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Bachelor's Thesis:
A Franco-German Engine in European Defense?
The Role of Franco-German Cooperation in Relation to the
European Union's Defense Policy.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	List of abbreviations	3
1.	Introduction.....	4
2.	State of research.....	5
3.	Theoretical framework	7
	3.1. Definition of Franco-German engine	7
	3.2. Processes behind the Franco-German engine	8
4.	Methodological approach.....	9
5.	Empirical analysis	11
	5.1. Divergences regarding Permanent Structured Cooperation	11
	5.2. Commitments on Permanent Structured Cooperation	12
	5.3. Establishment of Permanent Structured Cooperation.....	13
6.	Conclusion.....	16
7.	References	17

I. List of abbreviations

CARD	Coordinated Annual Review on Defence
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
ECFR	European Council on Foreign Relations
EDA	European Defence Agency
EDF	European Defence Fund
EMU	Economic and Monetary Union
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HP	High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
June 2016 Declaration	Joint Declaration by French and German Foreign Ministers on June 27, 2016
July 2017 Declaration	Joint Declaration on the 19th Franco-German Ministerial Council on July 13, 2017
2017 Proposals	Joint Proposals on commitments to reach an inclusive and ambitious PESCO signed by the French, German, Spanish and Italian Defense Ministers on July 21, 2017
MS	Member States
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation
TEU	Treaty on European Union
PESCO Decision	Decision 2017/2315 of the Council of the EU on December 11, 2017
September 2016 Declaration	Joint Declaration by French and German Defense Ministers on September 11, 2016
US	United States

1. Introduction

Since the 1950s, the cooperation between France and Germany have demonstrated a significant growth of common positions and resolutions within and outside the European Union [EU] (Picht et al., 1990, p. 17). It is often argued that there is a uniqueness to the Franco-German relationship due to their highly institutionalized exchanges to solve conflicts and reach agreements (Webber, 1999a, p. 02), and the role of their cooperation in the EU is repeatedly discussed in the literature.

Some policy fields in the EU have become quite integrated, such as the Economic and Monetary Union [EMU] or the Single Market, whereas “defence policy [is] among the least integrated policy areas in the EU” (Leuffen et al., 2022, p. 282; Hendriks & Morgan, 2001b, p. 137). Nevertheless, founding Member States [MS] also considered defense issues at the beginnings of European integration (Leuffen et al., 2022, p. 282), and since the Lisbon Treaty defense policy in the EU seems “to be progressively coordinated and even integrated” (Howorth, 2017, p. 342).

This matter has been revitalized due to important developments after 2014, mainly the Brexit referendum, Trump’s election, and Russian war against Ukraine (Cervellati, 2018, p. 05; Koenig & Walter-Franke, 2017, p. 03). These events “increased awareness that Europe needs to tackle security and defence more seriously than before” (Cervellati, 2018, p. 05), and several defense initiatives were launched in the EU, with the most meaningful achievement being the establishment of Permanent Structured Cooperation [PESCO] (Daehnhardt, 2018, p. 104).

Despite usually having distinct conceptions and objectives regarding the integration of defense policy in the EU, France and Germany continuously seek to collaborate, presenting joint policy proposals which are frequently adopted at the EU level. Therefore, this paper seeks to analyze the importance of both states in EU decision-making on defense policy, and the following research questions will be addressed: “*Is there a Franco-German engine in the defense policy of the EU? How does it operate in this policy field?*”.

First, the current state of research on the Franco-German engine will be examined, indicating the main arguments on the topic. Second, this paper introduces the definition of this engine – a strong Franco-German cooperation to encourage European integration – and the theory to explain the processes behind it. Third, it provides the methodological approach and then the empirical analysis of a single-case study on the founding of PESCO which is a relevant component of the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy [CSDP]¹, an integral part of the

¹ After the Lisbon Treaty, the CSDP replaced the European Security and Defence Policy (Howorth, 2017, p. 342).

EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy [CFSP] (Articles 42(1) and (6), Treaty on European Union [TEU]). Finally, this paper concludes that there is a Franco-German engine in European defense which affects EU decision-making to enact or change EU policies through Franco-German commitments and MS' support.

