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Supranational Self-Empowerment Through Bricolage: The Role of the European Commission in EU Security and Defence

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Abstract

This article provides a novel conceptualization of bricolage as a strategy for incremental supranational self-empowerment. It argues that the cumulative effects of different bricolage tools employed by the Commission have been central for progressively strengthening its role in EU security and defence, which culminated in the establishment of the European Defence Fund (EDF) and the Commission's Directorate-General Defence Industry and Space (DG DEFIS). Building communication upon communication, the Commission used discursive bricolage to set the conditions for employing existing EU financial and organizational resources to advance its interests. Specifically, with its incremental bricolage approach, the Commission has managed to mitigate sovereignty concerns of member states, progressively nudging them towards deeper integration. Overall, our article shows how the Commission has strengthened its influence through the cumulative bricolage tools even in the intergovernmental domains of security and defence.

Keywords: bricolage; CSDP; EU foreign policy; European Commission; research and development

Introduction

The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is increasingly characterized by a 'policy-making hybridity', which relates to the combination of intergovernmental policy-making modes with more supranational elements (Hoeffler, 2019, p. 45). The progressive supranationalization of certain areas of security and defence, particularly those linked to industrial armament-related aspects, has given rise to a growing yet still small number of scholarly research that examines how supranational actors like the European Commission, the European Court of Justice or the European Parliament (EP) have advanced a progressive deepening of integration in this domain whilst advancing their own roles and interests (Herranz-Surrallés, 2019). These works resort to various theoretical frameworks including judicial politics (Blauberger and Weiss, 2013), communicative action theory (Riddervold, 2011, 2016), role theory (Chappell et al., 2020), the failing forward approach (Bergmann and Müller, 2021), discoursive institutionalism (Calcara, 2020) or revised neofunctionalism (Bergmann and Müller, 2023; Håkansson, 2021; Haroche, 2020). Recently, works have also engaged with how core beliefs about defence technologies and industrial innovation have gradually become institutionalized in certain EU networks (Martins and Mawdsley, 2021), examining also the Commission's role in shaping debates on EU defence.

Overall, this literature and related works on supranational self-empowerment in other domains (e.g., Héritier et al., 2019; Maltby, 2013; Schmidt, 2000) provide insights into

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distinct competence maximizing strategies by supranational actors, such as bargaining, circumvention, agent-based learning, and discursive strategies, and their effects on important moments in the integration process. Yet, whilst several of these works acknowledge the importance of supranational agency, they tend to treat different strategies of self-empowerment as singular and isolated developments. This makes it difficult to explain integration patterns that are shaped by various modes of activity in an interrelated and cumulative fashion over time.

Addressing this research gap, this article explores the question of how the Commission has gradually strengthened its own role in this domain, notwithstanding its limited formal authority. To study the agent-based mechanisms of incremental supranational self-empowerment and the scope conditions under which they apply, we build on and advance the concept of bricolage, which allows us to examine the Commission's repertoire of ideas, resources and approaches, which are purposefully employed in a combined and cumulative manner to achieve a desired outcome (Cleaver, 2002, p. 16). In essence, bricolage means the pragmatic usage and reconfiguration of existing tools to achieve something new. It highlights the fact that a bricoleur has to rely on a limited number of available means to pursue its preferences. At the same time, it also means that available instruments of the bricoleur are known and acknowledged by other political actors.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of how the Commission uses the various instruments at its disposal, we distinguish between 'discursive bricolage', 'budgetary bricolage' and 'organizational bricolage'. In so doing, we contribute to the emerging theoretical literature on bricolage in the context of EU governance and works on the Commission's role as a policy entrepreneur. To test the utility of the concept of bricolage as an instrument of supranational agency, we examine the role of the Commission in the integration of security and defence. Accordingly, we also add to the literature on EU security and defence policy, showing how the domain of defence research and development (R&D) has played a key role in the gradual supranationalization of this domain of 'core state powers' (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs, 2013).

Methodologically, we rely on theory-building process tracing, which constitutes a common approach to probe the plausibility of novel theoretical arguments by searching for a theorized causal mechanism that may also be generalizable outside of the individual case (Beach and Pedersen, 2019). Through theory-building process tracing, we explore evidence linking new mechanisms, that is, the different bricolage strategies, with the outcome of a progressive strengthening of the Commission's role in security and defence. In addition, this kind of process tracing is also suitable to identify the scope conditions under which these mechanisms function properly (Beach and Pedersen, 2019, p. 271). Besides relevant academic literature, our process tracing analysis draws on evidence gained from a broad range of primary sources. Moreover, 12 semi-structured interviews with officials from EU institutions, EU member states, think-tanks and EU defence industries selected on the basis of 'positional criteria' (Tansey, 2009) were conducted between the beginning of January and the end of July 2022 (see Annex A). The interviews were semi-structured and included open-ended questions to allow interviewees to respond freely, to probe for information, to obtain hidden expert knowledge on causal steps in the bricolage process and to triangulate amongst respondents and other data sources. All interviews were transcribed and were assessed amongst the team of authors in terms of information linking bricolage processes to outcomes of supranational self-empowerment. The article starts

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by developing our theoretical framework that highlights key strategies of bricolage and the way they impact on EU policy-making. The subsequent empirical section first delineates core steps in the integration of defence-industrial co-operation. Second, it shows how the cumulative effects of bricolage dynamics have contributed to integration in this policy domain. In the conclusion, we discuss key findings.

