

**Explaining EU member state participation in PESCO:
A mechanism-based comparison of France and Germany**

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25th of June, 2025

11993 words

Summary

This thesis examines the mechanisms behind EU member states' participation in the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), with a focus on France and Germany. These mechanisms are grounded in existing theories of EU integration. PESCO is seen as a policy that has strengthened EU integration in security and defence. The theoretical foundation includes liberal and realist intergovernmentalism. The former explains EU integration through state-society structures and the relative status of member states within EU governance. From these assumptions, two mechanisms are identified that inform the hypotheses: (1) the importance of the defence industry and (2) the desire for leadership in the policy process. The latter describes EU integration as a reaction to the international distribution of material resources. From these assumptions, two additional mechanisms emerge to inform the hypotheses: (3) perceptions of threats and (4) attitudes towards U.S. security guarantees.

A qualitative content analysis of speeches by French and German government officials was conducted to identify the motivating mechanisms behind participation in PESCO. Realist mechanisms were most prominent in both countries. France particularly emphasised strategic autonomy in its distrust of American security guarantees and the threat of terrorism to security, which motivated its support for PESCO. Germany focused more on enhancing the EU's global status in response to security threats and burden sharing within EU-U.S. security guarantees. Liberal mechanisms played a less significant role in the speeches. For France, PESCO provides a platform for defence industrial innovation, and Germany focuses on streamlining defence industrial outputs in the EU. Both states took a leadership position in the policy process of PESCO to advance national interests.

This thesis advances the understanding of PESCO from a member state perspective and EU defence integration in general. Moreover, the motivating mechanisms emphasise potential conflict areas within the controversial topic of defence for the EU. However, since only two member states were analysed, this limits the broader applicability of the findings. Furthermore, the analysis relies on public speeches, which may omit internal decision-making processes in the PESCO policy development. Future research should include more member states and consider alternative theoretical perspectives, such as constructivism and institutionalism, to identify additional motivating mechanisms for member state participation in PESCO and other EU defence policies.

Preface

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master's programme in International Public Management and Public Policy at Erasmus University Rotterdam. It was written in Rotterdam and my hometown of The Hague, starting in February 2025 and finishing in June.

As a student of International Relations, I am passionate about the European Union's role in the international system and how to strengthen it. The courses offered by the programme have inspired me to pursue this thesis on EU security and defence integration, exemplified by PESCO. Writing this thesis has enabled me to combine academic insights with a personal fascination for how states navigate international cooperation in times of uncertainty.

I would like to sincerely thank my thesis supervisor, Dr. Zhelyazkova, for her guidance, patience, and invaluable feedback. I would also like to thank Anna Maaten and Lucia Guerrero Cigales, who were part of our thematic thesis group and provided valuable feedback to support my work. Finally, I am grateful to all the other students, teachers, friends, and family for their support, guidance on the topics covered in this thesis, and their emotional encouragement.

Benjamin Kester

List of content

1. Introduction.....	6
2. Theoretical Framework.....	8
2.1 European integration in security and defence	8
2.1.2 Current policies	9
2.2 EU member state motivations for participation in PESCO	10
2.2.1 Mechanisms.....	10
2.2.2 Theoretical foundations.....	10
2.3 Hypotheses.....	12
2.3.1 Liberal intergovernmentalist approaches	12
2.3.1.1 State-society interests.....	12
2.3.1.2 Leadership interests	13
2.3.2 Realist intergovernmentalist approaches	13
2.3.2.1 Geopolitical interests	13
2.3.2.2 Balance of power interests	14
3. Research design	15
3.1 Methodology	15
3.2 Cases	16
3.3 Corpus.....	17
3.4 Coding.....	19
3.5 Data analysis	20
3.6 Operationalisation	20
4. Results.....	22
4.1 France	23
4.1.1 Prominence of the defence industry	24
4.1.2 Leadership position in the policy process	26
4.1.3 Threat perceptions	27

4.1.4 Perspective on security guarantees from the United States	29
4.2 Germany.....	31
4.2.1 Prominence of the defence industry	32
4.2.2 Leadership position in the policy process	34
4.2.3 Threat perceptions	34
4.2.4 Perspective on security guarantees from the United States	36
4.3 Discussion	38
4.3.1 State-society interests	38
4.3.2 Leadership interests	39
4.3.3 Geopolitical interests	40
4.3.4 Balance of power interests	40
5. Conclusion	41
Bibliography.....	44
Appendix	56

List of Tables

Table 1: German government officials included in the corpus.....	18
Table 2: French government officials included in the corpus.....	19
Table 3: Coding frame core categories and examples.....	56
Table 4: Coding frame subcategories and codes.....	57

List of Figures

Figure 1: Number of speeches on PESCO.	23
Figure 2: France: Coding of core categories.	24
Figure 3: France: Coding of subcategory ‘Defence industrial companies’.....	25
Figure 4: France: Coding of subcategory ‘Government-industry cooperation’.	26
Figure 5: France: Coding of core category ‘Leadership position in policy process’.....	27
Figure 6: France: Coding of subcategory ‘Economic threats’.....	28
Figure 7: France: Coding of subcategory ‘Security threats’.....	29
Figure 8: France: Coding of subcategory ‘Europeanist perspective’.....	30
Figure 9: France: Coding of subcategory ‘Atlanticist perspective’.	31
Figure 10: Germany: Coding of core categories.....	32
Figure 11: Germany: Coding of core category ‘Prominence of the defence industry’.	33
Figure 12: Germany: Coding of core category ‘Leadership position in the policy process’. .	34
Figure 13: Germany: Coding for core category ‘Threat perceptions’.	36
Figure 14: Germany: Coding for core category ‘U.S. security guarantees’.....	38

1. Introduction

European security is currently at risk. A major war in Ukraine as Vladimir Putin's Russia continues its illegal invasion of a sovereign European country, in combination with the unpredictability of the President of the United States (U.S.) Donald Trump. These events have had and are having adverse effects on European security (Nimark, 2025). After decades of neglect, European security and defence have taken centre stage in recent policy discussions on the European Union (EU) level (Grand, 2024). Recent initiatives, such as Readiness 2030, aim to boost European defence capabilities and industry, building on the previous institutionalisation of EU defence and security within the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) (European Commission, 2025). The CSDP, established in the 2009 Lisbon Treaty, is the EU's policy framework for addressing security and defence issues. It aims to enhance the EU's ability to act in matters of security and defence, including peacekeeping, conflict prevention, and crisis management. The CSDP has facilitated numerous initiatives, such as PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation), established in 2017, an EU framework that enables willing member states to collaborate more closely on a project basis in defence and security by jointly developing military capabilities and conducting operations (Council of the European Union, 2017).

The EU strives for European integration, the process by which European countries coordinate and unify policies, institutions, and governance structures to achieve greater political, economic, and security cooperation within the EU. Significant progress has been made in economic integration through the creation of the single market. However, security and defence issues remain controversial and are traditionally national competencies. Progress has been made through the CSDP with PESCO. However, the motivations for member states to participate in PESCO remain not fully understood. The EU's integration progress in this policy area is often impeded by diverging national interests, yet some states consistently push for deeper integration. Thereby, understanding the motivations of states to participate in PESCO can lead to a broader understanding of EU member states' perspectives on European integration in security and defence. This leads to the research question: "What mechanisms explain EU member states participating in PESCO?" The member states up for analysis are France and Germany.

The scientific relevance of this question stems from the contribution to literature on European integration in the understudied policy area of security and defence. There is great literature

and theory on European integration in general (Moravcsik, 1998; Schimmelfennig, 2019). These theories will provide the foundation for this research. They will be tested to enhance the understanding of European integration in security and defence through participation in PESCO, from a member state perspective, by examining the mechanisms that drive national governments to engage in cooperative behaviour. Therefore, in addition to providing a better understanding of European integration as a process, this thesis will also enhance our understanding of state behaviour. The actions taken by national governments are complex and multifaceted. The broadly encompassing theoretical foundations for the hypothesised mechanisms that justify favouring European integration in security and defence will clear up this complexity and allow for a solid basis to be formed for future research on EU member state behaviour and European integration.

Furthermore, the social relevance of this research question stems from the acute insecurity the EU currently faces. The EU must act to take security matters into their own hands. Understanding national positions and their motivations on security issues enables the EU institutions to design more realistic and cohesive security policies. Understanding one another provides a platform for productive and fruitful discussion, as officials know what to take into account while negotiating. Furthermore, this research offers insights into the future of European security by examining the past. Through an analysis of the changing mechanisms that justify international collaboration in a controversial area like security, it is possible to make plausible inferences about what is needed to enhance this collaboration, particularly where motivations and the political salience of these issues diverge. These findings can inform EU-related policy-makers on how to align national and common interests in security and defence. As European citizens face new and more precarious security threats, the EU's ability to act decisively and protect its citizens depends on the alignment of member state positions, especially in security and defence, where this is often not the case.

This thesis will be structured to firstly address the relevant conceptualisations of key terms and theoretical foundations that inform the hypotheses. Then, the research design presents the methodology of content analysis and operationalisation of the mechanisms. Thereafter, the results of the analyses are outlined, which lead to the conclusions that provide an answer to the research question and highlight limitations and recommendations for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework will be structured to first conceptualise European integration and establish the link to security as a policy area. Secondly, current policies that have integrated Europe in security will be highlighted, with a focus on PESCO. Thirdly, motivating mechanisms will be conceptualised, and the theoretical foundations for these mechanisms that could explain participation in PESCO will inform the hypotheses.

2.1 European integration in security and defence

European integration is conceptualised as the process of enhancing cooperation and collaboration between European states. The first example being the 1952 European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). France, West Germany, Italy and the Benelux countries integrated their coal and steel markets into a single common market with a central authority to prevent future war through strategic collaboration in industrial sectors (Gillingham, 1991). More recently, cases of horizontal integration have emerged. Horizontal integration does not involve transnational cooperation through the EU's formal supranational structures. Instead, horizontal integration emphasises cross-border, non-hierarchical collaboration among (sub)national actors within the EU, realised through shared projects (Beck, 2022). Member states cooperate on an equal level, however, in reality, the larger countries often take the initiative to which smaller countries join (Moravcsik, 1998). Lastly, in the context of the EU, there is a general trend towards differentiated integration. This type refers to member states selectively engaging with EU initiatives (Schimmelfennig, 2019). As the EU is deepening (expanding its competences), policy proposals touch upon more politically salient and controversial topics, like security and defence, traditionally national competences. Thus, demand for differentiated integration is growing.

The focal point of this thesis will be security, but what does security actually mean for the EU? Member states and academics alike do not agree on a single paradigm for what security means to them in relation to the EU. Chappel et al. (2019) describe the extensive debates on what security means. The Copenhagen School critiqued the narrow definition of security and its focus on external military threats (Buzan et al., 1998). They argued, with merit, to include environmental, economic, societal and political security to the mix. However, for the sake of limiting the scope of this research, a narrow definition of security will be the focus of the policies aimed at enhancing EU security. Security is thus linked to external military threats and defence to the capabilities to withstand those threats.

2.1.2 Current policies

Security and defence policies in the EU have traditionally been at the margins, emphasising economic tools like sanctions rather than military force (Engelbrekt, 2022). However, the current geopolitical situation poses a threat to the EU. Exemplified by Russian aggression and the United States casting doubt on its commitment to European security structures, such as NATO. These developments have increasingly pushed the EU towards a more pronounced focus on hard security and defence capabilities (Engelbrekt, 2022; Meijer & Brooks, 2021). These capabilities are primarily formed within the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The CSDP is an integral part of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and focuses on military and civilian crisis management. Essentially, it is the implementation branch of the policy directions set forth by the CFSP (Sweeney & Winn, 2022). The CFSP aims to strengthen European cooperation and integration in foreign policy. It follows intergovernmental decision-making procedures (Dijkstra & Vanhoonacker, 2017). This means that the European Council sets broad foreign policy priorities and the Council of the EU adopts decisions. The interplay between national foreign policies and EU foreign policy, through the CFSP, is argued to result in the Europeanisation of national foreign policies, by which national foreign policy goals gradually become common European goals (Dijkstra & Vanhoonacker, 2017).

The CSDP thus functions within the CFSP framework, where the European Council sets the strategic direction and can call for the development of initiatives that align with the CSDP. Unanimity is necessary to implement any actions. This thesis is based on the intergovernmentalist nature of EU procedural decision-making. It highlights the importance of understanding motivations to participate in these projects, as this will shed light on potential areas of conflict in intergovernmental negotiations regarding further European security integration. security integration.

