

**The European Union's defence policy:
The differentiated integration of a core state power**

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Permanent Structured Cooperation (PSC), European Defence Fund (EDF), European Peace Facility (EPF), Strategic Compass, European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS), Security Action for Europe (SAFE), etc. In recent years, the European Union (EU) has seen the activation and creation of numerous policy instruments in the defence sector. EU defence policy is defined as an international public policy, i.e. 'the set of action programmes advocated by public authorities with the aim of producing effects that go beyond the framework of a state-national territory' (Petiteville and Smith, 2006: 362). The policy instruments shared by EU member states and used within the EU to respond to public problems related to war and armed conflict constitute EU defence policy (Meijer and Wyss, 2018). This definition is therefore not limited to the institutionalisation of military policy within the Union, which poses 'operational' challenges (Howorth, 2014), but also considers the European integration of the defence industry, to which the so-called 'capability' challenges are linked (Fiott, 2019).

Following on from the previous chapter on the EU's foreign and security policy (CFSP), the aim is to study the EU's external action through another 'core state power' (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs, 2013) whose European integration has been 'differentiated' (Schimmelfennig, Leuffen and Rittberger, 2015; Faure and Smith, 2019; Howorth, 2019).

'Vertical' differentiation refers to the division of authority between the EU and its member states relating to an intergovernmental decision, as in the context of the common foreign and security policy (CFSP), or the community method applied in the 'defence package'. 'Horizontal' differentiation refers to EU member states and non-EU states that participate in European political measures. From the end of the Second World War in 1945 to the fall of the

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in the 1991, the defence policy of European states was negotiated outside the EU, at the same time within the Atlantic Alliance (NATO) and through European cooperation such as the Western European Union (WEU) founded in 1954, the Franco-German Élysée Treaty signed in 1963, or the creation of the Weimar Triangle in 1991 (Faure, 2024).

Why did defence policy emerge and become institutionalised within the Union only in the early 2000s in the context of the end of the ‘end of history’ epitomised by the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States? How did the European Commission manage to become a player in this policy sector by becoming a ‘regulatory state’ (Majone, 1994) from the end of the 2000s, despite its limited prerogatives? In the second half of the 2010s, was the development of a supranational and interventionist integration of EU defence policy the result of, or did it precede, the war in Ukraine in 2022, leading to the emergence of a ‘supranational security state’ (Genschel and Schimmelfennig, 2023)? In this chapter, the major political milestones and scientific controversies related to EU defence policy are analysed from the perspective of its differentiated European integration and from the point of view of two policy areas, military policy and armaments policy. The chapter is organised in two parts.

The first part sets out the intergovernmental integration of defence policy within the EU through the institutionalisation of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) resulting from the Treaty of Nice signed in 2001. This type of intergovernmental governance has continued to structure EU defence policy since the beginning of the 21st century, including in the context of the war in Ukraine (Fiott, 2023). International relations theories – realist, liberal, constructivist – have provided useful insights to explain the genesis and institutionalisation of defence policy as a negotiated issue within the EU. However, EU defence policy is not governed exclusively by the member states. The second part therefore contextualises the unexpected supranational integration of defence policy in its liberal form from the end of the 2000s and in its interventionist form from the second half of the 2010s. The liberal supranational integration of defence policy within the Union is embodied in the adoption of the ‘defence package’ by the Council and the Parliament in 2009. Its interventionist supranational integration was analysed on the basis of the European Defence Fund (EDF) created in 2017. Liberal intergovernmentalism and neo-functionalism, constructivism and political sociology have contributed to the interpretation of the supranational integration dynamic of EU defence policy.

The intergovernmental paradigm of EU defence policy

The political context of the emergence of the EU as a strategic actor

Following the failure of the European Defence Community (EDC) project in 1954, defence policy was negotiated outside the EU throughout the second half of the 20th century (Jones, 2007; Haroche, 2018). In the context of the Cold War, European states decided to join transatlantic intergovernmental organisations such as NATO and European organisations such as the WEU to ensure the continent's collective security against the USSR. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the break-up of the USSR in 1991, European states continued to address military and strategic issues outside the EU within the framework of NATO and bilateral, minilateral and multilateral European partnerships.

