



Faculty of Human and Social Sciences

Degree in International Relations

Final Thesis

**The European
Commissioner for
Defense and Space:**

**A Symptom of a New
Defensive Union?**

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Madrid, April, 2025

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Abstract

The resurgence of uncertainty and the sense of dread in the European continent has enhanced the development of defensive mechanisms within the EU. Despite its core economic and political stance, in the last decades the European Union has directed its attention to the development of defensive projects with the aim of not only stabilizing itself as an economic power, but also with the goal of becoming a geopolitical actor capable of protecting its own territory. Thus, over the past years the European Union has promoted initiatives focused on strengthening state defensive capacities. Among these endeavors, it is possible to highlight the recent appointment of a new European Commissioner for Defense and Space, which is the core of this research work. Through the lens of the *path dependency theory* and the *path creation model*, this study aims to analyze: the course of action followed by the EU and its member states in the pursuit of a new Defense Commissioner and the actual competences of this new EU Official, and their relevance for the future of the European Union in the defensive sector. Aiming to provide clear and consistent approaches and conclusions in this matter, the present study leverages first-hand perspectives from experts with extensive and meaningful knowledge of the European Union and the defensive sector.

Keywords: European Commissioner for Defense, Andrius Kubilius, defense, investment, industry, competences, NATO.

Resumen

La reaparición de la incertidumbre y la preocupación en el continente europeo ha potenciado el desarrollo de mecanismos defensivos en el seno de la UE. A pesar de su enfoque económico y político, en las últimas décadas la Unión Europea ha dirigido su atención al desarrollo de proyectos defensivos con el objetivo de no sólo estabilizarse como potencia económica, sino también con la meta de convertirse en un actor geopolítico capaz de proteger su propio territorio. Así, en los últimos años, la Unión Europea ha promovido iniciativas enfocadas en fortalecer las capacidades defensivas de los diferentes estados miembros. Entre estos esfuerzos destaca el reciente nombramiento de un nuevo Comisario Europeo de Defensa y Espacio, la cuestión central de este trabajo de investigación. Desde la perspectiva teórica del *path dependence* y el *path creation*, la presente investigación pretende analizar: el proceso que ha seguido la Unión Europea y sus estados miembros para nombrar un nuevo Comisario de Defensa, las competencias reales de esta nueva autoridad europea, y su relevancia para el futuro de la UE en el sector defensivo. Con el objetivo de ofrecer enfoques y conclusiones claras y consistentes, el presente estudio hace uso de entrevistas personales con expertos con un amplio y significativo conocimiento de la Unión Europea y del sector defensivo.

Palabras Clave: Comisario Europeo de Defensa y Espacio, Andrius Kubilius, defensa, inversión, industria, competencias, OTAN.

1. Introduction

“Europe will not be made all at once or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a *de facto solidarity*” (Schuman, 1950). With these words collected in the Schuman Declaration, the former French Foreign Minister suggested the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community as a first step for the establishment of a European common project. The founding fathers Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman believed that the creation of the ECSC was the beginning of a shared endeavor that would lead to the creation of a united Europe, currently the European Union.

The EU is precisely what Schuman described as the result of a measurable and concrete accomplishment (Schuman, 1950). The economic union created by Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and the Benelux countries with the Treaty of Paris in 1951 would result in the creation of economic and political mechanisms that would motivate the incorporation of numerous member states and the creation of a political union. The Maastricht Treaty, where the European project acquired the name of the European Union, was a key historical moment for European integration with the creation of the European Monetary Union, but especially it was crucial for the establishment of a European political entity (Maastricht Treaty, 1992). With the entry into force of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, the European Union was not only an economic entity but also a political actor. The Maastricht treaty did also include a relative new aspect, the Common Foreign Security Policy (CFSP), which was a common project to align common foreign policy aspects and to promote security in the region. In the end of the 90s and beginning of the 21st, the idea of a “secured Europe” became a major concern, which also led to the reinforcement of the principles of the CFSP in the Lisbon treaty where defensive aspects were also included (Lisbon Treaty, 2007).

The idea of creating a union of defense in the European Union is a historical proposal that has never been seen as a feasible opportunity for the Union. Despite initiatives such as the one of the Prime Minister René Pleven in 1950 (EDA, 2025), who suggested the creation of a European Defense Community (rejected by the French National Assembly),

the creation of an official common defense to protect the member-states was historically believed to be unthinkable in the short term. This aspect can be clearly discerned in the Lisbon Treaty, where states agreed on the creation of a union with an external security focus, but not on the establishment of a defensive coalition. The Lisbon Agreement states that the EU can have operation capacity on missions “outside the Union, for peace-keeping and conflict prevention and strengthening international security” (Treaty of Lisbon, art.42.1) and that decisions relating to common security policy ought to be embraced by the Council through unanimous voting (Treaty of Lisbon, 2007). Thus, it was clear that the CSDP had a security and external scope and that defensive aspects resided in the sovereignty of each nation state.

Nevertheless, besides understanding that a common defense was not possible in the short term, the creation of a collective defense was believed to be a future opportunity. The Treaty of Lisbon established that the CFSP should adopt the forward-thinking perspective of a common union defense policy that would derive into the creation of a common defense once the European Council would decide so by unanimity-art.42.2- (Treaty of Lisbon, 2007). This principle meant that the EU should be progressively heading into a common union of defense if the heads of government and state would determine it through unanimous voting. Thus, although the creation of a common defensive project was not historically possible, the Lisbon Treaty paves the way towards its future establishment. In fact, new mechanisms related to defense have been agreed, among which is possible to highlight the following: the European Defense Found (EDF), the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the European Defense Technology and Industrial Dependencies project (EDTIB), the long-term European Defense Industrial Program (EDIP) and the new Commissioner of Defense.

The 26th of November of 2024 the European Parliament approved the new European Commission headed by Ursula Von der Leyen. Among these new commissioners it stood out the creation of a new position, the “Commissioner for Defense and Space”. For the first time in its history the European Commission would designate the figure of the defense official, who in this case would be Andrius Kubilius, former Prime Minister of Lithuania. Nevertheless, this new figure has opened a debate within European Union’s

member states due to the limited competences of the EU in matters of defense. Thus, this work is aiming to accurately analyze the new Defense Commissioner of the European Union and its significance for the evolution of defense cooperation and integration within the EU.

2. Literature Review

In order to provide an innovative analysis of the European Defense Commissioner, it is essential to carry out a literature review of relevant contributions to academia. The focus of this literature examination will be on the new figure of the Defense Commissioner and the increasing defensive mechanisms within the European Union.

Firstly, it is interesting to point out the contribution of Federiga Bindi in *European Union Foreign Policy: A Historical Overview* (Bindi, 2009). In this publication Federiga Bindi showcases how the creation of European common mechanisms regarding defense has always been a matter of disagreement and concern because of the power dynamics that it entailed. The creation of a common defense has always been perceived as a project that had to be led by one of the main member states. Historically the creation of a common defense community was not understood as a common project where everyone would have equal capabilities in the decision-process making, instead it was understood as a source for achieving individual goals. The author demonstrates this principle through concrete experiences such as the rejection of the EDC by the French Assembly in 1954, or Margaret Thatcher's opposition to European Political Cooperation (Bindi, 2009).

In 1954 the French National Assembly rejected the European Defense Community treaty signed by Germany, Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg, together with Italy's Parliamentary Commission. Nevertheless, the France of Édouard Herriot did not accept the ratification of the EDC due to the negative vote of the National Assembly, which perceived the impossibility to become the leaders of the EDC (European Defense Agency, n.d). Similarly in 1990 after the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi military forces, Prime Minister Thatcher showed her opposition to European Political Cooperation, an

initiative aiming to include the defense aspect within the security framework (Bindi, 2009). Bearing in mind its links with the US and their concern with the EPC, Margaret Thatcher rejected the signature of the treaty aiming to reach initiatives that would be complementary to its leading role as the connection between the US and Europe. This led to the adoption of the common CFSP instead in 1993, where it was made clear its complementarity with the prospects of the NATO framework (Treaty of Lisbon, 2007).

Those diverse positions within the European Union are an aspect that has also been pointed out by authors like Nicole Koenig, who has affirmed that the European Defense project has never been a possibility due to the gap between ambition and reality (Koenig, 2021). The German scholar highlights that European countries rely on different strategic cultures and various national threat perceptions, which makes it more difficult to actually reach a homogenous scope of the European Union. Furthermore, Koenig does also stand out other factors, such as the inclusion of material autonomy. The German scholar states that an independent European autonomy strategy is not feasible due to the reliance of European states in foreign capacity from countries like the US and China who are further developed in matters of technology and hence, military capabilities. Finally, it is relevant to highlight the institutional aspect that Koenig highlights in her work *The EU as an Autonomous Defence Actor* is the institutional confine (Koenig, 2021). Taking into consideration the need of unanimous vote and the lack of common agreement among member-states representatives, the homogenization and the creation of a common defense project within the EU is not possible.

Nevertheless, this has not been an obstacle for the creation of defensive mechanisms such as Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). This initiative established in 2017 aims to increase common military capabilities and to enhance the Strategic Compass, a commonly agreed plan in 2022 to strengthen the security and defense strategy (EEAS, 2022). The main goals of PESCO were: the harmonization and cooperation of military apparatuses, the address of shortfalls, the achievement of a common agreement on the levels of defense investment and the participation of equipment within the EDA (Biscop, 2017). The agreement on the principles of the Permanent Structured Cooperation was

a long process due to the differences among member states, which understand defense as a crucial aspect for the sovereignty of a state. Thus, countries such as Poland showed certain reluctance to the project, because they believed that PESCO entailed an extensive cession of national competences, and also due to the potential overstepping of capacities with NATO (Baranowski & Quencez, n.d).