The EU has horizontally integrated in security and defence through initiatives like PESCO, which enhances collaboration among member states in defence projects (Rieker & Giske, 2024). Participants commit to increasing investment in military equipment, particularly in line with international commitments. It seeks to align defence structures by identifying military needs, pooling and specialising capabilities, and fostering cooperation in training and logistics. Additionally, it promotes concrete measures to mobilise forces (Blockmans & Crosson, 2021). Joining PESCO and the individual projects is voluntary, therefore, PESCO

constantly balances ambition and inclusion (Blockmans & Crosson, 2021). It is a form of differentiated integration because not all member states have implemented or accepted membership in PESCO (Denmark and Malta) (Onderco & Portela, 2023; Cladi & Locatelli, 2020). Additionally, it is a form of horizontal integration as member states coordinate projects on the same level without transferring their sovereignty to a central authority. PESCO relates to the enhancement of EU defence capabilities, as it creates a platform for military capability development through projects that aim to eliminate structural weaknesses, such as infrastructure or ammunition, in participating member states. Thus, PESCO is a significant example of EU integration in security and defence, and it will be the focus of this analysis.

2.2 EU member state motivations for participation in PESCO

This subchapter conceptualises mechanisms for state action. It then outlines the theoretical foundations explaining why states are motivated to participate in PESCO, from which the hypotheses are derived. These hypotheses specify the particular mechanisms influencing state motivations to engage with PESCO.

2.2.1 *Mechanisms*

Mechanisms are the causal explanations for why EU member states choose to act in a certain way. In this case, they chose to participate in PESCO as a form of European integration in security and defence. These mechanisms are not outcomes themselves, but the motivations that generate state behaviour (Tilly, 2001). For the purpose of this thesis, mechanisms refer to the verbal expressions of national interests that justify participation in PESCO. They provide the motivating mechanisms (independent variables) behind participation in PESCO (dependent variable).

2.2.2 *Theoretical foundations*

Broader theories on European integration and the CSDP can lead the thesis towards the most fruitful theoretical directions for the mechanisms that drive state motivations for participating in PESCO. There is extensive debate on theoretical explanations for the establishment of CSDP and security and defence cooperation in general (Bickerton et al., 2011). The goal here is to revisit the motivations of member states and their influence on the eventual outcome, specifically participation in PESCO.

The theories that inform the mechanisms for state behaviour on the EU level are liberal intergovernmentalism and realist intergovernmentalism (Moravcsik, 1998). These theories

explain the formation of national preferences in the EU context. They are also useful for making assumptions about state motivations for certain policy decisions, as they reflect the intrinsic policy-making rationales or state behaviour of member states in policies supporting EU integration. Intergovernmentalism, as applied to both theories, refers to the strategic environment in which EU policy negotiations occur. According to intergovernmentalist theory, negotiations on this topic are voluntary in the sense that states are not coerced into participation (Moravcsik, 1993). Furthermore, EU member states act in an environment which allows them to gather high densities of information about the policies and motivations of others. Lastly, intergovernmental EU negotiations have low transaction costs, as they generally have longer durations and policies are backed by institutional arrangements that are designed to ensure compliance and effectiveness. Intergovernmentalism thus provides the strategic environment in which state motivations are expressed.

State motivations, or mechanisms, from the liberal intergovernmentalist perspective could be derived from the interactions between individuals and organisations within a state, which culminate in the positions of governments on particular topics (Moravcsik, 1997). This assumption is based on the liberal theory of International Relations that assumes the state motivations are based on the national interests that “represent some subset of domestic society” (Moravcsik, 1997, p. 518). This means that the interests from different groups within a society, referring to groups of people or particular organisations, are aggregated and taken into account on the international stage, and reflected in the states’ motivations to participate in particular EU policies. This relates to the principal-agent relationship within each member state, whereby societal principals (or groups) have granted the power to represent their interests to political elites (Moravcsik, 1993). The relative strength and prominence of these groups in their efforts to influence the representative institutions determine the state motivations and political salience of policy areas. Additionally, states can take a leadership position in the policy process and advocate for specific proposals to be implemented. The importance of certain policies for the betterment of domestic society and industries could be hailed as a state motivation for action, in that it is their responsibility to lead the implementation of these policies.

In contrast, realist intergovernmentalism looks at state motivations from a materialist perspective (Moravcsik, 1998). In line with neoclassical realism, state motivations for European integration are shaped by the “structural distribution of material capabilities” (Pollack, 2012, p. 5). This could relate to the perceptions of political elites towards PESCO

and that it is formed through the interests of states in deterring security threats from larger military geopolitical rivals. Additionally, this could be related to the broader international distribution of power (Moravcsik, 1998). Motivations could be formed through a lens which perceives the EU to be on the weak end of a military power imbalance. In essence, this theory examines how member states envision the path forward for enhancing European security capabilities and how they perceive the current security architecture in addressing specific threats. Therefore, realist intergovernmentalism is more of a reactionary theory on motivations for PESCO as it relates to the effects of external actors on the EU as a whole. In conclusion, the state motivations for PESCO, as outlined by this theory, could relate to the actions the EU must take in response to geopolitical threats or external events that impact its defence capabilities.

2.3 Hypotheses

This subchapter outlines hypotheses derived from liberal and realist intergovernmentalism. Four hypotheses, which are not mutually exclusive, are connected to the theoretical assumptions that government officials can refer to when motivating their support for joining PESCO. The countries selected as cases are France and Germany.

2.3.1 Liberal intergovernmentalist approaches

The following hypotheses are in line with liberal theorisation towards state motivations for EU integration and are linked to PESCO participation.

2.3.1.1 State-society interests

In accordance with liberal intergovernmentalism, state motivations to join PESCO could be derived from the domestic group interests that are represented in government (Bailer, 2011). As PESCO's goal is to enhance the defence capabilities of EU member states, this could relate to the size and influence of the national defence industries and the presence of major firms. These are the key actors for PESCO projects. Suggesting that the societal structure and the powerful groups that represent these structures are the main determinants for state motivations to join PESCO. These structures are related to the state-society relationship, insofar as the defence industry has strong ties to government and lobbies in support of its interests. The most important being the presence of particular industries within a country, in this case, it could be related to the defence industrial base in both France and Germany (Bechtel & Schneider, 2010). This provides the hypothesis:

H1: The mechanism that influences state motivations for participating in PESCO is the prominence of the defence industry in a member state.

2.3.1.2 Leadership interests

State motivations for joining PESCO could be derived from the importance of taking a leadership position in the EU policy-making process for member states. States could form their motivations according to the relative positions they hold in policy-making activities (Keohane & Nye, 2012). Depending on the political salience of a particular policy proposal, member states could desire a more prominent position in the policy formation process. For example, integration in security affairs has a significant economic dimension. Large investments are not only necessary for the military and defence industries, but also in infrastructure, technology, and raw materials (Michaels & Sus, 2024). Through Moravcsik's 'political economy approach' to state motivations in the EU, one can expect these motivations to align with the national strategic importance, in this case, the economic effects of PESCO (1998, p. 41). Thus, if a member state relies heavily on intra-EU trade for their defence industry, it would want to occupy a leadership or policy entrepreneurial role. To exemplify, a responsibility to lead is often given to the so-called 'Franco-German engine' for EU policies (Leuff et al., 2012). France and Germany often take a leading position to shape EU policy, aiming to satisfy their national interests. This provides the hypothesis

H2: The mechanism that influences state motivations for participating in PESCO is the desire for government officials to take up a leadership position in the policy-making and implementation process.

2.3.2 Realist intergovernmentalist approaches

The following hypotheses are in line with realist theorisation towards state motivations for PESCO participation.

2.3.2.1 Geopolitical interests

According to realist intergovernmentalism, state motivations for participating in PESCO are based on the uncertainty of the international environment and the corresponding necessity of political elites to respond to threats (Ripsman, 2011). They could be derived from the geopolitical environment and the corresponding perceptions of threats to national security. The desire to enhance European defence capabilities through PESCO aligns with the growing threats to national security. One could therefore argue that the geopolitical environment

influences state motivations on this topic. As Silva (2023) demonstrates, member states formulate their state motivations for action on CSDP issues in response to perceived threats to their national security. His work on state motivations is related to responses to perceived threats from the MENA region, which could indicate that the perception of the degree of severity of the threat influences state motivations to enhance EU defence capabilities. Thus, perceptions of threats to national security from geopolitical rivals could motivate states, like France and Germany, to act with the goal of enhancing defence capabilities through PESCO. This provides the hypothesis:

H3: The mechanism that influences state motivations for participating in PESCO is the perception of government officials towards threats from geopolitical rivals.

2.3.2.2 Balance of power interests

Additionally, the balance of power is a crucial aspect of the realist version of intergovernmentalism. Realists argue that the perceptions of political leaders of the position their country holds in the international system are reflected in the formation of state motivations for EU actions on security and defence (Moravcsik, 1998). In this case, this relates to the Atlanticist versus Europeanist debate within EU security policies (Stahl et al., 2004). This debate refers to the national perceptions towards U.S. security guarantees (through NATO). The Europeanist view is that Europe has to become more independent from the U.S. to rebalance in favour of European security guaranteed by Europeans. For example, France has traditionally been wary of American leadership in NATO. This has been ingrained in the thinking of political elites since the Second World War (Hoffmann, 2000). Scholars argue that French elites have therefore perceived the world as multipolar, in the sense that their country plays a significant role within the balance of power. In contrast, the Atlanticist view is that the EU should complement NATO and the U.S. in guaranteeing security. Thereby, perceiving NATO as the primary collective security arrangement, as Germany had consistently done (Stahl et al., 2004). Thus, this realist reasoning to explain state motivations for joining PESCO is contingent upon the view of political elites on historical and contemporary security structures and the corresponding international balance of power they portray. Referring to the dependence of EU member states on the U.S. through NATO for their security and their vision for the future. This provides the hypothesis:

H4: The mechanism that influences state motivations for participation in PESCO is the relative desire of government officials to become autonomous of U.S. security guarantees.

In conclusion, the research will not rule out the possibility of alternative explanations for the state motivations towards PESCO. These alternative mechanisms can be inductively identified during the analysis.

3. Research design

The purpose of the research design is to demonstrate how the research question will be addressed. The methodology of content analysis is described and applied to this thesis, with emphasis on validity and reliability. Then, the case selection is justified for Germany and France. Furthermore, the corpus of communication exercises is outlined, along with the methods of data analysis. Finally, the operationalisation of the mechanisms is included.

3.1 Methodology

The methodology for the analysis is qualitative content analysis. Krippendorff (2004) defines content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use” (p. 18). In the context of this thesis, content analysis, as a research technique, refers to a systematic and formal reading of texts. Rather, a procedure to systematically analyse government communications. This will lead to replicable inferences drawn from the data, as other researchers could utilise this method to come to similar results. The categories that link the data to the hypotheses are grounded in established theories and are therefore not initially reliant on interpretation, which removes the possibility of introducing research bias to the categorisation process. This enhances the internal validity of the findings as they will be strictly linked to the cases. Furthermore, the texts refer to the primary data that was collected. This data comes from reliable government websites that have published transcripts of speeches. Lastly, the context of the data is essential, as the goal is not just to understand the text itself, but to determine why it was produced. This will be an interpretive exercise to illuminate the mechanisms in government officials' communications. In this case, the mechanisms behind France and Germany's participation in PESCO are analysed. Therefore, not only is the explicit reference to the EU initiative taken at face value, but the broader context of the entire communication exercise, wherein PESCO is referenced, is also taken into account while conducting the analysis. This will be further elaborated on in the subchapter on coding.

3.2 Cases

The cases relate to the outcome of EU member states' participation in PESCO. The case selection would therefore need to adhere to multiple conditions, namely that they are EU member states and that data is plentiful. Furthermore, the external and internal validity for the cases of France and Germany is addressed.

France and Germany are both EU member states and participate in PESCO. This enables the analysis of the motivating mechanisms that led these states to participate in PESCO. France and Germany relate to something of importance for content analysts, namely, the accessibility of data. These countries are the largest and arguably most important countries for the CSDP. The literature often speaks of 'Franco-German leadership' in the EU (Schild, 2010; Ribeiro et al., 2024). These member states will allow for equal opportunity for the hypotheses to be tested as data is available and they are perceived to be the most dominant EU member states. The literature suggests that France and Germany have diverging interests and strategies in the context of EU integration. France's strategy towards the EU is often characterised by a highly politicised, sovereignty-focused discourse that views the EU as an external force to be managed for national interests, while Germany promotes integration through a consensus-driven, pro-European stance that embeds the EU within its national identity (Wiesner, 2005). Accordingly, France sees the EU as both a tool and a threat to its national autonomy, whereas Germany views integration as a normative and stabilising interest aligned with its post-war democratic values. Therefore, in reflection on equifinality, different causes or mechanisms can result in the same outcome.