In 1991, the Weimar Triangle was formed by Germany, France, and Poland, and the Visegrad group by Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia (Faure, 2018). In 1996, Germany, France, the United Kingdom (UK), and Italy created the Organisation for Joint Armament Cooperation (known by its French acronym, OCCAR). Subsequently, Belgium and Spain joined OCCAR, and seven other states are stakeholders in armaments programmes run by OCCAR, without being members of it: Finland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, and Türkiye (Mawdsley, 2004). In 2010, France and the UK signed the Lancaster House agreements (Pannier, 2020). Since 2014, the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) has brought together the UK, Denmark, Finland, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Sweden and Norway, all NATO members. Since 2022, the European Political Community (EPC) has brought together 47 states (Chopin, Macek and Maillard, 2022). In 2024, the NATO celebrated its 75th anniversary in the presence of its 32 member states. In the context of the war in Ukraine, Finland (2022) and Sweden (2024), two European states known for their strategic 'neutrality' (Beyer and Hofmann, 2011), decided to join NATO (Zima, 2023a). As in the case of other sectoral policies such as industrial policy, monetary policy or environmental policy (Warlouzet, 2022), the EU has not been the obvious political and institutional framework for governing defence policy on a continental scale.

It was not until the beginning of the 21st century that a set of policy instruments was created by the member states within the EU (Peterson, 2004). In the 1990s, the Yugoslavia war on the EU's borders demonstrated the powerlessness of the EU and its member states to respond

to this conflictual and unstable political situation, which necessitated the intervention of the United States and NATO (Howorth, 2014). In this context, a bilateral summit brought together the continent's two nuclear powers, France and the UK, in Saint-Malo in 1998. Jacques Chirac and Lionel Jospin for France, and Tony Blair for the UK, succeeded in resolving the 'Euro-Atlantic security dilemma' that had opposed them for almost half a century by agreeing on the need to create a policy instrument specific to European states and therefore distinct from NATO (Howorth, 2005). Building on this bilateral agreement, the fifteen EU heads of state and government decided to create the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) under the Treaty of Nice in 2001. The ESDP became the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) with the Treaty of Lisbon (2009).¹

Despite institutional developments such as the 'mutual defence clause' (Article 42.7 of the EU Treaty)² and permanent structured cooperation (PESCO)³, the CSDP has retained its intergovernmental governance through the rules defined by the Lisbon Treaty: decisions are taken unanimously by the member states within the informal Council of Defence Ministers and the European Council (Faure, 2016). The CSDP is implemented by the Political and Security Committee (PSC), the EU Military Staff (EUMS) and the EU Military Committee (EUMC). This intergovernmental architecture was supplemented by the creation of the European Defence Agency (EDA) in 2004, which aims to harmonise capability requirements between member states (Karampekios and Oikonomou, 2015). The EDA comes under the authority of the Council of the EU and is chaired by the High Representative (HR) for the CFSP. In contrast, the Commission, the Parliament and the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) have limited decision-making leeway in the development and implementation of CSDP. One state, Denmark, had initially decided not to take part in CSDP by activating its 'opt-out' back in 2001 (Adler-Nissen, 2014). In a referendum held in June 2022 in the context of the war in Ukraine, a majority of Danish citizens (66.87%) voted in favor of Denmark's participation in CSDP, which has since included all 27 EU member states.

As the armed wing of the CFSP, the CSDP is the civil-military crisis management instrument that enables the EU to intervene outside its borders (Howorth, 2007: 12). The

¹ To simplify reading, the acronym CSDP is used, even if this EU public policy was referred to before 2009.

² The 'mutual defence clause' was first activated by France in 2015 following the jihadist terrorist attacks in Paris.

³ The MDC was activated in 2017 by all EU member states except Malta and included 68 military-industrial projects of variable strategic importance negotiated by qualified majority in 2024 (Biscop, 2017).

mandate the EU received from its member states was confined to conducting peacekeeping operations to ensure state-building following armed conflict or war, for example in the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad (Rayroux, 2017) and Somalia (Egger, 2016). Having launched its first peacekeeping mission in 2003, and subsequently conducted almost 30 more in a decade, chiefly in Africa but also in the Balkans and the Middle East, the EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012 (Bazin and Tenenbaum, 2017). In 2025, 3,500 military personnel from the member states and 1,300 civilian personnel were deployed around the world on one of the 21 CSDP missions or operations.

