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GERMANY

MISSING A EUROPEAN ZEITENWENDE?

INTRODUCTION

Given that the Western alliance system is the main pillar of German foreign policy, it is reasonable to assume that it is an active promoter and supporter of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) (formerly European Security and Defence Policy, ESDP). Three days after the invasion of Ukraine, Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced a *Zeitenwende* (turning point) in foreign policy, which included a radical reassessment of relations with Russia, a firm commitment to the support of Ukraine and the transformation of the Bundeswehr into a modern deterrent force. As he stressed in his speech in Prague in August 2022, Germany intends to implement this foreign policy change in a Europeanised framework (SCHOLZ, 2022). However, after more than three years, it seems that the *Zeitenwende* has failed to live up to its expectations and is more an adjustment rather than a real turn in security and defence policy. In practice, Germany tends to pursue its national interests and is reluctant to Europeanise the announced *Zeitenwende*. I argue that Germany is both a driving force and an obstacle to a more militarily autonomous European Union.

This chapter looks at Germany's role in the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), its development and implementation. First, the main trends of German security and defence policy are described, followed by Germany's approach to the CSDP, its relationship to European strategic autonomy, its involvement in European defence initiatives and its participation in CSDP operations. The novelty of the following chapter might be that it attempts to provide a comprehensive picture of Germany's role from its involvement in the creation of the European Security and Defence Policy until the latest EU defence initiatives which were launched during the War in Ukraine.

MAIN TRENDS OF GERMANY'S SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

The reunification further strengthened the Federal Republic of Germany as Europe's leading political and economic power. However, this elevated position of power did not result in a radical change in Germany's foreign and security policy role. Germany remained a civilian power, which, as a member of the Western alliance with a normative foreign policy, pursued its interests strictly through multilateral forms of international cooperation (mainly EU, NATO, UN), subordinated itself to international law and supranational institutions, and regarded military force only as a last resort (MAULL 2018). However, because of the cooperative European order that emerged with the end of the Cold War, Germany's security perception changed, focusing more on challenges of global governance rather than on traditional military threats, thus defence spending gradually declined and collective defence capabilities eroded (BAGGER 2018). By the early 2010s, the political elite had become disinterested in security policy issues and focused their attention on the reform process in the Eurozone and the EU (BERTRAM 2015).

The turning point came in 2014 with the increased deterioration of European security: the Russian annexation of Crimea clearly violated international law, civil wars in the Middle East and Africa (Yemen, Syria, Libya) and the rise of terrorist organisations (Islamic State, African jihadist organisations) threatened to destabilise Europe's neighbourhood, and in 2015–2016, the migration crisis and terrorist attacks in Paris, Brussels and Berlin posed a direct threat. The incoming grand coalition government wanted a radical break with the “culture of restraint” in the face of international criticism and a changing security environment. In their speeches at the Munich Security Conferences in 2014 and 2015, Federal President Joachim Gauck, Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier stressed that Germany, as the world's fourth largest economy, is increasingly exposed to changes in the international security order and must therefore contribute to international peace and security in line with its economic and political weight. The new foreign and security policy narrative, the “Munich Consensus”, was reflected in new strategy documents and actual steps, including Berlin's leading role in the Minsk Agreements, the deployment of the Bundeswehr in NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence in Lithuania, the increase of development aid and the increase of defence budget from 1.19% to 1.51% by 2020 (BUNDE 2020; NATO Public Diplomacy Division 2017; NATO Public Diplomacy Division 2023). By 2017, however, the “Munich Consensus” had lost momentum and was ultimately unable to bring about a fundamental paradigm shift in security policy. The main

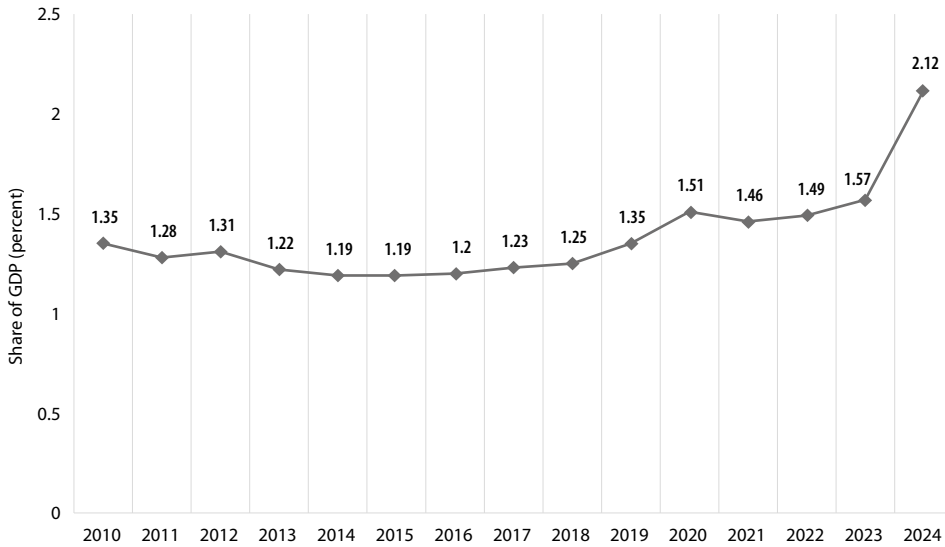


Figure 1. *The development of the German defence budget 2010–2024*
 Source: NATO Public Diplomacy Division 2017; NATO Public
 Diplomacy Division 2023; NATO Public Diplomacy Division 2024

reason for this is that, although there was agreement among political actors on Germany's greater international role, there was no unanimous consensus on how to achieve it (LEONARD–PUGLIERIN 2021).