In connection with the internal and external validity of the case selection, an inherent trade-off is present. External validity refers to the applicability of this type of research and the theoretical foundations holding up for more cases (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The mechanisms which motivate PESCO participation can differ for all states, however, they might not. The only way to know is to do the research. Therefore, one cannot make conclusions about the generalisability of findings using content analysis. However, internal validity is very strong, as content analysis delves deeply into the communications to determine why certain events occurred. The hypotheses to be tested are wide-ranging and focus on important aspects of motivational mechanisms, as outlined in the literature. This way, possible alternative explanations are minimised. The hypotheses take account of the mechanisms (independent variables) that may explain state motivations for PESCO

participation (dependent variable), which is a prototypical case of EU integration in security and defence.

3.3 Corpus

The corpus consists of speeches by French and German government officials. Speeches are an appropriate type of data to analyse the mechanisms behind state motivations because governments are constantly informing different audiences of the reasons why they behave in a certain way. As stated in the theoretical framework, these motivations are expressed to inform their publics and EU member states about particular policies. The sampling method is non-probability sampling, as all mentions of PESCO by German and French government officials are included in the corpus to create a comprehensive and detailed database. As the expression of motivations towards policies is a continuous exercise, it is important not to stop data collection from the moment of enactment. This will result in the exclusion of valuable information on how EU member state governments justify deeper European integration in a highly contentious policy area, such as security and defence. Furthermore, most data is in German and French, the software DeepL is used for translation purposes. This is an acceptable method of translation, as shown by research on translation software for qualitative research methods (Sebo & De Lucia, 2024; Song et al., 2020).

For Germany, speeches have been collected from the press databases on the websites from the Federal Government ([bundesregierung.de](https://www.bundesregierung.de)) and the Federal Foreign Office ([auswaertiges-amt.de](https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de)). The Defence Ministry and Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action have also been searched, but no data was found. The search words that were used for both the German and English databases, for consistency reasons, were “PESCO,” “permanent structured cooperation,” “Ständige Strukturierte Zusammenarbeit,” and “Ständigen Strukturierten Zusammenarbeit.” PESCO, in both German and English, is used to find data that explicitly refers to PESCO at least once. Then, within these texts, implicit references can also be coded. Duplicates were filtered out manually and for the texts that had an English and German version, the English version was chosen. 34 speeches were found, spanning from February 6, 2010, to November 23, 2021. The findings are triangulated with non-academic sources, including newspaper articles and think tank documents. Table 1 lists the German government officials present in the corpus, their roles, and the cabinets they served in.

Table 1: German government officials included in the corpus.

Name	Job title	Cabinet(s)
Angela Merkel	Chancellor	N/A
Guido Westerwelle	Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs	Merkel II
Stephan Steinlein	State Secretary at the Federal Foreign Office	Merkel III
Frank-Walter Steinmeier	Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs	Merkel III
Sigmar Gabriel	Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs	Merkel III
Michael Roth	Minister of State for Europe	Merkel III, IV
Heiko Maas	Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs	Merkel III, IV
Ursula von der Leyen	Federal Minister of Defence	Merkel III, IV
Niels Annen	Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office	Merkel IV
Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer	Federal Minister of Defence	Merkel IV
Andreas Michaelis	State Secretary at the Federal Foreign Office	Scholz

For France, data has been collected from the centralised government press database (www.vie-publique.fr). There is only a French database, so no English speeches are available. The search terms used are the same as those for the German data collection, but in French, namely, “coopération structurée permanente” and “PESCO.” There are 102 speeches in the corpus, spanning from October 8, 2004, until March 9, 2022. They will also be triangulated by non-academic sources. Table 2 lists the French government officials present in the corpus, their roles, and the presidents they served.

Table 2: French government officials included in the corpus.

Name	Job title	Presidency
Claudie Haigneré	Minister Delegate for European Affairs	Chirac
Jean-Pierre Jouyet	Secretary of State for European Affairs	Sarkozy
Hervé Morin	Minister of Defence	Sarkozy
François Fillon	Prime Minister	Sarkozy
Pierre Lellouche	Secretary of State for European Affairs	Sarkozy
Alain Juppé	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Sarkozy
Laurent Fabius	Minister of Foreign Affairs	Hollande
Jean-Yves Le Drian	Minister of Defence	Hollande
Jean-Marc Ayrault	Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs	Hollande
Harlem Désir	Secretary of State for European Affairs	Hollande
Emmanuel Macron	President	N/A
Nathalie Loiseau	Minister for European Affairs	Macron
Florence Parly	Minister of Defence	Macron
Édouard Philippe	Prime Minister	Macron
Jean Castex	Prime Minister	Macron
Jean-Yves Le Drian	Minister for Foreign Affairs	Macron

3.4 Coding

For the purpose of researching the explanatory mechanisms for participation in PESCO, the speeches need to be coded. A code is a word or sentence that represents the contents of a piece of text (Saldaña, 2009). These codes are gathered using a combined approach. Deductively, from the theories that inform the hypotheses. Additionally, to allow for unexpected findings, codes can also be gathered inductively from the data itself. The categories in which these codes will be placed are linked to the hypotheses. The core categories represent the general mechanisms stated in the hypotheses. Then, the subcategories are linked to particular aspects of the mechanisms. Lastly, the codes will be fitted into the subcategories. All (sub)categories are outlined in Appendix A. In the first cycle of the coding process, mentions of PESCO in the corpus will be coded according to the established codes outlined in the operationalisation of the mechanisms below. This will provide a database consisting of paragraphs that explicitly mention PESCO, allowing inferences to be drawn through the patterns that emerge around the expressed motivations for participating in

PESCO. Furthermore, the data is not mutually exclusive in the sense that it can only be coded in one particular way. Communications can express a multitude of perspectives. These will all be included in the analysis to avoid bias through the interpretation of relative code importance.

The corpus will be descriptively coded, an appropriate method for content analysis of this sort. Descriptive coding is the process of applying a conceptually grounded code that represents the research topic present in the hypothesis to the data segments (Saldaña, 2009). The data segments, or recording units, are paragraphs. It summarises the speech segment into a word or sentence that is reflected in the categories. This will be done manually in a self-constructed database. Descriptive coding builds a comprehensive database for categorisation of the explicit mentions of PESCO. The coded data is then categorised in the theory-based (sub)categories as part of the second coding cycle using axial coding (Saldaña, 2009). The clustering of data within the categories is then taken for deeper analysis to compare the mechanisms present in France and Germany.

3.5 Data analysis

Post-coding inferences can be drawn from the databases. These inferences refer to case-specific conclusions and comparisons between France and Germany. Circle diagrams will illustrate the coding frequencies in the (sub)categories for the speeches to determine the overall importance of each mechanism. Then, comparisons can be made between the overall importance of each mechanism and their detailed contents. The conclusion from the data will be triangulated to contextualise the mechanisms with relevant additional sources. Lastly, the results will be situated in the current literature in the discussion.

3.6 Operationalisation

To answer the research question, it is necessary to operationalise the variables. The dependent variable, being EU member state participation in PESCO, is operationalised through the actual participation in PESCO by France and Germany. This EU initiative has been established as a policy which integrates EU member states in the area of security. Therefore, the participation of France and Germany is inherently positive towards this end. The question remains what mechanisms explain their participation. The purpose of the analysis is to see how states have justified or motivated their participation in PESCO. These mechanisms have

been operationalised through existing theories, realist and liberal intergovernmentalism. The operationalisations are visualised in the coding frames of Tables 3 and 4 in the Appendix.

The first mechanism in Hypothesis 1 suggests that the prominence of the national defence industry has influenced participation in PESCO. In other words, the degree to which the national defence sector is a strategic priority in economic or political terms for government officials. Indicators from the data could be references in support of enhancing these industries. Furthermore, references to specific companies participating in the production processes resulting from PESCO projects suggest the prominence of the defence industry in explaining participation in PESCO. In addition, statements can emphasise the importance of defence exports and highlight the government's role in strengthening government-industry relations.

Secondly, the mechanism of the desire for a leadership position in the policy process of the member state refers to the member state's relative influence in the EU decision-making structures for PESCO. Indicators for this mechanism are references to the leadership position of the member state in EU policy-making. National or international responsibilities to push the cart for European integration could be hailed. Government officials could refer to the need to lead the policy process and participate in PESCO to advance national interests.

The third mechanism suggests that the perceived threats of member state government officials influence participation in PESCO. In other words, it is about how officials frame and interpret security threats from non-EU actors. Indicators of this mechanism include statements framing geopolitical rivals, such as Russia and China, as direct threats to economic and territorial sovereignty, in support of PESCO projects. These framing exercises could use threat language, such as "aggression" and "insecurity."

Lastly, expressed opinions on U.S. security guarantees could explain participation in PESCO. This is indicated by member states expressing a desire for either a shift from a U.S.-led security architecture through NATO to more autonomous EU capabilities, in line with the Europeanist perspective on European security. These could include critical remarks about NATO or U.S. security dependencies, as well as calls for independent European defence capabilities. Alternatively, one could aim to complement NATO security guarantees with EU capabilities through PESCO, in line with the Atlanticist perspective on European security. Here, officials could refer to the importance of not replacing NATO with EU capabilities.

4. Results

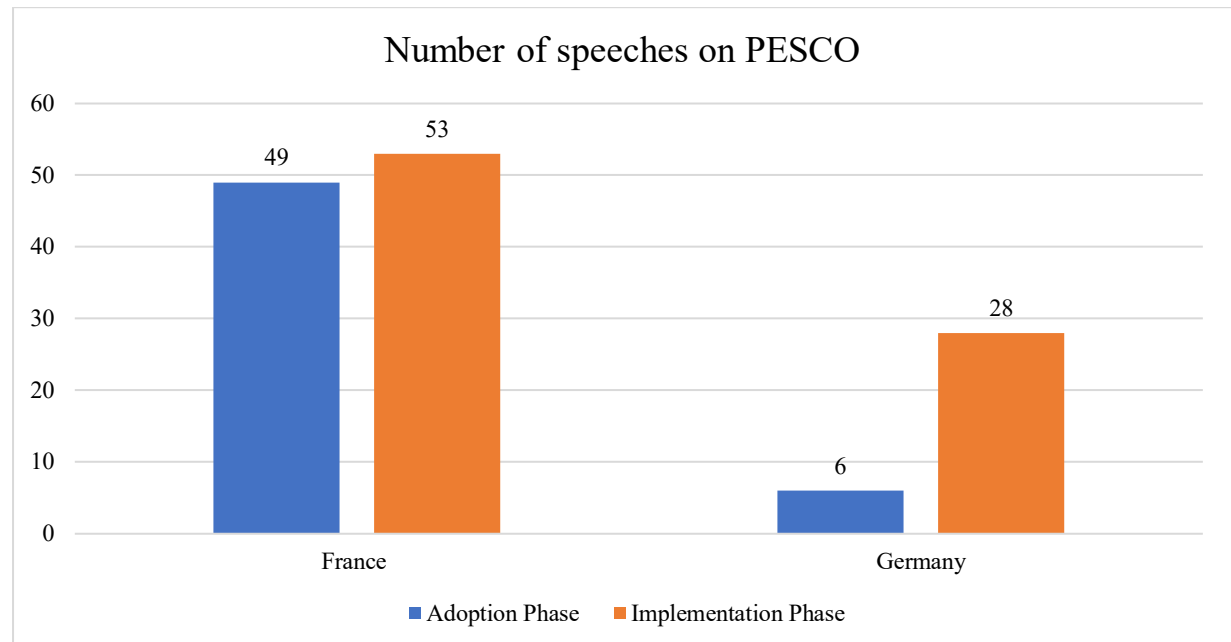
The goal of the data analysis is to explain the mechanisms that government officials from France and Germany employ to justify European integration in security and defence. The analysis applied a coding scheme derived from four hypothesised mechanisms explaining member states' positive inclinations towards defence integration: 'The prominence of the defence industry', 'Leadership position in the policy-making process', 'Threat perceptions', and 'Perspective on U.S. security guarantees'. Most core categories were divided into two subcategories, as shown in Table 4 in the Appendix. The individual codes will be highlighted to discover patterns to compare France and Germany in their motivations for participating in PESCO and find deeper meanings in the (sub)categories.

Before proceeding with the explanations of the categorical results, some general observations can be made regarding attitudes towards PESCO. All references to PESCO were positive, concerning the policy's objectives and implementation. This is understandable, as France and Germany played key roles in the formation and execution of PESCO (Billon-Galland & Quencez, 2017). Furthermore, the relative political salience of PESCO for France and Germany is reflected in the number of speeches. Figure 1 illustrates the frequency with which government officials in both countries mentioned PESCO during the period leading up to the Council Decision establishing PESCO on December 11, 2017 (Council of the European Union, 2017). This period has been termed the adoption phase. The implementation phase refers to the period from enactment to the present. For France, the number of speeches on PESCO before and after the Council Decision is nearly identical, with 49 and 53 speeches respectively, totalling 102. This indicates that the French governments were heavily involved in promoting the initiative as policy entrepreneurs and continued to emphasise the importance of PESCO for the EU and France after its implementation. In contrast, there is a noticeable difference in the political salience of PESCO in Germany. Only six speeches mentioned PESCO before enactment, compared to 28 afterwards. This suggests that Germany was less engaged in promoting this initiative compared to France. This is a significant finding, as it implies that Germany is less prominent in the area of security and defence within the so-called 'Franco-German engine', which acts as a policy entrepreneur and advocates for EU policy proposals.