Thus, the objective of the CSDP, as sovereignly decided by the member states, has never been to defend the EU from military attack or to set up a ‘European army’ to ensure the continent’s collective security. Reticent about the creation of CSDP in the early 2000s, the United States supported a limited scope for EU action. Following a functionalist logic of the international division of labour, the role of “peacemaker” granted to the EU was to complement the alliance’s role of “security provider” so as to avoid the trap of the “three Ds” – (de-linking, duplicating, discriminating) on which the US secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, insisted in 1998. The war in Ukraine triggered by Vladimir Putin's Russia in 2022 demonstrated that NATO was the only military alliance with sufficient operational and strategic capabilities to ensure the continent’s collective security. The strengthening of NATO’s political legitimacy since February 2022, embodied by the accession of Finland in 2023 and Sweden in 2024 (Zima, 2023b), has even been interpreted by some as confirmation of the ‘illusion’ of Europe’s strategic autonomy (Brooks and Meijer, 2021).

In the same intergovernmental logic of the policy instruments already mentioned, the European Peace Facility (EPF) was created in 2021 on the model of the ‘Peace Facility for Africa’ (Loisel, 2016) in order to increase the EU’s capacity to prevent conflicts, ensure international stability and preserve peace (Bergmann and Müller, 2021). Initially endowed with a budget of €5 billion, several successive decisions taken by the European Council in the context of the war in Ukraine from 2022 increased the EPF's budget to €17 billion in 2024. It was the EPF that enabled the EU to deliver arms to the Ukrainian armed forces as part of the war pitting Ukraine against Putin’s Russia (Haroche, 2022). In the same political context, the ‘Strategic Compass’ – a White Paper on defence and security for the EU – was published in 2022, updating and supplementing the ‘EU Global Strategy’ published in 2016 (Mälksoo, 2016).

The political driving forces behind the genesis and institutionalisation of the CSDP

In the 2000s and 2010s, the establishment of the CSDP was first analysed by theories of international relations (Schmidt and Zyla, 2013; Larive, 2014) before theories of European integration highlighted various conditions explaining its institutional architecture (Bickerton, Irondelle and Menon, 2011; Kurowska and Breuer, 2011).

According to structural realists such as Posen (2004), the CSDP was founded as a result of the European states' strategy of repositioning themselves vis-à-vis the United States in the post-Cold War context (i.e. 'balance against US hegemony'). More precisely, the CSDP was sought by France and the United Kingdom in order to maintain their strategic position and to develop additional politico-military resources distinct from NATO for action in the EU's neighbourhood, for example in the Balkans. This demonstration led Posen (2006: 185-186) to predict that the EU could become a less docile ally of the United States over the coming decades and that CSDP could be 'likely to complicate US-EU relations'. Posen's 'hard balancing' argument was challenged by the 'soft balancing' argument. According to the 'soft balancing' argument (Pape, 2005), the European states do not have the ambition to challenge the military hegemony of the United States insofar as their disagreements relate rather to the unilateral foreign policy and military action of the United States in the past. Thus, CSDP is interpreted as an instrument for balancing the position of European states through 'international institutions, economic diplomacy and strict interpretations of neutrality' rather than through military reinforcement (Pape, 2005: 17).

These arguments, which emphasise the effect of the United States on the EU member states' choice to create the CSDP, have been supplemented by an argument endogenous to European policy and stemming from classical realism (Freedman, 2004). The CSDP was the product of the national interests of (large) EU member states such as France, the UK and Germany (Duke, 2002: 169). EU member states have made differentiated political use of CSDP as a political resource to meet their strategic priorities. According to Rynning (2011: 37), the CSDP is 'an open and dynamic framework for understanding the intersection between power and purpose'. The CSDP has thus been used by EU member states to rebalance power relations with the United States – as the structural realists assert – but also to maintain the US military commitment on the continent or to respond to internal issues of EU governance.

