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Coping, struggling, or just getting by? Brexit and its implications for Czech and Slovak security and defence policies

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ABSTRACT

The overarching goal of this article is to investigate the extent to which and the ways in which the Brexit process impacted the policies of Czechia and Slovakia in the security and defence (S&D) domain between 2016 and 2020 and how the two countries positioned themselves in this area during the withdrawal negotiations. More specifically, the study explores 1) the strategies pursued by Czech and Slovak national authorities to cope with Brexit (hiding, seeking shelter, hedging); 2) the underlying logics of these strategies (the logics of appropriateness and consequence); and 3) how these coping strategies influence the Europeanisation of Czech and Slovak foreign policies (especially in terms of undermining or reinforcing them). The analysis draws on information derived from semi-structured elite interviews and numerous off-the-record meetings with diplomatic sources, senior civil servants and other officials from Czechia and Slovakia alike.

KEYWORDS

Brexit; security and defence; Czechia; Slovakia; coping strategies; logic of appropriateness; logic of consequence; europeanisation

1 Introduction

The overarching goal of this article is to investigate the extent to which and the ways in which the Brexit process has impacted the policies of Czechia and Slovakia in the security and defence (S&D) domain and how these two countries positioned themselves in this policy area during the Brexit negotiations. More specifically, in line with the general orientation of this special issue, the study aims to explore 1) the strategies pursued by Czech and Slovak national authorities to cope with Brexit; 2) the underlying logics of these strategies; and 3) the influence of these coping strategies on (de)Europeanisation of Czech and Slovak S&D policies.

The significance of this inquiry is highlighted by four key factors. First is the extraordinary uncertainty and ambiguity surrounding the implications of Brexit for European defence and security. Even though the European Union's (EU) Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and its core, the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), are implemented on an intergovernmental basis, the United Kingdom's (UK) withdrawal from the EU is bound to have serious implications in this realm. Over the years, the UK acted as a weighty mover driving EU activity in many key CFSP areas. Its Eurosceptic rhetoric notwithstanding, the UK played an instrumental role in the formulation of many CFSP/CSDP positions, including on Iran's nuclear programme and the EU sanctions against Russia (Shea 2020). As one of the most capable and influential countries in the field of defence and security (Black et al. 2017, 25), the UK was a key contributor to CSDP operations and missions in terms of capabilities, assets, personnel and expertise (Blunt, 2017, p. 2). On the other hand, the UK long acted as a heavyweight

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opponent to CSDP development and its withdrawal has enabled the EU to 'put out an impressive array of projects and programmes' (Franke 2020), including the creation of new institutions, such as the Military Planning and Conduct Capability, and deepening of defence integration in the form of the European Defence Fund, the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (Fiott, Missiroli & Tardy 2017; Shea 2020).

Secondly, the relevance of this research is highlighted by the fact that even though Brexit is bound to change the way European countries organise their S&D policies (Major and von Voß 2017, 1) and all EU member states will need to adjust to this new, disruptive situation, formal foreign and defence policy cooperation does not form a part of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement agreed by EU and UK negotiators on 24 December 2020. Despite its inclusion in the October 2019 Political Declaration on the future UK-EU relationship, at the request of the UK Government defence cooperation did not feature in the subsequent negotiations on the future relationship (Mills & Smith, 2021; Whitman, 2021). Instead, the UK Government opted for a flexible, ad hoc approach to defence cooperation within a framework of 'broader friendly dialogue and cooperation between the UK and the EU' (Mills & Smith, 2021: 1; Whitman, 2021). Hence, it is all the more important to pay due attention to the challenges and implications of Brexit in the S&D domain for each individual member state.

Thirdly, the S&D realm is a particularly sensitive area for small states (Weiss 2020, 3; Wivel et al. 2014; Maass 2016), as they are structurally disadvantaged when it comes to securing their own interests in EU politics (Weiss 2020, 2). A rigorous and well-sourced review of the literature in the field of small states studies was masterfully assembled by Thorhallsson (2018).

Fourthly and relatedly, despite the relatively extensive literature on the consequences of Brexit for EU defence and security policy (see, for instance, Black et al. 2017; Lain and Nouwens 2017; Martill and Sus 2018a, 2018b, 2019), there has been comparatively little academic analysis of its challenges for the S&D policies of individual EU27 member states, let alone the small ones (see, for instance, Harrois 2020 on France or Saxi 2019 on Germany). This sits rather well with De Gruyter's (2018) observation that 'A great deal of attention has been paid to the details of the Brexit negotiations themselves and how the UK's departure will affect big EU member states like France and Germany. But how Brexit will impact the political weight of and the dynamics between smaller member states has garnered far less attention than it should'. As a result, there is a lacuna when it comes to Brexit implications for the S&D policies of small member states in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) which is particularly noteworthy, since no other country has been as engaged in S&D matters in the region as the UK (Zaborowski 2021). The only notable contributions to the literature have been the work of Weiss (2020), who inquires into how the institutional setting affects Czechia's preparations for Brexit in the areas of CSDP and internal market, and Brusenbauch Meislová (2017), whose policy paper explores strategic challenges for the Czech Republic in light of post-Brexit CFSP.

