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Transatlantic ties in transition? EU policy integration and its effect on CEE-US dynamics Research

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**Universiteit
Leiden**
The Netherlands

Title:

Transatlantic ties in transition?

EU policy integration and its effect on CEE-US dynamics

Research question: What is the effect of EU foreign and security policy integration on the relationship of Central Eastern European States with the US?

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Abstract

This thesis explores the impact of European Union foreign and security policy integration on the relationship between Central and Eastern European states and the United States. Utilising data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) and the Pew Global Attitudes & Trends survey, the study employs multinomial logistic regression to analyse public attitudes towards the US in relation to the EU's foreign policy positions. The initial hypothesis was that increased support for a common EU foreign and security policy would correlate with more unfavourable attitudes towards the US, reflecting a shift towards greater EU autonomy and potential distancing from US influence. However, the results indicate that higher support for EU policy integration is actually associated with more favourable attitudes towards the US. This finding suggests that transatlantic relations remain strong, despite uncertainties introduced by the Trump administration and the threat from Russia. The study contributes to the understanding of the interplay between EU integration and CEE-US relations, offering insights for scholars studying Central and Eastern Europe and for policymakers navigating these complex dynamics.

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Introduction

The European Union (EU) and the United States (US) have long maintained a dynamic and complex relationship characterised by both cooperation and competition. This partnership has been foundational in shaping the strategic landscape of the modern world, particularly in the realms of foreign policy and security. Central and Eastern European (CEE) states, with their unique geopolitical contexts and historical legacies, find themselves at the crossroads of this complex relationship. They must balance their security policies between the EU's efforts towards greater autonomy and the enduring security assurances provided by the US.

Since the end of the Cold War, the relationship between the US and CEE states has been critical for the region. The US played an important role in integrating these countries into Western political and security frameworks, primarily through NATO expansion and bilateral security agreements. Additionally, at least publicly, the US was a strong supporter of CEE states' accession to the EU. However, the recent geopolitical landscape has become increasingly complicated. The EU's pursuit of greater strategic autonomy, exemplified by initiatives like the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), aims to reduce dependency on US security guarantees. Simultaneously, the US's foreign policy uncertainty under the Trump administration and the ongoing threat posed by a revisionist Russia have facilitated a deterioration of the relationship.

Despite the EU's pursuit of initiatives like the CSDP to enhance its strategic autonomy, it remains closely aligned with the US in addressing global security threats, particularly those posed by the war in Ukraine. This dual approach underscores the ongoing tension within the transatlantic partnership, where CEE states must navigate their security dependencies and policy alignments. Therefore, given the recent strain in relations with the US, and the EU's newfound strive for autonomy this research poses the following question: “What is the effect of EU foreign and security policy integration on the relationship of Central Eastern European States with the US?”

This thesis proceeds as follows. First, a literature review establishes the historical background of EU-US relations, highlighting the dual nature of cooperation and competition that characterizes the transatlantic relationship. Following this, the specific dynamics between the CEE states and the US are explored, identifying both historical ties and potential impediments to these relationships. The literature review concludes with an overview of the importance of the Common Security and Defence Policy as a crucial factor in shaping the

security landscape of the CEE region, the broader EU, and their collective relationship with the US, thereby introducing the research question.

The theoretical framework builds on the literature review by describing various theories that shape transatlantic relationships, focusing on both exogenous and endogenous factors influencing the behaviour of the EU and CEE states. This section spells out the mechanisms through which EU foreign and security policy integration impacts the relationship between the CEE states and the US. The theoretical framework culminates in the formation of the main hypothesis of the research, providing a structured approach to examining how deeper EU integration might affect the transatlantic dynamics involving CEE states.

Following that, the research design of this study is outlined. The thesis uses two separate surveys to investigate the relationship between EU foreign policy positions and public attitudes towards the US. By merging these datasets, the study defines dependent and independent variables and includes control variables, relations to Russia and confidence in President Trump, to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. The results section presents findings from a multinomial logistic regression analysis, highlighting significant relationships and interpreting statistical outcomes in light of the theoretical framework and hypothesis.

The discussion interprets these results, addresses the findings, and explores reasons for potential differences from initial expectations. The limitations section identifies the constraints of the study, including the limited scope of included CEE states and the combination of distinct datasets, suggesting areas for future research. The conclusion summarizes key findings, discusses their implications for EU-US relations and CEE states, and considers the broader impact of EU foreign policy integration on regional and global security dynamics.

Literature review

The literature review is structured as follows: First, it establishes the background of the EU-US relationship, emphasising the historically dominant role of the US in "high politics" and the inherent ambivalence in the partner-competitor dynamics. Next, it explores the relationship between the US and CEE member states, highlighting a potential decline due to a loss of trust in the US and the escalating threat from Russia. Finally, it examines the significance of EU foreign and security policy integration as an alternative security guarantee for CEE states, detailing how deepening EU mechanisms are increasingly being viewed as viable replacements for traditional US security assurances.

EU-US relationship background

The European Union and the United States, throughout their shared history, have maintained a uniquely strong partnership. Since the aftermath of the Second World War, the US has stood as Europe's principal security guarantor, playing a decisive role in the continent's post-war recovery and the establishment of a long-lasting peace (M. Smith & Steffenson, 2023, p. 373). Through initiatives such as the Marshall Plan and the formation of NATO, the United States helped to rebuild and secure Western Europe, laying the groundwork for what would eventually evolve into the European Union (Peterson & Pollack, 2003, pp. 3–5). Over the decades, this relationship has evolved into a dynamic partnership, with each becoming the other's most important ally. This transatlantic relationship has not only been foundational in shaping the strategic landscape of the modern world but has also been pivotal in defining economic and political structures globally.