The realist argument thus makes it possible to understand why the (large) EU member states decided to set up the CSDP without the EU having strengthened its actorness insofar as the CSDP remained a policy instrument institutionalised by and for state actors. Moreover, realists observe that the CSDP has been weakened by strategic divergences between European states since its creation: ‘In 2002, it became clear that there was neither strategy nor policy. Or rather, there were too many strategies and policies based on divergent strategic concepts’ (Lindley-French, 2002: 790). Lacking a common strategic culture, the CSDP embodied a ‘strategic schizophrenia’ (Lindley-French, 2002: 791), as during the war in Iraq in 2003, when the lack of European strategic unity was revealed by the political divisions between the UK, Italy and Spain, which supported the war, and France and Germany, which opposed it. This ‘strategic cacophony’ is not only ineffective but dangerous, as it can lead to political paralysis and the gradual renationalisation of security and defence policies (Meijer and Wyss, 2019).

Terrorism, which was the main threat to European states in the 2000s and 2010s, illustrated the heterogeneity of national strategic cultures within the EU: ‘Some [states] link terrorism to the phenomenon of poverty, others to the lack of vibrant civil societies, and still others to clientelist values’ (Rynning, 2003: 489). In fact, the EU was unable to tackle the fight against terrorism because the CSDP had neither sufficient budgetary resources nor the appropriate governance model. Military forces and resources have remained the almost exclusive property of the member states, since the EU budget does not exceed 1% of their GDP. Furthermore, the EU is dependent on its member states to finance the military operations launched under the CSDP, and to obtain armaments and military personnel insofar as the treaties prohibit the EU from acquiring armaments, and there are no ‘European’ military officers, only national officers from Belgium, Italy, Estonia, Portugal, etc.

These realist interpretations that focused on the power of large states, their national interests and the structure of the international system (logic of consequences) are complemented by liberal institutionalist, constructivist and sociological arguments that revealed the effect of institutions and ideas on the establishment of CSDP (logic of appropriateness). According to the liberal institutionalist approach, the root causes of the establishment of the CSDP were the EU’s commitment to multilateralism, transnational dialogue and international forums, rather

than a balance of military powers issue vis-à-vis the United States (Howorth, 2004: 280). Furthermore, proponents of constructivism have demonstrated the unexpected emergence of a European strategic culture that is not simply the sum of national strategic cultures (Cornish and Edwards, 2001; Bagayoko-Penone, 2006; Giegerich, 2006; Meyer, 2006; Biava, Herd and Drent, 2011). While CSDP governance has remained dominated by state actors, political negotiations have shifted to EU institutions, which have become the main arena for political work (Mérand, Hofmann and Irondelle, 2011). This has led to transnational political dynamics through processes of functional socialisation (between military officers from several member states, for example) and institutional socialisation (within the Council of the EU, for example).

This complex political reality has been conceptualised as a case of ‘supranational intergovernmentalism’ on the basis of an empirical study of national representatives sitting on the PSC (Howorth, 2011). This ‘Europeanisation’ of national strategic cultures has not replaced but rather complemented the political divergences between member states resulting from the national socialisation of CSDP agents (Mérand, 2008; Faure, 2017). Studies have shown that the more politically sensitive the issue being negotiated (2003 Iraq war, Russia policy, political situation in the Middle East), the more likely it is that the CSDP will be structured by national strategic cultures (Howorth, 2011). On the other hand, the less sensitive the issue negotiated within the CSDP framework is perceived to be by the actors (the implementation of a peacekeeping operation in Africa), the more likely it is that a process of Europeanisation of political practices will be at work, encouraging the emergence of a common strategic culture (Rayroux, 2017).

