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**THE PROVISION OF SECURITY IN THE EU: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY ANALYSIS
OF SECURITY AS A PUBLIC GOOD IN THE ERA OF TRANSNATIONAL THREATS**

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Abstract. This paper examines security as a public good within the context of its provision at the European Union level, analysing its theoretical, economic, and institutional dimensions. It is grounded in the concept of non-excludability and non-rivalry of public goods and demonstrates that modern security threats—ranging from hybrid threats, terrorism, organised crime, and pandemics, to cyber-attacks—transcend national state borders, thereby undermining traditional state-centric models of security provision. The author employs an interdisciplinary research approach, combining analytical methods from economics, political science, European studies, and security studies, which allows for a comprehensive capture of the multi-level nature of security provision as a public good. The analysis highlights that the EU is gradually assuming the role of a security provider through common policies, mechanisms, and instruments, while identifying fundamental obstacles, particularly in the form of fragmented competences, uneven Member State contributions, and inadequate financing. Empirical examples, such as the joint responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian aggression against Ukraine, confirm the growing necessity for coordinated, collective solutions. The article concludes that, given the deterioration of the regional and global security environment and the deepening of instability and uncertainty, the strengthening of European cooperation, solidarity, and financing is essential for the sustainable provision of security as one of the key European public goods.

Keywords: Security as a public good; European Union; collective security; fragmentation of competences; strategic autonomy; solidarity; political and institutional challenges

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1. Introduction

Security stands among the fundamental values and, simultaneously, the core preconditions for the existence of modern democratic societies worldwide (Palárik et al., 2018; Kavan, 2021; Wadjdi et al., 2023; Belan, 2023; Bamigboye, 2023; Szabó, 2023). It is not merely a negative state defined by the absence of threats or risks, but also a positive prerequisite for the development of liberty, prosperity, and sustainable development. The European integration process was, from its very inception, founded upon the idea that peace and stability are indispensable for economic growth and social cohesion (Androniceanu et al., 2021; Razminienė & Tvaronavičienė, 2024). Today, it is increasingly evident that security is not only a political and social value but

also a public good, the provision of which is of critical importance to all citizens of the European Union (EU). This perspective—security as a public good—allows for the question of its assurance (provision) to be conceptually grasped not only in a national but also in a European and global context (Baldwin, 1997; Engerer, 2011; Ivančík, 2012).

The concept of public goods is closely linked to classical economic theory, which characterises them as goods that are non-excludable from consumption and non-rivalrous in use, meaning they cannot be supplied solely to selected individuals but pertain to society as a whole (Samuelson, Nordhaus, 2009; Atkinson, Stiglitz, 2015). Security meets these criteria across multiple dimensions: an individual cannot be excluded from the benefits deriving from a stable and secure environment, and its consumption by one individual does not diminish the level of security available to others (de Vries et al., 2022). Security represents a specific type of public good primarily challenged by issues such as underproduction, tendencies towards free-riding, and financing concerns (Ivančík, 2012). Within the framework of the European Union, security therefore becomes an ideal case for considering the joint production and distribution of this good (Engerer, 2011). European societies face multiple serious security challenges in the 21st century that are closely related to deepening globalisation, increasing international interconnectedness, and significant shifts in the regional and global security environment (Majchút, 2018; Burinskas & Tvaronavičienė, 2022; Ybáñez, 2022). Hybrid threats, cyber-attacks, terrorism, and organised crime disregard the borders of individual states and possess a transnational character. Russia's military aggression against Ukraine since 2022 has revealed not only geopolitical but also economic and energy vulnerabilities in Europe. Furthermore, the war has exposed that the security of Europe is existentially intertwined with collective responses and that individual EU Member States do not independently possess sufficient capabilities and capacities to guarantee stability and protect their own populations (Jurčák & Ivančík, 2023; Hajiyeva, 2024; Ivančík, Andrassy, 2025, Frederick et al., 2025).

In addition to traditional threats, the significance of new factors is increasing, such as escalating great-power rivalry between the United States and China, which has significant implications for European security and its efforts towards strategic autonomy. Internal security is thus inseparably linked with external security, compelling the EU to review and reassess its institutional frameworks and capacities.

