

Course: SKOM12
Term: Spring 2026
Supervisor Prof. Camilla Nothhaft
Examiner Prof. Marlène Wiggill

Constructing a “New Europe”: The European Commission’s Discursive Legitimation of Increased Defence Imperatives – A Critical Discourse Analysis

VERA GAMPER

Lund University
Department of Strategic Communication
Master’s Thesis



Disclaimer and Acknowledgements

This thesis adopts a moderate, critical social constructionist ontological and interpretivist epistemological stance to analyse how the European Commission discursively constructs legitimisation strategies to build legitimacy for increased and unprecedented defence imperatives in a post-2022 security environment. It does not, however, dispute or contest Russia's aggression against Ukraine, nor does it question Europe's sovereign responsibility to protect and defend citizens and allies. Rather than scrutinising the effectiveness of public policy, the study focuses on how powerful institutional actors, in this case the European Commission, discursively legitimise political action and shape debates in a highly politicised arena. Anchored in the discipline of strategic communication, it seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the communicative, linguistic, and discursive mechanisms at work in strategic policy communication, rather than to judge or evaluate the material implementation of the policies themselves. In this sense, the inquiry underlying this thesis is not *is* this policy shift justified, but *how* is this policy shift justified – and legitimised.

The idea for this thesis began to crystallise during a crisis simulation in the late spring semester of 2025, only weeks after the European Commission announced its historic Readiness 2030 initiative. It consolidated during my internship in political Berlin in the autumn semester of 2025, as I could not stop wondering, how do political actors legitimise and communicate such an unprecedented policy shift in an institutional arena so full of discourses, tensions, and ambivalences? I was fortunate to have been supervised by Camilla Nothhaft, PhD, whose assistance and enthusiasm for my project were invaluable throughout the process and greatly helped me sharpen both my approach and the result presented on the following 98 pages. Thank you, Camilla, I am immensely grateful for your support!

Helsingborg, 22 May 2026

Vera Gamper



Abstract

Constructing a “New Europe”:

The European Commission’s Discursive Legitimation of Increased Defence Imperatives – A Critical Discourse Analysis

The *Readiness 2030* initiative, launched in March 2025, proposed unprecedented levels of European defence investment and integration in a historically constrained domain. This thesis analyses how the European Commission discursively constructed and legitimised increased defence imperatives through its official policy communication on this initiative. It thereby investigates discursive legitimation amid a strategic institutional shift as a communicative phenomenon. Drawing on Van Leeuwen’s (2007) discursive legitimation theory and Van Dijk’s (1998) insights on legitimation, power, and ideology, the study applies Fairclough’s (1992, 1995) three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis to policy documents, speeches, and press materials published between March and October 2025. The analysis highlights three interrelated discursive logics that structure the discourse, specifically *Transformation*, *Normalisation*, and *Integration*, within which legitimation strategies operate in patterned ways. Rationalization and Moral Evaluation communicatively work as a dual-legitimation strategy that normatively grounds a largely technocratic policy discourse. *Integration* emerges as a particularly powerful discursive logic that functions bidirectionally. Drawing on instrumental and theoretical rationalization, it legitimises defence imperatives from both security and economic standpoints, thereby expanding their perceived relevance and benefit. The European Commission is positioned as an enabler of this institutional shift and associated policy implications, whereby its policy discourse reproduces a peace-through-strength ideology that renders peace discursively dependent on rearmament. The thesis contributes theoretically to understanding discursive legitimation as a micro-linguistic, communicative process and empirically to the EU’s defence expansion and the European Commission’s growing role therein.

Keywords: Discursive legitimation, European Commission, Readiness 2030, strategic policy communication, Critical Discourse Analysis, European security and defence policy, strategic institutional shifts, communicative strategies

Word count: 19,998

Table of Contents

List of Tables and Figures	6
List of Abbreviations	7
1. Introduction	8
1.1 Geopolitical Context	8
1.2 Research Problem	10
1.2.1 A Strategic Communication Perspective on European Defence Policy	11
1.3 Research Aim and Question	12
2. Literature Review	13
2.1 Legitimation as a Communicative Process	13
2.2 Legitimacy Debates in EU Security and Defence	15
2.3 The European Commission as a Legitimation Actor	19
2.4 Synthesis	21
3. Theoretical Framework	22
3.1 Legitimation in Discourse	22
3.2 Van Leeuwen's Discursive Legitimation Framework	23
3.2.1 Authorization	23
3.2.2 Moral Evaluation	24
3.2.3 Rationalization	25
3.2.4 Mythopoesis	26
3.3 A Critical-Strategic Lens on Discursive Legitimation	26
3.4 Synthesis	28
4. Methodology	29
4.1 Research Paradigm	29
4.2 Research Design and Case	30
4.3 Data Collection and Sampling	31
4.3.1 Document Selection	31
4.4 Analysis Process	34
4.4.1 Analytical Method: Critical Discourse Analysis after Fairclough	35

4.4.2 Analytical Procedure: Operationalisation and Coding.....	36
4.5 Reflexivity, Trustworthiness, and Research Ethics.....	38
4.6 Limitations	39
5. Analysis and Results.....	40
5.1 Constructing Europe: “A New Europe Must Emerge”	40
5.1.1 Textual Dimension: A Moral Duty in a Changing World.....	40
5.1.2 Discursive Dimension: Recontextualising History and Military Doctrines.....	44
5.1.3 Social Dimension: An EU Mindset Shift	46
5.2 Defence as a “Collective Good”.....	47
5.2.1 Textual Dimension: Defence as Exceptionally Ordinary.....	48
5.2.2 Discursive Dimension: A Collaborative Policy Process	51
5.2.3 Social Dimension: Welcome to the New Normal	53
5.3 Talking about Defence Means Talking about “Competitiveness”	55
5.3.1 Textual Dimension: Unleashing Europe’s Power	55
5.3.2 Discursive Dimension: An Interdiscursive Competitiveness Agenda	58
5.3.3 Social Dimension: Europe at the Global Table, not on the Menu.....	60
5.4 Synthesis.....	63
6. Concluding Discussion	64
6.1 Implications for Strategic Communication Practice	67
6.2 Knowledge Contribution	68
6.3 Suggestions for Further Research	70
References	71
Empirical Material References.....	88
Appendices	91
Appendix A. Detailed Documents Overview.....	91
Appendix B. Illustrative Three-Dimensional Mapping.....	100

