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## **Neutrality and the future of Europe's Common Defence and Security Policy: The case of Austrian and Irish participation in PESCO**

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**Universiteit  
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Humanities

**Neutrality and the future of Europe's Common Defence and Security  
Policy – The case of Austrian and Irish participation in PESCO**

**Master's Thesis**

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## 1. Introduction

In 2017, over 60 years after the predecessor of the European Union (EU) failed to establish the European Defence Community, in its White Paper the then Juncker-Commission set out the goal to establish what could not be established back then and create a European Defence Union by 2025 (European Commission 2017c). The call inside the EU demanding improved military and defence capabilities has not become quieter either. Leading figures like current Commission president von der Leyen have repeatedly voiced the need for Europe to have “credible military capabilities” (Brown and Herszenhorn 2020). Indeed, since 2017 the area of Common Defence and Security Policy (CSDP) has seen some important additions to its toolbox – the establishment of the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence, the European Defence Fund and the newly created European Peace Facility. Arguably the most important innovation was the establishment of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), which was hailed by Juncker as awakening of “the Sleeping Beauty of the Lisbon Treaty (...) [able] to lay the foundations of a European Defence Union” (Juncker 2017). If done right, PESCO was seen by several policy experts and researchers as a crucial step to improve CSDP (Biscop 2017a, 2017b; Howorth 2017).

However, the national defence policies and defence traditions are not homogeneous, a problem many EU policy areas share. While most of the EU Member States (MS) are already cooperating in the military area through their North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) membership, five MS – Austria, Finland, Ireland, Malta, and Sweden – follow a policy of neutrality and are therefore not part of a military defence pact like NATO. It is conceivable that the creation of a European Defence Union would not be in the interest of those countries, as participation in such a defence pact can hardly be seen as being in line with the policy of neutrality. In a study for the European Parliaments’ think-tank dealing with PESCO, Mauro and Santopinto (2017) argued that Irish and Austrian participation in the project would be unlikely due to their policy of neutrality (*ibid.*, p. 26). Nevertheless, when PESCO was finally established in December 2017 all neutral EU MS except Malta signed up to PESCO.

Through analysing parliamentary plenary debates in Austria and Ireland, this thesis aims at uncovering the reasons why both countries joined PESCO albeit being neutral and what that might mean for the future development of CSDP. The research question guiding this thesis therefore is the following: Under which circumstances are neutral

EU Member States likely to participate in cooperation in the area of Common Security and Defence Policy? It will be argued that the main shared reason concerns the changed security environment, but that the specific character of PESCO, the explicit reference to the provisions and protocols of the Lisbon Treaty and its perceived usefulness for UN peacekeeping missions were also decisive factors, especially in Ireland. Furthermore, the differences how neutrality, PESCO and the relationship between both is debated in the Irish and Austrian parliament can mainly be attributed to the specific nature of neutrality of both countries as well as their respective geographical position.

After this introduction the next chapter will provide a theoretical overview of the different aspects of neutrality in a European context and how the perception of neutrality in the neutral EU MS has evolved over the years. The third chapter will present the method and the data selection as well as a short overview of the aspects of PESCO relevant for this thesis. It will be followed by the analysis of the parliamentary debates in Austria and Ireland dealing with PESCO, neutrality and their relationship in the fourth chapter as well as a short discussion of the findings in chapter five. In the conclusion, the implications for the future development of CSDP will be discussed.

## 2. Chapter: Neutrality in a European context

To this date the so called The Hague Neutrality Convention (International Peace Conference 1907) remains one of the core bodies of international law on neutrality, which has since then not been fundamentally changed (Seger 2014, p. 250). Its provisions include inter alia the prohibition of foreign troops being moved across or stationed on the territory of a neutral state – irrespective of their country of origin – the prohibition of neutral state's support for a party of war and the right to defend its neutrality by military means. However, as Guttman (1998) argues, the Convention only covers strictly military neutrality (ibid., p. 55). In addition to that, the events that occurred since 1907 “have fundamentally changed the ways in which neutrality is perceived” (Seger 2014, p. 250). It is therefore crucial to first examine the different terminology researchers use when talking about neutrality. This will be done in the first sub-chapter below.

### a. Characteristics of neutrality

On the most fundamental level, one can distinguish between *de jure* neutrality and *de facto* neutrality. The first category refers to a position of neutrality written down and codified in national or international law. In the latter case, neutrality is not officially codified but comes from a country acting in a certain way that can be described as being neutral (Beyer and Hofmann 2011, p. 292). A second basic distinction can be made regarding the way a country adopts the concept of neutrality. A state might voluntarily choose to adopt a foreign and security policy influenced by neutrality. Neutralization on the other hand refers to a situation where a country's neutrality was not self-chosen but rather imposed exogenously (Agius and Devine 2011, p. 268). It is not difficult to argue that a country which actively chooses a policy of neutrality and enshrines it into its constitution might be more reluctant to change this policy and will have to overcome more legal hurdles should it choose to abandon neutrality at some point than a country that was neutralized and did not include neutrality provisions in its constitution. However, in terms of how neutrality is designed in practice, different shades of neutrality exist. The following paragraph gives a brief summary, starting with the arguably most far-reaching expression of neutrality.

A first manifestation of neutrality, permanent neutrality, fits the *de jure* category, as “it is the creation of a treaty” (Kunz 1956, p. 418). Permanent neutrality is a holistic approach to neutrality, which means a state under permanent neutrality must stay out of any foreign war, cannot join military alliances, even during episodes of peace, or provide security guarantees to others. There must not be any foreign military bases in the country, nor can it allow the passage of foreign troops, even if they act under the mandate of an international organisation like the UN. A state under permanent neutrality however has the obligation to ensure the erection of an army able to defend the country and its neutrality (ibid., p. 418f.). The term traditional neutrality or classic neutrality in contrast, which expresses a similar holistic understanding as permanent neutrality, falls into the *de facto* neutrality category. Traditional or classic neutrality “is activated when war erupts and is often not codified” (Agius and Devine 2011, pp. 267–268). While also only applying to the presence of a war, ad hoc neutrality refers to a case-by-case decision of whether to stay out of a particular war or not (Ogley 1970, p. 2). The concept of non-alignment fits the *de facto* category as well, as it represents a political statement rather than a legal definition. It has its origins in the Cold War and

in its current form non-alignment "means that the state is not a member of a military alliance" (Agius and Devine 2011, p. 268). This kind of neutrality is sometimes also called military non-alignment. Notwithstanding, countries which adopt such a neutrality, can still actively participate in alliances and institutions that are not considered a military alliance, such as the UN. "Not to be aligned is often perceived as a kind of peace-time equivalent of neutrality" (Andren 1991, p. 74).

### b. The European neutrals

The variety of different concepts of neutrality are also reflected in the respective policy of neutrality in the four neutral MS that participate in PESCO. Even though these four countries are referred to as the European neutrals, they do not share a single and common definition of neutrality. This sub-chapter will therefore explain the origins of the policy of neutrality for the four neutral EU MS.

Both Austria's and Finland's neutrality fit into the category of neutralization. For Austria, neutrality was "a condition of its independence after the Second World War" (Agius and Devine 2011, p. 268). The treaty itself which re-established Austria's sovereignty did not contain, except in respect of demilitarization, any provisions about permanent neutrality. But in the negotiations leading to this treaty with the Soviet Union, Austria agreed to introduce a declaration to the Austrian parliament that would commit Austria to neutrality (Kunz 1956, p. 420). In the case of Finland, the Soviet Union was a central player as well since Finnish neutrality stems from the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance with the Soviet Union (Agius and Devine 2011, p. 268).

According to Andren (1991), the origin of Swedish neutrality lays in its historical, political and geographical position during the Cold War, as well as in Sweden's desire to serve as a neutral facilitator for diplomatic talks (ibid., p. 67). Swedish neutrality therefore can be defined as a self-chosen approach to its security and foreign policy. The same can be said about Ireland's neutrality. The origin of neutrality for Ireland stems from its direct neighbour, the United Kingdom. Neutrality was seen as a guarantee that Ireland did not have "to fight alongside or for the British". Connected with anti-British considerations, neutrality was also "a nation-building measure" for the general public as well as for the political elites (Beyer and Hofmann 2011, p. 295).

