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Citation

Leeuw, J. de. (2022). *A prospect of change? An analysis of recent Dutch policy on European defense integration*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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A prospect of change? An analysis of recent Dutch policy on European defense integration

Bachelorthesis Internationale Politiek

Bachelorproject Internationale Politiek

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Wordcount: 7996

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Introduction

Defense has long been a policy field lagging behind within the EU integration process. But over the last decade, much has changed in Europe. Recent years have seen a unprecedented amount of proposals of different size and form being launched across Europe to come to more cooperation and integration in the field of defense and security. The sudden increase and level of success after so many years of standstill make them an very attractive academic research subject. Is one of the last domain of politics left untouched by the EU finally integrating?

Since the middle of the 2010s, institutions like the European Commission have pushed different proposals for EU military collaboration, but actual policies becoming reality has been depended on the grace and willingness of the member states (Håkansson, 2021). An important detail however, has been the consistent lack of agreement on the topic between the two driving forces behind EU integration: France and Germany (Huntley, 2022). The discrepancy between the EUs main powers means the positions of the EU's middle powers have become increasingly important to explain (lack of) integration. Middle sized countries are able to lead groups of small member states to a common position that can resist Franco-German dominance, but at the same time, they are of enough size to connect with both France and Germany in bilateral relationships (Koops and Vériter, 2017). Investigating middle power positions in the EU defense debate, is crucial to be able to determine the future of the EU defense debate.

When looking at middle power EU member states, the Netherlands is a very notable case in the area of defense. Once seen as such a staunch Atlanticist country that academics nearly called it a satellite state, the country in recent years has had livingly national debates about the future of its foreign and defense policy (Andeweg, Irwin and Louwerse, 2020). With its Atlantic legacy and close relationship with the UK, the Netherlands forms an extreme case among EU middle powers on this topic. With the Netherlands being an extreme case and EU middle powers being in an unique position in this policy area, more research into the Dutch debate about EU military integration is certainly helpful to explain and predict the future of the EU as a military power.

Using different academic theories, this thesis will first explain the need to look into member states national policies when analyzing European integration. Besides this, the literature review will also include an overview into the recent positions of the European Commission and France and Germany in the field of European defense integration, as their positions provide the reason why this thesis investigates the Netherlands as a case study. Lastly, academic work on the

(recent) history of Netherlands defense policy is reviewed, as this provides the starting point for the research. Building on this backbone of previous academic research, a content analysis will be made of different coalition agreement and government policy papers between 2010 and 2020. With this research, the thesis aims to answer the following research question: What was the position of consecutive Dutch governments between 2010 and 2020 on European Defense integration?

Literature Review

Integration theories

From the start of European cooperation with the European Community for Coal and Steel (ECCS) in 1951, until the 27 member states that form the European Union today, a long route has been travelled. But what thrives integration between the European countries and why is it important to look at domestic policies of the member states like the Netherlands when we want to explain it? This literature review presents three theories, two of which are even specifically used for Explaining integration, the last one is a broader theory for explaining policy changes or the lack thereof. The three theories provide a theoretical scope for a case study on the Netherlands as an EU member state over a longer timeframe.

Neofunctionalism

One of the most important integration theories is neofunctionalism, developed by Ernst Haas in his 1958 book *The Uniting of Europe*. Neofunctionalism gives two key reasons for continuous integration. The first reason is that, according to Haas (1958), states are not the only actors that determine how much integration is being desired or achieved. Both actors within a country (political parties, interest groups, etc) and actors above the state (the created institutions) can actively push and pull states into more cooperation than was originally intended. Eventually, it is even possible that internal actors pull their loyalty and expectations away from member states and towards to newly created institutions (Haas, 1958, 16). The second key element in neofunctionalism is the phenomenon called 'spillover'. When spillover occurs, a process of integration within one policy field causes integration within another field as well (McCormick, 2020, 20). This happens, because links between the two policy fields, make the goal of integration within the original field only possible when steps are taken in another field as well. Spillovers can be subdivided by functional, political and cultivated spillovers (Håkansson, 2021, 590-591). Functional spillover can be seen as the consequences of rational linkage between different policy fields, like the linkage between an industry and its resource market. Integration in one of those, will lead to calls for integration in the other as well. Political

spillover targets the loyalty of politicians and bureaucrats. When loyalties and priorities of the national actors shift, problems will more easily be brought upon the supranational level. Cultivated spillover occurs when supranational agents act as an accelerator for more integration. Both supranational and national agents can become policy entrepreneurs, that actively seek more integration because they may gain power in the process.

Liberal intergovernmentalism

Liberal intergovernmentalism is the second grand theory on integration and puts relatively more emphasis on the national state as an actor than neofunctionalism does. With Moravcsik as its premier founder (1993, 1998), it posits the view that integration is being discussed at two levels: the national level and the supranational level. Because governments and politicians want to stay in office, pressure is on them not to lose voters support with decisions on the international stage. This results in governments negotiating integration solutions that ‘they can sell at home’ to their domestic audiences (McCormick, 2020, p. 23). Out of this, liberal intergovernmentalism draws the conclusion that integration is the result of a bargaining process between governments and bureaucrats of different member states representing their respective national interests (Milward, 1984).