The Russian aggression against Ukraine has led to a new turn in German foreign and security policy. In his speech to parliament on 27 February 2022, Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced the *Zeitenwende*, a major shift in foreign and security policy. The *Zeitenwende*'s main defence policy elements were an increase in defence spending to more than 2% of GDP and the creation of a special fund of 100 billion euros to fill the Bundeswehr's capability gap. In addition, Scholz announced support of Ukraine through arms transfers, a break with the previous policy of strict arms exports.¹ Germany also made a definitive break with its policy of *Wandel durch Handel* (change through trade) towards Russia, supporting EU sanctions and cancelling the Nord Stream 2 project. Germany announced the European Sky Shield Initiative with 14 European countries. Berlin has initiated its first permanent military deployment in Lithuania with a brigade-sized unit (Zeit Online 2022).

In June 2023, the government published Germany's first national security strategy, an important step forward in German strategic thinking. The strategy

¹ See more on the topic in SPECK 2019.

adopts a broad understanding of security. Its keyword is integrated security, which covers not only the military sector but also the economic, environmental, social and information sectors and seeks to coordinate them. The first pillar of the document is “Wehrhaftigkeit” (robustness), which includes, inter alia, the development of credible deterrence and defence capabilities, the strengthening of the European pillar of the transatlantic alliance and the common foreign and security policy, the development of European defence industry, more active involvement in EU crisis management, and a strengthened arms export policy that takes into account strategic interests. The second pillar of the document is resilience, which covers countering hybrid threats, disaster preparedness and cybersecurity, as well as reducing unilateral economic dependencies and diversifying supply chains, for example by building EU trade partnerships and strengthening the EU internal market. The third pillar of the strategy is sustainability, which covers climate protection, development aid and various areas of human security (Die Bundesregierung 2023).

One of the biggest uncertainties in the *Zeitenwende* is the issue of the special fund for the Bundeswehr (Sondervermögen). Olaf Scholz’s promise in February 2022 that “from now on we will invest more than two per cent of our gross domestic product in defence each year” is open to doubt based on financial planning. Under the special fund law, which was approved by the Bundestag in June 2022, the 2% target is to be achieved by using the special fund over a maximum of 5 years. The 100-billion-euro special fund is therefore counted in the regular defence budget and not on top of it. After the special fund has been spent, the defence budget is to be used to finance defence reform (Bundesministerium der Justiz – Bundesamt für Justiz 2022). However, the parliament approved in 2024 51.95 billion euros while the government’s proposed financial plan provides for 2025–2026 only 52 billion euros and for 2027 51.9 billion euros which are far from the 2% target (Deutscher Bundestag 2023; Bundesministerium der Verteidigung 2024c). In 2024 the defence budget reached the 2% goal (73 billion euros) but only with the special fund (Deutschlandfunk 2024).²

All in all, the *Zeitenwende* announced by Scholz can rather be seen as an adjustment. The special fund has made defence reform goals more achievable, but it will be hardly able to cover all the Bundeswehr’s needs, and the base defence budget would have to be continuously increased (CSIKI VARGA – ETL 2022). In addition to the financial resources, the same structural problems that accompanied the previous defence reforms persist, in particular the bureaucratic and inefficient procurement system. Furthermore, the defence industry needs to be able to adapt

² After the federal elections of 23 February 2025, Friedrich Merz, the chancellor candidate of the winner CDU–CSU parties, announced that an additional 200-billion-euros special fund should be established to continue the modernisation of the Bundeswehr (FAZ 2025).

to increased defence spending and procurement, as its production capacity has shrunk over the past 30 years, and it is facing supply problems and labour shortages (MÖLLING–SCHÜTZ 2022).

GERMANY'S APPROACH TO CSDP

Berlin's position on the CSDP is crucially shaped by Germany's unique historical past. European integration is ultimately a fundamental component of German identity after 1945. For Germany, European defence cooperation is of symbolic importance, which it sees as a project to maintain and strengthen the political unity of the European Union. Multilateralism and openness to supranational integration were fundamental elements of German foreign policy identity after World War II. Germany rarely acts unilaterally in foreign policy. These elements are also dominant in defence policy. When the Bundeswehr was created, it was designed to always act in a multinational, allied framework. One might therefore reasonably assume that the German politico-military elite is more open to defence integration than other large European states (BUNDE 2021).

The reality is more complex. Although German diplomats have traditionally been more open to a stronger EU role in security and defence policy, the Ministry of Defence and the military leadership have traditionally been socialised within the NATO framework. There is a consensus among the political and military leadership that NATO and the EU contribute to European security in a complementary way. In Berlin's understanding, there is no contradiction between the idea of a transatlantic alliance and European defence, with closer European defence serving to strengthen the European pillar of NATO (BANKA 2023; BUNDE 2021). However, Germany's commitment to the CSDP is less clear. Following the British–French declaration in Saint-Malo,³ the German EU Presidency under the SPD–Green Government played a key role in launching and giving substance to the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) at the Cologne summit in 1999. Although the ESDP was initiated by the British–French couple, there was considerable disagreement between them about its purpose. While Britain wanted to strengthen the European pillar of the transatlantic alliance, France wanted to strengthen European strategic autonomy, as such the German mediating role was of great importance (ALGIERI 2011). Germany, along with France, Belgium and Luxembourg,

³ The St. Malo Declaration, signed in December 1998 by British Prime Minister Tony Blair and French President Jacques Chirac, sought to establish a European security and a defence policy with the aim of making the EU an independent global actor (CVCE 1998).