Nevertheless, the US has historically assumed a more dominant role, particularly in areas of 'high politics' such as foreign policy and security. This predominance is rooted in the post-World War II era when America's military and economic power was critical in shaping the international order (Kagan, 2003, p. 86; Moravcsik, 2003, pp. 75–80). The US has leveraged this position to influence European foreign policies, often acting as the architect of collective Western responses to global threats and challenges, habitually disregarding European opposition (M. Smith, 2004, pp. 97–100). In security matters, the U.S. leadership in NATO has been a clear indicator of its influential role, where its strategic decisions and military capabilities have often steered NATO's direction and priorities (Howorth, 2018, p. 523). This leadership role extends into areas of crisis management and international diplomacy, where the U.S. has frequently taken the lead in negotiations, imposing sanctions, or engaging in military interventions (Kagan, 2003, p. 16). The dominant role of the US has led to tensions within the transatlantic relationship, especially when European priorities or approaches have diverged from American strategies (Howorth, 2003, p. 26).

Deep economic and political ties, in combination with the pronounced dominance of the US in areas of foreign policy and security, have cultivated an ambivalent relationship between Europe and the United States. This ambivalence can be seen in the origins of European integration which was partly motivated by the desire to establish a 'third force' capable of balancing the influence of both the US and the USSR during the Cold War (Kagan, 2003, p. 17; M. Smith & Steffenson, 2023, p. 373). The dual nature of the EU-US relationship is also reflected by the concept of competitive cooperation, where both partners work together on

numerous global challenges while simultaneously competing in areas like trade, technology, and influence over global governance (Kagan, 2003, pp. 53–72; M. Smith, 1998, p. 572). This competition is tempered by a strong economic and strategic interdependence, forcing both powers to negotiate and collaborate despite their divergent interests and policies. The competitive interdependence has been particularly evident in areas like economic policy, where disputes over tariffs and trade practices often occur alongside joint efforts to stabilise the global economy (Damro, 2016, p. 19).

The focus of this research is on one of the most significant areas of ambivalence between the EU and the US – foreign and security policy, and how it affects Central and Eastern Europe. While the EU aims for greater autonomy through initiatives like the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), it simultaneously remains closely aligned with the US in addressing international security threats, including revisionist Russia. This dual approach highlights the tension between dependence and the desire for sovereignty within the transatlantic partnership (M. Smith & Steffenson, 2023, p. 379). The complex nature of the EU-US relationship, marked by both cooperation and competition, is particularly significant for Central and Eastern European member states, who need both the European economic backbone and the US defence shield. Such a balancing act is crucial for maintaining regional stability, therefore, these states must navigate their security policies between deeper EU integration and the enduring security assurances provided by the US (Baun & Marek, 2013, p. 291).

CEE Member States and the US

The special relationships between the US and CEE member states of the EU are deeply rooted in the region's Cold War history and ongoing security needs. Post-Cold War, the relationships between the United States and CEE countries have been heavily influenced by the US's strategic interest in expanding its influence in Europe and securing allies in a geopolitically sensitive region (M. Smith, 2011, p. 301). The CEE countries have sought robust security guarantees to navigate their post-Soviet realities, finding a powerful ally in the United States. Despite facing criticism within broader EU circles, countries like Poland and the Czech Republic showed a strong alignment with US foreign policy, a stance that further cemented their special relationships with the US (Lansford, 2005, pp. xxi–xxii). This support was not merely a reflection of political alignment but also a strategic move by CEE states to solidify security assurances and foster closer bilateral relations with the US (Light, 2003, p. 71).

The perceived threat of a revisionist Russia has been a central concern for the security of CEE member states, shaping their foreign and security policies significantly. Since the end of the Cold War, Russia's assertive policies aimed at reasserting its influence in its near abroad, including military interventions in Georgia and Ukraine and its ongoing political meddling in various European affairs, have been viewed as direct threats by CEE nations (Baun & Marek, 2013, p. 291). These actions have revived historical apprehensions and reinforced the perception of Russia as a destabilising force in the region (Light, 2003, p. 82). Consequently, this perceived aggression has been a principal motivator for CEE countries to seek closer security ties with the United States, which they view as a crucial counterbalance to Russian power (Lanoszka, 2020, p. 461). The strategic support from the US, both in terms of military presence and political backing, is seen as vital for their national security, driving these nations to strengthen transatlantic bonds and often prioritise US protection in their security strategies (Denca, 2013, p. 254).

The relationship between the US and CEE member states has experienced significant strains in the domains of foreign policy. Tensions between the US and the EU in general first became pronounced during the conflicts in Yugoslavia in the 1990s, where divergent approaches to intervention and crisis management revealed underlying differences in strategic priorities (Hill et al., 2023, p. 35). These strains deepened with the Iraq War in 2003, as many EU countries, including several from the CEE, sided with the US, putting Atlanticism and Europeanisation at odds (Knezović, 2023, pp. 246–247). The election of Donald Trump in 2016 further exacerbated tensions, as his foreign policy approach, characterised by nationalism and a scepticism of multilateral engagements, led to a significant loss of trust among European allies (Knezović, 2023, p. 242; Larres, 2017, pp. 7–9; Nielsen & Dimitrova, 2021, p. 714). His administration's unilateral decisions, as well as those of his successor, such as the abrupt withdrawal from Afghanistan, left many European partners feeling sidelined and underscored the unpredictability of US commitment (M. Smith & Steffenson, 2023, p. 380). Additionally, the US's strategic pivot to Asia, aiming to counter China's rising influence, has signalled a shift in focus that has left many in Europe concerned about the waning attention to transatlantic security needs (Riddervold & Rosén, 2018, pp. 557–558). The prospect of Trump's reelection in 2024, or the rise of a similar nationalist populist candidate, continues to loom as a potential challenge, casting further uncertainty on the future of the US-EU relationship.

