



Germany's Security Role in Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Kosovo: From Civilian Power to Strategic Actor

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ABSTRACT

The Western Balkans remain a region of strategic importance for both the European Union and NATO, characterized by ethnic diversity, post-conflict challenges and aspirations for Euro-Atlantic integration. This research examines Germany's evolving role within the security and defence architecture of the Western Balkans, highlighting its dual identity as a „civilian power” and a pragmatic security actor. Through a comparative analysis of Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Kosovo, the study investigates how Germany's engagement – within EU and NATO frameworks – has influenced regional stabilization, and democratization. Employing a mixed qualitative methodology, incorporating document analysis and case studies, the study assesses Germany's contributions to key missions, including EUFOR Althea, EULEX Kosovo and Operation Concordia. The findings indicate that Germany has played a pivotal role in reinforcing the security commitments of the EU and NATO, advancing institutional reforms, and supporting the European integration of the Western Balkans. The findings reveal that Germany has played a crucial role in reinforcing the security commitments of the EU and NATO, promoting institutional reforms, and supporting the European integration of the Western Balkans. However, persistent challenges, such as enlargement fatigue, institutional fragmentation, and external geopolitical pressures, continue to constrain sustainable progress. The research concludes that Germany's foreign policy has evolved toward a hybrid model of strategic responsibility, reflecting the EU's own transformation into a global actor that combines normative influence with credible security capabilities. Therefore, the Western Balkans serve as a testing ground for both Germany's and the EU's capacity to act coherently and effectively in promoting peace, democracy, and stability within the region.

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Introduction

The ultimate objective of the Western Balkan states remains integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, which are perceived not only as guarantors of security, but also as essential frameworks for economic modernization and democratic consolidation. At the same time, NATO and the European Union share the strategic interest of fostering a stable and prosperous neighborhood, thereby preventing the reemergence of conflict and ensuring that the region does not become a geopolitical vacuum vulnerable to external influence. This dual dynamic regional aspirations on the one hand, and Euro-Atlantic strategic priorities, on the other, provides the essential backdrop against which security initiatives in the Western Balkans must be understood.

Historically, NATO's role has been crucial in stabilizing the region following the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Alliance's interventions, from Operation Deliberate Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1995) to the air campaign in Kosovo (1999), demonstrated a willingness to use military means to stop mass atrocities and prevent a wider regional destabilization. The continued presence of NATO through the Kosovo Force (KFOR), established in June 1999, has been particularly significant. The enduring presence of NATO underscores both the fragility of regional stability and the importance attributed by NATO members to maintaining security commitments in the Balkans.

The European Union, meanwhile, has gradually expanded its security role through the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Initially reluctant to assume responsibility in a region marked by deep ethnic divisions and political volatility, the EU progressively took on crisis management tasks. The most prominent of these was the deployment of the EU's largest-ever military mission, EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina (since 2004), which succeeded NATO's Stabilization Force (SFOR). Complementing its military engagement, the EU also launched civilian CSDP operations, such as the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), which has been working since 2008 to strengthen judicial and law enforcement institutions. These initiatives reflected the EU's growing ambition to act as a comprehensive security provider, integrating military, civilian, and normative instruments in pursuit of regional stabilization.

Nevertheless, the persistence of unresolved disputes, entrenched ethnic divisions, and governance deficits raises questions about the effectiveness of external

actors in fostering sustainable security outcomes. While NATO remains the hard-security guarantor of last resort, the EU's contribution has been more nuanced, relying on a combination of conditionality, institution-building, and gradual security sector reform. Yet both organizations face structural limitations: NATO is constrained by enlargement fatigue and divergent member state priorities, whereas the EU's CSDP has often struggled with limited resources, lack of coherence, and political hesitancy.

Together, the interplay between NATO and the EU in the Western Balkans illustrates both the possibilities and the limitations of external security provision. While the region has experienced relative stability compared to the 1990s, progress toward sustainable peace and Euro-Atlantic integration remains incomplete. Understanding the balance between NATO's military guarantees and the EU's civilian and normative instruments provides critical insight into the dynamics of post-conflict security governance.

The primary objective of the Western Balkan republics is to join Euro-Atlantic alliances, which they perceive as both security assurances and platforms for economic development and democratic consolidation. Additionally, it is strategically advantageous for NATO and the European Union to cultivate a stable and prosperous neighborhood that averts the reemergence of conflict and guarantees that the region does not persist as a geopolitical void susceptible to outsider influence. The relation between the Euro-Atlantic ambitions of the region and the strategic objectives of NATO and the EU constitutes the context for understanding security initiatives in the Western Balkans.

Considering these factors, persistent disagreements, longstanding ethnic divisions and institutional limitations continue to cast concern on the capacity of foreign actors to secure enduring security results.

NATO functions as a decisive hard security guarantee, but the EU adopts a different strategy using influence in politics associated with membership necessities, institutional development, and continuous security sector reform. Both institutions encounter limitations: NATO is undermined by enlargement fatigue and divergent priorities among member states, while restricted resources, a lack of coherence, and political reticence hinder the EU.

The partnership between NATO and the EU's involvement in the Western Balkans exemplifies the potential and limitations of foreign security assurances. In comparison to the 1990s, the region has relative stability; yet, the achievement of enduring peace and Euro-Atlantic integration remains incomplete. Recognizing the balance between NATO's military assurances and the EU's civilian normative mechanisms is essential for evaluating the

European periphery of post-conflict security governance.

Germany's role in the Western Balkans exemplifies the complex interplay between national interests, European integration goals, and the evolving understanding of 'civil power' (*Zivilmacht*). Since the 1990s, Germany has been a driving force behind the EU's and NATO's stabilization efforts in the region, combining its normative commitment to multilateralism with a pragmatic willingness to deploy military and civilian resources under international mandates. As a founding advocate of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), Germany has sought to strengthen the EU's credibility as a comprehensive security actor while maintaining close coordination with NATO structures.

The German government's engagement reflects the evolution of its *Zivilmacht* identity from a cautious, norm-driven actor emphasizing diplomacy, institution-building, and economic assistance, to a more assertive, yet still cooperative, contributor to hard-security missions. This transformation is visible in Germany's participation in military and civilian operations, such as EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina, EULEX Kosovo in Kosovo, and Operation Concordia and Proxima in North Macedonia. Each of these missions demonstrates Germany's dual strategy: strengthening EU cohesion through multilateral frameworks while also protecting national and regional stability goals.

Through initiatives such as the Berlin Process (launched in 2014) and its leadership in shaping EU defence instruments, including Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the European Peace Facility (EPF), and the Strategic Compass, Germany has further consolidated its role as both a norm entrepreneur and a security provider. This duality reflects the broader European debate on strategic autonomy: while France often emphasizes military sovereignty, Germany tends to frame European defence in terms of complementarity with NATO and the reinforcement of collective institutions.

In the Western Balkans, this balance is particularly evident. Germany's contributions to peacekeeping and capacity-building have been vital for maintaining post-conflict stability, yet they also highlight the limitations of the EU's civilian instruments when not supported by credible military deterrence. The selective involvement of the Bundeswehr, subject to parliamentary approval and embedded in collective security frameworks, illustrates how Germany reconciles its constitutional constraints with increasing international expectations.