Even though both Austrian and Finnish neutrality originate from neutralization, Austria is the only country out of the European neutrals which included the concept of neutrality in its constitution (see Verdross (1966) for an analysis of the respective constitutional provision). Finland, as well as Sweden and Ireland, which actively chose neutrality as a security norm, did not institutionalize it *de jure* but only adopted it *de facto* (Beyer and Hofmann 2011, p. 290). The table below, which is a combination of the findings of Beyer and Hofmann (2011) and the categorisation by Jesse (2006), provides a good overview of the different understandings of neutrality. Based on that table, it can be stated that at least regarding its historic origin and characteristics, Irish and Austrian policy of neutrality differ the most.

	Ireland	Finland	Sweden	Austria
Origin	Voluntary	Coerced norm -> USSR	Voluntary	Coerced norm -> USSR
Characteristics	nation-building character -> high public value; narrow definition; unarmed neutrality	broad practice; burden to EU Membership; armed neutrality	No membership in regional organizations but in UN; armed neutrality	Permanent neutrality -> holistic and constitutional; burden to EU Membership; armed neutrality
Theoretical source	Liberalism	Realist/Practical	Realist/Practical	Realist/Practical

Jesse (2006), p. 19; Beyer and Hofmann (2011), p. 302 (own graphical presentation, content cited from both authors)

Although the origin and initial interpretation of neutrality differ between the four neutral MS, there are some common developments regarding the practice of neutrality and the development of the norm over time. The first common aspect relates to the neutral EU MS active engagement in international peace efforts. “Neutrality was not a passive foreign policy stance from the perspective of practising states [but rather means] to play an active role in decreasing tensions and contributing to mediation and conflict



resolution” (Agius and Devine 2011, p. 271). In Austria’s case for example, neutrality was the norm on which the country was able to identify itself as a bridge builder between the two blocks during the Cold War and also a reason why Vienna was and still is the host for many international organisations, like the OSCE or the UN (Beyer and Hofmann 2011, p. 296). The active involvement in and promotion of peacekeeping missions with a mandate of the latter is also one of the core characteristics of Irish neutrality (Jesse 2006, p. 8).

The other point common to all four neutral EU MS is that the concept of neutrality and the way in which foreign and security policy is conducted using reference to neutrality has changed over time. The sub-chapter below will now focus on that aspect in providing a brief overview of the evolution of the notion of neutrality in the context of CSDP and the EU, while focusing in particular on Ireland and Austria as this thesis’ case studies.

### c. The changed perception of neutrality

The view that the neutral EU MS have changed their respective perception of neutrality is shared by most scholars. Cottey (2013) for example argues that nowadays all four European neutrals have adapted their understanding of neutrality to a point where it is more appropriate to call them "post-neutrals" as active cooperation with NATO and engagement inside the Unions CFSP/CSDP is now a major part of the respective national security considerations (ibid., p. 449). Beyer and Hofmann (2011) go in a similar direction and argue that

*[o]verall, there has been a revision and decline in the norm of neutrality in all four states, each of which currently practises a narrow understanding of neutrality, that is, they insist only on not being part of a mutual defence alliance (ibid., p. 302).*

Researchers present several, often interlinked explanations for this development.

From a realist perspective, the redefinition of neutrality was the consequential reaction to the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union (USSR) and the new international environment in the aftermath to that. Especially on Austria the end of the Cold War had a major impact, since the establishment of the country’s permanent neutrality was the fulfilment of a bilateral agreement with the USSR – the Moscow Memorandum – which required Austria to pursue a foreign policy characterized by permanent

neutrality. It was therefore effectively inseparable from the USSR which made it impossible for Austria to unilaterally revoke or make changes to its neutrality (Kunz 1956, p. 422). After the collapse of the USSR, Austria was able to adopt changes to its constitutional permanent neutrality to allow Austrian participation in EU peacekeeping missions and NATO's Partnership for Peace Program. In essence, Popławski (2020) argues that Austria rejected the permanent part of its permanent neutrality and decided to enable itself to stay neutral in a case by case approach (ibid., p. 110). The end of the Cold War also paved the way for Austria's accession to the EU, as the Soviet perception of the European Community as part of NATO's area of influence prevented Austria from joining the EU earlier (Beyer and Hofmann 2011, p. 296).

The neutral EU MS accession to the EU, successive European integration and the mutual influence of the respective values and policies can also be used to explain the move away from the respective country's original interpretation of neutrality towards what Cottey (2013) calls post-neutrality. Rieker (2004), for example, argues that the Nordic states did not change their security and foreign policy as a response to the end of the Soviet Union and the Cold War, but rather reacted to advances in the European integration process (ibid., p. 369). The influence of the EU can also be observed in the case of Austria. The political landscape was more or less on the same page regarding the Unions CFSP and several constitutional changes ensured that Austria's neutrality, which once enjoyed a holistic interpretation, was not a hurdle to the country's participation in EU security initiatives (Beyer and Hofmann 2011, pp. 298–299). This influence was not a one-way street but worked in both directions.

*The broad consensus here is that involvement in the CFSP and CSDP has reshaped the neutral states' foreign, security, and defence policies but that they have also been active players in the development of the CFSP and CSDP, giving them scope to shape EU policies in ways that reflect their longstanding policies of neutrality (Cottey 2013, p. 449).*

After the end of the Cold War, the EU started to redefine its foreign and defence policy more along the lines of "broadly accepted norms and values, such as democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms" instead of purely military terms (Agius 2011, p. 377). This can also be attributed to neutral EU MS' influence. The inclusion of the Petersberg Tasks in the Amsterdam Treaty for example, which focus on peace-keeping and humanitarian missions, can be credited to Sweden

and Finland. But even though they have a strong peacekeeping aspect, Rieker (2004) writes that "these tasks go beyond traditional peace-keeping when it comes to the use of military power, so this decision also indicates a change in the two national security approaches" (ibid., p. 377).

A third factor points to the intra-state discussion between political elites and the general public over the precise character of neutrality that occurred in the course of European integration in the four neutral EU MS. With a view on the arguments put forward by the political elite, Agius (2011) argues that "[t]hese discourses borrow from and rely on realist premises as a normative justification to move beyond neutrality" (ibid., p. 371).

"Public and elite characteristics of neutrality largely cohered in the post-war era up until membership of the EEC started to be seriously considered by a minority of the political elite" (Devine 2011, p. 341). With regard to European integration however, the split between political elite's and general public's perception of neutrality comes to light. The general public of the neutral EU MS tends to view neutrality in more holistic terms influenced by the country's identity and history, while the elite tends to interpret neutrality in a more narrow, military view (ibid., p. 334; see also Devine 2008, p. 462). Several authors argue that this gap between the political elite and the general public should be stable as well (ibid., p. 480; Cottey 2013, pp. 466–467). The effects of this intra-state division between public and elitist perception of neutrality can be best illuminated by the failed ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in the first referendum on that topic in Ireland. With the Lisbon Treaty, the political elite in the neutral EU MS displayed a shift in the national security policy and the respective underlying values. This, according to Devine (2011) is visible in several areas. Firstly, political elites inherited the view that the EU's abilities on the international stage are partially restricted if it does not have the credibility to back it with hard power as measure of last resort. Secondly, elites changed their foreign policy from a UN focused one to a foreign policy influenced by EU interests and aligned "with larger powers on the validity of international law" (ibid., p. 359). And finally, the neutral states committed themselves to a so called "constructive abstention" in EU missions and abolished their peacekeeping concepts based on neutrality and the UN in favour of an EU defined peacekeeping concept (ibid.). As neutrality is however internalized into the general public's identity as part of the nation-building identity, the Irish population still holds a more holistic interpretation of neutrality very dear. Deeper European integration in CFSP/CSDP is not compatible with the

general public's interpretation of the nation's neutrality concept (Devine 2009, p. 1). It is therefore not surprising that the perceived threat to Irish neutrality due to the new areas of military cooperation introduced by the Lisbon Treaty was one of the main reasons, why Irish voters rejected the Treaty in the first referendum (Quinlan 2009, p.114). It was only after the Irish government successfully obtained political guarantees that Irish neutrality was not impacted by the Lisbon Treaty, specifically that it did not allow for a European army or that it did not affect Ireland's defence provisions and requirements, when the Irish public approved the Lisbon Treaty in a second referendum. Those political guarantees were then later manifested in a protocol annexed to the Treaty (Official Journal of the European Union 2013).