pushed for a European headquarters for planning and conducting CSDP missions, although the initiative was ultimately vetoed by Great Britain and Member States (ISO-MARKKU – MÜLLER-BRANDECK-BOCQUET 2020). Moreover, Berlin's commitment to ESDP was also heavily influenced by the Iraq War which was incompatible with Germany's civilian power role. Berlin also wanted to avoid being isolated by its position in the Iraq War by seeking to form a coalition with France for European security (MISKIMMON 2007). The social democratic and green coalition government emphasised a broad understanding of security, including political, economic, environmental, social and military dimensions. It was mainly the idea of Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer that civilian crisis management was incorporated into the CSDP and the 2003 European Security Strategy. This German position fits into the concept of civilian power. The Schröder governments also supported the CSDP because 9/11 had decisively changed the German concept of security. As a consequence of the "global war on terror", the main task of the Bundeswehr was now declared to be crisis management rather than territorial defence. For Berlin, the significance of the CSDP lay in the EU's ability to act in its neighbourhood for crisis management. However, the Schröder governments treated the CSDP as a partner of NATO. Berlin decision-makers therefore supported the Berlin Plus Agreement,⁴ which allowed the EU to use NATO capabilities in peace operations (CHAPPELL 2012). In this early period of CSDP, Germany also joined the Franco-British plans for the EU battlegroup concept. Berlin declared that it would take a leading role in three battlegroups and participate in three others (ISO-MARKKU – MÜLLER-BRANDECK-BOCQUET 2020). However, Germany, alongside Great Britain, prevented the Battlegroups from being deployed when other Member States, including France, called for it (MAJOR-MÖLLING 2010).

German commitment to the CSDP waned in the second half of the 2000s. This was largely because the post-2005 governments led by Angela Merkel pursued a different security and defence policy direction. The second Merkel Government was hardly interested in security and defence policy, as it was concentrating rather on the global financial and euro crisis (ISO-MARKKU – MÜLLER-BRANDECK-BOCQUET 2020). Moreover, Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle and Merkel stressed that grouping within the EU, i.e. multi-speed integration, was not acceptable. The German leadership therefore did not follow the Schröder cabinets' commitment to European defence. Berlin did not support the deployment of EU battlegroups in African operations, mainly due to the limited intervention capabilities of the Bundeswehr (BECKER 2013). Germany tried to take the CSDP forward with the Ghent

⁴ See more in REICHARD 2004.

Initiative in 2010. The initiative focused on the pooling and sharing of military capabilities to enable Member States to develop their military capabilities more cost-effectively. The initiative was endorsed by the European Council in December 2013. Germany, however, failed to renew the CSDP because in 2010 France and the U.K. signed the Lancaster House Treaties,⁵ which operated only on a bilateral basis and covered areas not covered by the CSDP, such as nuclear deterrence. Berlin lacked the political will to lead by example. Germany's leading role in the CSDP was also limited by its abstention from the NATO intervention in Libya at the UN Security Council in 2011, thus directly confronting its allies. Merkel rather backed High Representative Catherine Ashton's approach to focus EU military missions on training and capability development. This coincided with Merkel's "doctrine" of strengthening local actors rather than direct military intervention (ISO-MARKKU – MÜLLER-BRANDECK-BOCQUET 2020).

The "Munich Consensus", announced by leading German politicians in 2014–2015, brought back security and defence affairs into German political discourse. Initially, this renewed commitment to European security was not implemented on the CSDP level. However, it was a crucial development that Germany, together with other member states, responded to the French Government's call for the activation of the EU's mutual assistance clause (Treaty of the European Union, Article 42) following the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015. Germany supported France by sending Tornado reconnaissance jets to Syria and increased its troops in the European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali) and the United Nations' MINUSMA mission. The main change in the CSDP and the German position was brought about by Brexit and, more importantly, by Donald Trump's actions. The exit of Britain, traditionally sceptical of the CSDP, opened new perspectives for European defence integration. President Trump's statements have led to the conclusion that the U.S. will no longer be committed to European security. Trump's criticisms and transactional approach have led Berlin's decision-makers to reassess Europe's geopolitical role, which was visible in the changed political rhetoric and efforts in the CSDP. Angela Merkel's call in 2017 that "we Europeans really must take our destiny into our own hands" is indicative of this change (FAZ 2017). Merkel's statement was followed by several calls for European autonomous action from German politicians. On a practical level, Ursula von der Leyen, together with her French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian, presented a series of proposals, which were supported by both the European

⁵ The Lancaster House Treaties (or Lancaster House Agreement) include two treaties between the United Kingdom and France for intensified bilateral security and defence cooperation. These cover armaments cooperation, joint work on military doctrine and development of joint military capabilities (Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs 2011).

Commission and the European Council. Two of the most important initiatives were the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPC), the first EU command responsible for the operational planning and conduct of non-executive EU missions, and the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) capability development programmes. With the support of Italy, Spain as well as four smaller Member States (Belgium, the Czech Republic, Finland and the Netherlands) the two initiatives were established in 2017 (ISO-MARKKU – MÜLLER-BRANDECK-BOCQUET 2020). The German Presidency in 2020, along with France, also played a key role in the creation of the EU Strategic Compass (SUS 2021).

In case of the early period of CSDP as well as the MPCC and PESCO, it can be clearly seen that Germany was only able and willing to take the lead in CSDP if it could form a coalition with other leading EU Member States. Thus, Germany assumed the role of a “co-leader” in the CSDP (ISO-MARKKU – MÜLLER-BRANDECK-BOCQUET 2020).