I. Bricolage and Institutional Change

Bricolage has only recently entered the scholarly literature on European integration and has been employed for various analytical purposes. Some scholars have used it to explain policy transfer and diffusion (Röper, 2021). Others see it as a key mechanism for maintaining institutional stability and continuity (Carstensen and Röper, 2022). The latter use contrasts with yet another approach to bricolage, which conceives it as a concept of change (Copeland, 2022). Contributing to this nascent literature on change through bricolage, we first have to note that bricolage fits well with a certain strand of historical institutionalism that has increasingly focused on gradual change (Carstensen, 2011, 2015; Mahoney and Thelen, 2010; Streeck and Thelen, 2005).[1] However, bricolage adds to this literature by putting a greater emphasis on political agency, which can be regarded as a 'neglected theme in much institutional theory' (Olsson and Hysing, 2019). The agency orientation of bricolage allows us to transcend the single action logics of rationalism or constructivism and investigate how actors with mixed motives purposefully use institutional opportunities, exploit ideas and resources and mitigate institutional constraints (Carstensen, 2015; Olsson and Hysing, 2019). Moreover, whilst the modes of gradual institutional change as developed by Mahoney and Thelen are widely used by other scholars, as being treated as mutually exclusive, which makes them difficult to explain empirical constellations that are shaped by various mechanisms of action (Van der Heijden and Kuhlmann, 2017). Bricolage, instead, highlights that political actors are willing to use available tools in a combined and cumulative manner to further their interests. This mix of ideational, material and organizational tools also distinguishes bricolage from discursive institutionalism, which is mainly concerned with the role norms and communication play in political processes (Schmidt, 2008).

The Commission's Bricolage Strategies

To theorize the bricolage strategies of self-empowerment of the European Commission, we assess their effects in terms of the scope of its decision-making authority (tasks and issues), the expansion of material capabilities (budget and staff) and the influence on institutional design decisions, within the EU's heterogenous and polycentric governance system (Carstensen, 2015; Heldt and Mueller, 2021, p. 84). Here, the concept of bricolage can help us to shed light on the dynamics of gradual change, highlighting that institutions offer a 'tool kit' or repertoire of ideas, resources, logics or policies from which the bricoleur constructs new 'strategies of actions' (Campbell, 2004; Swidler, 1986). As with

[1] For the purpose of this article, we assume change as gradual or incremental when it happens in small steps that appear to largely maintain the existing institutional environment, without involving significant sovereignty costs. That is not to say that gradual changes are irrelevant. Gradual change can indeed result in major or significant changes over time. Hence, incremental change cannot be conceived as a distinct alternative to the status quo but more as a development process (Burch et al., 2003; Mahoney and Thelen, 2010).

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many political agents, the Commission has been conceived as a 'competence maximizer' who strives to increase not only its own power but also the competences of the EU more broadly (Niemann et al., 2019; Pollack, 2003). However, as the formal competences of the Commission can only be increased by Treaty reforms, the Commission is obliged to act – or at least appear to act – within the boundaries of existing EU law.

This resonates well with the view of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who introduced the concept of bricolage into the social sciences. '[The bricoleur's] universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with "whatever is at hand", that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogenous […]' (Levi-Strauss, 1966, p. 17). Whilst the concept of bricolage maintains an understanding that political agency is a messy process of working with whatever is at hand, it also emphasizes that bricoleurs do not simply use existing elements but are engaged in tweaking and recombining them with the view to incrementally create something new over a certain period of time that furthers their interests (Blijleven and van Hulst, 2021, p. 281; Innes and Booher, 1999). The nature of these elements can be '[s]ubdominant institutional logic[s]' or 'minority discourses waiting in the wings' (quoted in Röper, 2021), as well as existing competences, resources or instruments, which have been created and assigned for different purposes.

To bring some analytical order into the complexity of supranational bricolage, we suggest that the European Commission possesses three bricolage tools that help to maximize its influence: 'discursive bricolage', 'budgetary bricolage' and 'organizational bricolage'. Whilst discursive bricolage has been discussed by some scholars (notably Carstensen, 2011, 2015), it also partly resonates with the notion of symbolic bricolage introduced by Campbell (2004, p. 70) that builds on the logic of appropriateness of organizational institutionalism (March and Olsen, 1998). Our approach of discursive bricolage, however, deviates from such an understanding highlighting the purposeful and strategic use of communicative action that is closer to approaches such as strategic constructivism (Jabko, 2006) or rhetorical action (Schimmelfennig, 2001). Conversely, whilst budgetary and organizational bricolage may be broadly regarded as examples of 'substantive bricolage' (Campbell, 2004, p. 69), they have thus far not been considered systematically by bricolage scholars. In our view, this is an important omission as we argue that the Commission's discursive tools have to be complemented with material and organizational ones to get a more comprehensive understanding of supranational bricolage.