2. State of research

The literature on the existence and significance of the Franco-German engine is extensive, and authors often disagree about their findings. A part of scholars advocates that the Franco-German leading role, and its effectiveness is essential and evident (Hendriks & Morgan, 2001a, p. 14), supporting that no decision in the EU can be made without or against both states, that a shared Franco-German position is a necessary, even if insufficient, condition for EU decision-making, and "that unless the Franco-German couple is happy, nothing moves" (Krotz & Schild, 2012a, p. 06).

However, such stance is contested, and other authors argue that France and Germany's influence has been declining, especially due to the EU's enlargements or that their impact rests on the EU policy area, its institutional context, and states' preferences (Krotz & Schild, 2012a, p. 06; Webber, 1999a, pp. 10-11, 16; Wallace, 1990, p. 145). Some scholars state that the Franco-German leverage is neither effective nor credible for it shows no internal stability (Pedersen, 2003, p. 24), while others stress that it is not enough for further EU unification (Wallace, 1990, p. 145).

Another argument mentioned in the literature consists in the necessity of reaching a shared position despite the initially different views or preferences. The foundation of the Franco-German engine is the common aim to build a powerful, integrated Europe (Webber, 1999a, p. 03; Hendriks & Morgan, 2001a, p. 14; Picht et al., 1990, p. 23). Nonetheless, France and Germany often demonstrate divergences (Hendriks & Morgan, 2001a, p. 07; Picht et al., 1990, p. 22), and a Franco-German cooperation can only be fruitful if they are willing "to reconcile divergent positions for the sake of their common objective" (Hendriks & Morgan, 2001a, p. 14). When both states firmly disagree, no European progress can be reached (Picht et al., 1990, p. 24), but their distinct views allow them to negotiate and make mutual concessions which assists to come to agreements regarding bilateral and European deals (Krotz & Schild, 2012b, p. 40). In fact, "the greater the divergence between French and German preferences on a given issue is, the more likely it is that, if a common Franco-German position is developed, this will be 'multilateralised' and taken over by the EU as a whole" (Webber, 1999a, p. 16).

Furthermore, the literature states that a Franco-German engine is less active in everyday decision-making processes than in historic events of European integration. It is often argued that both countries are more influential in major decisions concerning the EU's development than in the daily politics of the EU (Webber, 1999a, p. 04), and that "there is little evidence for a strong 'Franco-German engine' in day-to-day policy-making [...], since [...] [it] is usually referred to in the context of integration debates" (Leuffen et al., 2012, p. 59).

Lastly, the literature has found little evidence of the role of the Franco-German relationship in the defense policy of the EU, which remains one of "the least integrated policy areas in the EU" (Leuffen et al., 2022, p. 282), contrasting with the findings in other EU policy fields, especially in the establishment of the Single Market or the EMU (Hendriks & Morgan, 2001b, p. 137). Krotz and Schild (2012c) identify assorted findings, referring to the leading role played by both states to define the defense policy regime in the EU and promote this policy, mainly manifested in treaty amends, but a shared influence on the content is unclear, and France and Germany usually are less able or willing to lead in this field (pp. 213, 231-232). Hendriks & Morgan (2001b, 2001c) stress how external factors were crucial to implement provisions regarding CFSP in the Amsterdam Treaty, and how variable national interests challenge the estimation of Franco-German influence on CFSP, concluding that the Franco-German cooperation is necessary to shape CFSP, but not sufficient, especially for the lack of active implementation (pp. 124, 138, 179-182).

Bloch-Lainé (1999) acknowledges the Franco-German cooperation as decisive to set the terms for the CFSP in the Maastricht and Amsterdam treaties, since both states presented most policy provisions which were accepted (e.g., the conception of the High Representative for CFSP, now known as High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy [HP]), and they have led to the establishment of the Eurocorps, but most compromises relate to institutional aspects, whereas common approaches on operational and military matters are less likely, concluding that there is no Franco-German engine in EU defense (Bloch-Lainé, 1999, pp. 148-157). Leuffen, Degner and Radtke (2012) argue that the Franco-German engine was essential, but insufficient to develop the CFSP in the Maastricht Treaty, and an agenda-setter for CFSP provisions in the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference, and the Amsterdam Treaty, although not everything these states envisioned was established, but find no strong bond with the Franco-German engine regarding the Lisbon Treaty and the expansion of CDSP (pp. 75-80).