Countries such as Poland or Lithuania (from where the current Defense Commissioner comes from) firmly expressed their concern regarding the possible subversion of NATO. In light of NATO's capabilities and compromise, their geographical disposition regarding Russia and their historical links with the United States, Poland and Lithuania stated that in order to join PESCO, it would have to be complementary to the Alliance (Maulny & Di Bernardini, 2019). The United States has showed its willingness to increase European involvement in defense affairs since the end of the 20th century, with the European limited power to stop the Yugoslav Wars and along the 21st century with US' increasing power in the Indo-Pacific (Danindra Novita, 2022). Nevertheless, the United States of America has always portrayed willingness of complementary projects.

The same year in which the Permanent Structured Cooperation was signed by member-states, the European Commission launched the European Defense Fund (EDF). With the goal of boosting defense capabilities within member states and expanding homogenization among EU countries, the Commission launched the EDFs. This project was not only aiming to improve collaboration among member states, but also to enhance cooperation with defensive industries to promote investments in Research and Development, to develop wider capabilities and to enhance interoperability (European Commission, n.d). Nevertheless, the scope of the project was significantly limited due to its constrained economic budget and its attention to technological development.

During the EDFs' negotiations it was established a budget of 13 billion euros to spend in cooperative capability-development projects and defense research with the aim of reaching higher levels of innovation (Besch, 2019). However, in her work *The European Commission in EU Defense Industrial Policy* Sophia Besch affirms that the investment of the EDFs is significantly limited in comparison to the €200 billion that EU member states

spend on defense. Furthermore, Besch points out that the spotlight of the EDFs is restricted to industrial production. Nevertheless, this project which continues with EU desires of broader autonomy, as also stated in the EU Global Strategy of 2016, has risen concerns in the United States and other third parties due to their industrial exportation to EU countries. The United States has established itself as one of the main exporters of armament to European states, thus, larger independence of European states from external partners could mean a decrease of its national GDP. Nevertheless, despite the rise of production of European states such as France, the United States continues to be the main producer of weapons. (Euronews, 2024).

The principle of self-reliance was also promoted by different mechanisms such as the European Defense Industrial Strategy (EDIS), established for the first time in 2024 (European Commission, 2024). This project developed by the European Commission in hand with the European Defense Agency and the High Representative was also aiming to increase autonomy by promoting industrial self-reliance and innovation. Therefore, the agreement was seeking to enhance collaboration in defense investment among European states, the promotion of a culture of defense and the thorough collaboration with external partners (European Commission, 2024). This supposed the expansion of the European Defense Technological and Industrial Base, which emphasizes investment on defensive capabilities (Policy, Department of External Relations, 2020). Thus, aiming to improve European resistance from external threats.

All these mechanisms have been built upon the principle of “strategic autonomy”, which was for the first time approved by the European Council in 2013 (European Union, 2022). This new standard had a cross-disciplinary focus, aiming to promote a reduction of European dependence on other external partners (European Union, 2022). Considering the geopolitical variations, the central point of the “strategic autonomy” has varied throughout time. Thus, whereas in 2017 after the Brexit results the attention was mostly placed on trade transactions, in 2021 the main area of concern was the supply chain due to reliance on external partners during the Covid-19 crisis. Nevertheless, the “strategic autonomy plan” has always stood out for its focus on the defensive sector, most concretely on the production and management of defense resources, the industrial

policy and its financing (Fonfría, 2023). However, the breadth of the concept has led to various understandings on the principle that derived into clarifications in the “Strategic Autonomy, Strategic Choices” paper (Council of the European Union, 2021). In this declaration published by the Council it was stated that the strategic autonomy is not aiming for complete independence but rather for a middle point in between full dependence and complete independence.

In order to reach those levels of autonomy, scholars such as Félix Arteaga have showcased how since 2008 the European Commission has been looking for the establishment of a common ground in terms of defense industry and technology to increase its levels of strategic autonomy (Arteaga, 2024). It is precisely this area of industrial development and innovation in which the European Commission has competencies to promote guidelines and indicators to foster industrial cooperation in the arena of defense as stated in the Article 173 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, 2012). Considering the constrained roles of the European Commission in defensive matters, its focus has mostly been the industrial arena, highlighting production, technology and innovation (Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union, 2007). Nevertheless, as it can be discerned, the European Union has been able to develop mechanisms of crucial relevance to create common frameworks of defensive capabilities (Fritsche, 2021).

This improvement of industrial capacities is believed to be the main area of work of current commissioner of defense and space Andrius Kubilius. In September of 2024, when presenting its potential group of commissioners, President Von der Leyen stated that the former Prime Minister of Lithuania would be the new Defense and Space Commissioner and that he would be in charge of developing a Union of Defense and rising investment in defense and industrial capacities (Von der Leyen, 2024). However, taking into account the limited role of the Commission in defensive matters, it is believed that Andrius Kubilius will only have a role in the industrial aspect. In his work *“El nuevo puesto de Comisario de Defensa y Espacio ¿Una apuesta de futuro o más de lo mismo?”* (Romero Junquera, 2024). The analyst Abel Romero Junquera affirms that the

role of the new commissioner will be the establishment of a common strategy focused on the development of a European defense industry and a defense market to promote deterrence tactics. In this article Romero Junquera highlights the collective dimension of the EU complementary to NATO, yet not common (Romero Junquera, 2024). The IEEE analyst makes a clear distinction between collaboration and common, since as Lefebvre also pointed out in his research *"Has the time come for European Defense?"*, the collective defense is a mission of NATO. (Lefebvre, 2024). The French diplomat understands that the defense of Europe is guaranteed by North Atlantic Treaty Organization despite of the defensive advances of the European Union.

In October 2024, the analysts Joshua Posaner and Jacopo Barigazzi affirmed that Andrius Kubilius would be in charge of the European Defense Industry Program (Posaner & Barigazzi, 2024). Nevertheless, Posaner and Barigazzi believe that the role of the new Commissioner for Defense and Space is concentrated on the expansion of defense investment and the production of defense material. In fact, other scholars have argued that the new Defense Commissioner together with the High Representative should identify the needs and capabilities regarding defense in order to establish a stronger Europe (Mejino-Lopez & Wolff, 2024). However, the central point continues to be placed in the industrial policy. In the Mission letter from the President Von der Leyen to Andrius Kubilius, it is stated that the European Defense Commissioner does not have authority of national armed forces since that is under the control of each member state (Von der Leyen, 2024). The new Commissioner Andrius Kubilius should place prioritize rising European investment in defense through the promotion of a common and shared vision, the progression of a single market on defense to also reduce external reliance, and the endorsement of EU and NATO to reach common standards and coordination (Von der Leyen, 2024).

Thus, in view of the internal and industrial focus of the new Defense Commissioner, it is believed that Andrius Kubilius will be in charge of dimensions that were previously in the hands of other commissioners. The new position of the defense commissioner is believed to have adopted areas that were competence of former Internal market Commissioner Thierry Bretton, who was in charge of amplifying EU's economic power

by strengthening industrial capabilities and promoting the European Single Market. Andrius Kubilius has currently adopted competencies from the Commissioner for the internal market, which could also suppose problems inside European institutions due to the alteration of competences (Posaner, 2024). Nevertheless, the new European Commissioner in charge of defense and space is believed to be a secondary one, subsidiary to the Industry and Internal Market Commissioner for its limited scope and its former integration within the Internal Market administration (Romero Junquera, 2024). In the end the defense sector is a complicated and limited one. However, the creation of the new Defense Commissioner seems to have showcased the increasing need for integration within the European Union in matters such as defense.

3. Theoretical Framework

Despite its industrial and production orientation, the European Union has increased its commitment with defense. The creation of defensive common standards has always been a question of debate within the European Union, especially in the last century with the aim of becoming a crucial geopolitical actor with capacities to defend itself from external threats. The creation of defensive initiatives along the last century seems to have resulted in the establishment of new mechanisms and organisms in a natural and inevitable manner, also as a response to future threats. In view of this progressive and potentially predetermined institutionalization, the theoretical models that are going to be used in the present academic work are the path dependency theory and the path creation model. Both theoretical frameworks provide the possibility to understand the progressive defense integration through the analysis of the past, the potential future and the capacities of the different agents.

3.1. Path Dependency

The path dependency theory, which has been applied in cross disciplinary studies, is explained by William Sewell in the following manner. The American sociologist affirmed in 1996 that the path dependency theory is based on the assumption that past events

have an impact on events taking place thereafter (Sewell, 1996). This assumption has also been conveyed and further analyzed by other relevant scholars such as Paul Pierson, who is believed to be one of the main representatives of the path dependency theory in the social science environment. The political scientist from Berkeley University explained that the path dependency theory is the development of social processes that lead to the establishment of a trajectory that is not questioned and that is difficult to reverse (Goldstein et al., 2022). In this irreversible trajectory, actors are surrounded by existing structures and institutions that direct them into pre-established policy paths (Trouvé et al., 2010). Pierson more concretely states that institutions composed by actors and organizations shape their actions based on predefined paths by institutions' values, norms and policies dictated by previous choices in history that imply constraints. One of the main deterrents that Pierson pointed out was the high cost of reversal and also the expectations of the actors involved (Goldstein et al., 2022).

This approach has been partially shared by authors such as Simone Strambach and Henrik Halkier. However, as established in their work *Reconceptualizing change. Path dependency, path plasticity and knowledge combination*, they do believe that the path dependency theory does not only refer to events that lead to close-ended evolutionary processes, instead they understand the theoretical framework of path dependence as a flexible evolutionary whose initial progressions have significant effects in the trajectory of the institutions or organization (Strambach & Halkier, 2013). Thus, Strambach and Halkier do not agree with Pierson's idea of constraints, but they do believe that early actions do have significant impact on future events. Authors such as Percy, understand this path dependency as a source of equilibrium and expectancy, which can be desirable among significant sectors of the population.