Historical institutionalism

Historical Institutionalism is a broader theory, not only focusing on integration processes, but on policy changes in general. Academics using this theory focus on so called ‘path dependencies’ and ‘critical junctures’ that determine outcome of integration processes (Pierson, 2004). The theory sees integration as a path dependent process, meaning that decisions are made based on what has been decided in the past, and influence decision-making in the future (McCormick, 2020, 322). This path is started by so-called critical junctures, events that create a window of opportunity to choose to for an integration process. After a critical juncture has been taken, path dependency means it is very hard (if not impossible) to stop or reverse the integration process. Historical Institutionalism is a good theory for tracing back long term developments, as Pierson puts it:

HI scholarship is *historical* because it recognizes that political development must be understood as a process that unfolds over time. It is *institutionalist* because it stresses that many of the contemporary implications of these temporal processes are embedded in institutions, whether these are formal rules, policy structures, or social norms.

Applying academic theories to European Defense integration

Now that the three theories have been briefly described, it is important to look at some work of academics that have applied them recently to the developments in the area of defense integration in the European Union. First, an article by Håkansson (2021) using neofunctionalism to explain EU Commission efforts is mentioned. Secondly, an article by Bulmer (2009) analyses the EU defense integration from an historical institutionalist perspective.

Looking top-down: the European Commission

When it comes to European integration, the European Commission is one of the most important actors. As the supranational body it really has the ability to push for more integration when desired. Because of its close proximity to sovereignty, defense integration was long a policy area that was avoided within the EU-integration and cooperation project. Things seem to have changed however, as Håkansson (2021) explores new defense initiatives launched by the European Commission over the last few years. Using neofunctionalism, Håkansson (2021) studies the development of the European Defence Fund (EDF) proposed by the Juncker Commission in 2017. Håkansson, deepens the neofunctionalist theory by expanding it into 'revised neofunctionalism'. Additional to the earlier mentioned political, functional and cultivated spillovers, he also introduces exogenous spillovers and countervailing forces (Håkansson 2021, 591-592). Exogenous spillovers are factors outside of the integration process itself, and can both slow down and speed up integration. Countervailing forces come to light when an integration process is strongly opposed, or even blocked. Håkansson concludes that the exogenous spillovers were crucial for the development of the EDF (Håkansson, 2021, 595). The EU for a long time, had seen itself as a soft and normative power, without the need for military hard power to back this up. The Russian invasion of Crimea and war in the Donbass in 2014, terrorist attacks in 2015-2017, Brexit, the policies of the Trump administration and the more general US-China rivalry led to the 'awakening' that the EU would have to take care of itself. But it was not only external shock, the Juncker Commission also played a big role and acted as a cultivated spillover. With defense traditionally been seen as something dirty within EU politics, Junckers emphasis on the policy area during his campaign as 'spitzenkandidate' in 2014 was vital for the Commission. Without it, it would likely have been impossible for the Commission to make 'make the turn' towards hard power and become a policy entrepreneur on the topic (Håkansson, 2021, 596). The European Parliament had long been in favor of more

integration in this policy field, and did strongly support the change as well. Political spillovers had already been present for years, with budget cuts making national politicians eager for cost-cutting integration efforts in order to save money (Håkansson 2021, 599-600). Further, the common market already had created a functional spillover into the defense industry. Member States in the European Council however, did prove to be an important countervailing force by pushing back the EDF into a much smaller project than the Juncker Commission originally proposed (Håkansson, 2021, 601). Member states emphasized that defense integration should be intergovernmental instead of supranational, while some of the member states pushed to make the fund smaller because of cost-benefit analysis (Håkansson, 2021, 601-602). In conclusion, Håkansson's neofunctionalistic approach on European defense integration showed that external shocks and supranational entrepreneurship were initiators and motivators for the start of the process. However, (the position of) member states were the ones that decided on the tempo and size of the initiatives that made it into reality. This observation is an important argument to take a further look at the positions of different EU member states on defense integration.

More analysis into member states is needed

Bulmer (2009) looks deeper into the consequences that historical institutionalism has for research into EU integration. In his article, he criticizes neo-functional integration theory for being too theological: it can only explain why integration happens, but not when it does not happen, like when French President de Gaulle stepped the brakes on European integration (Bulmer, 2009, 312). While neofunctionalism focuses on incremental change, Bulmer also criticizes liberal intergovernmentalism for their focus on dramatical political events like Intergovernmental Conferences (IGCs). According to Bulmer, both incremental and radical changes need to be studied together, and this leaves an important legacy for Historical Institutionalism (2009, 312). Bulmer's critique on liberal intergovernmentalism can be traced back to the work of Pierson (1998). Pierson highlights that IGC's alone are not enough, when studying integration. He emphasizes that practical implementation of changes decided on such conferences, can often lead to different outcomes, while conference negotiators often lack the oversight over long-term consequences for their policies as well (Pierson, 1998, 34-50). A second observation of Bulmer, is the difference between 'political time' at EU level and national politics in member states. While national politics are 'cyclic' with politicians working towards the new elections, and opposition and governing parties switching roles, politics at EU level are much more 'linear' (Bulmer, 2009, 320). This lack of cyclus at the EU level, can be a source for important contributions to integration efforts, but need to be studied over a longer

timeframe in order to get good academic research. Supranational integration efforts, can in the long run have a decisive impact on the cyclic national politics cycles. And those member states are according to Håkansson (2021) the ones that can block or accelerate those efforts to make them succeed or not. This is also why Bulmer concludes that for research on EU integration, it may be very rewarding to make long term analysis of the impact of EU timescape at the domestic level (Bulmer, 2009, 319). Greater attention is needed for long term policy trends.