It is precisely for this reason that it is meaningful to examine security as a European public good. As the theory of public goods demonstrates, there are domains where it is more efficient and equitable to assure goods at a supranational level than at the level of individual nation-states. Bossong and Rhinard (2012) emphasise that EU internal security exhibits the characteristics of a typical public good: its benefits are collective, its insufficient provision creates risks for all, and its effective realisation necessitates coordination among states. In this regard, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic represented a watershed moment, where the joint procurement of vaccines confirmed the practical utility of the European public good concept (Anev Janse et al., 2025). Similarly, the areas of energy security and defence policies also indicate that common European solutions can be more effective than isolated national approaches.

The examination of security as a public good inevitably requires an interdisciplinary approach. The traditional understanding of security was long anchored in a state-centric framework, in which the nation-state served as the primary guarantor of security. However, developments in recent decades have shown this model to be insufficient. Academic research into security, therefore, combines insights from economics, which offers the categories of public goods and the concept of collective action, with political science and European studies, which analyse the dynamics of inter-state cooperation and the European integration process. Security studies also form an integral part of the analytical framework, drawing attention to the dynamically changing nature of security threats and challenges and the necessity for a comprehensive, multi-level approach. This interdisciplinary framework allows for a better understanding of why security within the European environment must be examined not as a set of isolated national strategies, but as a joint project of public interest.

From a methodological perspective, the paper employs a combination of several approaches. Firstly, it relies on a content analysis of available scholarly texts and strategic documents of the European Union that address the issue of security as a public good. The second element is a theoretical analysis of the public goods concept in both classical and modern economics, applied to the specific domain of security. The third methodological pillar

is critical analysis, which allows for reflection on the limitations of existing research and highlights potential contradictions between theory and practice. Furthermore, institutional analysis is applied, tracing the evolution and functioning of specific EU policies, such as the ProtectEU strategy, the common policy on the internal market and security, and instruments aimed at cyber security and civil protection.

These approaches are complementary and provide a comprehensive picture of security as a European public good. The content and theoretical analysis enable the research to be anchored in academic discourse, while the institutional and comparative analysis reveal the practical mechanisms through which the European Union overcomes the limitations of purely national security assurance. Finally, the critical perspective is essential to realistically assess the extent to which declared goals and common European commitments translate into real-world implementation and the capacity to collectively protect European citizens.

2. Security as a Public Good: Theoretical and Economic Foundations

The discussion regarding security as a public good follows a long tradition within economic theory that distinguishes between private and public goods. Samuelson and Nordhaus (2009) defined public goods as those characterised by two core properties: non-excludability from consumption and non-rivalry in use. Non-excludability signifies that once a specific public good is provided, no individual can be effectively prevented from utilising its benefits. Non-rivalry denotes a situation where the consumption of the good by one individual does not diminish the quantity of the good available to others. Classic examples of public goods include clean air, street lighting, and national defence (Ivančík, 2012; Mikušová Meričková & Stejskal, 2014).

Within this framework, security appears to be a model case of a public good. Insofar as protection against external aggression or internal threat is assured, the entire society profits from this state. A citizen cannot simply be excluded from the benefits of the security environment, just as their sense of security does not diminish the level of security available to others. Engerer (2011) emphasises that security possesses an additional, specific characteristic: it is not only the absence of risk or threat, but also a positive state of certainty and confidence in the stability of the social and political environment. This aspect differentiates security from other public goods, which are mostly purely material or technical in nature.

The distinction between national, European, and global security is crucial when applying the public goods concept. In the traditional understanding, security was primarily a national public good, assured by the state through the military, police, other armed security forces, and judicial institutions. However, globalisation and technological advancement have caused threats to increasingly assume a transnational character. Cyber-attacks, terrorism, organised crime, hybrid, and environmental threats cannot be isolated within the borders of a single state. Therefore, the concept of security as a regional and global public good is being increasingly applied (Bossong & Rhinard, 2012). The European Union, as a specific integration project, is moving to the forefront in the search for institutional solutions for the provision of this type of good.

