy permits leaders or governments to make radical changes, even in the absence of imperatives of the international environment, low executive autonomy may undermine ambitions of closer integration. An example, of high executive autonomy, was President Sarkozy's reintegration of France into NATO's unified command structure. Dyson argues that, with political stability at home and no immediate pressure to campaign for reelection, Sarkozy had the freedom to depart from core Gaullist principles. He chose to focus on maintaining France's influence in the international system, even if it meant sidelining traditional Gaullist pillars, such as strategic autonomy and distrust of US-led security guarantees

(Dyson 2016, 38–40). Conversely, low executive autonomy, according to Dyson, has significantly slowed Germany's pace of military reform. Accordingly, it may discourage daring reforms due to the domestic political risk associated for the incumbents. Nevertheless, while domestic variables do influence policy making, their role is typically that of an intervening factor, shaping how states respond to external pressures. Ultimately, however, neoclassical realism subordinates domestic variables to the demands of the international security environment (Dyson 2016, 38–39). Notwithstanding the role executive autonomy plays in shaping European security, integration is still a process that requires the participation of all member states. Even if a French President had such freedom in decision making, any proposal for closer integration would remain subject to a European consensus. As such, the concept of executive autonomy can be influential in the conclusion of unilateral acts, such as rejoining NATO structures, however, taken cumulatively, urgency to align European defense more closely might be the more decisive criteria.

In essence, realism, whether neoclassical or structural, offers limited tools for explaining European integration itself. While these theories aren't easily disproven and do provide a solid foundation for understanding why France might seek to balance against US hegemony, particularly in response to shifting threat perceptions like the Russian resurgence or doubts about the reliability of the transatlantic security guarantee, they fall short in explaining why particularly integration would be the most appropriate way to achieve this. Even when accounting for domestic-level factors, neoclassical realism doesn't convincingly explain why defense integration, rather than intergovernmental cooperation, a closer European alliance, continued bandwagoning with the US, or even strategic hedging with powers like China, is the chosen path. At best, neoclassical realism tells us that France will support integration when it aligns with its own national interests, especially when there are sizeable benefits for the French position, and it is allowed to retain its perceived leadership role. Conversely, this raises the crucial question why other European states would agree to deeper integration, if it appeared to come at the cost of their respective sovereignty and influence, under what may be perceived as a France-led Europe.

So yes, neoclassical realism suggest that France would integrate if it served the French purpose first and foremost. Or rather, France's push for integration can be considered an attempt at increasing its leadership and political clout. Thus, the question arises why the remaining European states would willingly surrender their sovereignty to a France led Europe. At this point it has been clearly established that a sovereign cannot be bound

without consent, but the pressing, by realism unsatisfactorily, answered question remains why a sovereign could be bound with his consent (Kennedy 1980, 380).

Overall, the question remains whether France's vision is an actual amalgamation of equals or actuality just French ambition to usurp power on the old continent in a non-hostile, agreeable way? And continuing with this logic, realism fails to explain why out of all the possibilities, closer qualitative integration would be the best way to deal with this shift in the strategic environment.

3.1.3 The Institutional Argument

Core Assumption

- *Larger and more powerful states, such as France, want to go beyond intergovernmentalism because the institutional structure would favor them and allow them to retain a comparative leadership position within a supranational framework.*
- *States that see an opportunity to realize economic gains want to integrate further.*

I. Defense Industrial Policy

In its 2025 White Paper on European Defense, the Commission highlights the EU's fragmented defense industry as a key challenge in creating credible defense readiness. The lack of a common European market for defense leads to competition between members and a focus on domestic markets (European Commission 2025, 12). In fact, in 2021 the Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space found that there is a critical duplication of weapons systems currently in use in the EU. Whereas the US has 30 different types of weapon systems, the EU boasts a number as high as 178. While the US, in 2021, had one single type of main battle tank, the EU had 17. Furthermore, the US had 4 different types of frigates and 6 different types of fighter planes, while the EU had 29 and 20 respectively. Moreover, 80% of defense procurement is managed independently by individual member states, causing significant overlap in defense capabilities. In sum, this redundancy is estimated to cost between 25 and 100 billion euros every year (Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space 2021). Additionally, between the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and June 2023, 78% of defense acquisitions by EU members were sourced from outside the EU, with the US alone accounting for 63%

(European Commission 2024). These numbers indicate that there may very well be untapped potential to realize economic gains in a competitive and integrated European defense technological industrial base (EDTIB). However, a fragmented EDTIB does not only lead to inefficiency, but it is also prone to competition on a global scale. France has urgently recognized that European defense companies need to join forces, as within the timespan of five to ten years, segments of the European defense industry may yield to international competition from countries such as China, Turkey, Israel, or South Korea (Le Gleut and Conway-Mouret 2019, 49).

Ostensibly, this would mean that member states should have an interest in closer defense integration, especially in the field of EDTIB. To answer why states seek to integrate their defense sector, even beyond intergovernmentalism, it is crucial to distinguish between economic benefits for the EU as an actor and those for individual member states, especially in the short to medium term. A liberal institutionalist perspective suggests that states welcome economic gains on the EU level and support closer EDTIB integration, if there are tangible economic benefits for their national industries. Conversely, Dyson (2016, 40) argues that states' willingness to pool and share military capabilities is often constrained by concerns over the potential negative impact on their national defense industries. More broadly, member states may fear losing revenue due to intensified competition from EU-wide contract tendering.

One European country that sees an opportunity to realize economic benefits, by way of closer integration, seems to be France. Bora (2023) suggests that France's bid for closer integration and European sovereignty should be seen as a defense industrial policy. In essence, French President Macron's policies aim at weakening the role of the state in favor of more supranational competences, through a common European defense market. This is due to the prospect of French defense companies capturing significant market shares in a closely integrated EDTIB (Bora 2023, 1288). Similarly, Brogger (2024, 413) points out, citing interviews with senior government and military officials, that integrative commitments in the EDTIB field can be, in part, explained by economic rather than political reasons.

II. Increasing Cost of Defense Capabilities

Besides the inefficiency due to fragmentation of the European defense market, inflationary costs of defense capabilities present a challenge to European defense. In fact, producer

prices for military transportation equipment and boat building, including military vessels, have increased by 12 and 14 percent respectively since 2022 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2024b, 2024a). Juxtaposing the EU's real GDP growth rate of 3.5% in 2022, 0.4% in 2023, and 1.0% in 2024 (Eurostat 2025), shows a considerable reduction in purchasing power of military capabilities. Similarly, Reilly (2024) shows, that defense costs in the US have been rising relative to the GDP deflator. This is especially relevant in the short term, because EU members still purchase off the shelf products from US producers. Consequently, by pooling procurement in a common EDTIB, economy of scale could be more effectively utilized to realize economic benefits. In its 2022 Strategic Review France acknowledges the need to augment European defense industrial capabilities, especially joint acquisitions of European hardware and European cooperation within the frameworks of PESCO, EDF, and CARD (Secrétariat général de la défense et de la sécurité nationale 2022, 43–44).

In line with Keohane and Nye's complex interdependence (2001), as well as the above findings, France's economic and political entanglement within the EU, makes unilateral security policy inefficient. As security challenges have become increasingly interconnected and unpredictable (French Ministry of Defense 2017a, 2017b; Secrétariat général de la défense et de la sécurité nationale 2022), these issues cannot efficiently be resolved by one state alone. This can be observed in France's approach to its deployments abroad and the CSDP. As opposed to exclusively French led missions, France benefits from deployments within a European framework through additional logistical support, funding, and above all, greater political and international legitimacy.