France and Germany

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, German and Franco policy preferences in the policy area of European defense integration are not aligned. But what are their preferences and why do they not align? It is important to review recent academic literature on this topic, in order to be able to research the position of the Netherlands vis-à-vis the two mighty powers in Europe.

France looking south, Germany looking east

Post-Brexit, Germany and France have become the two remaining significant defense actors in the EU, able to shape the direction of the Union and position of member states (Huntley, 2022, 174). Other member states have often delegated the compromise-seeking role to this tandem, while siding with one that best represents their interests (Huntley, 2022, 173). Huntley (2022) researches why the policies of these countries have failed to converge on the topic of European defense integration. He does this by looking at the development of PESCO, the EI2 and the FNCs. Huntley observes that German and French approaches to PESCO was fundamentally different (2022, 178-179). France envisioned PESCO as a platform to generate forces for operations, driven by a small group of ‘willing and able’ member states. This would suit French military strategy, with many out of area operations far away from the heartland of Europe because of its global commitments. For France, preventing stability in Europe’s southern neighborhood is a goal, and European defense integration can help with that (Huntley, 2022, 179). Germany’s approach to PESCO was very different. With Euroscepticism on the rise and Brexit just decided, Germany saw PESCO as a tool to keep European integration going, not necessarily as a tool to strengthen military strength. This led to an approach to led the project be as inclusive as possible, in order to tempt a variety of member states to participate. The result was a PESCO with many members, and an enormous amount of projects mostly related to non-combat capabilities. Entirely opposite from the French view to establish a small core of member

states who would pick a few key projects to establish powerful capabilities (Huntley, 2022, 179).

Disappointed in the direction PESCO was heading, France decided to create the European Intervention Initiative outside of the EU framework. France offered partnerships to those willing and able based on a differentiated approach. Germany was also included, because German non-participation would be politically untenable for the German-Franco role as the tandem of the EU (Huntley, 2022, 179-180). The French goal with the EI2 is to address the failures of PESCO in the French needs in the security of its southern neighborhood and the gap that PESCO leaves in the domain of combat capability development (Huntley, 2022, 180-181). While national sovereign decision-making in the EI2 was undesirable for France, it was a logical step in order to attract the 'willing and able' member states.

More European autonomy in defense can be realized in three ways. First within the EU, through structures like PESCO, second by strengthening the European pillar within NATO, and third by setting up initiatives parallel to EU and NATO, like the EI2 (Huntley, 2022, 181). Germany choose to take a leading role in strengthening the European Pillar of NATO, by taking the lead of a so called Framework Nation Concept (FNC). In this initiative, NATO countries work together to develop capabilities, based on national sovereign decision-making. Germany in this way, achieved far reaching integration of combat capabilities with among others, The Netherlands, Romania and Estonia (Huntley, 2022, 183). While the French EI2 primarily served French interests, the German FNC serves a common purpose for participating states: acquiring capabilities needed to deter the Russian aggression. This is why the German FNC has proceeded much better than the EI2, and Huntley expects the EI2 to become irrelevant in the long term (Huntley, 2022, 183). The author concludes that in this way, Germany is currently achieving much more influence on European defense integration. It addresses American concerns about burden sharing, achieves support from a wide range of participating nations and addresses needs that many member states experience. Meanwhile, the EI2 plays a sideshow in Europe's southern neighborhood, not seen as a priority by many member states (Huntley, 2022, 185-186).

[Dutch position on European defense: recent academic work](#)

When analyzing the Dutch governments position on European defense integration, it is important to give some context on the history of Dutch foreign and defense policy and their general position within the European integration debate. First a chapter by Andeweg, Irwin

and Louwerse (2020) about Dutch foreign policy since the Second World War is used. After that, an analysis of Dutch-US relationship since the Cold War is provided by Ten Cate (2019) and a chapter by Koops and Vèriter (2017) about Dutch position on EU and UN military cooperation is analyzed.

Dutch post-war foreign policy: From staunch Atlanticism to enthusiastic European integration?