List of Tables and Figures

Table 1. Empirical Material Overview	33
Table 2. Operationalisation and Coding Scheme	37
Figure 1. Integrated Analytical Framework	34
Figure 2. Analysis Overview	63

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Description
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
COM	Commission Communication
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DG COMM	Directorate-General for Communication
DG DEFIS	Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space
EC	European Commission
EP	European Parliament
ESG	Environmental, Social, and Governance
EU	European Union
HR/VP	High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission
JOIN	Joint Communication from the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
SAFE	Security Action for Europe
SFDR	Sustainable Finance Disclosures Regulation
SFL	Systemic Functional Linguistics
SOTEU	State of the Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
US	United States

1. Introduction

1.1 Geopolitical Context

“Europe is in a fight. (...) Make no mistake – this is a fight for our future. (...) This must be Europe's Independence Moment. I believe this is our Union's mission. To be able to take care of our own security and defence.”
(Von der Leyen, 2025d, p. 1)

These words from European Commission (EC) President Ursula von der Leyen during the State of the Union (SOTEU) address on 10 September 2025 encapsulate the scale of geopolitical disruption currently confronting Europe, and its implications for European governance and strategy. The European Union (EU) as a supranational institution currently faces a “polycrisis” (Hoeffler et al., 2024, p. 3224), characterised by internal and external environmental, social, economic, and geopolitical pressures that mutually reinforce one another. Thus, this thesis begins with the ontological premise that the world is becoming increasingly complex. Within this context, security and defence have moved significantly to the centre of political and public attention.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 marked a defining turning point in European security and defence policy. It shattered long-standing assumptions about peace in Europe and accelerated previously less visible debates on defence integration, military preparedness, and European “strategic autonomy” (Ivančík & Dušek, 2026, p. 1). Meanwhile, the unpredictability of Donald Trump’s second presidency has raised renewed concerns about the reliability of transatlantic security guarantees and the future of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Together, these developments have positioned the EU among major strategic actors, most notably Russia, China, and the United States (US), causing it to reassess its role as a security provider for European citizens (Gorawantschy et al., 2025, p. 1).

Against this backdrop, the EC, together with the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP), Kaja Kallas, and the first-ever Commissioner for Defence and Space, Andrius Kubilius, presented the *White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030* and the *ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030* (formerly *ReArm Europe Plan*) on 19 March 2025. The White Paper outlines a new strategic direction for European defence readiness, and the plan specifies the legal and financial means to significantly increase defence spending through a coordinated pan-European effort of up to €800 billion. They were accompanied by various financial instruments, follow-up initiatives, and communication materials emphasising their urgency and strategic rationale. These EU-level initiatives signal a lasting “paradigm shift” (Genini, 2025, p. 550) and “institutional shift” (Ivančík & Dušek, 2026, p. 7) in a traditionally national and intergovernmental domain. They point towards deeper defence-industrial integration and a substantial scaling-up of military investment within the post-Cold War Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) framework (Clapp et al., 2025, p. 2).

From a communication perspective, the *ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030* is notable because of its dual name, as it underwent a rapid rebranding shortly after the original announcement on 4 March 2025. The Italian and Spanish Prime Ministers expressed discomfort with the original framing, criticising the name as “excessively charged” (Liboreiro, 2025) and warning that it “risks alienating citizens” (Liboreiro, 2025). This episode constitutes an inherently communicative illustration of how contested and politically sensitive European rearmament is amid historically high yet volatile public support (European Union, 2025b; cf. Dellanna & Yilmaz, 2025; Neubert, 2025).

Moreover, the use of legal emergency measures to approve the *ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030*, framed as a response to an “exceptional and unprecedented security context” (Genini, 2025, p. 542), bypassed the European Parliament (EP) and raised political concerns about democratic legitimacy. Simultaneously, concerns persist that increased defence spending may come at the expense of green transition, social welfare, and research and development funding (Clapp et al., 2025, p. 11). The move towards a collective “European defence union” (European Commission, n.d.-a) therefore remains constrained by member-state fragmentation, sovereignty concerns, geographical differences in threat perceptions, debates

over defence spending targets and funding, NATO commitments, and varying “economic, political and strategic rationales” (Andersson & Britz, 2025, p. 324; Genini, 2025, p. 536). Meanwhile, policy experts criticise the EU for remaining vulnerable and dependent, and for failing to bridge the gap between rhetoric and action by not living up to its defence ambitions (Burilkov et al., 2025, p. 6).

These “legitimacy struggles” (Vaara, 2014, p. 514), competing discourses, and diverse expectations are embedded within wider debates about the EU’s expanding geopolitical and military role, given its *raison d’être* as a “civilian organisation” (Andersson & Britz, 2025, p. 324) and its traditional image as a “normative power” (Manners, 2002, p. 235). This underscores the EU’s need to balance diverse policy priorities, manage internal power dynamics, and reconcile its identity as a peace project centred on free trade, sustainability, social welfare, and human rights with a rapidly expanding defence agenda (Ivančík & Andrassy, 2025, p. 422). This thesis argues that these developments are not only material or institutional but also fundamentally communicative and discursive.

Taken together, these competing discourses and expectations prompt a closer examination of the communicative strategies employed by key European actors, notably the EC, in constructing and sustaining legitimacy for expanded defence imperatives in times of crisis and change.

1.2 Research Problem

Amid this increased politicisation, recent literature has renewed its focus on legitimacy as a driver of EC action (Davies, 2025, p. 1). However, it remains unclear how this legitimacy is discursively constructed through legitimisation strategies in current security and defence policy discourse. Specifically, limited attention has been paid to legitimisation as a discursively constructed, communicative “process” (Suddaby et al., 2017, p. 459; see Carta & Morin, 2014) regarding Europe’s post-2022 defence expansion, especially from a strategic communication perspective. Research here has largely focused on the implementation and effectiveness of digital communication strategies in CSDP legitimacy-building (e.g. Doyle & Desta, 2020; Molnár et al., 2021), rather than on the “discursive enactment” (Karlsson, 2024, p. 2) of policies and their communication. Specifically, it appears that no discursive legitimisation framework, such as Van Leeuwen’s (2007) seminal typol-

ogy, has yet been applied to analyse post-2022 EU defence policy communication.