This theory has been applied to analyze processes in the European environment, including certain aspects of European defense. In his work *Path Dependency in European Defense. Case Study on decision-making regarding domestic military sectors in light of simultaneous NATO and EU memberships* Fritzsche affirms that the historical decision of a state such as France, UK or Germany to become a member of the European Union and NATO does suppose a constrained trajectory in the future regarding their defense

commitment (Fritsche, 2021). Their decision to join these organizations implies the acceptance of rules and the engagement with different projects. Furthermore, the author does point out that the commitment of France, the United Kingdom and Germany is as well limited by historical events and perspectives, including the following. In the case of France for example, it has always supported significant activism in what armed forces entails. The French Republic has historically understood that military and army deployment is crucial, also in critical situations as the crisis of 2008, when in the context of the financial emergency, it decided to continue its participation in EU deployment programs (Fritsche, 2012). The United Kingdom has also historically displayed commitment towards military deployment to persecute and guarantee its interests, and to promote its Atlanticist position and its historical ties with the United States (Fritsche, 2012). The compromise of the United Kingdom with the U.S. was portrayed with UK's military participation in Iraq and Afghanistan.

However, in the case of Germany, the deployment of military missions is constrained and significantly controlled by the Bundestag due to its expected focus on international cooperation rather than on defense owing to its historical past. (Fritsche, 2012). Thus, in the last century Germany has not made significant defensive investments and developments. In fact, in 2023, Germany continued to be under the 2% objective established within NATO (World Bank, 2024). At the moment, following the NATO Secretary General's Annual Report of 2025, it seems that Germany's defense expenditure has surpassed the 2% of their gross domestic product (NATO, 2025). Nevertheless, the Federal Republic of Germany has been one of the main countries that has taken longer to reach the objective agreed in 2014.

3.2. Path Creation

However, in order to understand the progressive development of the European defense and the development of projects, mechanisms and new actors, it is also relevant to make use of the path creation theory which is concentrated on the individual itself. Whereas in the path theory it is established that actors take decisions based on previous events and decisions due to its limiting and influencing nature, the path creation theoretical

framework stands out the role of agents themselves. Academics such as Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, in opposition to path dependency supporters, have highlighted the role of agents in the decision-making procedure, understanding them as crucial variables in the course of action (Emirbayer & Mische, 1989).

Academics have underlined the importance of agency in the decision-making process, especially when it comes to social relations and personal aspirations (Garud et al., 2010). In their work *Path Dependence of Path Creation?* Garud, Karnøe and Kumaraswamy consider that the theoretical framework of path creation is a combination of past, present and future events. These scholars understand that future actions have significant impact in the understanding of the past, which at the same time has relevance in the comprehension and development of alternatives in present and future events. Thus, Vergne and Durand understood that in the path creation process, the trajectory to follow is the result of a dynamic and constructive focus rather than a given (Garud et al., 2010). It is understood that the path to follow is a strategic and deliberate choice made by actors in charge.

The path creation theory has been significantly used to analyze economic policies, energy transition or technological developments. In the area of social sciences, including political sciences, its utilization has been more restricted. It was the former President of the German Society of Sociologist Lessenich the first scholar in introducing this new perspective in the analysis of social policies, more concretely in continental Europe (Komara Yuda, 2023). Through Lessenich's work *"Frozen Landscapes Revisited: path Creation in the European Social Model"*, the German scholar establishes that the creation of the welfare state in continental Europe was not only path-dependent, instead, it was the result of an institutional inertia and a deviation from pre-established guidelines (Lessenich, 2005). However, path creation is a theory that has never been used to analyze the current evolution of European defense, which can also be interesting to the study of the figure of the new defense commissioner Andrius Kubilius.

4. Objectives

Through the path dependency theory and the path-creation theory, this research aims to explain the new figure of the Defense Commissioner and what it does entail for the evolution of the defense cooperation and integration within the European Union. Bearing in mind the international geopolitical context, the institutional frameworks within the EU, and the diverse stances of the member states regarding the increasing defensive competences of the European Union, this investigation strives to analyze the following aspects.

First of all, it is relevant to study the path towards the creation of a new Defense Commissioner of the European Union taking into account the intergovernmental nature of defensive policies. Secondly, this work aims to distinguish the current role of the Defense Commissioner Andrius Kubilius, in light of the limited competences of the executive organ of the European Commission in matters of defense. Thirdly, it is essential to understand what it means the new Defense Commissioner of the European Union for defensive integration. The European project is actually a progressive project as it was highlighted in Shuman's Declaration -"Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity"- (Schuman, 1950). In fact, what was born as an economic project, ended up being a common economic and political union (Lisbon Treaty, 2009). Thus, this work intends to give an answer to what is the actual meaning of the new Defense Commissioner in the continuous development, expansion and integration of the European Union

Considering the objectives of the investigation, this work strives to give answer to the following questions: How has the Union created a new Commissioner of Defense considering that the Commission has no policy-making capacities in matters of defense? What are the main competences of the defense commissioner? Where do these competences come from? What does the new Commissioner of Defense entail for European integration? Are we heading towards a community of defense?

5. Methodology

Committed to explaining the new figure of the European Defense Commissioner and its actual role in the constant evolution of European integration, this investigation does make use of a qualitative methodology. By means of a qualitative analysis, this work strives to explain through the path dependency and path creation theory, the establishment of a new Defense Commissioner and seeks to analyze the meaning behind this new dignitary.

It is relevant to mention that the sources that have been used for this work are both, secondary and primary ones. In order to have an overview of that current situation in the European Union's defensive landscape, the historical evolution of the defensive capabilities of the European Union, and the defensive mechanisms that have been implemented throughout history, it was carried out an analysis of secondary sources. This literature review and examination have been fundamental to establish the theoretical scope of this work, as well as the main foundations of this investigation: process towards a new Defense Commissioner, Competences of new Commissioner Andrius Kubilius, and European Integration. Nevertheless, the analysis of these historical and existing mechanisms has been complemented with primary sources, more concretely, interviews. Taking into account the novelty of the designation of the new European Defense Commissioner, and the importance and uniqueness of primary sources in the development of research works, this investigation does also make use of first-hand discussions.

In order to study the Commissioner of Defense of the European Union through the Path Dependency Theory of William Sewell (Sewell, 1996) and the Path Creation Model theoretical framework studied by Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische (Emirbayer & Mische, 1989), four experts have been interviewed along the process: Manuel Selas González, member of the Spanish Diplomatic Corps and former Deputy Director General for Foreign Affairs and Security, Dr. Daniela Ileana Serban Analyst with experience in the European institutions and Programme Director of the MSC in *International Security and Management* at Universidad Pontificia Comillas, Dr. Andrea Betti, analyst and

professor of European Affairs in Universidad Pontificia Comillas, and Captain Romero Junquera, current Analyst of the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies and specialist in European security and defense. These interviews with experts from various areas that include, defense, security, politics and European affairs were centered on the following sections of the research: the path towards the creation of the European Commissioner for Defense and Space, the competences of this new figure, the role of agents along the process of defensive integration and the future of defense within the European Union.

6. Analysis

6.1. Path towards the Creation of a New Defense Commissioner

The appointment of Andrius Kubilius as the Commissioner of Defense in the European Union was not unexpected, but was a milestone in the evolution of the European Union. The establishment of a new commissioner of Defense made clear the common path of the European Union in the establishment of commonalities in the creation of a defensive variable in the European Project. Until the Russian Invasion of Ukraine, the idea of a common project regarding defense was something unlikely in the short term. The creation of a common defense was not something feasible because of its perception as a battle of power among member states in the pursuit of their individual interests (Bindi, 2009). Nevertheless, within the European Union there have been significant attempts to increase collaboration among member states in the creation of collaborative defensive mechanisms to progressively establish the defensive Union that would require the approval of every representative of the European Council (Art. 42, Treaty of Lisbon).

The beginnings of this defense European project, currently materialized in the figure of the Defense Commissioner Andrius Kubilius, can be dated back to 1998 and the Saint-Malo Declaration. This bilateral summit between Jacques Chirac (former President of France) and Tony Blair (former British Prime Minister) would establish the basis of the European Security and Defense Policy (Romero Junquera, 2024). Although, with a security focus and an external scope complementary to NATO, which was believed to be the main defensive organization of the western liberal order by the United Kingdom, the

Saint Malo Declaration did also include for the first time a defensive aspect. The Saint Malo Conference establishes the path towards the creation of a potential defensive Union (Romero Junquera, 2024). Thus, this summit between former French and British leaders could be seen as the beginning of a progressive integration towards a European defense strategy. Although the Saint Malo Declaration gave place to a strategy complementary to NATO directed towards security rather than defense, it was the first step in a progressive mobilization of European mechanisms, which had been discussed for the first time some months before by France, Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Italy, who signed a document of common will (Larivé, 2019). In the context of the end of the Yugoslav Wars, where European nations were not able to defend the European continent, these six countries signed a document in which they expressed their wills towards a common approach of their national capacities (NATO, 2024).

The Saint Malo Declaration would motivate the creation of the European Defense Agency (EDA) in 2004, created by the agreement of heads of government and state at the European Union level. The function of this organization under the umbrella of the European Council is to promote defense cooperation and progression among EU member states. The EDA tries to pursue its goals through the development of analysis, projects and experts' recommendations and joint capability initiatives (European Defense Agency, 2024) such as the Capability Technology Groups (Domecq, 2018). These progressive measures that have been established over time, have a voluntary nature, although the membership in the European Union does entail an automatic presence in the European Defense Agency, the participation in its projects is voluntary. Bearing in mind the sovereignty of member states in defensive aspects, the European Defense Agency, with a significant security scope, has a freewill nature to maintain the intergovernmental aspect while encouraging member states to participate in a cooperative scope towards defense.