This chapter explained the different manifestations of neutrality and the development of the concept of neutrality in the neutral EU MS. It can be noted that while the respective origins of neutrality differed, due to exogeneous and indigenous influences that changed their respective understanding of neutrality, the four neutral MS today follow a policy of neutrality which can be defined as non-alignment. The next chapter will now present the thesis' choice of method and data as well as a short overview of PESCO.

### 3. Chapter: Method and Data Selection

To answer the research question of why neutral EU countries might decide to join projects in the area of CSDP, this thesis will utilize a hybrid quantitative and qualitative content analysis approach as its methodological tool and apply it to parliamentary debates regarding PESCO, neutrality and the area of CSDP. The necessary data is obtained from the respective debates in the Austrian Nationalrat and the Irish Dáil Éireann (DÉ). This chapter will explain and justify the choice of method and the data selection.

Following a very broad definition, content analysis is "a systematic, rigorous approach to analysing documents obtained or generated in the course of research", which originates from the analysis of mass communication (White and Marsh 2006, p. 22). It allows for drawing analytical conclusions from text-based data sources, such as newspaper articles, speeches, or interviews. Content analysis is however not a single methodological approach but has different manifestations. One can, for example, distinguish between a more quantitative and a more qualitative approach to content analysis. Quantitative content analysis aims at uncovering the stability of a certain message

over time, which also allows for comparison. In the words of Hardy et al. (2004), “content analysis assumes a consistency of meaning that allows for counting and coding” (ibid., p. 20). Qualitative content analysis on the other hand is less interested in the consistency of a message over time and puts more focus on the context and circumstances in which a certain word or a certain message appears (ibid.).

For the aim of this thesis, namely to elaborate the reasons, why neutral EU MS might join CSDP projects and how that could help the EU to further develop this policy area, both approaches to content analysis can produce valuable results. Therefore, this thesis will apply a hybrid, mixed-methods approach. A more quantitative and descriptive content analysis method will be used to uncover the ways, in which the parliamentarians in both countries frame PESCO, neutrality and the relationship of both, with the aim of discovering reoccurring arguments that allow a comparison between the plenary debates in Austria and Ireland. This will be accompanied by a more qualitative overlay, which is used to analyse differences and similarities between the two countries, based on the results of the more quantitative, descriptive content analysis.

As already noted in the beginning of the chapter, the data pool will consist of plenary speeches. Plenary debates hold an important role in democratic political regimes and in the voter-politician relationship. The theory of political responsiveness usually only points to one direction, arguing that parliaments and governments are responsive to a change in public opinion and therefore change their policies accordingly (see for example Page and Shapiro 1983; Monroe 1998; Toshkov et al. 2020). Influence is however not a one-way street. Politicians too are trying to influence and convince the voters of their respective political positions. And as Auel and Raunio (2014) argue, plenary “[d]ebates are vital elements of electoral competition as they provide for a public articulation of societal interest and the discussion of politics” (ibid., p. 13) or as Wilde (2012) puts it, they “perform the key role of linking public deliberation to the making of binding decisions” (ibid, p. 109). This, however, can also be said about the so-called fourth power – the media. Indeed, politicians also try to get their message across through media appearances, such as opinion pieces, interviews or press releases. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this thesis, the analysis of plenary debates is more appropriate for two reasons. As it is this thesis’ aim to uncover the conditions under which neutral EU MS are likely to participate in further CSDP integration, it is necessary to keep the selection bias as low as possible in order to minimize the risk of excluding certain

arguments and certain sides of the debate. While a text-based media analysis confronts the researcher with such a selection bias in choosing which media platform, which type of media contribution or which political point of view one should analyse, the democratic tradition in parliamentary debates ensures the inclusion of all potentially relevant arguments from the political spectrum. Secondly, as the motivation of two different countries to join PESCO is analysed, this thesis engages in a comparative case study. In order to ensure comparability between the data pools and since the media landscape can differ between countries (for Ireland and Austria see Grisold 1996, p. 489f.), the more standardized arena of parliamentary plenary debates is chosen for this thesis.

Out of the four neutral EU MS who joined PESCO, the plenary debates in two parliaments, the Austrian Nationalrat and the Irish D E will be analysed and compared. The two particular chambers – even though both Ireland and Austria have a two-chamber parliamentary system – are then chosen because they are the places where the day-to-day politics is decided and more importantly the national EU politics.<sup>1</sup> Austria and Ireland have distinctly different backgrounds concerning their historical origin of neutrality (see Chapter 2b). As stated in the introduction, it is the EU’s declared goal to establish a European Defence Union by 2025. In light of the research question a most dissimilar approach is deemed appropriate, in order to uncover the larger picture and show up ways how the EU could develop CSDP further, while including as many MSs as possible in this process.

The main criterion for the data selection should always be a positive answer to the following question: “Does the material selected contain theoretically relevant information for answering the research question?” (Wiesner et al. 2017, p. 88). Therefore, the data selection needs to be carefully justified. The development of CSDP and in particular talks about PESCO picked up speed due to three important geopolitical events – the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the election of Trump and Brexit in 2016 (Cramer and Franke 2021). In order to cover all potentially relevant plenary debates dealing with PESCO and the question of neutrality, the time period needs to

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<sup>1</sup> Even though the two parliaments belong to two different types of parliamentary settings – while the Nationalrat can be described as a working parliament (similar to the German Bundestag), the D E fits more into the British influenced category of a debating parliament – Auel and Raunio (2014) argue that the differences between those types of parliaments do not influence the degree of involvement of parliaments in EU affairs and the percentage of plenary debates concerned with EU matters.

include all parliamentary sittings from at least 2014 until the time of writing. For research purposes and since both parliamentary search engines have such a feature available, the selection of the plenary debates will be made according to legislative periods, instead of specific dates. The data pool for plenary debates relevant for this thesis in the Nationalrat therefore consists of the 25<sup>th</sup> legislative period (start 29.10.2013) to the current 27<sup>th</sup> legislative period. For the D   it consists of three legislative periods as well – the 31<sup>st</sup> D  il (start 09.03.2011) to the current 33<sup>rd</sup> D  il. The long observation period (eight years in Austria and ten years in Ireland) also has the advantage of minimizing the risk to exclude potentially relevant arguments, an aim already mentioned in the justification of the data selection. Based on the time covered by the analysis, one can also reasonably argue that arguments made in other arenas have ample time to be included into the speeches made in the plenary debates, especially since politicians also do not work in an enclosed environment and one can expect that they will consider and potentially also adopt arguments that support their aim.

To narrow down the data pool, the search engine function of the parliaments plenary debate documentation website is used to filter out plenary debates containing the search words *neutrality* and *neutral* (or in the Austrian case the German translation *Neutralit  t/neutral*), *PESCO* and *Permanent Structured Cooperation* (*SSZ* and *St  ndige Strukturierte Zusammenarbeit* respectively). However, since *neutrality/Neutralit  t/neutral* is not used exclusively in the context of defence and military policy, but also in the context of climate neutrality or CO<sub>2</sub> neutrality just to name two examples, the results containing the search word *neutrality/Neutralit  t/neutral* are further narrowed down in a second step, paring it with other search words from the area of European defence policy (for example *CSDP/CFSP* (*GSVP/GSAP* respectively), *Europe/Europa*, *EU*, *defence (policy)/Verteidigung(spolitik)* or *security (policy)/Sicherheit(spolitik)*). It is important to note here that an inductive data approach was used. This does not only apply to the data selection process, meaning that not only those speeches and interventions which explicitly contained the search words were examined but all speeches that were given in the specific plenary debate, where the search word appeared. It also applies to the analysis phase. In order to identify key messages, analytical “themes are not imposed upon the text from outside (...) or a priori, but they emerge as the researcher undertakes a close reading of a text” (Neuendorf and Kumar 2016, p. 4). This was done to keep the analysis as open as possible, both with regard to potentially relevant speeches and potentially relevant arguments.