The military modernisation announced as part of the *Zeitenwende* in February 2022 has not led to a European turn in German security and defence policy. For Germany, NATO is the cornerstone of European defence, and the Bundeswehr’s planning follows almost exclusively the NATO planning process. Germany’s main interest is to strengthen the European pillar of NATO. Berlin is confident that by relying on NATO, it will bind the United States to Europe in the long term (PUGLIERIN 2024a). This current position is reflected in the strategic documents. Although the 2021 coalition treaty expressed support for CSDP and increased cooperation between the European armed forces (Mehr Fortschritt Wagen 2021), the National Security Strategy published in 2023 identifies NATO as the cornerstone of European and German security (Die Bundesregierung 2023). The latest Defence Policy Guidelines, like previous documents, emphasise the importance of NATO–EU cooperation. The document stresses the complementary nature of the EU in the economic and humanitarian sectors of security (Bundesministerium der Verteidigung 2023a).

Overall, Germany’s commitment to the CSDP is half-hearted. German public opinion and the political elite are generally characterised by a Europeanised identity (KATZENSTEIN 1997), but other factors also shape security policy practice. According to a 2023 survey by the Bundeswehr Institute of Military History and Social Sciences, more than 60% of the public support the CSDP and Germany’s closer cooperation with its European partners, but only 48% think the EU should be an independent security and defence actor. However, alongside the Europeanised identity, there is a clear anti-militarist attitude. 47% clearly reject the idea of Germany playing a leading military role in the EU (GRAF 2024). This is confirmed by a recent survey by the Körber Stiftung, which found that 71% do not want Germany to be

a leading military power (Körber Stiftung 2023). Political parties are also divided on European defence integration. While the mainstream parties (CDU–CSU, SPD, Greens/Alliance '90) support it in their manifestos, the far-left *Die Linke*, the *Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht* and the far-right *Alternative für Deutschland* (AFD) reject the militarisation of the EU. The parties have traditionally insisted on the Bundestag's control over the armed forces, which Germany's allies often criticise as an obstacle to defence integration (BUNDE 2021; Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht 2024). Thus, Germany's approach to the CSDP is defined by a commitment to multilateralism and integration, which leads to support for the CSDP in principle, and is limited in practice by an anti-militarist stance.

GERMANY AND THE QUESTION OF EUROPEAN STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

The discourse on European strategic autonomy has been present in European institutions and Member States for decades, but in Germany, it has been revived by the actions of President Donald Trump. Trump has criticised Germany's defence spending in particular and has also hinted at the withdrawal of 12,000 U.S. troops from Germany. As mentioned above, the German rhetoric emphasised more the need for European autonomy because of the Trump Administration, but President Macron's critical tone towards NATO was not followed. Merkel distanced herself from the French President's statement that NATO is brain dead (BANKA 2023). In her 2020 article, Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer responded to Macron's call for European strategic autonomy by stating: "Illusions of European strategic autonomy must come to an end: Europeans will not be able to replace America's crucial role as a security provider." Furthermore, "we have to acknowledge that, for the foreseeable future, we will remain dependent [on the U.S.]" (KRAMP-KARRENBauer 2020). Similarly, Christoph Heusgen, Merkel's Security Policy Adviser, said about European sovereignty that: "This phrase is misleading, making claims that we cannot meet in the foreseeable future. We cannot secure the Kabul airport to evacuate our citizens without the Americans, let alone conduct major military operations. That is why I think it is presumptuous to talk about European sovereignty" (HEUSGEN 2022). For German decision-makers, European strategic autonomy is compatible with NATO and not an alternative to it. In her 2020 speech following Joe Biden's electoral victory, Merkel expressed that the European calls to do more should be embedded within the transatlantic alliance (BANKA 2023). As Claudia Major put it: "From a German point of view, there is no

contradiction between stronger European commitment and strong transatlantic ties. They are considered mutually reinforcing” (LATO 2021).

After Merkel the new government coalition parties in 2021 emphasised in their coalition treaty the European sovereignty, by which they meant not only the military dimension but also geopolitical, climate, economic and technological autonomy (Mehr Fortschritt Wagen 2021). Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock expressed that “the much-discussed strategic sovereignty is in any case not primarily a military question, but rather an economic and technological one” (BAERBOCK 2021). As Chancellor Olaf Scholz said in his Prague speech in August 2022, European sovereignty means that Europe must take greater responsibility in all fields of security. Thus, unilateral dependencies in the economy, energy and technology must be eliminated. In defence, he stressed joint procurement and development and proposed the creation of a separate permanent council of defence ministers within the Council of the European Union. The Chancellor pledged that Germany would be the leading nation for the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity of 5,000 troops by 2025. For the planning and conducting of EU military operations, he proposed the establishment of a permanent EU headquarters. Scholz envisioned a “geopolitical Europe” which is capable of acting autonomously in the new security environment. For autonomous action, he reiterated the need for qualified majority voting in CFSP, a goal that German politicians have been stressing for decades (SCHOLZ 2022). Scholz also supported Macron’s idea to extend France’s nuclear deterrence to Europe, but this does not mean that the EU will become a nuclear power (Reuters 2024).