The European Defense Agency, promoted by former Secretary General of the European Union Javier Solana, was a landmark in the path towards increasing common European defensive capabilities. This organization addressed the reduction of obstacles in the commerce of military equipment in the European Union since 2008 with the Capability

Development Plan. These plans aimed to expand the single market to the defensive sector (European Defense Agency, 2025), which would promote the growth of European giants such as Airbus or Thales, whose rise and future protection by mechanisms such as PESCO would be seen as a threat by small-medium size companies (Zaborowski, 2024). Furthermore, the European Defense Agency's efforts in the promotion of armed capabilities, development, innovation through a collaborative scope would facilitate the creation of a General Direction of the Commission in charge of the defense industry within the European Union and responsible for ensuring innovation and competitiveness (European Commission, 2025), including proposals regarding the EU defense budget.

The creation of the European Defense Agency and the widening participation of member states in the collaborative perspective of the European Union would lead to the creation of PESCO, with a security and defensive scope. Besides its mainly security focus outside the border, countries also showed engagement with collaborative initiatives in matters of defense through different initiatives. Among these defensive endeavors the do highlight the following ones: the compromise to develop larger interoperability among forces (art.13, PESCO), the share expenditure allocated to defense research and technology (art. 4, PESCO) or the rise of defense budgets in general (art.1, PESCO). With the signing of PESCO in 2017, in a tense international context, it was assumed that Europe was progressively entering in a defense dynamic complementary to NATO that was not possible to be diminished. PESCO, which became a clear path to follow in the EDA, did suppose an extraordinary commitment towards and increasing European cooperation also materialized in the EDF. Despite the limited compromise that was achieved (Martí Sempere, 2024), among other things due to internal differences, PESCO did become an important agreement in the wider compromise among member states in the pursuit of defense cooperation (Blockmans & Crosson, 2021).

The compromise of the European Union and member states in the collaboration of defensive matters significantly increased in 2021 with the creation of the European Defense Fund, when the European Commission started to have a direct involvement in defensive matters (Haroche, 2018). The US amplified engagement in the Indo Pacific,

with the beginning of AUKUS Partnership AUKUS Deal Debuts (Brooke-Holland et al., 2021) the expansion of Iranian nuclear project, the risk of the externalization as showcased by the Covid Pandemic or the uncertainty surrounding the European borders led to an increasing believe in the European Union regarding the necessity to rise collaboration among member states also in matters of defense. In 2021, for the first time, the Commission adopted a main role in European Defensive Affairs.

The European Commission has always been significantly effective in acquiring competences in areas where the divisor line is not very clear (Serban, personal communication, 2025). Thus, in 2021 through the European Defense Fund, the executive organ of the European Union adopted an economic role in the defensive environment. Although as stated in the Lisbon Treaty, any decision regarding the path towards a defensive union has to be approved by the European Council by unanimous vote (Treaty of Lisbon, 2007), the defensive industry is also under the scope of the European Single Market, since it is also an economic activity. Thus, in view of the exclusive competences of the European Union in the internal market, the European Commission discerned the manner to increase competences in matters of defense to increase collaboration among member states (Haroche, 2018). Thus, with the goal of promoting cooperation among defense companies and state actors, improving defense capabilities by boosting investments and helping defense industries to increase interoperability among member states, in 2021 the European Union created the European Defense Fund.

The European Defense Fund, approved by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union after formal proposal by the Commission, was incorporated standard procedures of the European Union, becoming part of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the long-term financing plan of the EU (European Commission, 2021). Under the section of “security and defense” (Brehon, 2025), it was decided that between 2021 and 2027 (the length of the MFF), the EU would spend 7,953 billion euros in defense (European Union, 2021). The expenditure of the security and defense budget was decided to be granted to research and to the co-financing of the defense costs with the aim of contributing to the EU strategic autonomy (European Defense Agency, 2025). The amount of the EU budget destined to defense, could be considered limited bearing

in mind the total amount of the MFF, which is 1,1074.3 billion (Delasnerie, 2024).

The creation of the EDFs amplified the capacities of the European Commission, which could be reflected through initiatives such as the Military Mobility project 2.0 proposed by the Commission, the Act in Support of Ammunition production (ASAP) or the European Defense Industry Reinforcement (EDIRPA). In the third semester of 2022, following the objectives pre-established within the Council of the European Union, the Commission proposed the Military Mobility Project 2.0 from 2022 until 2027, with the aim of improving security and defense in the Union and an increasingly effective mobility of large-scale forces within the EU (European Commission, 2022). The program was approved by the Council of the European Union, who understood it as an important step in a tense geopolitical scenario. Despite improvements complementary to NATO strategy and the promotion of corridor agreements among member states such as The Netherlands, Germany and Poland (Chihai, 2024), the impact in the expansion of military mobility continues to be limited. Nevertheless, this agreement could be seen as the result of an enhanced role of the European Commission in matters of defense since it started taking and widening powers in historically sovereign matters such as military personnel.

The growing role of the Commission could also be clearly discerned as well in the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP) approved by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union in 2023 with the aim of augmenting ammunition production (Fabbrini, 2024) and restocking inventory (European Commission, n.d). With a budget of 500 million euros, the Act aims to produce materials such as explosives and missiles as well as reconditioning previous machinery (European Commission, n.d). The same year that the European Union ratified the ASAP, the European Defense Industry Reinforcement (EDIRPA) was also validated. This program was willing to increase cooperation among member states to jointly acquire most urgent defense product needs (European Commission, n.d).

As it can be discerned, these defensive mechanisms that have been developed within the European Union have increased the role of the EU executive power in matters of

defense. Although in theory defense is an exclusive competence of member states as stated in the Lisbon Treaty, with the increasing powers of the European Commission in the defensive industry, it could be currently questioned if defense remains as a mere competence of member states. Since the beginning of the institutionalization of European common defensive efforts in 2004 with the European Defense Agency, it seems that the defense of member states is no longer an individual aspect, but instead requires a common approach. This collaborative perspective would be asserted with the rising capabilities of the European Commission in the industrial defensive framework. Since the establishment of the European Defense Fund in 2018, the Commission has been granted competences that seem impossible to revert, as the path dependency theory establishes (Sewell, 1996).

These broader defensive competences of the European Commission together with the uncertain context that surrounds the European Union nowadays have not only led to a process that seems difficult to revert, but to a system of unstoppable European cooperation, which does not mean homogenization. This has been lately materialized with the new figure of the Defense Commissioner, Andrius Kubilius. The appointment and ratification of Kubilius showcases the European commitment with the defense from a collaborative perspective. The European Commissioner for Defense and Space is the echo of that progressive European commitment to defense, and the difficult-to-reverse integrative process. Despite discussions regarding the formation of the new Commission, the figure of Andrius Kubilius was not characterized for its controversy in the appointment process in the Council nor in the ratification of the European Parliament.

Commissioner Kubilius is not just a symbol of inevitable defense cooperation, but also of increasing willingness among the EU Commission and member states to adopt a more prominent role. Aware of the current geopolitical landscape, European representatives have seen in the new Commissioner of Defense, an opportunity for the EU to adopt a more prevalent role in the current international landscape (Serban, personal communication, 2025). The large-scale invasion of Ukraine, the conflict in the Middle East, the rise of revisionist powers in the Asian continent, the conflicts that surround the

southern borders of the Union, the limited GDP growth rate of the EU or the potential loss of historical allies such as the USA led to a common belief among EU nations to take a more political stance to maintain geopolitical power. The new Defense Commissioner could be defined as a political stance, but not as a representative of a common defensive union. The role of the new Commissioner is not as defensive as it might seem.

6.2. Competences of the European Commissioner for Defense and Space

The 27th of November, 2024 the European Parliament approved the new body Commissioner led by former President Ursula von Der Leyen. This new body of executives included for the first time the figure of the “Commissioner for Defense and Space” as a result of the escalating desires among member states to adopt a more geopolitical role (Serban, personal communication, 2025) but also as a manner to propose wider cohesion among European member states that cannot be achieved in the European Council (Romero Junquera, personal communication, 2025). The main intergovernmental organ of the European Union, represented by heads of governments and states of each country, is characterized by its diverse positions regarding broader cooperation in matters of defense. Thus, the European Commission, which is equipped only with industrial capacities, has been aiming to overcome those differences by creating common mechanisms such as the Commissioner for Defense and Space.

The new European Defense and Space Commissioner will have limited competences in matters of defense, merely focusing on the relations with NATO and the industrial aspect (González Selas, personal communication, 2024). Despite its willingness to increase defense cooperation among member states, the Commission is only able to regulate in commercial and industrial affairs. Since 2021 and the European Defense Fund, the European Commission has adopted more competences in the matters. Nevertheless, those capacities are significantly limited due states’ eagerness to maintain their control over their sovereign defense. Thus, despite the executive’s willingness to opt for Kubilius as a leader of the project for a Defensive Union, the current role of the Commissioner for Defense and Space is mostly limited to the promotion of defense investment, the positive relations with NATO and the direction of the industrial sector.

6.2.1. Boosting Defense Investment

The large-scale invasion of Ukraine has caught European states out of guard and unprepared in defensive terms. Although in the last decades European countries have paid special attention to PSCD's external missions in crisis zones, with the aim of reaching stability in external territories, European nation states were not prepared for the conflict within the continent. Although the Yugoslav Wars at the end of the 20th century had already showcased that the war was not something distant from EU member states, most of the European nations have lived aside from defense until February 2022. In spite of the fact that the War in Donbas in 2008 and the Invasion of Crimea in 2014 had driven member states to increase their concerns regarding the stability to the European continent, it was not until the large-scale Invasion of Ukraine when countries started perceiving the need to increase their investment in defense. The War in Ukraine, as well as the conflict in the Middle Eastern Region and the surrounding areas of the Union such as the African continent, together with the growing priority of the United States in the Asian continent increased states' necessity of boosting investment in defense.