Against this background, comparing the responses to Brexit of Czechia and Slovakia serves a number of purposes. Building upon, extending and updating the earlier discussions, this article joins the prior studies and adds to an emerging body of research seeking to document and understand Brexit challenges for the S&D policies of small EU member states, and those in the CEE region in particular. Indeed, such a comparative analysis can be instrumental in evaluating the Brexit challenges for the S&D policies of small countries without any unusually close links to the UK. As well, this analysis has a broader relevance for other CEE countries that are either fully land-locked (e.g. Austria, Hungary) or have only a short seacoast (Slovenia). Empirically, I present a scorecard of the challenges stemming from Brexit for these countries' S&D policies. Conceptually, this analysis rests upon three main concepts of coping strategies, their corresponding logics and the dynamics of Europeanisation. The analysis covers the period from the British referendum in June 2016 and to the UK's withdrawal from the EU on 31 January 2020.

The article unfolds in the following manner. The first part introduces the rationale behind the case selection. The second part reflects upon the main concepts applied in this paper (the coping strategies, their corresponding logics and the dynamics of Europeanisation) and provides

information on the data used for this study. Structured along the triple proposition of this special issue, the empirical section then investigates Brexit challenges for Czech and Slovak S&D policies. Finally, drawing on this analysis, the last section provides concluding remarks.

2 Case selection rationale

Selecting the Czech Republic and Slovakia for the case analysis was driven by several considerations. To start with, both are CEE EU and NATO member states that clearly fall under the category of a small state and share important similarities in terms of political systems and societal qualities: both are former communist countries, part of the 2004 EU enlargement wave and members of the Visegrad Group. Both also belong to the 'core member states' category of small states, which are states 'affected most by EU integration in the sense of having their action space most severely limited by EU rules and regulations, but also enjoying the best chance of influencing the EU through multiple formal and informal channels' (Wivel and Thorhallsson 2018, 266). Czechia and Slovakia also face a similar level of exposure to the economic consequences of Brexit (Chen et al. 2018; Department of Finance 2018). When it comes to the S&D context, both are fully land-blocked countries which do not consider themselves flank nations and do not share the same level of exposure (or the perception thereof) as the North East and South East nations in the CEE region. Their defence investments have been rather modest and neither is interested in hosting a foreign military presence on its soil, be it permanent or rotational (Zaborowski 2021). Crucially, neither country has had any above-standard S&D relations with the UK.[1]

At the same time, however, there is an important variation among these two neighbouring countries. First of all, they differ in terms of their approaches to the EU. The Czech EU debate is generally politicised and most often characterised by a critical tone, mutually enforced at both the level of political elites and the public (cf. Hloušek and Kaniok 2021; Kovář and Sychra 2018, 61; Szent-Iványi 2018, 21). Correspondingly, its EU-level foreign and security policy has been often labelled as 'confused and divided' (Weiss 2015, 88). In contrast, Slovakia's approach to the EU has been 'highly positive', with the country 'enthusiastic about deepening its integration with the Community' (Szent-Iványi 2018, 31; see also; Hajko 2020). Also, in the area of CFSP and CSDP, Slovakia profiles itself as a stable, predictable ally, striving to keep a strong position in the EU (Brajerčíková 2018, 67; GOV SK 2021). Another variation between the two cases concerns the fact that the Czech population is more Eurosceptic than the Slovaks, with the Czech trust in the EU being the fourth lowest in the pan-EU context (Eurobarometer 2020). Further to this, whilst both countries consider the UK an important partner within the European power game, cooperating together across many levels of activity (ECFR 2018; MFA CZ 2015; Interviews #2, #9 p. 19), they differ in terms of the strength of their relationship with the UK (for more on this, see Chapter 4.1). Also, the level of emigration to the UK differs for each country, with the estimates putting the size of the Czech and Slovak expat communities in the UK at approximately 100,000 each (Euractiv 2019; GOV UK 2017; Hrabica 2017), which means a substantial difference per capita, given that Slovakia's population is half the size of the Czech Republic. The UK is also more important for Czechia than Slovakia trade-wise (Szent-Iványi 2018).[2]

3 Framework for analysis and data

In line with the general orientation of this Special Issue (Ferreira-Pereira 2021), my analysis conceptually rests upon three main concepts of 1) coping strategies, 2) their corresponding logics, and 3) the dynamics of Europeanisation. The coping strategies reveal if, how and to what extent the countries prepared for the post-Brexit period in the S&D area. According to Wivel and Thorhallsson (2018, 272), small EU states generally pursue three different strategies to limit the costs, and maximise the potential benefits, of Brexit: the strategy of hiding, shelter-seeking and hedging. A hiding strategy means that they avoid taking sides in the 'struggle' between the EU and the UK (Wivel and Thorhallsson 2018, 272). Shelter-seeking means that

they seek shelter (economic, military or societal) from great powers and international organisations, in this case the EU (Wivel and Thorhallsson 2018, 272). By a hedging strategy, scholars refer to exploiting other countries' interests by 'choosing flexible strategies and explicitly avoiding committing to one' (Janeliūnas 2020; see also Raimundo and Ferreira-Pereira 2021). This strategy avoids signalling support to any regional and global power, thus 'reducing the potential risk of becoming too dependent on a bigger state or involved in a confrontation between rival powers' (Janeliūnas 2020).