III. Amplification of Global Influence through Multilateralism

Institutions reduce costs of transactions, uncertainty, and importantly, lead to mutually beneficial cooperation. They furthermore serve to amplify the power and reach of their members (Keohane 2005, 107). At its core, liberalism theorizes that individual and group level domestic dynamics and variables, substantially influence a state's foreign policy (Moravcsik 2008, 236–37). Scholars, such as Pohl et al. (2015, 65), posit that European integration and the CSDP in particular, are the result of coinciding as well as dissenting national preferences. Furthermore, variations in societal expectations across EU members are the principal drivers of divergent government interests. Moreover, liberal Institutionalism suggests, perhaps vastly oversimplified, that supranationalization in the

field of security and defense has not happened, because it has not yet been a national preference or in the best interest of EU members (Richter 2015, 54).

In this sense, France's ostensible advocacy for closer CFSP comes against the backdrop of increasing its diplomatic and strategic influence in the international system. Events in recent years, such as the French withdrawal from Mali (French Embassy in the UK 2022; Deutsche Welle 2022) and the arguably secondary role Europe and France play in the conflict resolution process between Ukraine and Russia (CNN 2025; Le Monde 2025) have shown that France's international clout is on the decline. Closer integration would endow France with the resources and political legitimacy to counteract its declining global relevance. Accordingly, closer political integration could facilitate the coordination of policies at the regional and international level (Richter 2015, 50) and allow states to maximize utility by achieving absolute ideational and material gains (Pohl et al. 2015, 69).

Nevertheless, while France is seemingly a proponent of closer integration, it also resists any structure that might constrain its national sovereignty or strategic freedom. These contradictory notions can be observed in the 2022 Strategic Review, where France wants to strengthen its core '*capacities for autonomous assessment, decision-making and action*' (Secrétariat général de la défense et de la sécurité nationale 2022, 20) '*confirm the Alliance's¹ key role in the defence of Europe.*' (2022, 41) and play a key role in '*strengthening European sovereignty*' (2022, 43). Even though France regularly calls for the expansion of QMV, even in areas such as fiscal or tax policy, it has thus far omitted clarification on whether it would renounce its veto power in CFSP, permit the transfer of competences to the Commission and increase European Parliament's powers (Vallée 2022). In 2020 France has, furthermore, tied the extension of QMV in CFSP to the introduction of QMV in matters of taxation and fiscal policies. In 2023 France has joined the so called "group of friends", becoming one of nine EU members fostering the debate on the use of QMV in CFSP. In general, QMV would benefit France, because voting results have shown that smaller states are outvoted more often than for example France or Germany (Navarra et al. 2023, 8–9). However, the conditionality of tying CFSP QMV to taxation policy QMV makes reforms even more difficult, as taxation policy is arguably of more importance for smaller EU members than the CFSP itself (Fiott and Tercovich 2023, 4). Lastly, France's reluctance to share its nuclear deterrent with the EU is indicative of the independence it

¹ Referring to NATO

wants to retain. Although extension of QMV is conditionally put forward by France, President Macron's 2025 address to the nation underscores the country's sovereignty in defense. Nuclear capabilities are, just as they always have been, considered completely sovereign and French, and any kind of security guarantee for continental Europe, will exclusively remain at the discretion of the French President (Macron 2025).

By and large, a strong case can be made for France seeking closer integration in the field of security and defense because of self-interest in the realization of economic gains. However, inefficiencies in procurement and a fragmented defense industrial base have persisted for years. Moreover, even though the debate was reignited by Macron's Sorbonne speech in 2017, streamlining the EDTIB through creation of a common defense market had already been discussed as early as 1996 (Brzuska et al. 2025, 1). Economic cost-benefit considerations are indubitably an important variable in explaining EU integration, however, it is uncertain whether these economic factors are decisive in European defense integration. Although opportunities to realize economic benefits in the European defense sector have persistently presented themselves over the years, member states have continuously refrained from capitalizing on them. This reluctance indicates that reasons for closer defense integration extend both beyond the realist emphasis on augmenting absolute defense capabilities as well as the liberal focus on economically rational self-interest, suggesting instead deeper institutional, normative, and political considerations.

3.1.4 The Constructivist Argument

Core Assumption

- *France, seeing itself as a deeply European country is more willing to integrate.*

Constructivism offers a profoundly different lens from rationalist theories such as realism or liberalism. Rather than assuming state behavior is shaped solely by material interests or absolute security concerns, constructivism promises that states have potentially more freedom of choice in their interaction with the international system, however, this agency is at the same time constrained by social structures such as practices, identities, and interests of actors within the system (Hopf 1998, 177). Importantly, constructivism highlights the role of ideas, identities, norms, and social interaction in shaping state preferences. According to Ruggie (1998, 856) '*constructivism is about human consciousness and its role in international life.*' Within the constructivist analytical framework, this is significant

because France may act not solely on the basis of rational cost-benefit calculations, but rather in accordance with its identity-driven understanding of appropriate state behavior.

I. Identity

In constructivist theory, states can possess multiple identities that are socially constructed through interactions with various actors. These identities play a central role in shaping a state's interests. They reflect an actor's self-perception and understanding of its role in the international system. As such, identities are significant because they constitute the foundation of both interest and actions. For instance, the identity of a small state typically differs from that of a large state: while a small state's interests may be primarily oriented toward ensuring its survival, a large state is more likely to focus on global political influence or economic leadership and military power (Theys 2018, 2). A state's identity is not singular because it varies depending on the context of its interactions with different actors. For example, French identity differs in its engagements with the US, Germany, or Francophone Africa (Hopf and Allan 2016, 5).

Throughout its history, there have arguably been several key moments that have defined France's identity as a European state. France is a founding member of the EU and it was instrumental in setting up the framework that started out as the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), and later the European Economic Community (EEC). The Franco-German reconciliation under the Élysée Treaty in 1963 was a symbol for close cooperation between the two states and France's self-conception as a deeply European state (France Diplomacy 2023). France's identity as a fundamentally European state has been consistently reinforced by official government representatives, especially Emmanuel Macron, who has repeatedly positioned France as an advocate for a more sovereign, democratic, and integrated Europe (Macron 2023, 2017). This might in part explain why France keeps advocating for a closer Europe.

On the other hand, in the case of relations with the US, Gaullism demonstrates how identity, shaped by historical memory and collective experience, informs foreign policy preferences. Central to Gaullist thought is the imperative of strategic autonomy, particularly from the United States, reflecting a persistent suspicion of external dependence and desire for independent national action. This can be especially well observed in France's continuous skepticism towards the US, its aversion to integrate itself into NATO's nuclear planning group, and its repeated discourse on sovereignty.

In their study on French national identity Chan et al. (2016) examine a plurality of text samples such as political speeches, newspapers, high school textbooks etc. They find that Republicanism is the central element of the discourse around French national identity. France sees itself as western, modern, civilized, and European. Furthermore, France shares cultural affinities with European states. However, the French have also been found to be more eurosceptic than their European peers. Their euroscepticism, however, pronounces itself in a very nuanced way. In fact, Cautrès et al. (2020) have found that although 53% of French express attachment to and endorsement of the EU, 65% perceive the EU as ineffective, and 57% view it as distant. The study authors suggest that this ambivalence may be explained by a coexistence of ideological commitment to the European project and practical disillusionment about how the EU functions and who it serves. Additionally, French ambivalence toward the EU is rooted in two different visions of integration: the '*founding fathers*' vision, based on shared interests, and the Gaullist approach, viewing Europe as a tool for advancing national interests.