Consequently, there is scope to deepen understanding of how discursive legitimisation as a communicative “phenomenon” (Vaara et al., 2024, p. 2343) operates in the EU’s evolving security discourse, specifically how powerful political actors strategically use language to construct, negotiate, and sustain legitimacy for increased defence imperatives amid competing demands and expectations. This context warrants renewed attention, given the high stakes for both political elites and the wider public, who may benefit from a clearer understanding of how discursive legitimisation strategies shape policies and their communication amid unprecedented policy shifts (Macnamara, 2025, p. 18). This understanding can provide broader insight into the communicative *craft* of legitimising strategic institutional shifts within historically constrained domains, particularly under evolving organisational commitments marked by tensions that must also be managed discursively.

A new security environment that challenges pre-2022 assumptions about EU actorness and institutional agency in security and defence (Garančovská & Brusenbauch Meislová, 2026, p. 17; Ivančík & Andrassy, 2025, p. 421) further heightens the relevance of this research problem. The EC’s push to expand its role in defence policy through initiatives like *Readiness 2030* and to convince member states of its added value (Håkansson, 2024, p. 25), alongside its central communicative and agenda-setting position in EU policy (Garančovská & Brusenbauch Meislová, 2026, p. 8), makes it a particularly instructive discursive instance.

1.2.1 A Strategic Communication Perspective on European Defence Policy

This thesis conceptualises discursive legitimisation strategies as a form of institutionally embedded strategic policy communication. Strategic communication can be defined as “the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission” (Hallahan et al., 2007, p. 3), while policies are commonly understood as “collections of texts, practices, and decisions articulated by an institutional system to solve problems involving people in society” (Canary & McPhee, 2009, p. 148). In this sense, discursive legitimisation, as conceived by Van Leeuwen (2007), is understood here as communicative strategies through which political actions are

justified within an institutional setting – or, in Zerfass and Viertmann’s (2017) terms, as a communicative act that enables “room for manoeuvre” (p. 73).

Accordingly, policy communication, including policies and the communication about them, is seen as strategically working to answer political and public audiences’ “spoken or unspoken ‘why’” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 94) questions at a time when policy communication has become central in shifting the European debate amid volatile support (Karlsson, 2024, p. 2; Prochwicz Jazowska & Zerka, 2025).

1.3 Research Aim and Question

Building on these ideas, this thesis aims to examine discursive legitimisation amid a strategic institutional shift as a communicative phenomenon.

Specifically, it aims to address this phenomenon by critically analysing the discursive strategies mobilised by the EC, as a powerful European institution, to construct and legitimise increased defence imperatives and their policy implications amid competing expectations, crisis dynamics, and identity tensions. It thereby focuses on the EC’s policy communication on the *Readiness 2030* initiative as a single-case study and discursive site. The research question guiding this study, therefore, is:

RQ: *How did the European Commission discursively construct and legitimise increased defence imperatives through its official policy communication on the Readiness 2030 initiative?*

Grounded in a moderate, critical social constructionist ontology and interpretivist epistemology, and embracing the interdisciplinary nature of strategic communication research (Falkheimer & Heide, 2014, p. 133; Werder et al., 2018, p. 334), this thesis addresses the nexus between discursive legitimisation, strategic policy communication, and Europe’s evolving post-2022 security and defence discourse.

2. Literature Review

This review outlines how legitimacy has increasingly been studied as a communicative process. It also provides an overview of recent debates on legitimacy in the domain of European security and defence, considering the EU's shift from a predominantly civilian to a more military-geostrategic organisation. The review further maps existing scholarship on the legitimacy and legitimation of the EU, with particular focus on the EC and its expanding role in security and defence policy. The literature is then synthesised to position the thesis.

2.1 Legitimation as a Communicative Process

Three main strands dominate legitimacy research in organisational and institutional studies, namely legitimacy-as-property (e.g. Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975; Suchman, 1995), legitimacy-as-perception (e.g. Tyler, 2006; Zelditch, 2001), and legitimacy-as-process (e.g. Johnson et al., 2006; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). Discursive legitimation has recently emerged as a “multifaceted and dynamic phenomenon” (Vaara et al., 2024, p. 2343) in social and organisational research, generally falling within the latter strand (Suddaby et al., 2017, p. 453).

Within this processual perspective, legitimation has been studied as a communicative process through critical analyses of discursive strategies and language use (e.g. Rojo & Van Dijk, 1997; Vaara et al., 2006; Vaara & Tienari, 2008) and through analyses of the persuasive use of rhetoric and framing to construct legitimacy vis-à-vis specific audiences (e.g. Lefsrud & Meyer, 2012; Reyes, 2011). Much recent empirical research falls between these two main approaches (e.g. Erkama & Vaara, 2010; Patala et al., 2017). Brown et al. (2012, p. 315), for instance, demonstrate how a single policy text can legitimise institutional change by strategically combining logos, ethos, and pathos to privilege one “institutional logic” (p. 313) over others, thereby evoking contradictory discourses and reshaping broader power relations.

Similarly, Hurrelmann et al. (2007, pp. 8-9) were among the first to conceptualise legitimacy as procedurally and discursively constructed, albeit “elusive” (p. 6), in political studies. This also reflects a broader linguistic turn in EU legitimacy research (e.g. Biegon, 2013; Kutter, 2020; Schmidt, 2008; Schrag Sternberg, 2013), following Schneider et al.’s (2007, pp. 127-128) observation that political legitimacy research had been dominated by observation- and survey-based approaches rather than text-analytical perspectives. Nevertheless, in EU legitimization research, still relatively few studies focus explicitly on the above-outlined discursive approaches, treated as analytically distinct from governing actions (Pansardi & Battegazzorre, 2018, pp. 857-858).