In general, Germany's role in the Western Balkans can be understood as a test case for evolving security identity of the European Union. It reveals how Germany's *civil power* tradition adapts to a shifting geopolitical landscape, where normative commitments must increasingly coexist with the use of force and strategic responsibility. In this sense, Germany not only shapes but also exemplifies the EU's broader transition from a civilian to a hybrid security actor, aiming to project stability beyond its borders through both civilian and military means.

The purpose of this study is to provide a comprehensive understanding of Germany's evolving role in shaping the European Union's security and defence engagement in the Western Balkans. By analyzing Germany's contributions through military and civilian missions, this research seeks to clarify how Germany's 'civil power' principles interact with the Common Security and Defence Policy of the EU and the strategic framework of NATO.

The study aims to fill a gap in the existing literature by connecting theoretical approaches, such as civil power theory and military power, with empirical evidence from the Western Balkans. It contributes to understanding how national interests, EU integration mechanisms, and transatlantic cooperation intersect in a region that remains pivotal for European stability.

The findings of this research have a dual impact. From an academic perspective, the study deepens the conceptual understanding of Germany's hybrid identity as both a civil and security power within the EU. From a practical standpoint, the study provides policy-makers with valuable insights into how Germany's engagement can strengthen the EU's strategic autonomy and promote lasting peace and democratic consolidation in the Western Balkans. By assessing the successes and limitations of current approaches, the research also provides recommendations for improving future EU and NATO missions and fostering a more coherent European foreign and security policy actions.

Research question 1: How does Germany's engagement in EU and NATO security and crisis-management missions in the Western Balkans contribute to the shaping of post-conflict security governance and state-building processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Kosovo, and what does this involvement reveal about the balance between Germany's multilateral European commitments and its pursuit of strategic national interests within a multilevel security framework?

Research question 2: To what extent did Germany's civil power identity shape the form, scope and instruments of

its military and civilian engagement in the Western Balkans, and how did this identity influenced Germany's contribution to the development of the EU's strategic autonomy while remaining embedded in transatlantic security structures?

Together, these questions reflect the dual focus of the study. On the one hand, NATO's immediate security guarantees and crisis management; and on the other, the EU's ambition to project stability through its CSDP missions and enlargement policy. Exploring these dimensions in parallel provides a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of external actors in promoting lasting peace and preparing Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Kosovo for eventual Euro-Atlantic integration.

The study begins with a brief overview of the theoretical framework and introduces Germany's role as a civilian power. This followed the interaction of Germany with European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP/CSDP) and its initiatives, illustrating Germany's contribution to European strategic autonomy. The empirical chapters focus on case studies of three Western Balkan countries - North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo - detailing the role of German participation in EU and NATO missions (e.g., Concordia, Proxima, EUFOR Althea, and EULEX). Each case highlights Germany's dual function as both a stabilizing actor and a promoter of European integration. Finally, a conclusion is drawn.

Research Method

This research adopts a qualitative, interpretative approach that combines theoretical analysis with empirical case studies to examine the evolving role of Germany within the security and defence architecture of the Western Balkans. It focuses on three selected countries – Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Kosovo - which collectively exemplify diverse trajectories of post-conflict transformation and Euro-Atlantic integration. By combining document analysis, policy review, and comparative case study methods, the research seeks to capture the multifaceted nature of Germany's engagement in the Common Security and Defence Policy of the EU.

The empirical foundation of the research rests on a wide range of qualitative materials, including official documents (e.g., Bundestag resolutions and EU Council decisions), mission reports, academic analyses and policy papers. These materials provide a basis for assessing how Germany's participation in EU missions

has influenced local governance reforms, democratization and regional stability. A rigorous analysis of these sources facilitates both cross-case comparisons and a contextualized understanding of Germany's contributions in the countries under review.

The methodological design combines deductive and inductive reasoning. Theoretically, the study is anchored in the concept of 'civil power' (Zivilmacht), developed primarily by Hanns W. Maull (Maull, 1990) and complemented by Hedley Bull's (Bull, 1982) critique of the limitations of non-military authority. Maull's framework emphasizes the use of diplomacy, economic instruments and multilateral cooperation as tools to 'civilize' international relations and promote lasting peace. However, as Bull contends, the exclusive reliance on civilian means can be strategically inadequate in a turbulent international system where hard power remains a determinant of influence. By juxtaposing these two perspectives, the study conceptualizes Germany's foreign and security policy as a hybrid form of civilian power, one that retains a strong normative foundation while increasingly recognizing the need for credible defence capabilities.

The methodological framework of this study rests on two interrelated pillars. The first is the theoretical component, which traces the intellectual evolution of Germany's Zivilmacht identity and its gradual adaptation to the changing geopolitical environment of post-Cold War Europe. The second is the empirical component, which employs case study analysis to test how this identity is operationalized in different national contexts. Each case study examines the role of Germany in a specific mission environment, assessing how the German government's approach to crisis management, institution-building and regional cooperation aligns with its 'civil power' principles and the strategic objectives of the EU.

Ultimately, this mixed qualitative methodology enables the study to bridge the gap between theory and practice, demonstrating how Germany's 'civilian power' identity has evolved into a form of strategic responsibility. By integrating conceptual analysis with empirical evidence, the research seeks to explain how Germany reconciles its normative commitments with emerging security imperatives and how its engagement in the Western Balkans helps drive the EU's broader evolution into a hybrid global actor, combining values-based diplomacy with tangible defence capabilities.

Results

The Relations between Germany's Defence Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy of the EU

Thomas de Maizière, the former German Federal Minister of Defence, officially introduced the Framework Nations Concept (FNC) concept at the NATO Defence Ministers' meeting in June 2013 (Major & Mölling, 2014). Defence resources have decreased, global security problems have intensified, and the need for Europe to assume responsibility for its own security has increased. To address the adverse loop of resource reduction and escalating problems, Germany advocated that smaller governments align with larger 'framework nations' that maintain substantial military capabilities. As a result, smaller states would strengthen the framework nations by directing their resources toward the larger states, fostering synchronized capability growth and, ultimately, creating coherent clusters able to fulfill NATO's force needs. (Major & Mölling, 2014).

Remarkably, the FNC's primary strength was simultaneously its greatest weakness. It was a German project. Many ally states were concerned about joining with a country that declared itself a 'culture of military restraint' (*Kultur der militärischen Zurückhaltung*). The key function of the German Bundestag was explicitly identified as an issue: since 1994, the German military forces have supposedly required the previous approval of the Bundestag for all foreign deployments and the Bundeswehr is commonly referred to as a 'parliamentary army'. Germany's evident readiness to combine its military forces with those of its European allies, along with its hesitance to employ military force, has resulted in concerns that the resulting military frameworks may become politically ineffective, suggesting that divergent strategic cultures could compromise the FNC (Saxi, 2017).

In this context, Germany's defence policy within the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) cannot be understood in isolation from its broader approach to European Union enlargement, particularly in relation to the Western Balkans. German policy-makers have consistently framed enlargement not merely as a technical process of integration, but as a strategic instrument of security governance. Consequently, support for the EU membership perspective of the Western Balkan states has been closely linked with a firm insistence on strict accession conditionality, especially in the areas of the rule of law, democratic governance, and the resolution of bilateral disputes. This dual approach reflects Germany's

understanding that sustainable security in the region is inseparable from the consolidation of democratic institutions and the effective management of regional conflicts (Töglhofer & Adebahr, 2017).