This constructivist work has been extended by research conducted from a political sociology perspective as part of the ‘practice turn’ in EU studies (Adler-Nissen, 2016), in order to identify the social mechanism that has generated the convergence of strategic cultures and the institutional developments observed within the CSDP (Mérand, 2010: 372-373). The concept of the social field, derived from the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, was used to interpret the decisions taken by CSDP agents as a function of their social position (Mérand, 2006, 2012; Mérand, Bonneau and Faure, 2009). This body of research has made it possible to understand that the political organisation of the CSDP was not limited to national interests or the power of institutions and ideas, but was also the result of the practices of professional groups such as politicians, military officers and diplomats. The use of these categories of analysis, which are

less encompassing than a state or an EU institution such as the Council of the EU made it possible to clarify the networks of CSDP actors and the way in which they used their political, institutional and symbolic resources (Forget and Rayroux, 2012; Mérand, Barrette and Chicos, 2012).

Political unity without European integration? The effects of the war in Ukraine

In addition to the operational dimension (CSDP) of the EU's defence policy, its capability dimension (armaments policy) has also been shaped by the establishment of an intergovernmental order that emerged in the 2000s and was reinforced in the context of the war in Ukraine. Historical neo-institutionalism and rational choice neo-institutionalism derived from the theories of European integration have provided keys to understanding this political dynamic.

Historical neo-institutionalism proposes a convincing explanatory framework to describe the governmental order that has structured arms policy within the EU from the 2000s onwards (DeVore, 2012, 2013). The formation of the EDA in 2004 was interpreted as the product of an effect of 'path dependency' corresponding to the intergovernmental dynamic that preceded it outside the EU, especially within NATO and the WEU. Thus, EU member states – especially the largest – have been able to retain their dominant position in relation to supranational institutions within a new arena of political negotiations. Indeed, decisions are taken by unanimity with the EDA which, moreover, has limited resources of its own, being financially dependent on member states and having at its disposal only 200 staff. By contrast, the largest national armaments acquisition agency, the French DGA counts 10,000 staff, i.e. a ratio of one to 50.

From a rational choice neo-institutionalist perspective, Genschel and Schimmelfennig (2022) demonstrate that there is no mechanical link between military threats on the borders of the EU and political integration within it. Contrary to the constructivist argument that is part of historical sociology of the state (Tilly, 1992), the war in Ukraine has led to neither increased centralisation of European governance in the armaments sector nor the creation of capabilities for action distinct from member states that would have reinforced the 'actorness' of the EU (Genschel, 2022). Member states have rather used the war in Ukraine to reinforce the EU's intergovernmental order, by successfully maintaining political unity to face up to Russia. Even

Viktor Orban, the Hungarian prime minister, has not managed to break the unanimity of decisions taken within the European Council (Faure, 2024). And even the ‘strategic cacophony’ pitting states against each other because of their divergent perceptions of the threat, military resources for facing it, and strategic ambitions (Meijer and Wyss, 2019) has not called into question the EU’s political unity.

The increase in national military budgets has been another political lever (Genschel, Leek, and Weyns, 2023) contributing to arms policy continuing to be governed ‘by and for’ member states (Faure, 2022a). This theory of ‘bellicist state-building’, according to which the war in Ukraine has not weakened but strengthened the position of member states – and which is in contradiction with the theory of ‘bellicist integration’ (Kelemen and McNamara, 2022), which presupposes an acceleration of European integration – converges with the predictions of the theory of new intergovernmentalism (Bickerton, Hodson, and Puetter, 2015). Convincing though these neo-institutionalist arguments may be, they do not allow understanding of the acknowledged increase in power of the European Commission and the supranational integration of arms policy since the 2010s. Indeed, their hypothesis, according to which the intergovernmental order was to continue to ‘limit the opportunities for the EU – and especially its Commission – to shape the future contours of European defence-industrial cooperation’ (DeVore, 2012: 432), has been partially proved to be false.

Beyond the intergovernmental governance of EU defence policy

From a regulatory state to a capacity-building state?

Alongside the intergovernmental integration of member states’ military and armaments policies within the EU, there has been a supranational integration of armaments policy since the late 2000s. Armaments policy was not confined to an intergovernmental form of government within the EU, as might have been expected. At the end of the 2000s, the European Commission had been working quietly for nearly fifteen years to promote supranational integration of armaments policy through the publication of Communications and Green Papers (‘soft law’) (Faure, 2020a, 2022). The European Commission’s aim was to limit the repeated use of Article 346 of the Treaty on the functioning of the EU (TFEU) by member states, allowing them not to follow the rules of the internal market (non-discrimination and open competition) if ‘vital’ national interests were at stake.

