European Strategic Autonomy: How Realism Best Explains Why It Remains a Failure

https://www.e-ir.info/2024/12/03/european-strategic-autonomy-how-realism-best-explains-why-it-remains-a-failure/

SIMON RIO, DEC 3 2024

European Strategic Autonomy (hereafter referred to as ESA) has often been seen as a “buzzword”, encompassing several meanings and realities revolving around Europe’s security and foreign policy (Järvenpää et al., 2019). Its ambiguity and interchangeability with other concepts such as “European Army” or “European Sovereignty” led several policymakers and scholars to try to precisely define and conceptualise it (see Anghel et al., 2020; Mauro, 2018), but no consensus has been reached: European countries—when they do not oppose it—fail to agree on ESA’s precise meaning, scope, and end (Arteaga et al., 2016; Franke & Varma, 2019; Libek, 2019; Jarpenvaa et al., 2019). Different reasons are invoked to explain such disagreements. As we shall see later in this paper, these positions relate to the wider theoretical debate on European integration in foreign and security policy, a debate on which all three major traditions of IR theory—respectively Realism, Constructivism, and Liberal Institutionalism—have a view.

Some scholars believe that these diverging positions can be explained more easily through rationalist and materialist considerations about states’ interests (Krotz & Maher, 2011; Monaghan, 2023). Others argue that the diversity of national “strategic cultures” in Europe—which Meyer defines as principles, values, and perceptions regarding a state’s global responsibilities and its understanding of security challenges (Meyer, 2006)—accounts for the lack of convergence over ESA (see Zandee et al., 2020). Finally, some contend that the main challenges to ESA are coordination between European states over security policies, a gap between rhetoric and actions and the difficulties in identifying common European Union (EU) policy objectives for security and foreign policy (Dorosh and Lemko, 2023).

A significant gap in the literature revolves around which explanation is most relevant and helpful in understanding the sub-optimal cooperation between European countries and the reasons behind their divergences on ESA. Addressing this gap is not only academically significant but also has practical implications for policymakers and scholars in the fields of international relations, European integration, and security policy. While Libek’s work established the impact of diverging understandings of ESA—and therefore of strategic cultures—on ESA and cooperation, it did not test the validity of other hypotheses (2019). Franke and Varma, in their landmark paper, mention the existence of “different strategic cultures and geopolitical outlook” to explain their puzzling empirical result, but not in a systematic way (2019). Similarly, Arteaga et al. try to establish a causal link between countries’ views on their national strategic autonomy and their understanding of ESA (2016). While the method is interesting (though it does not yield conclusive results), their analysis dates back to 2016 and needs to be refreshed.

Therefore, this paper aims to fill this gap and empirically analyse the determinants of countries’ views on ESA. More specifically, it aims to assess realist explanations for cooperation issues between countries in the particular case of the ESA. It does so by analysing the relationship between four countries’ strategic interests and their view on ESA. Determining the views of these four countries—the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, and France—on ESA will also be helpful, as no recent comprehensive summary exists on these views. Given the changing international context, it is important to make an update. This paper will start with a definitional work aiming at refining the conceptualisation of ESA and allowing for its operationalisation, both of which still need to be clarified in the literature.

Theoretical Framework

Definitional Work

Despite ambiguities and divergences, there is a consensus on the broad meaning of ESA. First officially used and defined in the EU's Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy of June 2016 as "Europe's autonomy of decision and action", it was later refined as Europe's "global strategic role and its ability to act autonomously when and where necessary and with partners when possible" in the Council conclusions on implementing the EU Global Strategy in the area of Security and Defence of November 2016. Drawing on this first definition, Lippert, von Ondarza and Perthes understand strategic autonomy as "the ability to set one's own priorities and make one's own decisions in matters of foreign policy and security, together with the institutional, political, and material wherewithal to carry these through—in cooperation with third parties, or if need be alone" (2019). Now that this broad understanding of ESA is fixed, how can we "operationalise" the term and make it an appropriate topic of academic enquiry?

Let us first establish the scope of ESA. What should we understand by the term "European" in ESA? While several works have reflected on the question, taking Europe to be either geographical, political, institutional, economic or moral, our work will keep the focus at the level the EU (Barbé and Grasa, 1992). As Hill argues, nothing stable and worthy can be said of Europe's international role if the question of who is included remains uncertain (1993). The only notable multilateral security and foreign policy initiatives at European level (see the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) or the European Defence Fund (EDF)) have been taken by the EU. Therefore, the EU will be the main focus of our analysis.

What policy areas should be included in ESA? Helwig distinguishes between the conventional interpretation of strategic autonomy and the global one (2020). The conventional interpretation has been on the agenda since the late 1990's and focuses on the industrial, operational, and strategic capabilities that European countries must commonly develop. The main policy areas it deals with are foreign, security and defence policies. On the other hand, the global interpretation, which gained relevance after the Covid-19 outbreak, also considers geo-economic competition, climate change or digitalisation as essential areas for ESA. European integration in policy areas related to economics, usually referred to as "low politics", is pretty strong and cooperation not an issue. This paper seeks to understand why cooperation is more difficult in "high politics", policy areas such as security and foreign affairs. Therefore, this paper will focus on the conventional interpretation of ESA.

Next, what would it mean for Europe to be more "strategically autonomous"? Hill notoriously argued that the main problem of Europe's cooperation in security and foreign policy is the existence of an "expectation-capabilities" gap (1993). This gap represents the distance between the alleged goals of Europe and the means, not only in terms of material capabilities (money, arms etc.) but also in terms of political will, i.e., the ability to take and hold decisions. Similarly, Mayer pointed out the lack of "coherence and consistency" in Europe's foreign and security policy (2013).

How would bridging this gap translate in concrete terms? According to Drent (2018), there are four main elements: political autonomy, institutional autonomy, capabilities autonomy and industrial autonomy.

Firstly, political autonomy is the ability "to identify desirable political goals" and work towards their implementation (Brustlein, 2018). In defence policy, this would mean solving the main political problem identified by Monaghan: the strategic cacophony challenge (2023). Hugo Meijer and Stephen G. Brooks define the strategic cacophony challenge as "profound, continent-wide divergences across all the domains of national defence policies, most notably threat perceptions" (2021). Building political autonomy would therefore mean working on the ability of European states to hold and maintain a common position on foreign and security policy matters. The EU's struggle to unify internally creates vulnerability, stemming from prolonged decision-making processes and the failure to reach a consensus due to diverging national interests (Anghel et al., 2020).

