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Technocratic politics, internal security cooperation, and the emergence of military R&D in the EU

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Introduction

Several critical scholars and NGOs have noted how a “new market” and industry for security technologies has materialised in Europe in recent decades (Guittet and Jeandesboz 2010; Hoijtink 2014). This industry was propelled into existence in steps by the European Commission and certain business organisations, perhaps most notably through the gradual establishment of EU institutional support and funding instruments for research and development (R&D) of security related products. In the middle of the 2000s, these efforts culminated into what would become labelled the European Security Research Programme (ESRP), a programme for feeding millions of public funds into the development of controversial technologies for doing so-called “internal” or “civil” security, including products for large-scale digital surveillance, policing and crime control, counterterrorism, migration management, and border control. R&D consortiums came to involve applied research institutes and private security firms focusing on, for example, multi-sensors, ICT technology, and cybersecurity. Peculiarly, however, they also came to involve several multinational arms companies with a core interest not in civil security, but military innovation.

Despite the focus on “civil” security technologies, how come the EU allowed and invited, indeed even encouraged, arms companies to participate in the ESRP? How come arms firms eventually became some of the largest recipients of ESRP funding? Over time, it crystallised how this research programme was not only about supplying new counterterrorism and border security tools to EU agencies and responding the region-wide shift in practice towards internal security cooperation, but it was also in fact a key part of a long struggle involving the Commission and leading arms lobbyists concerning how to consolidate the many European security and defence companies who were struggling financially after the end of the Cold War. Since military R&D funding had been traditionally beyond the scope of EU cooperation, the ESRP, some argue, became a way to indirectly subsidise the arms industry via the “backdoor” of security R&D. This multifaceted and disputed role of the ESRP will be discussed in this chapter.

Whether or not these extensive R&D efforts in fact had the effect of increasing security in Europe is highly debatable, but what can be concluded is that the ESRP managed to put an arsenal of coercive, violent, and potentially rights-infringing technologies into the hands of EU
agencies and security practitioners. The mere fact that new and advanced security products were being increasingly made available to EU decision-makers in a way incentivised officials to also put them to use. However, a lot of these technologies were developed, procured, and put to work before any substantial policies were formulated for regulating their use in practice.

This strong technological drive can be understood in terms of a technocratic politics of security by which threats are defined instrumentally, as mere “security issues”, to be solved by various “solutions” delivered by tech-savvy actors stemming primarily from a private industry. With such a politics, the “terrorist”, for example, is not seen as a contested and ideologically laden concept, but as a concrete and actionable threat projected onto individuals and groups that can be identified and neutralised with the proper assemblage of hardware- and software components. This kind of politics, moreover, follows the logic of technological determinism; that is, an essentially neoliberal way of reasoning and strategizing according to which technology is seen as the catch-all solution and “quick-fix” to all forms of societal issues, including “problems” like terrorism, crime, migration, and so on (Dafoe 2015; McCarthy 2013).

With security R&D firmly in place since around 2007, the EU has recently started using the blueprint of the ESRP’s design in order to take the unprecedented step towards establishing a new military R&D programme. Here, it seems as if the ESRP has managed to at once fast-track and politically legitimate the new defence research programme and its related bureaucratic and industrial support structures directed specifically at armaments production and procurement. Marking the start of a new era for the regional cooperation in Europe, the “backdoor” is no longer needed as the EU is about to start funding and overseeing its own arms industry in the near future.

To what extent did the ESRP reflect, pave the way for, and accelerate the emergence of military R&D in Europe? What happened to the EU’s long-standing tradition of keeping defence issues, including research funding and industrial policies, off the agenda? Indeed, what happened to the notion of the EU as a “peace project”? What happened to the institution that in 2012 won the Nobel Peace Prize for “the advancement of peace and reconciliation”, but only some years later began investing heavily in rearmament and war preparedness?

These different questions will all be, if not completely answered, then at least addressed and explored in this chapter. The chapter aims, in short, to present a historically informed account of how the European security and defence industry has emerged in recent decades, and how the EU, through its technocratic politics of (in)security in combination with the strategic moves of its private industry, has transformed into an active subsidiser of security technologies, armaments, and weapon systems. In doing so, the chapter will first discuss the decline of European arms industries after the Cold War and the increased attention to internal security practices in the EU, second, map the emergence and establishment of the ESRP in relation to this general shift in practice, and third, show how the ESRP has come to serve as somewhat of a prefigure and model for the military R&D instruments and defence cooperation policies currently being developed.