II. *Social norms*

In addition to identity, the concept of *norm* is central to constructivist theory. Norms are understood to describe '*collective expectations for the proper behavior of actors with a given identity*' Katzenstein (1996, 3). Such norms can either be "constitutive", defining the identity of an author, or they can be "regulative", delineating expectations for proper conduct. In Katzenstein's words '*norms can thus either define (or constitute) identities or prescribe (or regulate) behavior, or they do both*' (1996, 3). Expanding on this, the "logic of appropriateness" by March and Olsen (1998, 951–52) posit that states that adopt a particular identity are expected to adhere to the norms linked to that identity. In this sense, certain actions and behaviors are deemed more acceptable than others. Foreign policy is consequently explained as '*the application of rules associated with particular identities to particular situations.*' (1998, 951). As French identity is built upon the self-perception of being a European nation (Chan et al. 2016) as well as a founding member, and arguably leader of the EU, France seeks closer integration because it is appropriate within the context of its identity. This might explain why France emphasizes an EU centric defense, even when NATO may offer more efficient economic and strategic alternatives. Thus, constructivist theory suggests that acting through EU frameworks is normatively more appropriate behavior for a state that sees itself as European. Evidence of this practice can

be found in the establishment of PESCO, fiscal mutualization, reform of state aid and merger control rules, as well as the EDF (Bora and Schramm 2023, 4)

III. Strategic Culture

French strategic culture is marked by a dual orientation: on one hand, it emphasizes substantive military deployments in support of international norms and liberal democratic values, on the other, it pursues national defense priorities that at times diverge from these ideals, even as France presents itself as a committed multilateral actor (Hellman 2024, 204). According to Irondelle and Schmitt (2013, 205) French strategic culture is conflicting, because, on one side, there is a traditional self-understanding as a guardian of human rights, multilateralism, and democracy. On the other, there is a sentiment of self-reliance and independence. Crucially, France has been focused on trying to maintain its status as a great power, in spite of a lack of material and economic resources (Hellman 2024, 206). Furthermore, French strategic culture has become increasingly embedded in European institutions, making EU integration preferable (Bora and Schramm 2023, 4–5). Strategic autonomy serves as one such example of how French strategic culture has become institutionalized at the EU level. Originally rooted in Gaullist tradition emphasizing sovereignty and independence from external powers, the concept was later reframed and adapted, especially by Emmanuel Macron, to align with the EU's collective identity and institutional logic.

Beyond strategic autonomy, France has furthermore succeeded in institutionalizing national preferences within the EU framework. Bora and Schramm (2023) posit that by the end of Macron's first term, France had managed to implement a plurality of different policies and priorities across policy fields. Additionally, in its push for strategic autonomy and European sovereignty, France disregards alternative visions for Europe, such as the German approach (Nachtmann 2024).

Accordingly, through a constructivist lens, France's approach to the CFSP is not simply national interest formed by material or strategic incentives, but instead appropriate behavior in line with its identity. France's strategic culture is Europeanized because it aligns with France's self-conception as both defender of liberty and democracy, as well as *puissance européenne*. Nevertheless, integration has always depended on reciprocal engagement. As Genschel and Jachtenfuchs (2014, 62) argue, convergence in military matters can, from a constructivist perspective, only happen when member state identities and cultures can agree

on a common European project. While a constructivist analysis highlights the consistency between France's identity as a European power and its support for integration, this alignment is not exclusively benevolent. Acting according to a logic of appropriateness often allows France to legitimize its actions that also serve national interest (March and Olsen 1998, 952). Occasionally, France will invoke the EU to reinforce its global interests, but when supranational institutions do not reflect its vision, France will not hesitate to bypass them. This has been illustrated by a continued strengthening of Franco-British bilateral defense cooperation, culminating in the coalition of the willing to reassert Europe's position (Liboreiro, 2025; Jozwiak 2025). In this sense, France's commitment to European defense remains conditional on the extent to which Europe conforms to a French vision.

3.2 Case Study Poland

This chapter seeks to explore Poland's position and approach to deeper European integration in the field of CFSP. Contrary to France, Poland can be characterized as an "Atlanticist" country, due to its keenness on US political, economic, and military involvement in Europe. By and large, Poland resists deeper integration and has been described as a '*status quo*' country (Gotkowska et al. 2020, 66), profiting from both the EU in its current form and NATO membership.

3.2.1 Historical Perspective and Transatlantic Relations

In contrast to France, Poland's foreign policy leitmotif is Atlanticism. To understand Poland's position on Transatlantic Relations a historical perspective has to be considered. In the wake of the First World War, Poland regained its independence only to find itself geographically trapped between the Scylla of Nazi Germany and the Charybdis of the Soviet Union. Faced with this perilous situation and anxiously anticipating what was about to come, Poland sought security guarantees from the Entente powers. Ultimately though, when confronted with Nazi Germany's invasion, neither France nor Great Britain provided the promised support to Poland (Prażmowska 2010, 129).

Following WW2, Poland fell under Soviet influence and became a satellite state within the Eastern Bloc, ending prospects for liberal democracy and becoming a founding member of the Warsaw Pact in 1955. Poland's foreign and security policy became subordinate to Soviet directives. In June of 1945 both the US and the British yielded support for the Government

of the Republic of Poland in exile in favor of the Provisional Government of National Unity (TRJN). Even though Josef Stalin had promised that free elections would take place in post war Poland, the reality was, that the TRJN government had no authority in Poland and was considered a puppet from the get go (Prażmowska 2010, 156–61).

Soviet domination over Poland can be broadly divided into two distinct phases: the period before and after the death of Stalin in 1953. The Stalinist period was characterized by totalitarian control that extended beyond mere coercive alignment of Polish state interests with those of the Soviet Union. It aimed at systematically eroding Polish national traditions and culture, replacing them with Soviet and Russian ideological and cultural norms. Although Stalin's death did not immediately lead to reform and liberalization, subsequent worker protests over poor economic conditions, the return to power of Władysław Gomułka, and debates over Stalin's succession within the Communist party led to Nikita Khrushchev denouncing Stalin's policies. This permitted new Soviet leaders to distance themselves from Stalinist mistakes and resulted in Poland regaining some domestic autonomy (Prażmowska 2010, 180–82).

As the cold war drew to a close, Poland, like many of its Eastern Bloc peers, underwent a peaceful revolution. The primary objectives for the Polish government were to dismantle Soviet influence, reject authoritarian rule, and reorient the nation toward Western Europe. Integration with the West was seen as a path to restoring full sovereignty and transitioning to a market based economy (Karolewski and Wilga 2021, 2). Altogether, contemporary Poland came to associate the end of WW2 and the subsequent Cold War period as a humiliating '*loss of independence, identity and thus their meaningful existence.*' (Mälksoo 2009, 666).

The Cold War era was followed by a period of political and economic transformation. In 1991 the government of Jan Olszewski officially sought integration into the European Communities. Accession to NATO, the EC/EU, Council of Europe, and the GATT/WTO were seen as primary foreign policy goals, to achieve true independence from Russia and the establishment of a competitive market economy (Karolewski and Wilga 2021, 4).

In parallel to seeking EU membership, Poland made NATO membership its foreign and security policy priority, eventually joining the alliance in 1999 (NATO 2024). Since then, NATO, and specifically the US, have been considered by Poland to be the only credible guarantor for Polish security. Furthermore, Polish foreign and security policy has been

aimed at retaining the US as a reliable partner and being a reliable ally to the US. Moreover, sovereignty as a political theme has dominated Poland's domestic discourse and international engagement, reinforced by a clear preference for intergovernmentalism (Osica 2004, 301–4). The US has strongly supported both Poland's NATO and EU accession (Mix 2023, 1). Defense relations between the two countries are particularly close, notably, an Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement was signed in 2020. Furthermore, as a reaction to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, additional US troops were deployed to Poland, increasing their number to 10,000, including armor, aviation, and permanent headquarters (Mix 2023, 129).

Even before joining NATO, Poland had already followed US foreign policy choices, to establish itself as a future reliable partner. Poland's commitment to Atlanticism was particularly apparent in 2003, when the then EU candidate country decided to participate in the US-led invasion of Iraq. This was a controversial choice for Poland to make, as particularly France and Germany were critical of an invasion without UN mandate and would have preferred a diplomatic approach. The choice to participate in the invasion was arguably to position Poland as a reliable partner and because NATO membership was seen as essential to balance the threat of a potential future Russian resurgence (Lash 2025, 278). In fact, scholars such as Zaborowski and Longhurst (2003, 1009–11) have even argued that Poland, over the years, and especially due to its involvement in Iraq, has become the closest US ally, or even, *protégé*, in the east. Moreover, in 2003 Poland decided to procure US F-16 fighter jets for a total of 3.5 billion dollars, instead of European made Eurofighters (Karolewski and Wilga 2021, 21).