Berlin is thus deliberately using the concept of strategic sovereignty, a broader and more neutral concept than strategic autonomy. The phrase of European strategic autonomy is completely non-existent in political statements and strategic documents, Germany wants a strategically sovereign Europe that does not seek autonomy vis-à-vis the United States. This position was clearly reflected in Berlin’s refusal to supply combat vehicles to Ukraine without a decision from Washington. The government decided to buy the F-35s, which Rheinmetall is also involved in the production of, and agreed to buy 60 Chinook helicopters (DW 2023; Reuters 2023). The European Sky Shield Initiative, a joint European missile defence procurement proposed by Berlin, is also largely based on Israeli and U.S. missile defence systems. The German Government has repeatedly stated that, while it supports European defence industrial integration, it gives priority to developing the Bundeswehr’s capabilities as quickly as possible over European projects (Bundesministerium der Verteidigung 2023a; GKKE 2022). There would likely be a significant change in the German position if the strategic focus of the United States were to shift spectacularly away from

Europe and the defence policy ‘epochal shift’ were to be a real success.⁶ In that case, Germany would be able to act as a more assertive military actor in Europe. Given the Ukraine War and the mixed success of defence developments so far, this scenario seems unlikely in the short term.

GERMANY AND THE CSDP INITIATIVES

Germany’s position on the CSDP initiatives is largely determined by the factors outlined above. Berlin has traditionally been committed to the initiatives in principle and rhetoric, but reluctant to implement them. Contrary to political statements, Berlin’s commitment to European defence industrial policy is modest. In the defence industry, Germany is not willing to cede its sovereignty to the European Union. Berlin is sceptical about the extension of the European Commission’s powers to defence procurement. Germany generally supports CSDP capability projects that are not in conflict with NATO objectives. It sees a complementary role for the EU in areas that are not NATO priorities, such as crisis management operations in Europe’s neighbourhood. More importantly, most German policymakers are not primarily interested in the EU’s military capabilities, but in ensuring that defence cooperation promotes European integration. For Berlin, CSDP initiatives therefore have a strong symbolic significance (BUNDE 2021; PUGLIERIN 2024a).

Of all the CSDP initiatives, PESCO has received the most attention in Germany. Preserving the unity of European integration was crucial to the German position on PESCO. Initially, Paris wanted to use the enhanced cooperation provided by the Lisbon Treaty to bring Member States with the right capabilities to work more closely together to develop intervention capabilities. However, Berlin wanted to preserve European unity after Brexit. It saw the exclusive approach as unnecessary, as Britain, which had been an obstacle to defence integration, had already left the EU. Because of the inclusive approach, Germany only reluctantly joined France’s European Intervention Initiative (EI2), which is outside of the EU framework. The inclusive PESCO, i.e. a programme allowing all Member States and non-EU states to participate, was a political victory for Berlin. It is no coincidence that PESCO received unusual attention in the German media. Moreover, PESCO also

⁶ By the finalisation of this chapter, this seems a possible outcome. After re-elected as president of the U.S., Donald Trump started bilateral negotiations with President Vladimir Putin without the European allies. This act shocked the German political elite. Friedrich Merz, chancellor candidate of the CDU–CSU parties, announced in February 2025 that Europe must gradually reach independence from the U.S. (FURRER 2025).

appeared in the 2018 Coalition Treaty. PESCO enjoyed a wide consensus between the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Bundeswehr, despite the fact that these actors often have different positions on CSDP (BUNDE 2021; MAJOR-MÖLLING 2019).

The German defence industry has modest expectations of PESCO. It is important for them that projects have clear strategic directions. Traditionally, the defence industry has criticised the lack of well-defined defence industrial priorities of German governments. The defence industry often complains that there is no regular consultation between the government and the defence industry, thus the interests of the defence industry are often ignored by the government. In other European countries (e.g. France or Italy), the interaction between the state and the defence industry is stronger (PUGLIERIN 2024a). Moreover, German companies are worried that some PESCO projects could provide an advantage for competitors in the future, for example, the Armoured Infantry Fighting Vehicle project initiated by Italy (MAJOR-MÖLLING 2019). According to German companies, the *Zeitenwende* in defence policy has still not provided an answer to this problem, as the government still lacks a clear defence industrial strategy, which is a disadvantage against competitors (DGAP 2024).

Critics warned, however, that the inclusive approach took away the real purpose of PESCO which could have been a significant achievement in defence integration. Although the finalised PESCO included projects that were beneficial to Berlin, such as Military Mobility based on EU–NATO cooperation, which facilitates the movement of military units between Member States, these projects have little to do with crisis management capabilities (MAJOR-MÖLLING 2019).

Germany is currently participating in 26 of the 68 active PESCO projects and it is coordinating 10 projects. Germany participates mainly in air traffic and C4ISR⁷ projects.⁸ In comparison, France is active in 45 projects and coordinates 15 projects,

⁷ Command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.

⁸ These are the following: Integrated European Joint Training and Simulation Centre (EUROSIM); EUFOR Crisis Response Core (EUFOR CROC); Integrated Unmanned Ground System (iUGS); Integrated Unmanned Ground Systems 2 (iUGS2); Anti-Torpedo Torpedo (ATT); Critical Seabed Infrastructure (CSIP); European Medium Altitude Long Endurance Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (MALE RPAS Eurodrone); European Attack Helicopters TIGER Mark III; Strategic Air Transport for Outsized Cargo (SATOC); Next Generation Small RPAS (NGSR); Future Medium-size Tactical Cargo; Future Short-Range Air to Air Missile (FSRM); European Secure Software-defined Radio (ESSOR); Strategic Command and Control (C2) System for CSDP Missions and Operations (EMILCOM); Electronic Warfare Capability and Interoperability Programme for Future Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (JISR); Cyber and Information Domain Coordination Center (CIDCC); European Medical Command (EMC);