Economic theory demonstrates that public goods are systematically threatened by the phenomenon of underproduction. Public goods are often produced in smaller quantities than would be optimal for society because private producers lack sufficient incentives for their output. Since individuals cannot be excluded from their consumption, private providers lack the motivation to invest in their financing to an adequate extent. This problem is known as the free rider dilemma, where actors expect the public good to be provided by someone else, while they themselves profit from it without their own contribution (Mikušová Meričková et al., 2024). In the case of security, this problem manifests at multiple levels. Domestically, individuals may expect the state to guarantee security, while at the international level, small EU Member States often rely on the initiatives and resources of others, especially large states, while contributing less themselves to the assurance of collective security.

The financing of security is therefore a critical issue. Engerer (2011) posits that the optimal level of security provision is not achieved in practice because, unlike private goods, the price mechanism cannot be utilised to express individual preferences and willingness to pay. In the context of the EU, this disproportion is exacerbated by the fact that the Union's budget amounts to only approximately one per cent of the member states' Gross

Domestic Product (GDP), while security and defence expenditure remains predominantly the competence of national governments (Anev Janse et al., 2025). This model results in resource fragmentation and the duplication of national initiatives, thereby diminishing the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the system.

Security also entails significant externalities, or spillover effects, that extend beyond the scope of a single state or individual. Positive externalities arise when the enhanced security of one state benefits its neighbours. For instance, the adoption of effective and efficient counterterrorism or organised crime measures within one EU member state contributes to higher security levels across the other member states. Negative externalities emerge when security policy failures in one member state increase risks for the rest of the Union. An example of this is inadequate border protection mechanisms in certain member countries, which can compromise the internal security of the entire European Union.

The public goods problem in the security domain is thus intrinsically linked to the collective action dilemma. As Mancur Olson (2009) highlighted, rational actors tend to minimise their contributions and maximise the benefits derived from the collective endeavour. At the EU level, this dynamic manifests in disputes over the distribution of financial and political costs associated with common security projects. Bossong and Rhinard (2012) argue that this dilemma is particularly evident in internal security initiatives, where certain member states adopt an approach of selective integration or negotiate opt-outs.

From a theoretical perspective, it is therefore imperative that institutional mechanisms are created at the European level to mitigate the free-rider problem and ensure a more equitable distribution of costs and benefits. Such mechanisms may take the form of joint financing, legally binding commitments, or coordinated strategies that reinforce the incentive for member states to contribute to the collective effort. Failure to implement these measures risks security remaining an undersupplied public good, with repercussions for the stability, prosperity, and credibility of the EU as a whole.

Security has long been perceived as a national public good, guaranteed by the state through its monopoly on the legitimate use of force. In the traditional conception, this meant that each state bore primary responsibility for protecting its citizens from both external and internal threats. This model was characteristic of the Westphalian system and dominated particularly throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The challenge it faces, however, lies in the fact that modern threats transcend national boundaries and can no longer be effectively managed by isolated national policies. Cyber-attacks are a typical example, which may originate in one country but whose consequences affect other countries or even entire regions. Similarly, organised crime, terrorism, and irregular migration are inherently transnational and necessitate a coordinated response.

Consequently, security is increasingly referred to as a European public good. In this conceptualisation, security is provided not merely by individual states, but primarily through common European institutions and policies. The European Union has a dual role in this area: firstly, it strengthens the competences and capabilities of the member states through legal and institutional mechanisms (e.g., Europol, Frontex, civil protection and crisis management mechanisms), and secondly, it creates a framework for the collective resolution of common threats. Bossong and Rhinard (2012) emphasise that in the EU context, security must be understood as the outcome of a collective contribution from all member states, where each member state provides a portion of resources, information, and capacities to create a transnational security space. This approach enables the overcoming of the unequal burden-sharing problem and establishes a legitimate framework for joint measures.

Security also acquires the dimension of a global public good. In a globalised world, it is evident that stability and security in Europe are intrinsically linked to developments in other parts of the world. Climate change, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, international terrorism, or geopolitical conflicts generate threats that cannot be isolated within the borders of the continent. Engerer (2011) warns in this regard that security, as a global public good, is even more challenging to provide because there is no supranational authority with sufficient competences and capabilities to guarantee it. In this context, the European Union is compelled to act as one of the key global security actors and contribute to international regimes, alliances, and partnerships that strengthen stability not only in Europe, but also in its neighbourhood and at the global level.