In 2009, the European Parliament and the Council voted in favour of the ‘defence package’, which included two directives proposed by the Commission (Hoeffler, 2012; Blauberger and Weiss, 2013; Weiss, 2014; Faure, 2020b). This was the first time in the history of the EU that binding European standards (‘hard law’) were passed to regulate the defence sector. The aim was to help create an internal armaments market and a European defence technological industrial base (EDTIB), which remained largely fragmented, despite some industrial consolidation that led to the creation of MBDA (Païtard and Bellais, 2019) and EADS in the early 2000s (Faure, Joltreau and Smith, 2019). This ‘market making’ dynamic (Scharpf, 1999), which favours the institutionalisation of liberal supranational instruments such as the ‘defence package’, has given the EU the role of ‘regulatory state’ in the armaments sector (Majone, 1994). In the early 2010s, the Commission became a fully-fledged player in EU defence policy, generating institutional rivalries with EU intergovernmental institutions such as the EDA (Fiott, 2015).

This supranational integration of arms policy within the EU was institutionalised in the context of the ‘polycrisis’ of the 2010s (Zeitlin, Nicoli, and Laffan, 2019; Avril, Faure, and Lebrou, 2023; Hoeffler, Hofmann, and Mérand, 2024) by the creation of the EDF in 2017 (Haroche, 2020; Hoeffler, 2023). Incorporated into the 2021-2027 multi-year budget (€8 billion for the period), the EDF gave financial support to armaments programmes conducted through European cooperation during the research and development phase. In 2019 the European Commission, headed by Ursula von der Leyen, incorporated the industrial concerns of defence into the portfolio of the commissioner in charge of the internal market, and created a new general directorate: the Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space (DG DEFIS) which is responsible for, among other things, managing the EDF.

The start of the war in Ukraine accelerated this dynamic of putting arms policy on a community level within the EU thanks to the vote by the Council and Parliament in favour of the regulations Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP) and European defence industry reinforcement through common procurement act (EDIRPA) in 2023 (Fiott, 2024). The ASAP regulation included a budget of €500 million to increase the production of munitions and missiles. The aim was to give European companies the capacity to export military equipment as a matter of urgency to support the Ukrainian armed forces. The ASAP regulation was also designed as an instrument to enable EU member states to replenish their stocks. The EDIRPA

regulation created a budget of 300 million euros to strengthen the European defence industry through joint procurement by promoting emergency arms purchases for the benefit of EU member states. In 2024, a few months before the European elections, the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) extended this work by publishing a EDIS and a proposed regulation to implement it (EDIP).

Indeed, the boldest propositions circulated during the preparation phase of EDIS and EDIP during the winter of 2024 were not retained: neither the creation of a commissioner in charge of defence policy (and not just of defence industry) formulated by President Ursula von der Leyen, nor a €100 billion fund supported by the internal market commissioner, Thierry Breton, nor a ‘eurobond’ loan as suggested by then Estonian prime minister, Kaja Kallas. The ‘colbertist revolution’ some expected or feared did not happen, and the Commission retained a political role that was limited by institutional and budget resources constrained by the states (Faure and Zurtrassen, 2024).

In March 2025, the Commission presented the ‘ReArm Europe’ plan, which accompanied the publication of the White Paper on European defence, known as ‘European Readiness’. In this plan, two main instruments were proposed to accelerate the rearmament of Europe: A joint loan for Member States of up to €150 billion (SAFE) and the possibility of activating the aforementioned derogation clause in the Stability Pact. In June 2025, the Commission supplemented these initiatives by enacting the ‘Omnibus Defence Package’, which brings together four proposed regulations, a directive and a decision, also aimed at accelerating the rearmament of Europe. In July 2025, the EU Council decided to activate the derogation clause in the Stability Pact for fifteen EU Member States for a period of four years. The aim of this measure is to allow national governments to increase their military spending without being prosecuted by the Commission for excessive deficits.