Secondly, material autonomy connects to the problem of the specialisation dilemma, the absence of political will for communalising weapons production and building common capabilities (Monaghan, 2023). European countries refuse to specialise and communalise, continuing to produce across all sectors or buying weapons from a non-European

country. This leads European countries to have 178 types of weapons systems, around 148 more than the US, despite a budget half lower. Hartley and Cox identify the "costs of non-Europe" in defence to equate to around 10 to 20 per cent of the cost of total weapons acquisition by European countries (1992). Europe would, therefore, gain material autonomy by favouring and developing a common defence technological and industrial base (EDTIB).

Finally, institutionally, autonomy means working towards implementing institutional structure facilitating European states' collective action in security defence and foreign policy. According to Helwig and Sinkkonen, this would involve three elements: decision-shaping and decision-making structures, policy-planning capacities, and transfer of competencies to the EU level (2022). The CSDP (including PESCO, the European Defence Agency (EDA), EDF and the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD)) and CFSP are reasonable first steps to create a European framework in foreign policy and security and defence. However, a more important integration would imply moving from government to governance, from unanimity to qualified majority voting, and from enhanced cooperation to co-decision.

As such, I will take countries' views on ESA to include their willingness to develop common European positions in foreign and defence policy, their attitude towards the development of a common EDTIB and the pooling of defence purchases, and, finally, their view on further institutional integration in foreign and defence policy.

European Strategic Autonomy and IR Theory

Understanding and evaluating ESA necessitates putting it back within theoretical perspectives. While there have been a few papers dealing with IR theories' understanding of ESA, most scholars on this issue have focused on European defence and foreign policy integration in general. I will draw on the latter to strengthen our understanding of the theoretical stakes behind ESA. Liberal accounts have, up to our knowledge, never formulated any precise view on the matter and are the less prolific in terms of explaining issues of cooperation in European security and defence. Thus, our focus will mainly stay on constructivists and realists accounts, the latter being our main object of analysis. I will still mention Liberalists' theories, but more briefly.

I. Realism

Increased cooperation in the security realm between European countries after the Cold War has been puzzling for realist theorists (Collard-Wexler, 2006). Since then, the main focus of realist scholars has been to explain the behaviour of Europe as a unitary actor. Some argue that Europeans do "soft balancing," subtly balancing the influence of the United States through non-military means to preserve their strategic interests without provoking US abandonment (Art, 2004). Others hold that Europe's security initiatives represent a form of "bandwagoning" where Europeans seek to stay on the side of the strongest power, and where their efforts are seen as strengthening the transatlantic alliance rather than undermining US supremacy (Brooks & Wohlforth, 2005 or Cladi & A. Locatelli, 2012).

Our interest and focus in this paper is rather to explain why European countries do not cooperate more in defence and foreign policy. As such, we need to look at Europe not as a unified actor but as a collection of states. While there has been less discussion on this point, we can identify some key explanations. Ringsmose argues that European countries dissatisfied with the US's unilateralist foreign policy may balance against the US, while countries that fear for their security or that identify opportunities for profit may rather bandwagon (2013). Similarly, Dyson and Konstadinides's hold that increased cooperation between European states is further hindered by the alliance security dilemma: the fear among European states of being either abandoned or entrapped by their main ally, the US (2013, pp. 5-6). Countries that fear entrapment into the US's policies may advocate for more European integration. In contrast, countries that fear the US might withdraw from Europe and stop their security guarantee may be more sceptic about concepts such as ESA. As we see, the bigger idea is that European countries have diverging national interests, which inform their views on ESA, leading to divergences and cooperation issues.

While no comprehensive realist's view on ESA's cooperation issues like this has ever been formulated, this bigger idea corresponds to the main features of realism. Helwig and Sinkkonen argue that the Realist's take on ESA's

cooperation should be based on the following main points: anarchy and power competition limit depth of cooperation, and states seek to protect their security and economic interest.

In fact, according to Burchill (2005, p. 46), realist theory perceives national interests primarily through the lens of power and security, emphasizing that states act in a way that maximizes their strategic advantages and security. Morgenthau, an important figure in the realist theory, points to power as an essential aspect of defining a nation's interests. He argues that national interest revolves around power and its preservation, and ultimately guides the conduct of states in international relations (1985, p. 125). Oppenheim adds that realists view the pursuit of national interest as a rational and unavoidable objective of any government, making actions that contradict these interests inherently irrational. Another view could arise from structural realism, as drawn by Waltz: considering security is scarce in an anarchical world, and considering states interact in a zero-sum game, i.e., any positive gain for one state leads to a loss for another state, states have no incentive whatsoever to cooperate and build a common security and defence apparatus. Such a view explains the difficulties of cooperating through the idea of a European international structure of "balanced multipolarity", which leads to competition between states (Waltz, 2000). The issue with this view is that current European defence programs such as PESCO, EDA, EDF, CARD and others are already substantial challenges to this version of realism. Secondly, the concern of our paper is less about international structure than about national strategic interest, domestic concerns and agency, concerns which are more coherent with a classical realist understanding of IR (Fiott, 2013).

II. Constructivism

Constructivism posits that countries' identities and histories shape the way they perceive their interests, and that the norms that derive from these identities and histories drive countries' policy choices (Dyson & Konstadinides, 2013, p. 114). At the heart of constructivist thought lies the idea that "anarchy is what states make of it", emphasising the role of ideas, representations and interactions between states in shaping international relations (Wendt, 1992). When delving into ESA and European defence cooperation, many constructivists place a strong emphasis on the intricate concept of strategic culture. As I have defined, strategic culture encompasses principles, values, and perceptions regarding a state's global responsibilities and its understanding of security challenges (Meyer, 2006).

Some constructivists observe a trend toward convergence in strategic cultures in post-Cold War Europe (Meyer, 2006; Rieker, 2006; Howorth, 2007). For instance, Meyer's analysis notes increased common threat perceptions, institutional socialisation, and crisis learning. He further identifies the emergence of a "humanitarian power Europe," marked by shared norms on the use of force and EU preference. However, other constructivists recognise that differences in strategic cultures may hinder European defence cooperation. According to King, the distinct organisational cultures within national militaries pose a formidable obstacle to such convergence (2005). Lindley-French highlights the persisting gap between European countries' understanding of European security and defence stakes (2002). De France and Witney also expressed concern over the lack of a shared strategic perspective across Europe (2013). One way of empirically assessing the constructivist theory applied to ESA is to examine the different understandings European countries have of the concept and how this relates to their strategic cultures. Libek, Franke Varma and Arteaga et al. all did this more or less comprehensively (Arteaga et al., 2016; Franke & Varma, 2019; Libek, 2019).