Based on the plenary debates selected from the aforementioned data selection process, the fourth chapter will lay out the arguments made by the Irish and Austrian parliamentarians and analyse the reasons, why both countries joined the European defence and military project PESCO albeit being neutral. However, to be able to put the arguments made in the respective plenary debates into context and to understand them fully, it is necessary to first provide a short overview of the defence and military project in question, PESCO.

#### a. The example of PESCO

The legal basis on which PESCO was established is the Treaty of Lisbon and in particular Articles 42 and 46 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) as well as Protocol No 10. Art. 42(6) TEU states that “[t]hose Member States whose military capabilities fulfil higher criteria and which have made more binding commitments to one another in this area with a view to the most demanding missions shall establish permanent structured cooperation within the Union framework” (European Union 2008, p. 41). Protocol No. 10 Art. 1-3 lay down the requirements for participating MS to increase their efforts aimed at improving the respective defence capabilities, increase cooperation within the EU and in particular in the context of the European Defence Agency (EDA),

*have the capacity to supply by 2010 at the latest (...) targeted combat units for the missions planned (...) within a period of five to 30 days (...) which can be sustained for an initial period of 30 days and be extended up to at least 120 days (ibid., p. 276),*

set certain military investment targets and increase the interoperability of the military and defence apparatus.

On 11 December 2017, the Council of the European Union in its CFSP format adopted Council Decision 2017/2315 establishing permanent structured cooperation (PESCO) and determining the list of participating Member States (Council of the European Union 2017), which was signed by 25 MS. The United Kingdom did not participate in PESCO because of Brexit and Denmark was not bound by the decision due to the Denmark protocol, laying down that the country does not participate in EU actions regarding the area of defence. Malta was the only MS, which voluntarily decided to not join PESCO.



The voluntary character of PESCO is also explicitly stated in section 4 of the preamble, which also includes the provision that joining PESCO “does not in itself affect national sovereignty or the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States” (ibid., p. 57).

In essence, PESCO has two main functions. On the one hand, it serves as an umbrella-mechanism for the participating MS to develop individual projects, aimed at enhancing the EU’s defence capabilities in seven different areas – *Training, Facilities; Land, Formation, Systems; Maritime; Air, Systems; Cyber, C4ISR<sup>2</sup>; Enabling, Joint; Space*. Currently 60 different projects are developed within the framework of PESCO ranging from projects like *Military Mobility (MM)* with 24 participants to projects like *Counter Unmanned Aerial System (C-UAS)* with only 2 participants. On the other hand, by joining PESCO, the participating MS commit themselves to retain certain more binding commitments, mentioned in Art. 42(6) TEU and set out in the Annex of Council decision 2017/2315. To be able to monitor the observance of the more binding commitments, participating MS are required to submit annual implementation plans, which are subject to review and subsequent report to the Council by the High Commissioner. These more binding commitments include inter alia a pledge to increase defence budgets and military expenditure (§1, 2 & 4), the obligation to make forces available that can be used for EU CSDP missions (§12) and a commitment to “[d]eveloping the interoperability of their forces (...) [while] acknowledging that they need to ensure interoperability with NATO” (§13) (Council of the European Union, p. 62f).

Having explained the main features and provisions of PESCO, the next chapter will provide the analysis of the different arguments concerning PESCO and its impact on neutrality made in the DÉ and the Nationalrat.

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<sup>2</sup> C4ISR stands for command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance

## 4. Chapter: Analysis

### a. Debate in the Irish Dáil Éireann

As outlined in the second chapter, Irish neutrality stemmed from a voluntary, sovereign decision, influenced by anti-British sentiments and in that context was seen as "a nation-building measure" for the Irish state (Beyer and Hofmann 2011, p. 295). It was, however, never formally institutionalised in the Irish constitution. Similar to developments in the other three neutral countries, the interpretation and realisation of Irish neutrality was subject to changes over the last decades. Neutrality is nowadays defined in a narrower understanding, in the sense that the neutral states emphasize the character of their respective neutrality as non-alignment – meaning not participating in a common defence pact (ibid., p. 302).

During the observation period, the term *neutral/neutrality* was used 1.978 times. The word *PESCO* in turn was used 243 times. In more than half of the results (143 times), *PESCO* and *neutrality* were used in the same instance. Other combinations like *neutral + EU + defence*, *neutral + EU + security* or *neutral + CSDP* appeared 286, 296 and 31 times respectively. The data pool of potentially relevant plenary debates amounts to 85 debates in the DÉ.<sup>3</sup> Using an inductive approach of reading through all 85 potentially useful DÉ debates, 61 plenary debates are deemed useful for answering this thesis' research question of why neutral EU MS decide to participate in CSDP projects, using the case of PESCO as an example.

It will be shown in the course of this subchapter that most of the arguments in favour and against Irish participation in PESCO can be connected to the question of whether PESCO undermines Irish neutrality. There are two types of argument made by the parliamentary groups and parties opposing PESCO<sup>4</sup> – Sinn Féin, the Labour Party, Solidarity-People Before Profit and the parliamentary groups Independents 4 Change group, Social Democrats-Green Party group and the Rural Independent Group – which

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<sup>3</sup> The difference in numbers between the potentially useful DÉ debates and the search results of the different search terms can be explained by the way, the search engine of the website of the Oireachtas displays the search results. Instead of showing only the full debate as a single result, each speech or intervention by a Deputy in the same plenary debate appears as an individual result. Therefore, the number of plenary debates dealing with the issue relevant for this thesis is lower than the number of speeches or interventions.

<sup>4</sup> The term opposition is not used in this context, as the 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil – the legislative period which saw the most plenary debates dealing with PESCO during the observation period – consisted of two minority Fine Gael-Independents governments supported by the opposition party Fianna Fáil. Therefore, the distinction between Pro-PESCO and Contra-PESCO is more appropriate in this context.

are not directly connected to the issue of neutrality. The first type of argument concerns the necessary expenditure of PESCO. This line of argument is in particular connected to the more binding commitments 1, 2 and 4 (see Chapter 3a). In the plenary debate that concerned the adoption of the government's PESCO motion, which was necessary to enable Irish participation in the project, Sinn Féin Deputy Seán Crow for example argues that

*PESCO's own benchmark is to increase defence investment expenditure by 20%. We have serious housing, homelessness and health crises which are getting worse every week. The Government states it has no additional money to tackle social and economic problems, yet it can miraculously find millions of euro to buy weapons (House of the Oireachtas 2017i).*

Next to the topics of housing, fight against homelessness and improving the health service – which became especially relevant in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic (see for example House of the Oireachtas 2020a) – other Deputies mention employment and community programmes, increase of pension levels, education (see for example House of the Oireachtas 2017b, House of the Oireachtas 2017i) as well as the fight against climate change and investments in renewable energy sources (House of the Oireachtas 2017g) as areas which could benefit from the money that will be spent on PESCO or in the context of PESCO. All these areas are distinctly separate from anything military or defence related. However, there is a subcategory to this line of argument, which specifically targets the improvements that could be achieved for the Irish Defence Forces. In her intervention, Deputy Clare Daly for example states that “the type of increased expenditure Members would seek are improvements to the pay, conditions and pension entitlements of Defence Forces personnel, not expenditure on [PESCO]” (House of the Oireachtas 2017j, see also House of the Oireachtas 2017f, 2017i).

A second line of argument against PESCO, which is not explicitly connected to its potential negative impact on Irish neutrality, concerns PESCOs' role in the direction of European integration and European influence over the MS.

