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Analysing Political Acceptability of Reforms Among National Policymakers

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ENVISIONING A NEW
GOVERNANCE ARCHITECTURE
FOR A GLOBAL EUROPE



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Executive Summary

The EU finds itself facing serious security threats in an increasingly polarised global environment. Against this backdrop, it is necessary to explore the perceptions and preferences of Member States (MS) towards EU foreign and security policy. This paper, which bases itself on theoretical work conducted in ENGAGE Working Paper 2 (Michaels & Kissack, 2021), aims to shed light on where various MS stand regarding a range of reforms and underused mechanisms by assessing levels of acceptability among national policymaking elites.

Focusing on the main reform proposals under consideration, as well as several underused and unused mechanisms identified between 2016–2021 by EU institutions and MS, we conducted semi-structured interviews in 14 MS and additional surveys in 13 MS. The analysis focuses on the MS where national policymaking elites were interviewed.

Our data reveals a divide among MS on the acceptability of various reforms but shows that some room for negotiation exists. We find that 1) some principled and, at times, proactive support for more rapid and flexible decision-making exists, although MS are not currently in agreement on immediate changes; 2) the unused or underused legal bases in the EU treaties – the so-called ‘sleeping beauties’ – are generally perceived as promising for strengthening the effectiveness of CFSP/CSDP; 3) differentiated integration initiatives in CSDP are largely seen as beneficial, as demonstrated by PESCO, even as built-in complexities regarding the operationalisation and a lack of legal clarity keep MS wary of commitments to additional arrangements; and 4) treaty changes, including granting more powers to the European Commission and the European Parliament, do not find wide support among national policymaking elites. Perceptions differed from country to country on when more flexible decision-making is to be applied, which ‘sleeping beauties’ should be deployed, how these arrangements should be implemented, and how to further enhance mechanisms that are already being employed.

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1 Introduction*

This working paper is the product of fieldwork conducted between March-September 2022, a period broadly impacted by the Russian war in Ukraine. The EU finds itself facing serious security threats in an increasingly polarised global environment. Against this backdrop, it is necessary to explore the perceptions and preferences of Member States (MS) towards EU foreign and security policy. What existing reform proposals on the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) are different national foreign and security policymaking elites willing to accept?¹ Would the deployment of already available tools (the ‘sleeping beauties’) be permissible? And how about decision-making through qualified majority voting (QMV) in the Council? Would institutional changes that provide increased authority for the European Parliament (EP) and the European Commission (EC) be viable for MS? And, finally, are national policymakers open to contemplating treaty changes, as requested by citizens at the Conference on the Future of Europe?

This paper attempts to shed light on where different MS stand regarding the usage suitability of a range of EU foreign and security policy options, by assessing levels of *acceptability*.² It is part of the ENGAGE project’s broader research agenda aimed at better understanding the willingness of MS to accept EU external action and relatedly the effects of these attitudes on the EU’s capacity to act in the world. This working paper is further targeted towards proposing feasible ways to make the EU’s external action more effective, coherent and sustainable (Sus et al., 2021 ([ENGAGE Working Paper 3](#))). The conceptual framework for studying the internal acceptability of EU external action and more concretely of the EU’s CFSP and CSDP was developed in [ENGAGE Working Paper 2](#) (Michaels & Kissack, 2021). That output explored the extent to which initiatives and decisions for EU external action are perceived as acceptable or unacceptable at the national level. The working paper highlighted the importance and impact of various national actors and suggested four levels of analysis: national decisionmakers, the foreign policy bureaucracy, national parliaments and the public (Michaels & Kissack, 2021).

In this paper, we proceed to assess some of the theoretical assumptions regarding the national acceptability of EU external actions by examining perceptions towards changes and reforms in CFSP and CSDP among national foreign and security policymaking elites. It follows the suggested hierarchy of ideational factors put forward in [ENGAGE Working Paper 2](#) (Michaels & Kissack, 2021), where perceptions are more important than beliefs and, secondly, goals and perceptions are seen as influencing each other and exerting a combined effect on

*Additional interviews and research were undertaken at IBEI by Óscar Fernández, Robert Kissack and Eva Michaels.

¹ Reforms for the purpose of this working paper do not include “rolling back” or “renationalising”.

² In [ENGAGE Working Paper 2](#), Michaels & Kissack (2021) define acceptability as a dynamic, contextualised rationale for EU external action that reflects a socially constructed permissive consensus at the national level.



the crafting of narratives. Similar to [ENGAGE Working Paper 8](#), this paper was informed by a hypothesis advanced in Michaels & Kissack (2021), specifically:

At the level of national institutions (government departments and parliaments), shared perceptions of threats, risks and opportunities related to the policy issue together with shared goals and understandings of how these goals can be arrived at determine whether a permissive consensus for an EU policy measure emerges. These perceptions and goals are mediated by broader political beliefs (Michaels & Kissack, 2021, p. 16)

This paper, firstly, briefly scrutinises perceptions among national policymaking elites concerning their national foreign policy priorities based on [ENGAGE Working Paper 7](#) (this includes shared goals) and shared perceptions in evaluating EU external action effectiveness based on fieldwork (interviews). Secondly, it identifies and succinctly describes the main reform proposals that have been under consideration and those that remain 'on the table'. It additionally examines several underused mechanisms that could potentially enhance the EU's external action – these tools have been assessed by EU institutions and some MS. The paper, thirdly, presents the empirical results and an analysis of the acceptability of national policymaking elites (among MS examined within the scope of this research) towards existing reform proposals and underused mechanisms in CFSP and CSDP. The ensuing final section advances the findings and conclusions of the research initiative.

1.1 Methodology and Selection Criteria

The time scope of the analysis, 2016–2021, encompasses the post-EU Global Strategy period and dates when both 'old' and 'new' proposals for reforms were formulated by the EU institutions (through, for example, White Papers and State of the Union addresses) and MS (through important speeches, non-papers and other national documents, for instance, the 2017 Sorbonne speech by the French President, the 2021 Dutch-Spanish non-paper on strategic autonomy and the 2021 German Coalition Agreement).

The working paper, in assessing the EU's legal framework, discusses the legal basis in the Treaties that have 1) been activated only recently and boast the potential to enhance the effectiveness of EU foreign policy (e.g. PESCO – Art. 42(6) Treaty on the European Union [TEU]); 2) been underused compared to their purposes and potential to achieve these ends (e.g. 'passerelle clauses'); or 3) remained completely unused (e.g. coalitions of the willing – Art. 44 TEU).

Constrained by a limited ability to separately study all four levels of analyses employed by Michaels and Kissack (2021) in [ENGAGE Working Paper 2](#), this paper uses the concept of 'national policymaking elites.' The term encompasses national decisionmakers (foreign policy executive) and the foreign policy bureaucracy (government departments).³ Specific criteria,

³ Since [ENGAGE Working Paper 8](#) dealt with national and European Members of the Parliament in detail, this working paper excludes them from the constructed concept of "national policymaking elites."



meanwhile, were devised to prepare a database of policymaking elites to be approached with an emphasis on (1) prioritising officials from different government institutions concerned with foreign and security policy including ministries of foreign affairs, European affairs and defence, Permanent Representations to the EU and the Political and Security Committee; and (2) tapping individuals from academia and the think tank community (full criteria list in Appendix 2).

Semi-structured interviews in 14 MS and additional surveys in 13 MS were used to gather empirical data for all 27 EU members (interview and survey questions can be found in Appendix 3). Detailed criteria were developed to ensure a broad and balanced selection of Member States for the interviews, since this set was prioritised for the working paper analysis (Table 1). The selection was also coordinated with [ENGAGE Work Package 2](#) “Challenges of Global Governance and International Relations” (especially its [Working Paper 7](#)) to ensure cohesiveness.

Table 1: Criteria for Selecting MS where Interviews were Conducted

Selection criteria	Selected countries/regions
Geographical location	North-South, West-East
Political weight in the EU	e.g. France, Germany, Poland
Combination of big and small states	e.g. Big- France, Germany, Spain e.g. Medium- Bulgaria, Slovakia e.g. Small- Cyprus, Estonia, Finland
Year of accession to the EU (foremost prior and post ‘Big Bang’ 2004 enlargement)	e.g. Prior 2004- Ireland, Italy, Spain e.g. Post 2004- CEE countries
General attitudes towards the EU (pro-European and Eurosceptical)	e.g. Pro-European- Belgium e.g. Eurosceptical- Hungary
Neutral countries in the EU	e.g. Ireland
Countries with strong defence capabilities and/or committed NATO partners and/or with high level of ambition related to EU external action	e.g. Estonia, France, Greece, Poland
Countries located on the EU border and vulnerable to crises in EU neighbourhood	e.g. Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, Greece, Spain

Source: own elaboration

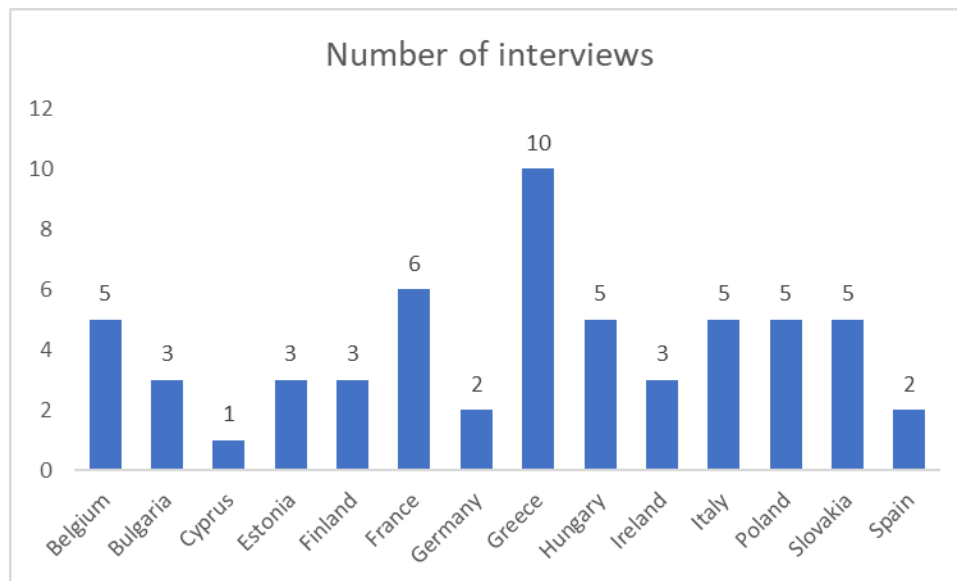
The researchers altogether conducted 58 interviews with national policymaking elites from March to September 2022 in *Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany,*

However, it adds selected academia and think tank community as part of the concept, ensuring that these are directly involved in shaping policies (advising, briefing, planning).



Greece, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Poland, Slovakia and Spain. The questions prompted the interviewees to assess: 1) the overall effectiveness of EU external action and the Geopolitical Commission and the Global Strategy; 2) their country's acceptability towards existing reform proposals and underused mechanisms within CFSP and CSDP; 3) their country's acceptability towards existing proposals for institutional and treaty reforms; and 4) their country's acceptability towards the EU's strengthening of the internal-external nexus.

Figure 1: Number of Conducted Interviews per Country



Source: own data

The survey results for the 13 additional Member States were not representative (20% would have constituted a reasonable response rate or 130 total responses/10 responses per country) and therefore were not used for analysis in the working paper. The final response rate for these countries stood at 6.5%. The data and additional details, nevertheless, can be found in Appendix 1.

1.1.1 Methodological Limitations

The fieldwork was scheduled to commence in March 2022. These plans were, however, altered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24th 2022. The immediate aftermath witnessed foreign and security policymaking elites drawn into the emerging crisis. Fieldwork, consequently, was largely postponed. Even following the start of the interview and survey process, elites were generally unavailable in the first 2–3 months of the research time scope. This external variable placed additional strain on researchers in promptly collecting and analysing significant quantities of data.

While the entire spectrum of policymaking elites cannot be captured through 58 interviews in 14 MS, the sample is sufficient in broadly measuring perceptions across the EU. Policymaking elites in the foreign and security policy sphere, in fact, include a relatively small number of high-



level decisionmakers, upper-level public administrators and experts. The preliminary set target consisted of 70 interviews; the working paper consequently reached 82.9% of its intended goal. Admittedly, the number of interviews per country varied. The dynamic process, however, meant that fieldwork could be ceased in specific countries where interviews had already been conducted with policymakers representing the main government branches or where the general narrative recurred over and over (e.g. Finland, Estonia). In some cases, like Cyprus, nearly no responses to repeated requests were recorded (this was the case, for example, with [ENGAGE Working Paper 8](#)). The research team, overall, faced difficulty in gaining access to willing interviewees from this 'exclusive club' even after resorting to informal networking and references. Policymakers, furthermore, often expressed reservations and were at times guarded in their answers.

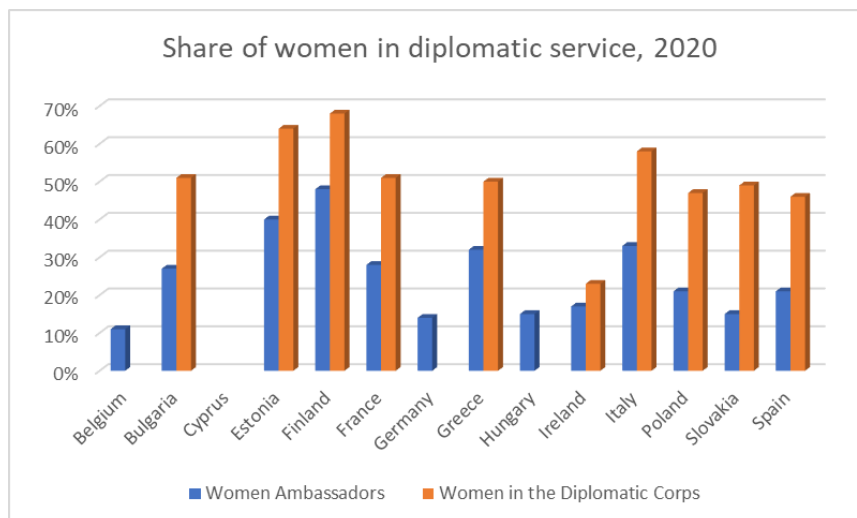
These obstacles contributed to some gaps in data collection and incomplete data sets for some Member States. Additional factors included the semi-structured interview format, differences in expertise between policymakers and variance in chosen reforms and mechanisms to discuss.

1.1.2 Gender Dimension

While there was a conscious effort to achieve gender parity in the fieldwork samples, women ultimately comprised only 25.1% of the interview participants and men 74.9%. The survey garnered slightly higher (by 2.8 percentage points) participation by women at 27.9%, with men making up 69.8% of respondents and 2.3% (1 respondent) indicating they 'preferred not to say'. The available data and literature suggest that women are underrepresented in diplomacy and the security field, especially in leadership positions (Lazzarou & Zamfir, 2021; Stephenson 2022; UN Women, 2022). The fieldwork samples, therefore, generally reflect the existing ratio among foreign and security policymaking elites. As the paper's definition of national policymaking elites is not standard, finding the corresponding ratio would not have been feasible for this study. However, available data on the share of women in the foreign affairs ministries illustrates a similar picture. While the total share of women working in the diplomatic service averages around 50% (based on available data), these figures drop to around 25% when it comes to upper level positions such as ambassadorial assignments.