This dual approach reflects Germany's attempt to maximize the stabilizing and transformative potential of the EU. By frontloading political and legal conditions and closely linking progress in accession negotiations to tangible reforms, Berlin seeks to prevent the emergence of security vacuums that could undermine both regional stability and the credibility of EU security engagement. In this sense, enlargement policy complements Germany's participation in Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions: whereas military and civilian operations address immediate security challenges, conditionality and integration frameworks aim to consolidate long-term stability (Töglhofer & Adebahr, 2017).

The intergovernmental initiatives promoted by Germany further illustrate this logic. By fostering regional cooperation, connectivity and socio-economic development outside the formal accession framework, Germany has sought to sustain reform momentum at a time of enlargement fatigue within the EU, without lowering accession standards. As a result, Germany's defence policy, its role in CSDP, and its enlargement strategy form an integrated policy mix, in which security provision and institutional anchoring are treated as mutually reinforcing dimensions of European stability (Töglhofer & Adebahr, 2017).

Responding in part to this perspective, German authorities declared at the Munich Security Conference in January 2014 that Germany needed to assume a more significant role in global affairs. Any concept that Germany is 'a hideaway from the international community' must be shattered (Gauck, 2014). The FNC initiative was established to provide support and was extremely effective in receiving widespread approval from the transatlantic community of officials and experts.

In an attempt to enhance Europe's security and operational capabilities, the CFSP started prioritizing crisis prevention, crisis management, and post-crisis rehabilitation. Therefore, the EU deployed civilian, police, and military resources. All crises present specific challenges: EU experts may engage in operations as ceasefire monitors (e.g., EUMM Georgia), aid in the establishment of rule of law frameworks (e.g., EULEX Kosovo), and support the training and deployment of police forces (e.g., EUPOL COPPS) and military units (e.g., EUFOR Althea) to strengthen affected nations to fulfill their security responsibilities in accordance with international standards.

The concept of European strategic autonomy gained importance when the EU's Global Strategy (European Council, 2016) was released in June 2016 and the subsequent nomination of Ursula von der Leyen, the former German Minister of Defence, as President of the European Commission. Since 2016, French-German initiatives in capability development have emerged to provide the EU with credible military weapons.

A notable example of this was the need to create an autonomous European military planning and conduct capability (MPCC) (European Council, 2017). In July 2016, at the NATO summit in Warsaw, the defence ministers of France and Germany resolved to revitalize a project that had been neglected since 2003. On 6 March 2017, the European Council formally endorsed the concept and decided on the establishment of a permanent Military Planning and Conduct Capability for non-executive missions. However, this step, initially constrained and not entirely executed, represents a crucial symbolic and practical development towards enhanced European strategic autonomy through the bilateral dialogue between Germany and France.

Despite the adoption of the EU's global policy, additional measures were required. Consequently, a proposal was presented again through German-French collaboration, which covered the reestablishment of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). The path toward an efficient and ambitious EU defence once more adhered to German-French concepts. On 11 December 2017, the European Council approved PESCO (Council of the European Union, 2017), the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), the European Defence Fund (EDF) and a more integrated and competitive European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB). The substantial amount of projects authorized by France and Germany shortly after the Brexit referendum illustrates their pivotal role in the gradual advancement of EU defence.

The European Peace Facility (EPF) was established under the German presidency in 2020 (Council of the European Union, 2021), facilitating the funding of shared expenses for CSDP military missions, capacity building initiatives to enhance the military and defence capabilities of partner nations, and the financing of peace support operations conducted by international and regional organizations.

The German government, such as other EU member states and the European External Action Service (EEAS), is advocating for the execution of the EU's Strategic Compass (SC), which was adopted on 21 March 2022, in conjunction with the European Peace Facility (Council of

the European Union, 2022). This security policy document is founded on a collaborative threat assessment and outlines the EU's strategic goals in security and defence. The Strategic Compass includes more than 80 domains of activity, with the objective of strengthening the EU's foreign policy to be swifter, more efficient, and more predictable while also building its resilience and defence readiness. The document affirms the EU's operational capacity, indicating that the EU's crisis management and capacity-building strategies should be structured similarly to NATO, while also outlining protocols for assisting the security sectors of other countries through the European Peace Facility.

Former German Chancellor Olaf Scholz initiated a transformative phase in the discourse of EU national military expenditure with his declaration of the *Zeitwende*, which was profoundly shaped by both local and international anticipations. Scholz asserts that Germany's 'key role' is to become 'one of Europe's principal security providers' (Scholz, 2022), and the subsequent increase in defence spending by other NATO partners following Germany's declaration underscores the nation's hegemonic position in European security and defence.

Deployability of the German Armed Forces (Bundeswehr)

The historical context of Germany has established a distinctive and intricate constitutional framework that regulates the foreign deployment of its military forces. The Bundeswehr was established following the entry into force of the Paris Agreements on 5 May 1955, with the legal basis established with the revision to the Basic Law on 22 May 1956 (Wehrverfassung). Article 24(2) of the Basic Law of West Germany stated that the Federal Republic of Germany could adhere to a collective security system for the sake of peace, therefore surrendering a portion of its autonomy (Federal Office of Justice, 1949). Until the early 1990s, the generally accepted perspective was that German military units may only be utilized for national defence and within the parameters of the mutual assistance commitment stipulated by Article 5 of the Washington Treaty (NATO, 1949).

The idea of a potential constitutional amendment emerged in 1988 because of the unconstitutional nature of Bundeswehr deployments beyond NATO territory. In the autumn of 1990, the political establishment maintained that the Bundeswehr was prohibited from deploying 'out-of-area' in any capacity, as stipulated by the Basic Law. Following significant transformations in the national and international political and legal landscape during the 1990s, the German populace increasingly embraced the nation's

new responsibilities, and academics contended that military engagement under the UN should be constitutionally allowed (Hevő, 2023).

However, disagreements between the parties made progress impossible. The Christian Union parties considered 'out-of-area' deployments possible not only in UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions, but also in missions under a future 'common European force'. In contrast, their liberal coalition partner at the time envisioned Bundeswehr 'out-of-area' deployments only within the framework of a UN mandate (Hevő, 2023b).

The CDU-FDP wanted to involve the Bundeswehr in several international operations, including UN missions in Somalia and Cambodia, as well as in the enforcement of the no-fly zone over Bosnia. This led to several constitutional complaints filed by the opposition (SPD and Greens). After the reunification, the Federal Constitutional Court (*Bundesverfassungsgericht*) made its landmark decision on 12 July 1994 (German Federal Constitutional Court, 1994), which essentially states that the Bundeswehr can participate in foreign deployments if they take place within the framework and rules of a collective security system (UN, NATO, EU), but that the Bundestag's consent must be obtained in advance for every deployment. Therefore, this ruling not only authorized the use of the Bundeswehr abroad, but also placed it under democratic control. Based on this, the German army is often referred to in the literature as a 'parliamentary army' (*Parlamentsarmee*) (Hevő, 2023c).