*The more we integrate the EU, the more EU scepticism we create. PESCO is part of that continuum of EU integration. We are long past*

*what is a tolerable level of EU integration. The desire of the EU federalist elite to integrate Europe further is the greatest existential threat to the EU at the moment* (House of the Oireachtas 2017i).

PESCO is seen as a vehicle used by the proponents of an ever-closer EU to create a United States of Europe (ibid.). Closely related to this is the argument made by some Deputies that PESCO increases the influence of EU institutions and other EU MS over Irish national politics. “By signing up to PESCO the Minister of State is giving a commitment to allowing the EU to monitor and interfere with the defence spending in this State” (House of the Oireachtas 2017d). At another instance, PESCO is described as “the military equivalent on the fiscal treaty” (House of the Oireachtas 2017h), to show the expected impact of PESCO, which is compared here to the grave impacts the Euro-crisis and the subsequent European measures had on Ireland, being one of the countries affected most by the crisis.<sup>5</sup>

The two lines of arguments presented above are primarily used by opponents of PESCO to elaborate on the projects’ potential impact on domestic Irish politics in general and not to support the argument that Ireland’s participation in PESCO violates the country’s policy of neutrality. The only exception relates to the “direction of European integration” argument, in particular to the creation of a common European defence pact (House of the Oireachtas 2017i). The role of PESCO as a vehicle to create a common European Defence Pact or European Defence Union with a common European army is one of the two main argumentative themes accompanying the question of PESCO’s threat to Irish neutrality, which dominates most of the interventions and speeches by Deputies opposing the project. In essence, it is argued that joining PESCO violates Article 29.4.9° of the Irish Constitution, which states that Ireland cannot participate in the establishment of a common European defence. PESCO in turn is seen as the starting point towards such a common European defence and ultimately the creation of a standing European army. In his contribution to the PESCO motion debate, Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett says, while referring to a factsheet about PESCO,

*[i]t goes on to state, "It will be a driver for integration in the field of defence". What is a common defence, which is precluded in the*

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<sup>5</sup> The government is also using the influence argument, albeit in the opposite direction, arguing that Ireland only has an influence in the future development of CSDP, when it keeps his seat at the table and joins PESCO (see for example House of the Oireachtas 2017i).

*Constitution? It states that this will be a driver for integration of a common defence (House of the Oireachtas 2017i).*

Besides referencing EU documents concerning PESCO, as well as the more binding commitments, which inter alia contain, as shown in Chapter 3.a., the commitment to provide resources for EU CSDP missions, Deputies often also use quotes and statements from other European heads of state or government – for example French president Emmanuel Macron or then German chancellor Angela Merkel (see House of the Oireachtas 2017i, 2019a, 2019b) – and from European officials – for example then Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker (see House of the Oireachtas 2017j, 2019a) – to underline the perceived European desire to create a common European defence mechanism/European Defence Union with a common European army through the means of PESCO.

The other main argument, why the defence project is a threat to Irish neutrality, concerns its relationship with NATO. Again, it is worth recalling PESCO's more binding commitments, in particular those related to enhancing the interoperability of the MS national armies with each other, thus also with armies from NATO MS. In the words of Sinn Féin Deputy David Cullinane, the development “presents a fundamental threat to our neutrality as PESCO and EU defence policy in general have, as the CSDP has become more established, become closely aligned with NATO's European pillar” (House of the Oireachtas 2017i). In the same debate, then Labour Deputy Brendan Ryan states, PESCO “has been designed to complement NATO structures, but Ireland is not a member of NATO” (ibid.). The argument is therefore that through the participation in PESCO, Ireland will become aligned with NATO's policies, missions and goals, thus discarding its policy of neutrality, defined as being non-aligned. Especially the potential of further involvement in NATO operations is worth mentioning, as it touches upon a core function of Irish neutrality, which is the active involvement in UN peacekeeping missions. In his intervention Sinn Féin Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh argues that the capabilities developed through PESCO can not only be deployed for EU operations, but also for those carried out by NATO. “That is at odds with Irish neutrality. Our capabilities should be available to the UN and the UN only” (House of the Oireachtas 2017d). Joining European defence projects like PESCO would ultimately undermine the credibility and reputation of the Irish Defence Forces to act as neutral contributors to UN peacekeeping efforts (House of the Oireachtas 2017e (here in the context

of Ireland's participation in EDA projects), see also for example House of the Oireachtas 2020b).

The reference to the active involvement of the Irish Defence Forces in UN peacekeeping missions as a part of Ireland's policy of neutrality also plays a role in the arguments brought forward by the government and the Deputies in favour of joining PESCO. The argument here is that PESCO aims at strengthening the EU's and through Irish participation in it, also the Defence Forces value for UN mandated peacekeeping missions. Since Ireland has a longstanding history in that area, joining PESCO is therefore a logical step. This line of argument is for example used by Deputy Martin Heydon, the then Chairman of the government parliamentary party, Fine Gael, in the PESCO motion plenary debate:

*PESCO will ultimately enhance the capability of UN-mandated missions engaged in peacekeeping and conflict prevention and the strengthening of our international security. When one considers the fantastic reputation of Ireland's Defence Forces internationally and the amazing peacekeeping work they do, approving this proposal makes perfect sense (House of the Oireachtas 2017i).*

It also recurs frequently in interventions and speeches made by several government officials, inter alia the head of government, The Taoiseach (see House of the Oireachtas 2017a, 2017c), the Minister for Foreign Affairs (see House of the Oireachtas 2017i) or the Minister of State at the Department of Defence (see House of the Oireachtas 2017j, 2019c). In order to underline PESCO's usefulness for UN mandated peacekeeping and conflict prevention missions, in a few instances Deputies in favour of PESCO as well as government officials also point out that "PESCO has had the strong endorsement of the United Nations" (House of the Oireachtas 2017i, here in a speech delivered by the Minister for Foreign Affairs).

Besides the reference to the perceived benefits for peacekeeping missions, one of the main arguments made by the proponents of PESCO why it cannot be considered an infringement of the country's neutrality, concerns the Lisbon Treaty and the debate around it which was already mentioned in the second chapter of this thesis. Following the rejection of a constitutional amendment which would have allowed the Irish government to accede to the Lisbon Treaty in the first referendum, the government put

forward a changed amendment which, together with the so-called Ireland Protocol annexed to the treaty, ultimately was enough to gain the approval of the Irish population in the second referendum. The reference to the constitutional and European Treaty provisions are used to underline the argument that PESCO by design cannot impact Irish neutrality, as done here by the Minister of Foreign Affairs during the PESCO motion debate:

*At Ireland's insistence, PESCO's participation criteria expressly stipulate that PESCO will be undertaken in full compliance with the Treaty on European Union and the associated protocols. It fully respects constitutional provisions of all member states, including Ireland's. It is important to state that participation in PESCO has no implications for Ireland's policy of military neutrality or the triple lock on the deployment of Irish forces overseas, that is, a UN Security Council resolution or mandate, Government decision and Dáil approval (House of the Oireachtas 2017i).*

It is however worth pointing out that the debate around this specific line of argument is showing some parallels to the debate around the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, in particular from those opposing PESCO, who in several interventions point out that the Lisbon Treaty in itself is undermining Irish neutrality and hence any defence project based on it undermines it even further (“We had a second referendum on the Lisbon treaty, which was the genesis of this process of undermining our neutrality. It took control from our people and sovereign Parliament” (House of the Oireachtas 2017i), see also House of the Oireachtas 2019b).