Figure 2. Share of Women in the Diplomatic Services in the Selected Countries, 2020



Source: SHEcurity, 2021

Although the data from the survey conducted is not analysed in the body of this working paper, a slightly higher percentage of women, notably, responded to the anonymous survey. This development dovetails with findings from the available literature on women's preferred forms of participation. The literature on gender and political engagement has found that women, in general, participate less in political activities (Bennett & Bennett, 1989; Kittilson, 2016; Wolak, 2020). The Special Eurobarometer on the Future of Europe (2022), for example, revealed that women are less willing to directly meet with policymakers than men (difference of 6%) but more willing to participate by staying anonymous. This research shaped our assumptions that alternative, less direct, formats of engagement like an anonymous survey would yield more responses by women than interviews would.



2 National Foreign and Security Policy Priorities and Perceptions towards EU External Action

In [ENGAGE Working Paper 7](#), Muller et al. (2022) mapped out the national foreign and security policy priorities of 13 Member States. These MS overlap with the countries selected to conduct interviews in this working paper (except Bulgaria). The data was gathered from primary source documents such as national strategies, white papers, major speeches of government officials and other strategic documents. These sources reveal an already existent domestic consensus that spans multiple parties and appears to not be constrained by the government of the day. The prevailing view, in other words, represents the shared perceptions and shared goals of national policymaking elites.

While a more detailed mapping can be found in [ENGAGE Working Paper 7](#), firstly, it should be noted that there is a general convergence on the assessment of threats and challenges to security and defence that has been gaining prominence - the focus is on 'broad security' correlated to the main drivers of international relations and global governance as identified in [ENGAGE Working Paper 1](#): "technological revolution(s), demographics and climate change and energy" (Müller et al., 2022, p. 5). Member States, secondly, similarly assess the global environment, pointing to "growing strategic competition between the US and China, a transition in the global order accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the rise of China and renewed Russian aggressiveness, the growing importance of non-state actors, etc." (Müller et al, 2022, p. 44). Thirdly, they strongly prioritise geographically close regions (immediate/adjacent neighbourhood). The outright 'dissent' of any particular MS, in this regard, is absent and instead there is an apparent general alignment with recent EU strategies and statements of officials. *Based on these observations and the suggestion that MS speak a common European language (built-in trust), it could be assumed that there is acceptability towards some reform proposals, specifically the use of various differentiated integration formats (e.g. enhanced cooperation, coalitions of the willing (Art. 44 TEU)).*

There are, of course, subtle differences identified in [ENGAGE Working Paper 7](#) that "might turn into obstacles to cooperation" (Müller et al., 2022, p. 45). The paper concluded, for instance, that MS place different levels of importance on broadly agreed threats and challenges. Moreover, there is the potential for assessments and goals to clash with one another.⁴ EU external action could potentially be affected in these scenarios and impact the EU's ability to act in the world.

One of the points of convergence among policymaking elites interviewed for this working paper, from the selected 14 MS, concerns the perception that CFSP and CSDP operate at a low

⁴ See [ENGAGE Working Paper 12](#), section 2.5, for further discussion on persisting differences.



level of effectiveness. These shortcomings in EU foreign and security policy, according to the interviewed elites, primarily stem from three issues: 1) an ongoing lack of unity and consistency between the national foreign policies of MS leading to dependency on the lowest common denominator; 2) a reluctance and lack of political will on the part of MS to delegate further powers to Brussels; and 3) institutional obstacles present in the EU's legal framework.

A broad consensus, intriguingly, holds that national interests strongly diverge and that this pattern hinders the potential effectiveness of EU external action including specifically CFSP and CSDP. The mismatch between, on the one hand, the conclusions of [ENGAGE Working Paper 7](#) finding a general convergence in attitudes and, on the other, the perceptions of MS policymaking elites purporting that there are actually irreconcilable differences between MS is worrisome. *If those that make the decisions in the Council and advise decisionmakers (the national policymaking elites) perceive that there is no common European language, then it might be expected that openness towards CFSP and CSDP reforms, especially related to decision-making (QMV) and/or differentiated integration formats (e.g. enhanced cooperation, coalitions of the willing (Art. 44 TEU)), would be difficult to find as MS seek to protect their own national interests.*

The fieldwork was conducted as a common external threat appeared—Russia's war in Ukraine. This conflict would, presumably, have the potential to prompt MS to disregard their differences and increase their acceptability of reforms of CFSP and CSDP (Saz-Carranza et al., 2022).⁵ Further assumptions can be drawn that MS geographically closer to the war would express strong acceptance towards proposed reforms.

National policymaking elites additionally attribute the low-level of effectiveness of EU external action to the bloc's prior failures to deliver (underachievement) and its inability to speak in the "language of power" (Borrell, 2022). These perceived shortcomings have made it more difficult to view the EU as a global actor. Such perceptions might be traced to the capability-expectation gap (Bendiek et al., 2020; Hill, 1993). While some analysts may hold certain high expectations towards the EU in its ability to act in the international environment, shaped by the EU's own ambitions, its available capabilities (material and political) to act in the world fall short.

Nevertheless, policymaking elites in Cyprus and Ireland perceive EU external action as beneficial and essential.⁶ As small sized countries, they lack the resources and capabilities to engage geopolitically on their own (a similar point was put forward by Bulgarian interviewees). Estonians also express "cautious optimism" towards the EU's ability to act "geopolitically".

Turning to the two most recent strategic documents that guide EU external action, the 2016 Global Strategy (EUGS) and the 2022 Strategic Compass, a clear appreciation for the drafting process of the Strategic Compass is apparent. National policymaking elites place more weight

⁵ See [ENGAGE Working Paper 12](#), section 2.2, for more detailed discussion.

⁶ Keeping in mind that there is a different level of enthusiasm related to CSDP. For more on public perceptions see [ENGAGE Working Paper 12](#) (Saz-Carranza et al., 2022).



on the document because it was prepared factoring in their inputs. The contrary is generally true regarding the EUGS. While elites from Finland and Spain recognise value in the EUGS and its contribution to the management of global challenges over the past seven years by the EU, others from Hungary and Poland questioned its very foundations by stressing that the process lacked MS consultation and failed to prioritise the visions of MS. There is some impetus to update the Global Strategy to better turn vision into common action by providing better tools to implement its ideals. Some national policymaking elites see the Strategic Compass, with its clear milestones and deliverables, as precisely this needed update and improvement. Russia's invasion of Ukraine fundamentally altered Europe's geopolitical backdrop - the EU has been pressed to respond to these developments through its core strategic documents. The interviews were mainly conducted following the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine and after the adoption of the Strategic Compass, where an attempt was made to address the new reality facing Europe. The general perception that this was only a partial update entails that a new Global Strategy, drafted with MS inputs as a desirable basic strategic document, will be needed as the meaning of security extends out to a broader context (explained in [ENGAGE Working Paper 7](#)).

The perceptions of national policymaking elites towards contributing to EU foreign and security goals through external-internal policies are overall positive. A more integrated approach would enhance the coherence of EU external action and heighten EU leverage through discovery regarding the weight and significance that domestic policies can exert vis-à-vis third countries. While most policymakers refrained from identifying specific policy areas where they would like to see further internal-external integration, some respondents from Cyprus and Spain favoured an expansion of the external-internal nexus in energy, climate, health, anti-terrorism and migration policy (Greece and Hungary were also proponents on the migration linkage).

An obstacle to further internal-external integration, as assessed by Belgian, German and Irish policymakers, concerns a lack of consolidation and implementation of existing goals and the absence of a delineation of the scope of EU external action. It is, at present, also difficult to identify strategic interests in each domain. There is still a need to discuss, define and legitimise EU strategic interests and move towards a better self-understanding pertaining to what EU external action entails before integration between internal and external dimensions can take shape.

The scepticism of Hungary and Poland towards further external-internal alignment poses yet another barrier. Hungary, for example, perceives that the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Commission do not serve Hungarian national interests on migration. Polish policymakers, meanwhile, identified a lack of common threat assessment in the EU as a problem. They further posited that the EU would continue to struggle to find internal-external nexus linkages as MS do not necessarily always share the same interests.

Several institutional obstacles, finally, were identified in the conducted interviews. Elites from Estonia, Finland, Italy and Poland pointed to the presence of structural problems in institutions tasked with the EU's external action including the High Representative (HR/VP) and the



Commission. The Lisbon Treaty introduced a key procedural innovation within the EU's foreign and security policy via the appointment of the HR/VP as a permanent chair at the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC). This provided the HR/VP with crucial agenda-setting powers and the ability to steer the EU's foreign and security policy. At the same time, however, the HR/VP's new competences have constrained and limited the room for manoeuvre available to Member States. Among other instruments, the HR/VP acquired the capacity to engage directly with capitals, known as 'trampolining', a process that may overrule or contradict the mandate of the Political and Security Committee (PSC) ambassadors (Mauer & Wright, 2021).



3 Existing Proposals for Reforms in CFSP and CSDP

Renegotiating the treaties would be the most straightforward way to reform decision-making processes and apply institutional reforms towards EU foreign and security policy. However, the Treaty of Lisbon (2009), which serves as the legal framework to which the EU is bound for the foreseeable future, provides some manoeuvring space when it comes to improving CFSP and CSDP effectiveness, cohesion and sustainability. The Treaty provides for some mechanisms that are not regularly used and others that are not used at all. Now that the EU is facing grave external threats and the transformation of the global order, MS governments, EU leadership and European citizens all want to see more effective processes take shape. It is appropriate, therefore, to examine existing reform proposals and underused mechanisms.

Following substantial work on mapping the legal basis and governance structures of the EU's CFSP (Szép & Wessel, 2022 ([ENGAGE Working Paper 5](#))) and defence activities (Szép et al., 2021 ([ENGAGE Working Paper 4](#))), this section summarises selected proposals for reforms and underused mechanisms in CFSP and CSDP.

3.1 Qualified Majority Voting in CFSP

The unanimity rule in the Council is one of the main obstacles to a more effective decision-making process in CFSP, an opinion shared by the European Parliament and European citizens. The proposal to drop the unanimity rule and shift to QMV has been on the table for years and is recurrently brought up in different forums (Nováky, 2021; Lațici, 2021; Koenig, 2022). While unanimity might remain the rule for more sensitive issues, a shift to qualified majority voting could improve processes overall.

Through the adoption of QMV, the EU would gain resilience against the influence of third countries (Nováky, 2021) that seek to exploit their close ties with specific Member States to lobby them to veto decisions that contradict their national interests. Nováky (2021) identifies additional benefits - QMV could contribute towards fostering a consensus culture among MS that would protect the interests of smaller Member States.

Not all scholars, however, agree that moving to QMV is the best way forward. Bildt and Leonard (2019) argue that the Council and the Foreign Affairs Council "should place contentious matters on their meeting agendas with a view to finding compromise and reconciling competing positions". These discussions would be based on different options drafted by the EEAS or groups of Member States (core groups). According to the authors, this approach would ensure that divisive issues are thoroughly addressed, and the finding of common ground facilitated.

With only a few exceptions, Member States still make decisions on CFSP matters through unanimous voting in the Council (Article 31 (2) TEU). The so-called 'enabling clause' permits the Council under clearly defined circumstances to make decisions by qualified majority.



These situations include the appointment of EU Special Representatives and the implementation of decisions deriving from unanimous decisions of the Council. Given that the latter themselves require political consensus, it has generally been presumed that little use is likely to be made of this option in practice (Bendiek et al., 2018).

3.2 Passerelle Clauses

The Treaty of Lisbon introduced a mechanism, known as the *passerelle* clauses, that provides for more flexibility. The general stipulation, contained in Article 48(7), enables the Council to shift from unanimity to qualified majority voting and to shift from a special to an ordinary legislative procedure. It however requires the consent of the European Parliament (majority vote) and the notification of Member States after which a six-month period kicks in when national governments can veto the decision. This clause can be applied towards foreign policy matters (but not military and defence issues).

A second, more specific, *passerelle* clause is contained in Article 31(3) of the TEU. It is meant specifically for matters of CFSP, namely the adoption of actions based on prior decisions of the Council, a Union action, or a position on a proposal which the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy has presented following a specific request from the Council, made on its own initiative or that of the High Representative or the adoption of implementing decisions and the appointment of special representatives. The article, however, cannot be used in CSDP matters, namely decisions with military or defence implications. Although these clauses were introduced to ensure a more efficient decision-making process, they have never been used in practice.

Turning to international sanctions, it is notable that, while decisions to adopt sanctions must be unanimous, the nature of said sanctions can be agreed by QMV according to Article 215(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). Considering that sanctions are the most often employed instrument of foreign policy (Wessel et al., 2021), the use of this clause would be particularly beneficial towards expediting the process through which sanctions are adopted (Koenig, 2022).

3.3 Enhanced Cooperation in CFSP, Art. 20(1) TEU

Enhanced cooperation was added into the EU institutional and legal framework by the Amsterdam Treaty in response to calls for the establishment of a mechanism allowing for deeper integration solely among Member States interested in these options. This measure, which allowed for institutionalised differentiation in the EU, was adopted in a break from the unity dogma the European integration had been traditionally built upon (Malíř, 2019). The instrument of enhanced cooperation can be used in the CFSP provided that at least nine Member States initiate a joint project. The Member States may make use of the EU's procedures, bodies and instruments. Enhanced cooperation, however, also requires a unanimous decision in the Council (Article 329(2) TEU) (Bendiek et al., 2018). While it allows



for a small number of Member States to undertake joint action in the name of the EU, in other words, it can be blocked by the veto of a single Member State.

3.3.1 Cooperation Outside the EU Framework

Cooperation outside the EU framework has become relatively common especially concerning differentiation within EU foreign and security policy. Differentiated integration has been defined by a vast range of different scholars (Blockmans, 2014; Wessel, 2021; Schimmelfennig et al., 2022; Kröger, 2022) and refers to integration or cooperation that allows states (EU members or non-members) to work together in flexible ways (Lavenex & Križić, 2019). Siddi et al. (2022) distinguished between two main types of arrangements when it comes to the differentiated integration: those that are based on EU treaties and those that are not. Since the working paper refers to these treaty provisions separately, cooperation outside the EU framework refers to arrangements that are not based on the EU treaties. Based on the work of Grevi et al. (2019) and Siddi et al. (2022), five modes of differentiated cooperation can be identified: *regional groups* (Visegrad Four, Benelux); *ad hoc* contact groups (EU members and third countries responding to international crises, for instance, in the Western Balkans); *lead groups* of states that assume a prominent role (E3 in the Iranian nuclear negotiation); cooperation in *international fora* (G7, G20); and *HR/VP appointment of foreign ministers* to perform a specific diplomatic task (Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto at the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly).