With the Second World War abruptly ending Dutch neutrality politics, the Netherlands entered a new area of foreign affairs. Andeweg, Irwin and Louwerse (2020) examine how the Dutch have managed different fields in European foreign politics from the 1950's until the 2010s (225-241). With the Netherlands being a maritime trade country by nature, it brought an very Atlantic perspective in Dutch foreign policy. The Netherlands is described as not being a continental European country like France or Germany by both culture and history (Andeweg, Irwin and Louwerse, 2020, 225). This Atlantic perspective, made the Netherlands one of the founding Member States of NATO, with the country viewing UK and US involvement in NATO as an important counterbalance towards German-Franco dominance on the European continent (Andeweg, Irwin and Louwerse, 2020, 225). Dutch Atlanticism weakened during the 1970-1985 timeframe, caused by the Vietnam War and Dutch aversion against the stationing of nuclear cruise missiles on Dutch territory. It even led to the diagnosis of 'Hollanditis', seen as a resurgence of Dutch neutralism (Andeweg, Irwin and Louwerse, 2020, 228). Because of the weaker relations with the US and at the same time the UK (an Atlantic partner) joining the European integration effort in 1973, Dutch foreign policy became more favorable towards European integration (Andeweg, Irwin and Louwerse, 2020, 235). Supranational initiatives were pushed, because the Dutch believed supranational integration would lessen the influence of Germany and France as the two biggest member states. Later, when several supranational proposals failed and the Netherlands turned to be a net contributor to the Union in the 1990s, the Dutch returned to their more cautious approach towards European integration as before 1973. This time however, not from Atlanticism, but rather the realization that supranationalism was not an effective counter towards German and French dominance (Andeweg, Irwin and Louwerse, 2020, 236). With the end of the Cold War weakening NATO's purpose and the UK dropping its resistance against European defense integration with the 1998 St. Malo agreement, the Dutch also had to accept the EU as an actor in the defense field as well. NATO now has to share its cornerstone in Dutch defense policy with the EU (Andeweg, Irwin and Louwerse, 2020, 229). Atlanticism is no longer rooted in the Dutch political system, with moderate right-

wing parties and orthodox Christian parties continuing to support it, while liberal, green and labor parties have turned towards a more Europeanized defense policy (Andeweg, Irwin and Louwerse, 2020, 230). This Atlantic-European division in Dutch foreign policy has become such a big issue, that it even caused the collapse of a Christian democrat-Labor coalition government in 2010, when a decision on continuing support for the NATO mission in Afghanistan had to be taken (Andeweg, Irwin and Louwerse, 2020, 230-231). European defense integration is further complicated by the domestication of European integration in general since the 2005 referendum on the European constitution. Right-wing parties like the VVD have tamed their European integration positions since the 2005 referendum out of electoral concerns, with new Eurosceptic parties like the PVV and FvD being established (Andeweg, Irwin and Louwerse, 2020, 238). Andeweg, Irwin and Louwerse predict that the Brexit will cause a reorientation of Dutch foreign policy, just like the UK's accession to the precursors of the Union did in 1973 (2020, 238). With Atlanticism much weaker now than during the Cold War, the authors think it is presumable that Brexit will push the Netherlands towards Europe.

Valuing Atlanticism after the Cold War: The Dutch doing 'just enough'

Ten Cate (2019) looks at the development of Dutch relationship with the US within NATO after the collapse of the Soviet-Union and the end of the Cold War. As NATO changed from being the guarantor of peace in Western Europe to an organization described as being 'out of area or out of business' (Reyn, 2004, 9), how did the Dutch cope with these changes both internationally and at the national level? Particularly the author focuses on the mechanisms of shared values and interests between nations and the 'divisions of labor' arrangements during operations (Ten Cate, 2019, 20). According to Ten Cate, the Netherlands provided full support for the US after the 9/11 attack, providing different kinds of forces to support the start of the 'War on Terror'. But already in 2002 doubt arose in Dutch government circles about US eagerness on Iraq, the Dutch were presented with a dilemma: 'stay on board, or get out?' (Ten Cate, 2019, 20). With the US eventually invading Iraq in 2003, the Dutch government found themselves an ambiguous solution: joining the coalition after the occupation. In this way, they showed eagerness to the US to provide troops, but hoped not to be seen as occupiers (Ten Cate, 2019, 21). While fighting and violence was very frequent during the Dutch deployment to Iraq, the Dutch government tried everything in national politics to downplay the fighting in order to keep public support (Ten Cate, 2019, 22-23). The United States however, were not impressed by the Dutch contribution. The Dutch contingent was much smaller than the US forces it replaced and the deployment was ended abruptly in 2005, after less than two years of operations