European Capacity Development and German Contribution

The European foreign policy discourse has been heavily influenced by the conflicts in the Balkan region during the 1990s, as well as the EU member states' failure to prevent the wars and the consequences of post-conflict reconstruction. The European Union's collective resolution to overcome historical obstacles was illustrated by the instruments outlined in the European Security Strategy (ESS) presented by Javier Solana in 2003 and the Security Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2004), which was designed to facilitate the integration of the Western Balkan Area. The mobilization and commitment of Member States' resources within the framework of CFSP and CSDP instruments represented the most significant opportunities for post-conflict stabilization and regional cooperation (EU Institute for Security Studies, 2017). German defence expenditure had stabilized at

approximately 1.4% of GDP at the turn of the century and remained at this point until 2009. However, the German defence sector was later impacted by additional reductions in expenses, resulting in a decrease in defence expenditure. The German government adopted a comprehensive military reform that resulted in the suspension of compulsory military service in 2011, a substantial reduction in the Bundeswehr's personnel, and the closure of 31 military bases (Csiki, 2012).

In addition to the objective of reducing costs through military transformation, persistent underfunding remained an issue. Following the deterioration of the European security environment after 2014, it was apparent that the objectives outlined in the defence guidelines adopted in 2011 were unattainable (Csiki & Etl, 2019). Therefore, changes were necessary. The structural defects further exacerbated the budgetary challenges, causing the defence budget to fail to fully expend the available funds on numerous occasions (Buck, 2018). This process resulted in a substantial decline in the status of the Bundeswehr, which was not a disruptive factor until 2014. This was due to the fact that no one had anticipated the necessity of resuming collective defence duties in addition to crisis management and peacekeeping operations in developing countries.

The six Western Balkan nations that remain outside the EU (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) were significantly influenced by civil society activism during the summer of 2014, which correlated with the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. The Berlin Process, which has become the most significant instrument for engagement with the Western Balkans, is led by Germany and supported by Austria, France, Italy, as well as Slovenia and Croatia. EU institutions, international financial institutions, civil society, and companies in the region are all involved in the process. It offers high-level political support, comprehensive information and transparency for EU programs and regional cooperation initiatives in the region. The Berlin Process, a project that has gone through a continuous evolution over the years, is presently comprised of the summit, ministerial meetings (foreign affairs, interior affairs, economy, Roma issues), and a variety of other secondary events (Vulović, 2022).

Beyond the Berlin Process, Germany's substantial contributions to the European Peace Facility (EPF) and its predecessor, the EU Athena mechanism, underscore its central role in European security policy. Established in 2004, the Athena mechanism financed the common costs of EU military operations, including headquarters, command structures, and logistics. Owing to its large GDP, Germany bore a disproportionately high share of these

costs, thereby playing a decisive role in sustaining missions such as EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Launched in 2021, the EPF replaced Athena and significantly broadened the EU's ability to support peace and security, extending funding to military training, and the provision of equipment to partner countries (Chevleski & Gligorova, 2018).

Germany's growing engagement within the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) has increasingly been framed through a capability-oriented conception of responsibility. Rather than prioritizing large-scale troop deployments, German defence policy emphasizes enabling and structuring multinational cooperation, particularly through the provision of critical capabilities, command structures, and logistical support. This approach aligns with Germany's self-conception as a framework nation, seeking to enhance European military effectiveness while remaining consistent with domestic political and constitutional constraints.

Within the CSDP, this orientation has manifested in a preference for coordination, interoperability, and institutional consolidation over unilateral power projection. Germany's focus on multinational capability development reflects a broader commitment to strengthening the EU as a credible security actor, while avoiding the perception of militarisation that could undermine political legitimacy both domestically and internationally (Mavromatidis & Leaman, 2008).

North Macedonia

Despite the fact that Macedonia has historically gained less international attention than the successor states of Yugoslavia, its proximity to the crisis-stricken region of Kosovo and the conflicts between various ethnic groups have still made it the subject of international community stabilization interventions. The most significant foreign policy objective of the country after its independence in 1991 was Euro-Atlantic integration. A formal rapprochement with the EU was initiated in 2000 when the parties started negotiations on the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP), which was ultimately signed in 2001 (European Commission, 2001).

Germany specifically supported the Western Balkans enlargement through the Berlin Process, despite the fact that the domestic political crisis in the country deepened starting in 2013, which also divided the EU member states. France, Italy, Austria, Slovenia and Croatia are also supporting the initiative, which was initiated by German Chancellor Angela Merkel. In order to address the country's integration process, which has

been slowing down for 20 years, the European Union and Germany were compelled to provide support in resolving crises that resulted from both external bad neighborly relations and internal political democratic challenges (Lilyanova, 2017).

Operation Concordia, which was conducted from March 31 to December 15, 2003, was the EU's debut military operation and a practical demonstration of the Berlin Plus agreement with NATO prior to the EU's assumption of peacekeeping responsibilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Concordia is essentially a continuation of NATO's Operation Allied Harmony. Its objective is to ensure a stable and secure environment and to support the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which terminated the internal armed conflict in 2001 and defined the rights of the Albanian minority. The operation was also notable for its development into a comprehensive crisis management role and its attempt at a political intervention from the EU. The launch of the mission also indicated that a majority of EU member states were prepared to assume additional security responsibilities and responsibilities in the Balkans. Concordia also served as a precursor to numerous other operations (Gross, 2004). Between 2001 and 2003, the German Armed Forces also participated in NATO and subsequently in EU operations in Macedonia. Germany participated in the NATO operations Essential Harvest, Amber Fox, and Allied Harmony, as well as in the EU operation Concordia. Their participation was predicated on the unanimous adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1371 on September 26, 2001 (United Nations-Security Council, 2001), as well as numerous resolutions adopted by the Bundestag on 29 August 2001 (Deutscher Bundestag, 2001), or 27 September 2001 (Deutscher Bundestag, 2001).

The task of the Bundeswehr, along with other NATO partners, was to collect and destroy weapons that had been voluntarily surrendered by Albanian armed groups in Macedonian territory (Essential Harvest). Additionally, the Bundeswehr was responsible for supporting and protecting observers from international organizations, including personnel from the EU and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The successful collection and seizure of 3.700 firearms and 400.000 rounds of ammunition, grenades and other explosives was the result of Operation Essential Harvest, which was actively conducted between August 29 and September 27, 2001. The operation involved 500 German soldiers (Bundeswehr, n.d.).

The German Bundeswehr contributed a total of approximately 300 soldiers to the crisis management efforts in the subsequent NATO operations in Macedonia, Amber Fox (27 September 2001 – 16 December 2002) and Allied Harmony (16 December 2002 – 31 March 2003). In

the subsequent Concordia operation (31 March 2003 – 15 December 2003), it increased its capacity by deploying an additional 70 soldiers in accordance with the Berlin Plus agreement (Bundeswehr, n.d.). The term 'Berlin Plus' is a reference to an agreement that was established in 1996 between NATO and the former Western European Union (WEU). The primary component of this agreement was the provision of NATO assets to the EU. In addition to the aforementioned elements, the NATO-EU security agreement and guaranteed capability requirements and conditions for the EU were incorporated into the agreement's scope in 2002 (EU-NATO, 2003).

North Macedonia, through the Concordia and Proxima missions, which contributed to post-conflict stabilization and capacity building, illustrates the EU's ambition to assume a leadership role in peacekeeping, conflict prevention and security sector reform in the Western Balkans.

1. Operation Concordia

The EU initiated its first mission, 'Concordia', in North Macedonia during the European Council meeting in Cologne in June 1999, as part of the CFSP. The Concordia mission, with approximately 350 personnel, was smaller than its predecessor, the NATO-led Allied Harmony. The mission's operational responsibilities, which were influenced by the local security environment, included observation of operations in crisis areas, promotion of stability, and prevention of a resurgence of ethnically motivated violence.