The destabilisation of European arms industries after the Cold War and the emergence of internal security practices

The end of the Cold War brought about a significant reconfiguration of political and economic priorities in the area of security and defence. Public spokespersons and decision-makers in Europe began changing the scope and goal of national security, from policies focusing on territorial defence and the development of military technologies, to policies formulated around wider definitions of security, new threat constructs, and emerging practices and technologies
related to crisis management, crime control, and counterterrorism. This reconfiguration in turn led to a massive decrease in defence budgets throughout Europe. With relative peace and stability, at least in the Western world, the development and procurement of new armaments and weapon systems became increasingly unlikely for European governments. In fact, global military expenditure had begun its decline already in the mid-1980s, but it was around the early 1990s when the most significant effects were felt in defence departments, agencies, military research institutes, and arms companies around the world.

The increased sense of peace and geopolitical stability in the EU region was not understood in exclusively positive terms, therefore. For parts of the European elite, the consequences of the so-called “peace dividend” were rather seen as a direct threat to hundreds of thousands of defence industry jobs, to technological capabilities, sales and export figures, and more generally, to the competitive position of European arms firms in relation to the traditionally dominant industry in the United States. Here, the EU found itself in an awkward position. How could European arms industries be if not explicitly “saved”, then at least consolidated and stabilised with the help of EU funding and institutional support? This question highlighted a central dilemma: in the EU, common defence policies and R&D of military technology had been historically viewed as “taboo”, as an industry branch to be excluded from the single market. Therefore, top-level bureaucrats and industrialists struggled throughout the 1990s and early 2000s around how to persuade EU decision-makers to gradually reconsider this position.

The mid-1990s saw some initial breakthroughs along these lines. In two communications in 1996 and 1997, the European Commission began addressing new ways of aiding the “defence-related industry” and how to “frame armaments trade and production as economically vital and belonging to [the] internal market” (Hoijtink 2014, 464). To maintain a “healthy and competitive European technological and industrial base” related to arms was understood as an absolutely necessity for the new common foreign and security stance to be credible (a policy formally introduced as the European Security and Defence Policy with the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997) (Hoijtink 2014; see also Mörl and Britz 2004). Highly controversial, this move was met with major opposition from member-states and their MEPs, and further attempts towards the end of the 90s to unify the European market for defence were effectively stalled.

It was not until 2003, when the Commission tabled a communication entitled “European Defence – Industrial and Market Issues: towards an EU Defence Equipment Policy” that the attempts from 1996–1997 were followed up. This report again attempted to connect security technologies with the single market, but now by making reference to crisis management operations and other aspects related to the so-called Petersberg tasks from 1997, as well as to an ambiguous notion of “global security”. Overall, in contrast to the 1990s, the Commission could now with the events of 9/11 more directly frame industrial policy not as traditional defence, but as having to do with different kinds of security practices. Indeed, the 2003 communication as well as the European Council’s declaration “A secure Europe in a better world” from the same year (which would become adopted by the EU as the “European Security Strategy”) tied directly into the discourse of the United States’ “neo-cons” and their strategies related to the “global war on terror”, as well as the recent establishment of a US department of “homeland security” (EU 2003; Hayes 2006, 11).

From this point onward, a new EU strategy began to crystallise: the Commission and its MEP supporters and industry allies momentarily gave up their ambitions to create a common market solely for armaments and weapon systems. Instead, they sought to establish an R&D scheme organised around the notion of “civil security” in which most major arms producers could still be involved and facilitated. In the wake of 9/11, an increasing demand for technologies of
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surveillance and counterterrorism had been constructed at the EU level, and by forging a market supply for civil security, this demand could be met (ECORYS 2009).

Hence, the move towards civil security technologies in the early 2000s was far from a haphazard one, nor was it simply some “market experiment”, but it strongly correlated with the steadily increasing amount of policy strategies and cooperative structures related to, more specifically, “internal security” in the EU. Not only the 9/11 events and the establishment of the DHS in 2002, but also the bombings in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005 incentivised the EU to formulate policies and laws and reallocate budgets for the expansion of transnational policing, crime control, surveillance, and counterterrorism (the Commission even appointed a special “anti-terrorism coordinator” in 2007). In the early 2000s, “internal security” effectively became the core organising stake in an emerging field of practice which mobilised a row of new EU agencies and instruments (Bigo et al. 2007; Bossong and Rhinard 2016). With the EU’s explicit intentions of “preempting terrorism”, this practice also had the effect of, among other things, enabling mass-gathering of data on European citizens and restricting or blocking the mobility of (some) travellers in the region.