Through discursive bricolage, the Commission engages with the politics of communication, drawing on a repertoire of established ideas and narratives and combining them in a creative way and/or adding new elements that pushes its point a bit further (Kornprobst, 2014, p. 273). The more the Commission can rely on, or refer to, published EU documents in the step-by-step construction of its narrative, the more it can persuasively argue that its own narrative represents commonly 'agreed language' (Campbell, 2004, p. 67; Myles and Pierson, 2001; Ross, 1995). As such, the Commission can connect its objectives with pre-existing narratives and discourses – including those advanced by other agents of institutional change that may form a discursive coalition (Calcara, 2020) – allowing it to frame its arguments as an established, common EU position and making them more familiar to competing actors in the field (Fox and Levav, 2000). By enshrining a certain approach or wording within a published document, the Commission can stake a claim for EU competence and create a discursive path that

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has the potential to reinforce itself over time through feedback mechanisms and lock-in effects (Pierson, 2000). Portraying its positions as an advancement of commonly agreed ends, even 'sovereign-minded' member states may over time find themselves increasingly 'entrapped' by a narrative that progressively builds on their own, initially vague and imprecise language (Schimmelfennig, 2001). Discursive bricolage is particularly powerful in the EU's institutional environment, where reputation-sensitive actors may find it difficult to oppose a certain narrative that has become incrementally anchored in official EU documents 'without damaging their credibility as a community' (ibid., p. 48).

Budgetary bricolage, in turn, involves efforts to revisit and revise existing financial tools to generate desired change and promote integration in a given policy domain. The EU's Multiannual Financial Framework is negotiated for a period of 7 years, establishing the general level of expenditures with regard to both the main budgetary categories and the overall ceiling of the budget. As this inhibits unscheduled spending, the Commission often has to work within the boundaries of existing financial instruments if it wants to address important policy developments and unexpected events, shifting resources from established budgetary lines to new policy initiatives. Given the EU's competence asymmetry, the Commission has an incentive to link its existing budgetary powers with intergovernmental policy areas it seeks to draw into its orbit. Specifically, the Commission may rely on flexible tools to reallocate existing budgetary resources, including through instruments like pilot projects and preparatory actions that are provided for in the EU Financial Regulation (2018/1046). Over time, EU-funded pilot projects and preparatory actions can help to align the expectations and interests of key stakeholder, including EU member states and representatives from other relevant public and private actors, with core elements of the Commission's policy agenda. Budgetary bricolage is particularly effective when the Commission succeeds in connecting envisaged competences with established powers on a discursive level. Presenting new competences with existing ones appears as incremental, rather than major change, which tends to be perceived as a lesser threat by member states who seek to preserve key sovereign powers whilst trying to gain access to EU resources (Glassner et al., 2011). As a result, reluctant member states may find it easier to accept the Commission's position.

Organizational bricolage relates to a Commission strategy of revisiting and revising existing institutional arrangements to promote desired integration outcomes. As a strategy of self-empowerment, it aims to lock-in political gains achieved through successful discursive and budgetary bricolage by transforming them into 'new institutional solutions through a recombination of elements in the existing repertoire' (Campbell, 2004, p. 33; Copeland, 2022, p. 3). Lacking relevant organizational assets in core state power areas such as security and defence, the Commission has to rely on existing organizational resources [e.g., Directorates-General (DGs)] with its well-established working structure to promote its policy objectives. In addition, the Commission may also involve external experts and stakeholders, which is a familiar and widely used practice in many EU policy areas (Krick and Gornitzka, 2019; Skelcher and Torfing, 2010). Allowing sympathetic outsiders to participate in policy-making processes, the Commission is able to build networks and coalitions, which in turn facilitates the dissemination of like-minded ideas and contributes to desired change. For reluctant member states, the strengthening of networking and EU capacity building may appear as an apolitical technocratic exercise and therefore as less threatening than new power transfers towards Brussels. Over time, and in line

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with other strategies of bricolage, the Commission may succeed in acquiring new tasks and competences, providing it with an appropriate organizational basis for establishing new institutional capacities (including a new DG) that build on and consolidate the experience and design of previous governance arrangements.

The Effectiveness of Bricolage and Its Limits

Bricolage can be an effective way to mitigate member state's sovereignty concerns as it plays to their status-quo orientation and reluctance to support major change in the configuration of decision-making authority and resources. At the same time, it subverts the status quo as its strategies set up the conditions for incremental change by stealth and recalibrate the incentives and expectations of relevant stakeholders.