3.4 Constructive Abstention in CSDP, Article 31(1) TEU

While decisions on CFSP must be unanimous, Article 31(1) TEU allows for MS to abstain from taking part in decisions through a formal declaration. When employed, the respective Member State need not apply the pertinent decisions even as the EU adopts them. The abstaining Member State, however, must commit to not engaging in action that would clash with EU actions taken based on the relevant decision. This process, known as constructive abstention, ensures that certain decisions can be taken even when one or more countries disagree. There are limits, though: a decision cannot be adopted if one third of Member States, representing one third of the population of the EU, decide to abstain. Bouton et al. (2015) argue that this system provides advantages over unanimity voting; it allows MS to communicate their reservations towards a decision without necessarily resorting to vetoing it. Nevertheless, there is a persistent reluctance among MS to use constructive abstention in practice and its employability has been very limited. For instance, constructive abstention had been used in the 2008 Council vote on an EU civilian mission for Kosovo (where Cyprus abstained) (SWP, n.d.) or most recently in the vote on an EU military assistance mission for Ukraine (where Hungary abstained) ("Hungary Backs EUR 500 Mln EU Aid to Ukrainian Military - BBJ," 2022).

3.5 Coalitions of the Willing, Article 44 TEU

Article 44 TEU stipulates that the Council may "entrust the implementation of a task to a group of Member States which are willing and have the necessary capability for such a task". In practice, an 'Article 44 operation' would be established by the Council of the EU acting



unanimously, not unlike any other CSDP operation (Tardy, 2014). An operation would need to be conducted by a group of Member States. The aims include “granting greater flexibility and speeding up reaction time”. The mechanism also seeks “to facilitate the deployment of CSDP operations by creating a framework which allows willing member states to go ahead with an operation as efficiently and effectively as possible” (p. 2). The Article, nevertheless, has never been put into use. The European Parliament, the High Representative and the Council, that said, have all called for exploring the potential use of the article, for example, for rapid reaction purposes or addressing issues with force generation (Bakker et al., 2016). More recently, the EU’s Strategic Compass adopted in March 2022 emphasised the need for the EU to strive for “greater flexibility in decision-making process without compromising on political and financial solidarity” (p. 26). The document refers directly to exploring modalities for implementing Article 44 TEU. In addition, Politico-Military Group (PMG) recommendations from September 2022 further specify that “Article 44 TEU is one of the key provisions ... allowing for greater flexibility and more swiftness in our CSDP decision-making process” (p. 2).

3.6 PESCO, Art. 42(6) TEU

One ‘sleeping beauty’ of the Lisbon Treaty was awakened in 2017. On 11 December 2017, Council decision (CFSP) 2017/2315 of 11 December 2017 formally established PESCO with 25 Member States participating. Denmark, Malta and the UK were the only Member States that decided not to join PESCO. Denmark had a defence opt-out and Malta pledged its national commitment to neutrality and non-alignment (Lazarou & Friede, 2018). PESCO’s provisions are enshrined in Article 46 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and Protocol 10 on permanent structured cooperation, established by Article 42(6) TEU. These legal bases provide the opportunity for ‘differentiated integration’ in defence among those MS that “fulfil the criteria and have made the commitments on military capabilities set out in the Protocol” (Lazarou & Latici, 2020, p. 2). In principle, PESCO allows a group of Member States, once the criteria are fulfilled, to pursue collective procurement and capability development in order to strengthen joint military capabilities (Bendiek et al., 2018). The decisions about EU operations still must be made unanimously. Driven by both endogenous and exogenous factors, political leaders in the Council recognised the need for MS to cooperate in more structured ways without conditionality forcing them to participate. For this reason, a package of harmonising measures was developed, with PESCO being the most prominent innovation in this field. As discussed by Blockmans and Crosson (2021), PESCO “is a force that generates ‘positive integration’ by de-fragmenting the defence market in the European Union” (p. 87). Since its activation, PESCO has raised cooperation on defence to a new level – currently there are 60 PESCO projects underway.

3.7 Solidarity Clause, Art. 222 TFEU

The Solidarity Clause was formally introduced by the Lisbon Treaty. It creates an explicit obligation that the EU and its Member States act jointly to assist one another in the face of terrorist attacks and natural or man-made disasters. Yet, as discussed by Martino (2016), it is simultaneously a rather ambitious and somewhat vague provision. The Council has only



superficially addressed the interpretation of Article 222 TFEU. The Solidarity Clause could potentially cover a particularly broad scope and trigger a wide range of different EU instruments and (operational) Union action. Keller-Noellet (2018) discusses three underlying reasons why implementing this clause might be rather complicated. Firstly, the clause entails a single recourse to all instruments at the Union's disposal including police and judicial cooperation, civil protection interventions and even the military resources of Member States. Secondly, the provision lacks details on the application of the clause that could clarify how it can be used and provide guidance to legislators adopting implementation measures. Some of the objectives of the clause, finally, have been supplanted by several concrete initiatives and decisions.

3.8 The Mutual Assistance Clause, Art. 42.7 TEU

Article 42(7) TEU – part of the Treaty's specific provisions on the CSDP – contains the mutual assistance clause of the EU.

Article 42(7) TEU

If a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power, in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. This shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States. Commitments and cooperation in this area shall be consistent with commitments under the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which, for those States which are members of it, remains the foundation of their collective defence and the forum for its implementation.

The mutual assistance clause has only been invoked once when France asked for aid and assistance from other Member States in the aftermath of the deadly terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015. The Council Conclusion had put all Member States under a legal obligation to aid and assist France through all available means including diplomatic, financial and/or military capabilities. The decision also mandated aid to support France in foreign operations where it was engaged. EU Member States, consequently, were expected to contribute to French military engagements in the Sahel, the Central African Republic, Lebanon and the Levant (Szép et al., 2021 ([ENGAGE Working Paper 4](#))).

Opinions on Article 42(7), however, diverge sharply across the EU, ranging from MS who prefer to discuss it as little as possible to avoid undermining NATO's collective defence primacy, all the way to those such as France who see it as part of the EU's ambition to come into its own as a geopolitical and security actor (Deen et al., 2022).

This concise explanation of already available but seldom, if ever, used mechanisms provides a useful list for the EU and MS to seek enhanced effectiveness, coherence and sustainability of EU external action without relying on treaty changes.

This review comes as the Conference of the Future of Europe conclusions, the Russian war in Ukraine and the candidacy status granted to Ukraine all trigger a renewed discussion regarding



further reforms aimed at changing the institutional framework of the Union and its decision-making processes and increasing the capacity of the EU to act internally, regionally and globally (Deen et al., 2022).



4 Perceptions of Policymaking Elites in Selected Member States Towards Reforms

The following section more extensively traces the political acceptability of national policymaking elites in each of the selected 14 MS to reform proposals, the enhanced use of available mechanisms identified in section 3 and institutional and treaty modifications.

4.1 Belgium

4.1.1 CFSP

Decision-Making

Belgium is a resolute supporter towards the introduction of QMV in CFSP (including CSDP) decision-making. Even though misgivings may exist among certain top diplomats on a maximalist application of QMV, Belgium's official position will remain very favourable and supportive for the foreseeable future. Faithful to its pragmatic approach to foreign policy, Belgium would back, for instance, recourse to using the so-called *passerelle* clauses.

Enhanced Cooperation and Cooperation Outside the EU Framework

No firm opinion exists on the use of enhanced cooperation in Belgium as it is still perceived as a generally theoretical component of CFSP. Would a concrete case appear, then the Belgian position would likely be supportive if it does not endanger EU cohesion. Similarly, cooperation outside the EU or NATO frameworks is not taboo for Belgian policymakers. For instance, Belgium takes part in the French-led European Intervention Initiative. But, once again, Belgium appears to be pragmatic by seeking to tie together initiatives in different frameworks. At the military level, bilateral cooperation with major partners may be valued as a guarantee of effectiveness (e.g. cooperation with France in the framework of CaMo).

4.1.2 CSDP

Constructive Abstention

Even though Belgium is not opposed to the principles underpinning constructive abstention, it does not consider increased use of the tool to be a useful solution to a lack of leadership and ownership of CSDP at the EU level. It is neither seen, in fact, as a constructive instrument for developing needed capabilities for CSDP missions and operations.

Coalitions of the Willing and PESCO

The promotion of coalitions of the willing within the EU framework (i.e. through the activation of Article 44 TEU) has been a major strategic goal for Belgium in recent years. In 2021, Belgium specifically organised a meeting with EU DPDs and SPDs to raise this issue at the European level. This commitment dates to 2008 and the lack of interest from European partners (notably France) to launch an EU mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.



PESCO is generally perceived favourably despite its lack of effectiveness. More than an increase in PESCO commitments, a reinforcement of EEAS/EDA scrutiny is necessary as projects are mostly seen as 'black boxes'.

The EU's Solidarity Clause (Art. 222 TFEU) and the EU's Mutual Assistance Clause (Art. 42(7) TEU)

Belgium is in favour of better linking Art. 222 TFEU with CSDP. It traditionally has believed that COPS and EU military bodies (EUMS, EUMC, etc.) should have an intra-EU role. And, even if Belgium does not put Article 42(7) TEU on equal footing with NATO Article 5, it does consider it binding and to contain a military dimension. Belgian decisionmakers favour a reinforcement/clarification of the implications of Article 42.7 (on the model of NATO Article 5). In this respect, if the Turkish veto on Finnish and Swedish membership within NATO were to persist, it would certainly create an opportunity to strengthen the clause.

4.1.3 Institutional Adaptations and Treaty Modifications

More Powers to the European Commission and the European Parliament

As the Commission is generally perceived as an ally to the interests of the 'big' Member States (i.e. France and Germany), Belgium is inclined to favour an expansion of the Community Method to CFSP/CSDP.

Even though there is no detailed discussion, Belgium could be favourable to granting a right to information to the European Parliament (on the Belgian model). The EP could also ensure that EU defence initiatives are implemented in a coherent way (e.g. the Strategic Compass and PESCO).

Robust support on 'trampolining' is absent in Belgium, especially given that the current use of the practice tends to result in the marginalisation of smaller Member States and foments frustration. Even though the HR/VP consults more frequently with certain capitals (depending on the issues), it should not preclude other MS from obtaining information. If the HR/VP fails to ensure a better balance between the views and interests of different Member States, it poses a clear risk to EU unity and cohesion.

Treaty Modifications

In principle, Belgium supports some treaty change, notably to foster improved effectiveness of CFSP/CSDP. But given the geopolitical context, Belgium would only be open to supporting limited changes (1) where a large consensus exists or can be achieved very easily and (2) which can be achieved through a fast-track procedure (e.g. *passerelle* clauses). Belgium largely believes that the EU cannot spend 4 to 5 years principally focused on its own functioning.



4.2 Bulgaria

4.2.1 CFSP

Decision-Making

The country has not taken a clear stance on the *passerelle* clause or towards gradually shifting to qualified majority voting in CFSP. Sofia, that said, is likely to generally oppose such initiatives. This debate at home will undoubtedly be linked to the bilateral issue with North Macedonia. The topic has proven to evoke strong emotional reactions among Bulgarians. The ability to use the veto at any time of the enlargement negotiation process has been wielded as a pacifier domestically. Bulgaria is at least willing to permit accession negotiations to begin knowing that the veto will still be there later. Sofia is, therefore, not likely to lend its support towards moving to QMV in the short term.

Enhanced Cooperation and Cooperation Outside the EU Framework

Any enhanced cooperation and differentiated integration agreements outside the EU are likely to be unacceptable to Bulgaria if they are judged to be directed at isolating Eastern European MS. Some limited flexibility, however, would presumably garner Bulgaria's stamp of approval. Sofia is regionally engaged and interested, for instance, in the Western Balkans, Southeast Europe and Turkey. And Bulgarian leadership, engagement and expertise in foreign policy areas would be welcomed. The country, in this regard, would be open towards situations where a specific group of MS or individual foreign ministers are tasked with representing the EU in special cases/missions. As one interviewee pointed out, "let the experts be the leaders".

4.2.2 CSDP

Constructive Abstention

Interviewees made no specific reference to the positions of Bulgaria on constructive abstention.

Coalitions of the Willing and PESCO

National policymaking elites pointed out that Bulgaria is likely to increase its engagement in PESCO and involve itself in further security and defence cooperation (with an emphasis on migration issues as a priority area). Bulgaria holds no particularly clear strategy with respect to PESCO and other CSDP EU missions. Its engagement herein is steered by the Ministry of Defence rather than political/strategic decisions. However, Bulgaria would rather not be an outlier in Europe (as it pertains to participation and professionalisation). At the same time, Bulgaria, in principle, would be favourably predisposed towards groups of willing and capable MS carrying out certain tasks in CSDP.



The EU's Solidarity Clause (Art. 222 TFEU) and the EU's Mutual Defence Clause (Art. 42(7) TEU)

Mutual assistance within the EU security policy framework is not currently under discussion. It is not a taboo topic but rather Bulgaria's defence and security strategy has not touched upon it yet. One policymaker suggested that this is mostly due to the security guarantees provided by NATO and Article 5.

4.2.3 Institutional Adaptations and Treaty Modifications

More Powers to the European Commission and the European Parliament

The interviewees agreed that Bulgaria prefers the intergovernmental framework in CFSP and CSDP to any potential increase in the Commission or EP's institutional power. Some policymakers cited the non-paper signed by 11 MS immediately after the conclusion of the Conference on the Future of Europe (2022). The document expressed negative sentiment towards the use of the Conference conclusions for attempts at granting more powers to the EP (through treaty changes).

Treaty Modifications

Any treaty modifications on CFSP/CSDP will be met with an ambiguous opinion on Bulgaria's side. The country has positioned itself within a group of Member States that are sceptical towards any premature attempts to launch a process on treaty changes, as indicated by the non-paper mentioned above.

4.3 Cyprus

4.3.1 CFSP

Decision-Making

Cyprus prefers the status quo on the unanimous decision-making process of CFSP as opposed to QMV. As a small Member State, it is concerned that the sovereignty costs imposed would be too steep. This is in part due to the particularities of the 'Cyprus Situation', namely that the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, only recognised by Turkey, constitutes 30% of the island (Stavridis 2020, p. 8). The situation is regarded as a frozen conflict and legacy of the 1974 invasion of Cyprus by Turkish military forces and its subsequent annexation. The intractable situation over the legal status of the northern part of the island entails also a dispute between an EU Member State and an accession candidate. While Cyprus would prefer to avoid being seen as an outlier and rather seeks to align itself with the consensus position, its relations with Turkey could prove to be a sticking point on voting reform.