It might be that the Franco-German relationship do not demonstrate the same decisiveness as at the origin of the EU (Wallace, 1990, p. 145), but it is still relevant if not

indispensable to direct the efforts in the EU to achieve additional integration (Hendriks & Morgan, 2001a, p. 04). One may perceive dissonances in their preferences, but the literature presents evidence that even if they portray ‘opposed poles’, representing two MS clusters, but not ‘most extreme poles’, their cooperation can be effective if they reach an agreement and converge their interests (Webber, 1999b, pp. 174-175; Hendriks & Morgan, 2001a, pp. 07-08). The Franco-German engine is not as present in everyday decision-making as in historic moments, and may not have been as influential in the EU’s defense policy as in other policy fields, but that does not discard its significance in the agenda-setting, especially after the latest events since 2014 (Cervellati, 2018, p. 05; Koenig & Walter-Franke, 2017, p. 03).

Usual gaps in the literature refer to vague explanations of what one understands under Franco-German engine or to the fact that the importance of their relationship in the EU “is more often taken for granted or simply asserted than demonstrated by careful empirical research” (Webber, 1999a, p. 01). Besides, the work on the Franco-German engine in the defense policy in the EU is still limited for it does not consider the most recent events in Europe and in the Atlantic Alliance, nor the latest advancements of the field which includes the establishment of PESCO.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1. Definition of Franco-German engine

The Franco-German relationship and its influence on the EU are denominated in diverse ways in the literature. The employment of terms such as engine or motor “implies that these two states have supplied the power or momentum which has driven or propelled the integration process” (Webber, 1999a, p. 03), and some authors have described this idea as a “steering capacity” (Wood, 1995, as cited by Leuffen et al., 2012, p. 50). Other scholars advocate a Franco-German leadership within the EU which “is provided by actors who are willing and capable, acting as co-leaders, to prompt other actors to contribute to the achievement of collective goals” (Lübckemeier, 2007, as cited in Krotz & Schild, 2012b, p. 20). In the context of an embedded bilateralism², Krotz and Schild (2012b) present three subtypes of this Franco-German leadership, with the one concerning the promotion of European integration being the most comparable to a Franco-German engine and encompassing

² This term refers to “the intertwined nature of a robustly institutionalized and normatively grounded interstate relationship” and “the interrelationship between this bilateral connection and multilateral European politics – of which this bilateral bond forms a constitutive part, and to the structuring of which it strongly contributes” (Krotz & Schild, 2012a, p. 08).

deepening integration by integrating new policy areas or expanding or improving EU competences in current policy areas, and widening integration by enlarging the EU (pp. 20-21).

This paper adopts the definition of Franco-German engine as “an intense Franco-German cooperation in view of actively promoting European integration in the sense of ‘improving the EU’s political and/or institutional problem-solving capacity’” (Leuffen et al., 2012, p. 50) to highlight the importance of commitments between both states, and their interest adaptation to one another in seeking to develop European integration. Cooperation differs from harmony, which “refers to a situation in which actors’ policies (pursued in their own self-interest without regard for others) automatically facilitate the attainment of others’ goals”, whilst the former indicates the case in which discordant actors adapt their attitudes to each other’s preferences through a negotiation process that is known as policy coordination (Keohane, 1984, p. 51). There is no need for actors in harmony to change their behavior, but such circumstance is unusual in politics, whereas cooperation requires actors to pursue policy adjustments and, if they do not attempt to do so, actors find themselves in discord, that is, a context in which actors perceive each’s “policies as hindering the attainment of their goals, and hold each other responsible for these constraints” (Keohane, 1984, pp. 51-52).