(Ten Cate, 2019). The Dutch deployment in 2006 to Afghanistan was part of a big debates at the national level about loyalty to the US after the unilateral invasion of Iraq. In order to get parliamentary approval for the mission, the Dutch government spin-doctored the strategic narrative of the operation into a peacekeeping and reconstruction mission (Ten Cate, 2019, 24-25). The reality was however, that the Dutch had to take the burn of the fighting in the areas assigned to them, losing 25 troops in the four year deployment (Ten Cate, 2019, 25-26). Although public and political support at the national level was difficult to achieve, the Dutch government was deeply committed to the Afghanistan mission. The government was keen to keep up the Dutch reputation as a loyal NATO-partner out of two reasons. First it was important to secure the Dutch future within NATO in the long term, because it provided the Dutch with their best security insurance as long as its defense budget kept shrinking. Secondly, a good reputation by bigger NATO allies was seen as a way to improve Dutch international influence, for example by supplying the next NATO Secretary-General (Ten Cate, 2019, 27). In the end the goal to gain more influence failed according to Ten Cate. Because the Afghanistan mission just like the Iraq mission ended in a ad-hoc withdrawal after only a few years of deployments, Dutch reputation in the US government became that of an auxiliary forces provider, not of a loyal coalition partner like the UK (Ten Cate, 2019, 27). To make matters worse, parliamentary politics forced an unworkable mandate on a follow-on mission in the north of Afghanistan in 2011, effectively making the Dutch deployment rather a burden than an added value for NATO-allies (Ten Cate, 2019, 27-28). An positive exemption to the deployments mentioned above were a variety of anti-piracy operations by both NATO and the EU in the bay of Somali in the 2008-2012 timeframe. The campaign was seen by both the Netherlands and EU/NATO-allies as a good example of burden-sharing and a division of labor fitting with the capacities of the Dutch armed forces (Ten Cate, 2019, 28-30). Ten Cate concludes that the Netherlands in the 1989-2014 timeframe was much less of an loyal partner to the US then the country's official statements suggest. By often providing insufficient forces under a mandate too strict to be effective and in a timeframe too short to be have lasting effects, the Dutch commitments were often far from effective contributions to US goals (Ten Cate, 2019, 30-32). According to Ten Cate, not Atlanticism but rather pragmatism can be seen as the driving force behind the different Dutch contribution to US or NATO-led operations. By committing resources to dangerous operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and later Libya and Syria (in 2011 and 2016), the Dutch compensated for their lack of defense spending within the NATO agreements (Ten Cate, 2019, 32). As Ten Cate puts it, going to war in the Middle East was not about ideals or loyalty, but

merely ‘just doing enough’ to satisfy the US to keep the superpower committed to defending European partners like the Netherlands with its abysmal defense budgets (2019, 32).

A ‘Big small power’: Dutch EU and UN military operations

Koops and Vèriter (2017) place considerable emphasis on the position of the Netherlands as a ‘big small power’ within the EU. As a ‘big small state’, the Netherlands fulfills a unique position within the EU negotiation system. Often leading groups of small countries (like the BENELUX), but also of enough size to engage in bilateral relationship with the three big (since BREXIT big two) powers in the Union (Koops and Vèriter, 2017, 97). As Koops and Vèriter observe, Dutch society has long had a positive attitude to more European and UN military cooperation, but will to seize this opportunity is low among political elites (2017, 97-98). What are the results from this divergence? In their chapter, the authors analyse the role of the Netherlands as a ‘big small power’ in the context of EU and UN military cooperation (Koops and Vèriter, 2017, 98). The Netherlands has long been a ‘staller’ and ‘blocker’ when it comes to EU proposals on military integration, but according to Koops and Vèriter, this changed with the Dutch presidency of the Union in 2016 after the shoot-down of flight MH17 and the Brexit-referendum (2017, 99). But at the time when the chapter was written in 2017, this is by authors considered to be rhetorically only with few real projects and troop contributions (Koops and Vèriter, 2017, 99-102). The real output of military integration, occurs mostly in bilateral cooperation with Germany (army) and Belgium (navy), but also with the UK. Bilateral cooperation with Germany and the UK fits in the theory of the Dutch being a ‘big small state’, trying to influence the course of bigger (member) states by persuading them into close relationships. At the same time, the Dutch keep opposing ambitious integration proposals that would give big member states more power at the cost of small states like the Netherlands (Koops and Vèriter, 2017, 102-103). In general, Dutch military participation in the CSDP missions is low, with higher focus on police and civilian missions. Dutch contributions to EU battlegroups and PESCO is modest, focusing more on the structure than operational value. According to the authors, this is in line with the Dutch strategy to use European initiatives to strengthen NATO (Koops and Vèriter, 2017, 103-104). They conclude that the Dutch government move towards a more favorable stance on European military integration is authentic, but there is a lack of ownership of the issue by any department or minister. The fear of losing (far) right-wing popular support, ensures that there is a contrast between the ambitious rhetoric and only little bilateral concrete steps in practice (Koops and Vèriter, 2017, 105-106). As Koops and Vèriter observe, the same ‘big small state’ strategy can be seen when it comes to

UN peacekeeping missions (2017, 110-112). After the Dutch ‘Srebrenica-trauma’, there is a focus on partnering with strong EU/NATO allies when deciding on the participation in an UN mission. The MINUSMA mission in Mali is taken as an example, where the Dutch participated because of back-up from heavy French forces, while at the same time persuading Germany to join the mission as well (Koops and Vèriter, 2017, 112). The authors conclude their chapter by stating that the Netherlands as a ‘big small state’ can have considerable influence on European military affairs, for example by leading the return of the EU to UN peacekeeping (Koops and Vèriter, 2017, 112-113). But that the country is still ‘punching below its weight’ when it comes to real military integration within the European Union, due to a cautious approach to the topic by its political elites (Koops and Vèriter, 2017, 113). A gap remains between ambition and reality.