Poland's EU accession journey started in 1991 with the signing of an Association Agreement to liberalize trade. After initial disagreement on eastern enlargement, in 1993, the EU presented the Copenhagen requirements, that eastern European countries would have to fulfill to qualify for membership. Poland officially applied for EU membership in 1994 after having introduced economic and legislative reforms conforming to the Association Agreement and Copenhagen criteria. Accession negotiations were initiated in 1997 during the Luxembourg Council (Karolewski and Wilga 2021, 5–6). After being granted the status of observer during the 2000 Intergovernmental Conference (ICG) and being allowed to participate in the negotiations over the so called "leftovers" from the Amsterdam Treaty, such as voting reform in the Council, QMV, and composition of the Commission and European Parliament, Poland materialized many of its positions. This

included being granted 27 votes in the Council and 50 seats in the European Parliament, numbers identical to those of Spain and almost matching those of Germany, despite the Polish population only being half the size (2021, 8–9). Finally, in a national referendum held in June of 2003, the Poles voted overwhelmingly, 77.45% to 22.55%, to join the EU (2021, 12). Additionally, Poland alongside the other Central and Eastern European countries applying for membership, was able to obtain a critical concession during the final accession negotiations. Because the Treaty on European Union was being negotiated in parallel to the eastern enlargement, Poland and other newcomer states were granted participation in the upcoming IGC in 2003, despite their formal accession to the EU not taking place until May 2004. This decision proved particularly contentious for France and Germany, and led to the failure of the 2003 IGC summit due to Poland vetoing the introduction of the double majority voting system in the council (2021, 12). Although EU members managed to find a compromise for the introduction of double majority voting (also called QMV) by raising the requirement threshold to 55% of member states and 65% of the total EU population, this still goes to show that even pro-European Polish governments have been reluctant to expand supranationalization. Instead, the introduction of QMV was considered a detrimental blow to Poland's previous relative voting power (2021, 13).

At the turn of the century the Polish were described as strong supporters of EU membership and Polish Euroscepticism was even referred to as an '*oxymoron*' (Szczerbiak 2001, 106). This is supported by the overwhelming majority in favor of EU accession in the 2003 national referendum. However, 2005 saw the rise to power of an extremely EU critical three-party coalition made up by the right-wing Law and Justice Party (PiS), the agrarian Self-Defense Party and the clerical-nationalist League of Polish Families. Until their collapse in 2007, the PiS led coalition did not consider EU membership as a priority and accordingly reoriented Polish European policy. To be granted an opt-out on the EU charter of fundamental human rights and to delay the planned implementation of QMV PiS threatened to veto the Lisbon Treaty twice (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2013, 28). Nonetheless, in 2004 Poland started to collaborate on defense projects within the newly established EDA, even becoming one of its biggest contributors in the field of defense research and technology (Karolewski and Wilga 2021, 21).

In subsequent years the Polish political landscape saw significant fluctuation between pro-European and Eurosceptic governments. From 2007 to 2015 Poland was governed by the

centrist Civic Platform (PO) government under Donald Tusk. The Tusk administration pursued a generally pro-European agenda, aiming to position Poland at the heart of the EU. Poland's foreign policy also saw some convergence with other EU members, even becoming less confrontational with Russia, as shown by the more cautious policies adopted in the wake of the 2014 Ukraine crisis (Krasnodebska 2021). Notably though, the US' financial crisis in 2008 and pivot to the Indo-Pacific under US President Barack Obama, as well as the Russian-Georgian War in 2008 made Poland commit stronger to CSDP initiatives, participating in both military and civilian missions, including Chad and Mali. In addition, the Ukrainian crisis in 2014 led to Poland accelerating its own military modernization, at the same time as supporting the development of the EU's defense sector (Karolewski and Wilga 2021, 22). Overall, between 2008 and 2015 Poland's involvement in the CSDP could even be considered '*avant garde*'. However, in the years to come this would change and Poland would once again be ruled by a Eurosceptic government (Zaborowski 2018a, 13).

The PiS party returned to power in 2015, forming the first single-party government in Poland since 1989. The PiS government adopted a more Eurosceptic stance, often conflicting with EU institutions over issues such as judicial reforms and media freedom. The Commission even initiated infringement procedures against Poland, citing concerns over the rule of law and non-compliance with the refugee relocation scheme (Karolewski and Wilga 2021, 24). Key developments in the foreign policy of the PiS government included a shift toward a bilateral and increasingly militarized security strategy centered on the alliance with the US, a pronounced Euroscepticism, and a nationalist and assertive stance in its policy toward Russia (Zięba 2022).

In 2023, Donald Tusk and his pro-European coalition assumed power with a commitment of restoring relations with the EU that had been undermined during the eight-year tenure of the PiS government. However, Tusk's government has faced significant obstacles from Polish President Andrzej Duda, who repeatedly exercised his veto power to block key legislative initiatives (Kassam and Krupa, 2025; La Feld, 2025).

In summary, since the end of the Cold War, and particularly from the early 2000s onward, Poland's domestic political landscape has been marked by volatility, oscillating between pro-European and Eurosceptic. Despite this, one constant has consistently been Poland's commitment to NATO, which remains the cornerstone of its national security strategy. Even under the pro-European leadership of Donald Tusk's second term, Poland continues to

exhibit a clear preference for intergovernmentalism within the EU framework (Navarra et al. 2023, 9; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland 2023). This continuous commitment to Atlanticism raises the questions why Poland refrains from embracing deeper supranational integration, despite the potential strategic and economic advantages such integration might offer.

3.2.2 The Neoclassical Argument

- *Poland may resist deeper integration due to its existing relative power capabilities, and the perceived importance of defense as “high” politics, in light of its geopolitical location and threats.*

I. Threat Perception

Scholars such as Adam Bromke (1967, 252) have long realized that *‘for Poland, the paramount political reality remains its location between Germany and Russia’*. Contrary to other EU members and across its political landscape, Poland has always perceived Russia as a threat (Polskie Radio, 2019; Kaczyński 2008). In recent history, this perception has been reinforced by the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia (Lašas 2012, 1074), the 2014 annexation of Crimea (MFA Press Office Poland 2020), as well as Russia’s hybrid warfare tactics including disinformation campaigns (Government Plenipotentiary for the Security of Information Space of the Republic of Poland 2024) and the use of migration to destabilize NATO’s eastern flank (Spokesperson for the Minister Coordinator of Special Services 2021). Crucially, however, the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine is perceived as clear threat to Polish security. This is because Russia has been explicitly hostile towards Polish core state interests, it possess the economic and military capacity to inflict damage, and due to the buildup over the course of recent history, the threat of Russian aggression is perceived as imminent (Sus 2025, 7–9). In fact, one could even go as far as to say, that Russia poses an existential threat to Poland, as in a direct confrontation Poland would be a frontline state and bear the brunt of a potential attack. As Polish economic and military capabilities are inferior to Russia’s, on top of not possessing its own nuclear deterrent, Poland expresses a clear preference for a concrete and reliable security guarantee, even going as far as reaching out to NATO to be included in its nuclear sharing program, a discussion that had previously been avoided to not increase tensions with Russia (Sus and Kulesa 2023, 242).