The effectiveness of bricolage strategies as tools for the Commission's self-empowerment depends on a number of scope conditions. First, supranational bricolage is particularly effective in policy areas that are shaped by persistent interest diversity, requiring member states to resort to vague language to reduce decision costs and to achieve some sort of compromise. Ambiguous wording or imprecise meaning, however, may serve as an entry point for strategically savvy bricoleurs, such as the Commission, to establish discursive links between existing powers and 'to-be-conquered' intergovernmental areas (Cram, 1997, p. 107; Sabel and Zeitlin, 2010). Second, bricolage benefits from the existence of a significant body of EU rules, case law and policy documents to which the bricoleur can refer to. This is particularly the case if the bricoleur manages to connect its envisaged supranational objectives to pre-existing competences and powers in related policy domains. This holds true for supranational fields with its dense web of hard and soft EU rules, political and social networks and powerful EU actors (Jabko, 2006; Stone-Sweet et al., 2001). Yet scholars have also observed that core state power areas have increasingly been shaped by joint decision-making by the European Council and the Council, which results in an increasing number of hard and soft law (Puetter, 2014; Wessel, 2009). Third, savvy bricoleurs can enhance the effectiveness of bricolage if they are able to frame their tools as preliminary or informal ones, which often appear less problematic or threatening to political opponents, thus reducing decision and sovereignty costs further (Trubek et al., 2006). Finally, the Commission as bricoleur benefits from critical external events and crisis. Whilst such situations create a sense of urgency and problem-solving pressure for member states, it also provides strategic opportunities for the Commission to offer a supranational response to commonly perceived threats and challenges (Kreuder-Sonnen and White, 2022).

II. Towards More Supranationalization in EU Security and Defence

Like other aspects of security and defence policy, the domain of defence R&D has traditionally been dominated by the EU member states, whilst supranational actors like the Commission have been relegated to the side lines. As a result of the diversity of the member states' interests and capacities, the EU has long been characterized by a high degree of fragmentation of its defence market and industries (De la Brosse, 2017; Fiott, 2015a; Hartley, 2008). Member states with a strong 'Atlanticist' orientation were particularly concerned about negative implications of greater EU integration on

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defence R&D on their relations with the United States. At the same time, member states with less competitive national defence companies traditionally sought to avoid negative effects of greater EU integration in defence R&D for their national industries, being concerned about domination of the larger member states. Conversely, larger member states with a 'Europeanist' foreign policy orientation and highly competitive national defence industries, most notably France, were the most supportive of enhancing Europe's technological and industrial capacity in the defence domain. Still, they traditionally preferred to enhance co-operation along intergovernmental lines (Fiott, 2015b).

Despite diverging interests and significant reservations and sovereignty concerns on the part of a number of EU member states, the Commission has successfully contributed to a greater integration in the area of defence-technological R&D since the early 2000s that also involved a strengthening of its own role. The processes of greater integration of defence R&D culminated in the establishment of the European Defence Fund (EDF) in 2021. Whilst the outcomes of the negotiations of the EDF reflected in important ways sovereignty concerns of member states and successful efforts of individual member states to reduce the budget initially proposed by the Commission (Håkansson, 2021), it has also been described as a 'game changer' for the integration of European defence (Haroche, 2020, p. 853). The establishment and institutional design of the EDF clearly marked a major step towards the empowerment of the Commission. Importantly, the EDF has broadened its decision-making competences, including through its role in the management and implementation of defence R&D that is also supported by substantive resources from the EU budget. Moreover, to manage these growing tasks in defence and security matters, the Commission has set up a new DG Defence Industry and Space (DEFIS), providing it with additional defence-related staff, expertise and resources.

III. The European Commission as a Supranational Bricoleur

To account for the incremental self-empowerment of the Commission in the intergovernmental domain of EU security and defence policy, we focus on the Commission's use of different bricolage strategies. At the discursive level, the Commission has been incrementally building a narrative for strengthening integration of defence policy that involved a greater reliance on its market and research powers. As this narrative developed and progressively spread to statements, communications and official documents of other actors, including the Council, it increasingly acquired the quality of shared 'agreed language', which strengthened EU integration of defence and the role of the Commission as a policy entrepreneur alike. Simultaneously, the Commission was able to build on and revise existing financial tools to generate desired change, which then often paved the way for more ambitious follow-up initiatives. This was backed up by an incremental build-up of the Commission's own institutional capacity in the domain of defence R&D, enabling it to fulfil its new functions and exercise its new powers. The Commission also extended and intensified its organizational linkages with other key actors, including with stakeholders from the defence industry and academia, to promote its policy objectives.