EU foreign policy and security integration

While the deterioration of relationships with the United States and escalating threats from Russia have the most significant influence on the security policies of CEE states, these factors alone do not fully capture why these nations increasingly view the European Union as their main security guarantor. A crucial aspect often overlooked is the deepening integration of EU foreign policy and security mechanisms (M. E. Smith, 2018, p. 608). Movements towards further integration are slowly enhancing the EU's autonomous defence capabilities (M. Smith & Steffenson, 2023, p. 379). Somewhat contradictory, the EU's internal crisis over the last decade, and subsequent increased polarisation, have further validated continued integration (Barbé & Morillas, 2019, pp. 765–766). More active participation in CSDP has been seen as beneficial as it allows CEE countries to develop stronger defence systems in a more volatile environment (Wang & Moise, 2023, p. 1694). This shift towards EU-centric defence mechanisms is critical, particularly as reliance on US security guarantees becomes increasingly uncertain amid fluctuating American foreign policy stances. Therefore, the strengthening of EU foreign policy and security integration is a fundamental driving factor in why CEE states are recalibrating their security dependencies towards an EU-centred approach.

The journey of EU foreign policy integration has been characterised by gradual advancements and pivotal moments that have shaped its current structure. Initially, the idea of a unified European defence and foreign policy was envisioned through the European Defence Community (EDC), but this plan failed to materialise in 1954 due to the French Parliament's rejection (Hill et al., 2023, p. 25). The concept lay dormant until the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, which marked a foundational shift by establishing the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The CFSP aimed to coordinate the foreign policies of Member States, promoting both alignment and collective European action on the international stage. Further steps towards integration were seen with the development of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) in 1999, following the Amsterdam Treaty (Hill et al., 2023, pp. 35–36). The CSDP was designed to enhance the EU's external ability to manage crises and conflicts, emphasising the EU's capacity for autonomous action (Howorth, 2023, p. 325). This included both military and civilian missions abroad, signalling a more active approach to security (Hill et al., 2023, p. 37; Howorth, 2023, p. 311). A significant institutional development occurred with the creation of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, a role designed to give a single face to EU foreign policy and improve coherence and consistency. The Lisbon Treaty in 2009 was a further step in integration, solidifying the role of the HR/VP and

establishing the European External Action Service (EEAS) (Amadio Viceré, 2018, p. 76). The EEAS serves as the EU's diplomatic corps, supporting the High Representative in carrying out the Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy.

The Common Security and Defence Policy of the EU has the potential to be a viable alternative for EU member states, especially when compared to relying solely on the US for security. The CSDP sets the foundation for the EU to conduct its own military and civilian missions independently of NATO, making possible responses in ways that are consistent with European values and interests (M. E. Smith, 2018, p. 611). This is particularly important for CEE countries that could benefit from further integration as they would be a part of shaping the general vision of the EU (Kasekamp, 2013, p. 156). The EU's ability to launch autonomous operations under the CSDP, such as those in the Balkans and off the coast of Somalia, demonstrates its capability to address security challenges directly impacting its members (Howorth, 2023, pp. 314–315). This shift towards a more integrated European defence posture, supported by institutions like the European Defence Agency and initiatives such as PESCO, underscores the growing significance of the EU as a security actor independent of US strategic priorities (Martill & Gebhard, 2023, pp. 115–116).

The evolving dynamics of the EU-US relationship, particularly concerning security and foreign policy, have deep implications for the CEE member states. Historically reliant on the United States for security guarantees, these states are now recalibrating their strategies amidst deteriorating transatlantic relations and escalating threats from a revisionist Russia. Simultaneously, the deepening integration of EU foreign policy and security mechanisms offers new avenues for ensuring their national security. Therefore, this research will explore the following research question:

“What is the effect of EU foreign and security policy integration on the relationship of Central Eastern European States with the US?”

This research addresses a gap in the existing literature by focusing specifically on the impact of EU integration on the newest EU members and their changing relations with the US, providing a nuanced understanding of how these states navigate their security and foreign policy landscape amidst evolving transatlantic dynamics. Understanding this shift is crucial for comprehending the broader implications for transatlantic relations and the future of European security architecture. The following section spells out the mechanisms shaping the CEE-US relationship and builds the theoretical framework to answer the research question.

Theoretical framework

The framework begins by examining the exogenous factors, such as bandwagoning and threat balancing theories, which explain why CEE states initially relied on the US for security guarantees and how the lack of interstate trust can make CEE member states turn towards the EU for guarantees. Next, it delves into the endogenous factors, incorporating liberal and constructivist theories to highlight the role of interdependence, international institutions, and shared norms in driving EU foreign policy and security integration. These theories elucidate how the EU's evolving identity and strategic culture enhance its attractiveness as a security partner. Finally, the framework introduces the theory of alliance shelter, built on traditional alliance theories. This theory provides a holistic approach to why CEE states are increasingly turning towards the EU for comprehensive security solutions.