With regards to the European security industry, an important first step in responding to this general shift in practice was the consecration of the so-called Group of Personalities (GoP) which worked until 2004 with setting up the general parameters and conditions for the planned R&D programme, thereby laying the groundworks for future industrial policies and procurement priorities. The GoP consisted of 28 members, including political figures and elite spokespersons from public institutions, as well as representatives from private organisations and leading security and defence firms. The arms lobby thus had a clear influence over the general agenda and final report of the GoP (Group of Personalities 2004). Published in early 2004, the GoP’s final report came to frame the question of security, including the solutions to insecurities like terrorism, largely in terms of advanced technological systems and products for control and surveillance.

Alongside the GoP report, a Commission communication also announced the launch of a programme for “Preparatory Action on Security Research” (PASR); that is, a research funding scheme for “protecting against terrorism” and “enhancing crisis management”, or more specifically, for technology-driven “pilot projects in the areas of explosives detection, aviation and maritime security, and emergency response” (Hoijtink 2014, 464). Between 2004 and 2006, the PASR programme funded 39 research projects, using €44.5 of its 65 million budget. Jones (2017, 14) notes how

23 of the 39 projects were led by companies whose primary interests lay in selling arms and other military equipment. PASR also financed projects aimed at the long-term development of EU security policy and research. Between 2002 and 2006 the EU’s 6th Framework Programme on research and development … and the PASR funded over 200 projects concerned with the GoP’s priorities.

PASR was “preparatory” in the sense that it was supposed to act as a foundation and start-up for the GoP’s and the Commission’s more formal plans of a “European Security Research Programme” (ESRP), to run from 2007 and onwards and to be embedded in the 7th Framework Programme (FP7). Despite its pilot-function, PASR was still remarkable in how it served as an early market-construction instrument for the Commission, and moreover, in how it managed to convince the European Parliament to begin investing public funds into security technologies even though some of the key beneficiaries of such a project would end up being arms firms. Karampekios and Oikonomou (2018, 194) argue that the results of PASR “justified the interest
of the arms industrialists, not purely in quantitative terms – since the entire budget was relatively small – but primarily in qualitative terms, since PASR became the European arms industry’s early entry point to security research”.

Establishing the European Security Research Programme

Immediately following the establishment of PASR, a series of additional steps were taken to institutionalise the new European security R&D programme and to thereby, it was hoped, pave the way for a new globally competitive European market for emerging security technologies (ECORYS 2009, iii).

First, a Commission communication later in 2004 promised the establishment of a “European Security Research Advisory Board” (ESRAB) with the goals “to advise on the content and implementation of the ESRP, “paying due attention to the proposals of the Group of Personalities” … and to ensure that the ESRP was closely linked with other EU policy areas, such as foreign affairs, internal security and defence” (C. Jones 2017, 14). After almost exactly two years in operation, the ESRAB delivered its final report in 2006, further setting out the organisational structures and research priorities for the ESRP and for the €1.4 billion “security theme” of the upcoming EU FP7 (ESRAB 2006).

In order to facilitate ESRP-related activities, the notion of “secure societies” became proposed in the ESRAB working groups as the name of the FP7 theme. Security in the name of “society” expanded EU’s notion of internal security cooperation and policies in the area of freedom, security and justice, as it mobilised practices of Petersberg-style crisis management as well as various forms of surveillance, infrastructure protection, policing, and counterterrorism under its umbrella. The emerging terminology of “societal security” reflected the attempt to launch a Europeanised and more open-ended form of “homeland security”, to put a label on the tendency in the EU region – not least in northern Europe, including Germany and the Nordic countries – of policies calling for “all-hazards”, “holistic”, and “comprehensive” models for security work (Hayes 2009, 72; see also Larsson 2019). Moreover, the “societal” framing of security R&D in the ESRP also signified the trend to significantly expand the post-9/11 priority on technologies for preempting terrorism to also include technologies for border and migration control, or more accurately, for monitoring, managing, or hindering the mobility of persons into and within the Schengen area.

High-level discussions around how to develop instruments for security R&D did not conclude after the ESRAB report, but proceeded in the form of so-called “public-private dialogues” in the newly established European Security Research and Innovation Forum (ESRIF). Crucially, actor representation had not changed significantly between the GoP and ESRIF, which meant that the security and defence industry CEOs and lobbyists still dominated the agenda, and civil society organisations and social science researchers continued to be more or less absent in the different working groups (Bigo and Jeandesboz 2010; ESRIF 2009).