III. Liberalism

Liberalism views European integration as driven by shared interests among states, facilitated by international institutions, and aimed at promoting multilateralism and cooperation. It emphasises the role of domestic and transnational societal coalitions, interdependence, and values in shaping state preferences and fostering cooperation (Helwig & Sinkkonen, 2022). For instance, Hoffman's intergovernmentalism underscores the significance of domestic preference convergence among EU member states as a driver of European defence collaboration (1966). It contends that party ideologies alignment across EU nations paved the way for advancements in defence cooperation. Liberalism may hold that ESA could go further if it is institutionalised and legitimated, with EU countries constrained to socialise and adapt their interests to each other (Helwig & Sinkkonen, 2022). According to Ikenberry, an integrated European defence policy could even be viewed as an attempt for the EU to re-own agency and promote

its vision of the global order in a time of weakening of the West's normative hegemony (2018).

Methodology

Research Goals

This paper seeks to assess the realist view on the challenges facing European states in achieving European Strategic Autonomy (ESA). As noted in the theoretical outlook, even though the realist literature emphasizes the significance of national interests and their influence on states' foreign policies, no coherent and comprehensive realist perspective has ever been thoroughly developed by any realist scholar about issues of cooperation and ESA. This aspect of ESA remains understudied in the academic literature. This analysis is therefore based on a reasonably probable reconstructed realist account. Consequently, this paper pursues a dual objective: *inductively deriving empirical results and analysis to formulate initial theoretical propositions regarding realism's stance on ESA*, and *deductively testing theoretical claims that could be associated with realism*.

Research Model

This paper aims to assess the idea that countries do not share the same view on ESA because they seek to pursue their national interests, which, at least in the short term, goes against the realisation of ESA. To test this hypothesis, this paper will run a comparative case study of 4 European countries. For each one of them, it will determine their national interests (according to a methodology explained hereafter) and their view on ESA. An in-case and cross-case analysis will follow. The in-case analysis sought to establish the existence—or inexistence—of a causal link between countries' interests and their view on ESA. The cross-case analysis aims to compare the results between countries to identify the existence—or inexistence—of patterns in the relationship between countries' interests and their view on ESA. As Lamont (2021) points out, when focusing on specific events within a particular country or geographic area, employing a case study approach enables one to delve deeply into how the variables interact and reveal underlying causation.

The central question of any case study is "what is this a case of?" (Levy, 2008). The crucial task of a case study is to create knowledge that can be applied outside of the particular case being studied (Lamont, 2021). Most of this task resides in choosing cases appropriately to illustrate the broader phenomenon one wishes to study. Several methods can be used to ensure a good and representative case selection (for a survey, see Bennett and Elman, 2007). In this paper, I rely on a cross-case method, where countries are chosen to represent the variety of views on ESA and the diversity of geopolitical situations and national interests that exist in Europe. The goal is to determine a persistent and consistent causation between a country's view on ESA and its national interests. Thus, there is no need to represent and account for all sensibilities and particular situations. A roughly representative panel of views and situations is sufficient.

Simon's seminal paper proposes a typology for ESA, encompassing three distinct groups of countries (2021). Firstly, the "Neutral club" includes countries like Austria, Ireland, and Malta, asserting neutrality due to constitutional limitations or foreign policy traditions, and rejecting deeper integration into European security interests. Secondly, the "Status Quo Club" comprises countries such as Sweden, Finland, Poland, and the Baltic States, internally divided on European defense cooperation but viewing NATO as pivotal to their security policies. Thirdly, the "Western Block", led by France and including Greece, Italy, and Spain, advocates for strategic sovereignty and autonomy. Germany, not fitting into any group, mediates between them, likely navigating its national strategic interests within the broader European security landscape. In this paper, I exclude "neutral bloc" countries, which are irrelevant due to their non-commitment to defence and security issues. From the "status quo club", I include Poland and the Netherlands, for that while they both see NATO as pivotal to their security, they have an opposite view on European defence cooperation. From the "Western Bloc", I include France, Greece, and Spain, each with distinct geopolitical and security contexts, despite their shared advocacy for European Strategic Autonomy. Finally, I include Germany, which case will be interesting to understand if its peculiar interest might have led the country to remain "unaligned".

Our two variables are our four countries' strategic interests (independent variable) and their views on ESA

(dependent variable). In my definitional work, I decided to focus on the conventional understanding of ESA, which focuses on security, defence, and foreign policy. However, security policy and economic interests are usually intertwined. While I will focus on countries' views on ESA conventionally defined, I will include the economic aspect in the "countries' interests" variable. I rely on a mix of primary and secondary resources to determine how countries view ESA. I draw on existing research from Arteaga et al., Franke and Varma (2019), Libek (2019), Järvenpää et al. (2019), Simon (2021), Česnakas and Juozaitis (2023). I also draw on many think tanks, such as the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI), the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), and the Real Instituto Elcano. Finally, I put a significant focus on government papers—when they exist—which allow us to give a country's take on particular aspects of ESA and to actualise the country's view with more recent information, when possible.

One limit with government papers is that it cannot be determined whether they should be closely scrutinised or whether they are merely a form of foreign policy advertising and signalling (Janulewicz, 2020). While there has been a recent tendency for governments to release public security strategies or white papers, these sources may also hide part of the reality: not mentioning some of the states' interests or views that they do not want to put under much public attention, for instance. As such, building on secondary sources and constructing our own synthesis by recoupling information is essential. In building what I think is a country's view on ESA, I will rely on the operationalisation work led previously in this paper. I determined that a country's take on ESA has several components: its willingness to develop common European positions in foreign and defence policy, its attitude towards the development of a common EDTIB and the pooling of defence purchases, and, finally, its views on further institutional integration in foreign and defence policy. For comparison and coherency purposes, I will find each country's position on these three components.