Methods

Theoretical background

As mentioned in the literature review, both neofunctionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism place emphasis on national actors when investigating integration. Neofunctionalism expects a shift in loyalty, while liberal intergovernmentalism emphasizes the ‘two-level’ discussion about integration: both on the national and at the international level. When researching shifting loyalties of departments, ministers or governments as neofunctionalism advocates, it is important to analyze the way they speak about, and their attitude towards organization discussed. In this case, the attitude towards NATO vis-à-vis the attitude towards the EU. When investigating about the influence of the national debate about integration on government policy, it is important to research if there is a difference between governments of Atlanticist-parties and more EU-friendly governments. Finally, according to historical institutionalism, policies need to be studied over a long time, in order to observe change or the lack of it.

Content analysis

This thesis will use content analysis (Halperin and Heath, 2020, 373-393) of Dutch government policies in the 2010-2020 timeframe in order to analyze the impact of party composition on policies, general attitudes in government papers and long-term changes during the decade. The analysis consists of two parts. One part is an analysis of the coalition agreements of the three governments formed between 2010 and 2020 (Rutte 1,2 & 3). Because Rutte 1 was a minority cabinet without a parliamentary majority, the tolerance agreement with far-right opposition party PVV is also included in the data. Coalition agreements are important to include, because coalition parties want to leave their ideological fingerprints in it, in order to

justify coalition participation to their voters and members. Ideological views of a new coalition in the Atlantic/Europeanist debate should therefore easily be recognized in the coalition agreement papers.

The second part of the content analysis looks into the different major defense papers published by the Ministry of Defense under the Rutte 1, 2 and 3 governments. These are the major budget cuts announced in 2011, defense policies of the Rutte 2 & 3 government, and the long term Defense Vision 2035 published by the outgoing Rutte 3 government in 2020 (Ministerie van Defensie, 2011, 2013, 2018, 2020). The policy papers are a good way to analyze long term policy changes, as department white papers written by government officials and public servants are generally less sensitive towards the latest political debate and party composition than a coalition agreement. Also, the amount of attention a topic like European integration receives and the way in which EU and NATO goals and achievements are treated in a paper, gives an idea about the general attitude and loyalty of a department towards the organization.

Different white papers and coalition agreements have been left out of this thesis. First the 'Eindrapport verkenningen' (Ministerie van Defensie, 2010) white paper is not used, because the Balkenende IV government had already stepped down when the paper was published, so the policies announced were never executed. Secondly, the coalition agreement of the Rutte 4 government and its defense white paper are not included. As the Rutte 4 government is only in office since January 2022 and the defense white paper not yet published when the first drafts of this thesis were written, it would have been difficult to analyze the true value of the Rutte 4 coalition agreement. Furthermore, the start of the Invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has heavily influenced Dutch politics, with the Rutte 4 government already amending their defense budget and rushing their white paper while this thesis was written. At the moment of writing, determining the full consequences of these choices is still impossible. Therefore it was decided to limit the research period to the Rutte 1-3 government timeframe.

Coding

Within the content analysis, four relevant policy objects are being coded. As shown in the literature review, the Netherlands has long been a country with strong Atlantic ties, with only a change in the 1970's to a more positive attitude towards EU cooperation (Andeweg, Irwin and Louwerse, 2020). This Atlanticism makes it important to look when and how NATO is portrayed in defense policy. Secondly pieces advocating or defending European defense integration efforts are coded in green, while pieces that express a negative attitude towards EU (defense)

integration are coded in red. Lastly general emphasis on EU's purpose and role in the area of defense affairs is coded yellow.

Results

Government agreements

The 2010 government agreement reflected societal and political attitude towards the EU at the time. The Cabinet being a minority government of Christian-democrats and conservative liberals, it needed support from the Freedom party, well known for its anti-EU position. The government agreement makes the statement that transfer of sovereignty to EU has limits and the EU needs to concentrate on core business (VVD and CDA, 2010, 7). Whether this does include defense integration is not clear. Emphasis is laid on Dutch commitment on international (military) mission, both NATO and EU being named as possible principals for those missions. Apart from these general statements, few things are mentioned in the defense policy area, the most notable being the decision to continue participation of the Netherlands in the F-35 program, a clear choice for Atlanticism (CDA and VVD, 2010, 9). The Tolerance Agreement (VVD, PVV & CDA, 2010) does not mention the defense policy field at all.

The 2012 government agreement notably places a much higher value to EU affairs, dedicating a full paragraph to 'The Netherlands in Europe' (VVD and PvdA, 2012, 13). But the paragraph does not mention anything about possible EU cooperation on defense. Defense in general is embedded very much into the international trade & development paragraph, with a construction being set up to finance international military mission from the development aid budget. (VVD and PvdA, 2012, 15). In true Atlantic fashion, the parties decided on purchase of F-35's within term of office of the government (VVD and PvdA, 2012, 15).