German Admiral Rainer Feist, who is also the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe (DSACEUR), was appointed as the operation commander in accordance with the Berlin Plus agreement, which includes EU access to NATO assets in operational planning. French General Pierre Maral served as the mission's field commander. The mission's budget was increased from 4.7 million euros to 6.2 million euros following the extension of the operation's mandate beyond the originally intended six-month period (Council of the European Union, 2003).

The mission was operationally made up of 22 light field liaison teams, which were responsible for patrolling, reconnaissance, surveillance, and reporting. A detachment equipped with MedEvac helicopters, an Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) unit, and a medical evacuation team provided additional support, in addition to eight heavy field liaison teams that provided

team support with wheeled armored vehicles and helicopters (Lindstrom, 2004).

Although Concordia served as an effective pilot initiative to improve EU implementation capabilities and operational protocols, it encountered many internal and external coordination issues throughout task execution. External challenges included the need for detailed tasking for future operations, as well as issues that resulted from the exchange of information between the EU and NATO. The EU's discussions were centered on the coordination of EU instruments to achieve a comprehensive approach, as well as the way in which the planning and execution of Operation Concordia leveraged existing EU instruments (Gross, 2004).

The government and civil society of North Macedonia have received assistance from Germany, the country's most significant trading partner, through a variety of cooperation programs and initiatives. For instance, the German Foundation for International Legal Cooperation and the Civil Peace Service have all made significant contributions. The Stability Pact's resources are utilized by the Federal Foreign Office to support a variety of initiatives. Germany accounts for approximately 40% of Macedonian exports, and a quarter of total commerce is conducted with Germany. Since 2017, the German-Macedonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AHK) has maintained a delegation in Skopje. The German-Macedonian Business Association, which is affiliated with the AHK, is the largest organization of its kind in the country, with approximately 175 member companies. More than 150 German companies employ more than 22,000 individuals (Auswärtiges Amt, 2025).

2. EU Police Mission in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (PROXIMA)

The Macedonian government requested the PROXIMA (EUPOL) police operation to replace the CONCORDIA military operation on December 15, 2003, due to the expiration of its mandate and the resulting improvement in security. PROXIMA was a capacity building mission that was designed to provide mentoring and assistance to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and to provide support to local police forces. Furthermore, it actively participated in the struggle against organized crime and contributed to the adoption of European police standards, all while attempting to provide comprehensive support for the Ministry of Interior's reform initiatives. 120 international police officers and 30 civilians comprised the mission, which also employed 140 local personnel in support duties (Fritsch, 2006).

Also in this instance, Germany supplied the operation commander, Brigadier General Jürgen Paul Scholz, and at least 20 police officers from federal divisions and states provided intervention. This amounted to approximately 14% of the total mission strength of 150.

3. EU Police Advisory Team in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (EUPAT)

On 14 December 2005, the EU Police Advisory Team (EUPAT) replaced the Proxima mission with a six-month mandate. EUPAT maintained its advisory activities in the aforementioned regions, with a particular emphasis on the implementation of police reform. EUPAT employed and provided support to approximately 30 police advisors in the development of a professional and effective police force that adhered to European police standards (Fritsch, 2006).

In terms of its operation, the EU Political and Security Committee (PSC) offers political control and strategic direction, while the EU Special Representative (EUSR) provides guidance to the EUPAT leader on behalf of the Secretary-General/High Representative (SG/HR). EU police experts are overseeing the country's police force in the areas of border management, public order and security, accountability, the fight against corruption, and organized crime in collaboration with the authorities of the host government and under the guidance of the EU Special Representative. The middle and senior management levels were the main focus of the six-month mission, which was designed to facilitate a seamless transition until the commencement of the European Community's on-site project (Fritsch, 2006).

Germany has also enabled EUPAT to receive up to five police officers from federal police units and individual federal states, in addition to the mission commander. With a maximum of 17% of the total personnel, Germany is still considered a prominent member in terms of operational contributions, in addition to the operation's commander (Fritsch, 2006).

In conclusion, North Macedonia's trajectory from a newly independent state to NATO's 30th member exemplifies resilience, diplomacy, and strategic partnership. The complex historical context of the country, particularly the name dispute and ethnic tensions, posed significant challenges that could have derailed its aspirations for international integration. Today, North Macedonia stands as a symbol of stability and cooperation in the Balkans. Its accession to NATO not only enhances national security, but also

strengthens the collective defence framework of the Alliance. This achievement underscores the critical role of diplomatic engagement and international organizations in promoting peace and stability in regions marked by volatility.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

On 14 December 1995, the Dayton Agreement (The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina) was signed in Paris, officially concluding the South Slavic crisis that gripped the region during the first half of the 1990s. At the time of its ratification, the most critical objective was to end the violent conflict that had resulted in the loss of 100.000 lives in Bosnia alone. The connection between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the European Union is not particularly old. Since the end of the war, the EU has been active in a specific capacity. As a stabilization and conflict management force, its objective has been to strengthen the region and prevent the recurrence of armed conflicts, which, due to their geographical proximity, could also pose significant challenges to Western Europe (Kemenszky, 2019).

However, since 2010, Bosnian citizens have enjoyed visa-free access to the Schengen area, turning the possibility of an EU perspective into a genuine reality. The area of Europeanization did not make any significant progress in subsequent years. However, in 2014, Great Britain and Germany initiated a change in approach toward Bosnia, and the country adopted the Reform Agenda on 30 September 2015. The fundamental objective of the initiative was to prioritize bilateral relations over political reforms to advance social and economic reforms. They anticipate their implementation as a prerequisite for integration progress. The EU will only then evaluate whether to grant Bosnia candidate status. The Stabilization and Association Agreement was ultimately implemented in 2015, albeit substantially later than the other states of the Western Balkans (Kemenszky, 2019).

1. EU Military Operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR – ALTHEA)

The European Union, meanwhile, has gradually expanded its security role through the Common Security and Defence Policy. Initially reluctant to assume responsibility in a region marked by deep ethnic divisions and political volatility, the EU progressively took on crisis management tasks. The most prominent of these was the deployment of the EU's largest military mission, EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina (from 2004), which succeeded NATO's Stabilization Force (SFOR).

Military and police missions implemented within the Common Foreign and Security Policy are among the EU initiatives that are intended to promote stability. The Dayton Agreement, which concluded the South Slav crisis, placed Bosnia under international administration. Peacekeepers were initially deployed and operating in the region under a UN mandate to provide the security component. NATO supervised the IFOR (Implementation Force) and SFOR (Stabilization Force) contingents. The EU's intention to establish a military mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina was subsequently encouraged by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1551, which was unequivocally enacted on July 9, 2004. The EU ALTHEA mission was initiated after the termination of NATO's effective SFOR operation. As a result, the EU assumed responsibility for international military administration in 2004 and deployed a mission known as EUFOR Althea to the region (Ujházy, 2014).