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Discursive Bricolage

The Commission's efforts to gain a foothold in the domain of security and defence date back to the mid-1990s, when it was seeking to rhetorically connect broad objectives, as enshrined in Treaty law or Council Conclusions, with already supranationalized policies, such as market integration and research policy (European Commission, 1996, p. 10). However, as this was prior to the establishment of the CSDP, there initially was little support for the Commission's narrative (Interview 12; European Commission, 2003a, 2003b, p. 3). In 2003, the Commission made a new attempt to establish a link between defence issues and the common market. Referring to the changed context created by the establishment of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), the forerunner of the CSDP, and a 2002 Resolution of the European Parliament, the Commission pointed to important economic benefits of enhancing defence-industrial co-operation, including through the establishment of a security-related research agenda. Moreover, it called for the launch of a preparatory action for advanced research in the field of global security (European Commission, 2003a, p. 19).

To depoliticize the conversation, the Commission deliberately used the term 'security research cooperation programme', rather than defence, as this reduced the potential of sceptical EU member states like the UK to block the process (Oikonomou, 2009, p. 4). The focus on research also allowed the Commission to enter the sphere of the Council not through the field of defence but through the already supranationalized areas of the common market and research. In May 2003, the EU's Competitiveness Council welcomed the intention of the Commission to promote a preparatory action on security research and a month later, the European Council called upon the Commission to proceed with defence- and security-related research (European Council, 2003). This endorsement not only meant a first important acknowledgement of the Commission's role in security research on the part of the member states, but it also put it in a strong position for promoting follow-up action through other bricolage tools (see below).

In February 2004, based on the Financial Regulation (1605/2002) and the Implementing Rules of the Financial Regulation (2342/2002), the 'Preparatory Action on the Enhancement of the European industrial potential in the field of Security Research' was finally established on the basis of a Commission Decision. A few months later, the Commission produced a further communication on security research, which built on previous communications and on an earlier report by a so-called 'Group of Personalities' (GoP) that included representatives from European governments, academia and industry. The GoP had been set up and tasked by the Commission to propose the outline of a European Security Research Programme (ESRP). Subscribing to the main thrust and recommendations of the GoP's report, the communication stressed that the ESRP 'can add significant value to the optimal use of a highly competent industry' (European Commission, 2004, p. 4). Linking its previous communication with a report that also reflected the views of other stakeholders proved to be an important move that enhanced the power and legitimacy of the Commission's position (Oikonomou, 2009, p. 6).

An important result of the work of the GoP and a next step in terms of the 'blurring of boundaries between the civilian and the military side' (GoP, 2004; Håkansson, 2021, p. 593) of R&D was the establishment of an ESRP, which established dual-use technology within the EU's 7th Framework Programme (FP7) for Research (Hayes, 2006). Prior

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to that, EU research frameworks were obliged to have an exclusive focus on civilian applications. From then on, dual-use research priorities were regularly incorporated in subsequent EU research frameworks, channelling resources to defence-relevant emerging technologies. Dual-use goods were further drawn into the Commission's orbit by its adoption of an explanatory note. Here, the Commission purposefully reinterpreted a key clause of EU research policy, namely, its 'exclusive focus' on civil applications, by explicitly allowing investments in dual-use goods, provided that the research is fully motivated by and limited to civil applications.

In a 2013 communication, the Commission went a step further, proposing a defence-industrial research agenda that was no longer limited to dual-use goods. Building on its own previous documents, the communication also referred to the Conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council of November 2012, which had vaguely called for 'sustaining and enhancing the CSDP'. To bolster its case, the need for action was also framed as a response to a changing international environment in which the EU had to take greater responsibility for its own security at times where several member states had faced severe defence budget cuts as a result of the 2008 financial crisis. External security developments, like the United States' pivot to Asia and the proliferation of numerous, complex and interrelated security challenges, were framed by the Commission as events that required a European response. This security assessment developed in the Commission's narrative, which was in its generality widely shared amongst EU member states, was combined with the established frame of promoting a greater competitiveness of the European defence industry. This argument was particularly powerful in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. For this end, the communication of the Commission put forth an 'Action Plan' that, amongst other things, stated the Commission's ambition to consider the possibility to 'support CSDP-related research, such as through a Preparatory Action' (European Commission, 2013, p. 11).

At that time, core positions advanced by the European Commission, including the use of Community instruments to facilitate co-operation on defence R&D, had already spilled over to a considerable extent into documents of the European Council. Member states with a significant defence industry, most notably France, Italy, Germany and Spain (Blockmans and Crosson, 2019, pp. 16–17; Fiott, 2015b), sought to gain access to EU funds through greater EU-level co-operation, whilst aiming to keep member states in charge of EU-level co-operation. Simultaneously, other cumulative effects of the Commission's discursive bricolage strategy began to materialize, with the growing links between defence and civilian resources producing synergies and cross-fertilization in key technologies and important stakeholders from industry and lobby groups becoming more aligned with the Commission's agenda (see below). Moreover, facing a proliferation of transnational security threats, including a growing risk of terrorism, that was articulated in high-profile EU statements and integrated in the Commission's narrative, even representatives from EU member states with no significant defence industries increasingly considered taking a constructive attitude towards Commission initiatives in this domain as part of their responsibility to act as good and responsible 'Europeans' (Interviews 6 and 8). Simultaneously, the fact that research already was a familiar terrain for Commission activity, reduced member state concerns about potential sovereignty costs as it did not seem to concern core matters of defence (Interview 8).