3.2. Processes behind the Franco-German engine

This paper adapts the theory created by Leuffen, Degner and Radtke (2012) to observe “the impact of joint Franco-German activities being present” (input) to enact or change policies at the European level (output) which aim to lead to further European integration (outcome) (p. 50). The theory originally sought to recognize if European integration increased, but this paper opted to determine the policy enacting as the phenomenon to be explained because it is more easily perceived and it is the first formal step towards further integration.

To assert the presence of such engine we must identify two processes. First, there must be policy coordination between both states, which occurs through communications, information sharing and negotiations during meetings to discuss European affairs and each state’s interests (Leuffen et al., 2012, pp. 50-51). Secondly, after policy coordination and a Franco-German initiative is presented, there must be an interaction between both countries and other MS in the EU system. Owing to the need of unanimity or consensus in the EU decision-making, the policy enactment or modification is only possible after enough MS uphold this Franco-German initiative, and this depends on French and German preferences and on how these may resonate with others’ interests (Leuffen et al., 2012, p. 52).

The first process concerns both states' preferences regarding a EU policy which may provoke three scenarios: France and Germany demonstrate a shared position from the start; they compromise despite conflicting preferences at first; or they cannot reach an agreement (Leuffen et al., 2012, p. 51). A joint initiative at European level is more likely in the first two cases, being the second the most probable one since the first is rather uncommon in politics (Keohane, 1984, p. 52), whereas such initiative is improbable in the third scenario because the lack of French and German endorsements hinders policy enactment in the EU (Leuffen et al., 2012, pp. 51-52). Thus, the first hypothesis consists in the elaboration of a common Franco-German initiative, which is more likely after an official commitment between both states than a shared position at the beginning, and is unlikely if they cannot compromise.

As for the second process, other EU MS will be more willing to adopt the Franco-German proposal if France and Germany show relevant divergence at first, representing opposing groups among MS, before coming to an agreement (Webber, 1999a, p. 16; 1999b, pp. 174-175). This results in faster dispute settlements and lower transaction costs, but solely if "preferences within the group of countries overlap" (Leuffen et al., 2012, p. 53) and if "France and Germany can convince their partners that they are exercised in the name of common European goals" (Schild, 2010, as cited by Leuffen et al., 2012, pp. 54-55). Hence, the second hypothesis is that the EU support for a Franco-German proposal is solely possible if other EU MS see France and Germany as committed to deeper integration and as having common interests, and is more probable in case of a Franco-German compromise than if they demonstrate a similar position from the start (Leuffen et al., 2012, p. 52). The Franco-German engine can only be effective in enacting or changing EU policies if these two hypotheses are accurate.

4. Methodological approach

To evaluate if there is influence of the Franco-German engine in the enactment of defense policies in the EU which may lead to further European integration, the selected case regards the establishment of PESCO that is part of the EU's CSDP and, thus, CFSP (Articles 42(1) and (6), TEU). First mentioned in 2007, when the Lisbon Treaty was signed, and in force since 2009 (Cervellati, 2018, p. 05), PESCO was introduced by the Decision 2017/2315 of the Council of the EU on December 11, 2017 [PESCO Decision] and is regulated by Articles 42(6) and 46 and Protocol 10, TEU. The goal of PESCO is the commitment between EU MS "to spend more, and more intelligently, on defence training, equipment and capabilities so that they

are better able to conduct operations at the higher end of the military spectrum” (Blockmans & Crosson, 2019, p. 03).

The present paper aims to conduct a single-case study, scrutinizing various data regarding an individual case to understand a broader occurrence and not performing any cross-case comparisons (Toshkov, 2016, pp. 285-288; Gerring, 2004, p. 342). This type of case study can be useful to assess few theoretical notions or substantial theories to explain the outputs³ and outcomes of this case, focusing on causal mechanisms, and goes deeper than comparisons among cases (Toshkov, 2016, pp. 285-288, 290-291). One possible disadvantage may be the lack of generalization (Toshkov, 2016, pp. 304-305) which may need the analysis of other (single) cases, but as this case design provides more detailed information and a deeper examination of a specific case, it still demonstrates scientific relevance (Gerring, 2004, p. 348).