Nevertheless, following Donald Trump's reelection as US President, concerns have emerged over the reliability of the transatlantic partnership. Trump's administration has repeatedly questioned the value of NATO, issuing warnings that the US may withhold support from European allies who fail to meet defense spending commitments (Ruhiiyyih Ewing, 2025). This presents a problem especially to Poland, as it has for a long time relied on the US as its guarantor of defense and sovereignty. Thus, Poland was prompted to consider hosting French nuclear weapons on its territory as a deterrent and to compensate for increased insecurities within NATO (Notes from Poland Staff, 2025; Hairsine, 2025). Additionally, Polish rhetoric on closer EU cooperation and integration has thawed, underlining that Europe '*must speak with one voice*' when it comes to reinforcing its eastern flank (Prime Minister's Office 2025). From a neoclassical realist perspective, systemic pressures, such as Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, can be seen as key inputs prompting foreign policy responses. However, I argue that this event, while significant, is not the primary systemic factor influencing Poland's threat perception. In fact, Russia has long been perceived as a strategic threat by Poland, and although the escalation of hostilities from 2014 to 2022 and beyond reinforced this threat perception, it did not fundamentally alter Poland's Atlanticist orientation. Rather, the more consequential systemic input has been the shift in rhetoric and policy signals from the US. Under the Trump administration, repeated questioning of NATO's value and the reliability of US security commitments introduced a degree of uncertainty, that directly challenges the core assumption of Poland's US centric security strategy, exacerbating the threat Russia now poses to eastern Europe.

II. Sovereignty instead of Strategic Autonomy – Regional Leader

Poland's foreign policy behavior can be better understood through a realist lens when considering its historical experiences and regional ambitions. Unlike traditional great powers such as France or the United Kingdom, Poland has never pursued global influence, nor has it engaged in colonial expansion. Instead, its identity has been shaped by repeated victimization at the hands of stronger powers, particularly during periods of war and occupation (Mälksoo 2009, 654). This legacy has cultivated a deep-seated emphasis on sovereignty and security. Poland's aspiration is not to become a global power, but rather a robust sovereign regional leader in Central and Eastern Europe (Sus 2025, 12). As the UK left the EU and France increasingly distances itself from the US, Poland may seek to position itself as Washington's most dependable partner within the EU. This strategy is further reinforced by persistent consensus over the Franco-German tandem dominating

European integration. For Poland, the idea of ceding too much sovereignty to Brussels, perceived as being under disproportionate German influence, may evoke historical anxieties of subjugation, similar to past Russian domination where key sovereign functions, such as for instance foreign policy were forcefully aligned against Poland's will (Lash 2025, 274). In this context, Poland's insistence on intergovernmentalism and its resistance to deeper EU integration can be seen as a rational attempt to preserve national autonomy while asserting regional leadership.

III. Domestic level variables

Although NCR places primary emphasis on the constraints of the international system, it acknowledges that domestic-level variables act as intervening factors that shape how states interpret and respond to external pressures (Dyson 2016, 38–39). Sus (2025) argues that beyond systemic pressures domestic-level variables such as leader's images, strategic culture, the domestic institutional landscape, and state-society relations have been highly conducive to Poland's Atlanticist orientation.

Poland's domestic institutional landscape during the 2015-2023 period was characterized by high executive autonomy (Dyson 2016, 39), as both the government and the head of state were controlled by PiS. This political constellation allowed the PiS leadership to respond to systemic pressures without significant internal constraints. In the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea, the instrumentalization of migration as a form of hybrid warfare (Muraszkiwicz and Piotrowicz), and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the PiS government deepened its strategic alignment with the US (Gotkowska et al. 2020, 63). At the same time, it adopted an increasingly Eurosceptic posture within the EU (Daniel Tilles, 2022a), resisting deeper integration. This was made possible, in large part, by the government's ability to act cohesively and autonomously in foreign policy decision making.

Poland's strategic culture is marked by a historically strong sense of betrayal by its European allies (Osica 2004, 303). Scholars have long argued that Poland's distrust of western European countries' ability to guarantee its sovereignty is a key explanatory variable for its Atlanticist alignment (Sus 2025; Cichocki 2011; Osica 2004). However, it remains a matter of debate whether domestic-level variables merely serve as intervening factors that shape how systemic pressures influence Poland's strategic alignment, as

neoclassical realism suggests, or whether these domestic factors, such as national identity and strategic culture, are in fact the primary explanatory drivers of foreign policy behavior.

3.2.3 The Institutional Argument

- *Smaller and less powerful states may not want to integrate further because they fear that such an institutional structure would potentially lead to the loss of influence and leverage an intergovernmental structure provides.*
- *States that see an opportunity to realize economic gains want to integrate further.*

I. *How Institutional Design discourages Poland from closer Integration*

Within the institutional setting of the EU, particularly in the field of CFSP, Poland is an advocate for the principle of unanimity. The Polish positions underlines that only an intergovernmental structure can guarantee that, regardless of country size or population, member states retain their decision powers in matters such as war and peace (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland 2023). Copsey and Pomorska (2010, 321) have found that due to a combination of factors, such as policy preferences, domestic political actors, unpersuasive advocacy, and a lack of alliance building, Poland's influence in the EU has been limited. The fear of being disregarded in CFSP should QMV be introduced is warranted, scholars suggest. In fact, in traditional areas where QMV is applicable smaller central and eastern European states are outvoted more often than France or Germany (Navarra et al. 2023, 9), particularly Hungary and Poland, have become the most frequently outvoted EU members after Brexit (Ondarza and Stürzer 2024, 5). Additionally, utilizing the *passerelle* clause (Pomorska and Wessel 2021, 352) to introduce QMV for CFSP decisions, without undergoing any major treaty reform would entail a problem of democratic legitimacy. As the Council is the main decision-making institution in CFSP the legislative procedure of the EU cannot be applied. This implies that the European Parliament's possibility of participation is limited and the Commission is barred from its role as initiator (Navarra et al. 2023, 4). Consequently, this could lead to a situation, in which a decision is being made without the involvement of neither the national government (if outvoted) nor its representatives in the European parliament. Thus, from an institutionalist lens Poland's concerns are not purely sovereign. Potentially being bound by a policy it did not vote for and cannot democratically challenge would clash with its democratic principles.

However, resistance toward supranationalization might also be explained in part due to broader institutional dynamics and their implications. There is a perceived risk that conceding QMV in CFSP could serve as a springboard for expanding QMV into areas such as taxation and fiscal policy, that are arguably of equal national importance to smaller EU members (Navarra et al. 2023, 4). In fact, using the *passerelle* clause to introduce QMV for areas under the CFSP such as sanctions, human rights, and civilian CSDP has been more popular with EU ministers than the expansion of QMV to energy, taxation, and fiscal policy (Koenig 2022, 6).

Moreover, from a Polish point of view, there is no need to go beyond intergovernmentalism in CFSP, as in the face of large-scale systemic shocks, such as the Russian invasion in 2022, unanimity has not majorly disrupted the speed and unity of the EU in implementing restrictive measures on Russia (Fiott and Tercovich 2023, 37). Although unanimity is intended to protect states with genuine and well-considered policy objections by allowing them to exercise a veto, in practice, it has often been exploited for leverage in unrelated policy areas (Koenig 2022, 3). A clear example is Hungary's behavior during discussions on sanctions against Russia, where it has repeatedly vetoed, or threatened to veto, Council and European Council decisions, as well as joint statements. Nonetheless, the other 26 EU member states have found ways to bypass such obstruction, issuing joint declarations without Hungary's endorsement (Gavin, 2025), and thus giving testament to the fact that there exist possibilities to make unanimity work, even when threatened by vetoes, if there is enough political will to do so.

II. Fear of domestic consequences over economic losses

While Poland has economically benefited from EU membership overall (Michalek and Hagemeyer 2024; Kopiński et al. 2024), the distribution of those gains has been uneven (European Commission Economic and Financial Affairs European Economy Institutional Papers 2023, 10; Bukowski et al. 2023), and many Poles perceive EU integration as having fallen short of its promises (Mularczyk, 2024). From a liberal perspective, this unevenness in distribution, may lead to emerging Eurosceptic domestic interest groups, shaping state preferences.