Let us turn to our second variable, countries' strategic interests. The most fundamental interest realist scholars identify is the security and survival of the state. This includes territorial integrity and political sovereignty. Realists also acknowledge economic prosperity as a crucial national interest. This involves securing access to markets, energy supplies, and other resources necessary for economic stability and growth. Other types of interests have also been identified, such as influence, which relates to Nye's soft power, a state's ability to shape global affairs through culture, political values, and foreign policies that attract and persuade others without coercion (1990) For the sake of simplicity, measurability and comparison, I will focus on interests defined in the narrow sense. I will stick with Nuechterlein's first two elements of what basic national interests: Defence interests, economic interests and World Order interests (1976). Defence interests encompass safeguarding the country from external threats, either from another state or through externally inspired challenges to its governmental structure. Economic interests involve advancing the country's economic prosperity through its interactions with other states. In the "economic interests" variable, each country's world order view will be integrated. They will serve as a test variable revealing whether or not countries' views on other foreign policy matter such as what should be the world order correspond to their interests.

Choosing the national interest as a variable comes with its problems, however. First, several scholars have emphasised the difficulty of determining a country's objective interests. Constructivists emphasize the significance of identity in determining national interests (Gray, 1999). Collective memory, including shared history, influences national identity formation. National interests are produced through the construction of international political representations, which suggests that interests are not mere objective facts but are created. Strategic culture, arising from these values and identity, impacts how policymakers perceive other states and determines alliances and adversaries (Lantis, 2002). However, modern-day realists also acknowledge that identity plays a big role in shaping the national interest and foreign policy (Zajec, 2017). One way of putting it is that while strategic culture is important in determining a country's foreign policy in many aspects, there is still a set of objective conditions that constrain a country's foreign policy and inform its perception of the national interest. It is these conditions that I am going to establish for each country. In the analysis of each country's situation, I will show that objective national interests determine the key elements of their foreign policy and their view on ESA, not strategic culture.

Results

The Netherlands

Defence/security interests: A small state neighbouring Germany and Belgium, the Netherlands remains a maritime and anti-continental country. The country's geopolitical interest has always been to be independent from continental powers. As such, it was an active player of the Pax Britannica and the later Pax Americana (de Wijk, 2020; Mengelber & Noll, 2023). Nowadays, it faces no immediate threat in its security environment, and its military shrank to 36,000 troops in 2020. Since 1949, the leading security guarantor of the Netherlands has been NATO and the USA, and the Netherlands uses its armed forces solely for maintaining the international rule of law or for humanitarian purposes (Wiltenburg & van der Vorm, 2019). The Netherlands' military is not designed to protect the country's territorial integrity; NATO's article 5 and the US are. The US is, therefore, the most important ally of the Netherlands (Sweijs & van Wijk, 2020). Thus, the first interest of the Netherlands is to remain a good and loyal ally to the US. However, at a time of increased pressure on Europeans to take care of their own security and out of fears the US could withdraw if Donald Trump gets re-elected (Wiltenburg & van der Vorm, 2019), the Netherlands' interest also became reinforcing defence cooperation with other European countries and follow the trend towards Europeanisation (Zandee, 2018).

Economic interests: The Netherlands boasts an open economy, acting as a global hub for trade and internet traffic, with trade openness reaching 177% of GDP, among the world's highest (Bolt et al., 2023). Approximately one-third of its economic activity relies on foreign markets (OECD, 2017). While possessing a robust defence industry, it is dependent on exports due to a small domestic market (Zandee, 2019). Strategically, the Netherlands seeks to reduce dependencies highlighted by events like Covid-19 and the Ukraine conflict, emphasizing diversification of energy and raw material sources to prevent reliance on nations like Russia and China (Strategy for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, 2022). Furthermore, with trade being pivotal to the Dutch economy, fostering diverse economic relationships and supporting entrepreneurship abroad are priorities. The Dutch vulnerability to disruptions in global value chains is massive, such event could result in a 2% annual GDP loss for the Kingdom (Bolt et al., 2023). Additionally, substantial contributions to institutions like the World Trade Organisation (WTO) have yielded notable increases in export: in 2019, an additional contribution of €5.4 million to the WTO led to a 2.9% increase in exports, about €13 billion in absolute value (Bolt et al., 2023). The Netherlands values a stable international legal order and actively participates in international institutions to support global governance and rule of law. It strives to uphold multilateralism and the effective functioning of international legal frameworks, which are seen as vital for global stability and prosperity (National Risk Assessment, 2022).

The Netherlands' view on ESA: The Netherlands cautiously views European Strategic Autonomy (ESA), stressing the need for compatibility with NATO and the transatlantic alliance (Franke & Varma, 2019). Dutch policy sees ESA as a means to bolster Europe's defence capabilities not already covered by NATO, leaving territorial defence and deterrence to NATO (Franke & Varma, 2019). They think it should focus on enhancing strategic transport, medical evacuation, and military training, as well as improving European defence industry cooperation while maintaining partnerships with non-EU countries, mainly the USA (Lebek, 2019). Recently, the Dutch government has started to mention ESA, but only as "Open" ESA, highlighting that non-military elements like economy and energy are key to their understanding of ESA (Strategy for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, 2022). On the other hand, the term ESA has not been used in the 2022 Defence White Paper.

The Netherlands shows no particular willingness to develop common European positions in Foreign and Defence Policy (Wiltenburg & van der Vorm, 2019). They prioritise autonomy of action over decision-making autonomy (Franke & Varma, 2019). The Dutch government supports initiatives like EDF or PESCO, which focus on developing a competitive European defence industry. It advocates for "pooling and sharing transport capabilities [to] create room for investment in other capabilities" and "buying the same materiel" to increase interoperability and standardisation (White Defence Paper, 2022). The Netherlands has expressed reservations on further institutional integration. Three key principles guide their approach: avoiding ideological debates about the ends of further European cooperation in defence and security, prioritising concrete output to measure success, and ensuring that output strengthens NATO (Zandee, 2018). As debates around ESA got more intense in 2018, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said that "The idea of a European Army goes way too far for the Netherlands" and that "NATO is and remains the cornerstone of our defence policy" (Reuters, 2018).