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In its conclusions of December 2013, the European Council explicitly endorsed the long-standing view of the Commission that 'civilian and defence research reinforce each other' (European Council, 2013). Moreover, in June 2015, the European Council stated the need for the EU budget 'to ensure appropriate funding for the preparatory action on CSDP related research', which was to pave the way 'for a possible future defence research and technology programme' (European Council, 2015, p. 6). For the Commission, this was an important breakthrough as it explicitly highlighted the member states' commitment to co-ordinated defence research beyond the dual-use goods aspect, whilst accepting the Commission's market- and research-based narrative. Building on these achievements, the Commission proposed a 'European Defence Action Plan' that was supposed to lead towards an EDF (European Commission, 2016). Establishing an EDF was a long-standing objective of the Commission and already expressed in previous speeches by then Commission President Jean Claude Juncker (European Commission and Juncker, 2016) and several Commission communications.

Besides economic and efficiency considerations, the Commission opportunistically used again the member states' own narrative, referring to the EU's general ambition in security and defence as stated in its 2016 Global Strategy, as well as requirements related to the implementation of commitments such as the EU-NATO joint declaration of July 2016 (NATO, 2016).[2] In so doing, the Commission's communications also made repeated reference to external security developments and crises, including Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, growing doubts regarding the credibility of US commitments to European security following the 2016 election of Donald Trump as US president, and the 2016 Brexit vote in the UK. These events not only served as a window of opportunity for the Commission to back up its own supranational narrative on European defence but also facilitated important changes in the security orientation of key member states like Germany, which became increasingly supportive of strengthening CSDP (Béraud-Sudreau and Pannier, 2021). To pave the way for its formal EDF proposal, the Commission launched the Preparatory Action on Defence Research (PADR), which allowed using the EU budget for defence R&D, as well as the European Defence Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP). This move created a legal path and further entrenched the bricolage process through establishing precedents for subsequent bricolage activities. Specifically, these preparatory programmes subsequently served as an important reference point in terms of 'agreed language' that contributed to a situation of rhetorical entrapment of sceptical member states, where it was considered increasingly difficult to reverse the trajectory of policy evolution, as this would have meant untying previous negotiation outcomes and commitments (Interviews 3 and 8). Member states had already accepted core components of the Commission's narrative about the links between defence and the Commission-dominated research domain, which had become locked-in previous decision and policy documents. As noted by a member state official, as they had not opposed previous steps leading to the EDF, opposition from a member state at a later stage would have involved significant reputational costs as there was 'group pressure' and a sense of urgency to move ahead (Interview 8). Against this backdrop, member states perceived

[2]While the member states did not officially endorse the Global Strategy, it still became an important guiding document for the development of CFSP/CSDP, whose implementation is monitored through routine progress reports.

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it as increasingly costly to backpedal from the supranational momentum to a more intergovernmental policy-making mode.

Budgetary Bricolage

Whilst discursive bricolage promoted rhetorical supranationalization of EU security and defence policy, it also prepared the ground for budgetary bricolage, which purposefully shifted and realigned existing EU budgetary and financial means towards new policy objectives. Operating within the EU's multiannual budgetary framework, the Commission repeatedly drew on established budgetary lines to fund a series of defence-related research activities. As stated by a Commission official, in the context of the EU's multiannual budget, 'one moves money somewhere from other programs' to support planned initiatives through a small test programme and sees 'how the member states respond to it' and if it works, one can follow-up with more ambitious steps (Interview 1). One industry representative described these incentives as a 'spark that ignites the fire' that reinforced the Commission's long-term strategy to change the 'rules of the game' in its favour (Interview 12).

Early examples of budgetary bricolage included the Preparatory Action on Security Research (PASR) that operated with a budget of €15 million per year in the 2004–2007 period. Though the budget of PASR was modest in scale, it paved the way for the more ambitious ESRP that allocated €1.4 billion for the period 2007–2013 under the FP7 framework to security research, triggering considerable interest from relevant industry stakeholder (Oikonomou, 2009, p. 9). In its efforts to break down the boundaries for European defence R&D, the Commission enjoyed strong support from the EP, especially from the European Peoples Party, which supported the idea of funding European defence in the EP and its communications and activities (see Béraud-Sudreau and Pannier, 2021, p. 302). In 2017, the Preparatory Action for Defence Research (PADR) was established that was jointly managed by the European Commission and the European Defence Agency (EDA), who signed a delegation agreement in May 2017 entrusting the EDA with the implementation of related research projects (EDA, 2017). The launch of PADR constituted an unprecedented move as it institutionalized a new policy framework for financial resources at the EU level, funding defence-related research with €90 million in the 2017–2019 period. As the PADR was also the first time that EU budget supported actions in defence R&D beyond dual-use good applications, it further strengthened the Commission as an important budgetary actor in the field (European Commission, 2016, p. 6). PADR was later complemented by an EDIDP with a budget of €500 million (2019–2020), which was also managed by the European Commission. It constituted the first EU grant programme that sought to enhance co-operation in the development of defence products or technologies.