The goal is to observe the documents from the interactions between France and Germany in 2016 and 2017 – the meaningful period shortly before the creation of PESCO –, and how these influenced the proposals for and provisions in the PESCO Decision. This paper will explore the survey findings in the EU Coalition Explorer from 2016 and 2018 among experts in governments, academic communities and think tanks in the EU MS. These surveys provide insights into other MS’ inclination to collaborate with France and Germany in defense policy and to understand the Franco-German commitment to deeper Integration and shared European goals as authentic. Unfortunately, there are no data collected from 2017 for the surveys are bi-annual, but as these studies were conducted in late 2016 and early 2018, one can assume that the conclusions apply to 2017 if findings in 2016 and 2018 are similar.

Several primary sources will be examined: the Joint Declaration by French and German Foreign Ministers on June 27, 2016 [June 2016 Declaration]; the Joint Declaration by French and German Defense Ministers on September 11, 2016 [September 2016 Declaration]; the Joint Declaration on the 19th Franco-German Ministerial Council on July 13, 2017 [July 2017 Declaration]; the Joint Proposals on commitments to reach an inclusive and ambitious PESCO signed by the French, German, Spanish and Italian Defense Ministers on July 21, 2017 [2017 Proposals]; and the PESCO Decision. Additionally, other secondary sources, such as academic articles and book chapters on PESCO, will be analyzed to provide a more extensive, already sorted out material about the previous points and France’s and Germany’s preferences on defense issues.

³ Toshkov (2016) only mentions outcomes (p. 288), but as these consist in the effects of outputs, I consider that single-case studies may be also employed to clarify the emergence of outputs.

5. Empirical analysis

5.1. Divergences regarding Permanent Structured Cooperation

France and Germany usually demonstrate different preferences regarding their ambitions for the EU which also encompasses its defense policy. Although both states seek the Europeanization and the further integration of defense in the EU, it is often argued that both states do not possess common visions, aspirations, or strategic cultures in defense issues, within and outside the EU (Koenig & Walter-Franke, 2017, p. 07; Daehnhardt, 2018, p. 107). France advocates the importance of a more ambitious strategic autonomy at the EU level, the military disentanglement from the United States [US] and an interventionist approach to project “military force outside Europe”, whereas Germany supports more inclusiveness of EU MS in defense, the complementarity of the military role of the US in Europe and a more hesitant approach to restraint military interventions (Koenig & Walter-Franke, 2017, pp. 07-08; Daehnhardt, 2018, p. 107; Meimeth, 2003).

Such divergences can also be traced down to each country’s political system (Koenig & Walter-Franke, 2017, p. 08). France has a centralized presidential system in which “the President decides on the deployment of the armed forces” and, from 2008 on, an authorization from the French Parliament, more specifically from the *Assemblée Nationale*, is only obligatory if the military mission lasts longer than four months from the presidential ruling (Koenig & Walter-Franke, 2017, p. 08). Differently, Germany has a decentralized parliamentary system in which the approval of the *Bundestag*, Germany’s Parliament, for the deploying the armed forces is compulsory, and these forces can only be put into action in matters concerning defense or multilateral operations (Koenig & Walter-Franke, 2017, p. 08).

Accordingly, France and Germany also had different aspirations for PESCO, especially before its establishment. With an emphasis on an ambitious role of PESCO, France perceived it “as an instrument for operative efficiency geared towards the EU’s strategic autonomy”, valuing ambition even if this led to a reduction in the number of MS which undertake crucial military actions (Koenig & Walter-Franke, 2017, p. 13). Otherwise, Germany stressed the importance of inclusiveness in PESCO to active further integration in European defense and aimed to prevent any division in the foundation of a common defense framework in the EU (Koenig & Walter-Franke, 2017, p. 13).

These different views may complicate a Franco-German cooperation in defense issues (Daehnhardt, 2018, p. 107) and may have hindered the negotiations regarding PESCO, but they did not preclude France and Germany from reaching considerable commitments. Experts in

both countries in 2016 and 2018 considered each state as critical partners in security and defense policy within the EU (European Council on Foreign Relations [ECFR], 2017, pp. 468-471; 2018, pp. 966-973). Such experts acknowledged that these states are two of the most committed to deeper integration and two of those who have the most common interests with other MS (ECFR, 2017, pp. 125-128, 622-625; 2018, pp. 161-166, 453-458).