Connected to the provisions-based argument is the reasoning put forward by those in favour of PESCO that because the project offers an à la carte approach and PESCO itself only serves as an umbrella project for further individual projects, Irish neutrality is preserved, since the government has the choice to opt in into certain projects “in areas where we are comfortable in co-operation” (House of the Oireachtas 2017h). In a question-and-answer session five days before PESCO was established by the Council, the Taoiseach states that

*[t]he reason we want to join PESCO is precisely because (...) we are going to join it on an opt-in, opt-out basis. We will only opt in to certain programmes and certain parts of PESCO that we want to be involved in,*

*for example, counter-terrorism, given all European countries need to work together to defeat terrorism. Cyber-security and peacekeeping are further examples of areas we are going to opt into. I can assure the Deputy we are not going to be buying aircraft carriers, we are not going to be buying fighter jets and we are not going to be shopping around military trade fairs for any of these things, as that is not in our interest (House of the Oireachtas 2017f).*

So far, the arguments why Ireland joined PESCO and whether it violates the country's policy of neutrality concern either the legal aspects of PESCO and its provisions, its role in European integration and the relationship to NATO or its impact on the ability of the Irish Defence forces to continue its traditional involvement in UN peacekeeping missions. Even though it does not appear as often in the debates as the aforementioned arguments, the whole issue is accompanied by a more fundamental debate which concerns the diverging understanding of Irish neutrality. This aspect is already indirectly touched upon by the fear of ever closer alignment with NATO through PESCO but is also explicitly mentioned in the several speeches and interventions made by both sides. Those opposed to PESCO – especially Deputies from Sinn Féin and the Solidarity-People Before Profit parliamentary group – see the fact that “Ireland's neutrality is a matter of Government policy rather than a requirement of statute law as it is not in the Constitution” (House of the Oireachtas 2017j), as being one of the main reasons why the government is able to argue that projects like PESCO and other past decisions do not violate Irish neutrality (see also House of the Oireachtas 2019a, 2019b). Based on the parliamentary debate, it appears that only two factors of Irish neutrality are shared consensus – military non-alignment and active involvement in UN peacekeeping missions. Apart from those aspects, the definition of Irish neutrality differs from party to party.

In a bill put forward and supported by Sinn Féin, aimed at creating not only a *de facto* but also a *de jure* neutrality, Sinn Féin Deputies describe their understanding of neutrality as adhering to the principles of the Hague Convention, prohibiting any sorts of support for countries participating in an armed conflict or a war regardless of who is involved – meaning also abstaining from supporting any other EU MS – and ensuring that the Irish Defence Forces “take part only in peacekeeping missions which have a United Nations mandate that allow a neutral country to participate” (House of the



Oireachtas 2019b). The Labour Party's concept of neutrality highlights two additional points to the shared understanding of neutrality. The first one concerns not taking part in the race of ever-increasing defence and military budget, but instead maintaining a low GDP% that is spent on defence. This part also relates to both aspects of the "money-better-spent-elsewhere" argument described at the beginning of this sub-chapter. The second point concerns the changed nature of neutrality and that even a neutral country needs to be able to respond to a changed security environment and a globalised world, thus having to seek "some engagement with military alliances to access the technology and shared intelligence we need to protect our citizens" (ibid.).<sup>6</sup>

While also acknowledging the shared understanding of Irish neutrality, it is exactly the last part of the Labour Party's perception of Irish neutrality that is stressed by the government party Fine Gael and the pro-PESCO opposition party Fianna Fáil. For these parties, neutrality "is not a policy of isolation but the freedom to participate and contribute to international peace and security in accordance with nationally determined values and principles" (House of the Oireachtas 2017i). What that means in the context of PESCO is exemplarily explained by the Taoiseach in a debate before a European Council meeting, two days after the adoption of PESCO.

*[T]his does not mean that we are neutral about everything. Common threats such as terrorism, cyberattacks, drug trafficking and human trafficking concern all Europeans and it makes perfect sense to work together to respond to them. Our participation in PESCO will facilitate greater co-operation here. (House of the Oireachtas 2017k)*

The argument is therefore that in an ever closer world which brings with it the rise of new threats that ignore state borders, the reference to a country's neutrality does not ensure protection (an argument made by Fianna Fail deputies (House of the Oireachtas 2019b)) and a neutral country is thus forced to work with other countries and share knowledge and resources as envisaged by PESCO. Even though Brexit does not appear as much as the reference to cross-border threats such as terrorism or cyberthreat in the context of a changed security environment, it is however worth mentioning that several comments made by government officials suggest that Brexit did indeed also

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<sup>6</sup> Even though it is not the aim of this thesis to analyse why the Irish Labour Party displayed different attitudes to different European defence projects, it is however interesting to point out that while its Deputies voted against Irish participation in PESCO, the Party supports the countries participation in other EU defence projects like the EDA or the EU's battle groups.

play a role in the Irish decision to join PESCO directly from the start – not only as part of the changed security environment, but also as a show of support for the EU as a whole (see comments made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Fianna Fáil Deputy Lisa Chambers during the PESCO motion debate (House of the Oireachtas 2017i)).

Recapping the findings so far, the decision of Ireland to join the EU CSDP project PESCO despite being a neutral country can be attributed to three aspects of PESCO. The first concerns the provisions of PESCO, on the one hand its voluntary based à la carte character and on the other hand that it is designed in full compliance with the Lisbon Treaty and its Protocols thus respecting Irelands policy of neutrality and the triple lock. The second aspect relates to PESCO's perceived usefulness in strengthening the Irish Defence Forces capabilities to engage in UN mandated peacekeeping missions, which is an integral part of the Irish policy of neutrality. The third aspect emphasises the governments understanding of neutrality, especially its evolving nature and the need to adapt to a changed security environment which makes defence and security cooperation necessary in order to ensure a country's own territorial protection.

Having analysed the reasons and arguments presented in the DÉ why Ireland joined PESCO and how that decision relates to the country's neutrality, the next sub-chapter will now do the same for the debates in the Nationalrat. Further, they will be compared to the debates in the DÉ with the aim of uncovering whether there are common reasons that led to the participation of both countries in PESCO or if the decision to join was driven by completely different considerations.

#### b. Debate in the Austrian Nationalrat

At least with regard to its origin, Austrian neutrality differs fundamentally from Irish neutrality (see chapter 2b). While Ireland voluntarily chose to stay neutral, Austria fits the category of neutralization. However, similar to Ireland, Austria also places a high emphasis on active UN involvement. And finally, as it was the case for the other European neutrals, the interpretation of what neutrality meant for Austria's foreign policy changed in the recent past (Beyer and Hofmann 2011, p. 302; Popławski 2020, p. 110).

The first thing one can observe for the debate about PESCO and neutrality in the Nationalrat, is that it apparently did not receive the same attention as it did in the DÉ. PESCO itself or the German translation *Ständige Strukturierte Zusammenarbeit* was

only explicitly mentioned in 13 speeches during the whole analysing period. The direct connection between neutrality and PESCO was only made two times compared to the 143 times in the DÉ debates. The words *Neutralität* and *neutral* appeared in 194 and 275 speeches respectively, with the term *immerwährende Neutralität* – the German expression for Austria's policy of permanent neutrality – appearing in 24 speeches. The context of European defence and security policy together with the terms *Neutralität* or *neutral* also were not mentioned in as many speeches compared to the respective debates in the DÉ. The German acronyms for CSDP and CFSP were being used at four instances in the same speech as the word *Neutralität*. The search for *neutral + EU + Verteidigung* and for *neutral + EU + Sicherheit* produced 4 and 8 results respectively and the search for *Neutralität + EU + Verteidigung* and *Neutralität + EU + Sicherheit* 9 and 13 results respectively.

The data pool of plenary debates potentially relevant for this thesis amounts to 119 debates in the Nationalrat.<sup>7</sup> Using an inductive approach of reading through all 119 potentially useful Nationalrat debates, a number of 32 plenary debates is deemed useful for answering this thesis' research question.

As already mentioned, PESCO did not play a major role in the debates in the Austrian Nationalrat. Therefore, it is not possible to make direct connections to why Austria joined PESCO based on the speeches made by the Members of Parliament (MP). That is also true for the most direct connection to be found in the plenary debates between PESCO and potential reasons to join the project as identified by the debates in the DÉ. The comment was made by MP Ewa Ernst-Dziedzic of the now government party Die Grünen. In this case, she refers to the changed security environment, where PESCO plays an important role.