In the context of proposed integration in the European defense sector, Poland may resist further steps not only due to sovereignty concerns, but also because its domestic defense industry, although small, could suffer from increased competition or be sidelined by larger

Western European defense companies, as the majority of the Polish defense industry is pooled under the state-owned Polish Defense Holding (PGZ) and is characterized by full dependence on the national market (Terlikowski 2018, 9). This is especially risky, as PGZ employs around 18,000 workers while only exporting goods worth 84 million Euros in 2016 at an annual turnover of 1.2 billion Euros (Zaborowski 2018a, 7). In fact, in 2023 PGZ was ranked 64 out of the top 100 arms-producing and military service companies, lagging far behind its European peers (SIPRI 2024). Thus, Poland may be reluctant to support further integration or the creation of an integrated EDTIB, fearing that pooled procurement obligations could sideline its domestic defense holding, in favor of larger competitors from countries like France or Germany. Even if the macroeconomic impact is limited, such sectoral losses could politically be salient, especially when mobilized by nationalistic parties, who have enjoyed strong support since the start of the 21st century.

Furthermore, Poland may be reluctant to engage in common EU defense procurement, as Commercial Off-The-Shelf (COTS) products, especially from US manufacturers are more readily available to fill capability gaps. This is supported by the 2023 EDA report on EU defense data, which highlights that the procurement of COTS products from non-EU manufacturers reflects the need to urgently address capability shortfalls, however, it also comes at the cost of temporarily slowing down European collaborative defense procurements, which are considered to be more complex and time-consuming (European Defence Agency 2024). Additionally, purchasing defense technology from the US has served as an expression of Poland's committed Atlanticism. In fact, by exporting high caliber military capabilities, such as F-35 fighter jets, main battle tanks, rocket artillery and air defense systems to Poland, the US plays a central role in its armed forces modernization (Mix 2023, 114). However, in spite of being a prime importer of US defense capabilities in Europe, US companies have not yet made any substantial investments in Poland. In fact, such COTS purchases, and consequent underinvestment into Polish domestic production capabilities, have led to a stagnant modernization of the Polish defense industrial base (Zaborowski 2018b, 94–97). Lastly, Valasek (2011, 20–21) proposes that although pooling and sharing projects can provide significant economic incentives, states may be hesitant to engage due to sovereignty concerns such as the fear of entrapment, abandonment, and concerns about free-riding. Thus, Poland may opt to forfeit potential savings in favor of retaining sovereignty, as this would generally be in line with its prioritization of national sovereignty.

An example of this would be Poland's reserved participation in PESCO projects. In 2023 Poland participated in 12 and led but one project within the PESCO framework. In fact, Poland is mostly participating in projects from the "Enabling joint" area and the "Training, facilities" area, that require notoriously low financial input (Gawron-Tabor and Willa 2023, 37–39). Accordingly, while Poland formally participates in the CFSP and CSDP, its engagement is limited in scope and marked by a degree of reluctance, often only amounting to compliance rather than proactive commitment.

By and large through a Liberal Institutional lens it can be observed that Poland may be reluctant to move beyond intergovernmentalism because it does not believe that a supranational framework would represent its interests fairly. Observing decisions taken by QMV throughout recent year in areas of so called "low politics" shows that Poland has been among the most frequently outvoted states. It is thus highly doubtful that Poland, who has an inherent preference for sovereignty and nationalism, would agree to supranationalization in a field of "high politics" that constitutes one of its core existential preferences. Even taking into consideration material benefits, such as economy of scale through common procurement and pooling and sharing, it is unlikely that the prospect of realizing economic gains would outweigh the downside of losing highly valued sovereignty.

3.2.4 The Constructivist Argument

- *Poland, placing heavy emphasis on national sovereignty, is resisting deeper integration.*

I. National Identity

Poland's national identity has been significantly influenced by its geographic position between Russia and Germany. The historical challenges of maintaining sovereignty in relation to these two powerful neighbors have contributed to a persistent sense of external threat, which continues to influence modern politics (Styczyńska 2024, 308). Particularly Soviet domination and the end of the Cold War are the events that have critically influenced Polish collective consciousness during the last 50 years. In contrast, for Western Europe this was the Franco-German reconciliation (Mälksoo 2009, 671–72). This goes to show, that the basis upon which European states build their perception of a common Europe differ in their very foundations.

An important element of Polish identity is the association with Christianity. Particularly among the historic nobility, there was a widely held belief that Poland had a special role in defending the Christian world. This idea has contributed to a national self-perception of Poland as a stronghold of Christian values. Overall, historical myths heavily influence Polish politics, public discourse, policy preferences, and policy making. Consequently, two competing narratives have emerged concerning Poland's position in Europe. On one hand there is the so-called nativist narrative, in which neo-traditionalism and populism are combined and which sees the Poles as culturally and economically distinct, while those who are different are regarded as enemies. On the other, there is the international narrative, which sees Poland as part of the wider European community and is more inclusive about its national community (Styczyńska 2024, 307–8). The nativist narrative serves to construct Polish right-wing national identity, invoking Poland's mission to safeguard Christian Europe. The international narrative, however, has developed as a bottom up counter narrative, emerging from citizen activism that criticizes Catholicism and sees Poland as a liberal, secular, European state (Baran 2022, 287–88).

Therefore, it would be easy to assume that support for the EU is split between partisan lines, in accordance with voting preferences. In actuality, however, the Polish electorate has consistently demonstrated strong support for EU membership ever since its accession, with polls indicating that well over 80%, and in some years even over 90% of Poles have expressed favorable views toward remaining in the EU (Balcer et al. 2017, 5; Statista Research Department 2024; Notes from Poland, 2024). Hence, when examining to what extent the Polish are in favor or against Europe an important distinction has to be made between EU membership and EU integration, meaning the conferral of competences. In contrast to membership, Poles are significantly skeptical of further EU integration with 39% in favor of a continuation of the status quo and 38% would rather that competences be returned to the state. Overall, close to 40% could imagine Poland functioning outside the EU (Balcer et al. 2017, 6).

Crucially, the influence of the Catholic Church cannot be understated, as it is central to understanding Poland's identity and resistance to deeper EU integration. Beyond its political role, including its support for the 2015 electoral victory of PiS (Markowski 2019, 130–31), the Church also acts as the underlying source for social conservatism in Poland that has resulted in conservative policies such as restrictions on abortion and the ban on same-sex marriage. These values and policies often contrast with the more liberal, secular

norms promoted by the EU. As a consequence, deeper integration is often portrayed as an attempt of liberal EU elites to interfere with Polish domestic affairs (Daniel Tilles, 2022b). Poland's strong Catholic identity was furthermore clearly reflected during the 2007 IGC where Polish officials expressed concern that the inclusion of the Charter of Fundamental Rights (CHFR) in the Treaty of Lisbon might conflict with religious and moral values. Specifically, there were fears that it could lead to pressure in legalizing same-sex marriage and grant the European Court of Justice jurisdiction over sensitive issues related to national identity and cultural norms. As a result, the 2005-2007 PiS government managed to negotiate an opt-out clause excluding Poland from the application of the CHFR in areas where it conflicts with national law (Karolewski and Wilga 2021, 15–16). The commitment to the negotiated opt-out was maintained, even by the more liberal Civil Platform government under the leadership of Donald Tusk that had succeeded PiS in 2007. Although Tusk underlined that he advocated for the full applicability of the CHFR in Poland, Civil Platform ultimately decided to not renegotiate the opt out clause amidst concerns that the necessary two-thirds majority in the Polish parliament couldn't have been achieved due to the dependence on parliamentary support from PiS (Taylor, 2007).

II. *Social Norms*

Following March and Olsen's (1998, 951–52) "logic of appropriateness", Polish reluctance toward supranationalization is the socially legitimate behavior within the context of its national identity and normative expectations. As a result of its historical experiences, a strong sense of sovereignty, independence, and self-determination has formed in Poland. Therefore, any attempt at external control, even by allies or partners, is met with suspicion (Styczyńska 2024, 311). Consequently, supranationalization is considered to be inconsistent with Poland's perception of being a sovereign state. Furthermore, in accordance with Poland's self-perception as the last bastion of Christianity, closer integration with a liberal, secular EU may seem like a challenge to domestic social-conservative norms, making closer integration inappropriate (Mudrov 2023, 660). Lastly, a 2022 survey found, that support for EU integration is conditional on non-interference by the EU in domestic matters. In fact, public support for integration tends to decline whenever the EU is perceived as imposing external corrections on national shortcoming (Krawatzek 2022). In accordance with March and Olsen's (1998, 951) explanation of foreign policy as '*the application of rules associated with particular identities to particular situations*' certain action, such as the advocacy for intergovernmentalism and a reluctance to grant the

EU more competences to interfere in domestic matters is deemed a more acceptable foreign policy choice, than pursuing deeper integration.