Exogenous factors

To understand why Central and Eastern European member states would initially rely on the United States, we need to explore the theories of bandwagoning and threat balancing. Bandwagoning describes the strategy of smaller or weaker states aligning themselves with a more powerful state to ensure their security and benefit from the protection and resources of the dominant power (Cladi & Locatelli, 2012, pp. 281–282; Posen, 2006, p. 155). For small EU member states, particularly those in CEE, bandwagoning is evident in their foreign policy decisions where they align closely with the United States. This alignment is driven by the need to secure robust security guarantees against perceived threats, such as a revisionist Russia. By supporting US-led initiatives and policies, these smaller states seek to enhance their own security and gain favour with the US. Additionally, threat balancing is a critical aspect of CEE states' strategies. Threat balancing involves aligning their foreign policies and security strategies to counter perceived threats, primarily from Russia (Posen, 2006, pp. 162–163; Walt, 1987, pp. 17–33). This manifests in several ways: aligning closely with NATO and the US for a robust security umbrella, integrating into the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) to enhance collective security, and investing in modernizing their military capabilities.

However, bandwagoning and threat balancing do not preclude these states from participating in EU foreign policy and security mechanisms; rather, they represent pragmatic approaches to maximising their security through multiple avenues. The dual strategy of engaging with both the US and the EU allows these small states to navigate the complexities of international politics, leveraging the strengths of both transatlantic and European

partnerships. This approach underscores the nuanced and flexible nature of their foreign policy, as they balance their immediate security needs with long-term integration goals within the EU.

Lack of interstate trust is a good example of why CEE states have been increasingly losing confidence in the United States as a reliable security partner. The erosion of trust between CEE member states and the US can be largely attributed to the foreign policy approach of the Trump administration. Under Trump's "America First" policy, the predictability and reliability of US commitments to NATO and European security were called into question. Trump's frequent criticisms of NATO and his ambiguous stance on Article 5, which ensures collective defence, led to significant doubts about the US's willingness to honour its security commitments (Nielsen & Dimitrova, 2021, p. 709). This shift from fiduciary trust, based on shared values and norms, to a more tenuous predictive trust, based on uncertain reciprocation, undermined the foundational trust that CEE states placed in the US (Larres, 2017, pp. 3–7). In response, CEE countries began to hedge their bets by strengthening their own security measures, increasing defence spending, and seeking greater integration within EU security frameworks like the CSDP and PESCO (Nielsen & Dimitrova, 2021, p. 711). This strategic adjustment underscores the growing importance of the EU as a security partner for CEE states, highlighting their need to diversify security partnerships amidst the unpredictability of US foreign policy.

Endogenous factors

Liberal theory provides a framework for understanding the EU's foreign policy and security integration, emphasising the roles of interdependence and international institutions. According to liberal intergovernmentalism, states are rational actors that cooperate based on converging national interests and shared vulnerabilities, not just in security affairs but across various domains (Amadio Viceré, 2018, p. 27). This cooperation is driven by the need to address common challenges more effectively through collective action. Periodic institutional innovations within the EU, such as the development of the CSDP, are seen as mechanisms that enhance the credibility of member states' commitments and facilitate the implementation of common policies for the benefit of all EU states (M. E. Smith, 2018, p. 608). By pooling resources and capabilities, the EU can respond more effectively to global threats and challenges, thereby increasing its influence and prominence as a global player. The liberal perspective underscores the importance of international political economy and domestic preferences in shaping states' interests and positions, suggesting that as EU integration deepens,

the Union's capacity to act as a cohesive and influential entity in global politics is significantly enhanced (Andreatta & Zambernardi, 2023, pp. 55–56).

Constructivist theory offers a framework for understanding EU foreign policy and security integration by emphasising the role of ideas, norms, and identity in shaping international relations. Unlike rationalist theories that view states as strictly self-interested actors, constructivism posits that states are socially constructed, and their behaviours are influenced by shared ideas and discourses. This perspective sees the EU as a source of innovative norms and methods for promoting security and global governance, grounded in its multilateral and highly institutionalised identity (Andreatta & Zambernardi, 2023, p. 57). Scholars highlight the EU's aspiration to reshape world politics in its own image, advocating for a cosmopolitan, multilateral, and post-Westphalian model of governance (M. E. Smith, 2018, p. 607). By fostering these shared norms and strategic culture, the EU enhances its attractiveness as a foreign policy partner and bolsters its credibility as a significant global actor (Andreatta & Zambernardi, 2023, p. 58). The constructivist approach suggests that as the EU deepens its integration and continues to propagate its values, it becomes more desirable for member states and external partners alike, facilitating its evolution into a formidable global player capable of shaping international norms and practices (Amadio Viceré, 2018, pp. 31–32).

The liberal theory's emphasis on interdependence and cooperation, supplemented by the constructivist theory's priority to norms and values provides a rationale for why CEE states might favour deeper integration within the EU's foreign and security policy structures. By participating in the CSDP and other EU mechanisms, CEE states can leverage the collective strength of the Union to address their security concerns more effectively than they could independently, thus aiding in the process of creating a more desirable system of defence. This integration not only enhances their security but also ensures that their interests are represented within the broader EU framework. Thus, the liberal and constructivist perspectives highlight why deeper EU integration in foreign and security policy can be desirable for CEE states, providing them with enhanced security, stability, and a stronger voice within the international community.