Germany

Defense/security interests: Since World War II, Germany has pursued a strategy of "Westbindung," which involved integrating Germany into European and transatlantic frameworks to rehabilitate the country after its defeat and division (Kirchick, 2017). The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 highlighted the weakness of the German military, leading the Chief of the German Army to state that the Bundeswehr was. Therefore, "NATO remains the anchor and main framework of action for German security and defence policy" (White Paper on German Security Policy, 2016). The outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war led to the creation of a €100 billion fund to rebuild a credible German military. The priority for Germany is to close its capability gap as quickly as possible, which implies buying "off-the-shelf"—mostly American equipment ironically—instead of more complex European solutions (Puglierin, 2024a).

Economic interests: Germany has long prioritised its economic interests over security concerns. Historically, Germany has tried to balance its Western security inclination through economic eastward pushes (, 2022). Germany is the third biggest exporter in the world, and its industry accounts for 26.6% of its GDP, a record in the G7. A major economic power, Germany sought to escape entrapment into US foreign policy in order to secure foreign markets for its companies and assert its position as a geoeconomic power (Schreer, 2023). While it cannot do so with Russia anymore, it is now balancing with China. The 2022 National Security Strategy (NSS) states that despite China being a competitor, "China remains a partner without whom many global challenges and crises cannot be resolved". Many prominent German firms that are "too big to fail" are heavily dependent on Chinese markets or supplies" (Tallis, 2023). However, at the same time, Germany knows that its dependencies on China and Russia are putting the country at risk. Russia uses Germany's energy dependency on its gas as a means of hybrid warfare (Puglierin, 2022). As such, one of Berlin's most important interests is to reduce its critical dependencies (White Paper on German Security Policy, 2016; NSS, 2022; Gibadło & Gotkowska, 2023). Finally, as an open economy, Germany also seeks to promote a rule-based world order, emphasising the importance of multilateralism and international institutions in its Defence Policy Guidelines (2023).

Germany's view on ESA: Germany officially supports ESA but remains cautious. Germany advocates for an ESA focusing more on civilian aspects, such as economic policy, humanitarian aid, internal security, etc. On the defence side, only the equipment and industrial aspect is highlighted. In fact, Germany started to push for further integration in defence policy during the Trump mandate, fearing the US's divergent interests with Europe and the possibility of abandonment (Libek, 2019; Franke & Varma, 2019). However, 24th February 2022 represented a full stop to these ambitions. While the Zeitenwende speech of Chancellor Scholz called for a geopolitical Europe that supports Ukraine and reduces its dependencies, and the 2022 NSS argued that Germany holds a particular responsibility in defending Europe as its biggest country, in reality, Germany reverted to a more traditional Atlantic position. Scholz stated that "The European Union can make a small contribution, but [that he does not] think it should be overstated because [Germany's] defence alliance is NATO" (Puglierin, 2024a). The main goal of Germany is "to keep the US engaged", as "the transatlantic alliance is seen as indispensable for Europe's security" (Puglierin, 2024b). It is worth highlighting that the term "Strategic Autonomy" is not even present in any of these official documents, whether the 2016 White Paper, the 2022 NSS, or the 2023 Defence Policy Guidelines document. Germany allegedly shows interest in developing common European positions in Foreign and Defence Policy. All the German policymakers interviewed by Libek stated that for Germany, "strategic autonomy" is also about "European unitedness in action in the field of foreign and security policy, both together with its partners and alone when necessary" (Libek, 2019). However, this seems rather complicated to confirm empirically (Puglierin, 2022). In 2022, French President Emmanuel Macron proposed to Chancellor Scholz that they travel together to Beijing to demonstrate EU solidarity and counteract Chinese efforts to divide European nations. Scholz declined. Germany also supports a "high-performance and internationally competitive" European defence industry (NSS, 2022), and officially supports Brussels's efforts to create a robust European EDTIB. However, Germany sees little potential in such an effort and does not fund it much (Puglierin, 2024b). Its decision to buy "off-the-shelf" American equipment to reduce its capability gap exemplifies the German disdain for European solutions. Finally, Libek's interviewees stressed that Germany favours a deeper European institutional integration in defence policy, particularly industrially (2019). However, Germany favours boosting European collaboration while maintaining its national sovereignty over defence matters. Berlin remains cautious about extending the European Commission's authority in defence and prefers to keep military procurement predominantly under national control (Puglierin, 2024a). There seems to be a gap between Germany's official statements and Germany's actions.

Poland

Defense/security interests: Poland's location as a borderline state, neighbouring a revisionist and imperialist Russia indirectly but also directly (Kaliningrad), has informed Polish foreign policy for decades. While the 24th of February 2022 was an occasion for Poland to affirm that Russia is its most significant security threat (see Foreign Minister Rau's speech to the Polish House, 2023), this perception—or rather this fact—has been ongoing for years (mentioned as such in the 2014 and 2020 NSSs). The danger Russia represents is such that NATO is existential for the country's survival (Rodkiewicz, 2017; Rau, 2023). Therefore, Poland's most fundamental interest is to strengthen the commitment and presence of American and NATO forces in its territory and across Central and Eastern Europe. It is also to strengthen the transatlantic bond and prevent any kind of dispute and division between EU countries and the US (Rodkiewicz, 2017; Sobczak, 2022). The second most fundamental interest is to build a strong military. One main fear of Poland is that NATO's deterrence principle keeps relying on deterring aggression through the expectation of counterattack, which would imply accepting temporary occupation of territory by the aggressor (Rau, 2023). To prevent occupation and resist long enough for NATO to react, Poland has been gradually raising its defence spendings, to reach 3% of GDP in 2023, with an ambitious program of rearmament (implying, as Germany, buying "off-the-shelf" equipment to the US) and technological modernisation. Finally, and in line with the long-existing Trimarium strategy—the alliance of twelve countries to build a strong central Europe separating Germany and Russia, the two historically imperialist states in the region—Poland's interest is to cooperate with its neighbours, the Baltics states, Slovakia, Hungary and other regional states. Poland already does so through an incredible number of different formats: the Bucharest Nine, the Visegrad Group, the Three Seas initiative, etc. (Valori, 2020).