These various European initiatives and instruments have strengthened the EU’s role as a regulatory state by providing it with additional resources, without transforming it into a ‘supranational security state’ (Genschel and Schimmelfennig, 2022; Faure, 2025). The level of financial resources available to the European Commission has remained limited compared with the budgets available to large Member States such as France and Germany, but also Italy, Spain and Poland.

The driving forces behind the supranational integration of defence policy within the EU

Liberal intergovernmentalism, neo-functionalism, constructivism, and political sociology have contributed to explaining this supranational integration of armaments policy. According to the adherents of liberal intergovernmentalism (Moravcsik, 1993, 1997; Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig, 2009), European integration, including in the armaments sector, is the result of negotiation between states and national preferences (Fiott, 2019), being subject to influence by interest groups (Schilde, 2017). States are considered as rational actors that make cost-benefit analyses using a ‘logic of consequences’ in order to develop their political strategy. It is the change in states’ political preferences that explains the establishment of political instruments that enhance the liberalisation of national markets with the adoption of the ‘defence package’ (Fiott, 2017) in support of an industrial policy steered by the European Commission via the creation of the EDF (Fiott, 2024; see also Sabatino, 2022). Indeed, in the context of the late 2000s and early 2010s, a period marked by economic rather than military instability linked to the Eurozone crisis (Mérand, 2021), states aimed to found an internal armaments market in order to respond to the fragmentation of the EDTIB, make Europe-based companies more competitive, and preserve, even create, jobs (Faure, 2022b).

During the second half of the 2010s and early 2020s, strategic instability linked to the Trump administration (2016-2020), but also to Brexit and China’s increasing power, caused the strategy of states to change, favouring more interventionist instruments, something the war in Ukraine speeded up. Arms policy was no longer used by states only as a lever for economic growth, but as a resource at the service of military policy. Fiott (2024) has described this moment as a ‘geoeconomic turn’ (see also Haroche, 2024) and refers to states taking into consideration the EU’s political dependence as regards China, Russia, and the United States. This watershed corresponds to the development of “outward narratives” such as European sovereignty (Fiott, 2021), strategic autonomy (Béraud-Sudreau and Faure, 2021; Fiott, 2022, 2025), and the geopolitical European Commission (Haroche, 2023): the EU no longer shaped itself in relation to government problems confined to the continent but in relation to actors and issues beyond Europe’s borders.

This argument of liberal intergovernmentalism is challenged by the adherents of neo-functionalism (Taylor, 1990; Guay, 1998) who demonstrate the European Commission’s role as a political entrepreneur that has activated the supranational integration of the armaments

sector. According to Haroche (2020) and Hakansson (2021), the EDF is less a result of the political preferences of member states than of the initiative of the European Commission, which drove a ‘spill-over effect’ from the economic sector (low politics) towards the military sector (high politics). This demonstration is persuasive for interpreting the creation of the EDF accompanied by the establishment of the DG DEFIS within the European Commission in 2019. However, the neo-functionalist theory seems less appropriate for examining the political difficulties encountered by the Commission in seeking to intensify, broaden, and accelerate the supranational integration of arms policy. The constructivist and sociological approaches bring complementary clarification as regards the motives for supranational integration of arms policy by opening the black box of European governance.

At the national level, Hoeffler (2013) emphasises the ‘uses of Europe’ (Jacquot and Woll, 2010) that have been chosen by state actors in order to defend their national industries in the name of ‘economic patriotism’. The ‘defence package’ has embodied the ‘liberal’ conception (Hoeffler, 2012: 445) of economic patriotism at the European level that states proclaimed. At the European level, Blauberger and Weiss (2013) reveal the strategic use of the jurisprudence of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) by the European Commission, which enabled it to transform the blocking majority of member states into a legislative consensus. Sociological studies based on field surveys have charted the institutional and industrial actors that have supported or opposed the adoption of the defence package by revealing the ‘political work’ carried out by the ‘liberal and sovereignty-supporting programmatic actors’ within the ‘field of Eurocracy’ (Lavallée, 2011, 2012; Faure, 2020c, 2020d, 2022). These categories of analysis have made it possible to explain the key elements according to which the supranational integration of arms policy is structured and which are not confined to the formal institutional divisions that distinguish the states from the EU and the Council of Europe from the European Commission.