To explain the political (in)actions by the Czech and Slovak governments in the S&D realm, I evaluate whether, and to what extent, these coping strategies were guided by the logic of appropriateness or the logic of consequence. At its most basic, these two logics capture a fundamental distinction between two modes of action. Based on the neo-institutionalist approach of March and Olsen (1995, 1996, 1998, 2011), the logic of appropriateness accounts for the normative rationality of action, understanding political actions as 'being rule- and identity-based' (Sending 2002, 447). If actors follow the logic of appropriateness, they act in accordance with institutional rules that define what is appropriate in different situations, with much consideration given to one's identity and emphasis put on the contextual-institutional or normative rationality of political action (Sending 2002, pp. 444–445, 450; cf. Goldmann 2005). By contrast, the logic of consequence is based on rational choice, providing an 'individual utility-maximizing picture' (Sending 2002, 450). This perspective is self-interested and based on 'rational anticipation and calculation of the consequences of an action' (Vandenabeele 2007, 548). In other words, actors act in reference to their own self-interests as defined by the expected consequences of their action (Sending 2002, 450).

The third concept applied in this paper is that of Europeanisation, which is understood as a set of processes and mechanisms by which policymaking at the European level may cause changes at the domestic level (Börzel and Risse 2003). Applying this line of theorising to the issue at stake here, further Europeanisation in defence policy would in practice be marked, for example, by increased adaptation of a country's policies to the common decisions taken in the CSDP area, redefinition of the country's S&D policies, strategies and/or preferences, and an increase in actions within the CSDP or institutional adaptations in this area. By contrast, de-Europeanisation would be demonstrated by (new) examples of obstructing a decision-making process conducive to the adoption of a common position or attempts to influence CSDP on the basis of nationalistic standpoints (Ferreira-Pereira 2021).

The data used for this contribution come from a number of different sources. This inquiry is based in part on an extensive analysis of primary materials, including governmental/ministerial public pronouncements, media statements, interviews, official documents and press releases. Bearing in mind that the policy field of security and defence cooperation might be 'less transparent than other policy areas due to its intimate connection to national security' (Håkansson (2021), I additionally draw on information derived from semi-structured elite interviews, email communications and numerous off-the-record meetings with diplomatic sources, senior civil servants and other officials from the Czech Republic and Slovakia, many of whom were direct participants in, or witnesses to, EU renegotiations, Brexit negotiations and/or their preparations. These included various central state institutions such as ministries (especially the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs), Offices of the Government, and the Permanent Representation of both countries to the European Union (for a full list, see further below). These interviews were conducted on a not-for-attribution basis between September 2017 and March 2020. This data was triangulated by secondary sources, in order to supplement the primary materials and get a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

4 Empirical analysis

Having now introduced my considerations on case selection, data and conceptual framework, let us now inquire into the Brexit challenges for Czech and Slovak S&D policies in the three dimensions of the coping strategies, their corresponding logics and Europeanisation dynamics.

4.1 Coping Strategies

Between 2016 and 2020, both Czechia and Slovakia largely pursued a shelter-seeking strategy in order to effectively mitigate and optimise the risks of Brexit vis-á-vis their S&D policies. This means that they sought shelter from the EU and clearly signalled their support for, and loyalty to, the EU, in an effort to combine all possible benefits that could be received from it.

Czechia and Slovakia have converged in their general outlook on Brexit as a regrettable, disruptive and highly consequential moment (and later a process) (GOV CZ 2016a; GOV SK 2017, 2019b). As will be detailed later, the interviews reveal that both countries consider Brexit a multiple challenge in the area of defence and security, but it was only rarely that they publicly and officially acknowledged the challenges connected to it. And when they did, it was always in the multilateral context only, never bilaterally. There seems to be a shared, if only rather quiet, understanding in both countries that, because of Brexit, both the UK and the EU will lose out in terms of S&D capabilities. Czechia realises, as does Slovakia, that losing a member state with such significant diplomatic and military resources and strategic assets will inevitably reduce the collective capabilities available for EU foreign, security and defence policies (Interviews #1, #3; MFA CZ 2019; cf. Bond et al. 2016, 9; Whitman 2016, 2).

Both countries' official response to Brexit corresponded with a shelter-seeking strategy, as they repeatedly (re)affirmed their commitments to the EU. During the time period under scrutiny here, both countries clearly signalled their support for the EU, observing its united front on Brexit, including in the S&D area. During the negotiations both countries used the EU as a political shelter (a patron, even), helping them overcome the disadvantages of being small (cf. Janeliūnas 2020). This was accompanied by their tendency to treat the S&D issue in relative silence and not to spend much political capital on it.