Economic interests: The Polish openness rate—the sum of imports and exports divided by two put as a ratio of GDP—is low, 52% in 2019, much less than its neighbours (Faure, 2022). Poland is therefore less constrained in its foreign policy by economic considerations. Poland's economic growth in the 1990s was allowed by massive European investments, allowing the country to build a strong industry, particularly in automotive and electronics (Today, Intra-EU trade represents 74% of Poland's exports (Credit Agricole, 2024). Moreover, Poland is the biggest beneficiary of EU funds. Therefore, while it may not have been self-evident in the PiS (right-wing populist party in power from 2015 to 2023) behaviour towards the EU, Poland benefits a lot from the EU and should work for its good-functioning, which PiS Foreign Minister Rau highlighted in his speech to the House (2023). Poland also prioritizes ensuring energy security through diversification of oil and gas supply sources and expanding natural gas import capacities. So far, this has been chiefly done through buying natural liquefied gas and new nuclear power plants from American suppliers, but this goal also has a European dimension, with the developing of regional connectivity with southern countries like Croatia, Slovenia or Greece (Janulewicz, 2020). Internationally, Poland advocates for human rights, justice, the democratic rule of law and environmental protection. However, the most important remains the respect of states' sovereignty based on international law and the protection of national identities (NSS, 2020; Rau, 2023)

Poland's view on ESA: Poland's perspective on European Strategic Autonomy (ESA) is primarily influenced by its strong pro-American stance and reliance on the US security guarantee. The government in Warsaw views the current push for ESA as potentially undermining transatlantic relations, fearing it may lead to a decreased reliance on the United States (Franke & Varma, 2019). Warsaw sees ESA efforts as potentially diverting attention and resources away from NATO's collective defence capability, which it considers crucial for its security (Arteaga et al., 2016). In April 2023, Prime Minister Morawiecki, answering French proposals regarding ESA, suggested focusing on bettering the strategic partnership with the United States rather than pursuing autonomy independent of the US (Fraioli, 2023). The word ESA or any of its corollaries are absent in government papers. Poland shows no particular willingness to develop common European positions in Foreign and Defence Policy. In his Foreign Policy speech, Rau holds that Europe should only have a supportive role to NATO initiatives, giving the example of EU Military Assistance Mission and the European Peace Facility, one a civilian program and the other aiming to finance military equipment (most of the time not even European) for Ukraine. Poland's engagement with PESCO and EDA, in which Poland has participated in joint investment programs, could indicate a willingness to support the European defence industry. However, Polish participation has been financially limited, and their involvement could be seen as a means to ensure that EU defence integration aligns with NATO commitments and to prevent duplication or discrimination between EU and NATO activities (Terlikowski, 2022). Finally, Poland strongly opposes further institutional integration in defence

areas. National sovereignty is paramount for Poland, and Poland does not accept any form of EU interference in its internal affairs (Reeves, 2021).

France

Defence/Security Interests: France's location at the end of the western Eurasian landmass allows it to escape any immediate security threats. Since Brexit, France has remained the only credible power in the EU. The cornerstone of France's global ambitions and foreign policy is keeping its power status (Kuokštyte, 2022). Further, France has the 2nd largest Economic Exclusive Zone in the world and is the only country with territory across the five continents. It sought to preserve its long-lasting influence and critical interests in the Middle East and North Africa region, the Sahel region and the Indo-Pacific, but it is being challenged by Turkey, Russia, and China in these areas. As such, France has its own strategic interests, sometimes different from those of its allies. This led France's continuous interest to be the preservation of its independence from bloc geopolitics, the escaping of entrapment into US-led policies and the assertion of its role as a "balancing power" (National Strategic Review, 2022). This willingness to be independent from the US drives France's wish to make the EU a "third superpower" (Brotman, 2023). Finally, a critical aspect of France's security concerns revolves around its defence industry. As the world's second-largest weapons exporter, maintaining a robust national defence sector is imperative for safeguarding France's independence (Defence and National Security Strategic Review, 2017). Given the limited size of the domestic market, France relies heavily on exporting these weapons, positioning itself in competition with the leading exporter, the USA (Kuokštyte, 2022).

Economic interests: France is less dependent on international trade than its neighbours, with its trade openness ratio at only 73.25% of GDP, against 177% for the Netherlands (Macrotrends, 2022). It is the largest agricultural power in the EU and is almost self-reliant for its food supplies. It has undergone a de-industrialisation, which led to industry representing only 17.38% of GDP (Statista, 2023). France exports across several strategic domains, such as weapons, civilian aeronautics, or civilian nuclear. In these markets, significant contracts (more than €150 million) represent half of deals, and most deals are major acquisitions that have great political and diplomatic weight (France Diplomatie, 2018). Therefore, France has an interest in being geoeconomically independent and choosing its economic partners freely. While energy autonomy is important to France (National Strategic Review, 2022), France is one of the most nuclearised states from a civilian perspective and is, therefore, much less dependent on hydrocarbon energies and Russian gas. The seventh country in terms of exports in 2023 (Statista, 2024), France remains committed to an international order based on international law and multilateralism (National Strategic Review, 2022).

France's view on ESA: France is the leading advocate of ESA. ESA is mentioned several times in French government papers dedicated to security and defence written since 2017 (Defence and National Security Strategic Review, 2017; National Strategic Review, 2022). It has clearly been an important goal of the French government, not only under Emmanuel Macron's governance (Kuokštyte, 2022). However, Macron brought it to another level, bringing the concept into the European public debate several times (most notably in his Sorbonne speeches in 2017 and 2024, but also in Bratislava in 2023). Macron's view of ESA is that "the European Union must be able to see itself as an adapted common entity, capable of taking decisions on its own and investing much more in key sectors of its sovereignty, such as defense" (Atlantic Council, 2021). France's view is often misinterpreted by other countries, which they see as staunchly anti-US and aiming at realising full autonomy (Libek, 2019). In fact, France recognises that "the guarantee provided by NATO's collective defence commitments remains the central pillar of security in the Euro-Atlantic area" (National Strategic Review, 2022). The difference is that France seeks a "more complementary relationship" between the EU and NATO, where the EU would be a "global player" (National Strategic Review, 2022). All French government officials Libek interviewed emphasised that strategic autonomy entails a collective comprehension of the security landscape (2019). They view the capacity to understand, analyse, and forecast in common as crucial for the EU to independently make decisions and take action. While acknowledging the inevitability of national differences on many topics, France still seeks to develop common European positions in Foreign and Defence Policy on key issues. For example, Macron called for a common European position in the competition between the US and China (Koch, 2023). France is one of the most vocal proponents of a European Defence Industry. France advocates for both a short-term instrument for joint acquisition and a defence investment program for collaborative development and procurement (National Strategic Review, 2022). An independent EDTIB is seen as

essential to Europe's capability to have common positions and act as a global player (National Strategic Review, 2022). While the Strategic review also praises more institutional integration in defence, there is ground to doubt that this will translate into actual acts. National sovereignty is fundamental to France, and France does not support the idea of a European army (Libek, 2019).