5.2. Commitments on Permanent Structured Cooperation

The willingness to cooperate in defense policy and to create PESCO is expressed in the declarations in 2016 and 2017 which tended more to the German model (Daehnhardt, 2018, p. 105). In the June 2016 Declaration, the French and German Foreign Ministers stressed the interdependence of EU MS' security and the role of the EU in safeguarding it through a security union, and proposed for the first time the creation of PESCO, in which participation should be voluntary, "to plan and conduct civil and military operations more effectively, with the support of a permanent civil-military chain of command" (Foreign Affairs Ministries of France and Germany, 2016, pp. 03-04; Krotz & Schild, 2018, pp. 1184-1185).

Aside recommending the establishment of PESCO in the September 2016 Declaration, the French and German Defense Ministers supported other measures to make CSDP more effective which "should also be considered in the framework of PESCO", such as setting 20% from defense expenditure for defense investments, proving a European Basic Training for EU officers, and developing "a permanent EU military and civilian planning and conduct capability" (Defence Ministries of France and Germany, 2016, pp. 01-04; Krotz & Schild, 2018, p. 1185). They also highlighted the need to strengthen the partnership between the EU and North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO], that participation in PESCO should be inclusive and voluntary, and that defense commitments should be binding (Defence Ministries of France and Germany, 2016, pp. 02, 04).

After the 19th Franco-German Ministerial Council and in the July 2017 Declaration, France and Germany promoted the foundation of an ambitious and inclusive PESCO in which EU MS could make more binding commitments on the most demanding missions, announced several joint projects, such as European maritime surveillance and Eurodrone programs, and emphasized PESCO's complementarity to NATO (Franco-German Ministerial Council, 2017, pp. 24-25; Koenig & Walter-Franke, 2017, p. 13). In this opportunity, these states envisioned important commitments which include allocating 20% of total defense expenses on defense investment and 2% of Gross Domestic Product [GDP] on defense, "engag[ing] in at least one

PESCO project and in the activity of the European Defence Agency⁴ [EDA], “contribut[ing] to the Battlegroup roster and to CSDP operations and missions while allowing for swifter national decision-making processes”, and “participat[ing] in the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence⁵ [CARD] and contribute to the European Defence Fund⁶” [EDF] (Koenig & Walter-Franke, 2017, pp. 12-13).

All this set the pace for the 2017 Proposals elaborated one week later by the Franco-German duo, Spain and Italy with Belgian, Czech, and Dutch support. As suggested principles for PESCO, the document endorses: the importance of PESCO to strengthen EU’s defense policy; how participation in PESCO should be voluntary without harming national sovereignty; the need for PESCO to be “inclusive and ambitious” with binding commitments; the willingness to have “more binding commitments with a view to the most demanding missions”; and PESCO’s complementary competences to NATO (Defence Ministries of France, Germany, Spain and Italy, 2017, pp. 01-02). The states also advocate that: projects should improve defense capabilities; the decision to activate and apply PESCO should be taken by qualified majority; and EDA should be “responsible for assessing compliance with the commitments” (Ministries of Defence of France, Germany, Spain and Italy, 2017, pp. 01-03).

The proposed list of commitments reaffirms the previously proposed measures, such as the ones related to the amount for defense investment and expenses, CARD and EDF, and adds other commitments, like settling periodic reviews of commitments, and engaging in EDA’s programs and adopting it “as the European forum for joint capability development” (Defence Ministries of France, Germany, Spain and Italy, 2017, pp. 04-06). Thus, the Franco-German initiative was the most influential in setting these 2017 Proposals. Considering their initially opposed views and the consecutive compromises between France and Germany, the first hypothesis for the Franco-German engine was fulfilled.