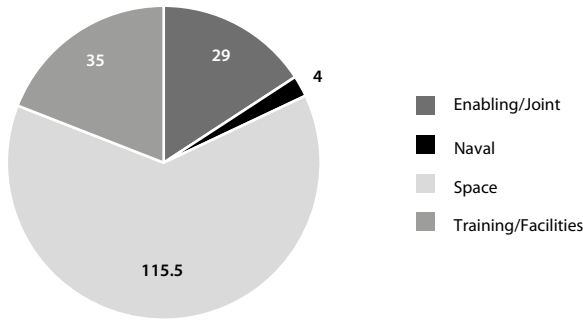


Figure 2. Volume of German coordinated EDF projects in million euros

Source: HELLEMEIER 2023

meanwhile, Italy is in 34 projects and coordinates 13 (PESCO s. a.). However, the German-coordinated projects are often larger than those of the other leading nations. Germany's main PESCO partners are France, Italy, Spain, Sweden and Norway (HELLEMEIER 2023).

Germany's participation in the European Defence Fund (EDF) is twofold. On the one hand, Germany doubled the number of its leading positions in projects in 2021. In 2022, only eight out of 41 EDF projects had no German participation. On the other hand, Germany has reduced its overall participation. In terms of the number of projects involved (31) and the number of participations (85), Germany has moved into second place behind the EDF champion France (32 projects and 96 participations). While the total value of the projects coordinated by Germany is close to 260 million euros, for France it is 894.5 million euros. The two projects led by Germany (in terms of financial volume) were "Odin's Eye II" and "Federates" in 2022. While the former is a space-based missile defence early warning system, the latter is the development of a training and decision simulation facility. Despite the positive attitude of the German defence industry towards EDF, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) account for 11% of German participation. In contrast, Italian and Greek SMEs had shares of 10% and 11% respectively (HELLEMEIER 2023).

According to the Federal Government's 2020 Strategy Paper on Strengthening the Security and Defence Industry, "the European Defence Fund has the potential to be

Network of Logistic Hubs in Europe and Support to Operations (NetLogHubs); Military Mobility; Geospatial, Meteorological and Oceanographic (GeoMETOC) Support Coordination Element (GMSCE); Timely Warning and Interception with Space-based TheatER surveillance (TWISTER); Materials and Components for Technological EU Competitiveness (MAC-EU); EU Radio Navigation Solution (EURAS); European Military Space Surveillance Awareness; Common Hub for Governmental Imagery (CoHGI); Defence of Space Assets (DoSA).

an important catalyst for an increasingly integrated European defence industry“ and “the Federal Government will seek to use this instrument to further consolidate the European defence market with the long-term policy goal of using the internal defence market” (Die Bundesregierung 2020: 4). Nevertheless, the German Government’s role in EDF is rather passive. The defence industry has criticised the absence of co-financing the EDF projects in the defence budget planning. Another problem is that the German EDF and PESCO priorities are not in line. Germany is active in the EDF in the maritime and cyber domains contrary to the C4ISR and air traffic PESCO programmes. Overall, in the EDF Germany underperforms given its economic and defence industrial weight (HELLEMEIER 2023). A positive development in this respect is that Krauss-Maffei Wegmann (KMW) and Rheinmetall, together with Italian, Spanish and Swedish companies, are planning to develop a new tank to succeed the Leopard 2. Given its multinational character, the participants plan to involve EDF funds. However, the new cooperation could rival the Franco–German Main Ground Combat System (MGCS) project, which has been under development since 2017 and whose success is highly questionable, given that its progress depends on the lagging Franco–German–Spanish Future Combat Air System (FCAS) project (NTV 2023).

Germany’s reluctance can be observed also in the recent CSDP initiatives. Although the German Government welcomed the new EU efforts, during the negotiation of the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP), it objected to an initial proposal that would have allowed the Commission to intervene in the European arms market. German officials, along with their Italian partners, believe that the Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space, headed by French Commissioner Thierry Breton, is serving French national interests. Germany’s defence industrial policy also seeks to bypass the European Defence Agency (EDA). In the joint procurement of 155 mm artillery ammunition for Ukraine, Germany has not joined the framework contracts concluded by the EDA but instead has concluded contracts with the Netherlands, Denmark and Estonia. Berlin considers the EDA hardly efficient and overly bureaucratic. The deteriorating economic situation in Germany currently plays a major role in supporting CSDP initiatives. Germany is the largest donor to the European Peace Facility (EPF) relative to its economic performance. As Germany has been heavily criticised by its Central and Eastern European allies for not supporting Ukraine enough, Berlin has taken the initiative to include in-kind donations in its contributions to the EPF (PUGLIERIN 2024a).

Germany has supported the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through the Common Procurement Act (EDIRPA), but, following an inclusive approach

similar to PESCO, it has also made EDIRPA eligible for the procurement of equipment from third countries. This decision led to a debate with France. In case of the European Defence Investment Programme (EDIP), the German Government, like in the case of ASAP, does not support the extension of the Commission's powers and is not willing to provide additional financial resources for EDIP (SCHÜTTE 2023). Furthermore, Germany does not share France's and Estonia's proposal which would allow the EU to issue Eurobonds to jointly fund common defence projects (PUGLIERIN 2024b).

Overall, Germany tends to pursue its own short-term interests and priorities in CSDP initiatives, weakening the EU's long-term ability to strengthen the European defence industrial base (PUGLIERIN 2024a; SCHÜTTE 2023). Instead of CSDP initiatives involving the transfer of sovereignty, Germany prefers self-initiated bilateral or multilateral defence cooperation. Examples include the Framework Nations Concept, which brings together more than 20 nations, or the Dutch–German or Franco–German bilateral defence cooperation. Berlin can keep these under its control while demonstrating its commitment to European defence (BUNDE 2021).