The following subchapters will present the coding results and link them to the hypotheses by showing the absolute and relative code frequencies for the (sub)categories. The percentages

shown in the graphs represent the code frequencies in relation to others within the same (sub)category.

Figure 1: Number of speeches on PESCO.

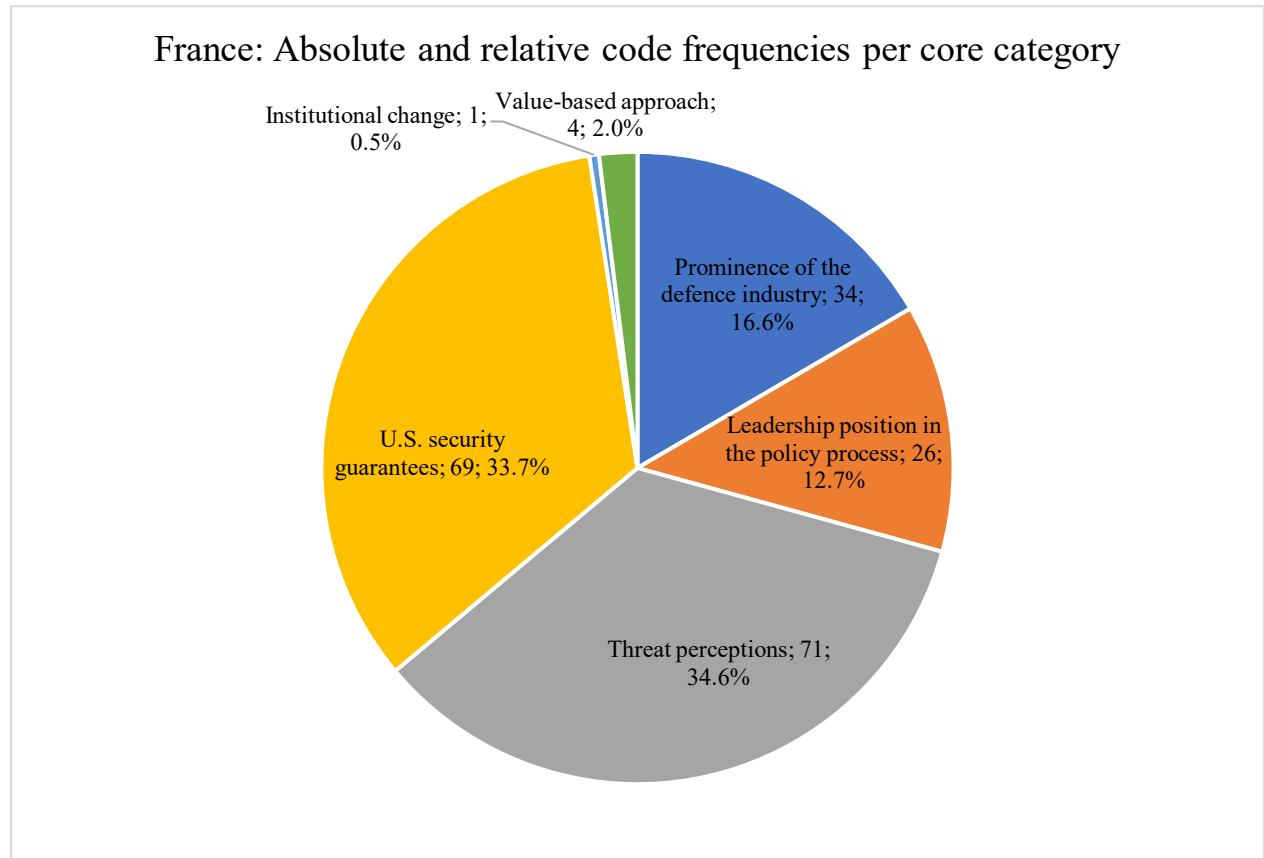


4.1 France

Speeches by French government officials have provided interesting results. Figure 2 illustrates the absolute and relative coding frequencies from each core category. After analysing 234 codes, the most prominent core category was ‘Threat perceptions’ (34.6%), closely followed by ‘U.S. security guarantees’ (33.7%). These categories were based on realist intergovernmentalism (hypotheses 3 and 4), suggesting that French government officials are more aligned with this type of thinking compared to liberal intergovernmentalist thinking (hypotheses 1 and 2), which is represented by the other core categories. ‘Prominence of defence industry’ (16.6%) and ‘Leadership position in the policy process’ (12.7%) comprise a total of 29.3%. Furthermore, through abductive coding, two more categories have been found. Namely, the ‘Value-based approach’, described as officials utilising European values and the necessity to uphold them as a justification towards European integration in defence through PESCO. This category is illustrated by Minister for European Affairs Loiseau, who states the priorities of the EU, emphasising: “Our values and the social and economic model to which we are committed are not threatened but, on the contrary, strengthened by the European Union” (Loiseau, 2018). Lastly, French officials have only

once called PESCO a force for ‘Institutional change’, calling for the removal of the burden of unanimity in their motivation.

Figure 2: France: Coding of core categories.

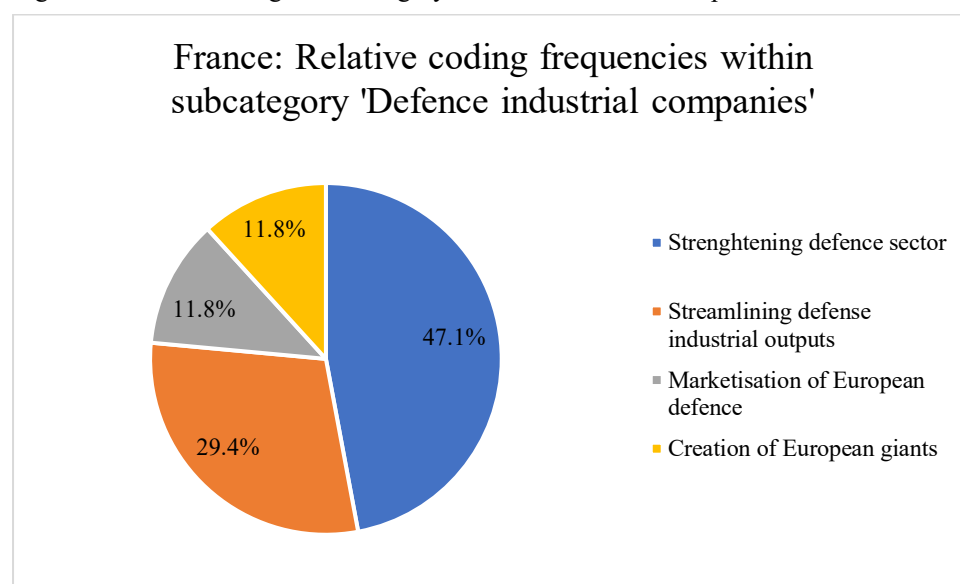


4.1.1 Prominence of the defence industry

The coding for the category of the ‘Prominence of the defence industry’ for France, related to hypothesis 1, was split evenly between the subcategories. The graphs (Figures 3 and 4) are divided into subcategories for clarity, as there are many different codes. Starting with *Defence industrial companies*, this subcategory was operationalised to include mentions of specific companies, however no such mentions have been found. This can reflect the public unpopularity of defence industrial companies in France, as President Macron has increased defence spending despite growing budget deficits (Goury-Laffont et al., 2025). Broader themes within the subcategory have been coded, illustrated in Figure 3, the most prominent being the call for strengthening the French and European defence sectors. Minister of Defence Florence Parly supports PESCO as it supports the idea that “European defence is a Europe of concrete action, a Europe of opportunities” (Parly, 2019). He supports PESCO as it is a concrete way to strengthen the defence sectors in Europe through project-based

investments. Furthermore, to a lesser extent, French officials support PESCO as it is a way to streamline defence industrial outputs. This aligns with the European Commission’s view that Europe's defence industry suffers from fragmentation, with dominant national players operating in regional, rather than European, markets (European Commission, 2025). Lastly, the codes of “marketisation of European defence” and “creation of European giants” are the least mentioned in the corpus. The former refers to one of the objectives of PESCO, namely the marketisation of European defence, specifically referring to market principles such as enhancing competition and expanding privatisation. The latter refers to the need to create European giants in the defence sector. The idea is that through PESCO, defence industrial companies will grow to facilitate larger demands and compete with American defence companies. This is underscored by multiple CEO’s in the European defence sector and defence ministers (Dubois et al., 2025; Ebhard et al., 2025).

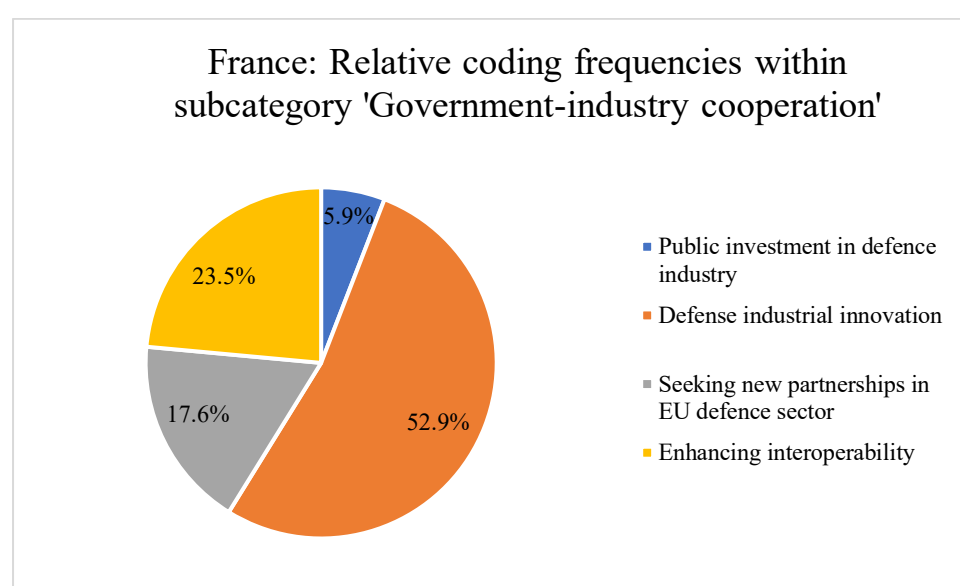
Figure 3: France: Coding of subcategory ‘Defence industrial companies’.



The coding for the subcategory *Government-industry cooperation*, shown in Figure 4, illustrates that a majority of mentions refer to PESCO as a catalyst for defence industrial innovation. Frequent references to the necessity of innovations, “such as the development of anti-submarine warfare capabilities” (Loiseau, 2017). Innovation through government-industry cooperation is one of the primary goals of PESCO, it is therefore not a surprise that this code is prominent. Furthermore, the themes of “seeking new partnerships in EU defence sector” and “enhancing interoperability” are present. The latter emphasises the importance of interoperability across military systems, as substantiated by the European Defence Agency (EDA) in their analysis. Currently, similar but different systems across the EU hinder military

cooperation due to the need for extensive additional cross-system training (EDA, 2024). The former includes mentions of PESCO facilitating new partnerships between EU member states. Lastly, to the least extent, French officials referred to PESCO as a means to stimulate public investment in national defence industries, which aligns with the binding commitments for participation in PESCO (Council of the European Union, 2017). In conclusion, the coded contents of these subcategories underscore the prominence of the defence industry for governments and its influence in favour of European integration in security and defence through PESCO.

Figure 4: France: Coding of subcategory 'Government-industry cooperation'.