What also attests to a shelter-seeking behaviour is the fact that both countries remained committed, if cautiously at time, to the EU's CFSP/CSDP 'shelter'. In case of Slovakia, there seems a discernible pattern of continuity when compared to the pre-Brexit state of affairs. Still entrenched in the debate on modernisation of its armed forces (Brajerčíková 2018, 67; Fischer 2020, 47–59), the country continued to participate in EU PESCO projects (cf. Ministry of Defence SK 2017a, 2017b). It also kept calling for a more inclusive approach towards PESCO (Pellegrini 2019) and a more intensive involvement of the European Commission in CSDP (MFA CZ 2019). Slovakia also emphasised that the debates on European defence and security should be stimulated on the national and regional levels (Pellegrini 2019). The country approached the EDF with 'cautious optimism' (Nagy 2019, 8), expressing scepticism that the EU could actually achieve real strategic autonomy (Interview #12). Slovakia also announced that it was not planning to join Macron's European Intervention Initiative – the joint military project between 14 European countries being organised outside of existing EU and NATO structures.

Czech Republic, by contrast, has recently taken several steps to move itself closer to the EU core driven by the Franco-German axis. For instance, it announced in February 2017 that it would integrate parts of its armed forces (more concretely, the 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade, which is considered the Czech army's spearhead force) into the German army within the scope of NATO's Framework Nations Concept (Brusenbauch Meislová 2017, 2). The country also got more robustly involved in the debate on the deepening of European cooperation in S&D (Národní konvent o EU 2019, 3; Weiss, 2020; Zandee et al. 2020, 33–34), hosting, for instance, a high-level conference on the future of European security and defence in spring 2017 (Národní konvent o EU 2019, 3). The Czech

government actively contributed to the debate on the launch of PESCO, viewing it as 'a stepping stone towards a more credible and efficient European defence cooperation' (Fiott et al., 2017, p. 25). Despite the change in government in December 2017, Czechia continued to support 'the deepening of European defence cooperation, building on significant personal continuity and given the fact that the new government, which failed to win the vote of confidence, did not revisit any major strategic documents' (Weiss 2020; similarly also Zandee et al. 2020, 33–34). Also, the creation of the EDF was perceived as an opportunity for the development of the Czech defence industry (Národní konvent o EU 2019, 3). Even though the Czech engagement in the new EU defence initiatives can best be described as 'nominally enthusiastic, but practically limited' (Weiss 2020, 7), this enthusiasm still contrasts with the outright rejection of EU's defence policy by previous Czech governments. At the same time, while the country continued to support 'an ambitious and inclusive PESCO' it 'failed to make a significant contribution to the first round of projects' (Weiss 2020, 7). PESCO implementation was, in itself, considered a 'daunting task' (Visegrad Youth Forum 2020; cf. Ministry of Defence SK 2020). When it comes to the future of European security and defence, the perception was that 'it would not be wise to let us be distracted, or even worse divided, by discussions on further integration leading to a possible European Defence Union' (Visegrad Youth Forum 2020).

One possible explanation for these policy shifts in Czechia (and the lack thereof in Slovakia) might be that the Czech Republic felt more endangered by Brexit than Slovakia, as it – unlike Slovakia – long considered the UK a key like-minded partner and ally with whom it shared a typically pragmatic, slightly detached, non-ideological and cautious approach towards CFSP/CSDP. Indeed, both Czechia and the UK consistently supported (keeping) CFSP's inter-governmental character and argued against extending majority voting in this sphere. Unlike Slovak strategic documents, the Concept of the Czech Republic's Foreign Policy even specifically ascribed an important role to the UK, nominally identifying CFSP as one of the two policies (alongside the common commercial policy) in which both countries are especially close to one another (CZ 2015, 12). Both Czechia and the UK also supported the application of the free market logic to the European defence market and emphasised avoidance of any duplication of NATO's role by the EU. The Czech Government[3] also sided with, and vocally supported, the UK in terms of its insistence on sustaining restrictive measures against Russia following its 2014 military intervention in Ukraine. Indeed, amongst the calls from other EU member states for the recalibration and relaxation of sanctions, Czechia – historically suspicious of Russia – expressed its view that without the UK it would be much more difficult to deter Russia and that Brexit might lead to an increased influence of Russia in the region. Alongside this, British transatlantic links have been long been considered by Czechia as a crucial guarantee of European security. This is different in the case of Slovakia which used to rely only very little on the UK in this area. Even though the countries share many of the same security threat perceptions, fundamental interests, values, and some outlooks (especially in terms of the accentuation of NATO ties), the linkages between them have been fewer and less explicit than those between the UK and Czechia. At the EU level, Slovakia sided with the UK especially in the promotion of liberal issues, competition in the internal market, innovation, trade and nuclear energy (Szent-Iványi 2018, 33), but less so in the area of defence. Slovakia, for instance, used to maintain a reserved attitude towards the efficiency of anti-Russia sanctions which, from the Slovak perspective, failed to influence Russia's political behaviour or settle any key issues (Interview #11). In fact, Slovakia has been the most pro-Russian amongst the four Visegrad Group countries (Euractiv 2014; Reuters 2018). This is underlined by the data from the EU Coalitions Explorer (ECFR 2018), which measures EU member states' relations within the EU coalition machinery and which clearly shows that the UK was a significantly less important partner in EU policy-making for Slovakia than it was for Czechia.