The distinction between the national, European, and global levels of security provision is therefore crucial for understanding the challenges facing the European Union. While member states strive to maintain their sovereignty in the security sphere, reality increasingly compels them to shift competences to the European level. And although the European level can manage many threats more effectively, it still encounters limits that require coordination and cooperation with partners at the global level.

From a theoretical and economic standpoint, it can thus be concluded that security is a paradigmatic example of a public good that manifests across multiple levels. This multilayered character raises the question of the extent to which the European Union is capable of assuming the role of the provider of this good and how successfully it executes this in practice. The answer to this question necessitates an examination of the concept of European public goods, the historical development of security integration, and the practical policies adopted by the EU. This logically opens the door for the next chapter, which will focus on the European Union and the concept of public goods in the security domain.

3. The European Union and the Concept of Public Goods in the Security Domain

The historical development of the European integration process demonstrates that security was long considered an exclusively national competence, intrinsically linked to state sovereignty. The Westphalian model of international relations enshrined the principle that every state possesses absolute authority to guarantee internal order and defence against external threats. Integration in post-Second World War Europe was thus initially oriented towards economic and financial matters—the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (1951) and the European Economic Community (1957) was motivated by the conviction that deepening economic and monetary cooperation would ensure peace and stability. Defence initiatives, such as the plan for a European Defence Community (1952), failed precisely due to concerns over the curtailment of national sovereignty in security and defence issues.

Over time, however, the purely national understanding of security proved to be increasingly ineffective. The rapid rise of cross-border organised crime, the issue of increasing migration, environmental catastrophes, and terrorist attacks in the 1970s and 1980s demonstrated that member states were unable to tackle many threats in isolation. The response was a gradual shift towards common policies in internal security, formally solidified in the 1990s with the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty (1992). This Treaty established the so-called three-pillar structure, within which cooperation in Justice and Home Affairs became an integral part of the European project.

A further significant step was the Amsterdam Treaty (1997), which placed a new emphasis on the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (AFSJ) and allowed for the progressive transfer of competences into the supranational framework. A fundamental turning point, however, was marked by the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent attacks in Madrid (2004) and London (2005). These events accelerated the creation of pan-European mechanisms in the fight against terrorism, strengthened Europol, and encouraged the adoption of several framework decisions that harmonised member states' criminal law in key areas. The Lisbon Treaty (2009) abolished the pillar structure and fully incorporated internal security into the EU's legal and political framework, thereby confirming that security could no longer be understood as an exclusive national competence (Koutrakos, 2012).

The developments at the external level also played a significant role in this process. The EU enlargement to include new member states in 2004 fundamentally shifted the Union's geographical boundaries and necessitated a more coordinated protection of external borders. Simultaneously, the growing interconnection between internal and external security demonstrated that threats cannot be strictly separated. Conflicts in the EU's neighbourhood, such as the war in the former Yugoslavia, the crisis in Libya, or the fighting in Ukraine after 2014 and the outbreak of the full-scale war in 2022, showed that destabilisation in the immediate vicinity has a direct impact on EU internal security (Kompan & Hrnčiar, 2021; Ivančík, Andrassy, 2025; Genini, 2025). This trajectory progressively legitimized the building of the European security apparatus, from Frontex to civil protection and cybersecurity defence mechanisms.

From a historical perspective, it is thus evident that the EU has gradually evolved from a project of economic and financial integration to an increasingly strong security provider, with security now understood as a European public good. This shift is the result of a long-term process, in which it became clear that the collective guarantee of security is more effective, efficient, equitable, and legitimate than fragmented national approaches.

The concept of European public goods has gained a stronger footing in both academic and political discourse in recent years. Fuest and Pisani-Ferry (2019) point out that there are areas where the provision of public goods at the member state level is not efficient, and where the European Union has a unique capacity to ensure collective benefit. In addition to climate policy, financial stability, and innovation, these areas include security. Ensuring security in an environment of open borders and strong international interconnectedness is a classic example where the European level is better equipped than isolated national solutions.