The 2017 government agreement is fundamentally different. While both the Rutte 1 & 2 governments introduced budget cuts on defense, the 2017 elections were held during a time of economic prosperity. With the most pro-EU party in the Netherlands, the social-liberals (D66), no part of the coalition parties, it is no surprise that the EU-paragraph is present in the new government agreement. While the EU paragraph still lacks defense integration proposals, a substantive 'defense' paragraph is introduced, a fundamental break from previous government agreements (VVD, CDA, D66 & ChristenUnie, 2017, 47-48). With the new government injecting up to 1,5 billion euro's in the defense department, the parties found it necessary to give some clarity on the way they want to spend the money. Remarkable is the total absence of the phrase 'NATO is the cornerstone of Dutch defense policy' that had ruled Dutch foreign policy for years (Andeweg, Irwin and Louwerse, 2020). Great emphasis however is placed on

European defense industry and the possibilities to cooperate on development and procurement of material (VVD, CDA, D66 and ChristenUnie, 2017, 48).

Defense Ministry's white papers

With little to nothing being stated about defense policy in the 2010 government coalition, the 2011 defense paper was predominantly a product of consequences of the global financial crisis that had hit economies worldwide since 2008. The paper was a summary of capabilities being scrapped, units disbanded and investments postponed. (Ministerie van Defensie, 2011). International cooperation and integration is mentioned only as a way to get expensive capabilities like strategic airlift at a bearable cost, with both the EU and NATO being named as (possible) facilitators of pooling and sharing agreements (Ministerie van Defensie, 2011, 22). The argument for supporting the European Defense Agency (EDA) project is that the project is 'relatively small' (Ministerie van Defensie, 2011, 23)! Apart from EDA, European defense integration is mainly referred to in bilateral sense, with cooperation projects with Germany (army) and Belgium (navy) being continued or intensified (Ministerie van Defensie, 2011, 22-23).

With the big budget cuts from the Rutte 1 government finished and the emphasis on international peace keeping mission in the coalition agreement due to the participation of the Labour party, the 'In het belang van Nederland' (In the interest of the Netherlands) vision of the Rutte 2 government made clear divisions between 'core' and 'niche' capabilities (Ministerie van Defensie, 2013). Apart from 'core capabilities' like infantry units or frigates, 'niche capabilities' are defined; specialistic capabilities not fielded by every EU or NATO partner (Ministerie van Defensie, 2013, 14). International cooperation and integration was sought as a mean to preserve or regain capabilities lost after different rounds of budget cuts (Ministerie van Defensie, 2013, 8). NATO is still seen as the primary defense actor, with many projects rooted in the alliance, but the EU joins the list, with the Netherlands even taking the lead in a project to modernize and reinforce air-to-air refueling capabilities (Ministerie van Defensie, 2013, 8).

De Defensienota (defense note) 2018 brought more detailed proposals to spend the 1,5 billion Euros investment of the Rutte 3 government into the Dutch armed forces. Notable is that the vision predominantly reasons the new defense strategy from 'NATO capability objectives' and the 'defense of NATO territory (Ministerie van Defensie, 2018, 7). But with new projects EU projects started, much has changed since the previous policy paper of 2013. The Dutch Ministry of Defense now considers themselves as 'part of the leading group' within the EU's PESCO project and has started the 'Military Mobility Initiative' (Ministerie van Defensie, 2018, 15).

Also, the ‘mutual assistance’ article of the Treaty of the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) is mentioned in the paper (Ministerie van Defensie, 2018, 22). One countervailing force to the more positive attitude towards EU defense ambitions is the repeated and explicit mentioning that the government will interpret article 346 TFEU very liberal, giving the government political space to favor national defense industry above EU public tenders if it wishes to do so (Ministerie van Defensie, 2018, 25).

In the Autumn of 2020, the then Minister of Defense Ank Bijleveld launched the *Defensievisie 2035* (defense vision 2035), a long term vision setting out guidelines and ambition far beyond the next government into the 2030’s. At that time, news outlets were predominantly occupied with the enormous budget request of the paper (13 to 17 billion extra every year, more than double the budget at that time), but the *Defensievisie* was more than only a plea for budget (Bijkerk and Klep, 2020, 25 October). With 10 ‘furnishing principles’ to guide defense policy for the coming years, one of those was ‘committing to a stronger, more self-reliant Europe’ (Ministerie van Defensie, 2020, 35). The document clearly stated ‘We are therefore more emphatically committed on a Europe, and therefore also an EU, that takes responsibility, too on a military level’ (Ministerie van Defensie, 2020, 35). While also naming non-EU initiatives like the E12 and Joint Expeditionary force (JEF), the focus was clearly on the EU, resulting in the concrete target: ‘we are focusing even more on an EU who is more capable of performing as a geopolitical player and who can independently protect and defend the European security and interest.’ (Ministerie van Defensie, 2020, 35). While NATO surely was not out of the picture, the *Defensievisie 2035* portrayed the EU and NATO much more like equal partners, both important actors in Dutch defense policy.