GERMANY IN THE ESDP/CSDP MISSIONS

Germany's involvement in military ESDP/CSDP operations was made possible by the Constitutional Court ruling in 1994 which allowed the participation of the German armed forces within a collective security organisation. With the Kosovo intervention, Germany broke with its previous culture of military abstention.⁹ Germany played a major role in all EU peace operations in the 2000s, even though in 2007, for example, only four out of 16 operations were entirely civilian. In Operation

⁹ Because of the burden of the pre-1945 historical past, West Germany, and later united Germany, refrained from using military force outside NATO territory. Helmut Kohl, for example, prohibited German soldiers from entering countries occupied by the Wehrmacht in World War II. The restraint was gradually eased by sending German peacekeepers to Somalia and then Bosnia under United Nations mandates. The domestic political debate about the deployment of the Bundeswehr outside of NATO territory to combat missions was finally settled by the Federal Constitutional Court's decision of 1994, which ruled that the Bundeswehr can be deployed in combat missions outside of NATO territory as long as the military operation is carried out within a collective security organisation and the parliament decided about the exact mandate of the mission. The Kosovo case was a major turning point because NATO's aerial campaign against Yugoslavia, in which German Tornado aircraft also took part, lacked a UN mandate. However, the German decision-makers, notably Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer decided that Germany can participate in the military action to prevent the further genocide of Kosovo Albanians.

Concordia,¹⁰ Germany contributed a quarter of all EU troops, and in Operation Althea,¹¹ Germany provided 900 of the 6,000 troops. Importantly, however, these early EU operations were low-intensity crisis management operations, hence the overwhelming support of the German parliament. In contrast, in high-intensity peace operations, Germany favoured NATO, of which Afghanistan is a prime example. Nevertheless, German ESDP participation was an important part of the learning process of the Bundeswehr gaining experience in geographical regions where there were no direct German interests (MISKIMMON 2007).

Of particular importance in this early phase was the participation in the 2006 EUFOR RD Congo operation.¹² The German Government was initially reluctant to take part in the operation, partly because the Bundeswehr did not have the experience for a deployment in Africa. Furthermore, 57% of the German population opposed participation (BECKER 2013). However, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan put increased pressure on Berlin. Additionally, France, which had led Operation Artemis¹³ in Congo in 2003, refused to take over operational leadership. It became clear that Berlin could not avoid taking on greater responsibility, but Merkel made the leadership role strictly conditional on a UN Security Council mandate, the participation of EU Member States and the acceptance of the Congolese Government. The operation was eventually backed by the governing parties and the Greens, as a result, 780 Bundeswehr soldiers were deployed (MISKIMMON 2007). Germany provided the operational command, but France had leadership on the ground. Although Berlin thus crossed a further threshold into a more active military role by taking the lead in an operation in Africa, it has sought to avoid risk throughout the operation. The German Government was not willing to extend the operation.

¹⁰ Operation Concordia, launched in Macedonia in March 2003, was the European Union's first military crisis management operation which was conducted using NATO assets based on the Berlin Plus Agreement.

¹¹ Launched in December 2004, Operation Althea was deployed in Bosnia-Herzegovina to ensure the compliance with the Dayton Agreement, replacing NATO's SFOR mission.

¹² The EUFOR RD Congo was a military mission of the EU to support the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the summer 2006 general elections, by providing security to UN personnel and installations, protecting the Kinshasa airport and protecting civilians.

¹³ Operation Artemis was the first autonomous EU military operation outside Europe. It was launched in June 2003 to stabilise the security situation and to ensure the protection of displaced people in Bunia, capital of Ituri province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The EUFOR operation in Chad and the Central African Republic¹⁴ a year later was not supported by most of the EU Member States, including Germany. Berlin officially cited overstretched involvement in Afghanistan, but it questioned the impartiality of the operation and considered it to be unilaterally serving French interests. The overwhelming European rejection ensured that Germany's reluctance did not damage its reputation (BECKER 2013). By the early 2010s, Germany generally shied away from a more active military role in the face of growing opposition to involvement in Afghanistan.

The foreign policy revision initiated by the 'Munich Consensus' resulted in a return to a more active engagement, although in harmony with NATO's defence planning, collective defence became the Bundeswehr's priority once again. Regarding peace operations and crisis management, the renewed international commitment was mainly seen in the participation in the UN MINUSMA operation in Mali, and to a smaller extent in the EU Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali). The participation in MINUSMA was capped at nearly 1,100, while the EUTM was capped at 450 soldiers. Germany's increased presence was mainly motivated by a demonstration of alliance solidarity with France and action against terrorism and irregular migration (THURAU 2020; PLATZ 2019). By 2022–2023 the Bundeswehr ended its participation in the MINUSMA and the EUTM Mali (Bundeswehr – EUTM Mali s. a.).

The National Security Strategy 2023 and the Defence Policy Guidelines have made it more explicit that the Bundeswehr's primary tasks are collective defence and deterrence in the face of the threat posed by Russia. The Defence Policy Guidelines define international crisis management and capacity building of partners within the UN, NATO and EU framework as a secondary task (Die Bundesregierung 2023; Bundesministerium der Verteidigung 2023a).