Although Vaara et al. (2024, pp. 2362-2365) argue that further research on discursive legitimization is needed in contested and complex contexts, recent studies have increasingly focused on crisis settings. Falkheimer (2021, p. 1) makes this link explicit by labelling crises as processes of legitimization. Vaara (2014), for instance, applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to Finnish media texts during the Eurozone crisis, studying it as a transnational institutional legitimacy crisis. He finds that discursive legitimization strategies, such as rationalizations grounded in economic arguments and mythopoesis used to construct inevitability, draw on competing discourses of financial capitalism, humanism, nationalism, and Europeanism as their ideological basis (pp. 505-506), providing a useful benchmark for identifying broader discourses mobilised in other EU crises.

From a different political and strategic communication angle, Lischka (2019) combines neo-institutional theory and discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2008) with CDA to identify how big data platforms use discursive legitimacy strategies to manage EU regulatory pressures by drawing, among others, on ideological techno-utilitarian narratives. She demonstrates how corporate communication can simultaneously signal conformity to legitimacy expectations while shaping them (pp. 197-198). Discursive legitimization has also been studied across other policy domains. Cheng (2021), for example, extends this perspective beyond corporate regulation to state-level trade policy communication. Analysing Chinese government white papers on Sino-American trade friction, he identifies authorization, moralization, and rationalization as dominant strategies through which China legitimises its image and political response while delegitimising the US government’s actions (pp. 254-256). This provides relevant insight into how geopolitical

rivalries are (de)legitimised both domestically and globally. Krzyżanowski (2015), on the other hand, uses a discourse-historical approach to analyse EU climate policy discourse, showing how the EU discursively constructs itself as a global climate leader through implicit and explicit differentiation from others and ambivalent discursive logics that combine newer identity narratives of European integration with older discursive frameworks of international competition. He concludes that international and globally-oriented policy fields such as climate change significantly reshape European policy discourse and legitimation (pp. 127-128), underscoring the relevance of examining similar dynamics in the increasingly central, complex, and geopolitical domain of EU security and defence policy.

Similarly, in the field of foreign policy, Karlsson (2024) draws on Van Leeuwen's (2007) discursive legitimation framework to analyse how the Swedish government brands and sells its feminist foreign policy through strategic government communication. Her study suggests that zooming in on legitimation strategies in the early stages of foreign policy enactment can help explain how legitimation lays the groundwork for persuasively communicating political images and actions (p. 2). From a related Swedish strategic communication perspective, Ågren and Sataøen (2022, pp. 58-62) show how the Swedish Armed Forces employ discursive legitimation strategies to construct themselves as a modern, ordinary organisation, thereby normalising rearmament in response to geopolitical instability and reframing war in terms of peace, security, and social responsibility. This raises questions about how these insights from internal strategic communication within a national military organisation translate to supranational defence legitimation.

Overall, legitimacy research has increasingly embraced a processual and discursive perspective across organisational, political, and (strategic) communication disciplines. To identify lacunae and overlaps, the following sections review recent debates on legitimacy in EU security and defence and examine how the EC has been studied as a legitimation actor.

2.2 Legitimacy Debates in EU Security and Defence

Recent developments in EU defence integration, substantially driven by the EC (Genini, 2025, pp. 532-535), have reshaped the discursive environment and intensified scholarly attention therein. Legitimacy has long occupied EU foreign policy

scholarship from institutional governance (e.g. Tonra, 2018; Wagner, 2005), empirical (e.g. Nicoli et al., 2025; Peters, 2014), and constructionist (e.g. Carta & Morin, 2014; Sijursen, 2004) perspectives. Constructionist and communication-oriented approaches highlight the role of ideas, discourses, and identity in shaping EU security and defence policy. Recently, Hoeffler et al. (2024) argue that existential crises such as Brexit and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine generated "positive politicisation" (p. 3225) by fostering a "collective discourse on the necessity for the EU to take action" (p. 3235).

In this context, scholars find that emerging concepts such as "strategic autonomy" (Helwig & Sinkkonen, 2022, p. 1), "technological sovereignty" (Casernatoni, 2022, p. 409), "innovation" (Martins & Mawdsley, 2021, p. 1459), and "European sovereignty" (Roch & Oleart, 2024, p. 560) function as flexible, ambiguous discursive tools and legitimisation devices in contemporary EU strategic public communication. Their malleability allows different actors, notably the EC, to mobilise them across policy areas to justify increased action, integration, and responsiveness to geopolitical pressures (Casernatoni, 2022, pp. 409-411; Helwig & Sinkkonen, 2022, pp. 17-19). However, while this ambiguity enhances their political usefulness, it also renders these terms contested and potentially diluted, warranting further examination of how they are constructed and deployed in recent defence policy debates (Roch & Oleart, 2024, p. 561).

The use of such "floating signifiers" (Casernatoni, 2022, p. 395) is evident not only at EU level but also within member states' changing discourse. A prominent example is then-Chancellor Olaf Scholz's *Zeitenwende* (watershed) speech. Bisiada (2023, pp. 641-643) shows how his policy statement following Russia's invasion of Ukraine strategically foregrounds discourses on threat, morality, and history while marginalising alternatives around diplomacy, dialogue, or disarmament, thereby framing Germany's military paradigm shift as a natural and unavoidable response to a constructed new reality. This provides a valuable benchmark for studying how discursive strategies construct and legitimise drastic policy shifts as necessary and inevitable in political communication, particularly in contexts historically associated with restrained or normative defence policies, such as the EU.

Moreover, recent research underscores persistent legitimacy and communicative challenges. Pane and Innace (2025) find that policy experts, acting as "epistemic intermediaries" (p. 66), generally support deeper defence integration but

criticise EU communication on the CSDP as technocratic, insufficient, and unclear, creating a legitimacy gap at a time when legitimacy can no longer be treated as a “secondary concern” (p. 76). This echoes Meyer’s (1999) seminal notion of a European “communication deficit” (p. 635), which they suggest has become increasingly urgent to address to sustain legitimacy in a volatile geopolitical context amid broad but contested public support (Pane & Innace, 2025, p. 75). As their study does not analyse the discursive content of expert communication itself, there remains scope to examine how legitimacy is constructed in institutional communication on recent policy initiatives before reaching intermediaries and the public.