When the ESRP was about to be launched it became clear that the development between approximately 2003–2007 had led “security” to be defined in largely techno-centric and entrepreneurial terms and that “research” concerned mostly different forms of products and solutions to be developed by the private industry (Bigo et al. 2014; Martin-Mazé 2020; Figure 24.1). The gradual design of the ESRP, in other words, made sure that its activities became outsourced to the very corporations that had the most to gain from their implementation, noticeable not least in how central responsibility over security R&D was handed “not to the Commission Directorate-General for Research & Innovation – which oversaw the majority of the EU’s
research programme – but instead to the Directorate-General for Enterprise & Industry” (C. Jones 2017, 41).

Lobby organisations, such as the Aerospace and Defence Industries Association of Europe (ASD) and the European Organisation for Security (EOS), also played key roles for these developments in Brussels. Either they became directly invited by EU officials to help shape the early stages of its civil security R&D programme in “high-level expert groups” (Calvo Rufanges 2016) or they themselves invited stakeholders and politicians to “high-level security roundtables”, such as the ones around 2011–2012 “organised by EOS under the ‘patronage’ of Cecilia Malmström, at that time EU Home Affairs Commissioner, and then–Commission Vice-President Antonio Tajani” (C. Jones 2017, 38). These various forums and roundtables, including the “security advisory groups” in the FP7 and FP8, have been called “lobby fraternities” since the participants all seem to know each other and benefit from each other’s actions (Boros 2016). It perhaps hardly comes as a surprise, therefore, when looking back at the results of the ESRP, that the main beneficiaries of the research programme have been private companies:

In total, private companies took almost €552 million from the FP7 ESRP (2007–2013) budget, some 40% of the €1.4 billion total. Per project, private companies took almost 25% more money on average from the … ESRP than they did from counterpart research programmes such as health, ICT, energy, environment and transport. (Jones 2017, 3)

More precisely, a substantial portion of these private actors were in fact multinational arms firms, including companies like Thales (France), Airbus (Germany/Netherlands), BAE Systems (UK), SELEX/Leonardo-Finmeccanica (Italy), Indra (Spain), and Saab (Sweden). Typically, arms companies had entered into this technological area in the early 2000s by establishing new civil security branches, sometimes in direct response to the EU’s R&D initiatives, and often with the implicit intention to enable the development of so-called dual-use technologies – i.e. products with both military and civilian application in society – that had strong kinship with their traditional core of military R&D (Larsson 2020). In FP7, the top three arms firms participated in 165 different projects, receiving a total sum of €78.2 million in R&D funds (Jones 2017).

Beyond the arms industry, another major recipient category of ESRP funding was research institutes focused on introducing and applying new security technologies; for example,
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Fraunhofer Institute (Germany; €51.5 million; 85 projects), TNO (Netherlands; €30 million; 54 projects), FOI (Sweden; €31.8 million; 53 projects), and CEAS (France; €15 million; 39 projects). Some of these actors, like FOI in Sweden, are state-owned defence research institutes with long historical traditions of delivering military solutions to the national armed forces.

Some of the largest projects and most funded technologies emerging out of the ESRP have been centred on border control (Amicelle et al. 2009; Andersson 2014; Figure 24.2). On the one hand, this R&D concerns modernising the physical measures for border control such as traditional walls and fences, for example, by developing interlinked multi-sensors for detecting human movement in border zones. Another priority has been to fund projects on autonomous vehicles, and in particular surveillance drones (Hayes, Jones, and Töpfer 2014; Martins and Küsters 2019), for monitoring migrant routes and refugee boats in the Mediterranean Sea. On the other hand, projects have aimed to develop the digital features of border control.

Figure 24.2 Selected projects of the ESRP.
example, this concerns developing surveillance technologies and large-scale platforms for collecting personal and biometric data sets (e.g. fingerprints and iris scans for the EURODAC database) (Glouftsios 2019). Combined, these sets create so-called “data doubles” that are connected to travelling bodies and can be traced, categorised, and transferred around different interoperable databases for migration control (Bigo 2020). If deemed to display a “suspicious” or “irregular” travel pattern, certain individuals can then be sorted out and “flagged”, relinking the data double with the body, and allowing border guards to apprehend these individuals. In practice, this enables a form of policing at a distance; that is, a form of migration management taking place not at the heavily guarded border crossing, but in an office, in front of a computer (see also Bigo 2014; Geiger 2014, 2016).