In 2024, Germany contributed 237 personnel to EU operations, including 130 soldiers, 38 police officers and 69 civilians, which is lower than the participation in UN peace operations (881 personnel) (ZIF 2023–2024). In April 2024, the Bundeswehr participated in four military CSDP operations:

Germany strongly supported the EU's training mission for Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine) in which it played a central role by providing the Multinational Special Training Command in Brandenburg responsible for coordinating and conducting all training measures for the Ukrainian forces in a wide variety of fields (European External Action Service 2023). Most recently, the Bundeswehr's participation in the

¹⁴ The European Union Force Chad and the Central African Republic between February 2008 and March 2009 was mandated by the United Nations to protect civilians, facilitate delivery of humanitarian aid and protect UN personnel in eastern Chad and northeastern Central African Republic.

Table 1. *The Bundeswehr's participation in peace operations in April 2024*

Mission	Location	Number of personnel
EUFOR Althea	Bosnia-Herzegovina	31 (present)
EUNAVFOR MED Irini	Mediterranean	16 (present)
EU Military Partnership Mission in Niger (EUMPM Niger)	Niger	Max. 60 (approved)
EUNAVFOR Aspidos	Red Sea	Max. 700 (approved)

Source: Bundeswehr 2024; Bundesministerium der Verteidigung 2023b; Bundesministerium der Verteidigung 2024a

EUNAVFOR Aspidos operation has attracted significant attention. The operation is aimed at protecting merchant ships against Houthi rebels. The participation of the Bundeswehr frigate Hessen was authorised by the German Parliament in February 2024 (Bundesministerium der Verteidigung 2024a). Shortly after the deployment, the frigate destroyed two Houthi drones and mistakenly a U.S. drone. The frigate soon also ran out of ammunition (MDR 2024). The ship was withdrawn from operation at the end of April 2024, to be replaced by the Hamburg frigate in August (Bundesministerium der Verteidigung 2024b).

Since 1991, 12 out of more than 25 Bundeswehr operations abroad have been EU military operations. Despite Germany's limited previous military experience abroad, between 2003 and 2012 it had more troops involved in CSDP operations than either the U.K. or Italy (CHAPPELL 2012; Bundeswehr s. a.). As in almost all military operations outside alliance territory, Germany has adopted a reluctant attitude towards ESDP/CSDP operations. The decision on the Bundeswehr's participation was always taken by the political decision-makers under external pressure, as such, Berlin's behaviour was mainly reactive. The primary motivating factors were alliance solidarity, counterterrorism and the stability export. Germany was mainly involved in military operations which, because of their low intensity, entailed a minimal risk of casualties, but which were a symbolic demonstration of its commitment to the security of Europe. Rather than engaging in peace operations, Berlin sought to build the capacity of local partners through the so-called *Ertüchtigungsinitiative* initiated by the Chancellery (thus it was labelled as the "Merkel doctrine"), under which Germany has provided military equipment, training and advice to local armed forces, for example in Iraq, Nigeria and Mali (Deutscher Bundestag 2017). These capacity-building initiatives are also present in the Bundeswehr's CSDP missions. Finally, in policy statements, strategic documents (such as the 2017 Guidelines for Crisis Management or the National Security Strategy), and mainstream party

programmes (especially by the Greens) civilian crisis management is more strongly emphasised (Die Bundesregierung 2017; Bündnis 90/Die Grünen 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

Germany's power and diplomatic influence make its participation in European defence cooperation indispensable. Berlin's importance is most evident in its ability to keep the Member States of the European Union united. Although this has often led to compromises, sometimes at the expense of effectiveness, without Berlin, the CSDP is likely to be much more fragmented. Germany's role is particularly important for small states in Central and Eastern Europe, such as Hungary, as Berlin's inclusive approach allows all states, regardless of their capabilities, to participate and benefit from closer defence cooperation.

From another perspective, however, we see that Germany's role in the CSDP is controversial. As Julian Junk and Christopher Daase put it, there is a tension between rhetoric and practice at the level of ambition (JUNK-DAASE 2013). This contradiction, in our view, can be traced back to an internal conflict within the German civilian power role. According to Hanns W. Maull, the foreign policy of post-1945 (West) Germany is decisively characterised by its avoidance of unilateral solutions and the pursuit of national goals through international cooperation. To make such cooperation effective, it seeks to institutionalise it, even through the transfer of sovereignty. At the same time, German civilian power, learning from its pre-1945 history, refrains from the use of military force, seeing it as the last instrument of foreign policy. In the civilian power role, these two elements, military restraint and a tendency towards integration, conflict with each other and the former aspect prevails most of the time. Germany wants to promote European defence cooperation, but without transferring too much from its national sovereignty. Therefore, German engagement in the CSDP is often rather symbolic (BUNDE 2021; PUGLIERIN 2024b).

Another characteristic of Berlin's policy towards the CSDP, as in its defence policy in general, is that it is often reactive. Germany supported the CSDP when it felt that the transatlantic alliance was in crisis and trust in the United States was declining (see the 2003 Iraq war or during the Trump Presidency). In the event of a second Trump Administration, it may be possible that Berlin's approach to European strategic autonomy will see a new turnaround. Like other European countries, Germany considers the United States a primary partner in the event of a serious security threat. At the same time, Berlin has been able to contribute

to the effective shaping of the CSDP when it has been able to act together with its main European partner, France. However, Berlin has always treated Paris with a certain caution, as it does not wish to be subordinated to French great power ambitions. This perception was one of the determining factors, alongside limited military capabilities, for Germany's reluctance to participate in EU military peace operations in Africa.

Two years after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine and Olaf Scholz's *Zeitenwende* speech, Germany's security and defence policy is in a transitional phase. Although Berlin is aware that the cooperative European security order is over, it does not have a clear vision for the defence of Europe. The *Zeitenwende* has yet to be truly embedded in a European framework.

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