The EU, however, does not function as a classical state, but rather as a hybrid provider of public goods, combining elements of intergovernmental cooperation with supranational competences (Balfour et al., 2024). This hybridity is exceptionally visible in the security domain. On the one hand, member states remain the main guarantors of internal order and external defence; on the other hand, they are increasingly transferring their powers to the European level through agencies, common funds, and legally binding standards. Anev Janse et al. (2025) emphasise that this model creates a unique type of European public good: security is provided in a combined manner, through the solidarity of member states, joint financial mechanisms, and regulatory frameworks that mitigate the risk of fragmentation.

The significance of the EU as a public goods provider has intensified particularly since 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed that in crisis situations, the Union is capable of coordinating joint solutions that would be inefficient or impossible for individual states to pursue alone. The joint procurement of vaccines, the creation of strategic reserves of medical supplies, and the coordination of cross-border measures were examples of the EU acting as a guarantor of collective security. This experience confirmed that security in the broadest sense—from health to internal and cybersecurity—is becoming a European public good that can only be provided effectively through collective efforts.

Following the above, it is important to stress that the EU is not merely a passive coordinator but actively creates new policies and institutions that enhance its capacity to provide public goods in the security area. Initiatives such as PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation), the EDF (European Defence Fund), and mechanisms focused on cybersecurity represent steps towards creating common competences and capabilities that extend beyond the scope of voluntary cooperation. Simultaneously, they reinforce the legitimacy of the assertion that security is a good with a European dimension that requires an equitable distribution of costs among member states (Dorussen et al., 2009; Thielemann, 2012).

Fuest and Pisani-Ferry (2019) point out that the provision of European public goods has not only an economic but also a political significance. It enhances the legitimacy of the European project because citizens see the tangible benefits of common policies. In the case of security, this effect is particularly pronounced: border protection, cybersecurity, and the fight against organised crime are areas where citizens directly perceive the added value of European cooperation. In this way, security becomes not only a key public good but also an integrating element that contributes to the Union's stability and cohesion.

The conception of security as a European public good is reflected in the specific policies and institutional mechanisms that the EU has progressively built. One of the key areas is border protection and migration. The Schengen Area, founded on the free movement of persons, created the necessity for common external border management. The response was the strengthening of the Frontex agency, which has transformed into the European Border and Coast Guard with a mandate to coordinate and support member states in protecting external borders (Raimondo, 2024). Common border management possesses the character of a public good: if the borders of one member state are better protected, the security of the entire Union increases. According to Kellerhals et al. (2022), the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the migration crises of 2015 and 2021, demonstrated that the effective management of migration and border protection necessarily require European coordination, otherwise leading to chain problems that threaten internal security.

Another crucial area is police and judicial cooperation. The establishment of Europol and Eurojust has enabled a more effective fight against organised crime, human trafficking, and terrorism. These institutions function as platforms for information exchange, investigation coordination, and support for national authorities. Security threats in the digital environment, such as cyber-attacks or the misuse of online spaces for the spread of extremism, have led to the adoption of pan-European cybersecurity frameworks (Trimintzios et al., 2024), such as the NIS2 Directive, which introduces stricter resilience requirements for critical infrastructure (Digital Europe, 2025). Cybersecurity is a typical example of a public good, as attacks targeting one member state can have a domino effect on the entire Union.

Civil protection and crisis management represent another dimension of common policies. The Union Civil Protection Mechanism enables a coordinated response to natural disasters, technological accidents, or humanitarian crises (European Commission, 2025). This has been demonstrated in practice, for instance, by the deployment of European teams to extinguish extensive fires in Greece, Portugal, and Spain, as well as by joint deliveries of medical supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic. This mechanism proves that European solidarity in the security domain is not merely a theoretical concept but a concrete manifestation of the joint provision of a public good.

All these policies confirm that security has become an inseparable part of the European project and that its provision has assumed the character of a European public good. The aforementioned examples of common policies indicate that the EU has progressively positioned itself as an active security provider in areas where national solutions encounter limitations. Simultaneously, they highlight the growing importance of solidarity and coordination among member states. However, the question remains as to how effective these mechanisms are and what political and institutional challenges impede their full development. Precisely these issues will be the subject of the following chapter, which will focus on the political and institutional challenges of securing security as a public good in the EU.