The intriguing question is, however, to what extent the above-mentioned policy shifts in the Czech case can be directly attributed to Brexit. Weiss (2020, 6) doubts its effect, arguing that 'the anticipation of Brexit did not play a significant role in the Czech support for PESCO'. According to him, it was not Brexit that gave the impetus to get more closely involved in EU S&D efforts. Rather, Czechia 'sought a shift of defence cooperation to a higher level qualitatively, but connected it firmly

to the protection of European borders and crisis management in the countries that had become the source of the main migration flows to Europe in the Czech discourse' (Weiss 2020, 6). The interviewees, however, did not support this view fully, opining that the new embrace of EU defence initiatives was, essentially, at least indirectly enabled by Brexit, as the UK often acted as the main source of opposition to further deepening of EU defence cooperation (Interview #15). Nevertheless, from what patchy evidence exists in this respect, it appears that Brexit's direct effect was very limited at best.

4.2 Underlying Logics

The shelter-seeking strategy of both countries in the S&D area can be seen as guided both by the logic of appropriateness and the logic of consequence. Starting with the former one, this article contends that the countries' reactions to Brexit in S&D matters can be understood as an enactment of the countries' role conception within the EU, anchored in rules of appropriate action. Representatives of both countries considered it appropriate and right to align their countries' positions on Brexit with those of EU institutions, in terms of substance and procedural preferences alike. Slovakia, just like Czechia, placed much emphasis on EU unity and coherence vis-à-vis Brexit,[4] thereby fulfilling the obligations stemming from their status as EU member states. This may perhaps come as a surprise in the case of the Czech Republic, a member state with a strong tradition of party-based Euroscepticism and general 'Eurosceptic leanings' (Kaniok and Hloušek 2018). Even more so given the fact that the country might have quite a lot of incentives to seek enhanced bilateral relations with the UK. Indeed, Czech-British mutual bilateral cooperation in the S&D realm has been more developed than Slovak-British cooperation. To name a few illustrative examples, the British Military Advisory Training Team is based in the Czech Republic, in Vyškov, offering courses and assisting the country in increasing its capabilities to participate in multinational peace support operations. There is also a British liaison officer at the Czech defence ministry (Weiss 2020, 4). Additionally, Czech and British troops have collaborated in peace-making operations in the Balkans and, under British command, in Iraq and Afghanistan.

All of this notwithstanding, it was the commitment to the EU (and to the integrity of the vast single market), coupled with the considerations of the countries' reputation, status and image within the EU (cf. Janeliūnas 2020) that guided the countries' thinking on Brexit. Let me provide one prominent example thereof. As the interviewees cautiously revealed, the UK invested quite a lot of effort into broadening and deepening its bilateral S&D relationship with the Czech Republic. In April 2017, the British Embassy in Prague approached the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a proposal to create a strategic partnership between the Czech Republic and the UK (Interviews #6, #7, #8). The UK proposal outlined potential collaboration in four areas, including S&D. Here, the future cooperation was envisaged in five areas of 1) Terrorism (partnering the Czech Hybrid Threats Unit with the British Research, Information and Communications Unit; joint workshops at official or working levels; expert speakers at conferences and events); 2) Security/Policing (signing an agreement on enhanced policy cooperation between the Home Office and the Czech Ministry of Interior); 3) Cyber Security (partnering with UK organisations; expert speakers at conferences and events); 4) NATO, Defence of Europe, and Defence Cooperation (without any further details); and 5) Smuggling (technical assistance, partnering with UK organisations such as HMG and NGO). A key part of this was also proposed annual senior officials/Deputy Minister-level discussions in London and Prague on a rotational basis. Additionally, the cooperation that could have been talked about 'now' was specified in four areas: 1) a Joint UK/CZ Defence training facility in Vyškov; 2) 71 Defence projects including Desert/Winter/Jungle Warfare; Targeting and Intelligence; Bom b Disposal; Air control and battle space; Management; Arms control; Close protection; Senior staff courses; legal training, English language; 3) Cyber security Joint Exercising and Planning; 4) Counter Terrorism Cooperation; and 5) Joint NATO cooperation. Despite the tempting nature of the proposal, the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs put any

discussions on hold, fearing that the county might be perceived as compromising the EU unity and undermining the Brexit negotiations, with the arguments presented as grounded on the sense of appropriateness (Interviews #6, #7). Accordingly, despite numerous proclamatory declarations on the importance of bilateral Czech-British relations (GOV CZ 2018a, 2018b; MFA CZ 2019; Ministry of Interior CZ 2019), no practical steps were taken towards enhancement of bilateral ties with the UK.