Enhanced Cooperation and Cooperation Outside the EU Framework

Cyprus, as a non-member of NATO, already accepts that cooperation takes place in that forum. As part of its ongoing relationship with Greece, it presumes Athens will look out for its own



interests. Cyprus also seeks to enhance relations with the US through its foreign policy. When larger MS engage in diplomatic actions that exclude some MS, Cyprus acts pragmatically insofar as it acknowledges that this is diplomacy in action. It accepts these initiatives provided they are not later institutionalised in some form. Provided that coalitions are informal, in other words, Cyprus is willing to accept them.

4.3.2 CSDP

Constructive Abstention

Interviewees made no reference to the position of Cyprus when it comes to constructive abstention.

Coalitions of the Willing and PESCO

No specific positions of Cyprus were mentioned regarding coalitions of the willing. When it comes to PESCO, Cyprus participates in the framework and strongly supports actions that make the EU a more capable security actor, aligning with comments above. Soon after joining the platform, it voiced the opinion that security is considered an important component of EU action and capabilities. Cyprus also participates in the EDF.

The EU's Solidarity Clause (Art. 222 TFEU) and the EU's Mutual Assistance Clause (Art. 42(7) TEU)

There have not been any specific references made to the position of Cyprus on the EU's solidarity clause nor the EU's mutual assistance clause.

4.3.3 Institutional Adaptations and Treaty Modifications

More Powers to the European Commission and the European Parliament

Interviewees made no mention of Cyprus's stance on delegating more powers to the European Commission or the European Parliament.

Treaty Modifications

Given statements and positions on other questions, namely a preference for (a) continued consensus-based decision-making and (b) avoidance of formalisation in institutional changes and its overall position that the CSFP is working, Cyprus is unlikely to back treaty modifications. Cyprus, that said, wants to demonstrate its European commitment by orienting its national position towards the consensus stance. To this end, if a large proportion of MS are in favour of treaty change, Cyprus would most likely respect these views absent a strong national position.



4.4 Estonia

4.4.1 CFSP

Decision-Making

The policymaking elites agreed that Estonia remains cautiously optimistic about expanding the use of QMV into CFSP and CSDP decisions. They indicated that the use of QMV could prove beneficial towards fostering a more rapid and robust decision-making process, which in turn will contribute to a more “sovereign” Europe. Estonia is specifically open to examining the introduction of QMV in what are perceived as “softer” topics, such as sanctions, civilian missions and humanitarian issues. However, Estonia is reluctant to implement QMV as a blanket policy to all CFSP/CSDP issues, with the country still seeing value in unified decisions. Unanimity ensures that countries are also willing to implement decisions.

Interviewees added that the right time for adopting QMV decision-making for CFSP/CSDP - at least with respect to human rights issues, sanctions and civilian missions – was perhaps around the time of the publication of the EU Global Strategy in 2014–2016 when EU Member States had not yet ‘locked in’ their positions. Any expansion, at present, would require further study before MS would be willing to even to consider such a move. Estonia, all told, remains open-minded on the matter, with some reservations. It would support increased use of QMV but is not seeking to actively put the issue on the EU agenda.

Enhanced Cooperation and Cooperation Outside the EU Framework

Estonia is supportive of enhanced cooperation in the CFSP and CSDP areas so long as it does not undermine NATO’s role in European security. Interviewees emphasised that Estonia remains an ardent backer of the European Defence Fund (and supported its predecessor EDIDP), PESCO and other capability development projects. Estonia has been actively involved in these projects since their establishment and views them as opportunities to develop capabilities that would not otherwise be done alone. Interviewees, however, stressed that these projects and Estonia’s participation and/or leadership in them must be needs-driven based on the demands and objectives of the Estonian Armed Forces. Industrial and defence market projects that complement NATO and foreground the EU’s strengths are particularly compelling to Estonia.

Tallinn has assumed a pragmatic and constructive approach towards defence frameworks outside the EU. It was pointed out that Estonia participates in both the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) and the European Intervention Initiative (EI2). It sees both as tenable provided that they do not undermine either the EU or NATO structures. Bringing them under EU frameworks, however, is not seen as feasible or preferable. As repeatedly affirmed by interviewees, Estonia continues to prioritise NATO as the primary collective defence and security organisation for national defence purposes.



4.4.2 CSDP

Constructive Abstention

Estonia harbours scepticism towards the use of constructive abstention in CSDP. The country would rather first see constructive abstention employed in relation to humanitarian and civilian missions before it is applied to thornier CSDP decisions. Interviewees also questioned whether decisions would still be seen as consensus if constructive abstention were used in CSDP. Nonetheless, all agreed that the issue is not currently a priority, outside its use within the European Peace Facility. It was noted that constructive abstention is also essentially only currently used during EU coordination at the UN. As such, Estonia maintains a sceptical attitude towards the use of constructive abstention in CSDP matters.

Coalitions of the Willing and PESCO

The interviews suggest that Estonia is fully open to participating in and/or permitting others to form coalitions of the willing outside the EU. Estonia has adopted a pragmatic approach to 'coalitions of the willing', seeing them as a necessary and useful tool that can enable a smaller group of EU Member States and third countries to achieve foreign policy and defence objectives. One interviewee pointed out that the EU CSDP operations can already be construed as 'coalitions of the willing' since it is not mandatory for Member States to participate in the missions. When there is a 'coalition of the willing', it is important that complementarity be the norm. 'Models' for future coalitions of the willing may include the French-led Operation Takuba (Estonia participated) and Barkhane in Mali that aimed to complement the EUTM Mali and the UN MINUSMA. Estonia's greater openness to 'coalitions of the willing' than to CSDP operations stems from military frustrations with EU structures including sluggish decision-making processes and challenges in securing necessary resources.

Tallinn has been actively engaged in PESCO since its founding - the initiative, in fact, was launched during the Estonian Council presidency. The Estonian government was also the first to announce its decision to join the framework. One interviewee said that Estonia sees PESCO as a way for the EU to bring concrete projects and developments to the table and a constructive way to save resources through joint procurement and research and development. As such, PESCO is understood to enable the development of capabilities that are absent and/or where the EU is reliant on the US – examples include medical emergency and military airlift capabilities. One interviewee, nevertheless, noted that PESCO is merely one instrument, among numerous others, reflecting a military-driven and pragmatic approach to the framework.

The EU's Solidarity Clause (Art. 222 TFEU) and the EU's Mutual Assistance Clause (Art. 42(7) TEU)

Estonia is taking a nuanced approach to discussions around Art. 42(7), the mutual defence clause. While Estonia is bound by it and sees it as a military solidarity clause, it does not necessarily entail that all EU Member States will participate militarily. Tallinn believes it should not duplicate NATO's Art. 5 as EU MS do not possess sufficient resources to maintain two similar systems. Interviewees also noted that Art. 42(7) currently lacks the same political and



military weight as NATO's Art. 5 due the absence of an institutional framework behind it. As such, policymaking elites pointed out that one of the most significant issues facing Art. 42(7) concerns ambiguity about what happens when it is activated, even when compared to Art. 222.

Estonia is, therefore, willing to respond and act in solidarity when Art. 42(7) is deployed but does not think that it provides a similar level of collective security as NATO's Art. 5.

Art. 222 should be put on equal footing with Art. 42(7). One interviewee indicated that Estonia pressed for an enhanced role for Art. 222 during the Strategic Compass's drafting process. The solidarity clause is equally or even better suited than Art. 42(7) – the former involves the European Commission and wider EU institutions but the latter only MS and potentially the EEAS. Art. 222 is still seen as an emergency/crisis management clause related to non-violent situations, with terrorism a possible exception that necessitates Commission involvement. Estonia could consequently potentially support an expansion of Art. 222 to CSDP issues.

4.4.3 Institutional Adaptations and Treaty Modifications

More Powers to the European Commission and the European Parliament

Though Estonia holds no strident position on granting more powers to the Commission or the EP, policymakers are rather sceptical that an expansion of competences are currently plausible. These questions, especially with respect to the EP, were largely seen as generally abstract or even theoretical in nature.

Treaty Modifications

Estonia is not interested in treaty modifications, especially on CSDP issues.

4.5 Finland

4.5.1 CFSP

Decision-Making

Finland has adopted a strongly supportive position on the use of QMV since its accession to the EU and advocated an increased role for QMV in treaty negotiations. This is especially true on CFSP/CSDP issues - interviewees noted that Finland is unlikely to be "voted out or boxed into a corner" and that the use of QMV benefits Finland and the EU. Helsinki sees QMV as expediting EU crisis response including the introduction of sanctions. Increased use of QMV would also put an end to 26–1 or 25–2 votes that witness one or two MS obstruct measures even though they have no desire to reach a genuine compromise.

Enhanced Cooperation and Cooperation Outside the EU Framework

Bolstering EU-NATO cooperation is a key issue for Finland - policymakers stress that complementarity is particularly important towards combatting cyber and hybrid threats where each organisation is seen as playing equal and complementary roles.



Frameworks outside the EU, such as the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) and the European Intervention Initiative (EI2), are viewed as acceptable and beneficial for Finland. The interviewees stated that Finland needs to assume a constructive and open approach towards these arrangements. JEF is seen as important to tying the UK to the Nordic-Baltic region and wider European security and defence framework and EI2 in improving a shared strategic culture.

4.5.2 CSDP

Constructive Abstention

While Finland generally supports the use of constructive abstention and backed the incorporation of this mechanism within the European Peace Facility, its position remains partly ambivalent. From a Finnish perspective, it could be deployed in situations where one MS is singled-out or states adopt a spoiler-role but these situations are currently resolved through negotiation. When negotiations falter, constructive abstention is not seen as solution to situations where the obstructing Member State thwarts progress to prevent a decision from being made. Constructive abstention, to this point, is generally hollow and an unnecessary instrument.

Coalitions of the Willing and PESCO

Finland also takes a tolerant and pragmatic view on differentiated integration including coalitions of the willing (under Art. 44) that are permitted under the current treaty architecture. Helsinki, therefore, would lend its support to the development of such initiatives on CFSP/CSDP issues. To this end, Finland should be included at all EU tables, reflecting the pragmatic view that Member States wishing to deepen integration should be able to do so given broad agreement on CSFP/CSDP. The French operations Takuba and Barkhane in the Sahel were mentioned as effective examples of differentiated integration in the CSDP in practice (ad-hoc groupings).

PESCO projects, in general, also enjoy robust support among Finnish experts, policymakers and the public who would, in fact, favour stronger integration therein. Any further participation in PESCO or other R&D projects pursued through the EDF, nevertheless, will be needs-based and oriented towards producing concrete outputs and credible evidence of delivery. Further integration, according to Finnish interviewees, could be achieved by focusing on the development of dual-use and military technologies, such as space, under the concept of 'strategic autonomy'. The EU should aim to be self-sufficient and the Commission should play a more active role.

The EU's Solidarity Clause (Art. 222 TFEU) and the EU's Mutual Assistance Clause (Art. 42(7) TEU)

Finland, together with France, is seen as one of the key proponents of Art. 42(7). Art. 42(7) is seen as the bedrock of the CSDP and remains central to Finland despite the country's pending NATO membership. Finland is focused on operationalising and implementing the article. This



includes encouraging the development of mechanisms regarding the possible activation of Art. 42(7) given the ambiguity of the current process, especially with respect to possible cases of cyber and hybrid attacks. For Finland, Art. 42(7) more broadly reflects wider EU solidarity and integration on CFSP/CSDP issues.

Art. 222, meanwhile, is seen more as an interior ministry issue rather than one of defence and foreign affairs ministries. But for Finland, both articles should be seen as complementary in nature rather than competing arrangements. Like Art. 42(7), Finland is supportive of the hypothetical use of Art. 222.

4.5.3 Institutional Adaptations and Treaty Modifications

More Powers to the European Commission and the European Parliament

Finland supports deeper integration in CFSP/CSDP issues and expresses openness to increasing the institutional powers of the Commission recognising that the EU lacks sufficient military/security capabilities and instruments. Bolstering the powers of the Commission, that said, will not necessarily lead to greater military policy integration. The interviewees stressed that Finland instead sees the primary role of the Commission to be directed at developing a more equitable, transparent and open military and defence industry across Europe and the internal market.

The European Parliament is perceived as a good ally for Finland, especially as it relates to lobbying for deeper CSDP integration. The enhanced powers of the EP granted by the Lisbon Treaty were seen as a positive development in the country. The delegation of additional formal power to the European Parliament, however, is now viewed as largely a theoretical matter.

Furthermore, the interviewees stressed that the EU Member States, Finland included, are particularly reluctant to relinquish competences on CFSP/CSDP to the Commission or the European Parliament and prefer to keep it an intergovernmental policy area.

Treaty Modifications

Finland has taken a reserved approach to the opening of treaty negotiations including on CFSP/CSDP issues. Finland would first want to see the specific ideas and proposed changes. There would, moreover, need to be a clear picture on the objectives of any such amendments. The current political and economic situation in Europe renders any treaty revisit difficult - it would entail enormous political work on the part of national legislative bodies and decisionmakers.



4.6 France

4.6.1 CFSP

Decision-Making

France is opposed to the introduction of QMV in CFSP decision-making. France's official position, referenced several times by interviewees, is the following: political problems cannot be solved through technical tricks; attempting to force a European position through a change in the voting mechanism is doomed to fail. One of the interviewees suggested that it would be better to "treat the substance (reasons behind opposition) instead of the symptoms". France is instead counting on the emergence of a common strategic culture to overcome impasses and is pursuing a strategy that revolves around persuading reluctant Member States that it is costlier to block a decision than to join the consensus, even if it requires concessions at the margins.

There are, that said, some nuances to the French position. Most interviewees, firstly, agree that the topic is worth exploring and that such a change would track with the general historical evolution of the EU. Secondly, two interviewees referenced recent statements by the French President and the French Secretary of State for Europe that suggest France is open to the idea, in very specific cases, to get around vetoes. And, finally, one interviewee emphatically emphasised that Member States agree on 98% of topics and that this debate concerns only 1–2% of subjects, albeit divisive issues that can be difficult to reconcile with strongly held national opinions.

Enhanced Cooperation and Cooperation Outside the EU Framework

The recourse to enhanced cooperation within the CFSP framework is perceived positively in France. One recurring theme concerns the notion that the CFSP should be able to operate in accordance with the principle that those who wish to move forward should be able to do so even as others are not obligated to do the same. The abstainers, importantly, should not prevent more proactive Member States from doing so.

Similarly, France is favourable to cooperation outside the EU and NATO frameworks, especially with candidate countries or countries who aspire to join the EU. Some policymakers argued that more should be done with the US and the UK. French decisionmakers, by and large, believe that these practices are beneficial and cause no detrimental impact to the consensus approach of the EU. By multiplying the EU's modes of action, the bloc rather can augment its resonance capacities in third countries.

4.6.2 CSDP

Constructive Abstention

France favours the use of constructive abstention as a pragmatic tool that can enhance the flexibility of decision-making without resorting to QMV. Broadly speaking, French national



policymaking elites support leaving a certain level of flexibility/ambiguity to MS, so as not to obstruct consensus.