Strategic communication research similarly suggests limitations in EU security and defence communication. Studies of CSDP missions identify low engagement and predominantly one-way messaging (Doyle & Desta, 2020, pp. 65-68), alongside a strong focus on intra-European audiences and shared values, which primarily reinforces internal legitimacy (Molnár et al., 2021, pp. 330-331). Conducted before the first CSDP mission on European territory in Ukraine in 2022 (Hoeffler et al., 2024, p. 3238), these studies focus on the implementation and effectiveness of digital communication strategies, which suggests scope to examine how legitimacy is discursively constructed in relation to recently expanded policies under the CSDP framework.

These developments are also embedded in broader debates about the EU’s identity as a normative actor. This is most prominently articulated through Manners’s (2002) concept of Normative Power Europe, which conceptualises the EU as a unique “hybrid polity” (p. 252) that exerts influence by projecting norms and values such as peace, rule of law, sustainability, democracy, and human rights, thereby defining what is considered “normal” (p. 253) in international relations and diplomacy. However, this conceptualisation remains contested and has been criticised in the literature as biased, inconsistent, overly idealistic, and reliant on differentiation from less normative others (cf. Diez, 2005; Erickson, 2011; Hyde-Price, 2008; Sjørnsen, 2006). Although Manners (2006, p. 194) maintains that normative and military dimensions are not inherently incompatible if militarisation remains oriented towards “sustainable peace” (p. 195) building, the debate underscores tensions between competing understandings of EU security and defence action.

Recent empirical work suggests that the EU's normative identity is not being replaced but recalibrated as it adopts a more assertive geopolitical posture to enhance its international credibility and institutional authority in defence, generating tensions that require strategic management and reconciliation (Ivančík & Andrassy, 2025, pp. 421-422). Similarly, Andersson and Britz (2025, p. 323) identify a shift in the EU's "raison d'être" (p. 338) from a civilian organisation focused on crisis management to one that enables member states' defence capacities, particularly through the EC's established role in industrial policy. Public diplomacy scholars have described this integration of soft, value-based power with hard, military power as "smart power" (Nye, 2009, p. 160). Hoijtink and Muchlenhoff (2019, p. 368), on the other hand, argue that European common security and defence is undergoing a "normalisation of militarism and the military masculinities associated with it" (p. 364), often legitimised through threat narratives. These developments raise questions about the EU's continued efforts to reconcile and legitimise recent institutional shifts and to overcome traditional military-versus-civilian/normative dichotomies (Ivančík & Andrassy, 2025, p. 422).

Managing such tensions is inherently complex. Malmio (2024, p. 625) argues that linking social sustainability, a core normative value, with security produces constant paradoxical trade-offs between efforts to improve security and to support sustainability. This warrants further research into how actors in increasingly complex global politics understand and manage the relationship between security and values such as social sustainability. At the level of communication, Hoffjann (2021) suggests that political, economic, and organisational actors manage such paradoxes and societal contradictions through "oscillation between strategic clarity and strategic ambiguity" (p. 297). Both conceptual insights are relevant to Ivančík and Andrassy's (2025) empirical finding on the recalibration of the EU's normative identity.

The durability of this politicisation remains uncertain. Hoeffler et al. (2024) contend that "negative politicisation" (p. 3225) may reemerge if shared perceptions of existential threat among member states weaken, potentially reinforcing fragmentation without clear strategic purpose or leadership. Overall, recent debates indicate that EU legitimacy in security and defence extends beyond justifying increased military spending to national governments and citizens and also involves legitimising and consolidating an expanded role for the EU, particularly

the EC, in this policy domain. The following section, therefore, focuses on how the EC has been studied as a legitimisation actor.

2.3 The European Commission as a Legitimation Actor

As a “*sui generis*” (Pollack, 2005, p. 381) supranational organisation, the EU, alongside its “democratic deficit” (Majone, 1998, p. 5), has long been the focus of foundational legitimacy research (e.g. Beetham & Lord, 1998).

Much of this literature builds on Scharpf’s (1998, pp. 3-5) distinction between input legitimacy (citizen participation and representation) and output legitimacy (policy effectiveness and outcomes). Schmidt (2013) extends this by introducing “throughput legitimacy” (p. 3), emphasising the quality of decision-making processes that connect input and output through transparency, inclusiveness, and openness to consultation. This parallels communication research, where recent scholarship calls for more participatory approaches to strategic communication in public policy processes (Macnamara, 2025, pp. 15-19).

Regarding the EC as the EU’s executive institution, Davies (2025) shows that, in a context of increasing politicisation and crisis, the EC’s actions are driven not only by instrumental problem-solving but also by legitimacy concerns, particularly the need to signal appropriate behaviour. Her empirical study of decision-making during the global financial crisis highlights the role of symbolic and communicative action in maintaining credibility and addressing multiple audiences (pp. 16-17). As integration deepens and the EC’s competences expand, she suggests that reliance on discursive legitimisation is likely to increase to sustain legitimacy amid contestation (p. 17), yet how such legitimacy is discursively constructed in recent crisis-driven defence policy shifts remains underexplored. Similarly, Rauh (2023, pp. 695-696) argues that the expansion of the EC’s competences and its growing politicisation in public debate have increased the need for supranational public communication. He nevertheless finds that the EC’s press communication remains highly technocratic, reflecting internal consensus-building and bargaining processes while limiting the ability to legitimise or delegitimise both policy action and the EU as an institution in broader public discourse (pp. 685-686).

Echoing this growing need for EU legitimacy-building in times of multiple crises, Pansardi and Battegazzorre (2018, pp. 856-858) offer one of the few systematic applications of a discursive legitimation framework to EC communication. Analysing SOTEU addresses, they identify a shift from then-Commission President Barroso's technocratic, rational, and output-based discourse – relying on rationalization and authorization, consistent with Rauh's (2023) findings – to Juncker's greater emphasis on democratic and value-based claims through moral evaluation, mythopoesis, and authorization (pp. 867-868). This demonstrates variation at the level of political speech, but it remains unclear how such logics, technocratic language, and legitimation strategies shape the discursive legitimation of unprecedented defence imperatives in the post-2022 context.