This combination of both “hard” and “smart” solutions create a comprehensive surveillance assemblage adaptable for virtually all kinds of border spaces (Follis 2017). The €28 million project PERSEUS, for instance, involved both security SMEs as well as major arms firms, and aimed precisely at combining different surveillance measures – from digital databases to drone footage to radar planes and even satellite data – for creating a region-wide “situational picture” for networked border security (e.g. as intended with the EUROSUR system) (Heller and Jones 2014).

Taken together, the strong focus on border security in the ESRP has in a sense expanded the overall threat conception in the EU from concerning mostly the Terrorist in the early 2000s, to now also include the Migrant in the 2010s. This is further supported by the fact that the EU set up, in parallel with the ESRP, three specific funds for implementing the new technologies in practice. In addition to the funds for fighting crime (€600 millions) and countering terrorism (€140 millions), the third and much larger so-called “external borders fund” was given a budget of €1.8 billion.

Arms companies, in particular, have in fact come to dominate the market for migration control and border surveillance in Europe, winning major contracts to supply EU agencies with both conventional hardware as well as digital software solutions (Akkerman 2018; Jones and Johnson 2016). Discussing how arms firms involved in border security have made substantial profits from the refugee crises in recent years, NGOs and critical scholars often point to the paradox that this industry manages to at once arm countries abroad and build a fortress at home. “Most perverse of all”, Akkerman (2016, 1 [emphasis added]) argues, is “that some of the beneficiaries of border security contracts are some of the biggest arms sellers to the Middle-East and North-Africa, fuelling the conflicts in the region that have led refugees to flee their homes” (see also Baird 2017; Benedicto and Brunet 2018; Hayes and Vermeulen 2012).

Another central issue with the ESRP was, as indicated, that the processes by which it emerged were largely undemocratic, elitist, and lacked public transparency (Martin-Mazé 2020). Its design was based on a logic of “security through profit and technology”, or as succinctly put by Hayes (2009, 80): “Be it pandemics, political violence or protest, the ‘problem’ is seen as a grave danger and the ‘solution’ couched in terms that favour the transfer of social policy responses from civilian agencies to law enforcement and militarist proscriptions developed by securocrats and technocrats”. The European Parliament’s civil liberties committee, for instance, saw the ESRP as a “closed community in the making” which was immediately “put at the service of industry rather than society” (Bigo et al. 2014, 11, 27; see also Jeandesboz and Ragazzi 2010; Leese, Lidén, and Nikolova 2019). Baird (2016, 34) concludes, in a similar fashion, that security and surveillance R&D in Europe has taken on the form of a “tangled community” with “overlapping network structures”. NGOs have even argued that the entire enterprise of setting up and institutionalising an R&D programme did not in any objective sense “increase security”, but served more as a multi-billion “networking exercise” dominated from the outset
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“by profit-driven conglomerates with a particularly narrow view of how best to achieve security based primarily on the use of military force” (C. Jones 2017, 15; Hayes 2006, 40).

To conclude, some of the central actors and largest beneficiaries of the ESRP may have had a speciality and competence in military force, and the programme may as such have developed strongly in line with the interests of the European arms lobby. However, this does not mean that the sole purpose of the ERSP was to “save” the arms industry after the Cold War or that its “civil” framing was set up by the Commission as a mere disguise for arms-related innovation. Rather, the ESRP was most certainly also a response to the demand coming from EU agencies and politicians for new counterterrorism and border control tools. Indeed, MEPs have not been completely sidelined in this process, but did at some point consent to, or even push for, the development of internal security and border management technologies. Most EU decision-makers also supported not only the R&D, but the application of these new technologies, evidenced by the external borders fund mentioned above as well as the so-called “internal security fund” that became established immediately after the ESRP’s conclusion in FP7, to run in parallel with the 8th Framework Programme between 2014–2020 with a total budget of €3.8 billion.

Of course, the ESRP did not only involve defence industry giants like BAE Systems or Thales or other multinationals with a strong focus on military innovation, but several sizeable consortiums were initiated by their growing civil security branches and spin–off firms, or spearheaded by other niched SMEs and security companies with a very particular expertise in, for example, drone technology, sensors and detectors, system integration and interoperability, biometrics and databases, and other advanced digital measures for policing and managing borders at a distance.