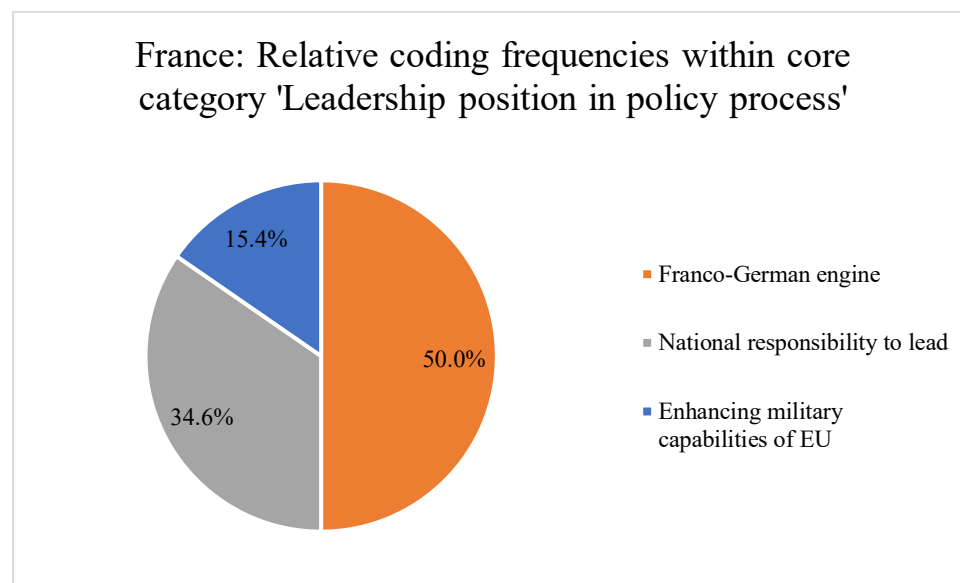


4.1.2 Leadership position in the policy process

Other ways for French government officials to motivate their participation in PESCO have been to taunt their leadership position in EU policy-making surrounding PESCO (Hypothesis 2). This mechanism is limited to the core category of 'Leadership position in the policy process'. Coding reveals that the so-called 'Franco-German engine' was emphasised. Especially after President Macron was elected in 2017 and cooperated closely with German Chancellor Merkel on responding to multiple crises (Droin, 2022). Additionally, they have been instrumental in EU policy innovations and initiatives, as Macron stated: "We have a joint Franco-German strategy to do more" (2017a). Essentially referring to PESCO as the joint initiative that it was to expand it to include all member states (Billon-Galland & Quencez, 2017). To a lesser extent, French government officials declared their support for PESCO by proclaiming a greater national responsibility to lead. This code became especially

relevant after the Brexit referendum in 2016, as France attempted to manoeuvre into the power vacuum left by the United Kingdom in the EU. The British were an obstacle to European integration in defence due to their preference for American or NATO defence structures (Black et al., 2017). The French took the opportunity to take centre stage and strive for PESCO and other EU defence proposals through their speeches. This suggests that speeches are not only a source for showing motivations for participating in PESCO, but also a strategy to push for further European integration. Lastly, this subcategory includes the code referring to PESCO as a way to enhance the military capabilities of the EU. Although the least prominent code, it remains essential as it suggests that France, taking a leadership position, justified its support for PESCO, as it strengthens the overall EU governance structures and cooperation through the addition of new EU initiatives in an underexplored policy area, such as defence. This is in line with their national interest to enhance independent EU security guarantees, to which they have taken a leadership position (Bouemar, 2021).

Figure 5: France: Coding of core category 'Leadership position in policy process'.

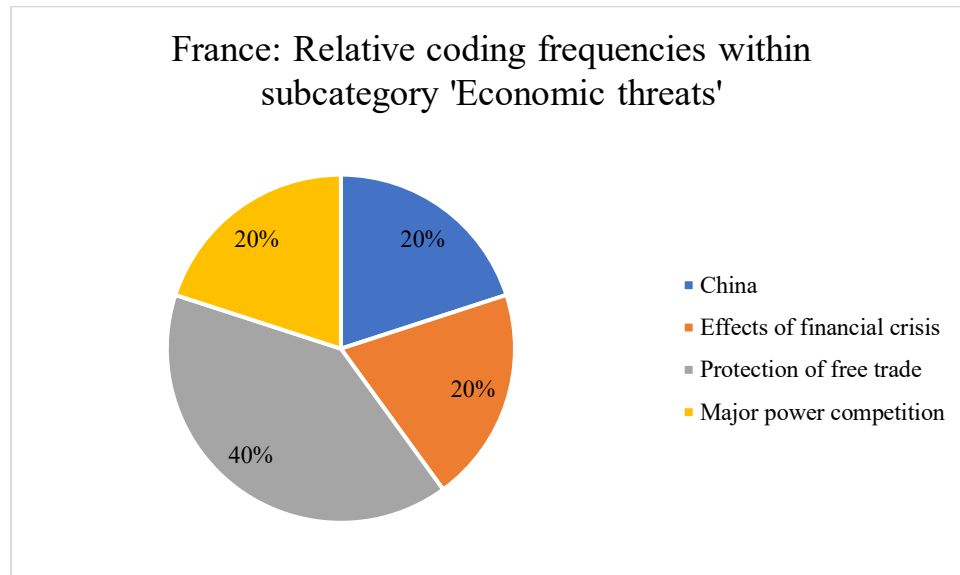


4.1.3 Threat perceptions

For the category of 'Threat perceptions', there was an overwhelming majority of 93%, with 66 codes for *Security threats*, compared to five references to *Economic threats*. These graphs (Figures 6 and 7) have been separated for clarity. On economic threats, after the 2008 financial crisis, Jean-Pierre Jouyet, Secretary of State for European Affairs, supported the idea of PESCO to prevent foreign powers from acquiring struggling (defence) industrial companies in the EU (Jouyet, 2008). Then, Minister for Foreign Affairs Le Drian referred to

China as a “partner, competitor and systemic rival of Europeans” (2021) and that PESCO was a step forward for the EU’s competitiveness. This is related to the other codes, where French officials referred to PESCO as a means to protect free trade and engage in economic competition with major powers.

Figure 6: France: Coding of subcategory ‘Economic threats’.

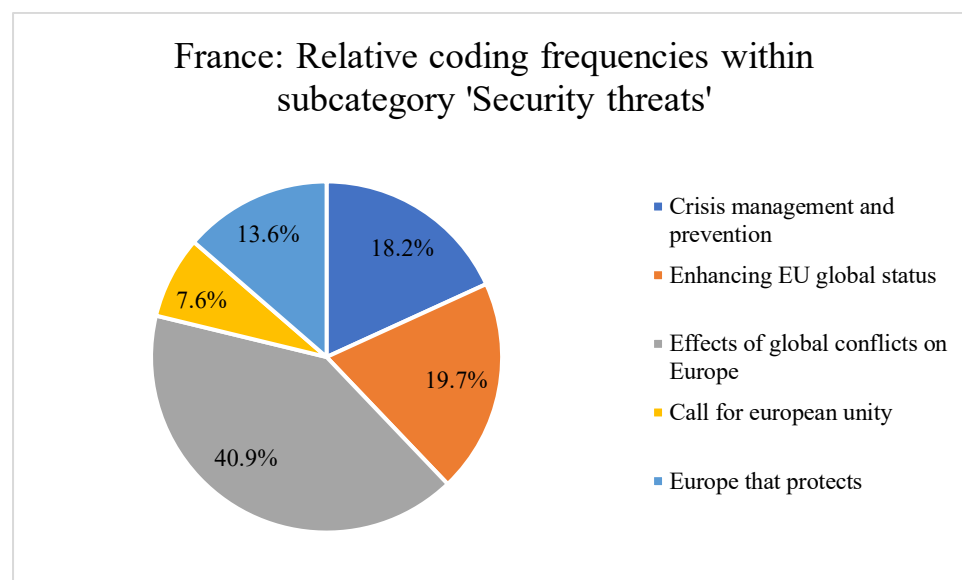


As stated, the overwhelming majority of codes within the category of threat perceptions were related to security threats. The codes and their relative frequencies are shown in Figure 7, the largest one being the effects of global conflicts on Europe. This encompasses references to conflicts occurring both within and outside the EU as motivation for PESCO. For example, as France faced terrorist attacks in 2015 and 2016, Macron described them as “a lasting terrorist phenomenon whose stated aim is to fracture our free societies” (2017d). Through the adoption of PESCO, he states that “Europe has finally become aware of its weaknesses and the need to act together” (Macron, 2017d). These codes also include references to migration issues resulting from conflicts elsewhere, as Macron expressed his desire to “have a genuine Europe that can protect us from large-scale migration” (2017c) when talking about PESCO. In connection, French government officials called PESCO a means to enhance the EU’s status as a global player in the area of security and defence.

In 2008, Secretary of State for European Affairs Jouyet stated the necessity to “strengthen our hand in globalisation” (2008). Back then, PESCO was still an idea to be added to the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon. Nevertheless, for the French, it was already about broadening the scope of EU capabilities to include security and defence in response to the ever-faster changing world order. Furthermore, PESCO was hailed as a support mechanism for crisis management and

prevention efforts, with reference to ongoing external EU missions and the need for further development. Furthermore, French officials referred to their self-coined theme of a ‘Europe that protects’ to thematically frame PESCO as a means to protect Europeans from external and internal security threats (Macron, 2017b). Lastly, some mentions called for European unity in response to security threats in support of PESCO, whilst highlighting that division would make the EU more vulnerable to external attacks. These findings suggest that French government officials base their motivations primarily on security threats. They highlight the importance of the mechanism from Hypothesis 3, in that threat perceptions from government officials, especially those related to security, play a significant role in driving the push for European integration in defence and security, exemplified by PESCO.

Figure 7: France: Coding of subcategory ‘Security threats’.

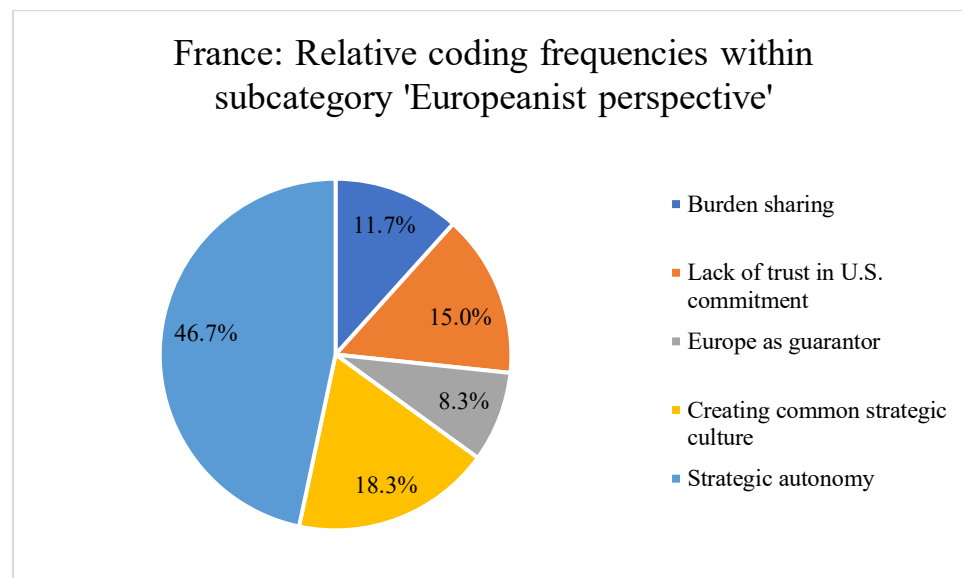


4.1.4 Perspective on security guarantees from the United States

The second-largest subcategory, coded from the French corpus, is the *Europeanist perspective* on U.S. security guarantees (Hypothesis 4), comprising 87%, an overwhelming majority over the *Atlanticist perspective*. These graphs (Figures 8 and 9) have been separated for clarity. The relative frequencies within the subcategory of the *Europeanist perspective* are shown in Figure 8, with “strategic autonomy” being the largest code by far. As France has consistently advocated for strategic autonomy in security and defence as the ultimate goal for the EU, this finding seems unsurprising (Martin, 2023). Strategic autonomy fits within the category of the relative desire to be independent of U.S. security guarantees, as France has conceptualised it as achieving security and defence independence. In response to the American shift from Europe to the Indo-Pacific in terms of strategic importance, Minister for

Foreign Affairs Fabius states that PESCO is “a means of achieving strategic autonomy for Europeans” (2012). Furthermore, the initiative aims to foster the creation of a shared strategic culture. For the EU, a common strategic culture means that member states share aligned beliefs and assumptions about the use of military force and how to achieve strategic objectives (“Strategic culture”, 2021). France believes that by working together on defence projects, like PESCO, this can become a reality and the EU would be better able to handle its security affairs. The last three codes are in direct affront to U.S. security guarantees, explicitly stating a lack of trust in the U.S. commitment to defending European security. Additionally, it is stated that Europe should share the burden and be the guarantor of European security, rather than the U.S., while supporting PESCO as a means to achieve these ends.