Since 2022 certain European countries, such as Poland, Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania have significantly increased their defense expenditure. The neighboring countries of Latvia and Lithuania have exceeded more than twice their military expenditure in the last decade (2014-2024), passing from 0,9% and 0,8% of their GDP, to 3.29% and 3,11% respectively (NATO, 2025). Poland has faced a similar situation, although since its access to NATO Poland has always been around the NATO requirement of 2% (World Bank, 2025), in the last decades it has tremendously strengthened its percentage of GDP destined to defense, which nowadays has surpassed the 4% (NATO, 2025). Estonia is another clear example of growing commitment to NATO, since 2014 it has increased by more than 1.5% its proportion of GDP destined to defense (NATO, 2025). Moreover, nowadays Estonia is willing to increase its GDP expenditure to 5% (Satanovskii, 2025).

Although there is a significant number of member states who have elevated their commitment with defense, there are substantial EU countries who have not made such

a compromise. Countries who are not external to the international threats such as Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, Belgium or Spain have not considerably enhanced their defensive efforts, in fact, currently they do not meet the 2% requirement of the Atlantic Organization. In the case of Italy for example, Draghi has affirmed that the country will not achieve the 2% expending of the GDP on defense until 2028 (Balmer & Amante, 2022). Thus, bearing in mind the disparities among member states and the limited commitment by some countries to increase their allocation of resources on defense, one of the main goals of Andrius Kubilius is the promotion of defense investment. By boosting defense investment, the European Union could increase its appeal, since sometimes perception is as important as action (Selas González, personal communication 2024), to portray itself as a relevant international actor.

This commitment with defense spending can be clearly discerned in Kubilius' speech regarding the White Paper that took place in Berlin on March 21st. Three days after the presentation of the Defense White Paper of the European Union, where it is explained the current approach of the European Commission regarding defense, Commissioner Andrius Kubilius gave a speech centered on the main goals of the Commission in matters of defense. One of the main priorities that the former Prime Minister of Lithuania mentioned was the rise of defense spending (Kubilius, 2025). The Defense Commissioner is seen as a figure to promote defense investment among member states of the European Union. Among the initiatives that he has made public as a representative of the defensive aspect within the Commission, they stand out the increasing EU budget directed to defense. Whereas nowadays the budget allocated to defense within the EU Multiannual Framework is 10 billion out of 1 trillion, Commissioner of Defense and Space Andrius Kubilius seeks to raise those numbers and reach the destination of €100 billion to defense (Barigazzi, et al., 2024). The idea is that the current Commissioner for Defense and Space will promote the need to enhance the EU budget compromise with defense (Selas González, 2024). Thus, not making from defense a symbolic scope in the EU budget, but instead a formal compromise.

Nevertheless, it is relevant to point out that the possibilities of the European Commission to elevate the defensive breadth in the EU budget are significantly

restricted. The European Union as a supranational body cannot include defense in the EU budget as stated in the Treaty of Lisbon. Article 41 of the Treaty of the European Union establishes that “operating expenditure to which the implementation of this Chapter gives rise shall also be charged to the Union, except for such expenditure arising from operations having military or defense implications and cases where the Council acting unanimously decides otherwise” (art.41.2, Treaty of Lisbon) and that “[...]member states whose representatives in the Council have made a formal declaration under article 31(1), second paragraph, shall not be obliged to contribute to the financing thereof” (art.42.1, Treaty of Lisbon). Thus, it can be stated that defense expenditure should come from the proper member states, who can reach agreements regarding a common defense budget in the European Council. The Commission, and therefore, European Commissioner for Defense and Space in theory do not have competences to increase EU budget without European Council approval

However, the European Union has found manners to make possible designation of EU financial plans to defense matters, specially through the development of civil and military technological plans. For example, the adoption of the defensive aspect in the Multiannual Frameworks has been possible due to the focus on I+D research and the development of prototypes with that double scope of civil and military (Romero Junquera, personal communication, 2025). These double-sided mechanisms directed to technological development, research and innovation, have allowed the European Commission to overcome the necessity of the European Council approval for the introduction of defense in the EU common budget. This idea could increase disparities among certain EU member states that have historically maintained a more neutral position regarding defense.

Ireland is the clear example of an EU country which has historically asserted a neutral position regarding defense, as it can be clearly noticed with its non-participation in the Second World War, but especially with its non-adhesion to NATO and its lack of defense pacts. In fact, a significant part of the Irish population has been historically characterized by its rejection of the increasing defensive orientation of the Union (Devine, 2009). Something similar has happened with Malta, which besides their implications in the

Second World War, since then they have been discerned by their neutral position regarding security and defense. Currently, it is believed that both countries will have to make a decision regarding their historical neutral position, by joining the new defensive approach of the Union or to maintain themselves aside (Cordina, 2024). In the case of Ireland, the current geopolitical scenario seems to have escalated the national compromise with defense as expressed by Tánaiste Martin and Defense Minister Harris in February 2025. After the Munich Security Conference, both representatives affirmed Ireland's rising compromise with defense while not putting under risk their neutrality (Hickey, 2025).

Despite the internal differences among political groups in Ireland, the international context together with the potential threats to the submarine cable system that surrounds the country, have increased a common position regarding the rise of defense spending, especially among the ruling party. In the case of Malta, there is an amplified rejection towards defensive commitments, understanding them as potential risks for their neutrality. In fact, Prime Minister of Malta Robert Abela has expressed that Malta will not support EU military funding with him as the nation's ruling leader (Borg, 2025). The stances of neutral countries could be a difficulty for Kūbilius to promote common defensive mechanisms on behalf of the European Commission. Nevertheless, double-sided initiatives could be a manner to overcome potential disagreements of certain nation states regarding the Commission involvement in matters of defense. Thus, considering the difficulties that the Commission may face to promote mechanisms centered on increasing EU budget for defensive aspects, the idea of the Commissioner for Defense and Space is to also increase the expenditure of member-states themselves. Former Lithuanian Prime Minister has for example expressed the intention to raise member states' investment in defense by 800 billion (European Commission, n.d).

In the White paper published on March, 2025 it was established that in order to ReArm Europe, defense spending should rise, reaching and extra investment of 800 billion euros. 650 billion euros out of the 800 billion euros, would come from member states' growing expenditure exempted from the Excessive Deficit Procedure (Von der Leyen, 2025). The rest 150 billion euros would hail from EU loans granted to member states

(Romero Junquera, direct communication 2025). The European Union would facilitate loans to EU countries aiming to increase their defense investment in ammunition, anti-systems, mobility and interoperability, and common purchases (Von der Leyen, 2025). Thus, it can be affirmed that the funding to ReArm Europe does not emanate from the Multiannual common budget of the Commission, instead from the proper member states. Thus, in this regard, it is believed that the role of the European Defense Commissioner will be to enhance conversations with the Council (González Selas, personal communication, 2024; Serban, personal communication, 2025), and with other institutions such as the European Defense Agency and the High Representative to increase compromise (Serban, personal communication, 2025).

The relations between the European Defense Commissioner and the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, currently Kaja Kallas are understood as crucial due High Representative's direction of the EDA and their control of the CSDP. The figure of the Defense Commissioner is precisely seen as an attempt towards an increasing coordination within the European Union in matters of defense (Serban, personal communication, 2025; Romero Junquera, personal communication, 2025; Betti, personal communication, 2025), and it is perceived as a clear effort towards a more relevant geopolitical role within the international landscape (Betti, personal communication, 2025; Serban, personal communication, 2025). Although the main impulse should come from member states themselves, the figure of Andrius Kubilius is seen as an urge towards larger integration (Betti, personal communication, 2025), and as a political initiative towards a prominent geopolitical role (Serban, personal communication, 2025).

6.2.2. Industrial Scope

Nevertheless, in practical terms there is a general agreement regarding the limited role of the Commissioner for Defense and Space in matters of the defense industry (Selas González, personal communication, 2024; Romero Junquera, personal communication, 2025). Despite Andrius Kubilius' capacities towards increasing investment, and its potential rising competences in the future, it is understood that in terms of formal

competences, those capacities are limited to the industrial defensive arena. In his speech in the city of Berlin the 21st of March of 2025, European Commissioner for Defense and Space established that one of the main priorities of the new Commission was to foster the defensive and industrial market. Bearing in mind the current European dependence on foreign actors and the limited role of European companies in rising member states' defensive capacities, Kubilius aims to support European industries. Following the European Defense Industrial Strategy, and its goals of strengthening European autonomy in the production of defensive capacities (European Commission, n.d), the new Commissioner for Defense and Space will be focused on promoting European defense industries and the defensive internal market.

However, it is relevant to point out as established in the EDIS, that the advancement of the internal industry and market of defense is complementary to external collaboration. The promotion of the internal defensive industry is not something that would be done independently from EU allies, the European Union is conscious that it needs to count with partners to boost defense capabilities. However, the European Commission aims to reduce the substantial dependence on foreign nations such as the United States. The Draghi Report showcased that 80% of the defensive capacities of the European Union do come from the United States (Draghi Report, 2024), which could be perceived as a limitation for the EU to achieve defensive autonomy (Koenig, 2021).

Between 2020 and 2024, the United States of America assumed the exportation of 43% of Global Arms (Statista, 2024), and its main importers were found in the European continent, including EU member states. Through companies such as Northrop Grumman, Boeing or Raytheon Technologies, the United States have become one of the main defense exporters to the majority of EU member states, among which it is possible to highlight Poland, Italy or the Netherlands, which in 2023 were the 5th, 8th and 10th, main importers of USA defensive products in the world. Concerns regarding the large-scale Invasion of Ukraine in 2022, together with the increasing pressures of defense spending by different organizations such as NATO, have risen the need to boost defense spending, and therefore, the current purchase of American products. Thus, aware of the larger European defensive necessities, the European Union aims to promote the internal

market and the internal industries. The most benefited country of this initiative is believed to be France, which since 2020 has surpassed Russian production of weapons, which has decreased by more than 12% (Statista, 2024).