The EU as an alliance shelter

Traditional alliance-building theory emphasises the importance of states forming alliances primarily to counteract or balance against a common threat. According to balance of power theory, states align with others to supplement their own capabilities or to reduce the impact of an antagonistic power (Bailes et al., 2016, p. 3). This approach is typically driven by

rational calculations of national interest and the desire to enhance security and deter aggression (Walt, 1987, p. 26). States join alliances not just to protect themselves from immediate threats but to deter potential adversaries by demonstrating a united front. This concept is central to understanding the formation of NATO during the Cold War, where Western European countries and the United States formed a collective defence against the Soviet Union. The theory suggests that alliances are inherently reactive and strategic, aimed at ensuring mutual security and stability within the international system (Bailes et al., 2016, p. 3).

Alliance shelter theory takes the traditional alliance theories and provides a nuanced understanding of why small states in vulnerable positions, such as most CEE states seek alliances beyond mere balance of power calculations. It posits that small states align with larger powers or international organisations to mitigate their inherent vulnerabilities, which are not limited to military threats but also include economic, political, and social dimensions (Bailes et al., 2016, p. 4). This theory recognises that small states often lack the domestic buffers to withstand external shocks, making them heavily reliant on international cooperation for shelter. For instance, small states benefit disproportionately from the political, economic, and societal protections offered by larger entities, such as the EU or NATO. These relationships are not just about security; they involve deep integration that affects domestic policies and societal structures (Bailes et al., 2016, p. 7). Small states may yield significant control over their decision-making in specific areas in exchange for the comprehensive protection and stability provided by the alliance. This approach highlights the asymmetrical but mutually beneficial nature of such relationships, where the cost of dependency is outweighed by the security and stability gains.

The application of both traditional alliance building and alliance shelter theories can be seen in the behaviour of CEE states. Post-Cold War, these states sought to align with the United States and NATO as a means of counterbalancing the perceived threat from a resurgent Russia. Traditional alliance theory explains their initial reliance on the US for security guarantees. However, as trust in the US has eroded due to inconsistent policies and the pivot to Asia, CEE states have increasingly looked towards the EU for a more stable and comprehensive security arrangement. The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) offers these states an alternative that not only addresses military threats but also provides economic and political stability. This shift can be understood through alliance shelter theory, which suggests that the EU's multifaceted protection is particularly attractive to small, vulnerable states like those in CEE. The deep integration with the EU allows CEE states to mitigate a wide range of vulnerabilities, reinforcing their security through a stable, institutionalised framework.

Mechanism and hypothesis

The mechanism underlying the shift in CEE states' security and foreign policy strategies can be understood through the interplay of exogenous and endogenous factors. Exogenous factors, such as bandwagoning and threat balancing, initially drove CEE states to align closely with the United States for robust security guarantees against perceived threats like a revisionist Russia. However, the erosion of trust in the US, particularly under the Trump administration, has prompted these states to diversify their security partnerships. Endogenous factors, grounded in liberal and constructivist theories, highlight the increasing role of EU institutions and shared norms in shaping a cohesive European security identity. As the EU strengthens its Common Security and Defence Policy CSDP and other mechanisms, it becomes a more attractive and reliable security partner for CEE states. Therefore, the EU is gradually seen as an alliance shelter, providing holistic protection and stability for the smaller CEE states, addressing not only military but also economic and political vulnerabilities. Thus, this paper has the following main hypothesis:

H1: The increasing integration of EU foreign policy and security mechanisms positively influences the security strategies of CEE member states, leading them to prioritize EU-centric security arrangements over traditional reliance on the United States.

In the following section, the research design of the paper is outlined, describing the model used, the dependent and independent variables analysed, and the control variables used to isolate the effect.

Research design

To research the relationship between EU foreign policy and security integration and the relationship of Central and Eastern European states with the US, two datasets are employed – the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) and the Pew Global Attitudes & Trends both from 2019 (Jolly et al., 2022; Pew Research Center, 2019). The Pew Global Attitudes & Trends dataset is selected for its broad international perspective, capturing public opinion on a variety of global issues. Particularly, it provides data on attitudes towards the United States from CEE states, which serves as this study's dependent variable (DV). The CHES dataset has been chosen for its extensive coverage and detailed data on political party positions across Europe, collected through standardised expert surveys. Specifically, CHES measures the position of different parties from Central and Eastern European (CEE) states regarding their stance on EU foreign

and security policy and thus provides the independent variable (IV) for the research. Because neither dataset independently measures both the IV and the DV, the datasets are merged based on respondents' attitudes towards different political parties in their country. Research has shown that party position can act as cues for their voters on what position they should support, therefore, merging the datasets based on party favourability is conceptually acceptable (Ray, 2003, p. 990). Finally, it is important to state that the Pew Global Attitudes & Trends has data only on the countries of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia. Nevertheless, this is not seen as a problem, given that they represent the majority of CEE member states and offer a good geographical and political mix. For performing a meaningful multinomial regression, several assumptions need to be met, which are described in Appendix B.

Dependent and independent variables

The dependent variable, *us_opinion*, measures the attitudes towards the US among the populations of CEE states. This variable is a good metric for understanding the relationship between CEE states and the US because public opinion reflects broader social, political, and economic sentiments that influence and are influenced by international relations. Population attitudes provide a grassroots perspective on how foreign policies and international interactions are perceived by the general public, making it an important component in assessing the effectiveness and impact of regional and global developments. The *us_opinion* variable is ordinal, capturing the spectrum of public sentiment with four distinct values: Very Favourable, Somewhat Favourable, Somewhat Unfavourable, and Very Unfavourable.

The independent variable, *eu_foreign*, measures the position of political parties in CEE states towards a common EU foreign and security policy. This variable is a very good metric for analysing whether political parties are in favour of further integration within the EU. The *eu_foreign* variable is measured on a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 indicating complete opposition and 7 indicating complete support for a common EU foreign and security policy. Although inherently ordinal, *eu_foreign* is treated as a continuous variable, therefore enabling the examination of linear relationships and trends (Robitzsch, 2020, p. 1).