The fact that the EU budget was used for these preparatory and temporary measures gave the Commission a powerful argument that it also had a prominent role to play in their implementation. At the same time, the nature of key instruments employed for budgetary bricolage – with their limited scope and duration – helped to mitigate member state concerns about sovereignty costs and a loss of control. Whilst especially France had advocated for an intergovernmental mechanism for managing the EDIDP programmes, the Commission successfully insisted on the application of comitology rules, where the

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Commission adopts implementing acts in areas under its competence, whilst it is assisted by a committee in which member states decide by qualified majority (Haroche, 2020, p. 863). Yet, once agreed upon, these programmes gave rise to sunk costs arguments in the subsequent negotiations leading to the EDF. In particular, member states were concerned to re-negotiate 'the whole thing again', as important parameters of PADR and EDIDP had already been agreed upon in difficult, multi-level negotiations and, during the implementation phase, had produced specific policy lessons and experiences. Accordingly, untying these EU-level agreements would have increased negotiations costs substantially, requiring member state representatives to find a new EU-level consensus and then go back to the domestic level (Interview 3). The experiences and governance design of the two preparatory actions, including the prominent role attributed to the European Commission, subsequently served as key building blocks for the EDF.

As the EDF was legally based on provisions that fall under the title 'Industry' and 'Research and technological development and space' of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (Articles 173, 182, 183 and 188), all defence-related research activities were covered by a multiannual framework research programme. To fund its activities, the EDF was endowed with a budget of €7.95 billion, of which €2.65 billion were allocated to its research window. At this point, the Commission's strategy of using the EU budget provided substantial financial incentives for domestic and industry actors. As a result, budgetary bricolage also bolstered the political support of defence R&D as these stakeholders began to develop high hopes of securing the increasing amount from the programme already in the build-up to the EDF (Interviews 6 and 12). Amongst relevant stakeholders, it created a sense that 'money would just be laying there on the street', which could easily be 'picked up' (Interviews 6 and 8). And when member state representatives had to realize in the negotiations leading to the EDF that the governance design of the new funding instrument would involve a substantive role of the European Commission, they were not only 'entrapped' by previous policy decisions, but they also faced high expectations from relevant stakeholders to contribute to the success of the EDF (Interviews 6 and 12).

Organizational Bricolage

The discursive and budgetary bricolage dynamics described above involved a progressive expansion of the Commission's role in defence R&D, providing the ground for a complementary process of organizational bricolage. Initially lacking a robust institutional arrangement in security and defence, the Commission at first also possessed only limited expertise and organizational resources in this domain that limited its capacity to act as a policy entrepreneur. In the context of its growing ambitions, a number of different Commission DGs became gradually involved in the Commission's defence-related activities, including DG Relex, DG Enterprise and DG Research. However, the respective DG units dealing with defence R&D issues were rather small, often involving only one or two staff members with little defence expertise, handling these matters primarily from a market- or research-oriented perspective (Interview 12).

To enhance its own organizational capacity, the Commission often drew on flexible or informal arrangements such as networks of external stakeholders, including representatives from EU member states and independent experts, that were ad hoc, informal and temporary and could be established on the basis of the Commission's existing

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competences. Repeatedly, the Commission established groups of high-level experts that were often charged with evaluating policy initiatives and providing advice to policy-makers. This provided the Commission with much needed external knowledge and legitimacy that facilitated its role as a policy entrepreneur (Interview 8). Moreover, bringing stakeholders from industry, member states, EU institutions and academia into the deliberation process provided a framework for the Commission to familiarize itself with the preferences and concerns of key actors, to forge strategic alliances and to progressively align key actors with its policy proposals (Csernatoni, 2021). At the same time, the flexible and temporary nature of these arrangements – as well as the participation of representatives from member states – was crucial to dispel the concerns of EU member states about a loss of national control. Importantly, it reassured them that no entirely new and stable organizational formats were established that would compete with their influence in this sensitive policy field (Interview 12).

An early example of the Commission's organizational bricolage strategy was the set-up of the GoP on Security Research that first met in October 2003 to propose the principles and priorities of the ESRP. Following up on an earlier resolution of the EP, the group's political representatives included the former presidents of Finland and Sweden, the EU's High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, two European Commissioners, several members of the EP and representatives from industry and research institutions. Subsequently, the European Security and Research Advisory Board was established in 2005, which was to contribute the implementation of the ESRP through a decision of the European Commission. Similarly, an advisory group, the so-called Horizon 2020 Protection Security Advisory Group (PASAG), was established in 2014 to advise the Commission in the preparation of security-related aspects of the Horizon 2020 work programme. And in March 2015, another GoP was convened by then Commissioner Elzbieta Bienkowska from Internal Market and Industry (DG GROW) to provide advice for setting up the Preparatory Action for CSDP-related research, producing its report in February 2016.