The EUFOR Althea operation's mandate is divided into two components: executive and non-executive. The EUFOR mission is established by a Joint Action of the EU Council of Foreign Affairs (FAC), which incorporates an implementation component from the UN Security Council. The UN Security Council provides the implementation mandate. Additionally, it comprises a non-execution section. This enables Bosnia and Herzegovina to transition from a 'security provider' to a 'security consumer'. Like Operation Concordia, Althea is being implemented within the Berlin Plus agreement. Operation Althea is responsible for maintaining a military presence in order to establish a secure environment and prevent the resurgence of armed violence. Furthermore, it provides assistance to the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the areas of institution-building and instruction (European Union Force in BiH – Operation ALTHEA, 2024).

On 17 November 2004 the German Bundestag authorized the Bundeswehr's participation in the ALTHEA operation. The ALTHEA mission is supported by German personnel to ensure the freedom of action of their own forces, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and to contribute to a secure environment. Additionally, the German contingent will be responsible for ensuring that arms control agreements are adhered to. The Bundeswehr is responsible for the highest contingent of the total EUFOR strength, which is approximately 6,300, furthermore 969 German soldiers (approximately 15.4% of the total force) were deployed to Bosnia in March 2006 (Fritsch, 2006). Since 2022, the Bundeswehr has resumed its participation in the EUFOR Althea mission after a 10-year absence. The mandate

extension, which is consistent with previous extensions, permits the deployment of a maximum of 50 Bundeswehr soldiers; 35 soldiers were deployed in (Zentrum für Internationale Friedenseinsätze, n.d.).

On 25 June 2025, the German Bundestag approved the continuation of Germany's participation in the EUFOR ALTHEA operation. The planned activities include supporting and organizing training for the Bosnian Armed Forces, assisting in the establishment of a safe and secure environment, and carrying out command, guidance, and support functions. The Bundestag authorized the deployment of German armed forces until 30 June 2026 at the latest, with a maximum of 50 soldiers permitted. This figure represents the theoretical maximum number of troops that could be deployed.

2. EU Police Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUPM)

CSDP operations and missions have played a pivotal role in bridging the European Union and its partner countries, both politically and operationally. The EU's involvement in civilian crisis management began in 2003 under the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP – the precursor of CSDP) with the launch of the EU Police Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The mission was designed to support the ongoing police reform process, while simultaneously strengthening local capacities and promoting regional cooperation in combating organized crime. Beyond its operational objectives, EUPM represents a significant benchmark for the EU's civilian crisis management framework, testing both the institutional capacity of the EU and its ability to implement complex police initiatives in post-conflict settings.

The EUPM is the first crisis management operation ever implemented within the European Security and Defence Policy framework. On 1 January 2003, the EUPM succeeded the International Police Task Force (IPTF), which was established by the United Nations immediately following the Dayton Peace Agreement. In accordance with the relevant European Council decision and UN Security Council Resolution 1396 of 13 March 2002, the mission was established to formalize the EU's involvement in Bosnia. The EUPM was involved in the establishment of state-level law enforcement institutions, including the Ministry of Security, State Investigation and Protection Agency, and border police. This initiative aimed to improve the operational capabilities and cooperation of law enforcement agencies, support investigative efforts against corruption and organized crime, and enhance collaboration between the police, the prosecution, and

penitentiary institutions. (Common Security and Defence Policy, 2012).

An example of how a significant EU member state uses civilian crisis-management instruments to advance institutional change and stability in post-conflict settings is Germany's participation in the EU Police Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since 2003, Germany has collaborated with other EU member states by deploying police personnel and civilian professionals to a mission aimed at reforming local enforcement institutions, establishing accountability systems, and addressing organized crime and corruption. Germany's contributions focused on training, advising, and mentoring rather than direct enforcement, in line with the mission's non-executive mandate. This approach meant that local ownership and political backing were essential for the success of the reform. Germany not only provided staff but also assumed leadership positions during the mission's duration, which had an impact on how mission practice and institutional learning developed. Germany's participation enabled it to solidify its position as a normative power advancing the rule of law in the Western Balkans. The EUPM acted as a testing ground for civilian police reforms and helped shape the EU doctrine on civilian crisis management. From a foreign policy perspective, Germany's involvement in EUPM solidified its strategic position as an advocate for peace, legal standards, and institutional stability, consistent with its overarching goals of European integration and regional stabilization (European Parliament, 2012).

In light of the EUPM mandate expiring on 31 December 2005, the EU reviewed the mission and decided to launch a follow-up operation with a two-year mandate beginning on 31 January 2006. The mission is designed to establish a professional, sustainable, and multi-ethnic police force that operates according to the highest international and European standards. This is achieved by mentoring, monitoring, and inspecting the police forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of a broader rule of law strategy. The main issue in Bosnia and Herzegovina is organized crime, which is the primary objective of the mission. Germany contributed 90 police officers, drawn from its federal police divisions and individual federal states. This accounted for approximately 20% of the EU member states' contribution and around 17% of the total personnel. As of 28 February 2006, a total of 262 police officers had been deployed (Fritsch, 2006).

Kosovo

Compared to the other Western Balkan countries, Kosovo's Europeanization is qualitatively distinct. The primary reason for this is the state's unresolved status and incomplete sovereignty, which even the EU member states do not fully agree upon. Additionally, the unresolved issues of neighborhood, minority, and property division are of extreme significance. In 2008, the Republic of Kosovo proclaimed independence, and Germany was among the first countries to formally recognize and establish diplomatic relations with it. Furthermore, the German government sheltered hundreds of thousands of Kosovar refugees both prior to and during the 1998/99 conflict. Since 1999, it has been providing assistance with reconstruction efforts, initially through emergency aid measures, and subsequently beginning development cooperation (Auswärtiges Amt, 2024).

The Bundeswehr's largest foreign deployment is the German contingent within KFOR. Additionally, the UN-led UNMIK mission, the EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), and the OSCE-led OMIK (OSCE Mission in Kosovo) mission have all contributed to the further development of positive relations between the two countries. Germany is one of the largest bilateral donors in the field of development cooperation, as well as its second most significant trading partner and largest investor. Germany has allocated over 660 million euros for technical and budgetary cooperation initiatives since 1999. In April 2024, Germany and Kosovo formed a climate and energy partnership with the objective of facilitating Kosovo's participation in international climate forums and fostering Kosovo's green transition (Auswärtiges Amt, 2024).

1. European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX)

The European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), established under Joint Action 2008 of the Council, was launched in 2008 as the largest civilian mission under the Common Security and Defence Policy of the EU. In addition to mentoring, monitoring, advising, and supporting the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue, EULEX has also played an executive role in the field of the rule of law, particularly through the investigation and prosecution of organized crime and war crimes. Council Decision 2023/1095 extended the mandate of EULEX until 14 June 2025. Before the establishment of EULEX, the EU Planning Team deployed to Kosovo worked closely with NATO to develop arrangements for joint operations. These plans were integrated into operational procedures without a formal political agreement, resulting in close contact between EULEX and NATO at the lower levels, including

regular joint training exercises (Gashi, 2011).

EULEX is the largest civilian mission of the EU to date, is particularly notable for its executive mandate, which allows it to exercise direct authority in certain law enforcement, underscoring the EU's willingness to assume robust responsibilities in post-conflict governance. Since 2005-2006, the EU has been preparing to assume the main role in the Kosovo settlement and enhance its involvement. However, the establishment of the EULEX mission was extremely challenging due to the opposition of both Serbia and Russia. As opposed to the initial transition, it has been operating under a UN mandate since 2008. It is responsible for ensuring the rule of law, supporting the democratic institutional system, promoting the values associated with Europeanization, and facilitating their dissemination (Richter, 2011).