Discussion

A gradual change can be observed throughout the Dutch defense policy in the second decade of the 21st century. The country entered the 2010s with the consequences of the global financial crisis still cutting into its economy. Political support for EU integration was a sensitive topic after the 2005 referendum and the UK was blocking progressive EU defense proposals like PESCO. The Dutch armed forces for the last decade had been fully committed towards the US War on Terror, with the Dutch deploying troops to both Iraq and Afghanistan. This attitude in politics and society was reflected in little attention to defense within the Rutte 1 government agreement, the total absence of any mentioning about defense issues in the Toleration Agreement and the large budget cuts in the 2011 policy paper. These findings are a typical reflection of the party composition: CDA and VVD being traditional atlanticist parties, with the

PVV toleration party being an anti-EU party. While EU defense policy was still in its infancy due to British blockades, Dutch attraction towards international cooperation and integration can already be seen in the 2011 policy paper, with binational cooperation and integration initiatives with both Germany and Belgium being proposed or intensified. With the Rutte 2 government being much more positively towards the EU in general, more EU cooperation can already been seen in the 2013 governments defense vision. While seen as a way to preserve expensive capabilities, the Netherlands is already actively seeking to participate or even lead in some EU projects. Although supply of opportunities from the EU Commission is still limited, the Netherlands actively seeks the cooperation, for example by taking the lead in the Air-to-Air refueling project. In retrospect, the Rutte 2 government already lays the seeds for what will come later. This can possibly be traced back to the government composition, with the government seats in parliament being almost evenly split between the pro-European labor and Atlanticist VVD.

When the Rutte 3 government takes offices, shocks have gone through world politics. With the shoot-down of flight MH17, the 2014 War in Donbass and the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean, chaos, conflict and war are once again back on the borders of Europe. At the same time the Western world order is being questioned, with the UK leaving the EU and Donald Trump taking office in the USA. As discussed in the literature review, the EU Commission 'has awakened' and is launching defense proposals like the EDF. In the Netherlands, one of the new governing parties are the social liberals (D66), the most profound supporter of EU integration in Dutch domestic politics. All these factors combined lead to some incremental policy changes throughout the years. With the Rutte 2 government planting some first seeds, those seeds are picked up within the Defensienota 2018 and the Rutte 3 government joins initiatives like the EDF, PESCO and non-EU defense initiatives like the EI2 and FNC. At the end of the decade, things have changed completely. EU is seen as a comparable actor to NATO in the Defensievisie 2035 and EU and European integration is actively sought in the area of military mobility, transport, exercises, development, training and procurement.

While reviewing coalition agreements and policy papers is a good way to track long term developments over the decade, it also has drawbacks. Because relatively few are made and gaps of years exist between them, it is possible to miss developments that happen in between the policy papers. Also, a rare long term policy paper is unlikely to be written on a crucial juncture, than on the important tipping point that Historical Institutionalism wants to capture. The papers however does include things like a threat analysis, overview of measures already taken and a

prospect of policies that will be set out for the future (Ministerie van Defensie, 2011, 2013, 2018, 2020). By comparing content of the different papers, it must be reasonably possible to identify if changes happened and if yes, when and why.

Conclusion

What was the position of consecutive Dutch governments between 2010 and 2020 on European Defense integration? By using content analysis, the paper has examined both influence of party composition, long-term changes, general attitude and possible shift of loyalty in the Dutch defense ministry towards EU military integration. This way of research, supports the Historical Institutionalist viewpoint that policy changes need to be studied over a longer time, while at the same time addressing the views of liberal institutionalist and neo-functionalist that national actors and member states are important study objects in the EU integration process.

The analysis shows that the Rutte 1 government was a continuing of the Atlanticist line. Supported by views of the governing parties and an general lack of interest in defense in the public, the government showed relatively little interest in European defense integration, focusing on bilateral cooperation to save costs instead. The Rutte 2 government formed the awakening of Dutch interest in European integration. Driven by pragmatic forces to (re)gain high cost capabilities and political support from the Europeanist labor party, the defense department started some interesting cooperation and integration projects. General loyalty in the defense department however still lay in NATO. The Rutte 3 government build upon the seeds planted by the Rutte 2 government. With the progressive social-liberals (D66) now in government, openly advocating for more and deeper integration projects now was no longer an taboo for the defense department, with the Netherlands participating and leading in different projects. A clear shift of loyalty can also be observed by the Rutte 3 government, by its white paper openly placing the EU mutual assistance article TFEU 42 equally to NATO's article 5 (Ministerie van Defensie, 2018, 22).

Academic and societal consequences

With the Brexit, Ukraine-crisis and election of Donald Trump taken place during the time in between the Rutte 2 white paper and Rutte 3 white paper, a critical juncture could possible be sought in future research. The big gaps between the different policy papers limit this research, while the negotiated and careful nature of government papers make it difficult to see concrete loyalty changes. Further research into the loyalty and commitment of Dutch foreign policy

towards NATO versus the EU should probably focus on individual government officials. For example by analyzing defense minister speeches. More generally, there seems to be an increasing division between traditionally Atlantic parties like CDA and VVD, and their increasing Europeanistic defense policies, future politicians will need to fix this gap.

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Appendix

The following coded examples will be turned in separately:

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