Through companies such as Airbus Group, Dassault Aviation Safran or Thales Group for example, France would be the most benefited country of this strategic autonomy. Nevertheless, this measure could also enhance the economic capabilities of other member states such as Italy, Germany and Spain, with the potential expansion of Leonardo S.p.A, Rheinmetall or Navantia, respectively. Nevertheless, the initiative has been seen as beneficial for the European Union as a whole, since it would be an opportunity to enhance interoperability (Betti, personal communication, 2025), and a window to promote the European economy, the expansion of the European Union as a geopolitical actor, and the reduction of long-lasting dependence on external actors. The purchase of external defensive capacities does not only suppose a short-term dependency, but also a prolonged reliance on external products, since member states are also dependent on the concrete ammunition of those external countries. Thus, the reduction of 80% of dependence on the United States (Draghi Report, 2024) in terms of defense would also suppose fostering European independence in the long-run.

However, the “European strategic autonomy” could also present an issue for medium and small companies, whose presence could be significantly reduced. In some countries, such as Poland, which combine their purchase of American materials with the national production mainly carried out by Polska Grupa Zbrojeniowa, fear that broader European reliance would only favor big companies as it was showcased during PESCO agreements (Zaborowski, 2018). Furthermore, there do exist issues regarding a common European scope towards larger independence of the European Union from external member states, since that would also promote interdependence among member states, which are not all aligned with their goals. A clear example is the case of Hungary or Slovakia. Thus, although there is a common idea regarding an increasing commitment with defense as showcased with the appointment and approval of the Commission with the new figure of the Commissioner for Defense and Space, there are internal differences that would also have to be approached by Andrius Kubilius in its enhancement of the

internal market and the European self-reliance.

In the pursuit of this objective, it is believed that the former President of the Republic of Lithuania will assume competences focused on the industry of defense. Andrius Kubilius will adopt competences that before were in hands of the Industrial Commissioner, currently the Industrial European Commissioner of Prosperity and Industrial Strategy (Selas González, personal communication, 2024; Romero Junquera, personal communication, 2025). Thus, it can be established that despite new competences such as the fostering of military mobility, the bolstering of EU-NATO partnerships or the handling of cyber and hybrid attacks resilience (European Commission, 2025), most of the capacities are not new competences the European Commission, instead come from the restructuring within the Commission, where Kubilius adopts the community competences of the industry of defense.

This argument does explain why different experts affirm that the term with which Andrius Kubilius was proposed is a misleading one. Spanish former Subdirector General for International Security Affairs, Manuel Selas González, believes that other denominations should be granted such as Commissioner for the Armament within the EU (Selas González, personal communication, 2024). Differently, academics such as Daniela Serban, understand this denomination as a clear political compromise (Serban, 2025). Thus, although the title of the European Defense Commissioner for Defense and Space seems to be misleading in terms of actual competences of the Union, it is a clear political stance regarding the aspirations of the EU.

Nevertheless, it is relevant to point out that despite the competences of the Defense Commissioner in the industrial arena, due to the European Commission capacities in this regard, the new Defense Official will not have full competences in that regard. Despite the exclusive competences of the European Union in relation to the internal market, which does also include industries in general, in the case of the defense industry the supranational competences are more limited, since it is a very sensitive matter in which states want to maintain significant competences. Thus, bearing in mind the importance that EU member states give to defensive control, countries can still limit the defense

industry and within the EU internal market in an intergovernmental manner (Romero Junquera, 2025).

By making use of the article 346, states can still claim that the measures adopted by the Commission are a danger for their internal matters, thus they would not adopt decisions coming from Brussels (Romero Junquera, 2025). The article 346.1.a and article 346.1.b. do explicitly establish that “no member state shall be obliged to supply information the disclosure of which it considers contrary to the essential interests of its security”, and that “any Member State may take such measures as it considers necessary for the protection of the essential interests of its security which are connected with the production of or trade in arms, munition and war material” (art. 346.1.a & art. 346.1.b, Treaty of Lisbon).

Thus, although the Defense Commissioner has industrial competences, it can be discerned that the industry of defense can be still perceived not as complete competence of the European Commission. European states are significantly reluctant to transfer defensive competences to the European Union, for diverse reasons among which it is possible to highlight: the relevance of the defensive aspect in the establishment of a state as a sovereign entity, or the historical differences among certain member states as it could be the case of Poland and Germany. Nevertheless, although limited, the figure of the Defense Commissioner is precisely an attempt to increase integration regarding member states’ industrial defense.

6.2.3. Enhancer of EU-NATO Relations

Besides the Industrial aspect, the Defense Commissioner is also presented as a figure that would increase cooperation among European Union’s member states and NATO. One of the main principles of the European Security and Defense Policy collected on the Lisbon Treaty is precisely the complementarity with NATO. Article 42 of the Lisbon Treaty establishes that the commitment regarding security and defense should also be complementary to NATO agreement, which continues to be the basis of the collective defense for members of EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (art. 42, Treaty

of Lisbon). This complementing initiative is also established in other mechanisms, such as the PESCO project. In fact, complementarity was a requirement by diverse nations such as Poland, to join the PESCO program (Baranowski & Quencez, n.d).

Twenty-three out of the twenty-seven member states of the European Union are also part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Only the historical neutral countries of the EU (Austria, Malta and Ireland), together with the facto divided Cyprus are not members of NATO. Whereas in the case of the neutral states it could be perceived as a national statement, in the case of Cyprus the non-adhesion to NATO is closely aligned with Turkey's de facto control of the northern side of the island and its non-recognition of the Republic of Cyprus. Nevertheless, due to NATO's membership of more than 90% of EU civilians, the organization has historically been perceived as something essential and complementary to the EU for the development and protection of the Union member states.

With regard to their regional and correlative scope, the European Union and the Atlantic Organization have a history of continuous compromise since the Collapse of the Soviet Union in the end of the 20th century. The main primary event can be traced back to 1990 with the celebration of the NATO and Western Union Cooperation, which also led to the first informal meeting of the North Atlantic Council and the Political and Security Committee of the European Union in 2000 (European Union, n.d). These events progressively increased the relations of the EU and NATO, which were seen as opportunities for the European Union to guarantee integration, and for the Alliance to reinforce the European engagement (European Parliament, 2020). Conscious of the mutual benefits of boosting cooperation, the EU and the Alliance would formalize this collaboration with the Berlin Plus Agreement in 2003, which clarified the different scope of both organizations (NATO as a defensive organization and the EU as a crisis-management actor). The Berlin Plus Agreement did also enhance the cooperation of the Alliance and the European Union in the external crisis control and administration, with common missions (EUR-Lex, 2007).

The Berlin Plus Agreement established a precedent in the formal cooperation between

NATO and the European Union that would also motivate further collaboration in concrete missions. Nevertheless, the landmark moment in the partnership between NATO and the EU took place later, in 2016, two years after the Invasion of Crimea with the First EU-NATO Joint Declaration. The First EU-NATO Declaration promoted by the Council within the Union (the one with defense capabilities) reinforced the idea of essential partners with common goals (European Parliament, 2020). The process of joint declarations were both repeated in 2018 and 2023 in the context of the large-scale Invasion of Ukraine. The war in the European Union's neighborhood, together with the uncertainty that surrounds the current international landscape has increased the need for cooperation within the EU and NATO framework.

The European Commission and member states have seen in the figure of the European Commissioner for Defense and Space, the possibility to reinforce relations between NATO and the EU (Romero Junquera, personal communication, 2025; Sela González, personal communication, 2024; Serban, personal communication, 2025). In fact, one of the main events that took place in the first month of the new Commission, after being approved by the European Parliament, was the meeting between Andrius Kubilius and NATO's Secretary General Andrius Kubilius (NATO, 2025). This meeting was a clear message for the cooperation of the European Union and the Atlantic Alliance, which is not seen as something exclusive, but instead contributory. Furthermore, this meeting did also enhance the figure of the European Commissioner for Defense and Space as a relevant figure in the political sphere. The new Commissioner for Defense and Space has achieved a more political role, which boosts the political image of the defense in Europe.

The creation of the figure of the European Commissioner for Defense and Space could not have been designed aside from NATO, which is grasped as the main defense organization to protect European states. In fact, whereas the CDSP has an external scope as states in article 42 of the Lisbon Treaty, the Atlantic Organization has an internal scope to protect member states within its borders (article 42, Lisbon Treaty). Thus, the figure of Andrius Kubilius as the Defense Commissioner was also designed as a manner to bridge the gap between NATO and EU capabilities and to increase collaboration among both institutions (Kubilius, 2025). NATO has tried to increase delegation of

competencies within the European Union since the 90s, but it was never possible due to the lack of tools (Serbán, personal communication, 2024). This could be clearly discerned in the Yugoslav War at end of the 20th century when the European Union struggled to pose solutions to the war in the Balkans.

The complimentary scope of the European Commissioner for Defense and Space is to establish synergies between EU and NATO that would enhance common strategies rather than independent ones (Selas González, 2024). Analysts such as Romero Junquera believe that the idea within the promotion of EU-NATO cooperation through the figure of the Defense Commissioner is to reinforce the European dimension within NATO (Romero Junquera, personal communication 2025). The goal is to increase coordination among both organizations, to increase efficiency in the defense of the European territory, currently under. Thus, one of the main focuses is to boost cooperation among both organizations is the industrial aspect. Despite collaboration regarding the need of increasing expenditure, the focus is that NATO officers and Andrius Kubilius would closely collaborate to enhance industrial development of defensive capabilities within the EU by fostering the previously mentioned internal market of defense.

Nevertheless, it is relevant to point out the role of Commissioner Kubilius as a compatible figure to Foreign Affairs Representative Kaja Kallas in the pursuit of regular contact with NATO authorities (Domínguez Cebrián et al., 2025). The majority of the agreements that have been reached among EU institutions and NATO representatives have been related to the CSDP, which is controlled by the High Representative. Thus, the idea is that the role of Andrius Kubilius would be complementary to Kalla's duties in the pursuit of continuous enhancement of EU-NATO relations. Whereas in the case of the High Representatives the focus is on the CSDP, in the case of Andrius Kubilius the focus is mostly placed on the industrial aspect and the promotion of the relations between the EU executive and the Alliance.