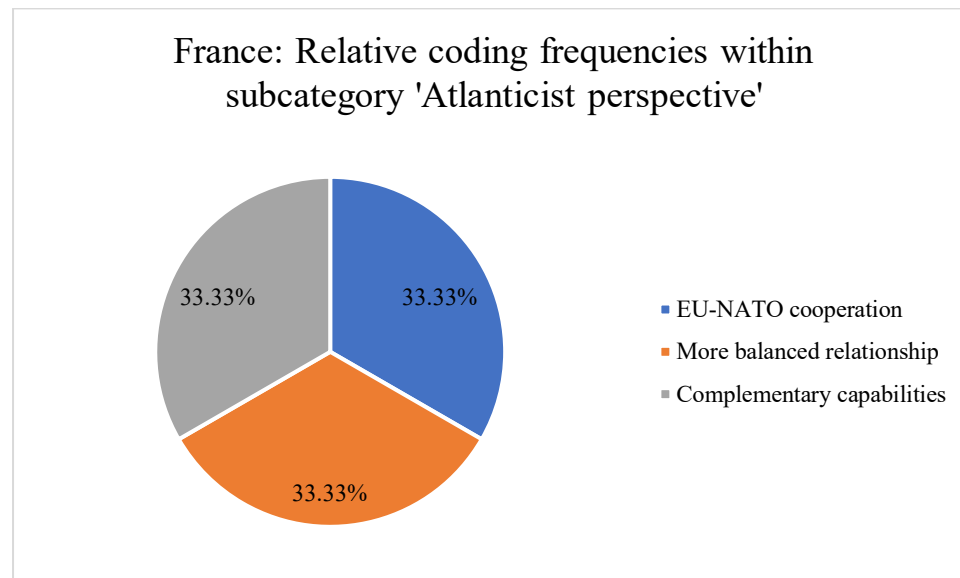
Figure 8: France: Coding of subcategory ‘Europeanist perspective’.



The *Atlanticist perspective* resulted in only nine mentions, equally distributed across three codes, shown in Figure 9. Macron states, for example: “A Europe of defence is a Europe that is capable of contributing much more effectively to its own security and of being an effective and credible component within the Alliance” (2017e). Explaining that PESCO supports a Europe of defence, ultimately contributing to a more balanced relationship between the U.S. and Europe in protecting European security. Whilst still benefiting from and contributing to NATO security structures. Furthermore, PESCO was described as replacing or duplicating NATO structures (Brzozowski, 2019). Le Drian tried to relieve those concerns by explaining that PESCO fits within “the complementary nature of European defence within NATO” (2018). Meaning that EU defence initiatives offer complementary capabilities to the Alliance.

Therefore, it is suggested that, despite France's inherent distrust of the U.S. for security, as reflected in the dominant Europeanist perspective, they emphasise the importance of NATO, without contesting it too harshly.

Figure 9: France: Coding of subcategory 'Atlanticist perspective'.

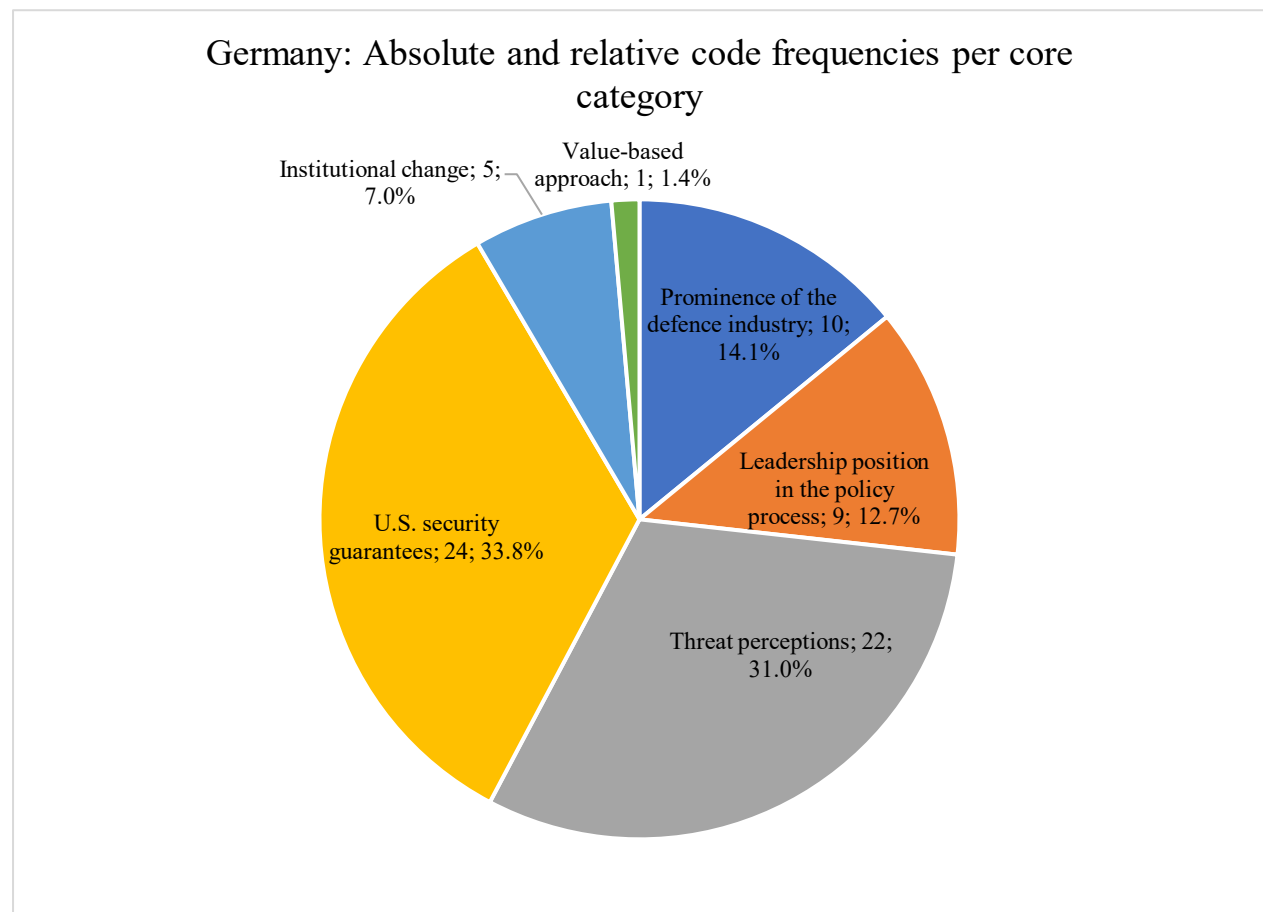


4.2 Germany

In terms of absolute coding frequency, Germany has a substantially lower amount than France. Analysis of 34 speeches provided 75 codes. The relative code frequencies for each core category are shown in Figure 10. The most prominent core categories are 'U.S. security guarantees' (33.8%) and 'Threat perceptions' (31%). This suggests that German government officials, in their motivations to support PESCO, are more in line with realist intergovernmentalist thinking (hypotheses 3 and 4). The categories aligned with liberal intergovernmentalism (hypotheses 1 and 2) were less visible. 'Leadership position in the policy process provided', 12.7%, and 'Prominence of the defence industry', 14.1% of all codes. Furthermore, the inductive coding process also revealed codes for the categories 'Institutional change' and the 'Value-based approach'. The former is illustrated by the proclamation of Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs Maas: "If the unanimity requirement in European Union bodies continues to allow individual countries to be repeatedly bought off by others who pursue only bilateral or even unilateral interests, depending on their interests, then a common European foreign policy will be impossible" (2019d). He essentially argues that European foreign policy cannot be based solely on the pursuit of consensus to be effective, while supporting PESCO, as it has alleviated the burden of unanimity. For the latter, there

was only one mention of the German government standing “firm on our common European values” (Annen, 2019).

Figure 10: Germany: Coding of core categories.



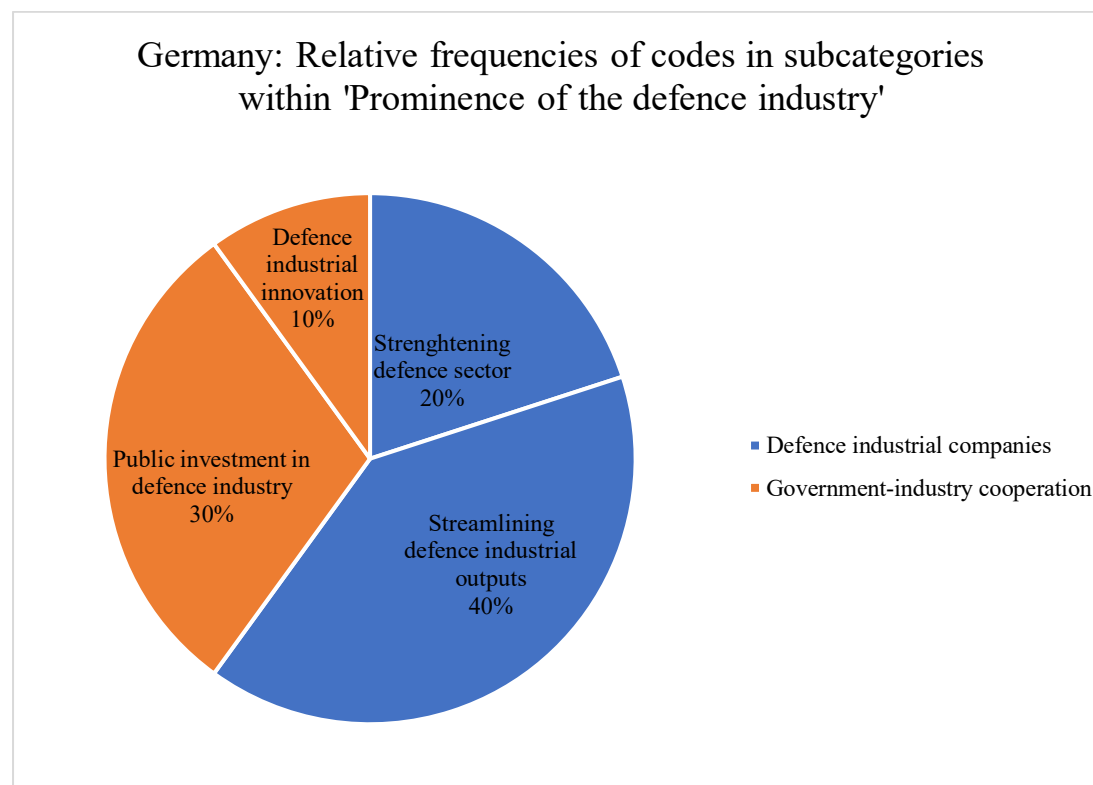
4.2.1 Prominence of the defence industry

The coding of the subcategories within the core category of ‘Prominence of the defence industry’ (Hypothesis 1) reveals interesting results, shown in Figure 12. Firstly, the relatively small coding frequencies for this category are somewhat unsurprising, as Germany has a historical aversion to the defence industry following the Second World War. The results suggest that indeed German government officials do not utilise the components of *Defence industrial companies* as a motivating mechanism to support more investments in defence through PESCO. It is only recently that the German government has made efforts to recentre its defence industry in Europe through government support (EDA, 2022). However, there is some strong messaging in the German corpus on the need to streamline defence industrial outputs. Chancellor Merkel stated that one “can imagine how inefficient military cooperation within Europe is when each weapon system requires its own maintenance, training units, and personnel” (2018). She describes PESCO as a means to increase efficiency in defence-related

production processes. However, German officials refrain from highlighting particular companies in their discussion of how they play a role in PESCO. Similar to France, German defence industrial companies do not hold good reputations in Germany (Nielsen, 2025). Even though Germany has increased defence spending, defence industrial companies remain out of the spotlight. This can be attributed to Germany's historical pacifism following the Second World War and the cultural resistance to arms ingrained in German society (Fine & Carlyon, 2024).

Furthermore, in the subcategory of *Government-industry cooperation*, Federal Minister of Defence Von der Leyen called for and subsequently approved more public investments in defence after urging to reignite the European Defence Union with PESCO (2016). However, she states: "There is no doubt that this is a bitter pill to swallow, but it is an unavoidable task ahead of us" (Von der Leyen, 2016). Again, these statements suggest a passive approach towards defence issues in Germany. Lastly, Chancellor Merkel stated that PESCO is a platform for defence industrial innovation through the joint development of several EU member states for a new type of aircraft and tank (2019a). In conclusion, the importance of a prominent defence industry is relatively low in Germany. Government officials generally avoid referring to the defence industry when discussing PESCO.

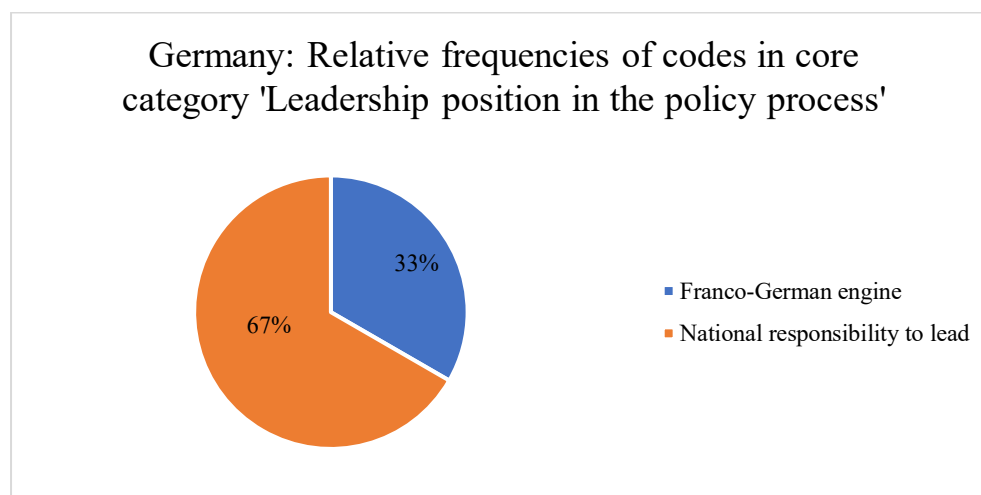
Figure 11: Germany: Coding of core category 'Prominence of the defence industry'.