5.3. Establishment of Permanent Structured Cooperation

Although the Lisbon Treaty already referred to PESCO in 2007, the need for renewal of defense policy in the EU emerged after 2014 (Cervellati, 2018, p. 05; Koenig & Walter-Franke, 2017, p. 03). Events worth acknowledgment are the Russian occupation of Crimea in

⁴ The EDA foments cooperation, establishes new programs, and presents projects to develop defense capabilities (European Union, n.d.).

⁵ The CARD is a voluntary, intergovernmental EU initiative, and its secretariat is the EDA which must formulate biennial notes on defense plans of MS, the fulfillment of defense priorities, and advancement of defense collaboration in Europe (Koenig & Walter-Franke, 2017, pp. 14-15).

⁶ The EDF seeks to increase defense investments and mutual efforts by funding research, the unfolding of collaborative projects, and the acquisition of means for defense (Koenig & Walter-Franke, 2017, pp. 13-14).

2014, the terrorist attacks in Europe since 2015, migration waves during 2015 and 2016, the United Kingdom's Brexit referendum in 2016, Trump's nationalist foreign and defense policy in the US, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (Cervellati, 2018, p. 05; Koenig & Walter-Franke, 2017, p. 03).

The former HP presented the EU Global Strategy in June 2016 to encourage improved, more organized collaborations among EU MS which was already provided on the Lisbon Treaty (Koenig & Walter-Franke, 2017, p. 12; Blockmans & Crosson, 2019, p. 03; Cervellati, 2018, p. 05). France and Germany pioneered in defending the establishment of PESCO through their declarations in June and September 2016 as they have actively advocated that EU MS should cooperate more in defense in the years before PESCO Decision (Daehnhardt, 2018, p. 103).

These declarations most likely influenced discussions around PESCO. First, their content was discussed in the informal reunion of Defense Ministers in the EU at the end of September 2016 (Daehnhardt, 2018, p. 103). Then, it clearly influenced negotiations in the European Council in June 2017 because it acknowledged the urgency of launching PESCO which should be inclusive and ambitious and directed to the most challenging operations (Koenig & Walter-Franke, 2017, p. 12; Koenig, 2018, p. 05), aspects stressed in the Franco-German declarations. On this occasion, EU MS decided to draft commitments, appraisal processes, and a schedule in three months (Koenig & Walter-Franke, 2017, p. 12). France and Germany took the first steps at the 19th Franco-German Ministerial Council, deliberating over commitments, projects, and the need for an ambitious and inclusive PESCO which were reiterated and expanded in the 2017 Proposals.

After the Ministerial Council and Proposals, Defense Ministers of 23 MS accorded to establish PESCO on November 13, 2017, and Ireland and Portugal decided to join it on December 7, leading to the creation of PESCO through the PESCO Decision after the approval of the HP and the European Council in December 2017 (Krotz & Schild, 2018, p. 1185). Currently, 25 out of the 27 MS integrate PESCO (Article 2, PESCO Decision) and initially 17 projects were endorsed, a number which later increased (Cervellati, 2018, pp. 03-04; Blockmans & Crosson, 2019, p. 02).

The 2017 Proposals and Franco-German declarations in 2016 and 2017 consist in a turning point for the conception of PESCO and served as "a solid basis for its subsequent establishment" (Cervellati, 2018, p. 06). The PESCO Decision also stresses that: participation in PESCO is voluntary and does not affect national sovereignty; projects to enhance defense capabilities is part of PESCO's commitments; PESCO is ambitious and inclusive provided with binding commitments and is necessary to strengthen defense policy in the EU (Annex I);

involved MS “shall make contributions which fulfil the more binding commitments” (Article 3(1)); how PESCO is complementary to NATO (Annex I); PESCO’s establishment and implementation must be approved by qualified majority (Annex I); and the EDA shall support the annual report prepared by the HP to the Council of the EU to assess MS’ fulfilment of PESCO commitments (Article 6(3); Annex I; Item 1, Annex III).