6.2.3. Actors

In the wider scope of the European Union in matters of defense, it can be inferred that

the agency of the actors themselves is crucial. Following the principles of the path creation theory where it is stated that actors play a significant role in the evolution of the path followed by institutions and organizations (Garud et al., 2010), it can be said that in the case of the broader competences of the EU in matters of defense, there are certain actors that have played a key role. Among these agents, in the last decade it is possible to highlight the figure of Federica Mogherini (Serban, personal communication, 2025) and Ursula Von der Leyen (Betti, personal communication, 2025; Romero Junquera, personal communication, 2025; Serban, personal communication, 2025).

In the course of the progressive development of security and defense within the European Union, they highlighted different actors for their significant contribution, such as José Manuel Durao Barroso, President of the European Commission between 2004 and 2014 and Javier Solana, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security from 1999 to 2009. Both figures were crucial in the establishment of the Common Security and Defense Policy, which entered into force with the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 (European Union, 2007). However, in the last decades, when it could be timed the substantial rise of defensive integration, Mogherini and Von der Leyen have stood up for their agency and leadership.

In the European Recovery of the financial crisis that gripped the European Union in 2008-2009, Mogherini arrived at the European Commission with a strong transformational leadership that would entail a substantial change in the portrayal of the European Union. This could be clearly discerned at the Conference “Thinking Europe Forward” in October 2017 (Mogherini, 2017). The former member of Italian the socialist democratic party arrived in the European Union with the intention of contributing to the strengthening of the EU. Mogherini was in charge of fostering the legitimacy of the European Union in the external scenario, which did also entail an internal progression and a close alignment with the Commission. Federica Mogherini increased relations between the European Council and the European Commission and advocated for a prominent role of the Commission as it was discerned through different initiatives, among which it is possible to highlight the transfer of her main office to the Commission headquarters (Aggestam & Hedling, 2019).

Mogherini's aims to increase the positioning of the European Union in the global scenario together with her increasing wills of integration did also have a significant impact on the evolution of EU defense. In fact, in 2015 Federica Mogherini promoted an Implementation Plan on Security and Defense within the EU Global Strategy (EEAS, 2018). This new initiative, ought to Mogherini's promotion of expanded relations between the European Commission and the European Council was not only focused on the enhancement of crisis responses and coordination among military and civilian frameworks, but also on the coordination of defense annual spending and the larger cooperation among EU member states (EEAS, 2016). In this process, aware of the importance of public opinion, Mogherini made significant efforts to include society along the integration process.

Former Italian Minister promoted a public and transparent process in the discussion of the EGS (European Global Strategy), and thus in the Implementation Plan on Security and Defense (Aggestam & Hedling, 2019). Whereas until the moment negotiations had been mostly done behind the doors, Mogherini boosted a new manner of politics that would elevate EU society compromise. Thus, Federica Mogherini did not only showcase substantial leadership to increase the European Union's institutional cohesion in matters of foreign policy, security and defense, but also the necessity to incorporate society along the way. This communication strategy has also been used by other leaders throughout the process such as Ursula Von der Leyen.

Von der Leyen has been characterized by its leading figure within the European Commission and the European Union as a whole. Former German Minister of Defense has adopted a prominent role within the European Commission. Mogherini adopted a new leading strategy that would be adapted by Von der Leyen. In general terms it can be said that the current President of the Commission has had the commanding capabilities to increase the governing competences of the European executive, in crucial matters such as defense. Whereas in other previous mandates the Commission had strictly adopted the competences established under the Lisbon Treaty, Von der Leyen's Commission has gone beyond. With the ambition of rising integration and the EU's

geopolitical role, the serving leader of the European Commission has pushed to the limit her capacities (Betti, personal communication, 2025; Serban, personal communication, 2025).

The Commission of Ursula Von der Leyen has been able to acquire competences in a state of uncertainty whose ruling was not clear. Among other things, these expanded competences haven been possible thanks to people's perception of a leader, a view that has been enhanced by her response to the Covid-19 crisis, which has increased her credibility (Serban, personal communication, 2025). These leading abilities together with her leadership recognition among society have allowed her to increase the defensive capacities of the European Union. Through this adoption of competences, Ursula Von der Leyen has amplified the Commission's role in the industry of defense through the promotion of the internal market and the designation of Andrius Kubilius as the Defense Commissioner. These actions have also been part of Von der Leyen's strategy to increase supranational competences in matters of defense due to the limited actions EU leaders in the European Council (Romero Junquera, personal communication, 2025).

The expanded competences of Von der Leyen's Commission cannot only be highlighted in matters of defense, also in questions of Climate Change for example with the development of the Green Deal. Nevertheless, over the past years, Von der Leyen has stood out for her commitment with the defense, motivated by her leadership, her role as German Defense Minister, the international geopolitical context that shapes the current scenario and the lack of agreement in the European Council. Von der Leyen's leadership and different approach to interpret the Presidency have significantly affected the evolution of defense within the European Union as it can be discerned with the development of initiatives such as ReArm Europe (Von der Leyen, 2025). The White Paper has showcased a compromise of the European Commission with defense that had never been seen before (European Commission, 2025). Furthermore, Von der Leyen has not only increased institutional compromise with the defense, also among society.

The European Commission led by Ursula Von der Leyen has spread not only a manner of

doing politics, but also a clear path to follow by EU diverse societies. Besides establishing an institutional orientation over the main goals of the European Commission in the different mandates (European Commission, 2019; European Commission, 2024), Von der Leyen has also spread common mindset patterns among society (Betti, personal communication, 2025). In the case of defense, this can be clearly discerned with the increasing commitment with European defense among EU societies. Whereas in the past there was significant rejection to the cession of larger defensive competences to the European Commission, as it was seen as a risk by different member states, currently there is broader support among European public opinion to transfer defense competences to the EU (Wang & Moise, 2023). This can be certainly attributed to the international geopolitical context, but also to the initiatives taken from the European Commission to increase EU competences in matters of defense, and to the communicative profile of Ursula Von der Leyen, who since her arrival into power has slightly increased and stabilized support to a common European defensive approach (Eurobarometer, 2024).

Leaders such as Ursula Von der Leyen and Mogherini have showcased that agents do also play a crucial role in shaping EU's defense evolution. Thus, although institutionalization of defensive policies does indirectly lead to an increasing systematization of defensive mechanisms in the European Commission that seem hard to retreat, agents do also have an essential role in the push forwards those wider competences. Ursula Von der Leyen and Federica Mogherini are two clear examples of agents who have fostered the development of European defense mechanisms because of their personal leadership. Andrius Kubilius is believed to be a potentially relevant actor in the development of an amplified defensive approach within the Union.

Current European Commissioner for Defense and Space has been granted the capacities to become a relevant figure in the development of EU defensive capacities. With directions to increase EU countries defense investment, to enhance the development of European industries of defense and the internal market, and with the goal of facilitating and boosting EU-NATO relations (European Commission, 2025), Kubilius could become a relevant figure in the evolution of EU defense. Andrius Kubilius, whose appointment

can not only be attributed to his political career but also to his stance against Putin's Russia and EU's current focus on the East, can also become a significant figure in the development of EU common defense mechanisms. Nevertheless, this prominent positioning would also depend on his leading capacities to not only adapt to the expectations, but to also take a step forward, as it was the case of Mogherini (Serban, direct communication, 2025) or Ursula Von der Leyen in the progressive integration of the European defense. However, it is also relevant to mention that Kubilius' capacities do not only depend on Von der Leyen's decisions but also on Kallas' determinations.

In the case of the European Union, defense continued to be under the umbrella of Common Foreign and Security Policy, which is chaired by the EU's High Representative and Vice-President of the European Commission, as previously mentioned. Thus, despite the potential relations between Andrius Kubilius and leaders of the European Union, Kaja Kallas has more formal opportunities for official discussion of defensive matters, since she has the chance to chair the foreign Affairs Council and meet with Foreign Affairs Ministers of each nation states, who are also in charge of defense in the European sphere. Defense is not one of the ten different configurations of the Council of the European Union, in the EU sphere it is under the Foreign Affairs one (EUR-Lex, n.d). Thus, here it could also be found an open door for the European Commissioner for Defense and Space, to enhance involvement of ministers of defense. Nevertheless, for the moment, it can be established that the potential leadership of the European Defense Commissioner could have a significant impact on the evolution of EU defense integration. However, in some scenarios the competences of the new Defense Commissioner are intertwined with those of the High Representative.

6.2.4. Are we heading towards a Defensive Union?

One of the main objectives of Ursula von der Leyen with the appointment of Andrius Kubilius as the European Commissioner for Defense and Space, was the progressive creation of a Defensive Union (Von der Leyen, 2024). Nevertheless, this does not seem to be an option in the short term. Lately the European Union has been characterized by

its speeches focused on aspirations rather than actual capacities (Koenig, 2021; Romero Junquera, 2025), thus the EU in their statements uses concepts as manner to chart EU path forward. The Defensive Union mentioned by Ursula Von der Leyen in the presentation of the new Commission, is a clear example of the aspirational discourse used by the European Commission. Something similar could be also said about the position of “European Commissioner for Defense and Space”. Although the increasing ambitions of the European Union could be focused on expanding the defensive competences of the Commission through the creation of a Defense Commissioner, the reality is that its role is mostly limited to the defense industry (Selas González, personal communication, 2024; Romero Junquera, personal communication, 2025; Witney, 2024).