Coalitions of the Willing and PESCO

The promotion of coalitions of the willing within the EU framework (i.e. through the activation of Article 44 TEU) has stood out as a major strategic goal for France in recent years. Paris sees it as a way to overcome institutional obstacles. Several recent examples speak to its effectiveness: EMASOE in the Arabian Gulf and the more recent implementation of Takuba in the Sahel region. Several interviewees insisted that the use of coalitions of the willing from the outset, nevertheless, prevents handing the operations over to the EU afterwards due to compatibility issues. Additional challenges include debates centred around building an exclusive club (vs. an open club), ambition (vs. inclusiveness) and a security provider (vs. security consumers).

France strongly supports Art. 44 TEU even if the process is too formalised as it stands now, to the point that it is almost like launching a classic CSDP mission (i.e. a unanimous decision of the Council is needed before a small group of MS can be entrusted with an operation). Therefore, Art. 44 TEU needs to be reviewed and made more flexible. In parallel, it is important to familiarise MS with Article 44, which has never been used since its inception.

PESCO is generally perceived favourably despite its lack of effectiveness.

The EU's Solidarity Clause (Art. 222 TFEU) and the EU's Mutual Assistance Clause (Art. 42(7) TEU)

France considers the EU's solidarity clause (Art. 222 TFEU) to be fundamental to the Union even if it shows more affinity towards Article 42(7). France indeed prefers the simplicity of use of the latter compared to the shared decisions required by Art. 222. Regarding the reform of this clause, France notes that since the tools developed in Art. 222 can also be used in the framework of Art. 42(7), it is not necessarily useful to adapt the current clause. In general, both articles must be read in consort and priority should be given to the capacity to respond concretely to crises.

As the only country to date to have used it (in the context of the 2015 attacks), France is strongly in favour of operationalising Article 42(7) TEU and puts it on an equal footing with NATO Article 5. French policymakers see complementarity between both articles, insofar as Article 42(7) can be invoked under the threshold of Article 5 (i.e. in contested fields like cyber and space) and used in situations where Article 5 cannot be activated (i.e. in case of a Turkish veto). The minimised institutionalisation of Article 42(7) is considered both a strength (flexibility) and a weakness (lacks use cases).



4.6.3 Institutional Adaptations and Treaty Modifications

More Powers to the European Commission and the European Parliament

A recurring idea from interviewees suggested that rather than delegating new powers to the Commission, policymakers should ensure that the Commission makes full use of powers currently at its disposal. Successive HR/VPs, for example, have not made sufficient use of their position as Vice-President of the Commission. An additional idea put forward recommended that the Commission strengthen the EEAS, as a joint institution, and give it more power. The institution rather has been excluded from crisis management to date, to the detriment of the EU.

France is, notably, cautious about a greater transfer of power to the European Parliament. Overall, a shift in decision-making from the intergovernmental (Commission) to the Community level (Parliament) is not perceived as more democratic by France, with the Parliament viewed as even more supranational than the Commission.

French policymakers are divided over the possibility that specific groups of Member States or individual national foreign ministers may represent the bloc. While some are opposed to this practice on the grounds that the EEAS and HR/VP are best placed to assume this role and due to concerns about the logic of large states vs. small states, others believe that it has potential. Proponents alluded to the example of the Finnish foreign minister who was sent to the Horn of Africa on behalf of the EU.

France is not opposed to 'trampolining' under two conditions: the HR/VP must strike a balance between freedom of action and respect for MS positions and ensure that at least the most concerned states and the five largest EU Member States (FR, DE, IT, ES, PL) are kept in the loop.

Treaty Modifications

In principle, France supports some treaty changes, notably, to foster greater CFSP/CSDP effectiveness. But, given the geopolitical context, it does not consider this to be a priority and believes that expanded use of existing instruments should be prioritised. Paris, therefore, favours working with the current framework and only revising it over the long term when the existing framework proves to be no longer relevant.

4.7 Germany

4.7.1 CFSP

Decision-Making

Moving to QMV in CFSP decisions is acceptable to Germany and primarily seen as enhancing the EU's ability to act and boost its credibility. Yet there are some concerns QMV could threaten the EU's cohesion. A careful balancing act, therefore, is needed. Weighing the pros and cons, overall, the necessity to improve decision-making outweighs any desire to stick to the status



quo. A gradual shift to QMV (e.g. the *passerelle* clause) would be preferable to the costs of the present approach.

Enhanced Cooperation and Cooperation Outside the EU Framework

Enhanced cooperation should not become an end in itself; it should rather only be used whenever the potential gains outweigh the risks and costs that could come from worsening EU cohesion. This should be decided on a case-by-case basis. Following the above rationale, differentiation could prove to be key to success.

4.7.2 CSDP

Constructive Abstention

Germany officially espouses support for this tool. Some respondents, however, expressed scepticism that the instrument will be used in practice. They consider it unlikely that countries (especially those contributing troops) will abstain from decision-making where their interests and resources are concerned.

Coalitions of the Willing and PESCO

While Berlin provides principled support for the concept, some policymakers struggle to envision a scenario where a coalition of the willing could be put into practice. On the other hand, Germany perceives increased engagement within PESCO as feasible and desirable. Priority should be given to smaller and less ambitious projects that can be more swiftly implemented to generate measurable outcomes and the necessary experience and motivational boost for bigger projects down the road.

The EU's Solidarity Clause (Art. 222 TFEU) and the EU's Mutual Assistance Clause (Art. 42(7) TEU)

Germany supports use of the solidarity clause (Art. 222). The public, however, appears rather unaware of Art. 42(7) TEU and, if invoked, the government would need to first secure such support before moving forward with any action. At this point, given the prospects for Finland and Sweden to join NATO and the present security situation, this is considered a somewhat hypothetical and superfluous clause for Germany. Confidence in 42(7) is lower than in NATO's Article 5.

4.7.3 Institutional Adaptations and Treaty Modifications

More Powers to the European Commission and the European Parliament

Germany is rather hesitant to support granting more powers to the Commission, a perceived overambitious move that would be difficult to legitimise and potentially prove challenging to synchronise with national laws and procedures. While delegating more power to the EP, meanwhile, would be considered more legitimate in Germany, similar challenges would emerge.



Though there is ambiguity regarding Berlin's formal position on 'trampolining', national policymakers argued that the HR/VP would need to gain more "working muscle" to use the powers and implement the capacities that the office has already been granted.

Treaty Modifications

Germany would prefer to see some success in implementing the EU's current ambitions and treaty contents prior to embarking on further changes.

4.8 Greece

4.8.1 CFSP

Decision-Making

Greece stands opposed to moving to QMV in CFSP decisions. The country is reluctant to give up its veto power in foreign and security policy given the absence of strong EU guarantees that its national security interests will be safeguarded without the veto. While one interviewed expert argued that moving toward QMV could address some of the EU's structural weaknesses and sluggishness, multiple elite stakeholders noted that Greece is not convinced that QMV would make EU foreign policy more effective. Athens also tends to think that the loss of unanimity voting would be prone to creating tensions. The *passerelle* clause could, potentially, be agreed to as an area of compromise. The issues of human rights and sanctions were mentioned as possible areas to introduce QMV while leaving core foreign policy issues to unanimity.

Enhanced Cooperation and Cooperation Outside the EU Framework

According to policymaking elites, Greece would favour enhanced cooperation in CFSP as a possible solution should full consensus not be attainable. Athens is, in fact, interested in participating in any enhanced cooperation projects put in place. Despite this robust support for these arrangements, the country places elevated importance on the principle of inclusivity and diversity in Member State leadership as part of this cooperation.

Greece also prefers enhanced cooperation in CFSP over differentiated integration outside EU structures. However, as long as cooperation outside the EU framework does not undermine EU policies and cohesion, Greece is willing to accept these types of arrangements too. Greece is, overall, open to cooperation with countries both inside the EU, such as the France-Greece Defence Partnership, and outside the EU, as demonstrated by partnerships with Egypt and the United Arab Emirates as well as the US following a notable rapprochement.

4.8.2 CSDP

Constructive Abstention

This procedure is not particularly on the radar in Greece. Constructive abstention, however, could be acceptable for Greece according to interviewed stakeholders if the MS abstaining is



not coerced or pressured to do so. Despite this openness to the concept, constructive abstention should not become the norm; attaining unanimity should instead remain paramount. The flexibility granted through constructive abstention, nevertheless, was positively highlighted.

Coalitions of the Willing and PESCO

Greece would, in principle, be willing to accept permitting groups of willing and capable MS to carry out certain tasks in CSDP. Athens, however, would prefer to move forward with all 27 members when feasible. One elite stakeholder expressed the view that the use of coalitions of the willing, to some extent, underscores the lack of consensus within the EU and its unwilling Member States. Multiple interviewees, however, said Greece would be willing to participate in such groups. But Greece would only support actions under Article 44 that are taken in pursuit of and in full alignment with clearly set and previously agreed objectives.

Greece is one of the most supportive MS regarding PESCO. Increased engagement in PESCO commitments would be very much welcomed by Athens. This tool is perceived by Greece as critical to enhancing European defence capabilities and a powerful mechanism for shifting the mindset of MS, reinforcing their mutual trust and galvanising their declared ambitions to cooperate in defence. The country is also in favour of third country participation in PESCO projects. Greece is currently involved in 33 PESCO projects; in 6 as a coordinator, 12 as a participant and 15 as an observer.

The EU's Solidarity Clause (Art. 222 TFEU) and the EU's Mutual Assistance Clause (Art. 42(7) TEU)

Both clauses have been widely discussed in Greece at the public and elite levels and are not seen as taboo. The debate, however, has been one-sided and centred on the right for Greece to receive assistance especially against the backdrop of the Turkish threat. The national conversation has focused less on the possibility that Greece could be called upon to provide assistance. The Greek National Parliament has expressed a clear consensus, meanwhile, on Art. 42(7). The Parliament has called for this protocol to be strengthened, and the Greek Government would like to see it operationalised more. There is a concerted demand for greater clarity and specificity to be laid out on the implications and procedures of the article. Greece especially recognises the need for Art. 42.7 to be considered within the context of the EU Hybrid Toolbox. Although it is regarded as binding, like NATO Article 5, it is not as strong given its current lack of practicality. On Art. 222, Greece would also like to see a review of its practical use.

4.8.3 Institutional Adaptations and Treaty Modifications

More Powers to the European Commission the European Parliament

While Greece broadly favours the Commission assuming a considerably more active role and gaining the ability to deploy more substantial economic and other means to support MS in developing their military and industrial capabilities, there would need to be more specific



information provided if it were to back giving it extra powers. The delegation of more formal powers to the EP would similarly need to be examined holistically. Taken in isolation, Greece would oppose increasing such powers.

Greece would not rule out the possibility that specific groups of MS or individual national foreign ministers could be tasked with representing the EU in special cases/missions. This should be the exception rather than become the norm though. Greece would prefer the EU put forward the HRVP as the main representative of the Union. Athens, therefore, believes the HRVP should bolster its relationships with all capitals and extend itself more.

Treaty Modifications

Greece would, in principle, favour discussions regarding improvements to the CFSP and CSDP. While no specific areas for improvement were identified by interviewees, they noted that any discussions and potential support would be dependent on the timing and political context.

4.9 Hungary

4.9.1 CFSP

Decision-Making

Hungary rejects compromise on the unanimous voting procedure in the Council. Any move towards the centralisation of decision-making would be unacceptable to Budapest - the veto is perceived to be Hungary's only remaining tool to influence the course of the EU. It is speculated, however, that Hungary would be ready to make compromises on the voting issue in exchange for concessions in the ongoing Article 7 procedure against the country. Hungary could potentially support giving up unanimity on human rights issues and those related to the old Petersberg tasks.⁷ Budapest, nonetheless, would oppose giving up veto powers in matters of hard security.

Enhanced Cooperation and Cooperation Outside the EU Framework

Hungary is content to stay out of enhanced cooperation alliances on many issues and reluctant to see their expansion as it would weaken its veto leverage. Hungary could support enhanced cooperation on short-term foreign policy goals but not in mid- and long-term goals.

There is ambiguity on its views towards differentiated integration outside the EU. While Hungary appears to not be resistant to these arrangements, it wishes to stay inside the EU's inner circle. Any slippage to an outer circle or secondary membership would, again, strip Hungary of its leverage. Policymakers, furthermore, outlined that Hungary is interested in less rather than more integration.

⁷ See <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/petersberg-tasks.html>



4.9.2 CSDP

Constructive Abstention

Hungary is not overly supportive of this tool. A possible concession would involve Budapest accepting the procedure as long as it is not precedent-setting and not linked to QMV in CFSP. Hungary would generally prefer the instrument be avoided, though, as it could weaken its veto power.

Coalitions of the Willing and PESCO

Hungary is open to coalitions of the willing as long as common European funds are not used for their implementation. And Hungary is generally supportive of PESCO and open to more engagement therein.

The EU's Solidarity Clause (Art. 222 TFEU) and the EU's Mutual Assistance Clause (Art. 42(7) TEU)

No clear position has been identified. The mutual assistance clause would be in the interest of Hungary if better framed and agreed upon by all Member States.

4.9.3 Institutional Adaptations and Treaty Modifications

More Powers to the European Commission and the European Parliament

The Council comes first for Hungary, and Budapest wants not more but fewer powers in foreign policy for the European Commission and the European Parliament. Two participants also pointed to the precedent-setting nature of European reforms: according to the Hungarian perception, “everybody is out there to get Hungary”, so if Budapest allows Pandora’s box to be opened, it will only provide more avenues to “punish” the country.

Treaty Modifications

Policymakers unanimously agree that Hungary is not interested in treaty modifications or institutional adaptations, as those would likely result in relinquishing some existing Member State competencies in foreign policy. As framed by one participant, treaty modification is only possible if it is fully in line with Hungarian national interests – i.e. deeper cooperation with third countries in the global East or South in accordance with the Hungarian government’s ‘Eastern opening’ and ‘Southern opening’ geopolitical strategies.

4.10 Ireland

4.10.1 CFSP

Decision-Making

Following Russia’s aggression and the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe, indications point to cautious support for QMV in CFSP building up in Ireland. Dublin, however,



is opposed to the extension of QMV to CSDP – this stance is shaped by the government’s efforts to protect Irish neutrality and maintain its distinct security and defence profile through its veto power. The ardent public resistance to anything resembling the “militarisation of the EU” makes openness to QMV, even the *passerelle* clause format in CSDP, too far a stretch for the domestic audience.

Enhanced Cooperation and Cooperation Outside the EU Framework

While Ireland seeks to maintain strong bilateral relations with the US, the UK and increasingly France, Dublin’s participation in the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) and the French-led European Intervention Initiative (EI2) is likely to be limited. Ireland appears to lack the necessary political will or even the military capability to join in such initiatives outside the EU. All interviewees were explicit: Dublin will not join any UK-led military or defence framework despite the strong need for defence cooperation between Ireland and the UK.