III. Strategic culture

Akin to national identity, Polish strategic culture has been shaped by its history. It is notably influenced by a perception of strategic uncertainty, that stems from its geographic location and conflict with its neighbors. As a consequence, Poland seeks the most robust and reliable security guarantees obtainable (Terlikowski 2013, 269). The historical fear of abandonment has contributed to a strong emphasis on formal equality among states and a preference for intergovernmental arrangements, where national sovereignty is preserved, and no single member is subordinated to another. This is clearly reflected in Poland's approach to NATO, which it has always viewed as the cornerstone of its security (Ministry of National Defence Republic of Poland 2024), because it fulfills both criteria of sovereign equality as well as robust and reliable security guarantee. From the outset, Poland considered the US as more committed to Polish security than some European states (Osica 2004, 309–10). It should also be noted that strategic culture is not exogenously given, instead it evolves over time. This evolution can be observed in Poland's approach to CSDP. While Poland was concerned at first, that a European defensive framework could enter into competition with NATO (Karolewski and Wilga 2021, 21), CSDP has ended up becoming a necessary pillar of Polish security that complements NATO (Ministry of National Defence Republic of Poland 2022). Lastly, since Poland's accession in 1999, NATO membership has enjoyed rising support by the Polish public. While approval started out fluctuating between 60 and 70 percent in the earlier years of Poland's membership, it saw a dramatically steep increase to 80 percent in the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, and peaked at 94% in 2022 after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Statista Research Department 2025a).

Consequently, through a constructivist lens, Poland's advocacy for intergovernmentalism and Atlanticism is not simply national interest formed by material or strategic incentives, but significantly rooted in its identity and history. Poland engages with the EU and sees itself as a European state, only as long as the EU does not attempt to intervene with domestic political issues that are rooted in its identity as a Catholic state. Moreover, due to historical reasons, Poland is suspicious of western Europe's commitment toward its national security. Acting according to a logic of appropriateness, Poland is unable to pursue deeper integration even if it comes at the cost of tangible economic benefits, because its highly valued sovereignty would be at stake. Nonetheless, contrary to Hungary, Poland is

not actively disrupting the EU and has proven itself as a reliable partner, although with limited enthusiasm. Lastly, even though the US has shifted its strategic focus toward Asia, NATO has enjoyed substantial popularity. Thus, Poland has remained, in line with its strategic culture, a staunch Atlanticist, believing that the US security guarantee is more substantive and robust than one from Europe.

3.3 Discussion

This thesis set out to address a fundamental question in the academic field of European studies and International Relations: *Why do some European states seek to move beyond intergovernmentalism in foreign and security policy, while others resist deeper integration?* Existing scholarship offers a wide array of theoretical approaches to examine European integration, drawing on factors such as systemic pressures, economic incentives, institutional constraints, political identity, and social norms. Although it is widely accepted that states cannot be bound to supranational authority without their explicit consent, there is no clear consensus on which underlying factors most conclusively explain the willingness of states to cede aspects of their sovereignty. Over the course of this research, it has become increasingly clear that the key to understanding integration in the policy domain of high politics, does not lie in isolating a single explanatory variable. Rather, the more conclusive approach lies in evaluating the explanatory power of competing meta-theoretical perspectives, namely, whether rationalist or constructivist frameworks offer a more persuasive account of why states may seek to move beyond intergovernmentalism in areas traditionally seen as core to national sovereignty.

To leverage the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of individual theories this study employed a composite theoretical framework. As each theory has its own limitations and may not fully capture the nuances of European integration, a phenomenon that has proven to be complex and multifaceted, the theoretical framework of this study draws on neoclassical realism, liberal institutionalism, and constructivism. By formulating analytically distinct theoretical expectations derived from each perspective and applying them to two distinct empirical cases, the aim was to assess the extent to which these approaches can be substantiated in explaining state behavior, and to evaluate their respective explanatory power.

The cases of France and Poland were selected for analysis due to their distinctive characteristics. Both states have historically emphasized sovereignty as a core principle of foreign and security policy. Over time, however, France's stance has evolved toward a more integrationist vision, increasingly promoting the idea of European sovereignty and deeper EU integration. In contrast, Poland has maintained a firm commitment to national sovereignty, favoring intergovernmentalism and relying on Atlanticism as a key pillar of its foreign and security policy. This divergence makes the two states particularly interesting

for examining the conditions under which member states support or resist integration in areas of high politics.

3.3.1 Overview of Major Findings

This study finds that France's support for and Poland's reluctance toward deeper European integration in foreign and security policy are shaped by strategic, economic, institutional, and ideational factors.

Taken individually, each theoretical framework examined in this study reveals strengths and limitations in its explanatory power. NCR effectively accounts for systemic pressures, such as Russia's resurgence and growing US isolationism, and plausibly interprets France's push for deeper integration as an effort to assert leadership, provided that integration aligns with national interest. However, NCR does not convincingly explain why supranational integration, rather than enhanced intergovernmental cooperation, or strategic hedging, would be the preferred means to achieve these objectives.

In the case of Poland, NCR suggests that, as a regional power with limited global ambitions, Poland seeks to preserve national autonomy while asserting leadership within its immediate geographical vicinity. Given its proximity to and shared border with Russia, Poland's threat perception is more acute than that of many Western European states. From this perspective, Poland's reluctance toward deeper EU integration can be interpreted as a rational strategy aimed at safeguarding sovereignty while maximizing regional influence. However, while NCR incorporates domestic-level variables, it ultimately subordinates them to systemic pressures and materialist assumptions. As a result, it fails to fully account for the profound influence of Poland's historical experiences with foreign occupation and the ideational factors that underpin its strong preference for Atlanticism, that are critical to understanding its skepticism toward European integration.

Liberal Institutionalism explains France's support for deeper CFSP integration as driven by economic self-interest and the advantages offered by institutional mechanisms like QMV, which have been shown to favor larger EU members such as France. However, this study finds that France's commitment remains conditional; it supports integration only insofar as it does not compromise national sovereignty or strategic autonomy. Moreover, the theory fails to explain why, despite long-standing economic incentives, such as those offered by an integrated EDITB, meaningful integration in the field of CFSP has not yet occurred, revealing the limits of economic and institutional rationality in high-politics domains.

From an Institutional perspective, Poland's reluctance toward deeper EU integration may stem from concerns over institutional arrangements that disadvantage smaller states. Moreover, the existing intergovernmental structure has not significantly constrained Poland's interests, as seen in the implementation of restrictive measures on Russia. Even with potential material benefits such as economies of scale from common procurement, these are unlikely to outweigh the perceived loss of sovereignty. However, Institutionalism assumes fixed state preferences and thus overlooks the ideational factors central to the formation of Poland's position.

A constructivist analysis highlights the alignment between France's identity as a European power and its support for integration in security and defense. It suggests that advocacy for closer integration can be understood through the logic of appropriateness, rooted in France's national identity and strategic culture. However, the findings of this study also indicate that France's commitment to EU institutions is conditional, as France is willing to bypass them when they fail to reflect its strategic vision or serve its broader global interest.

Lastly, Constructivism posits that Poland's commitment to Intergovernmentalism and Atlanticism is not merely a product of material or strategic calculations but is deeply rooted in its historical experiences and national identity. These experiences have shaped a strategic culture that highly values sovereignty. According to the logic of appropriateness, Poland's reluctance toward deeper integration can be understood as a reflection of this ideational core, where tangible benefits are insufficient to justify perceived compromises to national autonomy. Nonetheless, it is important to note that EU membership itself remains a widely accepted and valued component of Polish identity; it is the prospect of deeper political and institutional integration that Poland is skeptical of.