Among the commitments in its Annex, the PESCO Decision made some changes in those in the 2017 Proposals. Few new commitments were included, such as the one “to ensure increasing efforts in the cooperation on cyber defence” (Item 11), while most of other commitments were barely altered in terms of content, like the 2% from GDP for total defense expenditure (Item 4), the 20% from total defense expenditure for defense investment (Item 2), to engage in the CARD (Items 6, 7 and 15) and in the EDF (Items 3 and 8), the minimal participation in at least one of PESCO’s projects (Item 17), instituting regular reviews of commitments (Item 5), and using EDA “as the European forum for joint capability development” (Item 18). Even though PESCO Decision is still intergovernmental, it provides participating EU MS, which consist of almost all EU MS, with the instruments to achieve further (differentiated) integration in defense policy at the EU level (Leuffen et al., 2022, pp. 298-300; Blockmans & Crosson, 2019, pp. 23-24) through higher interoperability and effectiveness in common operations.

The Franco-German impact on PESCO is not by chance and does not merely rely on the critical events before its establishment. According to EU experts, France and Germany are seen as two of the EU MS most committed to deeper integration and two of those who have the most common interests with other MS, with France scoring higher among Southern states and Germany, among Northern and Eastern states in the latter section (ECFR, 2017, pp. 102, 125-128, 599; 2018, pp. 120, 161-166, 414). These experts regarded both states as the most influential EU MS in security and defense policy during the last years and the most favored partners to collaborate in security and defense policy (ECFR, 2017, pp. 324, 445; 2018, pp. 579, 908-909). Moreover, other EU MS previously presented their ideas on a more effective or permanent cooperation in EU defense⁷, but no previous proposal was successful to establish an initiative analogous to PESCO (Blockmans & Crosson, 2019, p. 03).

Therefore, the second hypothesis for the Franco-German engine was also accomplished. As the single-case study of PESCO’s establishment satisfied the two hypotheses,

⁷ Belgium, Poland, and Hungary presented a “non-paper of their trio presidency to outline thoughts on how cooperation might be made inclusive and effective” in 2010, and in 2011 Spain and Italy submitted to the HP a written requisition to include PESCO in the Foreign Affairs Council (Blockmans & Crosson, 2019, p. 03).

the Franco-German engine exists in European defense and influences EU decision-making to enact or change EU policies through its interstate commitments and the EU support, which is assured by the Franco-German commitment to deeper integration and European interests.

6. Conclusion

Since its foundation, the EU has demonstrated relevant developments, and the solid Franco-German cooperation has played a significant role to encourage further European integration (Hendriks & Morgan, 2001c, p. 177). The defense policy in the EU remains the less integrated (Leuffen et al., 2022, p. 282; Hendriks & Morgan, 2001b, p. 137), but this is changing, and it has gradually become more coordinated after the Lisbon Treaty (Howorth, 2017, p. 342) in which PESCO was first mentioned. Despite the controversy, the Franco-German cooperation was decisive for the developments in European defense because they “formulated compromises and extended them to other member states” (Koenig, 2018, p. 02).

After scrutinizing the establishment of PESCO, this paper concludes that there is a Franco-German engine as “an intense Franco-German cooperation in view of actively promoting European integration in the sense of ‘improving the EU’s political and/or institutional problem-solving capacity’” (Leuffen et al., 2012, p. 50) operating in European defense. Both states usually demonstrate opposed views on defense (Koenig & Walter-Franke, 2017, p. 07; Daehnhardt, 2018, p. 107), but that did not prevent them from making important commitments which were then upheld by other MS for the Franco-German commitment to make the EU more integrated and common European interests, being the most influential states in the establishment of PESCO (Koenig, 2018, p. 02).

France and Germany aim to build a European defense union (Koenig, 2018, p. 02) and PESCO has brought the tools to enhance (differentiated) integration in defense policy in the EU (Leuffen et al., 2022, pp. 298-300; Blockmans & Crosson, 2019, pp. 23-24), despite showing intergovernmental elements and preserving national sovereignty. Whether PESCO will fulfill its potential and assist in founding a European defense union, this is still uncertain, but the Franco-German cooperation will be necessary, especially if they are willing to work together and can reach agreements on their joint vision for EU defense which represent European goals to have the support of other EU MS (Leuffen et al., 2012, pp. 81-82).

(6.562 words; references, footnotes, and list of abbreviations included)

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