Any initiatives seeking to promulgate further CFSP/CSDP integration are perceived as potential bargaining chips to secure concessions in other policy areas. As such, while Ireland itself cannot or will not participate in further CFSP or CSDP integration, it also is unlikely to block such initiatives. According to the interviewees, this is because Ireland wants to be seen as a “good citizen” in the EU.

4.10.2 CSDP

Constructive Abstention

Ireland will most likely approach constructive abstention on a case-by-case basis and lend its guarded support for the mechanism. The inclusion of constructive abstention in the European Peace Facility (EPF) on providing lethal military equipment was largely due to the insistence of Ireland. As such, Dublin is supportive of its use on CFSP/CSDP issues.

The unanimity rules, with the option of constructive abstention, have been important in providing a compelling domestic argument justifying Ireland’s participation in the CFSP/CSDP. Ireland, nonetheless, continues to prefer unanimity in CSDP decision-making and the robust mandate it affords EU CSDP.

Coalitions of the Willing and PESCO

The Irish perspective on coalitions of the willing is context-dependent and contingent on the purpose of the ‘coalition’. While the term in Ireland has been tainted by the legacy of the Iraq War, Afghanistan and Libya, Dublin still expresses open-mindedness to the concept. Were certain EU Member States to plan to undertake military missions, Ireland would be unlikely to oppose such plans. Interviewees, however, stressed that Irish participation in any coalitions of the willing would likely be limited due to constitutional and political constraints. Any ‘coalition of the willing’ would also need to be granted a UN mandate to gain Ireland’s military participation. It is unlikely, therefore, that Ireland would participate in any coalitions.



For Ireland, participation in PESCO projects remains politically controversial. PESCO has garnered considerable attention in the Irish Parliament (Dáil); it is, notably, seen as potentially threatening Irish neutrality. Despite these domestic challenges, Ireland still participates in PESCO projects which do not involve the development or provision of “lethal equipment”. Acceptable PESCO projects encompass those that deal with surveillance, security, peacekeeping and humanitarian aid.

The EU's Solidarity Clause (Art. 222 TFEU) and the EU's Mutual Assistance Clause (Art. 42(7) TEU)

On Art. 42(7) TEU, there is no real ongoing discussion in Ireland. The interviewees stated that in accordance with Protocol 10, Ireland can provide non-military assistance should the article be invoked. After the clause was triggered by France in 2015, nevertheless, Ireland increased its indirect military assistance through participation in relevant UN peacekeeping operations. Ireland currently lacks sufficient defence forces capable of providing military assistance or military equipment reserves. While Ireland overall expresses support for the Art. 42(7), this backing comes with strong caveats and limitations.

There is minimal discussion in Ireland, meanwhile, about the relationship between Art. 222 and Art. 42(7). From the Irish perspective, the key difference between the two articles concerns the role of EU institutions (excluded in the case of the latter but not the former). As with Art. 42(7), Irish assistance would come in the form of humanitarian and financial aid should Art. 222 ever be invoked by an EU Member State.

4.10.3 Institutional Adaptations and Treaty Modifications

More Powers to the European Commission and the European Parliament

Ireland has adopted a context-dependent approach towards granting additional power to the European Commission when it comes to CFSP/CSDP issues. Ireland is likely to agree to delegating more competences to the Commission on issues relating to the EU defence industry and management of the European Defence Agency and European Defence Fund. Yet when it comes to defence and military issues, Ireland will presumably oppose any further effort to expand the Commission's role. Interviewees attributed this opposition to both the traditional hesitancy expressed by EU Member States and the sensitivities around “Irish neutrality”.

Dublin is also wary towards bolstering the role of the EP on CSDP matters - even in an oversight capacity.

Treaty Modifications

Domestic opposition to treaty changes will likely dissuade the government from espousing support for any such amendments for the foreseeable future.



4.11 Italy

4.11.1 CFSP

Decision-Making

Italy favours the use of QMV and stands far more open than other MS towards removing the unanimity requirement, at least regarding certain issues (e.g. sanctions) even if perhaps not others (e.g. military missions). This shift would resolutely signal that the EU is united. There is a need, however, to also weigh potential internal divisions and other obstacles that could be identified and exploited by external actors.

Enhanced Cooperation and Cooperation Outside the EU Framework

Rome also takes a constructive view towards enhanced cooperation projects in CFSP as a step forward. According to interviewees, Italy sees a need to make the EU more autonomous and independent from the US/NATO in the defence sector and to better coordinate available resources and capabilities.

4.11.2 CSDP

Constructive Abstention

Interviewees consider constructive abstention to provide a pragmatic “third way” alternative over the short-term that would facilitate a transition towards QMV in the future.

Coalitions of the Willing and PESCO

The deployment of groups of Member States assigned specific tasks by the EU Council could be prudent. The participation of the HR/VP and the involvement of Italy are the main prerequisites. France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Poland were all seen as ideal nominees for such groups. Italy could assume, for example, an important role in dealing with issues in Southern Europe and the Mediterranean region.

While there is continued support for PESCO, Italian policymaking elites underlined the need for greater information concerning concrete progress that has come from the format.

The EU's Solidarity Clause (Art. 222 TFEU) and the EU's Mutual Assistance Clause (Art. 42(7) TEU)

No specific references were made regarding Italy's position on the EU's solidarity clause nor the mutual assistance clause.

4.11.3 Institutional Adaptations and Treaty Modifications

More Powers to the European Commission and the European Parliament

There is some scepticism about giving more powers to the Commission and the EP – these moves could unnecessarily centralise decision-making processes. An alternative path would



place more emphasis on protecting national autonomy and identity even as shared EU guidelines and objectives provide an overarching framework.

Treaty Modifications

Interviewees did not make any reference to Italy's position on treaty modifications.

4.12 Poland

4.12.1 CFSP

Decision-Making

Proposals to shift to QMV are opposed by Poland undergirded by the country's desire to protect its key security and national interests in EU foreign and security policy debates. The idea that Germany and France, for example, could decide Warsaw's foreign policy without a Polish say is unfathomable. The switch to QMV, additionally, would strengthen the dominance of some MS at the expense of others and it might detrimentally impact European unity. According to Poland, a supposed divergence in threat assessments across Member States renders the use of mechanisms aimed at circumventing unanimity, such as the *passerelle* clause, as likely to increase these divergences and threaten political cohesion.

Enhanced Cooperation and Cooperation Outside the EU Framework

When it comes to enhanced cooperation, Polish fears abound that it will lead to differentiated integration and could see Warsaw "left behind" in CFSP decision-making processes. Enhanced cooperation and the special Member State task force proposals were often linked by interviewees. According to these experts, it is essential that Poland consents to, participates in and/or gives binding instructions to such groups and that their procedures are not ad hoc. It can therefore be inferred that Poland would prefer a more formalised format. Yet enhanced cooperation contradicts its wishes to preserve EU unity.

Interviewees from Poland were more sanguine regarding cooperation outside the EU framework than they were towards enhanced cooperation so long as Poland's involvement was assured. The experts cited examples of Poland's bilateral relations (e.g. Turkey, South Korea). They also underscored that such formats should include partners, such as the UK and US, important to Poland in terms of security, defence and foreign policy.

4.12.2 CSDP

Constructive Abstention

Poland would more likely than not oppose the use of constructive abstention, concerned that it may detrimentally affect political unity in the EU. As the argument goes, decisions under the EU banner would no longer be necessarily backed by the entire group. One interviewee, furthermore, mentioned that constructive abstention "ruins the logic of Article 44" (coalitions



of the willing), according to which actions not agreed upon by all Member States are supposed to be conducted outside the framework of the EU.

Coalitions of the Willing and PESCO

Ambiguity appears to be the hallmark concerning Poland's view towards coalitions of the willing. While Poland would generally prefer to avoid these arrangements, the country has refrained from outright dismissing them.

Poland is also generally open to further engagement through the PESCO framework. From a Polish perspective, PESCO can play a role in bolstering its security and defence capabilities. It is also favoured as a flexible format that is not expected to overburden Member States with too many commitments. That said, Poland believes the format, is also hobbled by divergent threat perceptions and national interests. Another risk concerns the possibility that it could promote too much interdependency. If the goal is to promote Member State cooperation, Poland would rather widen PESCO inclusiveness by including like-minded countries such as the US, UK, Norway and other NATO countries.

The EU's Solidarity Clause (Art. 222 TFEU) and the EU's Mutual Assistance Clause (Art. 42(7) TEU)

Poland sees no benefit in further defining implementation procedures for these clauses. It would, according to the Polish view, be a thorny task with insufficient benefits - NATO has already forged consensus on similar matters over many decades.

As it pertains specifically to Article 42(7), its further operationalisation will come with risks including the possibility that it may prove counterproductive against the backdrop of NATO's own response protocols. The worry is that operationalisation of the clause would represent a de facto statement of isolationism (i.e. the EU does not want NATO to ensure its security) that would diminish Alliance cohesion over the medium-term and leave the EU unable to adequately counter future threats.

Though there appears to be a reduced risk with respect to Article 222 compared to Article 42(7), Poland is not any more interested in further developing the clause.

4.12.3 Institutional Adaptations and Treaty Modifications

More Powers to the European Commission and the European Parliament

Poland opposes the strengthening of the Commission's CFSP/CSDP powers. Concerns that the EU will neglect Poland's existential interests are driving this stance.

In contrast to this position, Poland holds a more constructive stance on the potential for an expanded EP role. The Parliament could, for instance, gain additional competences in steering the strategic direction/setting the agenda for CFSP/CSDP.



Treaty Modifications

Poland is rather sceptical regarding the matter of treaty change. There is no need for new mechanisms; attention rather should be directed at making better use of “untapped potential” under the current system. Two directions mentioned by interviewees herein include an emphasis on improving EU leadership and the performance of the High Representative – neither of these requires treaty change according to the Polish view.

4.13 Slovakia

4.13.1 CFSP

Decision-Making

Slovakia does not have a straightforward position on QMV in CFSP. The country fervently appreciates the unity and solidarity the EU provides to Europe and worries that abolishing unanimity could disturb this dynamic. Bratislava, however, remains open to further exploring options. Important questions concern how expeditiously decisions could be adopted compared to the status quo and how financial appropriations would be covered following a move to QMV. There is also a need to ascertain and examine public opinion on the matter. Slovakia would, nevertheless, be more open to supporting such a move if it was also accompanied by a clear set of rules that define the level of action and commitments eligible for majority voting procedures. Certain topics, notably, should remain consensus based. And the EU should heed the fact that majority rule in CFSP is more complicated than perhaps other areas. There is a risk that some actions adopted by majority vote in this sphere could lead to a major crisis. The possibility that Member States objecting to any particular decision could resist action is particularly disconcerting.

Enhanced Cooperation and Cooperation Outside the EU Framework

Enhanced cooperation is also an area where Slovakia lacks a firm position. The country is generally inclined towards supporting enhanced cooperation recognising that it may increase the effectiveness of the EU’s ability to act. Slovak policymakers, though, are concerned about how political responsibility will be divided among participating MS considering they represent the entire Union. Slovakia, meanwhile, holds no clear position on cooperation outside the EU framework.

4.13.2 CSDP

Constructive Abstention

Policymaking elites in Slovakia, by and large, see any revival of constructive abstention as opening the door towards more flexibility between Member States in their decision-making. Member States may gain the opportunity to learn more about issues off their radar and capability screens without obstructing progress for MS that wish to act. A disadvantage to this approach concerns the possibility that Member States may attempt to become “free riders.”



Coalitions of the Willing and PESCO

When it comes to coalitions of the willing, the same concern arises as to who will assume political responsibility for certain actions. Slovakia, here, would rather lean towards embracing the use of QMV for certain types of operations and missions to enhance their effectiveness. The coalitions of the willing approach, however, may not attract the strategic interest of some MS. Hence, QMV in certain concrete areas would be preferable, for instance, civilian missions.

Policymakers in Slovakia consider PESCO to be an excellent instrument for capacity building. The country strongly supports PESCO and stands particularly content with its current development. It would, however, prefer participants put an emphasis on fulfilling present ambitions and realistic goals through concrete outputs rather than putting forward more and newer aspirations. Slovakia believes that PESCO should be used for information sharing among Member States regarding their capabilities and the harmonisation of necessary tools. PESCO should also put greater stress on generating effective and efficient outcomes as it transitions from higher politics.

The EU's Solidarity Clause (Art. 222 TFEU) and the EU's Mutual Assistance Clause (Art. 42(7) TEU)

There is minimal debate about the 'solidarity clause' in Slovakia. The country generally would be unlikely to oppose its use but lacks a firm opinion. Slovakia, similarly, has not developed a resolute position on the 'mutual assistance clause'. This latter clause is perceived as beneficial to Member States – Slovakia, therefore, is seen as tacitly approving of it. But domestic politics would play a critical role too - political leaders are not often active on some of these issues. Opponents, therefore, can sometimes seize the narrative and distort public opinion.

As a strong advocate for transatlantic security, Slovakia also wonders whether the provision holds the same significance for EU MS that are also NATO members. NATO's Article 5 rather serves an important role in collective defence and hence most would opt to activate this clause in an emergency. And considering the latest NATO enlargement round, Slovakia perceives that other Member States would rather opt for Article 5 too.

4.13.3 Institutional Adaptations and Treaty Modifications

More powers to the European Commission and the European Parliament

Interviewees made no specific references to the positions of Slovakia on allocating more powers to the European Commission or the European Parliament.

Treaty Modifications

Policymakers believe that Slovakia is quite flexible and would be willing to support those institutional adaptations or treaty modifications that would bring about some real improvements and could be agreed upon by the entire Union.



4.14 Spain

4.14.1 CFSP

Decision-Making

The potential move to using QMV in EU foreign policy represents an acceptable and even desirable move for Madrid. Spain's position in this regard is vastly different to the one it held about five years ago when it found itself considerably less open to this shift. Unanimity is now perceived as a tool for those countries, unlike Spain, that do not feel comfortable with a truly European foreign policy. Spain's perception that these sceptical views have become prevalent across the EU has only further incentivised Madrid to distance itself from European capitals that tend to throw spanners in the works. As a country that is deeply committed to European integration (e.g. it was one of the early supporters of the broadening of QMV in Maastricht), Spain has come to view the implementation of QMV in foreign policy as a natural evolution, with many more pros than cons. This new position has been openly expressed via a non-paper on EU strategic autonomy produced by Spain and the Netherlands in 2021, which stated the following:

Strengthening the ability of the EU to defend its public interests and increasing its open strategic autonomy calls for effective decision-making mechanisms. It could therefore be useful to explore in which areas the extension of qualified majority voting is possible, limiting – where possible and desirable- the instances where unanimity hampers the EU's capability to act (Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021b).

This stance comes with a few caveats though. Spain is not entirely comfortable with a system that permits the Commission and/or the EEAS to 'pre-cook' some of the decisions (e.g. in the framework of the G7 and G20) by not giving Member States sufficient time for a proper appraisal. Madrid would also want to see more transparency pertaining to decisions and proposals brought forward for consideration by the EU-27 still "open for discussion" or with strings attached and therefore not subject to much modification.