Moreover, as has become increasingly apparent over the last ten years, “civil security” as a technological area has grown to be more than a mere market experiment for security and defence industries. Many arms companies branched out to dual-use or purely civilian production under the headline of “diversification” as far back as in the 1980s, partly as a way to compensate for falling domestic military orders, but today, with the rapid development in civil engineering and computer science, the product area of civil security has a different and far more important role to play. Indeed, military researchers and leading arms firms today state that with recent breakthroughs in, for example, artificial intelligence, robotics, computing and algorithms, nanotechnology, multi-sensors, infrared optics, unmanned vehicles, 5G networks, 3D printing, virtual- and augmented reality, and much more, civil engineering have come to largely surpass military production in terms of the novelty and complexity of its innovations. This has led several arms companies, who are indeed dependent upon technological advancements, to increasingly base new products, solutions, and weapon systems on “civil” platforms and foundations and, from there, “scale up” and add layers of “robustness” (Larsson 2020).

Expanding from the ESRP into rearmament policies and military R&D

As the ESRP continued to produce new and more advanced security technologies – with increased civil-military overlaps – it grew increasingly difficult to situate this kind of R&D within the parameters of the dual-use framework, to enforce technological regulation, and to define its application as either “security” or “defence”. What is more, despite legislation affirming that research under the “secure societies” theme should have an “exclusive focus on civil applications”, when the ESRP moved into FP8 (Horizon 2020, to run between 2014–2020), the Commission stated its intent to “evaluate how the results [of research projects] could benefit also defence … industrial capabilities” (C. Jones 2017, 3 [emphasis added]). Shortly thereafter, the Commission began moving towards (indeed, revisiting) questions of how to provide military
innovators with a separate funding instrument, and how to potentially set up a European defence research programme (EDRP) in the near future; thereby breaking the “long-held mantra” in the EU of exclusively civil R&D priorities (Karampekios, Oikonomou, and Carayannis 2018, 2).

These latest developments have led researchers to conclude that the ESRP may have emerged in part as a response to the field’s transformation towards internal security, and in part as a way to “test the waters” for a potential full-fledged defence research programme, as a “stepping stone” for propelling research objectives from the civil to the military realm (Akkerman 2018, 351).

Citing critical voices from within the EU parliament, Vranken (2017, 5) suggests that the ESRP was perhaps always about finding ways to subsidise the arms industry:

In what one Green Member of the European Parliament (MEP) called a ‘salami-strategy’, this has led to a ‘slice-by-slice-approach’ whereby political red lines have progressively been transgressed. Defence research has always been officially excluded from all EU research programmes so the defence industry could only get funding through ‘the back door’: a security research programme.

Others reminisce the struggles during the late 90s, when the lobbyists and bureaucrats who initially put the idea of an EU-funded defence programme on the agenda were forced to settle with a “security” programme, and from there perceived the entire situation as “unfinished business” (James 2018, 25). A key move by lobbyists in the early 2000s, then, was to push the Commission to frame the ESRP as ambiguously as possible in the beginning – basing it on innovationist lingo and techno-deterministic logics – so that when a window of opportunity would open up a rough decade later, strategies for expanding into military R&D could be easily revisited by using a similar blueprint (James 2018, 39; see also Langley, Parkinson, and Webber 2005).

In early 2015, the Commissioner for Industry took the first concrete step towards a defence research programme. Following the model from 2003, a strikingly similar High-Level Group of Personalities on Defence (GoPD) was appointed, again comprising industry CEOs, political figures, and other big names from the EU arms lobby (Fotiadis 2017). According to Vranken (2017, 13), the GoPD was “very conscious of the contentiousness of its proposals”, and Commission representatives had made it clear to the group that their final report should seek to “overcome resistance towards a defence research programme”. A year later, the final report declared that the EU was about to take the unprecedented step of establishing a military R&D programme: The so-called Preparatory Action on Defence Research (PADR), with a budget of around €90 million. PADR is only a first step, however, as it is to evolve into the significantly larger EDRP which will run between 2021 and 2027 as a part of the 9th Framework Programme (Figure 24.3).

Here, Karampekios and Oikonomou (2018, 201) note the rather obvious, but nonetheless very important point that

the experience of the Commission with PASR proved so successful (in terms of setting the agenda, involving the manufacturers and securing legitimacy) that the Commission pursued the exact same path with defence research as well. The two main pillars of the early steps of EU security research, i.e. a report by a group of personalities and a preparatory funding action, were reproduced in the case of defence research.