Recent studies further point to the EC's expanded role in crises, specifically in the security and defence domain, and begin to address its discursive aspects, for example, from discursive institutionalism and neo-functionalist perspectives (e.g. Capati, 2024; Håkansson, 2024; Müller et al., 2023). Notably, Garančovská and Brusenbauch Meislová (2026), building on earlier work on EU leaders' social media legitimation (Özdemir et al., 2025), analyse how EU institutions discursively construct and legitimise European agency attribution on X. They find that the EC constructs itself as the central leader and coordinator of Europe's response to the war in Ukraine, using inclusive language such as “we” (p. 6) and emphasising collective effort (pp. 16-18). This raises questions about how such self-attributed agency translates into the discursive legitimation of recent defence policy shifts.

From an elite communication perspective, Hensell (2021, pp. 166-167) further shows, through an ethnographic and document study of EU security research policymaking, that the EC builds legitimacy by developing close relationships with selected security and technology stakeholders who help shape policies and then also support and justify them. These findings relate to debates over technocratic communication, low citizen engagement, and concerns about “throughput legitimacy” (Schmidt, 2013, p. 7).

Taken together, these studies indicate that the intersection of strategic communication, EU legitimacy, and discursive legitimation is a promising but still developing field (Özdemir et al., 2025, p. 20), specifically in the context of post-2022 European security and defence policy debates and the EC's role therein.

2.4 Synthesis

Existing research has examined how norms, strategic autonomy, and crisis narratives are mobilised in relation to post-2022 policy developments. However, limited work critically applies discursive legitimisation frameworks, such as Van Leeuwen's (2007) typology, to EU security and defence discourse. Specifically, no study seems to have applied this framework to the EC's policy communication on post-2022 defence initiatives. This indicates a clear scope for a more detailed investigation of how discursive legitimisation strategies are employed to justify recent institutional shifts in this policy field. Simultaneously, current literature has renewed attention to legitimacy as a driver of the EC's actions in a changing political environment (Davies, 2025), warranting closer examination of how this legitimacy is constructed discursively.

While discursive legitimisation strategies have been examined in political discourse (e.g. Reyes, 2011) and in adjacent policy fields, such as financial crises (Vaara, 2014), digital data (Lischka, 2019), trade (Cheng, 2021), and feminist foreign policy (Karlsson, 2024), research on recent EU security and defence expansion has tended to favour alternative theoretical and empirical focuses and approaches (e.g. Capati, 2024; Garančová & Brusenbauch Meislová, 2026; Müller et al., 2023), limiting understanding of how such imperatives are discursively legitimised in policy communication. Addressing this gap would enable a more detailed analysis of discursive legitimisation strategies and generate critical insights into legitimacy-building during periods of crisis-driven change and unprecedented policy shifts.

Given that most EU executives are not directly elected, contested policies are often attributed to the EU as a whole. So, studying how the EC discursively legitimises defence imperatives through policy communication may also shed light on how it legitimises the EU as an institution (Özdemir et al., 2025, p. 6).

3. Theoretical Framework

The literature review shows that organisational and EU studies have increasingly adopted a processual understanding of legitimacy. However, detailed analyses of discursive legitimation strategies in post-2022 European defence policy communication remain scarce. To understand how powerful political actors discursively justify unprecedented imperatives in the current geopolitical environment, this study adopts a micro-level view on discursive legitimation within a macro-institutional context. This includes attention to the *language of legitimation* that addresses the underlying *why* questions and the broader discourses underpinning it. Accordingly, Theo van Leeuwen's (2007) seminal legitimation theory, complemented by Teun A. van Dijk's (1998) conceptualisation of legitimation, constitutes the theoretical backbone and lens of this thesis.

3.1 Legitimation in Discourse

Before outlining Van Leeuwen's (2007) framework, a conceptual clarification of legitimacy is necessary. Situated within the legitimacy-as-process perspective that emphasises the central role of language in studying legitimacy, this thesis distinguishes between *legitimacy* as an outcome (Suchman, 1995) and *legitimation* as the discursive process through which legitimacy is constructed. Rather than treating legitimacy as a static and empirically measurable property, the focus here is on how legitimation is discursively constructed in text (Suddaby et al., 2017, pp. 459-463).

Van Leeuwen (2007, p. 92) adopts Berger and Luckmann's (1966, p. 111) definition of legitimation as the process that explains and justifies an institutional order by presenting its meanings as valid and its practices as appropriate. In other words, legitimation is a social meaning-making process that constructs social practices as aligned with broader norms, values, and beliefs presumed to be widely shared (Johnson et al., 2006, p. 25). As legitimation discourse typically occurs

in political-institutional contexts, it can be seen as the institutional equivalent of interpersonal justification (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 255). Accordingly, Van Dijk (1998) considers legitimation as claims or beliefs by institutional actors that they act in accordance with “official norms, and (...) the prevalent moral order” (p. 256) and thus also with expectations and demands. Institutions are hereby understood as multifaceted societal structures that rest on normative, regulative, and socio-cognitive foundations of legitimacy (Scott, 1995, p. 33).

In this sense, legitimation gives implicit or explicit answers “to the question ‘Why’ – ‘Why should we do this?’ and ‘Why should we do this in this way?’” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 93). This process is never decontextualised or isolated but always embedded in institutional orders and social contexts (p. 92).

3.2 Van Leeuwen’s Discursive Legitimation Framework

Van Leeuwen (2007, p. 92) proposes a typology of four main legitimation categories, each comprising several subtypes, to explain how language constructs legitimation in text. These forms of legitimation occur separately or combined and can be used to legitimise, delegitimise, and critique practices, actions, and/or actors. As such, this theoretical framework explains how discourse syntactically and semantically produces legitimacy in public communication and social interaction. It builds on a preliminary version developed within the critical discourse-historical approach (see Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999) and provides the theoretical lens for conceptualising the “language of legitimation” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 91) in discourse.

3.2.1 Authorization

Authorization is “legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom and law, and of persons in whom institutional authority of some kind is vested” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 92). Van Leeuwen (2007) distinguishes between “personal authority” (p. 94) linked to institutional roles or status and “impersonal authority” (p. 96), meaning intangible rules, laws, or policies. Notably, references to timing can also be legitimised through personal authority, called “time summons” (p. 94), in which a speaker invokes their authority to decide when an action should occur. Drawing on Halliday’s (2014) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), this

legitimation form frequently occurs in verbal clauses expressing obligation. Impersonal authority constructs legitimation by evoking socially recognised sources and is particularly relevant to this thesis, focused on EU policy and institutional communication (Van Leeuwen, 2018, p. 147).