Enhanced Cooperation and Cooperation Outside the EU Framework

Spain is generally reluctant to pursue enhanced cooperation within the CFSP framework apart from existing arrangements that already allow for differentiated integration. One interviewee claimed that Spain has always expressed such hesitancy to introducing "flexibilities". That said, one interviewee stressed that Spain is less focused on pursuing the ideal of unanimity today and instead towards participating as part of the core group of countries driving CFSP forward.

4.14.2 CSDP

Constructive Abstention

Spain's traditional reluctance towards integrating flexible arrangements into the EU's design and decision-making processes extended to constructive abstention. Spain's support for the



use of QMV in CFSP, though, suggests that any prior objections to constructive abstention (often seen as a less politically sensitive alternative to QMV) would be less vehement at present. However, Spain would rather institutionalise QMV in CFSP than rely on a constructive abstention tool that depends on the goodwill of Member State(s) to merely express their reservations about a particular course of action without blocking it.

Coalitions of the Willing and PESCO

Spain is generally reluctant towards pursuing enhanced cooperation within the CSDP framework beyond existing arrangements that already allow for differentiated integration (e.g. PESCO).

Spain regarded the establishment of PESCO in December 2017 as an exceptionally positive step forward. As one interviewee pointed out, Spain is involved in 25 of 60 ongoing and/or in-development PESCO projects, placing the country among the most active participants within the framework.⁸ Spain's approach to PESCO is both inward-looking (i.e. a focus on strengthening already existing instruments and deepening levels of cooperation with an emphasis on eventually integrating all EU Member States) and outward-looking (i.e. opening up the initiative to non-EU MS). This is consistent with Spain and the EU's narrative that PESCO and NATO are fully compatible and need to be brought closer together. Madrid regards the EU and NATO as the two key pillars of the European security architecture, with one reinforcing the other. The Spanish approach to PESCO is pragmatic, in the sense that it seeks to carefully monitor the allocation of scarce resources. Spain avoids making commitments to PESCO that it cannot implement with full guarantees.

The EU's Solidarity Clause (Art. 222 TFEU) and the EU's Mutual Assistance Clause (Art. 42(7) TEU)

While the solidarity clause (Art. 222 TFEU) was not discussed, Spanish interviewees addressed Art. 42(7) TEU. Spain believes there is no contradiction between strengthening EU defence and NATO. One interviewee recalled that Article 42.7 TEU makes explicit reference to NATO by specifying that "commitments and cooperation in this area shall be consistent with commitments under the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation which, for those countries that are members of it, remains the foundation of their collective defence and the forum for its implementation".

4.14.3 Institutional Adaptations and Treaty Modifications

More Powers to the European Commission and the European Parliament

As a way of strengthening CFSP/CSDP, Spain favours granting the European Commission a more significant role (it has already done so, inter alia, through the launch of the EDF). This

⁸ For comparison, here are the number of PESCO projects each of the 14 MS is involved in: Belgium – 12, Bulgaria – 6, Cyprus – 9, Estonia – 7, Finland – 5, France – 44, Germany – 23, Greece – 18, Hungary – 11, Ireland – 1, Italy – 30, Poland – 13, Slovakia – 6, Spain – 25.



step would go hand-in-hand with a move towards QMV, with the final goal being to achieve more resourceful, resolute and agile European external action. However, it is Spain's view that for this to happen the Commission must enhance its transparency when taking part in bilateral and multilateral negotiations on behalf of the EU-27.

Similarly, Spain believes that the European Parliament should play a greater role in foreign policy matters, especially if CFSP evolves substantively and if QMV is adopted, but even in its current configuration. This position - "the more, the merrier" according to one interviewee – backs an enriched public debate on EU external action. Furthermore, the Parliament is viewed as a natural ally in Spain's quest to increase the European Commission's transparency and ensure that a move towards greater supranationalism does not result in excessive discretion on the part of EU institutions and Member State disengagement.

Treaty Modifications

Interviewees made no references to potential treaty modifications.



5 Finding Acceptability? Analysing Member State Appetite for Reforms

The past few years have seen renewed proposals for changes and enhanced use of available mechanisms aimed at fostering a more effective and coherent EU foreign policy and increased European-level defence and security. Taking a keen eye towards these developments, several observations can be noted. These include: 1) some principled and, at times, proactive support for more rapid and flexible decision-making exists though MS are not currently in agreement on immediate changes; 2) the unused or underused legal bases in the EU treaties – the so-called ‘sleeping beauties’ – are generally perceived as promising for strengthening the effectiveness of CFSP/CSDP; 3) differentiated integration initiatives in CSDP are largely seen as beneficial, as demonstrated by PESCO, even as built-in complexities in the operationalisation and a lack of legal clarity keep MS wary of commitments to additional arrangements; and 4) treaty changes, including granting more powers to the European Commission and the European Parliament, do not find wide support among national policymaking elites. Policymaking elites differed from country to country on *when* more flexible decision-making is to be applied, *which* ‘sleeping beauties’ should be deployed, *how* these arrangements should be implemented, and *how* to further enhance mechanisms that are already being employed.

Table 2: Overview of the Interview Results in Respective Member States

Country	Unaccepting and rather unaccepting	Somewhat (un)accepting, no clarity in position	Accepting and rather accepting
Belgium	Constructive abstention	Mutual assistance clause (art 42) Treaty modifications	QMV Enhanced cooperation Cooperation outside EU structures Coalitions of the willing (art 44) More PESCO Solidarity clause (art 222) More powers to the EP More powers to the Commission
Bulgaria	QMV Enhanced cooperation Cooperation outside EU structures More powers to the EP More powers to the Commission Treaty modifications	Coalitions of the willing (art 44) Mutual assistance clause (art 42)	More PESCO
Cyprus	QMV Treaty modifications	Cooperation outside EU structures	Enhanced cooperation More PESCO



Estonia	Constructive abstention Treaty modifications	More powers to the EP More powers to the Commission Enhanced cooperation Mutual assistance clause (art 42)	QMV Cooperation outside EU structures Coalitions of the willing (art 44) More PESCO Solidarity clause (art 222)
Finland	Constructive abstention More powers to the EP More powers to the Commission Treaty modifications		QMV Enhanced cooperation Cooperation outside EU structures Coalitions of the willing (art 44) More PESCO Solidarity clause (art 222) Mutual assistance clause (art 42)
France	QMV (with exceptions) More powers to the EP More powers to the Commission	Treaty modifications	Enhanced cooperation Cooperation outside EU structures Constructive abstention Coalitions of the willing (art 44) More PESCO Solidarity clause (art 222) Mutual assistance clause (art 42)
Germany	More powers to the EP More powers to the Commission Treaty modifications	Enhanced cooperation Cooperation outside EU structures Coalitions of the willing (art 44) Mutual assistance clause (art 42)	QMV Constructive abstention More PESCO Solidarity clause (art 222)
Greece	QMV More powers to the EP	Enhanced cooperation Cooperation outside EU structures Constructive abstention Coalitions of the willing (art 44) Solidarity clause (art 222) Mutual assistance clause (art 42) More powers to the Commission Treaty modifications	More PESCO
Hungary	QMV Treaty modifications More powers to the EP	Enhanced cooperation Cooperation outside EU structures Constructive abstention	More PESCO



Ireland	More powers to the Commission	Coalitions of the willing (art 44) Solidarity clause (art 222) Mutual assistance clause (art 42)	
	More PESCO More powers to the EP Treaty modifications	QMV Enhanced cooperation Cooperation outside EU structures Constructive abstention Coalitions of the willing (art 44) Solidarity clause (art 222) Mutual assistance clause (art 42)	More powers to the Commission
Italy		More powers to the EP More powers to the Commission Solidarity clause (art 222) Mutual assistance clause (art 42)	QMV Enhanced cooperation Constructive abstention Coalitions of the willing (art 44) More PESCO
Poland	QMV Enhanced cooperation Cooperation outside EU structures Constructive abstention More powers to the Commission Treaty modifications	Coalitions of the willing (art 44) More PESCO Solidarity clause (art 222) Mutual assistance clause (art 42) More powers to the EP	
Spain	Enhanced cooperation	Cooperation outside EU structures Constructive abstention Coalitions of the willing (art 44)	QMV More PESCO Mutual assistance clause (art 42) More powers to the EP More powers to the Commission
Slovakia		QMV Enhanced cooperation Coalitions of the willing (art 44) Solidarity clause (art 222) Mutual assistance clause (art 42)	Cooperation outside EU structures More PESCO

Source: Interviews conducted with policymaking elite (March–September 2022)

While treading cautiously and acknowledging the limitations of the data, there is an apparent general consensus around reform proposals and improved use of underutilised mechanisms related to enhanced cooperation initiatives, cooperation outside the EU structures, coalitions of the willing (Art. 44), PESCO, the solidarity clause (Art. 222) and the mutual assistance clause



(Art. 42). There is more dissent, meanwhile, against granting additional power to the European Parliament and the Commission and pursuing treaty modifications. Member States appear to lack a uniform or firm stance on proposals related to decision-making through QMV and the use of constructive abstention. This ambivalence could provide some latitude and manoeuvring space during future negotiations. Using a semaphore system, Table 2 assigns different examined proposals and underused mechanisms under 'acceptable' (green), 'in between' (yellow) and 'unacceptable' (red) for each of the 14 MS. Furthermore, Table 3 presents the general state of play to identify the pockets of general support and issues that represent the 'third rail' of CFSP/CSDP reform.

Table 3: Cumulative Interview Results

More powers to the EP More powers to the Commission Treaty modifications	QMV (division yes/no) Constructive abstention (real mix)	Enhanced cooperation Cooperation outside EU structures More PESCO Coalitions of the willing (art 44) (leaning yes) Mutual assistance clause (art 42) (leaning yes) Solidarity clause (art 222) (leaning yes)
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Source: Interviews conducted with policymaking elite (March–September 2022)

There is considerable ambiguity with respect to views on moving towards QMV in CFSP even as policymakers resent the currently sluggish speed of the decision-making process (yellow semaphore light). While Belgium, Germany, Italy and Spain outright back shifting to QMV, others like Poland, Hungary, Greece and Cyprus express ardent opposition to these considerations. A final group of MS, including Slovakia, Ireland, France and Estonia, are open to the use of QMV in certain cases and under specific conditions.

While decision-making through unanimity is expected to persevere in the short-term, other tools to speed up and enhance EU external action are considered, on the whole, to be acceptable solutions (green semaphore light). Enhanced cooperation and cooperation outside of the EU framework, in particular, are now perceived as viable options. The main caveat to pursuing these arrangements concerns the need to allow all willing MS participate. The EU must strive for inclusivity and keep all MS informed. Most Member States also see a benefit to their national interests from cooperation outside the EU framework and from the EU engaging with third countries in such formats.

As far as CSDP is concerned, 'constructive abstention' remains an intriguing option (yellow semaphore light). It has seldom been employed, last in connection to the European Peace Facility, and the mechanism is seen by some as a prudent middle ground between unanimity and QMV. It ostensibly addresses the sensitive concerns of some MS (e.g. Ireland's 'neutrality'). But others view it as an empty vessel that could even prove disruptive to EU unity (Hungary, Estonia, Finland).



Meanwhile, 'coalitions of the willing' and increased engagement in PESCO find the greatest support among the 14 MS (green semaphore light). On the one hand, Member States are more reserved in their openness to groups of willing and able MS pursuing engagement and representing the EU under Art. 44 TEU. Since the mechanism has not yet been used, policymaking elites appear to differ in their interpretations on its content.

PESCO, for its part, is regarded as flexible and beneficial for capacity-building, enhancing interoperability and engaging with other MS and even third countries. The broad acceptance of PESCO and the willingness to deepen and broaden the initiative can be attributed both to its familiarity and the minimal divisiveness attached to it. Some concerns remain related to a lack of specific outputs and deliverables and the need for more transparency with respect to PESCO projects (Germany, Belgium, Finland).

The EU's 'solidarity clause' (Art. 222 TFEU) and the 'mutual assistance clause' (Art. 42(7) TEU) enjoy broad acceptability among MS (green semaphore lights). Some, like France (the only MS to invoke Art. 42(7)), value these clauses as essential and necessary. While both clauses garner approval, in principle, the cumbersome process involved in invoking Art. 222 and the lack of clarity in the implementation of the clauses hold MS back from declaring them useful mechanisms. Additionally, there is a perceived tug-of-war between NATO's Art. 5 and EU's Art. 42(7).

Policymakers provided various solutions to improve the EU's ability to act in the world and make its external action more effective, coherent and sustainable. French and German elites, to this end, agreed the implementation of existing texts and the capacity to act under them should be prioritised over any revision to the texts and/or the development of new documents. German policymakers further emphasised the importance of consolidating and achieving existing goals prior to elevating EU ambitions even further. The bloc's goals need to be credible for the EU to be seen as a global actor rather than merely an aspirational entity. While French policymaking elites would also prefer to prioritise existing frameworks before moving to treaty changes, they tended to stress the need for a "high level of ambition". Belgian stakeholders, on the other hand, favour reforms that would require treaty changes, including those aimed at modifying the institutional CFSP architecture. Although Belgian respondents were the only elites that explicitly mentioned their support for treaty reform, German and French respondents clarified that they would not be opposed to such changes over the long-term. Amid a complex environment and the inevitably long and potentially unsuccessful road towards a new treaty, MS are not prepared to give the go-ahead to beginning negotiations on treaty changes (red semaphore light).

Some sort of institutional realignment, however, seemed to resonate with policymaking elites from Estonia, Finland, Poland and Greece. These respondents highlighted the need for reform to the functioning of the EEAS (including its geographical balance), a clarification of the roles and mandates of the HR/VP and stronger cooperation between the EEAS and the Commission to increase coherence within the institutions (horizontal). Prospects, therefore, remain for picking up enough backing to give impetus to delegating some additional power to the Commission, as long as the outputs simultaneously lead to both more effective EU external



action and safeguarding of the national interests of Member States (not changing the current balance of power) (red semaphore light).

Yet this same prospect for openness to granting more powers to the European Parliament appears to be absent (red semaphore light). Some Member States, though, envision the EP playing a more prominent role in strategic development, oversight and fostering closer cooperation with MS.

Common ground, finally, was found between Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain and Ireland on placing an emphasis on the substance of EU external action instead of merely on the process. Policymaking elites suggested that a broad rethink of foreign and security policy as a concept is needed, including more discussion around the main issues dividing Member States and a common assessment of threats. There is also a need to forge a common strategic culture and develop more effective decision-making and response structures in EU external action.



6 Conclusion

The EU will be unable to advance towards coherent, sustainable and effective external action until common ground is found between national policymaking elites. The goal of this working paper was to gain deeper insights into 1) the foreign policy priorities of Member States (thus also referencing ENGAGE Working Papers [7](#) and [12](#)); 2) perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the EU's current range of policy areas; and 3) perceptions regarding existing reform proposals and underused mechanisms (as identified in ENGAGE Working Papers [4](#), [5](#) and [6](#) and in existing strategic documents studied in task 10.1) and the openness of MS politically to these ideas.