Analysis

Within-Case Analysis

This section aims to determine the causal connection between the two variables investigated for each country. The main challenge to this paper's thesis that countries' objective interests constrain their views on ESA is the idea that the country's interests cannot be objectively defined but are rather subjective threat perceptions that arise from strategic culture. For each country, I will establish that this objection fails.

The Netherlands: The fact that the Netherlands is dependent on the US for its security is prevalent. It explains Dutch's caution on ESA and its emphasis on autonomy of action, which fits the US's request for greater burden sharing, rather than on autonomy of decision-making, which would imply an emancipation from the US. The Netherlands' view on what ESA's scope should be—energy and economic security—also perfectly aligns with the unparalleled importance of its economic interests. A test variable which shows how the country's foreign policy aligns with its interests is the world order view of the Netherlands: Its unique insistence on the importance of international stability, the rule of law and multilateralism reflects the importance of trade and globalisation for the Netherlands' economy. On defence ESA, the Dutch emphasis on facilitating troops movement is, like for the Baltic states, explained by the fact that the Netherlands' security relies on the rapid deployment of allied troops in case of problems (Šešelgytė, 2019). However, unlike the Baltic states, the Netherlands is not under direct threat from Russia and has other interests than only territorial defence. As such, it can reasonably take some degree of freedom by pushing for "open" strategic autonomy, centred around energy and economy. While there have been debates on the extent of consistency in Dutch foreign policy, most of its policy decisions seem to be drawn from established approaches (de Wijk et al., 2020). This consistency seems to indicate that Dutch foreign policy is constrained, to some extent, by a set of immovable conditions which determine the Netherlands' interests. For example, it could be argued that the Netherlands' choice to give up its security to the US was the product of a particular strategic culture (Booxhorn, 2020). While it could have been in 1949, it is now an objective fact that the Netherlands cannot reasonably change for now, in the absence of credible alternative.

Germany: One way of analysing the case of Germany is cross-time. Germany's foreign policy have always fluctuated between alliance with the West and pushes to the East (Alonso-Trabanco, 2022). However, this alternation does not reflect changes in strategic culture, rather, they correspond to changes in the external situation faced by Germany. When Trump first took office, Germany, fearing the US's disengagement from Europe, became a strong advocate of a European alternative, based on ESA. As soon as Trump was replaced by the more conciliant Biden, this push for ESA stopped, replaced by a strategic vision emphasising the centrality of NATO. This shift is very clear if one compares pre-2020 analysis of Germany's view on ESA, where Germany is one of the leading proponents (Libek, 2019; Franke and Varma, 2019) and post-2020 analysis, where ESA is deemed unnecessary and resource-wasting by German leaders. More revealingly, in February 2022, Germany feared that Ukraine would not last days against Russia, and that Russia would quick become an immediate threat to Germany, with no guarantee of US assistance: this led to Scholz calling for a Zeitenwende (literally an epochal change), where Germany would become a security guarantor for Europe and where Europe would take responsibility for its defence. However, observing the resistance of Ukraine and the importance of American money and equipment for Ukraine to hold, Germany reverted to a classic Atlanticist position, leading some to mock the Zeitenwende as a (slow-motion change) (Tallis, 2023). These inconsistencies even lead Germany to be accused of following its own path based on its national interest, without consideration for its European partners' perspectives (Puglierin, 2024b).

Poland: Poland is one of the most vigorous opponents of ESA, which stems from its position just next to Ukraine, Russia and Belarus. The danger Russia represents, and the existential security guarantee the US offers to Poland drives Poland to be opposed to any initiative that may lead to a weakening of NATO or a disengagement from the

US. Another position that shows how much national interests constrain Poland's position is Poland's strong willingness to enlarge NATO and the EU by incorporating Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova. Such enlargement would prevent Poland from being at the front line, the last border of the alliance (NSS, 2020; Rau, 2023). Of course, one could always relativise: for example, Reeves argues that Poland's location near Russia is not an objective condition in itself: Poland could still choose to pursue a Belarussian path (2021). However, I contend that it is obvious (economically and politically) that Poland is better off than Belarus and that Poland's national interest is not to join Russia's "sphere of influence". Belarus's foreign policy is guided by the personal interest of its pro-Russian elite, not by an objective national interest. Reeves himself acknowledges that Poland's security policy has not substantially changed in the last decades, minimising the importance of strategic culture in determining Poland's main foreign policy decisions (2021). Strategic culture—i.e., the history and identity of Poland's foreign policy—probably increases the Polish perception of Russia as an existential threat. In the same way, the tumultuous relationship that Poland has had with Germany these past two decades has also been influenced by the Polish historical perception of Germany as an imperialist power with ambitions over Polish territory. However, the fact that Russia is, indeed, a threat to Poland's integrity is more than a perception: Russia's aggressive actions/hybrid war against Poland are real (Krasivskyy, 2021).

France: France is the country for which the debate between perceived interest/strategic culture and objective interests is the most relevant. Contrary to other countries in this study, France faces no immediate threats in its surroundings, nor does it sustain any significant dependencies on another power/alliance for its security. France's willingness to represent a third way in international relations, its desire to reclaim its lost prestige after World War II, the Gaullist tradition, and its universalist claims and ideational foreign policy, all these elements could concur in concluding that France's foreign policy is driven by identity and perceptions rather than by objective interests (Alaranta, 2022). However, while the impact of strategic culture in France's case should be acknowledged, France also acts in function of an objective set of interests: France's defence industry would be the first beneficiary of ESA, and France is pushing for European solutions (i.e., mostly French, as France is the biggest weapon producer in Europe) instead of American ones (Kuokštyte, 2022). Moreover, the AUKUS episode, where Australia broke a contract for French submarines to opt for American ones, or the economic war of the US against French and European companies can be in competition with the US when they do not have the same interests. France, the only credible military power in Europe, whose security relies on its 100% French nuclear deterrent more than on NATO's article 5, can aim at using ESA to balance against the US and prevent entrapment into US's policy when their interests diverge, something which other countries that are not autonomous cannot afford doing. This strategy is illustrated by the fact that France defines itself as a "balancing power" (National Strategic Review, 2022). However, France knows that it cannot bear the cost of Europe's defence alone, and that American weapons and money are essential to defend Ukraine: their discourse on ESA increasingly emphasises the centrality of NATO for Europe's defence and the complementarity between ESA and NATO (Ross, 2024). France's policy is therefore also determined by objective circumstances that define the national interest.