4.2.2 Leadership position in the policy process

Within the category of ‘Leadership position in the policy process’ (Hypothesis 2), a significant number of codes indicate a leadership position in EU policy-making activities surrounding PESCO, as shown in Figure 12. This leadership position is seen as a “national responsibility” and through the “Franco-German engine” for EU policy innovation. These findings suggest that the German government is aware of its position within EU governance, as Minister Maas notes: “expectations towards Germany have grown” (2018a). Multiple officials have heralded PESCO as a showcase of German leadership. Additionally, German officials signalled the importance of the Franco-German relationship for the betterment of EU citizens with the implementation of PESCO. Recent reports show the significance of German leadership in the EU, particularly in the area of defence (Burilkov & Wolff, 2025). A responsibility to lead was primarily expressed in the adoption phase. This suggests that, although France seized the opportunity in the implementation phase, Germany joined later.

Figure 12: Germany: Coding of core category ‘Leadership position in the policy process’.



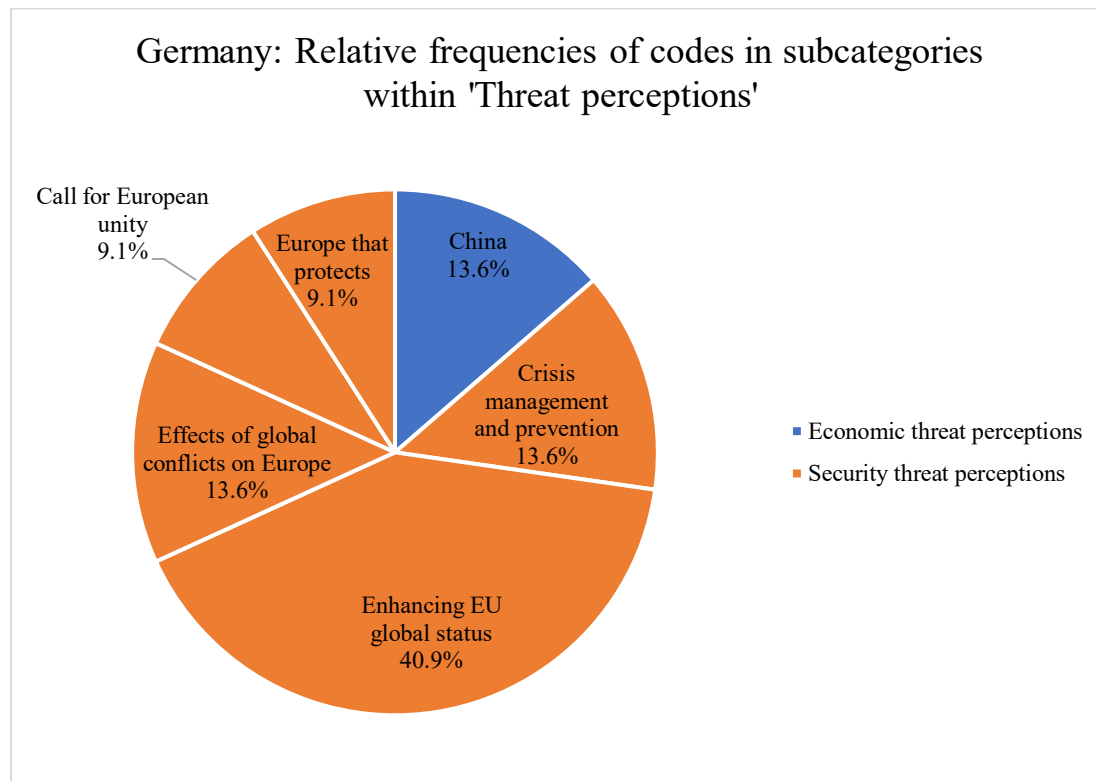
4.2.3 Threat perceptions

Within the core category of ‘Threat perceptions’ (Hypothesis 3), there is a clear majority for mentions related to *Security threats*, over *Economic threats*, similar to France, as shown in Figure 13. In terms of economic threats, all are directed at China. During a speech on reasons why European integration in defence and security is paramount, referring to PESCO, Minister Maas expresses a dire need for “a strategy to handle the economic and political ambitions of China” (2019a). To contextualise, Germany in particular is facing economic constraints as the Chinese market is becoming less accessible to German car exporters

(Waldersee, 2025). PESCO could then be seen as a way to foster European cohesion to strengthen their competitiveness in the economic realm.

Nevertheless, the largest subcategory is related to security threats, with the most frequent mentions calling to enhance the global status of the EU. In response to persistent and expanding security threats, Minister Maas states that “this inward-looking Europe must now suddenly be an actor on the world stage” (2019c). He refers to the EU as inward-looking because he suggests that the EU has been selfish. The priority has been to enhance economic prosperity within the Union. However, this has become under threat from external threats and thus, the EU should enhance their foreign policy engagement through initiatives like PESCO. Furthermore, German officials frame their support for PESCO as an “integrated approach” to build peace and handle crises (Maas, 2020a). Crisis management policies cannot solely focus on military means. The integrated approach refers to the inclusion of civilian means, such as reconstruction, rule of law advisers, and monitoring efforts, within crisis responses. PESCO, in turn, is helping rebuild military capabilities as EU member states, with few exceptions, have consistently divested from defence (European Parliament, 2025). Thus, these findings suggest that the German argument is that, in order to implement civilian crisis management, which the EU excels at, there needs to be military means to back this up. Similarly, effects of conflicts “in neighbouring regions from the Sahel to the Middle East” (Maas, 2020b) have an apparent influence in support of European defence integration through PESCO. To a lesser extent, German officials have supported PESCO by calling for European unity in the area of defence and the theme “Europe that protects.”

Figure 13: Germany: Coding for core category 'Threat perceptions'.



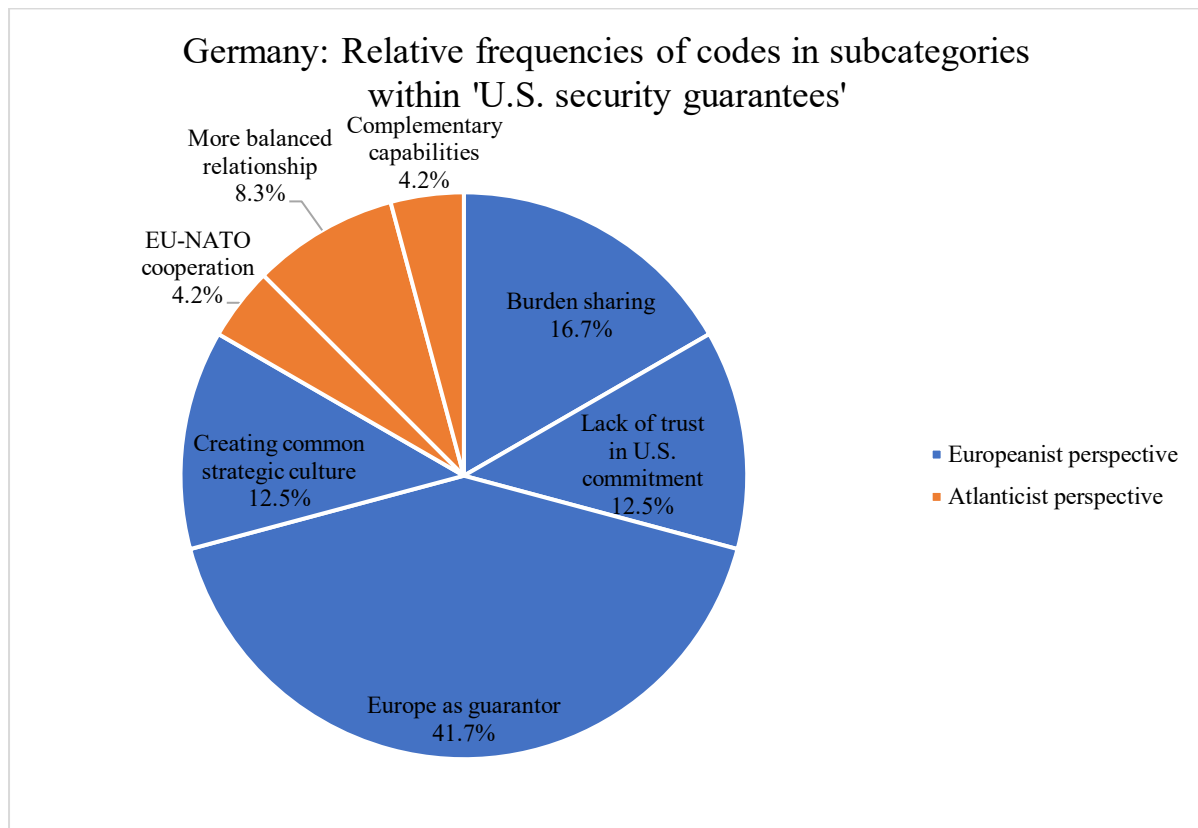
4.2.4 Perspective on security guarantees from the United States

The coding results for the core category of 'Security guarantees from the U.S.' (Hypothesis 4) reveal a strong inclination towards the *Europeanist perspective* by German government officials, as shown in Figure 14. Within the Europeanist perspective, mentions mostly refer to the premise that Europe is supposed to be the guarantor of European security, which PESCO supports. As Minister Maas points out: "Europe must assert itself in a geopolitical environment characterised by increasingly fierce competition between major powers" (2018d). The escalation of competition between major powers forces Europe to act as its own security guarantor, according to German officials. In terms of burden sharing, Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs Steinmeier states: "Our American friends are rightfully calling for a greater distribution of the burden and for Europe to take on more responsibility" (2016). This is in response to U.S. President Trump's insistence, already in his first term, towards European countries contribute their fair share to NATO (Barichella, 2017). German officials view PESCO as a means to this end, alongside enhanced investments in defence on a national level. In connection, a noticeable decline in trust is evident in the U.S. commitment to European security. As Minister Maas expresses: "Part of the new transatlantic reality is that we need to take on more responsibility for our own security because we can no longer count

on the other side of the Atlantic doing so for us” (2018c). While calling for enhanced EU cooperation in defence-related projects, like PESCO. Lastly, German officials view PESCO as a means to foster a common strategic culture, whereby Europe becomes a stronger pillar within the Alliance, based on a shared perspective on security issues (Maas, 2019b).

There was surprisingly little mention of the *Atlanticist perspective*, as Germany is traditionally viewed as an Atlanticist state within Europe (Kundnani & Puglierin, 2018). At the same time, the relationship between Chancellor Merkel and President Trump was strained and only worsened during his first term (Stanley-Smith, 2024). This could be a reason why Germany cautiously shifted its stance towards the Alliance. The few mentions that aligned with the Atlanticist perspective related to PESCO's enabling of EU-NATO cooperation (Merkel, 2018). Furthermore, it was noted that PESCO supports a more balanced EU-U.S. relationship in terms of security, and that PESCO projects are complementary capabilities, not intended to replace or duplicate NATO's security architecture (Maas, 2018b; Merkel, 2019b). Thus, the motivating mechanisms for participating in PESCO were more aligned with the Europeanist perspective due to the deteriorated view of U.S. security guarantees. Therefore, participation in PESCO is justified to strengthen EU security capabilities and independence.

Figure 14: Germany: Coding for core category 'U.S. security guarantees'.



4.3 Discussion

This section revisits and evaluates the hypotheses for France and Germany, providing a detailed comparative analysis. Additionally, the significance and position in the current literature of these findings will be highlighted to explain why France and Germany have joined PESCO.

4.3.1 State-society interests

Hypothesis 1 posits that: *The mechanism that influences state motivations for participating in PESCO is the prominence of the defence industry in a member state.* The prominence of the national defence industry would be highlighted by mentions referring to defence industrial companies and/or government-industry cooperation. Both in France and Germany, the results suggest that this mechanism plays a marginal role in their motivations for PESCO. As officials from both states referred to this mechanism relatively little. In addition, the mechanism was operationalised to include mentions of defence industrial companies. Even though France and Germany have significant national defence industries, government officials refrained from referring to them. Instead, France's focus was limited to the need to strengthen the defence sector in general terms through PESCO projects, and the possibilities

that it will enable for defence industrial innovation. In turn, Germany placed more emphasis on streamlining defence industrial outputs at the EU level and, to a lesser extent, that PESCO is a stimulant for the expansion of public investments in defence. This apparent desire does suggest a shift after decades of government neglect towards defence and its industries (EDA, 2022). This suggests that PESCO could be seen as a way to justify this shift in favour of more public defence investments.