The contribution of Germany to EULEX has been based both on material and personnel. It has consistently seconded civilian experts, legal professionals and police officers to the mission. The Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF) in Berlin has deployed several German civilian experts to EULEX, currently numbering five (Zentrum für Internationale Friedenseinsätze, 2024). These experts are involved in areas such as case monitoring, judicial reform, and advising local institutions. In addition, German police officers play an operational role within EULEX, focusing on mentoring and supporting Kosovo's law enforcement agencies. The Federal Ministry of the Interior regularly oversees and coordinates these deployments through its Department for International Police Missions.

Institutional engagement further underscores Germany's ongoing commitment. In July 2024, a joint delegation from the German Ministry of Interior and ZIF visited the EULEX headquarters and field units in Mitrovica, receiving briefings on the structure, mandate, and operational challenges of the mission (Zentrum für Internationale Friedenseinsätze, 2024). These visits not only serve oversight functions, but also symbolize Berlin's political endorsement of EULEX objectives. They also facilitate policy learning and coordination between national and EU-level actors.

Germany's role within EULEX must also be viewed in the broader historical context of its engagement in Kosovo since the late 1990s. Following the Kosovo conflict, Germany participated in peacekeeping operations under KFOR and contributed significantly to post-conflict reconstruction. Through its development cooperation programs, Germany has provided hundreds of millions of euros in aid to strengthen

governance, education, and infrastructure in Kosovo. EULEX, as part of the EU's civilian crisis management portfolio, thus represents a natural extension of Germany's long-term involvement in the region (Auswärtiges Amt, 2024).

Nevertheless, Germany's involvement has faced criticism. As EULEX evolved from an executive to a monitoring and advisory mission, German policy-makers and analysts have occasionally questioned the effectiveness and accountability mechanisms of the mission. Despite these challenges, Germany remains among the leading contributors to the mission and continues to advocate for a strong EU presence in Kosovo as a guarantor of stability and the rule of law.

EULEX provides assistance to the Kosovo authorities in the establishment of rule of law institutions that are both sustainable and accountable. It is in the process of establishing multi-ethnic justice, police, and customs services and it is making an effort to guarantee that these institutions are free from political influence and operate in accordance with European norms and practices, albeit with varying degrees of success. The EU Special Representative (EUSR) is responsible for the coordination of the EU's activities in Kosovo and receives direct oversight from the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. In addition, the EUSR provides assistance to the Kosovo government in its efforts to integrate into the European Union and promotes the observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms (Richter, 2011).

Germany's contribution to EULEX Kosovo reflects the intersection of national interests, European solidarity and a normative commitment to upholding the rule of law in post-conflict societies. Through its consistent provision of personnel, expertise, and political support, Germany exemplifies how EU member states operationalize their broader security and governance objectives through civilian CSDP missions. EULEX, in turn, serves as a key platform for Germany's projection of civil power within the EU's external action framework.

Discussion

The analysis presented in this study demonstrates that Germany's engagement in the Western Balkans represents a crucial testing ground for both its evolving foreign policy identity and the broader ambitions of the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy. As a traditional *Zivilmacht* (civilian power), Germany has sought to influence post-conflict stabilization primarily through diplomatic, economic, and institutional instruments. However, over the past two decades, Berlin has

increasingly recognized that effective stabilization requires a multidimensional approach that combines civilian and military components within multilateral frameworks such as the EU and NATO.

The research of this study highlights that Germany's engagement in the examined countries represents a key test case to understand the transformation of its foreign and security policy identity from a traditional *Zivilmacht* into a hybrid actor of 'strategic responsibility'. This evolution aligns with the broader trend of the gradual shift of the EU from a normative to a pragmatic security provider. The findings of the research indicate that Germany's engagement in the Western Balkans serves as a microcosm of its greater transformation from a traditional civilian power into a more comprehensive security actor that combines normative principles with strategic pragmatism. This evolution reflects both external pressures - arising from the changing geopolitical environment - and internal political dynamics that have shaped Berlin's readiness to assume greater international responsibility.

Germany's foreign policy behavior in the region reflects a gradual adaptation of its civil power identity to the realities of the post-Cold War and post-Yugoslav order. Its participation in NATO and EU missions illustrates this hybridization. Through these operations, Germany has sought not only to maintain peace and security, but also to support political and legal institutions in the Western Balkans. This dual orientation – balancing stability and integration – has become the cornerstone of Germany's strategic presence in the region.

In light of the theoretical frameworks outlined earlier, these findings can be interpreted through the complementary lenses of Hanns W. Maull's concept of *Zivilmacht* and Hedley Bull's critique of the limits of civilian authority. According to Maull, the civilian power model seeks to civilize international relations by emphasizing diplomacy, economic interdependence, and the strengthening of multilateral institutions. Germany's participation in EU and NATO missions in the Western Balkans – ranging from peacekeeping and institution-building to the promotion of democratic governance – is largely in agreement to this tradition. Its commitment to multilateralism, parliamentary oversight of military missions, and preference for non-coercive instruments reflect a deep-rooted culture of restraint that has been characteristic of German foreign policy since the post-war period (Maull, 2000).

However, when interpreted through Bull's perspective, Germany's evolving behavior also reveals the gradual recognition that normative influence and financial

assistance alone are insufficient to maintain international order in a changing security environment. Bull argued that a purely civilian approach constitutes a 'semantic contradiction' unless supported by credible military capacity. The reorientation of German security policy after 2014 indicates an implicit convergence toward Bull's logic. The declaration of *Zeitwende* in 2022, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, further accelerated this transformation. It symbolized a historical departure from Germany's post-war culture of military restraint and a redefinition of the *Zivilmacht* concept to include strategic and defence dimensions (Bull, 1982).

Germany's engagement must also be viewed through the broader evolution of its post-unification foreign policy and its embeddedness within the European multilevel governance. As Hellmann argues, German foreign policy after 1990 reflected a gradual redefinition of its 'civilian power' identity. While the core commitment to multilateralism and the European project remained intact, unification introduced new expectations of international responsibility. This transformation entailed a slow but discernible shift from a normatively constrained actor toward one prepared to use military and civilian means to maintain stability within its regional setting. In the Western Balkans, these dynamics are visible in Germany's simultaneous reliance on EU institutions and its leadership within NATO-led missions (Hellmann, 1999).

Hellmann emphasizes that the goal of Germany's post-unification European diplomacy was to influence its regional environment by institutionalizing cooperative security and economic interdependence rather than by making unilateral claims (Hellmann, 1999). This paradigm describes Germany's approach to the Berlin Process, EULEX Kosovo, and EUFOR Althea. Each project coupled pragmatic adaptation to new strategic circumstances with normative commitment. Instead of indicating the 'end' of the civilian power model, these engagements illustrate its transformation into a 'realist-civilian' type of power, in which military involvement bolsters normative and institutional order.

Similarly, Bulmer and Paterson describe Germany as Europe's reluctant hegemon, a state whose material capabilities and political influence within the EU have grown, but whose leadership style remains cautious, consensus-oriented and embedded in collective frameworks. This reluctance is particularly evident in security and defence policy, where Germany continues to frame its initiatives, such as the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the European Peace Facility (EPF) and the Strategic Compass, as instruments of European cohesion rather than dominance. Yet, as Bulmer and Paterson emphasize, the asymmetry of capabilities within

the EU makes Germany's leadership functionally indispensable, even if it is politically constrained (Bulmer & Paterson, 2013).