Apart from the approach based on political uses and coalitions of actors, the adherents of constructivism have also demonstrated the effects of political framing. From the 1990s, and also in the 2000s, the European Commission has ‘framed’ arms policy as a ‘market’ issue referring to the supranational working of the internal market, rather than a ‘defence’ issue corresponding to the CSDP whose institutional architecture was intergovernmental (Mörth, 2000, see also Mörth and Britz, 2004). During the 2010s, the EDF was a ‘hybrid military capacity-building instrument’ because it was a result of a policy frame competition between the

Commission-driven ‘efficiency’ frame that championed greater supranational centralisation and the ‘distribution of competences’ frame supported member states so as to, on the contrary, limit the supranational integration of arms policy (Hoeffler, 2023; see also Oliveira and Mawdsley, 2021). The creation of ‘interventionist instruments without the capacity for intervention’ such as the EDF (Faure, 2024) has confirmed that arms policy is governed by the emergence of a ‘community dirigisme’ (Smith, 2022) that is still institutionalised to a limited degree within the EU, even following the mandate of 2019-2024.

Conclusion

The EU has unexpectedly become a central arena for political negotiations in the defence sector in the 21st century without having extinguished or absorbed the other political organisations that make up the European security architecture. Defence policy emerged within the EU with the signing of the Treaty of Nice in 2001, which institutionalised CSDP through intergovernmental governance. This political role of ‘peace-maker’, responding to the operational challenge outside the EU’s borders, was supplemented by the placing on the political agenda of the capability challenge, broadening the EU’s scope for action. The vote in favour of the ‘defence package’ by the European Parliament and the EU Council in 2009 embodied the supranationalisation of EU defence policy. This policy instrument, described as ‘supranational-liberal’, was designed to create an internal armaments market in response to the fragmentation of the EDTIB. In the second half of the 2010s, so-called ‘supranational-interventionist’ policy instruments such as the EDF provided further evidence of the differentiated European integration of defence policy.

In fact, the supranational liberal and interventionist instruments have not supplanted but complemented the institutionalised intergovernmental instruments within the EU but also outside the EU through bilateral, minilateral and multilateral cooperation between European states. As for NATO, its political legitimacy has been strengthened since Russia’s military attack on Ukraine on 24 February 2022, bringing the number of member states to 32 by the time of its 75th anniversary in Washington, DC, in July 2024. The result is a complex political governance of the EU’s defence policy, implemented through intergovernmental and supranational, liberal and interventionist, instruments. On the other hand, the institutional order of EU defence policy has not changed since 2001, remaining intergovernmental according to the preference of the member states. Decisions are still taken unanimously within the European

Council, there is still no formal ‘Defence’ configuration within the Council of Ministers, the Commission’s prerogatives continue to be strictly limited by the treaties, and the Parliament has only a ‘Security and Defence’ sub-committee. It is hard to imagine that these institutional rules will change in the short term, given that the reform of the treaties requires a unanimous decision by the 27 member states, which the heads of state and government want to avoid.

On the other hand, the 2024-2029 term of office can be analysed in terms from two angles in a context of political continuity within the EU following the European elections in June 2024, but also of political instability in certain member states (starting with France after the unexpected dissolution decided by President Macron) and in the United States (possible return of Donald J. Trump to the White House). Firstly, European actors could propose new ad hoc political, institutional or budgetary instruments to produce effects, particularly in the defence industrial sector. Secondly, the next multiannual financial framework (MFF, 2028-2034) will be at the heart of the political negotiations over the next few years. In July 2025, the Commission proposed a budget of €131 billion for the military-industrial sector. The day after this announcement, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz stated that the Commission was overstepping its institutional role with such an ambitious budget. Which actors will play the role of ‘gap feeder’, ‘game changer’, ‘trouble maker’ or ‘veto player’? How will they work to move political and institutional lines or, on the contrary, to favor the conditions of the status quo? This is the kind of research agenda that requires us to continue our fieldwork and propose innovative conceptualisations in order to grasp the complex political dynamics at work within EU defence policy.

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