Therefore, these findings are in line with current literature on how governments frame defence industrial investments (Brøgger, 2024). Particularly in EU countries they frame these actions as being a necessity in light of external influences, over emphasising strengthening national defence industries. Brøgger (2014), in her research on why several EU defence initiatives, including PESCO, were launched, argues that there were arguments which reflect these findings. Namely, defence investments were framed around efficiency and defence industrial competitiveness. However, these problems of inefficiency and lack of competitiveness, which PESCO is supposed to help address, have been around since numerous EU countries began to divest in defence following the end of the Cold War. This motivation was therefore not essential for Germany and France to establish PESCO.

4.3.2 Leadership interests

Hypothesis 2 posits that: *The mechanism that influences state motivations for participating in PESCO is the desire for government officials to take up a leadership position in the policy-making and implementation process.* Operationalised to include references to national leadership positions and responsibilities in EU policy-making activities surrounding PESCO to advance national interests. Firstly, in general, this mechanism only played a marginal role in the policy position formation of France and Germany. For France, these mentions primarily emphasised a responsibility to be a policy entrepreneur in the EU context. Leadership in the implementation of PESCO was framed as a joint exercise with Germany. While Germany slightly preferred to frame their leadership position in a national context. However, these findings suggest that both France and Germany utilised their leadership position in EU policy-making to support PESCO. These findings support existing knowledge on the ‘Franco-German engine’ in EU policy-making. Especially after Brexit, the political will to expand the CFSP came primarily from France and Germany (Leuff et al., 2012). These findings corroborate that, as Brexit was often referred to in the corpus. However, Germany is suggested to have a less prominent role in the Franco-German engine when it comes to EU

defence initiatives (Bunde, 2021). While France primarily takes centre stage in this policy area.

4.3.3 Geopolitical interests

Hypothesis 3 posits that: *The mechanism that influences state motivations for participating in PESCO is the perception of government officials towards threats from geopolitical rivals.*

Indicators refer to security threats, including those related to territorial and economic sovereignty, as well as terrorism. This includes mentions related to the need to enhance crisis responses and capabilities and calling for European unity in light of collective threat perceptions. These threats could also be of an economic nature, all codes within this category refer to threats as motivations for European integration through PESCO. For France and Germany, this category proved to be prominent. Additionally, both countries massively favoured utilising security threats over economic threats as mechanisms. Differences are present within the subcategory of security threats as France placed heavier emphasis on the effects of global conflicts on Europe, especially related to terrorism, as France faced multiple attacks before PESCO's implementation. Germany, on the other hand, utilised this mechanism to support PESCO to enhance the EU's global status through credible defence capabilities. This is in order not to become a lone bystander or victim of the international economic competition with the U.S. and China, and military threats from Russia.

The prominence of threat perceptions as a catalyst for European integration in defence is corroborated by Rutigliano (2023). She argues that the Russian invasion has brought about EU integration in defence and the enhancement of PESCO. The external shock of the invasion is described as a trigger for renewed political will among member states. This reflects the spill-over logic as external crises provide opportunities and incentives to cooperate beyond the initial domain. In line with the findings, France and Germany have utilised external threats, such as terrorism, as a motivating mechanism for participating in PESCO and cooperating in new areas of defence. The same way governments now use the Russian invasion as a motivator for enhancing EU integration in defence and expanding PESCO projects (Rutigliano, 2023).

4.3.4 Balance of power interests

Hypothesis 4 posits that: *The mechanism that influences state motivations for participation in PESCO is the relative desire of government officials to become autonomous of U.S. security guarantees.* This mechanism was operationalised to include references to the EU needing to

become more independent in this realm or a general lack of trust in the American commitment to Europe, whilst favouring PESCO as a response. Alternatively, a more Atlanticist approach would involve PESCO being complementary to NATO. Again, France and Germany strongly favour the Europeanist perspective. France is applying their longstanding desire to become more strategically autonomous from the U.S. in terms of protecting their security. Germany, however, did not utilise that term once and can be argued to be more cautious in their rhetoric towards the U.S. Instead, German officials referenced more the desire for Europe to do more as a security guarantor. Thus, they are not directly in confrontation with the U.S., as they stress the importance of Europe doing more, rather than doing it alone, as enhancing autonomy entails.

These findings highlight the change of attitude towards the U.S. and its security guarantees, especially for Germany. Common positions for the EU and U.S. on international issues, such as climate change and multilateralism, are increasingly rare and relations have been souring (Riddervold & Newsome, 2018). This is in line with the increasing lack of trust Germany and France place in U.S. security guarantees. Riddervold and Newsome refer to the unilateral actions taken by the Trump Administration (2018). By retreating from international agreements such as the Paris Climate Accord and the Iran Deal, and questioning the value of the NATO Article 5, the U.S. sends a signal that the EU is on its own (Riddervold & Newsome, 2018). Eventually, this will form the basis of support for participating in PESCO.

Ultimately, the prominence of realist intergovernmentalist mechanisms in explaining participation in PESCO highlights the importance of framing EU defence policy proposals to reflect security threat perceptions and reducing dependence on U.S. security guarantees. Especially within countries like France and Germany, this framing can resonate, as these results show that emphasising the EU's capacity to act independently and provide a capable collective response to external threats can foster unity and strengthen domestic legitimacy for EU defence initiatives, which remain a controversial topic.

5. Conclusion

The research aim of this thesis was to explain the motivations of EU member states for participating in PESCO through mechanisms rooted in existing theories on EU integration. To achieve this, a comparative case study was conducted for France and Germany, utilising a content analysis of speeches by government officials. The hypotheses were based on assumptions from liberal and realist intergovernmentalism. Liberal intergovernmentalism

offered two key mechanisms: ‘Prominence of the defence industry’ and ‘Leadership position in the policy process’. The defence industry played only a marginal role in both countries, likely due to its general unpopularity, discouraging officials from referring to it explicitly. Conversely, France more actively promoted the Franco-German engine and framed PESCO as a vehicle for its leadership position within PESCO, while Germany emphasised its national responsibility. This reflects the roles of France and Germany in advancing the CSDP, particularly following Brexit.

In contrast, realist intergovernmentalism highlighted ‘Threat perceptions’ and ‘Perspective on U.S. security guarantees’ as explanatory mechanisms. Security threats dominated in both countries. France emphasised international terrorism, while Germany stressed the need to strengthen the EU’s geopolitical status. Both also referenced the need to reduce reliance on the U.S., aligning with a broader Europeanist shift. France emphasised strategic autonomy, while Germany, although more cautious, shared similar aims alongside support for Transatlantic cooperation. These findings support the trend towards a Europeanist perspective, driven by declining trust in U.S. reliability. They view PESCO as a means to a more independent Europe with credible defence capabilities.

Even though coding allowed alternative explanations to emerge, these remained marginal, as Germany had some references to PESCO as a means of engaging in institutional change by alleviating the burden of unanimity. France, on the other hand, sometimes took a value-based approach in PESCO, which served as a means to protect the European values upon which the EU was founded. In conclusion, the mechanisms rooted in realist intergovernmentalism were more prominent in the countries’ motivations to participate in PESCO.

However, one must address the limitations of the research conducted. Firstly, selecting only two countries has yielded detailed results, but it also limits the generalisability of the findings. Research on other EU countries is necessary to further compare and comprehend the mechanisms. Secondly, the methodological scope is restricted to publicly available speeches. This reliance may exclude internal preferences and negotiation dynamics that could be important for joining PESCO. The third limitation is the narrow policy focus. Since the speeches are linked to explicit mentions of PESCO, support for other defence initiatives aimed at increasing EU integration in security and defence may have different motivations.

Nevertheless, this research provides a strong foundation for future research to be performed. Namely, one could utilise the same research design for other member states. As smaller EU

countries could adhere to different mechanisms in their support for integration initiatives. Furthermore, the theoretical framework could be expanded to include other broad theories on EU integration, such as institutionalism or constructivism, which examine state behaviour in general. These theories reveal different mechanisms to explain participation in PESCO. Institutionalism focuses on path dependency and institutional constraints (Pierson, 1996). Cases could be selected to exemplify these mechanisms based on countries with high national policy alignment with EU governance structures, like Belgium (Bursens et al., 2014). Constructivism could highlight the role of state identity or international norms and values (Christiansen et al., 1999). Here, cases could be selected based on the relative importance of national identities and the strength of norms, such as Ireland's historical neutrality (Devine, 2008). These cases and theories would broaden the results and create more depth through additional mechanisms.

Furthermore, the conclusions provide recommendations for policymakers in national governments or the EU, working on defence policies. Namely, the prominence of realist intergovernmentalist mechanisms underscores the importance of framing EU defence policy proposals, tying them to security threats and the desire to become more independent of the U.S.. This framing could garner more support for such initiatives. Furthermore, the findings reflect the importance of recognising national differences between EU member states. These differences in the mechanisms of support for policies can be a source of potential conflict between countries, which could hinder cooperation.

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Appendix

Table 3: Coding frame core categories and examples.

Core category	Description	Examples from data (subcategory, code) (name, year)
Prominence of defence industry	Government officials refer to PESCO in a way that highlights the prominence of the domestic defence industry.	“Permanent structured cooperation and the European Defence Fund are investments in new military capabilities and more effective equipment that guarantee our strategic autonomy. They are opportunities for innovation, for SMEs and start-ups, as well as for the industrial sector, which is in such need of them” (Defence industrial companies, Strengthening defence sector) (Parly, 2019).
Leadership position in policy process	Government officials refer to PESCO in a way that highlights their leadership position in PESCO’s policy process.	“In a new world order, I was told that Germany – and Europe – would need to pull more weight. That’s basically the task I was set. The expectations on us are indeed high. I don’t think that this will change in the foreseeable future. To fulfil these expectations, we must also make available the necessary capabilities” (Leadership position in policy process, National responsibility to lead) (Maas, 2018)
Threat perceptions	Government officials refer to PESCO in a way that highlights perceived threats to their security.	“The first key, the foundation of any political community, is security. We are experiencing a dual movement in Europe: a gradual and inevitable withdrawal of the United States, and a lasting terrorist phenomenon whose stated aim is to fracture our free societies. In these areas, Europe has finally become aware of its weaknesses and the need to act together” (Security threats, Effects of global conflicts on Europe) (Macron, 2017).
U.S. security guarantees	Government officials refer to PESCO in a way that highlights their opinions on U.S. security guarantees.	“In terms of defence, our goal must be for Europe to be able to act independently, alongside NATO. The foundations for this autonomy have been laid, with historic progress made in recent months. Last June, we laid the foundations for this Europe of Defence: permanent structured cooperation, enabling us to make greater commitments, move forward together and coordinate better” (Europeanist perspective, Strategic autonomy) (Macron, 2017).

Table 4: Coding frame subcategories and codes.

Core category	Subcategory	Description	Codes
Prominence of defence industry	Defence industrial companies	Reference to national defence industrial companies. This could relate to the need to strengthen them.	Strengthening defence sector, Streamline defence industrial outputs, marketisation of EU defence, Creation of European giants.
	Government-industry cooperation	Reference to government-industry cooperation. This could relate to the need for expansion in certain realms.	Public investments in defence industry, Defence industrial innovation, Seeking new partnerships, Enhancing interoperability.
Position in EU governance	Leadership in EU policy-making activities	Reference to the leadership position of the EU member state in formulating policy proposals. This could relate to enhancing proclaiming a national responsibility to lead.	Franco-German engine, National responsibility to lead, enhancing EU military capabilities.
Threat perceptions	Economic threat perceptions	Reference to threats to economic stability and growth. This could relate to economic dependencies on China.	China, Effects of financial crisis, Protection of free trade, Major power competition.
	Security threat perceptions	Reference to threats to national and EU security. This could relate to military aggression from Russia.	Crisis management and prevention, Enhancing EU global status, Effects of global conflicts on EU, Call for European unity, Europe that protects.
U.S. security guarantees	Europeanist perspective	Reference to the need to become more independent in capabilities to ensure security. This could relate to enhancing EU military capabilities.	Burden sharing, Lack of trust in U.S. commitment, Europe as security guarantor, Creating common strategic culture, Strategic autonomy.
	Atlanticist perspective	Reference to the need to engage with the United States to cooperate in the realm of security. This could relate to EU-NATO cooperation.	EU-NATO cooperation, Reducing alliance, More balanced relationship, Complementary capabilities.