These considerations were arguably even more pronounced in Slovakia where the level of bilateral contacts with the UK is lower, limited to some cooperation between the Slovak and British police and intelligence communities and sparse collaboration between the armed forces on land, sea and air, notably in training and education (GOV UK 2017; Interviews #5, #12; Zaborowski 2021). Also in this case, country's political behaviour towards Brexit in the S&D area can be explicated by the perception of its image-building within the block and its own 'EU role' as a stable, predictable ally (Brajerčíková 2018, 67; GOV SK 2021) as well as of the commitments stemming from the country's EU membership. Crucially, the country held its first-ever presidency of the Council of Ministers in the second half of 2016. Being responsible for the common position of the EU as a whole, Slovakia sought to establish itself and get recognition as a credible, impartial moderator (Interview #16). Such positioning can be seen as appropriately matching Slovak's self-conception as a country belonging to the EU core.

At the same time, the countries' positions on Brexit in the S&D area were also clearly driven the logic of consequence, as the shelter-seeking strategy adopted by both was conceived as the most suitable way how to protect both national (and collective EU) interests. During the Brexit negotiations, both countries have come an unequivocal conclusion that their strategic interests were best served by leaving it up to the supranational body, the European Commission, to act on their behalf. They knew that they would not be able to exert power politics in this context through unilateral action. Negotiating as part of the EU team of 27 member states, they left it up to EU institutions to champion the common cause and represent their national interests, especially protecting the integrity of the single market and of the EU's legal order. This allowed them to negotiate with the UK from a position of strength which would have otherwise been hardly possible, given the acute historical asymmetry of Czech-British and Slovak-British bilateral relations (Brusenbauch Meislová 2019a).

What is more, instrumental rationality and cost-benefit calculations also guided countries' commitment to EU's CFSP/CSDP 'shelter' and the EU unity as such. In the case of the Czech Republic, its behaviour was in direct accordance with the country's strategic interest in 'a uniform, strategically run EU Common Foreign and Security Policy' (MFA CZ 2015; along similar lines also GOV CZ 2015a, 2015b). The same applies to Slovakia, whose 2021 *Security Strategy* explicitly states that the country 'will support making EU Common Foreign and Security Policy and Common Foreign and Defence Policy stronger and more effective, in an effort to make the EU an influential actor on the international scene' (GOV SK 2021). Slovak's behaviour reflected this calculated strategic interest. Correspondingly, the emphasis on the EU's unity in the context of Brexit mirrors the countries' strategic realization that they are heavily dependent on the single market and indivisibility of its four freedoms (Interview #30). This was appositely observed by one interviewee: 'We would like to have special relations with the UK, among other things because of the historical reasons. But the Czech Republic's first political priority is to protect the cohesion of the single market, because we are economically dependent on the EU. Building a privileged bilateral partnership with a post-Brexit UK comes second. The potential tariff-free access to the British market would be great but the integrity of the single market is much more important. The EU simply has a priority here' (Interview #8). The same goes for Slovakia, which also has an economic interest in maintaining a close relationship with the UK, but never at the risk of threatening the unity of the single market (Interview #10). This positioning was succinctly articulated by the Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lajčák: 'It is in our interest to preserve the unity of the EU' (MFEA 2017b). Hence, it was also interest- and preference-driven concerns that help comprehend why both countries proved immune to the British divide-and

-conquer tactics (Interview #30). Summing up, these findings corroborates theoretical literature that in practice the logics of appropriateness and consequences are not mutually exclusive but overlap considerably (March and Olsen 2011).

4.3 Europeanisation dynamics

On the evidence so far, between 2016 and 2020, the coping strategies and adopted behavioural patterns were not accompanied by further Europeanisation or de-Europeanisation in Czech and Slovak S&D policies. In fact, Brexit, and the prospect thereof, neither advanced nor undermined Europeanisation of these policies in either country. It did not affect the countries' strategies in this policy area, nor reordered their preferences or led to any institutional adaptations. Both governments realise, and speak of, the steadily-growing importance of defence and security (Lajčák 2020; MFA CZ 2019; Národní konvent o EU 2019, 3; Pellegrini 2019), but neither redefined, in the wake of Brexit, its strategies, priorities or preferences when it comes to S&D policies and/or approach to CSDP as such. Neither country expressed any greater willingness to assume additional international responsibilities at the EU level nor invested too much effort into preventive adjustment in the CSDP area (Weiss 2020).