Just as the ESRP was followed up with funds for implementing the technologies, PADR and the subsequent EDRP do not come alone either. The upcoming military R&D programme is,
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in fact, part and parcel of the larger so-called European Defence Fund (EDF) which allocates a staggering €40 billion not only on research and development, but also for the procurement of weapons. Regarding the latter, the Commission proposed in 2017 that a European Defence Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP) should run alongside the EDRP with the aim of fostering “new cooperative weapon programmes and the procurement of these weapons by Member States” (Vranken 2017, 3–6). The Commission has in other words made another historical move: From facilitating the development and manufacture of security and defence commodities, to directly encouraging member states to purchase them as well.

Much like in the case of internal security, R&D and procurement in the defence area has come to fast-track the development of EU policy itself. For example, in 2017, the Commission tabled several proposals in addition to the EDF (e.g. the new European Defence Action Plan), as well as revived the so-called Permanent Structure Co-operation (PESCO): “a mechanism known among EU officials as ‘the Sleeping Beauty of the Lisbon Treaty’” (Fotiadis 2017). PESCO means that all member states “who are capable and willing” (currently 25 of 28) shall make their defence capabilities available for EU military operations and thereby “enhance the EU’s capacity as an international security actor” (EEAS 2019). Federica Mogherini, the EU’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and a former GoPD member, has stated that “the possibilities of [PESCO] are immense”; indeed, the treaty is legally binding and serves as the framework for what will in practice become an EU army in the future, available for both defensive cooperation at home as well as offensive operations abroad. A cornerstone of PESCO is the binding commitment to “spend together, invest together, buy together” (EEAS 2019) in the area of armaments and weapon systems. This commitment is a central driving force for all emerging EU defence policy, but would arguably not have been so central had it not been for the two preceding decades of technocratic politics for fostering a regional security and defence industry and joint R&D system.

The establishment of civil security and military research structures, industry policies, as well as procurement mechanisms “in conjunction with opportunities for the EU to go to war”, Fotiadis (2017) argues, “will inevitably have a profound impact on the future of the EU”. Indeed, the EU has now for the first time formulated policies that are not merely about migrants and terrorists, but explicitly focused on war preparedness, policies that actively seek to arm member states and strengthen Europe’s internal security and regional defence capabilities, policies that thereby enact a kind of heterogeneous societal-territorial (in)security logic.

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In summarising recent developments, one could argue that the circle has been completed from the Commission’s point of view: What began as a contentious policy experiment in the late 1990s to consolidate post-Cold War arms industries has been picked up, seemingly resolved, and expanded into de facto defence cooperation in the mid 2010s. In this process, the ESRP – or perhaps more accurately PASR – played a key role in how it ruptured European research and industrial policy traditions and presented “the first of a long – in retrospective – series of steps taken by the European institutions in accepting that security, security-related, and defence research priorities are eligible for funding at the European level” (Karampekios and Oikonomou 2018, 201). Put differently, while the ESRP was obviously not the sole factor for the emergence of military R&D in Europe, it was an important one, and certainly signified a transition from the ‘business-as-usual’ mode of tight interaction between national defence industries and national state agencies to a new paradigm of equally tight interaction between European internationalised defence firms and their political representation in Brussels and the European Commission. (Karampekios and Oikonomou 2018, 202)

Is the circle “complete” in the sense that the creation of a European defence industry and “EU army” was the end-goal for the many bureaucratic, political, and economic processes initiated by the Commission and pushed onwards by industrial elites? As if the long trajectory since the early 2000s of funding and implementing, not military, but internal security technologies was nothing more than a parenthesis in the grand scheme of things? Certainly not. It needs to be emphasised that the technologies that were introduced through, or at least alongside, the ESRP were in many cases novel, and had serious effects both in the field of EU internal security itself, as well as on the fundamental rights and liberties of European citizens more generally. The involvement of new actors with specific technical skills in surveillance and border control contributed heavily to the overall reframing of the Terrorist, and eventually also the Migrant, as the new central threats towards Europe. Importantly, though, despite the recent “defence turn” and (re)militarisation of Europe, the technologies addressing these threats have not been removed or replaced, but remain in place alongside new policies like PESCO, and continue to have a violent effect on the individuals that become targeted.