Compared to previous studies (Maull 1990; Hellmann 2006; Bulmer & Paterson 2019), which argue that Germany's foreign policy evolution cannot be understood solely through the lens of restraint, but must also account for its growing strategic engagement within the EU. The Western Balkans, as this research confirms, have served as a laboratory for testing this hybrid model of civil and strategic responsibility. Germany's hybridization of civilian and military instruments exemplifies a greater European trend toward 'comprehensive security', where the boundaries between soft and hard power are increasingly blurred. This evolution enhances the EU's potential to act as a coherent global actor, but it also introduces normative dilemmas: the risk that the civilian character of the EU could erode under growing pressure to project power. Therefore, Germany's cautious approach could serve as a model to balance ethics and strategy in future EU missions.

When considered collectively, these views highlight Germany's dual role in European security governance: it continues to be a structural power in institutional practice and a civilian power in normative aim. Berlin operationalizes this balance through its involvement in the Western Balkans, where it cautiously increases its strategic agency while projecting stability through multilateral channels. Thus, the union of the EU's civilian tools and NATO's hard-security guarantees reflects Germany's own hybrid identity, which is neither explicitly hegemonic nor exclusively civilian but rather sits at the nexus of institutional leadership, strategic need, and moral obligation.

Nevertheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the qualitative and case-based design of the study provides depth, but limits generalizability beyond the context of the Western Balkans. Second, reliance on documentary analysis may not fully capture evolving political perceptions or decision-making processes within Germany's security apparatus. Third, while the theoretical integration of Maull's and Bull's frameworks enriches interpretation, it may oversimplify the diversity of German foreign policy debates, which also include constructivist and institutionalist perspectives. Future research should therefore expand this analysis by incorporating elite interviews, policy discourse studies, and cross-regional comparisons to better assess the external applicability of the hybrid *Zivilmacht* model.

In conclusion, the results of this research confirm that Germany's identity as a *Zivilmacht* has not been abandoned but rather reinterpreted in light of new strategic imperatives. The Western Balkans have provided a critical testing ground for this transformation, revealing both the strengths and constraints of the German approach. By embedding military capacity within a civilian and multilateral framework, Germany continues to promote a European security order based on cooperation and legitimacy rather than coercion. However, as the regional and global environment becomes more volatile, the long-term sustainability of this balance, between moral restraint and strategic necessity, will remain one of the central challenges for both Germany and the European Union in shaping the future of collective security.

Conclusion

This research aimed at analyzing the role of Germany in the security and defence architecture of the Western Balkans, focusing on its interaction with the EU and NATO frameworks and the influence of its civilian power identity. Drawing on theoretical, documentary, and empirical analysis, the study provides new insights into the ways Germany contributes to the stabilization of Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Kosovo.

1. In addressing RQ1 Germany acts as both a European integrator and a pragmatic national actor. The study finds that Germany's security and crisis management contributions generally reinforce the cohesion and credibility of the EU. Berlin's participation in missions such as EUFOR Althea, EULEX Kosovo, and Operation Concordia demonstrates how national participation can strengthen common policies and institutions of the EU in the Western Balkans. However, Germany's involvement is not entirely altruistic. Although it supports the collective goals of the EU, it also pursues its own strategic and economic interests, particularly in areas of energy security, migration management, and regional influence. This duality illustrates a pattern of '*embedded bilateralis*', where national initiatives are framed within multilateral structures, but guided by pragmatic considerations.

2. Germany's identity as a 'civilian power' has evolved into a hybrid form of strategic responsibility.

In answering RQ2, the study reveals that Germany's traditional *Zivilmacht* identity, rooted in diplomacy, economic assistance, and institution-building, has gradually adapted to new security realities. Since the 1990s, and especially after the declaration of the *Zeitwende* in 2022, Germany has acknowledged that

normative influence alone is insufficient for ensuring peace and stability. This transformation does not mark an abandonment of the civil power model but rather its modernization. Germany has become a 'civilian power with military credibility', integrating soft and hard instruments to maintain order. Its selective participation in CSDP and NATO missions reflects a pragmatic balance between restraint and responsibility.

3. Germany contributes to the development of EU strategic autonomy while maintaining NATO complementarity. Germany's advocacy for European defence initiatives, such as PESCO, the European Peace Facility (EPF), and the Strategic Compass, illustrates its role as a key architect of the evolving security identity of the European Union. However, Berlin interprets strategic autonomy not as independence from NATO, but as a strengthening of Europe's capacity to act within the transatlantic partnership. In the Western Balkans, this approach has translated into operational synergy: NATO provides the hard-security guarantees (e.g., KFOR), while the EU, supported by Germany, focuses on civilian and institutional stabilization. This complementary structure remains one of the most durable frameworks in the region.

4. Germany's leadership strengthens the Europeanization process, but cannot replace the unity of the EU. While Germany has acted as a stabilizing force and a political advocate for the integration of the Western Balkans, its influence remains limited without a larger consensus in the EU. The erosion of the credibility of the EU's enlargement and the internal divisions between member states undermine the effectiveness of Germany's initiatives. Therefore, Germany's leadership is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for sustainable democratization and security in the region. Its efforts must be reinforced by consistent EU policies, tangible accession prospects, and renewed political will at the European level.

5. The transformation of German foreign policy mirrors the evolution of the EU itself. Germany's adaptation from a post-war *civil power* to a responsible security actor parallels the EU's transition to a hybrid global actor, one that combines normative influence with operational capacity. Both Germany and the EU are redefining their identities in response to global instability, great-power competition, and internal expectations for strategic credibility. This process illustrates a new European paradigm: security through integration, where civilian and military instruments are combined to sustain peace, foster democracy, and protect European interests.

6. The study suggests policy implications and future prospects for European and regional policy-makers. The EU should deepen coordination between the CSDP and NATO to ensure coherence and efficiency in the Western Balkans and Germany should continue using the Berlin Process as a platform to maintain political momentum for reform and cooperation. Long-term peacebuilding requires greater local ownership of reforms, sustained EU engagement and a credible accession trajectory for all Western Balkan states. The experience of Germany in the region can serve as a model for combining civilian norms with strategic responsibility in EU external action in a more general sense.

7. The empirical analysis of Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Kosovo demonstrates that the influence of Germany and the results of the EU/NATO missions are uneven. In Bosnia and Herzegovina the German engagement through EUFOR Althea has ensured basic stability, but has not yet enabled full political consolidation. In North Macedonia, early German support for EU and NATO missions contributed significantly to conflict resolution, institution-building, and eventual NATO accession. In Kosovo, Germany's participation in EULEX and KFOR has bolstered the rule of law and security sector reform, although unresolved sovereignty disputes continue to restrict progress. These differences highlight that the success of external engagement depends both on local political will and on the credibility of the EU enlargement process.

8. Germany's engagement in the Western Balkans reflects the intersection of moral responsibility, strategic necessity, and European solidarity. The study concludes that Germany's ability to balance normative restraint with proactive engagement will determine not only the stability of the Western Balkans, but also the credibility of the EU as a coherent and capable security actor. The Western Balkans remain both a testing ground and a proving ground for the evolving role of Germany in global security and for Europe's aspiration to act as a unified force for peace and democracy.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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