4. Political and Institutional Challenges of Securing Security as a Public Good in the EU

The provision of security as a public good within the European Union faces specific political and institutional obstacles that are directly connected to the nature of the European integration project (Walker, 2020). Unlike national states, where the monopoly on the provision of security is vested in state power, in the EU this competence is distributed across multiple levels—national, European, and in some cases, global. The fragmentation of competences between member states and European institutions thus constitutes one of the most fundamental problems (Gruarin et al., 2025).

Competence fragmentation is evidenced by the fact that member states traditionally retain dominant powers in the areas of internal order, justice, and defence, while the EU primarily holds coordinating and supplementary powers (Demke et al., 2020). The result is a multi-level governance structure for decision-making, which often leads to inefficiency and a delayed response to security threats. While agencies such as Europol, Frontex, and Eurojust can provide support and coordination, they lack full executive authority to act independently of the member states. This means that crisis responses—whether to terrorist attacks, migration flows, or cyber-attacks—are conditioned by the political will of individual governments and their willingness to share information, capacities, and resources.

This fragmentation also creates an asymmetry in expectations and responsibilities. EU citizens perceive security as a core value that the Union should provide, yet the institutional framework is currently not adequately equipped to do so. As Bossong and Rhinard (2013) note, this mismatch between expectations and real competences generates a legitimacy deficit and contributes to political tensions between the national and European levels. Member states are often ambivalent—on the one hand, they demand a stronger European response, but on the other, they refuse to cede further powers to Brussels (Maurer, Wright, 2020).

Fragmentation also has practical consequences in the form of duplicative or uncoordinated policies. For example, in the area of cybersecurity, various parallel national strategies and institutions exist, and their harmonisation at the European level is still only in its initial stages (ENISA, 2025). Similarly, in border

protection, differences persist in technical capabilities, legislative frameworks, and approaches to migration among individual member states, which complicates the effective functioning of the Schengen Area (Fürst, 2024). The result is an uneven level of security across the Union, which undermines citizen confidence in European solutions.

One of the most crucial challenges for the provision of security as a public good in the EU is the risk of the free-rider problem and uneven contribution. This phenomenon is an inherent feature of all public goods, but it is acutely manifested in the context of security. As Bossong and Rhinard (2013) point out, because security possesses the characteristics of a non-excludable and non-rivalrous good, member states tend to minimise their own contributions and rely on security being guaranteed to them thanks to the investments and measures of others.

In the internal domain, this problem is evident, for example, in border protection. Countries on the EU's external border face a greater burden in managing migration and cross-border crime, and their capacities are often insufficient (Bakardjieva Engelbrekt et al., 2024). Other member states that do not face the same immediate pressure have less incentive to invest in joint solutions. The outcome is an imbalance in the distribution of costs and benefits. While the benefits of the free movement of persons accrue to all, the costs of border protection are primarily borne by the frontline states. This situation leads to disputes over solidarity and financial mechanisms that should compensate for the disproportionate burden.

In the area of defence and external security, the free-rider risk is even more pronounced. Some member states systematically underfund their defence budgets and rely on security guarantees from NATO or the investments of stronger European partners (Knezović, Tkalec, 2025). This phenomenon has long been subject to criticism, particularly from the United States, which highlighted that European allies were not meeting the target of 2% of GDP for defence (Ellyatt, 2018; Davidson, 2023). Within the EU itself, there is consequently an ongoing debate about the need for a fairer distribution of costs and mechanisms that would incentivise member states to invest more in common projects.

Uneven contribution is also evident in police and judicial cooperation. Some states are more willing to share intelligence information and engage in joint investigations, while others approach this cooperation selectively. The consequence is a differential level of integration and trust among member states. From the perspective of public goods provision, this is a problem of “partial contribution”, where only a fraction of actors invests in the common system, while others profit from it without a comparable input.

Such behaviour not only undermines the effectiveness but also the legitimacy of the European security project. If citizens perceive that certain states’ profit from common policies without contributing equitably, it erodes trust in the principle of solidarity, which is fundamental to European integration (Porschlegel, 2021). Therefore, proposals are increasingly being put forward to introduce conditionality in funding and to create mechanisms that would sanction states with low contributions or those refusing to cooperate. Bossong and Rhinard (2013) emphasise in this context that only an equitable distribution of costs can ensure the sustainability of security as a European public good.