*Because the framework conditions (...) have changed enormously in the last decades, (...) we need cyber defence, stronger disaster protection as well as a newly established airspace surveillance. (...) In fact,*

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<sup>7</sup> The difference in numbers between the potentially useful debates in the Nationalrat and the search results of the different search terms can be explained by the same phenomenon which also applies to the DÉ. The inclusion of more Nationalrat debates into the data pool of potentially relevant plenary debates compared to the DÉ can be attributed to the decision to include the whole body of results for the search terms *Neutralität* and *neutral*. While the reduction of search results for the terms *neutrality* and *neutral* to only include DÉ debates with an EU or defence/security aspect still provided for enough material to have a meaningful debate aimed at answering this thesis research question, this would not have been the case for the Nationalrat.

*however, something has changed dramatically, and talks at the European level - keyword Pesco - are also of great relevance (Nationalrat 2020a, p. 385).<sup>8</sup>*

However, since Die Grünen were an opposition party by the time PESCO was established, the comment here cannot be regarded as a direct reasoning why Austria joined PESCO in the first place, but only as an argument why it continued its engagement within the project. In this sub-chapter it is therefore only possible to deduce potential reasons for Austria's participation in PESCO from the speeches made by the MPs in the Nationalrat, while keeping in mind the arguments analysed in the first sub-chapter.

The changes in the security environment and its impact on Austria which are also highlighted in the quote above are the only line of argument that can be safely deduced here. With regard to new areas of engagement and concern for the Bundesheer, similar cross-border challenges as in the DÉ are highlighted that demand new and modern responses – for example terrorism, cyber-attacks, migration or natural disasters (Nationalrat 2014f, p. 36, by the then Minister of Defence). The argument of new security concerns that demand action is not only made in the context of the development of the Bundesheer, but also in connection to the development of the European foreign as well as security and defence policy. Christine Muttonen, MP for the then governing social democratic SPÖ, for example argues that Austria needs to recognize the changed security environment for the EU and be prepared to invest more – also financially – into EU CFSP (Nationalrat 2016, p. 94). The reference to cross-border threats is also used by Reinhold Lopatka, MP for the then, and still governing Christian democratic ÖVP, when mentioning areas where more European CFSP and CSDP engagement is needed (Nationalrat 2017b, p. 90). In a debate about the fight against terrorism, two days after PESCO was formally established, he argues that Austria is “of course not only committed to cooperation at the level of interior ministers, but also on a military basis” (Nationalrat 2017c, p. 29), while explicitly mentioning PESCO as an example. Those three examples are especially relevant for this thesis as they come from MPs who were part of the coalition that was in power during the negotiation phase of PESCO and which was – as a care-taker government – also responsible for the decision to join PESCO.

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<sup>8</sup> All direct citations from the Nationalrat debates are the authors own translation from German to English

Not only was PESCO debated to a greater extent in the D  , but the topic of neutrality also featured more frequently and in different scenarios in the Irish parliament than in the Nationalrat. In the latter, neutrality is mostly used in two contexts. The first one is a debate about the nature and the elements of neutrality, which are to some extent similar to the ones highlighted in the D  , for example the focus on peacekeeping (Nationalrat 2014f, p. 62) or the argument that close cooperation with only one superpower, namely the US, runs counter neutrality (Nationalrat 2013, p. 52, 2014a, 148f., made by the then opposition party FP  ) vs. the argument that neutrality does not mean that a country has to stay silent when international law is being breached (Nationalrat 2014a, p. 157, 2014d, 42f., 2014e, p. 52). The second scenario concerns budget debates, which cannot be found to the same extent in the D  . While in the Irish case only two parties, namely Fianna F  il and Fine Gael, argue that more money should be spent on the Defence forces<sup>9</sup>, which they do not explicitly connect to the issue of neutrality, most parties in the Nationalrat clearly establish the connection between the demand for an increased defence budget and the preservation of neutrality – especially opposition parties criticising the budget proposals by the respective governments. Whether it comes from TEAM STRONACH, a small party, which was in parliament only for one legislative period during the analysing period (Nationalrat 2014c, p. 399), the nationalist FP   (Nationalrat 2014b, p. 138, 2014f, p. 32) or the social democratic SP   (Nationalrat 2019, p. 127, 2020b, p. 43) the usage of this line of argument does not depend on the ideological party position of the individual MP. This type of reasoning is also the one, where the reference to PESCO is mostly used in the debates in the Nationalrat, in the sense that the more binding commitments require Austria to increase the defence budget and not doing so violates EU standards (Nationalrat 2018c, p. 282 (here SP  ); Nationalrat 2020a, 384f., 2020b, p. 45, 2020b, p. 52 (here FP  )). This is a stark contrast to the debates in the D  , where the reference to the more binding commitments is used to underline the perceived negative influence of PESCO on Irish neutrality, as shown in the sub-chapter above.

Recapitulating the findings so far, it is firstly safe to say that joining PESCO was an extensively and more controversially debated issue in the D   compared to the Nationalrat. The only common reason to the question, why both neutral countries joined PESCO appears to be the reference to a changed security environment and cross-

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<sup>9</sup> The exception being the topic of adequate wages for members of the Defence Forces which is also mentioned by opposition parties.

border threats that are better dealt with on a European level than on a national level. Secondly, in contrast to Ireland, where PESCO was also debated in the context of its implications on neutrality, no Austrian MP or government official made a direct connection between PESCO and its impact on Austria's permanent neutrality.<sup>10</sup> And finally the definition, content, its implication and application of neutrality is also a more disputed topic in the D   than in the Nationalrat, where neutrality is also mostly used in the context of budget negotiations – besides the also present references to its definition, content, implication and application.

## 5. [Discussion](#)

The last part of this analysis will now engage in a brief discussion, how these differences might be explained. The most obvious reason, why the debate about neutrality is more present in the D   than in the Nationalrat concerns the *de facto* and the *de jure* character of the respective Irish and Austrian policy of neutrality. As shown in chapter 4a, the political parties in the D   basically only agree on two characteristics of Irish neutrality – the active engagement in UN peacekeeping missions and non-membership in military alliances. Other than those two aspects, the interpretation of Irish neutrality ranges from active neutrality, in this case meaning speaking up if common values and beliefs are threatened, to low military spending, complete impartiality towards conflict parties and staying out of any conflict that does not have a UN peacekeeping mandate. In Austria however, the policy of neutrality is enshrined in the countries' constitution. Therefore, it is not surprising that most of the speeches in the Nationalrat which touch upon the essence of Austrian neutrality, basically highlight the same aspects. Besides the relevance of peacekeeping and international engagement as well as non-membership in military alliances, the characteristics of neutrality mostly relate to the tasks of the Bundesheer in ensuring the integrity of Austrian neutrality – national defence, air surveillance and also disaster relief – which in the majority of the cases appear during budget debates. This explicit reference to the national army as a guarantor of neutrality and the need for adequate capabilities other than those benefitting UN mandated peacekeeping missions is only to be found in that clarity in the Nationalrat debates.

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<sup>10</sup> The only exception to that being a statement by then Chancellor Sebastian Kurz five days before the Council established the first round of PESCO projects, stating that “[a]ll the plans that are currently on the table are very compatible with our neutrality and at the same time provide the opportunity for more security” (Nationalrat 2018b, p. 24)

This is not surprising however when one recalls the definition of Ireland's neutrality as unarmed neutrality and Austria's as armed neutrality (Jesse 2006, p. 19). The inclusion of a capable army as a core part of Austria's permanent neutrality can be seen as an explanatory factor, why PESCO was not perceived as a threat to neutrality, even though this explicit argument cannot be found in the debates.

A second reason might be that the public opinion towards increased CSDP cooperation is more positive in Austria than in Ireland. The reference to the importance of the respective policy of neutrality to the public can be found in both parliamentary debates (Nationalrat 2014f, p. 55; House of the Oireachtas 2017i). Indeed, public opinion polls and researchers alike show that the policy of neutrality holds a high value for the population of both countries (see for example Vytiska 2017 for Austria; Devine 2008 for Ireland). Public opinion towards increased CSDP cooperation however can also not be used to explain the differences how PESCO is debated in the two parliaments. During the two 2017 Standard Eurobarometer surveys, both Ireland and Austria range among the lowest five EU MS, who's population is in favour of a common defence and security policy. In the spring version of the Eurobarometer, the support amounts to 67% of Irish respondents and 61% in Austria (European Commission 2017a). For the autumn version, support actually decreases to 64% and 56% respectively (European Commission 2017b).