This was the case despite the fact that both countries acknowledge, if only unofficially, some practical (yet surmountable) Brexit-related problems in the S&D area. As was already mapped out above, the S&D issued was treated in relative silence by both countries. Yet, this is not to say that S&D considerations were completely absent from the two countries' strategic thinking on Brexit. Let us first start with the level of official, strategic documents. In the case of the Czech Republic, the S&D policy area initially ranked high and featured as one of the country's three headline priorities (alongside the rights of Czech citizens in the UK and economic ties), albeit with no elaboration of details, in a statement by the Czech parliamentary parties in 2017, which strove, rather uniquely, to ensure a coherent whole-of-parliament response to Brexit. Nevertheless, at later stages of the negotiations, this issue was not officially promoted (Weiss 2020, 5), with the only exception being security of information and data (Weiss 2020, 6).[5] What is more, S&D did appear in several public pronouncements by leading Czech political figures (for instance, MFA CZ 2017a, 2017c, 2017d; MFA CZ 2018, 2019; Ministry of Defence Ministry of Defence CZ 2017a), sometimes being designated as a 'priority' (MFA CZ 2019; Ministry of Interior CZ 2019). Regarding Slovak official documents on Brexit, S&D issues were consciously absent in all of them, with no identification of S&D positions and priorities that would underpin the country's engagement in the Brexit process as it unfolded. However, as in Czechia, Slovak representatives, both at the political and senior official levels, did mention them in various statements (for instance, MFEA 2017c, 2017d, 2018a, 2018b, 2019, 2020). In the unofficial and behind-closed-doors context, however, data from my interviews paints a difference picture, revealing that S&D matters did, after all, form a part of the countries' Brexit-related considerations. The CSDP-related questions considered most important in the context of Brexit were the nature of the relationship between the UK and the EU vis-á-vis CSDP, and the UK's status as a third party, particularly in the sense of its participation in EU defence projects and PESCO.

Importantly, there is a slight variation between the countries when it comes to the perception of the specific nature of the Brexit-induced loss as such. While the Czechs mentioned especially the loss of British strategic thinking, cooperation with the British within the EU coalition machinery, and the UK's CSDP budget contributions (Interviews #1, #5), the Slovaks seemed concerned primarily about the loss of British resources (both financial and non-financial), and, secondarily, about the UK's absence in EU-organised missions (Interview #12). What is more, while they agreed that, unlike most areas affected by Brexit, CSDP appears to be one of the few policies in which the costs of Brexit might be higher for the EU than the UK (Interviews #15, #12, #16; cf. Whitman 2016, 2), they differed in their precise understanding of how. The Slovakian side emphasised the loss of prior certainties and the loss of resources (both financial and non-financial) as one of Brexit's key impacts in the area of defence (Interview #12), whereas the Czechs were more concerned about how to replace the

experienced British personnel in operational planning for CSDP missions (Interview #5; cf. Weiss 2020). Czech officials were more aware of the fact that Brexit might have implications for the multifaceted inter-institutional EU-NATO relationship and create certain institutional tensions, as the UK has always been a strong proponent of meaningful complementarity between EU and NATO and often acted as a pragmatic mediator between the two (Interview #5). Yet, none of these problems was perceived as significant enough to warrant any changes in the countries' strategic S&D documents.

There are two intimately related reasons why this was the case and why Czechia and Slovakia expected, during the time period under consideration here, that the direct effects of Brexit on the countries' S&D policies would be only limited. First of all, the Brexit-induced reorientation of S&D policy was expected to be only partial, as the UK was leaving only the EU and not NATO, and it repeatedly vowed to remain committed to NATO even post-Brexit. From both countries' perspectives, it is NATO, not the EU, that is the main security guarantee of Europe's military defence and deterrence. Indeed, both Czechia and Slovakia (but more so Czechia) have been 'doubtful of the validity of purely European security guarantees', having looked 'overwhelmingly to the US and NATO for their security' and being 'wary of additional solidarity burdens that the CSDP and Brussels would be put on them' (Shea 2020; also Brajerčíková 2018, 68; GOV SK 2021; Lajčák 2020, 8; MFA CZ 2015; MFA CZ 2019).

Secondly, the countries had little incentive to (de)Europeanise their S&D policies because they were convinced that the UK would remain closely engaged in EU security and defence efforts even after Brexit. Indeed, both countries supported, albeit not loudly, constructive post-Brexit engagement of the UK in CSDP (MFA CZ 2017a, 2017c, 2017d; MFA CZ 2018, 2019; Ministry of Interior CZ 2019; MFEA 2017c, 2017d, 2018a, 2018b; MFA CZ 2019; MFEA 2020; Ministry of Defence Ministry of Defence CZ 2017a), not least because all actors would essentially continue to face the same security threats and live in the same strategic environment. As one interviewee phrased it, rather bluntly, 'it makes financial and strategic sense to keep the UK involved' (Interview #13). To make things more ambiguous, however, both countries expressed their reservations of French-led projects and concepts that would include the UK, such as the European Intervention Initiative and the European Security Council (Weiss 2020, 7; Zandee et al. 2020).

5 Conclusion

S&D policies have proved a compelling focus for exploration of Brexit implications. Building on comprehensive empirical material, this article has provided an analytical assessment of the implications of Brexit for the S&D policies of Czechia and Slovakia, two small CEE EU member states, through the three lenses of coping strategies, their corresponding logics and the dynamics of Europeanisation. The picture that emerges from this analysis is rather complex and not always clear-cut.