The “authority of tradition” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 96) legitimises by claiming that something has always been done in a particular way. This subtype is not tied to a single actor but to collectively enacted tradition, or, in Bourdieu’s (1977, p. 17) sense, shared internalised norms. Similarly, “authority of conformity” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 96) draws on the collective action of others, often through comparison. Moreover, “expert authority” (p. 94) relies on reference to expertise, while “role model authority” (p. 95) draws on opinion leaders and exemplary figures to legitimise actions.

3.2.2 Moral Evaluation

Moral Evaluation refers to “legitimation by (often very oblique) reference to value systems” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 92), whereby legitimation is “linked to specific discourses of moral value” (p. 97). Here, the linguistic devices, such as evaluative adjectives, may be explicit, but the underlying value system is usually not. Consequently, Moral Evaluation is analytically challenging because it is typically recognised through commonsense and shared socio-cultural knowledge (p. 98). This draws on Bourdieu’s (1977) notion of “genesis amnesia” (p. 79) to describe how historically constructed values become naturalised, thereby obscuring their ideological origins and sustaining invisible institutional power relations (pp. 167-168). It also corresponds with Van Dijk’s (1998) understanding of legitimation as “one of the main social functions of ideologies” (p. 255), eventually contributing to the Gramscian concept of “ideological [or cultural] hegemony” (p. 261), in which dominant meanings and values are naturalised and accepted as commonsense. In that sense, institutional actions and policies not yet widely regarded as normal may be linked to broader systems of value that also render them commonly beneficial (p. 259; see Reyes, 2011, p. 787).

Van Leeuwen (2007) differentiates three subtypes, namely “evaluation”, “abstraction”, and “analogies” (pp. 98-99). Evaluations can function as a form of “Naturalization” (p. 99), presenting social practices as natural or normal by re-

placing moral and cultural orders with the natural order, for example, using evaluative adjectives or references to time and change (p. 98). Abstraction legitimises by representing social practices in abstract terms that foreground their morally desirable qualities (p. 99). Analogies legitimise or delegitimise through implicit or explicit comparisons (p. 99). In this sense, Moral Evaluation is particularly relevant for political discourse, especially in the value-laden EU context.

3.2.3 Rationalization

Van Leeuwen (2007, p. 100) argues that Moral Evaluation and Rationalization are often intertwined in contemporary discourse and defines Rationalization as “legitimation by reference to the goals and uses of institutionalized social action, and to the knowledge society has constructed to endow them with cognitive validity” (p. 92). He differentiates between “instrumental rationalization” (p. 101) and “theoretical rationalization” (p. 103). Instrumental rationalization justifies social practices by reference to their “goals”, “means”, or “effect” (pp. 101-103), while theoretical rationalization legitimises actions by explicitly grounding them in a taken-for-granted “natural order of things” (p. 101) and “the way things are” (p. 103). Regarding instrumental rationalization, not all references to purpose constitute legitimation (p. 101). Purposes become legitimating when they are moralised, that is, when linked to moral values such as “purposefulness, usefulness and effectiveness” (p. 102). In such cases, purposiveness and purpose reflect what Habermas (1976) terms “strategic-utilitarian morality” (p. 22).

Theoretical rationalization, by contrast, grounds legitimation in claims about truth, nature, science, or reality, on which a social practice is said to rest. Van Leeuwen (2007) distinguishes between “definition”, “explanation”, and “prediction” (p. 104). Based on generalisations, these subtypes respectively legitimise social practices by defining an activity in terms of another moralised activity, describing the nature of the involved actors, or offering predictions based on expertise. Drawing on Berger and Luckmann (1966, p. 112), Van Leeuwen (2007) further distinguishes “experiential and scientific rationalizations” (p. 104), whereby the former refers to anecdotal commonsense knowledge, and the latter invokes trusted bodies of knowledge to legitimise institutional orders. In political discourse, Reyes (2011) refers to theoretical rationalization as “rationality” (p. 786),

in which decisions and actions are presented as the outcome of a thoughtful, consultative process. In short, theoretical rationalization is closely related to Naturalization but relies on explicit representations of a taken-for-granted reality, not on references to usefulness and morality, although the latter remains submerged in any Rationalization (Van Leeuwen, 2007, pp. 100-101).

3.2.4 Mythopoesis

Mythopoesis is “legitimation conveyed through narratives whose outcomes reward legitimate actions and punish non-legitimate actions” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 92). Van Leeuwen (2007) labels these narratives “moral tales” (p. 105), which reward actors who engage in legitimate social practice or restore institutional order, and “cautionary tales” (p. 106), which warn against engaging in illegitimate actions that violate social norms and legitimate order. Such stories may also use symbolic actions to represent broader institutional or social systems (e.g. the military or security governance) as either desirable and justified (legitimizing) or problematic and open to critique (delegitimizing) (pp. 106-107).

Importantly, this category has been criticised as underdeveloped and too narrowly defined, especially in the EU context, where foundational myths of post-war cooperation and peace remain prevalent narratives (see Bennett, 2022). Therefore, this thesis adopts a broader understanding of Mythopoesis, alongside Van Leeuwen’s (2007) conceptualisation, namely “a form of legitimation through history” (Bennett, 2022, p. 2). That is, narratives of the past that have attained a status of truth within a given social context, building on Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) “externalization, objectivation and internalization” (p. 149).

3.3 A Critical-Strategic Lens on Discursive Legitimation

Importantly, Van Leeuwen (2007) argues that legitimation strategies often link social practices to broader “discourses of value” (p. 109). This is particularly relevant considering what Habermas (1976) terms a legitimation crisis, in which the grounds for legitimation in contemporary societies are increasingly unstable. In contexts where shared moral frames and discourses are contested and divided, institutions must work harder – and differently – to legitimise themselves and their practices (Van Leeuwen, 2007, pp. 110-111). Consistent with this and his frame-

work's critical discursive foundations, Van Leeuwen (2018, pp. 142-144) later stresses that investigating the *why* questions must go beyond what is explicitly articulated to also consider what is omitted, silenced, or implicit. Legitimation must therefore be understood as emerging from interdiscursive, intertextual, and recontextualised dynamics, and from the different discourses and moral value frameworks in which it is embedded (pp. 145, 151).