To establish a connection between the DV and the IV, the position of each political party (*eu_foreign*) is assigned to respondents based on the party they identified as most favourable in the Pew questionnaire. This method creates a link between the public's attitudes towards the United States (measured by the *us_opinion* variable) and the political stance of the party they support regarding EU integration.

Control variables

Controls help to mitigate confounding variables and provide a clearer understanding of the true relationship between the dependent and independent variables. The first control in this research is *trump_conf*, which measures respondents' confidence in President Donald Trump on a binomial scale with 0 representing confidence in the leader and 1 representing lack of confidence. This control is included to account for the potential impact of individual attitudes towards Trump on the overall perception of the United States. Given President Trump's tenure was marked by unpredictable behaviour and controversial policies, which significantly influenced international relations, it is important to determine if the deterioration in CEE-US relations can be attributed to a loss of trust driven by these factors. By controlling for *trump_conf*, the analysis can more accurately assess whether the negative opinions towards the US are specifically related to broader political dynamics and party positions in the CEE states, or if they are significantly influenced by the personal trust (or lack thereof) in President Trump. This ensures that the findings regarding the relationship between positions on EU foreign policy integration and the US are not confounded by individual views on Trump's presidency.

The second control variable in this research is *russia_opinion*, which measures the favourability attitudes towards Russia, measured on a binomial scale with 0 representing unfavourable opinion and 1 representing favourable. This control is included because it serves as a potential confounder, influencing both the drive for EU foreign policy integration and attitudes towards the United States. Favourable opinions towards Russia can impact support for a common EU foreign and security policy, as CEE states with more positive views of Russia might be less inclined to support deeper EU integration, particularly in areas of defence and foreign policy that could oppose Russian interests. Conversely, CEE states with more negative views of Russia might desire stronger EU security integration, as Russia can be seen as a potential threat. Additionally, a more favourable view of Russia could correlate with a less favourable opinion of the US, given the historical and geopolitical tensions between the two countries. This control helps ensure that the observed relationships between EU foreign policy and security integration and attitudes towards the US are not confounded by underlying sentiments towards Russia.

Model

Given that the dependent variable is categorical, multinomial logistic regression will be employed, as this method is effective for analysing the effects on dependent categorical variables. The method breaks down the dependent variable into a series of binary comparisons between the categories. For the *us_opinion* variable, which has four categories the multinomial logistic regression model will create three comparisons, each against the reference category, "Very Favourable." This approach enables the analysis to capture the effects of the independent variable on each category of the dependent variable without assuming uniformity across all levels. Additionally, this model allows for the inclusion of both continuous and categorical variables that can serve as a control to the main independent variable, thus having the potential for more explanatory power.

The mathematical formula for each of the three parts of the model is as follows, with $P(us_opinion = k)$ representing the probability of the DV being equal to the reference category, with $P(us_opinion = j)$ representing the probability of the DV being equal to the three other categories:

$$\log\left(\frac{P(us_opinion = j)}{P(us_opinion = k)}\right) = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}(eu_foreign) + \beta_{2j}(trump_conf) + \beta_{3j}(russia_opinion)$$

In the following section, the results from the regression are presented and interpreted. Additionally, the statistics on the goodness and fit of the model are explored and explained.

Results

Table 1. Multinomial regression on attitudes towards the US

	b(SE)	Exp(B)	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
			Lower	Upper
Very unfavourable				
Intercept	-.806** (.252)			
EU foreign policy	-.379*** (.057)	.685	.613	.765
Russia – favourable	-.855*** (.171)	.425	.304	.594
Trump – favourable	2.930*** (.209)	18.733	12.426	28.243
Somewhat unfavourable				
Intercept	.564** (.175)			
EU foreign policy	-.416*** (.043)	.660	.606	.719
Russia – favourable	-.131 (.124)	.877	.687	1.119
Trump – favourable	2.312*** (.137)	10.096	7.726	13.194
Somewhat favourable				
Intercept	1.333*** (.146)			
EU foreign policy	-.163 (.035)***	.850	.793	.911
Russia – favourable	.079 (.103)	1.082	.884	1.325
Trump – favourable	.982*** (.110)	2.669	2.152	3.311

Note. $R^2 = .17$ (Cox-Snell), 0.19 (Nagelkerke). $\chi^2(9) = 585.57$, $p < .001$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 2. Goodness-of-Fit

	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Pearson	647.669	213	<,001
Deviance	622.175	213	<,001

To begin the interpretation of the results, the first statistic that is examined is for the model fitting. The decrease in the log-likelihood from the baseline model to the final model is assessed with a chi-square statistic that is the difference between the two, in this case – 585.57. The change is significant, meaning that the final model accounts for more variability in the outcome. Additionally, the R^2 measures predict small to medium sized effects in predicting the outcome.

It is important to note that both tests that measure the goodness-of-fit statistic are significant, which would indicate that the model is not a good fit. However, neither of these tests will give reliable tests of goodness-of-fit if there are many cells with zero frequencies and/or small expected frequencies and are thus generally not recommended (Laerd Statistics, 2015). As the data shows that nearly 70% of cell frequencies are below 5, thus the goodness-of-fit test is not taken into consideration (see Appendix B).