Recent years have witnessed renewed efforts to advance existing proposals for reforms in the EU in the field of foreign and security policy. Apart from the numerous crises that have occurred over the past ten years and pressing external threats, the EU foreign and security policy faces strategic, political and structural challenges. The Union needs to resolve its internal differences to better implement its external relations effectively.

The Lisbon Treaty introduced a set of promising tools and mechanisms that could improve the effectiveness and coherence of CFSP and CSDP, but they are primarily underutilised or find themselves not used at all. Our data reveals that there is a divide among Member States on the acceptability of different potential reforms. Even MS that genuinely back certain reforms remain ambivalent about actively advocating for their enactment, underscoring a lack of political leadership. Most MS that boast generally favourable attitudes towards reforms, in fact, are not willing to take the “driver’s seat” (e.g. Belgium). Other MS, meanwhile, lack confidence in the ability of the EU to be a global actor. The EU’s mechanisms, to this point, often merely serve as tools to protect the national interests of countries (e.g. Poland). Some MS place elevated importance on other formats such as NATO, the UN, OSCE and regional cooperation arrangements.

The perceptions of Member States are also often influenced by domestic instability and domestic political crises that can contribute to governments assuming cautious and ambiguous policy positions (e.g. Bulgaria and Slovakia). The prioritisation of national interests, in this regard, may lead to a single point of departure in forming clear positions on EU policies and the acceptability of reforms. Additionally, not all Member States seek an active role in foreign and security matters and some are rather willing to trust the process so long as core MS such as France or Germany and/or most MS are in favour (e.g. Cyprus).

The Russian war in Ukraine has seemingly prompted MS to disregard their differences and divergent perceptions regarding foreign policy priorities and instead emphasise speed and effectiveness with respect to future action. The general openness to the use of differentiated integration mechanisms (entrusting the few to represent the Union) might be a product of the current pressing external threat. The broad support revealed for the solidarity and mutual assistance clauses, furthermore, can also be potentially attributed to the war. EU MS geographically closer to Ukraine appear to indicate increased openness towards unused and



underused mechanisms (apart from QMV, delegating more powers to EU institutions and new treaty modifications) though it is pure speculation whether the conflict has impacted these views. Openness to changes that would diminish the veto power or the current balance in the EU, nonetheless, remains low. This suggests that any changes in the acceptability of reforms occurs strictly following self-assessments by countries of their national interests and their ability to trust other MS and the Union more broadly.

While this working paper focused on examining the acceptability towards proposed reforms in CFSP and CSDP by national policymaking elites, it also uncovered that institutional amendments alone are not enough to ensure effective, coherent and sustainable external action. The views of MS differ on EU external action and accompanying challenges. Their perceptions are informed by various sets of factors (internal and external). EU decision-making in its external action is complex capturing three elements: 1) a common strategic culture; 2) political will; and 3) institutional and legal structures. Some institutional changes are plausible to envision, with the findings revealing room for negotiation and manoeuvre among MS. A lack of legal clarity and the cumbersome process it will take to awaken 'sleeping beauties', however, might complicate the process. No substantial results, nevertheless, can be achieved until a robust common strategic culture is established and accepted (the Strategic Compass has commenced the process but further Member State work on better understanding what EU external action entails is needed). This process would identify and legitimise universally agreeable and vital EU strategic interests. While the opportunity to use different decision-making mechanisms and various formats to take action are important to the EU external action toolbox, the substance, based on strategic culture and political will, is as essential as ever.



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Appendix 1: Survey Results

This working paper initially aimed to gather data from representatives of all EU Member States (MS). However, since conducting semi-structured interviews was not feasible with all MS, the research teams carried out interviews across 14 MS and sent out surveys to the other 13 MS. The survey was distributed among policymakers and experts in the following countries: Austria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Sweden.

The surveys were collected online via the secure GDPR-compliant SurveyMonkey platform. To match the selection criteria to the best extent possible, the research team extensively mapped out stakeholders across all 13 countries. Within each country, approximately 50 key stakeholders, representatives and policymakers were identified from Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Prime Ministers/Chancellery, Ministries of Defence, Embassies to the EU, Political and Security Committees, Embassies to NATO and think tanks and academia. The goal was to target a minimum of 30–40 people in each Member State and obtain at least 10 responses per country. To make the surveys more accessible to national policymakers and experts, the surveys were also translated into the national languages of the respective countries, with respondents provided the option to respond in English or their national languages.

The survey was additionally divided into three parts: EU foreign policy and the EU capability to act, proposals of reforms (CFSP, CSDP, institutional adaptations and treaty modifications) and the EU's External Action Toolbox. The survey respondents were able to choose their area of expertise and focus on answering the most relevant parts of the survey.

The survey commenced in March 2022 and the first round of emails was sent out by the end of the month in all respective countries. The number of responses was evaluated on a weekly basis. Following the first round of emails, the research team noted a very low response rate at around two responses per country on average. For this reason, a second round of invitations to participate in the survey was sent out in June 2022. Following an additional thorough review concerning the response rate in each country, the research team decided to launch a third round of invitations and extend the deadline for survey completion. The third round of invites was disseminated in August 2022 and officially concluded at the end of September 2022.

The overall response rate stood at 6.5% following the three rounds of survey invites. As this rate does not constitute a representative sample (the planned response rate was 20% or 130 responses), the data was not included in the main analysis of the paper. As it pertains to the gender ratio of the survey, women comprised 27.9% of respondents and men 69.8%, with 2.3% (1 respondent) indicating they prefer not to say.

Two main lessons can be drawn in relation to conducting surveys among national policymaking elites: 1) collecting data through a survey for this target group is not advantageous and 2) in circumstances where a survey is the selected method for collecting data, brevity and simplicity should be prioritised.



The main findings of the survey are presented in Table 4. They represent the respondents' country acceptability towards reforms in the areas of CFSP and CSDP, institutional adaptations and treaty modifications.

Table 4: (Speculative) Overview of the Survey Results in Respective Member States

Country	Unaccepting and rather unaccepting	Somewhat (un)accepting, no clarity in position	Accepting and rather accepting
Austria	Cooperation outside EU structures More powers to the EP More powers to the Commission Treaty modifications	QMV Enhanced cooperation Constructive abstention Solidarity clause (art 222) Mutual assistance clause (art 42)	'Enabling clause' Art. 31(2) TEU <i>Passerelle</i> clause Art. 31(3) TEU Coalitions of the willing (art 44) More PESCO
Czech Republic	QMV More powers to the EP	'Enabling clause' Art. 31(2) TEU <i>Passerelle</i> clause Art. 31(3) TEU Enhanced cooperation Cooperation outside EU structures Constructive abstention Coalitions of the willing (art 44) More powers to the Commission Treaty modifications	More PESCO Solidarity clause (art 222) Mutual assistance clause (art 42)
Croatia	Cooperation outside EU structures	QMV 'Enabling clause' Art. 31(2) TEU <i>Passerelle</i> clause Art. 31(3) TEU Enhanced cooperation Constructive abstention	Coalitions of the willing (art 44) More PESCO Solidarity clause (art 222) Mutual assistance clause (art 42) More powers to the EP More powers to the Commission Treaty modifications
Denmark	QMV <i>Passerelle</i> clause Art. 31(3) TEU Treaty modifications	'Enabling clause' Art. 31(2) TEU Enhanced cooperation Constructive abstention More powers to the EP	Cooperation outside EU structures Coalitions of the willing (art 44) More PESCO Solidarity clause (art 222) Mutual assistance clause (art 42) More powers to the Commission
Latvia	More powers to the EP	QMV	<i>Passerelle</i> clause Art. 31(3) TEU



Lithuania		'Enabling clause' Art. 31(2) TEU Enhanced cooperation Cooperation outside EU structures Coalitions of the willing (art 44) Treaty modifications	Constructive abstention More PESCO More powers to the Commission
	More powers to the EP	QMV 'Enabling clause' Art. 31(2) TEU <i>Passerelle</i> clause Art. 31(3) TEU Enhanced cooperation Cooperation outside EU structures Constructive abstention Solidarity clause (art 222) Mutual assistance clause (art 42)	Constructive abstention Coalitions of the willing (art 44) More PESCO More powers to the Commission Treaty modifications
Luxembourg			QMV
Malta	QMV Cooperation outside EU structures More PESCO	'Enabling clause' Art. 31(2) TEU <i>Passerelle</i> clause Art. 31(3) TEU More powers to the EP More powers to the Commission Treaty modifications	Enhanced cooperation Constructive abstention Coalitions of the willing (art 44) Solidarity clause (art 222) Mutual assistance clause (art 42)
Netherlands		QMV 'Enabling clause' Art. 31(2) TEU <i>Passerelle</i> clause Art. 31(3) TEU Enhanced cooperation Cooperation outside EU structures Constructive abstention Solidarity clause (art 222) More powers to the EP Treaty modifications	Coalitions of the willing (art 44) More PESCO Mutual assistance clause (art 42) More powers to the Commission
Portugal	QMV 'Enabling clause' Art. 31(2) TEU <i>Passerelle</i> clause Art. 31(3) TEU	Enhanced cooperation Cooperation outside EU structures Coalitions of the willing (art 44) Solidarity clause (art 222)	Constructive abstention More PESCO Mutual assistance clause (art 42)
Romania	Coalitions of the willing (art 44)	'Enabling clause' Art. 31(2) TEU	QMV Solidarity clause (art 222)



Slovenia		<i>Passerelle</i> clause Art. 31(3) TEU Enhanced cooperation Cooperation outside EU structures Constructive abstention More PESCO	Mutual assistance clause (art 42) More powers to the EP More powers to the Commission Treaty modifications
		QMV Enhanced cooperation Cooperation outside EU structures Constructive abstention	'Enabling clause' Art. 31(2) TEU <i>Passerelle</i> clause Art. 31(3) TEU Coalitions of the willing (art 44) More PESCO Solidarity clause (art 222) Mutual assistance clause (art 42)
Sweden	QMV More powers to the EP Treaty modifications	'Enabling clause' Art. 31(2) TEU <i>Passerelle</i> clause Art. 31(3) TEU Enhanced cooperation Cooperation outside EU structures Coalitions of the willing (art 44) More PESCO	Constructive abstention Solidarity clause (art 222) Mutual assistance clause (art 42) More powers to the Commission

Source: Survey conducted with policymaking elite (March–September 2022)



Appendix 2: Selection Criteria

Table 5: Selection Criteria for Interviewees and Survey Respondents in EU Member States

Institution	Departments	Positions
Ministry of Foreign Affairs/ Europe Minister	Department for European Union policies (different names in different countries)	Deputy Ministers Head of Departments Experts
	Department for Strategy Department for Defence and Security Policy Department for Development Policy/Aid	
Prime Minister Chancellery	European Affairs Cabinet of Europe Minister	Europe Minister Chief of Staff of Europe Minister Head of Department
Ministry of Defence	Department of International Security Policy	Deputy Ministers Head of Departments Experts
	Department for the European Union Department for International Relations	
Permanent Representation to the EU	Political section	Ambassador Person responsible for CFSP
Political and Security Committee (PSC) in the EU		Ambassador/Deputy Ambassador Lower rank official
Permanent Representation to the NATO	Civilian section, in particular EU-NATO relations	Ambassador Person responsible for EU-NATO relations
Think tanks (foreign and security policy field)	EU Programs (Future of Europe, Defence and Security, EU institutions)	Director Head of Programme Experts/Fellows
Academia	Departments/Institutes of EU studies, in particular CSFP	Professors Fellows PhD

Source: own elaboration



Appendix 3: Interview Questions

CORE QUESTIONS

1. What are the reasons for the EU's lack of ability to act more effectively in foreign policy? And what would help the EU to conduct a more coherent EU foreign and security policy according to your country?
2. Which proposals for reforms for enhanced EU external action are nowadays discussed (and could be acceptable) in your country?
3. Would any institutional adaptations or new treaty modifications to improve the functioning of the CFSP/CSDP be acceptable for your country?
4. Overall, is your country satisfied with its involvement in the preparation of the EU Strategic Compass? Is this process (Member States-led) more acceptable to your country than European Global Strategy 2016 which saw the EU institutions take the lead?
5. Is it acceptable for your country to link the internal and the external dimensions of European policies so that they aid EU foreign policy goals and ambitions on the global stage?

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. How does the country assess the EU ability to act in foreign policy and how successful has the 'Geopolitical' Commission' been in influencing world affairs in accordance with the objectives it set in 2019? To what extent has the EU Global Strategy 2016 managed to turn vision into common action? Does your country think the strategy should be updated? How does your country evaluate its involvement in preparation of the EU Strategic Compass?
2. Which of the specific reforms are acceptable (or not) for the country?
 - 2.1. The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP):
 - Decision-making: Is moving to QMV in CFSP decisions acceptable to your country? What are the top 3 reasons for/against it? If shifting to QMV as a whole is not feasible, would a gradual shift of QMV (ex. the *passerelle* clause in some policy areas) be acceptable for your country?
 - Enhanced cooperation: Would the activation of enhanced cooperation projects in the area of CFSP be acceptable for your country?
 - Cooperation outside EU framework: Would a differentiated integration outside EU be more/less acceptable than enhanced cooperation in CFSP for your country?
 - 2.2. The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP):
 - Constructive abstention: Would a revival of constructive abstention to enable more flexibility between Member States in decision-making be acceptable for your country?



- Coalition of willing: Would your country be willing to allow a group of willing and capable Member States in carrying out certain tasks in CSDP (ex. for military operations)?
- Permanent Structured Cooperation: Would increasing the engagement in PESCO commitments be acceptable for your country? What would improve MS cooperation in this framework?
- The EU's solidarity clause: To what scope and extent is use of the solidarity clause acceptable in your country?
- The EU's mutual assistance clause: How much discussion about it is taboo for your country?

2.3. Institutional adaptations and treaty modifications:

- Would your country agree that alteration of the institutional framework by incorporating more power to the Commission could advance the integration process within the CFSP?
- Would it be acceptable for your country to give more power to the European Parliament so that it can play a bigger role in shaping EU foreign policy decision-making?
- Would tasking a specific group of Member States or individual foreign ministers to represent the EU in special cases/missions be acceptable for your country?
- Does your country think 'trampolining', the capacity of the HR/VP to engage directly with capitals, should be continued or reformed?
- Would the establishment of a European Security Council be acceptable for your country? If yes, in which format?
- Would your country be open to any treaty modifications to improve the functioning of the CFSP?

3. External-internal policies nexus: How can the EU do better in terms of handling the linkages between the internal and the external dimensions of European policies (the external action plus policies), so they can be better linked to CFSP goals and increase the effectiveness and coherence of EU external action? What should be done so that EU external action is treated in a comprehensive manner?



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