Between 2016 and 2020, both Czechia and Slovakia chose a shelter-seeking coping strategy in order to effectively limit the costs of, and maximise the potential benefits from, Brexit vis-á-vis their S&D policies. What with both countries' behaviour in line with the traditional instincts and logics of small states, both clearly signalled their support for the EU, albeit in an often-differentiated manner, and strived to combine all possible benefits that could be received from it. In this sense, the EU with its rule-based systems and highly institutionalised framework effectively acted as an external shelter, reducing their vulnerability and increasing their ability to achieve the best outcome from Brexit. The analysis also revealed that the coping strategies of both countries vis-á-vis their post-Brexit S&D policies were guided both by the logic of appropriateness and the logic of consequence and not accompanied by further Europeanisation or de-Europeanisation of national S&D policies. As was shown, Brexit, and the prospect thereof, neither advanced nor undermined Europeanisation of these policies. It did not affect the countries' strategies in this policy area nor made them reorder or rethink their preferences or make any

institutional adaptations. The countries were not incentivised to (de)Europeanise their S&D policies, as they believe that their S&D policies will not be too directly affected by Brexit. There are two main reasons for this, closely interlinked and jointly at work. First, as the UK was not leaving NATO, there was no need to revisit any policies and priorities in this respect, because for both countries NATO is the cornerstone of their international security. Second, the general expectation was that the UK would remain closely engaged in EU security and defence efforts even after Brexit.

Regarding the outlook for the future, the bilateral S&D relations between the UK on the one side and Czechia and Slovakia on the other are very likely to remain low-key, despite elements of occasional collaboration (especially in training and education) (Zaborowski 2021). On the other hand, it would certainly make sense for the UK to seek more cooperation with both countries as representatives of EU member states that have concerns about EU defence efforts undermining NATO (Franke 2020).

My findings come with several caveats. Given the article's focus on two cases, the key problem revolves around the degree of reliability and generalisability of the results. And even though I believe that choosing the Czech Republic and Slovakia as the cases is well-founded, applying a broader comparative perspective across more EU member countries and over time would allow us to draw wider conclusions and is a promising future research avenue. This inquiry is primarily exploratory and therefore more in-depth research needs to be conducted before any definitive conclusions can be reached about the complex motivations and actions of EU member states within the post-Brexit S&D context. Another shortcoming that merits attention is the potential for (sub)conscious bias in the interviewees' perceptions. Yet, it is my hope that the fact that each interviewee was involved in a different role and task ensures that they approached the S&D matters at hand from various angles and brought different perspectives to the study. Finally, the uncertainty surrounding the implications of Brexit in the S&D realm will be with us for quite some time, as it has been already for several years, thus making this investigation inevitably a work in progress.

Notes

1. This contrasts with the UK's relations with other CEE countries, especially the attention it has been paying in the security and defence realm to North-East (Poland and the Baltic States) and South-East flanks (Romania and Bulgaria) of NATO (Zaborowski 2021).
2. During the period under scrutiny here, there were no dramatic changes in the composition of the national governments in either country. At the time of the British referendum, the Czech government was led by PM Bohuslav Sobotka and consisted of the centre-left Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), the centre-right populist ANO party and the Christian Democrats. In October 2017, the general election was won by Andrej Babiš and his ANO party. He formed a minority coalition government with the ČSSD, which relied on the tacit support of the Communist Party (KSČM). That government was approved by the Czech parliament in June 2018. In Slovakia, parliamentary elections were held in March 2016, and again in late February 2020. During this time, the ruling left-wing populist Direction – Social Democracy (SMER–SD) party, headed by Robert Fico, remained the strongest party, but lost its majority. As a result, a four-party coalition government, led by Robert Fico, was formed, comprising SMER-SD, the Slovak National Party, Most-Híd and Network.
3. Unlike Czech President Miloš Zeman, who has long been one of the loudest top-ranking Czech opponents of the sanctions regime.
4. This said, Czechia, unlike Slovakia, experienced a number of occasional deviations. The first example dates back to January 2017, when Czech Interior Minister Chovanec made headlines by criticising the EU27 for its handling of the negotiations and calling for the Czech Republic to unilaterally launch talks with the UK (ČT24 2017), thus jeopardising the EU's collective bargaining leverage. The second example concerns Prime Minister Babiš's call for a second UK referendum on Brexit. Yet, these were just isolated outcries, not compromising the country's overall support for the EU's unity as such.
5. The interests of Czechia and Slovakia in Brexit negotiations were thus highly issue-specific. A high priority Brexit-related topic both took action on, for example, was citizens' rights, not S&D issues.

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(2) Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic to the European Union, 14 September 2017
(3) Permanent Representation of the Slovak Republic to the European Union, 14 September 2017
(4) British Embassy in Prague, 23 February 2018
(5) Czech Ministry of Defence Official, 12 March 2018
(6) Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 13 March 2018
(7) Czech Office of Government, 9 April 2018
(8) Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 19 November 2018
(9) Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, 27 November 2019
(10) Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, 27 November 2019
(11) Slovak Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, 28 November 2019
(12) Slovak Ministry of Defence, 28 November 2019
(13) Czech Office of Government, 3 December 2019
(14) British Embassy in Prague, 12 December 2019
(15) Czech Embassy in London, 5 March 2020
(16) Slovak Embassy in London, 9 March 2020