The results of the model show the following: The position toward EU common foreign and security policy significantly predicts whether one has a ‘very unfavourable’ attitude towards the US, $b = -0.38$, Wilds $\chi^2(1) = 44.94$, $p < 0.001$. The odd ratio indicates that as the position on EU common foreign and security policy increases by a unit (measure from 1 to 7), the change in the odds of having a ‘very unfavourable’ attitude towards the US (rather than ‘very favourable’) is 0.69. The higher the position toward common EU foreign policy integration, the lower the chances of having a ‘very unfavourable’ attitude towards the US.

The position toward EU common foreign and security policy significantly predicts whether one has a ‘somewhat unfavourable’ attitude towards the US, $b = -0.41$, Wilds $\chi^2(1) = 91.40$, $p < 0.001$. The odd ratio indicates that as the position on EU common foreign and security policy increases by a unit (measure from 1 to 7), the change in the odds of having a ‘somewhat unfavourable’ attitude towards the US (rather than ‘very favourable’) is 0.67. The higher the position toward common EU foreign policy integration, the lower the chances of having a ‘somewhat unfavourable’ attitude towards the US.

The position toward EU common foreign and security policy significantly predicts whether one has a ‘somewhat favourable’ attitude towards the US, $b = -0.163$, Wilds $\chi^2(1) = 83.12$, $p < 0.001$. The odd ratio indicates that as the position on EU common foreign and security policy increases by a unit (measure from 1 to 7), the change in the odds of having a ‘somewhat favourable’ attitude towards the US (rather than ‘very favourable’) is 0.85. The

higher the position toward common EU foreign policy integration, the lower the chances of having a ‘somewhat favourable’ attitude towards the US.

Discussion

Below, the results of the monomial logistic regression are discussed in relation to the theory and hypothesis, and some speculation on why the results are inconsistent with the theoretical framework. After that, a few limitations are outlined, including the scope of the study, both in terms of countries, and time-span. Additionally, a short section on why ordinal logistic regression was not used in the research.

Analysis of the results

The results of the model reveal a significant relationship between the independent variable – position on common EU foreign and security policy – and attitudes towards the US. However, the direction of this relationship is contrary to expectations. While it was initially hypothesized that an increase in support for a common EU foreign and security policy would correlate with more unfavourable attitudes towards the US, the findings suggest the opposite. The odds ratios indicate that higher support for EU policy integration is associated with lower odds of having 'very unfavourable,' 'somewhat unfavourable,' or even 'somewhat favourable' attitudes towards the US, compared to 'very favourable' attitudes. This unexpected direction suggests that stronger support for EU integration may be accompanied by more favourable perceptions of the US.

The unexpected findings, indicating that higher support for a common EU foreign and security policy correlates with more favourable attitudes towards the US, suggest that transatlantic relations remain robust despite recent uncertainties surrounding President Trump's administration and the ongoing threat posed by Russia. This positive relationship implies that even as EU member states seek greater autonomy in their foreign and security policies, they continue to value and maintain strong ties with the US. This enduring favourability towards the US highlights the deep-rooted nature of transatlantic bonds, which likely stem from shared values, historical alliances, and mutual interests in addressing global security challenges. Moreover, it underscores the resilience of these relationships in the face of external pressures and changing political landscapes, reinforcing the notion that EU and US cooperation remains a cornerstone of international stability and security.

Having regard to the hypothesis:

H1: The increasing integration of EU foreign policy and security mechanisms positively influences the security strategies of CEE member states, leading them to prioritize EU-centric security arrangements over traditional reliance on the United States.

This research fails to support this hypothesis in its current state. The research does not find evidence that increased support for common EU foreign and security integration leads to worsened relations with the US. On the contrary, US support and EU integration seem to be correlated positively.

Limitations and suggestions for further research

One of the limitations of this research is that it includes only six out of the eleven Central and CEE states who joined the Union post-2004, which may not provide a fully comprehensive view of the region's attitudes towards the US. This can limit the generalizability of the findings and only produce partial results. Additionally, the data for this research were not gathered during a single study but were combined from two distinct studies: the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) and the Pew Global Attitudes & Trends survey. These studies, while valuable, differ in their unit of analysis and collection of data timeframes, and contexts, which could introduce variability and potential biases into the results. That can influence the findings, complicating the interpretation of the relationship between EU policy positions and attitudes towards the US. Such limitations underscore the need for cautious interpretation and suggest that future research should aim to include a more comprehensive set of CEE states and ideally gather data within a unified study framework to enhance reliability and validity. A good example of such a study is the CHES survey from 2006, as it included additional questions on party positions towards the US (Jolly et al., 2022).

Additionally, this study examines the effect of support for a common EU foreign and security policy on attitudes towards the US within a single year, providing a snapshot of the current dynamics between CEE states and the US. While this approach offers valuable insights into the relationship at a specific point in time, it does not account for changes and trends that may have occurred over the years. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of how CEE-US relations have evolved, a time series analysis would be beneficial. Such an analysis could track the variations in public opinion and policy positions over multiple years, highlighting how external factors such as political shifts, economic developments, and security threats, including the fluctuating US administration policies and the persistent threat from Russia, have

influenced these relationships. This approach would enhance the robustness of the findings and offer deeper insights into the complexities of CEE-US interactions.