One of the most significant impediments to the provision of security as a public good at the European Union level is limited financial resources. The EU budget has long been set at a relatively low level—approximately one per cent of the member states' Gross National Income. Compared to national budgets, this share is negligible, with security and defence expenditure remaining predominantly under the competence of member states. This means that European institutions possess only limited means to implement their own policies and projects in the security field (Fuest & Pisani-Ferry, 2019).

This situation creates the undersupply of security at the European level. Although there is broad consensus that many threats—from cyber-attacks and terrorism to hybrid threats—require supranational solutions, the available EU financial instruments are often fragmented, short-term, and insufficient. The European Defence Fund (EDF), the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), and internal security funds represent a step forward, yet their scope is limited compared to the ambitions declared by member states in political strategies. The budgetary

disproportion between citizen expectations and the EU's actual capacities creates a trust deficit and reinforces the arguments of Eurosceptic actors who question the Union's ability to secure key public goods such as security and defence (Mejino-López, Wolff, 2024; Hildebrand et al., 2025).

A watershed moment was the launch of the NextGenerationEU (NGEU) instrument in 2020, established in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (European Union, 2025). This substantial funding package, exceeding €750 billion, demonstrated the EU's capacity to mobilise resources on a scale previously considered unattainable. Although NGEU was not primarily focused on security, it established a precedent for common financing through debt instruments, which may have implications for future security policy. Consequently, some authors (Anev Janse et al., 2025) speak of the potential for a "security-oriented iteration of NGEU" that would facilitate collective investment in shared infrastructure, cyber resilience, and security research. Such an approach could help overcome fragmentation and the differential contribution of Member States.

However, the financial challenges do not merely concern the overall volume of funding, but also the mechanism of resource allocation. The European budget is often the result of trade-offs between Member States that prioritise the financing of legacy policies, such as agriculture, at the expense of investments in security (Abalasei, 2024). This leads to a situation where security programmes are under-resourced and must operate within the framework of constrained grant schemes. Simultaneously, there is a lack of stable and predictable mechanisms to allow for long-term planning regarding security and defence capabilities and capacities.

Funding challenges, therefore, constitute a central policy dilemma: if security is to be genuinely understood as a European public good, then it is imperative to establish adequate funding instruments and a common budgetary framework that moves beyond *ad hoc* initiatives. Failing this, the EU will inevitably encounter limitations that will undermine its credibility as a security provider and reinforce tendencies toward renationalisation (Guntram et al., 2025; Dermine, 2025).

One of the greatest challenges in providing security as a public good within the European Union is the nexus between the internal and external dimensions of security. Traditionally, these two spheres were viewed separately: internal security encompassed policing, justice, and public order, while external security was associated with foreign and defence policy. In a globalised and technologically interconnected world, however, this boundary is gradually diminishing. Crises and threats now propagate in chain reactions that simultaneously impact both the internal and external environments (Trauner, 2011; Deubner, 2016; Vasiliauskienė, 2024; Mafart, 2025).

The European Union has responded to this reality through a series of strategic documents, the most recent being the ProtectEU initiative (2025). This strategy underscores that 21st-century security cannot be maintained solely through traditional instruments of internal control or national defence but requires a holistic approach that integrates internal and external policy realms. Migration, terrorism, cyber threats, hybrid attacks, and energy dependence are typical examples of threats that cannot be categorised exclusively as internal or external (European Union, 2025; European Commission, 2025; Rehak et al., 2025).

The problem is that the EU's institutional architecture is still predicated on their formal separation. Internal security falls under the purview of the European Commission and the Justice and Home Affairs Council, while external security is the domain of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, the Common Security and Defence Policy, and the European External Action Service. This dualism leads to a lack of coordination and overlapping mandates. The challenge is therefore to create effective operational mechanisms that ensure measures adopted in one sphere are coherent with those in the other.

From the perspective of public goods theory, the integration of internal and external policies is of paramount importance: only this way can an equal level of security be achieved for all EU citizens. If certain states remained exposed to higher risks due to their geographical location or geopolitical situation, it would undermine the principle of solidarity and the uniform provision of the public good. Therefore, the ProtectEU strategy explicitly emphasises that security must be understood as an indivisible good that requires a coordinated internal and external response (European Union, 2025; European Commission, 2025).