Cross-case analysis

In this part, I will establish the main behaviour patterns between our two variables, countries' interests and their view of ESA. The author of this paper also studied the cases of the Baltic states, Greece and Spain, but their analysis fell beyond the scope of the paper. As such, while our cases suffice to determine some main patterns of behaviour, we may substantiate the claims made with some insight from these countries.

The first element that I can withdraw from the empirical results is that countries first position themselves on ESA in function of their geographical location and their immediate security environment. The further the countries were from Russia, the less opposed they were to ESA. The cases of the Baltic states and Greece also fit with this finding. The Baltic states, immediately threatened by Russia, are firmly opposed to any initiative that may weaken NATO or duplicate superfluously its capabilities, though they accept a couple of initiatives, such as EDF, which will benefit small countries (Šešelgytė, 2019). Greece, aiming to defend itself against Turkey, a fellow NATO member, advocates for ESA because it sees it as a way to build a security architecture without its main competitor (Dokos, 2020). As such, countries' immediate security interests are key determinants of their view on ESA.

Surprisingly, however, there is no clear correlation between a country's dependency on NATO and the US and their view on ESA. For instance, Germany can be seen as more opposed to ESA than the Netherlands, despite having more military capabilities than the latter. In the same way, Poland has a competent military, but is the staunchest opponent of ESA. Spain is also relatively weak militarily speaking, but it has a positive view of ESA. This seems to indicate that the external security environment is more important in determining countries' views on ESA than their military capabilities.

A second finding is that countries favour the parts of ESA from which they would most benefit. For instance, Germany and the Netherlands, the two countries most dependent on trade in their economy, both insisted on the economic aspect of ESA. They are also the two countries most dependent in terms of energy policy, and were the ones that put the more considerable emphasis on energy autonomy. On the other hand, Poland, whose interest in territorial security is most important, only pushes for elements not already in NATO to prevent any useless dispersion and duplication of resources. This includes peace-keeping missions, reconstruction capabilities and the financing of military equipment—whatever its origin. Similarly, the Netherlands, but more importantly the Baltic states, insist on building military mobility between EU countries to ensure swift arrival of reinforcement in the case of an invasion (Šešelgytė, 2019). The Baltic states also highlight the need to build EU Cyber means to defend themselves against the hybrid warfare Russia is leading against them (Veebel & Ploom, 2023).

Another element of interest is that countries with global ambitions tend to support ESA to balance against the US and prevent entrapment in their foreign policy. This is, as the results show, the case for France. However, this was also the case for Germany before the 24th of February 2022: before Russia became a very tangible threat to Germany, Germany advocated for ESA and was doing unilateral pushes to the east to balance against the US, to which it remained very dependent (Alonso-Trabanco, 2022). Now, Germany follows the same kind of policy with China, despite its intense competition with the US. Spain is another example of a middle power that seeks to kick above its weight, and supports ESA as a means to increase its influence in Europe and worldwide (Mestres, 2019). On the other hand, countries that are only interested in their territorial security because of an immediate threat in their surroundings, such as Poland or the Baltic states, are very cautious with ESA.

These findings are coherent with the main realist claims I identified in the theoretical framework part. Our analysis fits with Ringsmose's idea that some countries balance against the US's hegemony while others bandwagon due to security concerns or profit opportunities (2013). This also reflects how divergent national interests, whether economic or security related—shape countries' views on ESA cooperation. This corresponds to Helwig and Sinkkonen's and my reconstruction of the realist take on cooperation issues in European defence and foreign policy (2022).

Countries' world order view reveal that European countries not only determine their views on ESA through the lenses of their strategic interests: they also determine other foreign policy views based on these. Our results show that countries whose reliance on economy and foreign exchanges is highest, and who depend on the current international order and International Organisations to have a weight in the concert of nations, tend to advocate for values such as multilateralism, global peace, and to support International Organisations. This is the case for the Netherlands, and to a lesser extent, Germany, which correspond to the fact that the Netherlands is the country most dependent on trade for its economy and on multilateralism for its geopolitical weight than Germany. Spain's emphasis on multilateralism and support of International Organisations and global governance formats (as stressed in the 2021-2024 Foreign Action Strategy) also corresponds to its willingness to kick above its weight using the current international order. On the other hand, Poland's most pressing interest is security-related, not economic, and relates to its territorial integrity: Therefore, Poland stresses the importance of the respect of countries' internationally established borders and of countries right to self-determination.

Conclusion

This study has compared the strategic interests of four European countries—the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, and France—and their view on European Strategic Autonomy (ESA), aiming to show the causal link between these two variables. These four countries have various views on ESA and diverging strategic interests and were chosen to be grossly representative of Europe as a whole. The goal of this study was to assess the realist explanation to issues in

cooperation between European countries in defence and foreign policy, i.e., that objective strategic interests constrain countries' foreign policy choices, against the constructivist account, which argues that strategic culture is responsible for sub-optimal cooperation. It showed that the realist explanation was better at explaining why European countries fail to agree on ESA, by establishing a causal relationship between countries' strategic interests and their view of ESA, and by showing that these strategic interests are objectively definable and are not produced by any strategic culture.

The main findings of this study are the following: Firstly, countries tend to base their positions on ESA largely on their geographical location and immediate security concerns. Despite this, there is no consistent correlation between a country's NATO dependency and its stance on ESA, indicating that external security environment plays a larger role. Secondly, countries tend to support aspects of ESA that align with their specific benefits, such as economic or security interests. For example, Germany and the Netherlands prioritize economic aspects, while Poland focuses on territorial security. Additionally, countries with global ambitions, like France, support ESA to balance against the US and increase influence. Conversely, countries primarily concerned with territorial security, such as Poland and the Baltic states, approach ESA cautiously. These findings align with realist claims and suggest that a realist approach to ESA is best suited at explaining the main dynamics at stake. Finally, countries' views on world order perspectives, with those reliant on economy and international order advocating for multilateralism, while others emphasize security concerns and territorial integrity, open further avenues for research, showing that the idea that strategic interests define countries' foreign policies could extend to other topics than ESA.

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