3.3.2 Explanation of Major Findings

The findings of this study reiterate that European integration is complex and multifaceted. Accordingly, this study shows that taken individually, theories of international relations offer compelling arguments for selected aspects of European integration. However, to mitigate explanatory weaknesses and to find the most nuanced and comprehensive understanding of why some states seek supranationalization in the area of foreign and security policy, while others do not, they should be employed cumulatively in a mutually complementing manner.

The findings suggest, that both rationalist and constructivist variables play a significant role in shaping state preferences, when the conferral of sovereign competences to a supranational body is concerned. Utilizing a neoclassical perspective provides a strong framework to understand the influence of systemic pressures and intervening domestic-level variables on state preferences. The findings of this study would suggest that NCR provides a strong framework to explain why states do not seek to go beyond intergovernmentalism. However, it does not offer entirely convincing arguments as to why states would integrate their security and defense policies. This does not imply that neoclassical arguments cannot explain integration, it merely suggests that a wider array of theoretical explanations should be taken into consideration, to accurately explain state behavior in this field.

Utilizing an institutionalist approach provides a strong framework to analyze institutional mechanisms and economic incentives and benefits. In line with academic literature, the findings of this study suggest that Institutionalism can offer a potent framework to analyze why states would pursue deeper integration in foreign and security policy.

Finally, applying a constructivist lens permits thorough analysis of ideational variables, which go beyond rational and material interests. The findings suggest that the exploration of variables such as identity, social norms, and strategic culture can provide a compelling framework to explain why states would advocate for supranationalization. Nevertheless, this study suggests that rationalist factors cannot be disregarded, as France has been shown to bypass EU institutions when they do not align with its strategic interests.

Contrary to its underlying hypothesis, this study found that French support for supranationalization in the field of CFSP is highly conditional and not self-evident. Irrespective of the theoretical lens applied, this study found that France wants to retain the ability to pursue its strategic interests and does not see supranationalization as a true amalgamation of equals, but rather as a way to achieve its strategic interests, in a rational sense, or legitimize and substantiate its self-perception as a *puissance européenne* in a constructivist sense. In conclusion, France seeks to go beyond intergovernmentalism due to (1) systemic pressures, such as changing threat perceptions and the perceived need to balance against the US; (2) institutional advantages it would enjoy in a system of qualified majority; (3) the prospect of realizing economic gains by capturing significant market shares in an integrated EDTIB; (4) as well as ideational factors that remain conditional on the extent to which Europe conforms to a French vision.

In accordance with its underlying hypothesis, this study found that Poland does not seek to go beyond intergovernmentalism in the field of CFSP. Irrespective of the theoretical lens applied, this study found that Poland wishes to retain its sovereignty at all costs. In conclusion, Poland does not seek to go beyond intergovernmentalism because of its (1) threat perception, that is more acute than that of western European states; (2) concerns about institutional disadvantages, especially a fear that QMV would not represent its interest fairly; (3) concerns that an integrated EDITB would potentially undermine its sovereignty as well as domestic political concerns that EU wide competition might create; (4) and crucially, its deeply rooted, historical sense of sovereignty, independence, and Catholicism, that feels threatened by a liberal, secular, EU that is strongly influenced by French and German preferences.

By and large, the findings suggests that major leaps in the development of a supranational foreign and security policy are unlikely, as both the utilization of the *passerelle* clause as well as a potential treaty change would require unanimous agreement between all EU members. Nevertheless, there is also no supply for disintegration in the field of foreign and security policy, as has been previously suggested by Genschel and Jachtenfuchs (2014, 62), as no major political actor advocates for the complete renationalization of military forces, as European states, including France, do not deploy troops outside of multilateral frameworks. Nonetheless, the question of whether future military integration will occur within the EU framework remains contested, particularly because NATO continues to serve as a viable alternative for European defense policy.

3.3.3 Acknowledgment of Limitations

While this thesis offers a focused analysis of the contrasting approaches of France and Poland toward EU foreign and security policy integration, it is important to acknowledge several limitations that shape the scope and interpretation of its findings.

First, the selection of only two cases allows for a clear distinction between integrationist and intergovernmentalist preferences. However, this binary comparison does not capture the full diversity of 27 EU member state positions. As such, the findings cannot be generalized across the entire EU without caution, as this would risk oversimplifying a more complex web of state preferences. Other EU members, such as Germany, Italy, or the Netherlands might have more nuanced positions that cannot be characterized in the same way as explored in this thesis.

Second, the study relies on a composite theoretical framework employing Neoclassical Realism, Liberal Institutionalism, and Constructivism. While such a multi-layered theoretical approach allows for analytical depth it also fragments explanatory power. Each theory captures only specific dimensions of state behavior and is, by nature, constrained by its own epistemological assumptions. Neoclassical Realism underplays ideational and normative factors (Wendt 1992, 423–24); Liberal Institutionalism treats state preferences as exogenously given and under-theorizes questions of identity (Moravcsik 1997, 537–38); and Constructivism, while extensive in interpretive potential, at times disregards systemic pressures (Rose 1998, 152). Consequently, even though the theoretical frameworks are analytically useful, they cannot offer a fully integrated or causally definitive account of state behavior.

Third, the study is limited in empirical scope. It relies primarily on publicly accessible documents, policy statements, and secondary literature. The absence of policy maker interviews or insider perspectives limits the ability to look behind the institutional veil and understand national strategic decision-making. This is especially relevant in the area of foreign and defense policy, where rhetoric and action may end up being different or even contradictory.

Lastly, the findings are situated in a rapidly evolving geopolitical context. EU security policy is not static and geopolitical as well as domestic events are continuously reshaping national and institutional responses. While the study aims to reflect recent dynamics, some conclusions might become outdated or incomplete in light of future developments.

In sum, these limitations do not invalidate the arguments made, but they do point to areas for future research. Broader comparative studies, access to primary data, a wider array of methodological approaches would significantly enhance the understanding of the complex and contested process of EU foreign and security policy integration.

4. Conclusion

This thesis set out to explain why certain European states, such as France, seek to move beyond intergovernmentalism in the area of foreign and security policy, while others, like Poland, remain committed to national sovereignty. It argues that European integration is multifaceted and willingness or reluctance to confer competences on a supranational institution are the result of strategic, economic, institutional, and ideational factors. This has been demonstrated using three key theories of international relations: Neoclassical Realism, Liberal Institutionalism, and Constructivism. The research argues that no single theory offers a fully conclusive explanation as to why France seemingly seeks deeper integration, meanwhile Poland does not. Rather, a comprehensive, mutually complementing approach is needed to understand how motivations for or against integration can be explained by a complex interplay of material interests, institutional and economic advantages, as well as embedded identity narratives. On one hand, France's support for further integration is consistent with its self-image as a European power and defender of democracy, it remains conditional and strategic. On the other, Poland's resistance toward deeper integration is not simply out of rational self-interest, but because its historical experience and national identity make its advocacy for sovereignty imperative.

The theoretical contribution of this thesis lies in its demonstration that no single theory is sufficient in explaining foreign and security integration alone. It proposes and encourages a more nuanced, pluralist approach to EU integration research. Moreover, it helps to explain gridlock in EU decision making as the analysis shows why France and Poland diverge in their strategic preferences. Furthermore, it cautions that rational incentives are what will push states toward integration, instead the findings would suggest that symbolic and ideational barriers should be acknowledged.

Ultimately, this research contributes to a more differentiated understanding of why supranationalization in foreign and security policy remains elusive. Rather than assuming that deeper integration is a linear process, it highlights the importance of a comprehensive explanation, including identities, social norms, and strategic culture alongside strategic imperatives and material interests. Consequently, future scholarship and policymaking should, *inter alia*, not only focus on *how* states can be convinced to integrate, but instead *why* some express reluctance, regardless of the incentives on offer.

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