Conclusion
This chapter traced the emergence of security-related R&D in Europe, its political and practical implications, as well as the peculiar relationality between the ESRP and the forthcoming EDRP. Not only were both of these research programmes negotiated and established through largely obscured bureaucratic processes interlinked with the interests of the security and defence lobby, but as discussed, the ESRP also worked as a prefigure, potentially even a door-opener, for the EU’s recent R&D policies in the area of military technology.

What is at stake here is of course not only the democratic legitimacy of the EU, but also human lives. Security and military R&D is per definition about inventing and making available technologies that have infringing, controlling, violent, or even lethal effects in practice. Indeed, with the two traditionally separated technology areas of security and defence being increasingly developed in tandem and put to work side-by-side today, the EU has participated in constructing a security assemblage that, as Akkerman (2016, 2) puts it, deploys technologies “that point outwards and inwards, that right now are targeted at some of the most vulnerable [and] desperate people on our planet”.

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As illustrated by the long row of strategic moves and decisions associated with the ESRP, a technocratic approach to security through the constant promotion of industrial policies and product-oriented solutions will have an inevitable effect also on practice. The introduction of new security and surveillance technologies becomes, in itself, a drive and incentive for putting them to work, which in turn contributes to the enactment and framing of particular threats. Consider this in the context of the EDRP and the EDF. In line with binding commitments of PESCO, the EDF will fund not only research and development, but also the procurement (and in extension, the use) of weapons and military technologies. How and where will these be put to use? By whom, against what? Europe may or may not be preparing for war, but it is certainly cementing itself as “the kind of society which goes to war” (Thompson 1982, 23).

When looking back at the past two decades, public officials in Europe must not be held unaccountable to the fact that they have transformed the EU institution from what was once, at least in theory, a regional “peace project” into an active subsidiser of an industry which produces violence and exports war. As millions of euros are funnelled into new military R&D projects and as arms procurement routines are streamlined at the EU level, “[t]he disastrous impact of European arms exports is not even considered. On the contrary, arms exports are seen as a sign of a thriving defence industrial base” (Vranken 2017, 24).

Finally, as the EU moves further towards solidifying its own industry and market for defence, it must indeed not be forgotten that the many coercive measures and violent technologies already invented via the ESRP to manage “suspicious” individuals are still in place. Europe has not undergone some radical “to-from” transition, from Cold War military practice to a post-9/11 security practice – and then back again to regional defence cooperation in the 2010s. The overall practical logic of security, according to which related industrial and political priorities become aligned, must rather be seen as “dual” or “multiple” today, as forming a messy space organised around a kind of “double” violence: On the one hand, certain technologies of deterrence and physical coercion are produced for defending sovereign territory; on the other hand, certain technologies of preemption and digital surveillance are produced for identifying terrorists and hindering mobility. While still different and distinctive, these are two types of technologies that are increasingly developed and put to work side-by-side in European societies today, in a kind of “continuum” (Bigo 2001; Larsson 2019). They are not merged into one “total” apparatus, but become tangled and applicable interchangeably by both military and police, for both external and internal use, and thereby enact what we may call a societal-territorial (in)securitisation logic by which society (and the assumed threats toward it) and territory (and the assumed threats toward it) are simultaneously but in different ways within the scope of contemporary security practice.

Notes
1. What is in fact a core difference between the ESRP and the EDRP can be traced all the way back to the Maastricht Treaty which introduced the second and third “pillars” for the European cooperation. The third pillar concerned police cooperation in the area of “Justice and Home Affairs” (also known as TREVI before 1992, and “Freedom, Security and Justice” after 2009), and the second pillar concerned the EU’s “Common Foreign and Security Policy”. Whereas the former area has seen plenty of activity and transnational cooperation over the years, the EU has taken a far more restrained (or at least distinctly different) position when it came to cooperation in the latter area (see also Bosson and Rhinard, this volume). Until very recently, the European Commission has viewed defence policies and military R&D as “forbidden” and as excluded from high-level cooperation, and the “common security policy” has rather, if anything, focused on reinforcing the “peace tradition” of the EU, e.g. by addressing liberal themes like “promoting international cooperation”, “preserving peace”, “developing and
consolidating democracy and rule of law”, and “respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms”. See https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12012M%2FTXT.
2. See www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2012/summary/.
3. Figure 24.2 illustrates some key projects of the ESRP and their respective budgets, but covers only a handful of the vast amount of consortia and research aims included in the programme. Numbers reflect the total contribution coming from public EU funds. For more information, see https://cordis.europa.eu.

References


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