Bridging the gap between internal and external security thus represents not only a practical but also a normative challenge. If security is genuinely to be a European public good, then Member States must overcome traditional jurisdictional divisions and adopt a multi-level governance approach in which internal and external security mutually reinforce each other.

Conclusion

Security as a public good is currently one of the most debated topics in European political and academic discourse. The analysis demonstrates that, within the conditions of a globalised and interconnected society, security cannot be provided exclusively at the national level, as modern threats transcend state borders and affect entire regions or even the entire international system. In this context, the European Union is becoming a unique laboratory where security is being forged as a European public good, founded on the principles of solidarity, collective action, and common financing.

The first key observation stems from the theoretical-economic foundations. Security possesses all the attributes of a public good—it is non-excludable and non-rivalrous (or indivisible), and the investment of one actor generates positive externalities for all others. This leads to the inherent risk of under-provision, uneven contribution, and the free-rider problem. In the European context, these issues manifest as jurisdictional fragmentation and asymmetry among Member States, often complicating the effective operation of common policies. Despite this, providing security at the European level demonstrates greater efficiency and legitimacy than isolated national solutions, particularly in cross-border domains such as migration, cyber-attacks, and climate or health crises.

The second observation relates to institutional development. The European Union has traversed a long trajectory from purely economic integration towards an increasingly powerful role as a security provider. The historical evolution from the Maastricht Treaty, through the Lisbon Treaty, the Global Strategy, and the Strategic Compass, up to the ProtectEU initiative, shows a progressive transfer of competences in the security domain to the European level. While Member States still retain a dominant role, the significance of agencies like Europol and Frontex is growing, as are strategic documents that integrate the internal and external security dimensions into a single framework. Security is thus becoming an integral component of the European project and a pillar of its legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens.

The third fundamental dimension concerns political and institutional challenges. The fragmentation of competences, the exploitation of the free-rider phenomenon, the insufficient share of the EU budget dedicated to security, and the complicated nexus between internal and external security represent barriers that undermine the Union's capacity to fully realise security as a public good. It is evident that without strengthening common fiscal capacity and achieving more effective coordination, the EU will continuously face limitations. Overcoming these barriers necessitates new solidarity mechanisms, innovative financial instruments (such as applying the NextGenerationEU precedent to the security domain), and superior integration across different levels of governance.

Empirical examples—the joint procurement of vaccines, joint energy procurement, the PESCO and EDF initiatives, and the response to the war in Ukraine—confirm that the EU is capable of acting as an active provider of public goods in crisis situations. However, they also reveal that these solutions often emerge only in reaction to acute threats, rather than as part of a long-term sustainable strategy. The key lesson is the need to shift from *ad hoc* reactions to a systematic approach based on risk anticipation and the cultivation of higher levels of resilience.

From a normative standpoint, this implies that security must be understood as a shared commitment of all Member States of the Union, transcending national interests and founded on the principle of solidarity. Political decisions regarding the distribution of competences and resources should therefore not be perceived as a loss of sovereignty but as an investment in collective security. If this approach can be successfully implemented, the EU can function as the "provider of last resort," guaranteeing a minimum level of security for all its citizens.

Looking forward, the key objective for 2030 and beyond will clearly be the strengthening of the Union's strategic autonomy. This does not entail complete independence from partners but the capacity to act autonomously when necessary. Strategic autonomy in security and defence is intrinsically linked to increasing budgetary capacities, developing a joint European defence industrial and technological base, and integrating internal and external policies. The emerging security union will have to respond not only to traditional threats but also to new challenges, such as hybrid attacks, climate insecurity, and geopolitical rivalry among major powers.

In conclusion, security as a public good has become a key pillar of European integration. Its provision transcends the framework of individual Member States and requires novel forms of cooperation, financing, and political coordination. The European Union faces a historic opportunity to transform its security policy to guarantee stability, prosperity, and the confidence of its citizens, even in a period of increasing uncertainty and instability. By fulfilling this role, it will affirm itself not only as an economic and political project but also as the guarantor of one of the most valuable public goods—security.

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