Besides the aspirational discourse of the European Commission regarding the path towards a Defensive Union, this ambition continues to be infeasible in the short term, since countries are not willing to cede their defense sovereignty. As it happened in the 1950s when the idea of a European Army was proposed for the first time (Pontijas, 2019), the majority of states are not willing to cede their competences in defense, given that it is one of the key principles of a sovereign and independent nation state. Despite relevant and crucial commonalities among EU countries, they do also exist differences that constrain states from conceding defense capacities to a supranational institution. A clear example could be the case of the neutral states such as previously mentioned Malta and Ireland, which have different approaches to the defense, the case of Poland, which is closely aligned with NATO and feels certain hesitations to share defense competences with historically antagonist powers such as Germany (The Economist, 2019), or the case of Hungary and Slovakia, whose links with Russia detach them from EU countries (Lukiv & Thorpe, 2024).

However, despite the lack of a current Defensive Union or its possible achievement in the short term, a European Union of defense is not something that is understood as unattainable in the long-term. Overall, it can be said that the areas in which the European Union has achieved wider supranational competences, are difficult to eliminate. One of the limited examples where it could be said that the European Union

has reduced its competences in areas in which it had previously achieved it is the case of the United Kingdom, but its attempt to reduce Brussels' competences in different matters, ended up with its exit in 2020. In concrete aspects such as defense, something similar seems to happen, states have reached a point in which it is not possible to move back, and instead just continue towards compromise even though they are not legally forced to.

As it was explained before, the European Commission has progressively adopted growing interests in matters of defense that now seem difficult to eliminate and on the contrary, have led to enhanced defensive competences. As it is explained through the path dependency theory, the institutionalization of certain defensive aspects has expanded the creation of defensive mechanisms within the European institutions. This institutionalization together with the agency of certain actors have increased EU capacities in the field of industrial defense. The current scenario and compromise of different states have showcased that the path to follow seems to be similar, and that the EU could be moving forwards to its aspirations.

Since the Declaration of Saint-Malo in 1998, European states have progressively pursued larger defensive cooperation. The Declaration of the two main European leaders at the time gave place to the development of common mechanisms that would enhance the progressive cooperation of EU member states with the enlargement of future mechanisms such as the European Defense Agency, the creation of the Common Security and Defense Policy, the establishment of the PESCO, or the enter into of the European Defense Fund. Each formalized mechanism has led to higher levels of cooperation, but also to the acknowledgement of areas of improvement. The functioning of the European Defense Agency, together with international instability showcased the need for an increasingly common approach that would result in the proposal of the EDF by the Commission.

Similar conclusions could be reached in regards to the industry of defense. Permanent Structured Cooperation aimed, among other things, to increase industrial collaboration within matters of defense, has resulted in growing industrial cooperation discerned in

2024 with the EDIS (European Commission, 2024) and in the figure of Andrius Kubilius. Cooperation in matters of the defense industry has revealed areas in need of broader coordination and has led to common strengthening of industrial cooperation. The industrial scope of different defense initiatives such as the PESCO or the Capability Technology Group has triggered the development of the European Defense Industrial Strategy and the appointment of a new Commissioner for Defense, focused on the development of defensive industrial capacities and the defense industrial market (Kubilius, 2025).

Nevertheless, it is also relevant to point out that this EU industrial scope in defense has also been motivated by external factors, such as the large-scale invasion of Ukraine, the disrupter position of historical EU allies and main defense trade partners such as the United States, and Von der Leyen's commitment with defense, which could be perceived in her publication of the program Re-Arm Europe (European Commission, 2025). Thus, although it is clear that the institutionalization of certain mechanisms does influence the escalating systematization of defensive aspects (especially in what industrial development entails), factors such as extrinsic factors and leaders' role do also play a crucial role. Bearing in mind these variables, and the increasing EU role in matters of defense, it can be assumed that the EU countries are moving forward to strengthen its defensive integration. However, this enhanced cooperation can be only limited to the industry and the promotion of defensive investment.

EU member states have not ceased their industrial cooperation in what defense entails, in fact they have promoted the creation of common mechanisms, they have all agreed on the appointment of the European Commissioner for defense and most of them have concurred to enhance defense spending. Leaders of EU member states have not opposed the rising supranational capacities of the European Commission in what defense entails. However, this common EU defense approach is limited to investment and industrial capacities. Member states are not willing to cede their governing rights in crucial defensive aspects such as military operations within the Union or forces control (EDA, 2024).

Although there do exist different approaches towards an increasingly common approach of the European Union in certain aspects of defense, it could be affirmed that states are not willing to cede defensive national competences, as they perceive them fundamental for their national sovereignty and representation. Thus, it would be possible to state that although in the long-term future a defensive Union (Von der Leyen, 2024) could be possible, in the short term it could be feasible to affirm that we are moving forwards a Union of Industrial Defense. Nevertheless, in this amplified common approach towards the defensive industry states themselves still have significant competences. EU countries are still capable of banning industrial initiatives in case they consider them a threat to their national security, which yet gives them the capacity to retain their sovereignty in that regard.

7. Conclusions

The European Union is a constant process of progression and integration that is discerned in the defensive scope. Although defense has always been a competence that has been retained by member states as established in the article 42 of the Lisbon Treaty (art. 42, Lisbon Treaty), leaders of EU countries have progressively accepted the increasing involvement of the European Commission in this area. Whereas until 2017 the majority of decisions related with defense, including those focused on industry and investment, were in the hands of member states themselves, with the establishment of the European Defense Fund, in some way the Commission expanded its direct involvement in this regard. The EDF would lead to the inclusion of industrial aspects of defense in the Multiannual Frameworks (2021-2027) through the scope of innovation and development, with a military and civil span (Romero Junquera, direct communication, 2025). This intensified systematization of defensive aspects has led to an inevitably amplified institutionalization.

Recently, at the end of 2024, EU countries agreed on the appointment of a new European Commissioner for Defense and Space, currently Andrius Kubilius. In light of common, progressive and enduring efforts of the European Commission in matters of defense, states saw in Andrius Kubilius a figure to politically represent those endeavors.

However, the approval of a new EU Official committed to defense has also been possible due to other factors besides the intensified institutionalization of the European Union. Aside from the historically constant integration of the European Union (Steinberg, 2023), there are other three main variables that have determined the evolution of defense and that have driven the creation of the European Commissioner for Defense and Space: the international context, the leadership of Ursula Von der Leyen and the competences of the Defense Commissioner.

Firstly, the international geopolitical instability in terms of conflict and allies, together with the progressively restricted role of the European Union on the global stage, has led European member states to increase their common standpoint on defensive matters to enhance their geopolitical power. Secondly, it is relevant to point out the leadership of Ursula Von der Leyen. The former German Defense Minister has focused on strengthening the role of the European Commission since her arrival to power (Müller & Tömmel, 2022). This integration can certainly be adapted to defense, where she has increased common approaches through mechanisms such as the EDF, and where she aims to continue enhancing collaboration through the appointment of a Defense Commissioner and a program to Re-Armament (European Commission, 2025). Thirdly, and finally it can be affirmed that the growing EU collaboration materialized in the figure of Andrius Kubilius can also be attributed to the limited scope of this EU Official in the following areas: defense industries, EU-NATO relations and defense investment.

Kubilius has the responsibility to boost investment among member states, an aspect on which there is general consensus among EU countries, with the exception of certain historically neutral states. Furthermore, the current European Commissioner for Defense and Space is also in charge of promoting EU defense industries and creating a solid internal market of defense, competences previously in hands of the European Commissioner for Industry and Entrepreneurship. Finally, Andrius Kubilius has the duty to enhance EU relations with NATO following the complementary principle of Lisbon (art.42, Lisbon Treaty) and in coordination with High Representative Kaja Kallas. However, the common agreement regarding the figure and competences of the Commissioner for Defense and Space is also contingent on the capacities of member

states, who decide on their investment, who can block industrial frameworks in case they consider them a threat to their national security (art. 346, Lisbon Treaty), and who maintain bilateral relations with NATO.

Thus, although it is possible to affirm that the development of social process and existing structures and institutions constrain the path to follow as stated by Pierson (Goldstein et al., 2022), it is also important to mention that defense within the EU follows bounded but not unstoppable paths that are not only confined by institutionalization. Although states cannot rescind a decision once made in terms of cession of competences, they can stop its consequent integration. Furthermore, it is crucial to emphasize that institutionalization is not the only cause of increasing EU defense mechanisms.

Despite the relevance of standardization in the integration of defense within the EU, there are other significant variables. The uncertain and complex international context, together with the agency of actors such Ursula Von der Leyen, has played a key role in the development of the European Commissioner for Defense and Space, but also in the evolution of EU defensive mechanisms in general. Therefore, it can be inferred that the creation of the European Defense Commissioner as peak in the defensive integration within the Union, does not only follow the theory of path dependency (Trouvé et al., 2010), but also the path creation theory, where it is established that agents are crucial variables in the institutional evolution (Emirbayer & Mische, 1989).

The future of the European Union with regards to defense does reside in the evolution of the international geopolitical landscape, but especially in: the evolution of EU defense mechanisms, the wills of nation-states themselves, the agency of President Von der Leyen in this second mandate, and as the acting capacities of the High Representative and the European Commissioner for Defense and Space Andrius Kubilius. Thus, it could be interesting to prospectively explore the projects carried out by Andrius Kubilius and his relations with member states, High Representative Kaja Kallas and NATO representatives.

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8. Artificial Intelligence Statement

Statement on the Use of Generative AI Tools in Final Degree Works

I, Paula María Jiménez Lendoiro, student of International Relations and Global Communication at **Universidad Pontificia Comillas**, by presenting my Final Thesis entitled "**The European Commissioner for Defense and Space: A Symptom of a new Defensive Union?**", hereby declare that I have used the ChatGPT Generative IA tool or other similar IAG code only in the context of the activities described below:

1. **Equivalent Term Browser**
2. **Translator:** To translate terminology

I affirm that all information and content presented in this work are the product of my individual research and effort, except where otherwise indicated and credit has been given (I have included appropriate references in the dissertation and have made explicit what ChatGPT or other similar tools have been used for). I am aware of the academic and ethical implications of submitting non-original work and accept the consequences of any violation of this statement.

Date: April, 30, 2025

Signature: Paula María Jiménez Lendoiro