Finally, an ordinal logistic regression would have been a good fit for the model in this research because it is designed to handle ordinal dependent variables, such as the one employed here. However, a key assumption of ordinal logistic regression is the proportional odds assumption, which requires that the effect of the independent variables is consistent across all thresholds of the ordinal outcome. This means that each predictor's effect should be identical at each cumulative split of the ordinal dependent variable (Laerd Statistics, 2015). For this research, that assumption was violated, and multinomial logistic regression was used, however, future research can attempt to perform an ordinal regression, providing a better insight into how changing attitudes towards the US are dependent on factors such as EU integration or lack of trust in the United States.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the impact of EU foreign and security policy integration on the relationship between Central and Eastern European states and the United States. Contrary to initial expectations, the findings reveal that higher support for EU policy integration correlates with more favourable attitudes towards the US. This suggests that transatlantic relations remain robust, despite recent uncertainties surrounding the Trump administration and the threat posed by Russia. It indicates that CEE states, while seeking greater EU autonomy, continue to value and maintain strong ties with the US, highlighting the resilience of transatlantic bonds grounded in shared values and mutual security interests. Overall, this study contributes to the understanding of how EU integration influences CEE states' relationships with the US and its limitations as a potential substitute to the US. The results show that the EU and the US are seen as a tandem in Central and Eastern Europe, and so far, there has been little necessity to choose between one or the other. This research is relevant for scholars who study transatlantic relations, and more specifically the CEE member states. It can also be useful to policymakers, as they try to navigate an ever more complicated international and regional environment.

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Appendix A: Data used in the research

This online appendix contains the original datasets used in the research, the modified dataset, the outcome of the regression analysis and the tests for assumptions.

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/t2cmd9apzoug6tcxi1482/AMTM90JCCReNUYgv2KelvOo?rlkey=5jdkfute4fapcegawh2gxcme9&st=r4wc6h85&dl=0>

Appendix B: Test of assumptions

Categorical dependent variable

The DV *us_opinion* is categorical, with four categories – ‘Very unfavourable’, ‘Somewhat unfavourable’, ‘Somewhat favourable’, and ‘Very favourable’.

At least one categorical or continuous independent variable

The IV *eu_foreign* is treated as a continuous variable with a scale from 1 to 7.

The control variables *russia_fav* and *trump_conf* are binomial, with values being 0 or 1.

Multicollinearity test

Determining whether there is multicollinearity is an important step in multinomial logistic regression, just as with multiple linear regression, and can be determined using the same method used for multiple regression, despite the dependent variable being categorical and not continuous (because multicollinearity is concerned with the independent variables). Multicollinearity occurs when there are two or more independent variables that are highly correlated with each other. This leads to problems with understanding which variable contributes to the explanation of the dependent variable and technical issues in calculating an ordinal logistic regression (Laerd Statistics, 2015). To find out if a problem with multicollinearity exist, one needs to consult the "Tolerance" and "VIF" values in the Coefficients table that was produced, as shown below. VIF should not exceed 5, and as it is seen, it does not.

Coefficients^a

Model		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	<i>russia_verybad</i>	.519	1.926
	<i>trump_bad</i>	.272	3.679
	<i>trump_good</i>	.272	3.674
	<i>EU_foreign</i>	.977	1.023
	<i>trump_verybad</i>	.326	3.069
	<i>russia_bad</i>	.387	2.586
	<i>russia_good</i>	.368	2.717

a. Dependent Variable: *us_opinion*

Independence of the DV choices

Multinomial logistic regression does have assumptions, such as the assumption of independence among the dependent variable choices. This assumption states that the choice of or membership in one category is not related to the choice or membership of another category (i.e., the dependent variable). Further, the Hausman-McFadden test can be used to check for that, however, it is currently not available in SPSS (Jon Starkweather, n.d.). Nevertheless, a respondent can only choose one category in their attitudes towards the US. Therefore, this assumption is assumed not violated.

Number of cell frequencies

<i>number_cp</i>		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	179	32.0	32.0	32.0
	2	86	15.4	15.4	47.3
	3	56	10.0	10.0	57.3
	4	36	6.4	6.4	63.7
	5	31	5.5	5.5	69.3
	6	19	3.4	3.4	72.7
	7	13	2.3	2.3	75.0
	8	9	1.6	1.6	76.6
	9	12	2.1	2.1	78.8
	10	7	1.3	1.3	80.0
	11	6	1.1	1.1	81.1
	12	13	2.3	2.3	83.4
	13	6	1.1	1.1	84.5
	14	3	.5	.5	85.0
	15	9	1.6	1.6	86.6
	16	2	.4	.4	87.0
	17	5	.9	.9	87.9
	18	6	1.1	1.1	88.9
	19	3	.5	.5	89.5
	20	4	.7	.7	90.2
	21	3	.5	.5	90.7
	22	4	.7	.7	91.4
	23	2	.4	.4	91.8
	24	1	.2	.2	92.0
	25	2	.4	.4	92.3
	26	2	.4	.4	92.7

27	4	.7	.7	93.4
28	1	.2	.2	93.6
29	2	.4	.4	93.9
30	5	.9	.9	94.8
31	2	.4	.4	95.2
33	1	.2	.2	95.4
35	1	.2	.2	95.5
36	1	.2	.2	95.7
37	3	.5	.5	96.3
39	1	.2	.2	96.4
40	1	.2	.2	96.6
41	1	.2	.2	96.8
44	2	.4	.4	97.1
48	2	.4	.4	97.5
52	1	.2	.2	97.7
55	1	.2	.2	97.9
58	1	.2	.2	98.0
60	1	.2	.2	98.2
65	1	.2	.2	98.4
66	1	.2	.2	98.6
67	1	.2	.2	98.8
69	1	.2	.2	98.9
70	1	.2	.2	99.1
73	1	.2	.2	99.3
82	1	.2	.2	99.5
89	1	.2	.2	99.6
92	1	.2	.2	99.8
104	1	.2	.2	100.0
Total	560	100.0	100.0	