A final reason for the differences in the ways PESCO and its impact on neutrality are debated in the D E and in the Nationalrat relates to the geographical position of Austria and Ireland in the EU. While Ireland is in the periphery of the EU and has only one land border to another, now non-EU country, Austria is located in the middle of the continent and borders to seven other EU MS and one non-EU country. Even though the four freedoms of the EU also apply to Ireland, due to its geographical position in Europe and the fact that it is not a member of the Schengen-area and has obtained case-by-case opt-outs in the area of freedom, security and justice, it is not difficult to argue that Austria's security and wellbeing depends to a far greater extent on the wellbeing of its neighbouring countries and the EU itself than Ireland's security. Even though this line of argument is mostly used by the liberal opposition party NEOS (see for Nationalrat 2014f, p. 79, 2017a, p. 113, 2018a, p. 160), it is also applied by the government parties in some instances, here for example by the  VP MP Klaus Lindinger, who argues that Austria needs "to cooperate much more on a European level to ensure security in

Europe. Austria's security is directly linked to the security of its partner countries, our neighbouring countries and the European Union” (Nationalrat 2018b, p. 23). It therefore stands to argue that it is more natural for Austria to cooperate with other EU MS in the area of CSDP than it is for Ireland. This can also be seen in the continuous commitment of Austria to PESCO and to take part in several PESCO projects. Ireland only participates in the project Upgrade of Maritime Surveillance<sup>11</sup>, which was part of the first round of projects, and it is also not a member of the project Military Mobility, which is the only project where all remaining 24 participating states are involved – including Cyprus. Austria on the other hand is part of seven different projects, serves as project coordinator for one of them and, with the exception of the third wave of projects, joined at least one each round.<sup>12</sup> This is even more striking, when one considers that the commitment to PESCO was held up high during three different coalition governments representing political ideologies ranging from the left part of the political spectrum to the right – from the European S&D member SPÖ, to the Identity and Democracy Party member FPÖ, to the European Green Party member Die Grünen, who all were in a coalition with the EPP member ÖVP.

There is however another alternative reason for the discrepancy in the way PESCO was debated in the Nationalrat and in the D  , which concerns parliamentary procedure and the requirements to allow for a country’s participation in PESCO. While a simple government decision without a parliamentary vote was enough to sign up Austria to PESCO, in Ireland the procedure demanded a D   vote and a preceding debate. Therefore, one could argue that this procedural requirement simply made an extensive debate about PESCO more likely in the Irish case. However, one would expect that Austrian parliamentarians, who are concerned about PESCO and its impact on neutrality, would use other parliamentary debates to voice their concern. As this was not the case, this line of reasoning cannot hold true for the case at hand.

Having discussed several reasons and arguments made by government officials and parliamentarians in D   and Nationalrat debates dealing with PESCO, the respective neutrality and the potential impact of the former on the latter, the next and final chapter

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<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, the project description on the respective PESCO-webpage (<https://pesco.europa.eu/project/upgrade-of-maritime-surveillance/>, last accessed 10.12.2021) only mentions defence and security aspects at third place as potential areas of application after energy security and environmental aspects.

<sup>12</sup> Both countries were also part of the now closed project European Union Training Mission Competence Centre, which was closed due to lack of added value.



will now provide a recap of the findings of the analysis aimed at answering this thesis' research question. This will include a discussion about the consequences for the future development of the EUs' CSDP as well as suggestions for areas of further research.

## 6. Conclusion

This thesis has examined the research question of why neutral EU MS might join European defence projects, which was analysed using parliamentary debates in Austria and Ireland concerning neutrality and European defence integration, in particular PESCO. In conclusion, the only common argument used by parliamentarians in both countries that explains the countries' participation relates to the changing security environment in the last decade and the (re-)emerging old and new cross-border security threats. From the debate in the D   three additional reasons emerged that enabled Irish participation in PESCO. Firstly, the Irish government pointed out the full compliance of PESCO with the Treaties and its associated protocols, including the Irish protocol to the Lisbon Treaty as well as the full respect for the integrity of national defence policies written down in the Lisbon Treaty and in the Council decision establishing PESCO. Secondly, PESCO was perceived to be complementary to Ireland's and the EU's efforts to enhance their contribution to UN peacekeeping missions. And thirdly, the decentralist *  la carte* character of PESCO enabled the participating MS to take part in projects that benefit the respective national defence policies.

Furthermore, the differences in the way and the extent in which PESCO, neutrality and the relationship between both was discussed in the D   and the Nationalrat can be attributed to two factors. Firstly, since there is a broader consensus in Austria regarding the definition of the policy of permanent neutrality than in Ireland and more importantly Austria's neutrality is also enshrined in the country's constitution, there is naturally more room for discussion about the nature of neutrality in the D  . Secondly, due to its geographical location, Austria's national security is more deeply intertwined with the security of the EU than Ireland's national security. Therefore, cooperation in the field of CSDP and in a project that aims at enhancing the EU's capabilities to ensure its own safety and security is less controversial for Austria than it is for Ireland, since it improves Austria's national security as well.

For the future development of CSDP – under the premise that the EU wants to go ahead with the development of CSDP with as many MS included as possible – those findings essentially highlight two factors, with which the EU would be able to foster an inclusive improvement of CSDP. Firstly, all future developments in CSDP need to happen in full and clear compliance with the Treaties and its associated protocols, while simultaneously respecting and taking into account the individual national security policies. While it might sound like an obvious requirement that the development of CSDP should be in line with the legal provisions, the D  debates showed that the reference to PESCO explicitly being fully in line with the Treaties and the protocols served as an important argument to justify Ireland’s participation in the project. Secondly, the EU should continue to design its CSDP projects with an explicit decentralist *à la carte* character, leaving the final decision where to engage in the hands of the participating MS and therefore allowing them to choose areas of deeper cooperation and engagement based on their respective national security and defence policy and where the benefit for their national armies is the greatest.

In interpreting the result of this thesis and its implications for the future of CSDP, one must nevertheless consider that this thesis only analysed why two of the four neutral EU MS joined PESCO. While the most dissimilar approach was the appropriate method to achieve the aim of this thesis, it however neglected potential reasons for neutral countries to join CSDP projects that might have been present in the debates in Finland and Sweden, while being absent in the Austrian and Irish debates. This leads to the final point of this thesis’ conclusion – areas of further research.

It will be interesting to analyse on the one hand, whether the arguments used in the D  and Nationalrat debates are also present in the parliamentary debates in Finland and Sweden or if those two countries joined PESCO after completely different considerations. On the other hand, a comparison between Malta, the only neutral EU MS that did not join PESCO, and one (or all) of the neutral MS that did join might also produce insightful results that could help understand the stance of neutral EU MS towards CSDP projects better. Another area for future research concerns the choice of PESCO projects the participating MS decide to join. Especially regarding Austria and Ireland it is worth pointing out the apparent discrepancies in plenary statements by government officials concerning the areas of potential further engagement in PESCO and the actual choice of projects. In Ireland, the chair of the Fine Gael parliamentary party for example

stated that Ireland wants to participate in areas like information exchange, cyber and military training (House of the Oireachtas 2017i) and in the same debate, the Foreign minister additionally also announces the wish to engage in several projects in the maritime area. In the end, Ireland only joined the later closed Training Mission Competence Centre and the Maritime Surveillance project. A similar discrepancy between words and action can be observed in Austria. While cybersecurity was for example frequently mentioned as a cross-border threat that demands more European cooperation, Austria did not join a single project in the *Cyber, C4ISR* area and instead joined projects in the areas *Training, Facilities* and *Enabling, Joint* as well as *Land, Formation, Systems* and *Space*. It will be interesting to analyse what the choice of a particular project could tell the researcher about the country's commitment to CSDP and whether the discrepancy between words and action might actually be related to the policy of neutrality as well.

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