In light of the progress made on other defence initiatives, like the establishment of the Permanent Structured Cooperation in 2018, the Commission realized that these new tasks also required an organizational response that ensured an efficient management. Again, the Commission employed a step-by-step approach. At first, within DG GROW, the existing unit working on defence had been complemented by a second unit established in January 2018, a move that was justified with the Commission's growing responsibilities in the defence domain. Simultaneously, internal debates within the Commission for the establishment of a new Commission directorate in charge of defence matters, which date back to the Juncker Commission, gained traction. This debate was energized by the Commission's growing role and competences in the defence domain, which provided powerful arguments for developing the Commission's internal resources and capacity. To bolster its position in defence and security matters, the Commission finally opted for setting up a new DG DEFIS, which was established as part of the von der Leyen Commission.

DG DEFIS was partly created out of DG GROW and also maintained a certain degree of continuity of key personnel, with the former heads of DG GROW's two defence units moving on to lead the units of the new DG DEFIS in charge with the EDF's research and capability windows (June and Vanholme, 2019). Whilst some member states were concerned about the Commission gaining additional entrepreneurial fire power in the field

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of defence through the establishment of DG DEFIS, the Commission's prominent role in the management of the EDF provided it with a sound basis to further develop its administrative capacity in the defence domain. This organizational move allowed the Commission to strengthen its defence-related expertise and resources, substantively consolidating its role in the field.

Conclusion: The Commission's Bricolage Continues

Conceptualizing bricolage as a strategy of self-empowerment and competence maximization, this article has shown how the Commission can promote supranational integration in an incremental way, even in intergovernmental domains like security and defence. Through its different bricolage strategies, the Commission has been able to address widely shared policy challenges through instruments that are part of its existing toolkit, which were often limited in scope and duration and seemingly imposed – at least initially – only minor sovereignty costs on EU member states. Addressing defence issues through the lenses of the common market and research policy, the Commission acted as though it operated within its own orbit. Building communication upon communication and using mutual references between them and other EU documents, the Commission set the discursive conditions to use existing EU financial and organizational resources to advance its interests. With this incremental approach, the Commission simultaneously managed to mitigate concerns of member states and progressively nudged them towards deeper integration. As a result of the different bricolage strategies, member states have become gradually locked-in successive policy positions and decisions, whilst the interests of a series of stakeholders have become increasingly aligned with the Commission's policy initiatives. Over time, the cumulative effects of the Commission's bricolage measures have had a notable impact, leading to an incremental strengthening of the European Commission in the field of security and defence in terms of its decision-making authority and its material capabilities and expertise.

Whilst the article has examined bricolage activities from the 1990s to the aftermath of the adoption of the EDF, we have reason to suspect that the pattern of the Commission's bricolage continues. With the Ukraine war that started in February 2022 being widely considered as a major change in the EU's security environment, the Commission has already discursively built on calls for greater EU-level co-operation by other EU bodies and representatives from EU member states to propose a number of concrete steps to move integration forward. In so doing, the Commission has again to rely on existing financial resources instruments, as any substantive increases of the EU's defence spending, in turn, would require a complex re-negotiation of the 2021–2027 EU budget that is not supported by EU member state (Finkbeiner and Van Noorden, 2022). A recent example includes the joint communication of the Commission and the High Representative on 'defence investment gaps' presented in May 2022, which build on the European Council's commitment to bolster European defence capabilities in light of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine (European Commission and HR/VP, 2022). Again, the Commission's rhetoric was followed by budgetary bricolage strategies, including efforts to use the EU budget for defence procurement. In particular, the Commission proposed the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through the Common Procurement Act (EDIRPA) in July 2022, a short-term instrument with a limited budget that is meant to

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pave the way for follow-up action (European Commission, 2022a). Simultaneously, the Commission aims at further optimizing, integrating and connecting established EU programmes, including by encouraging dual-use research on critical and emerging technologies and innovation for security and defence across existing EU programmes and instruments (European Commission, 2022b). Again, we see a pattern, where the Commission is using a crisis in the EU's security environment and related statements by other EU actors to prepare the ground for follow-up action that build on established Commission instruments and tools. As bricolage has only recently gained traction amongst EU scholars, more research is needed to find out whether the concept is also applied by other EU actors and whether instances of bricolage can be detected in other policy fields.

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Annex A:

Interview no.	*Affiliation code*	*Date*
1	European Commission official	21.01.2022
2	European Commission official	22.02.2022
3	European Commission official	21.03.2022
4	European Commission official	29.04.2022
5	European Commission official	12.10.2022
6	EU Member State official	21.02.2022
7	EU Member State official	22.02.2022
8	EU Member State official	19.06.2022
9	EU Member State official	25.07.2022
10	EU Member State official	30.06.2022
11	EU think-tank representative	05.04.2022
12	Defence industry representative	01.04.2022

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