Finally, a conceptual clarification is necessary, as this thesis is disciplinarily anchored in strategic communication, understood as the purposeful use of communication to achieve organisational goals (Hallahan et al., 2007, p. 3), where legitimisation is often regarded as a “communicative prerequisite for accomplishing the strategic intent” (Aggerholm & Thomsen, 2016, p. 197). As this study adopts Van Leeuwen's (2007) framework as its primary theoretical lens, it should be noted that his legitimisation categories do not explicitly foreground deliberateness or strategic intent. While such intent may very well underlie communicative practices, particularly in political discourse (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 256), his approach enables the detangling of how purposiveness is discursively constructed to present social practices as legitimate, regardless of whether purposeful intent can be empirically verified (Van Leeuwen, 2000, p. 66).

Subsequent work building on this framework has made the strategic dimension more explicit. Vaara et al. (2024) define discursive legitimisation strategies as “the deliberate use of language to develop, maintain, or change perceptions of legitimacy” (p. 2353). Reyes (2011, pp. 783-784) similarly conceptualises them in political discourse as goal-oriented, intentional processes through which actors justify courses of action, naturalise political goals, and enact “symbolic power” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 165). Van Dijk (1998, p. 257) further suggests that legitimisation becomes part of political institutions' crisis management strategies, particularly when institutional legitimacy, power, and authority are at stake and the self-legitimation of institutions and ingroups, alongside the delegitimation of others and outgroups, becomes necessary. As such, legitimisation strategies may be deliberate and strategic, but also draw on broader, taken-for-granted discourses (Vaara & Tienari, 2008, p. 987).

The legitimacy-as-process perspective recognises this productive tension regarding intentionality. Accordingly, in line with recent work on the persuasive use of language to construct legitimacy, this thesis is situated between the two poles

of this debate (Suddaby et al., 2017, p. 460; cf. Vaara et al., 2006, p. 804). Likewise, although foundational to the legitimacy-as-property perspective, Suchman (1995, pp. 576-577) rejects a strict dichotomy between strategic agency and institutional/structural constraints, advocating for an integrative view instead. In this sense, discursive legitimation strategies may involve intention and strategic agency at the micro-level while remaining embedded within broader societal and discursive-institutional contexts at the macro-level, which arguably offers a productive middle ground in increasingly complex environments.

3.4 Synthesis

In summary, Van Leeuwen's (2007) discursive legitimation framework provides the central theoretical lens of this thesis. It offers a micro-level *language of legitimation* – Authorization, Moral Evaluation, Rationalization, and Mythopoesis – through which actors answer the *why* questions used to justify political actions and institutional orders. Simultaneously, the framework situates these strategies within the broader discourses and moral frameworks they draw on and combine. The legitimacy-as-process perspective (Suddaby et al., 2017) grounds these discursive strategies in an understanding of legitimacy as discursively constructed within institutional contexts. Van Dijk's (1998) insights further situate legitimation within political institutions, linking it to power and ideology.

As an appointed EU body, the EC's authority is legally and institutionally constrained, as its power is bounded by law and shared with other EU institutions. This requires continuous justification of decisions and actions in legal, political, and public terms to meet expectations and demands. Times of crisis and institutional shifts often involve changing social norms and values, and thus, this need intensifies (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975, pp. 123-125). In this sense, the EC's legitimation efforts constitute a collective action aimed at justifying both political practices and the EU institution itself. Legitimation discourse is therefore an inherently political form of (policy) communication and language use through which practices of institutional order are justified (Van Dijk, 1998, pp. 255-257; Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 92). This theoretical framework is therefore well-suited to an approach anchored in strategic communication and focused on a political-institutional actor's discursive legitimation strategies.

4. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological choices made to address the research question, building on the theoretical framework. It sets out the thesis's moderate, critical social constructionist and interpretivist onto-epistemological foundation and presents the research design as a single-case study. It then details the selection of policy documents and communications for empirical analysis, introduces Fairclough's (1992, 1995) three-dimensional CDA approach as the analytical method, and explains the analytical procedure. The chapter concludes with critical reflections on quality assurance and study limitations.

4.1 Research Paradigm

Consistent with Berger and Luckmann's (1966, p. 111) definition of legitimation underlying Van Leeuwen's (2007) framework, as described in the previous chapter, this thesis adopts a moderate social constructionist ontology and interpretivist epistemology. Working in a constructionist paradigm prioritises understanding meaning-making processes over positivist causal explanation and values research as "critique" (Prasad, 2017, p. 7). An interpretivist epistemology holds that knowledge of the social world emerges through multiple interpretations (pp. 14-16). In this thesis, this epistemological position is grounded in the ontological tenet that reality is partly socially constructed, while recognising the existence of institutional contexts and material conditions (Hacking, 1999, p. 25).

This moderate constructionist perspective acknowledges the constitutive role of language, but also that language does not fully determine meaning and is embedded in social contexts (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000, p. 1130; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 176-178). In line with the research question, the thesis examines the representations, meanings, and discursive strategies through which legitimacy is constructed in the EC's policy discourse, and how these are shaped by, and in turn shape, political debate and agendas. Accordingly, the EC's official

policy communication is treated as a discursive site where political meaning is negotiated, not as a fixed truth or neutral reflection of reality (Gralewski, 2011, p. 166). Aligned with Van Leeuwen's (2007) critical foundations, the thesis also adopts a critical social constructionist stance. It offers one situated, reflexive interpretation that aims to contribute to greater transparency and ongoing debates on shifting policy priorities in a post-2022 society, rather than claiming objective truth (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 209-211; Wodak, 2000, p. 203).

4.2 Research Design and Case

This thesis adopts a qualitative case-study design, using the EC's *Readiness 2030* initiative as a single case. Policy communication and its complex discursive dimensions cannot be studied in isolation from their (geo)political and institutional context (Canary & Taylor, 2020, p. 685). A qualitative case study centred on analysing a contemporary phenomenon in its real environment is therefore suitable (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014, p. 26; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 37-38). It enables an in-depth exploration of the "unit of analysis" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 39), namely the EC's legitimisation discourse surrounding the *Readiness 2030* initiative, as articulated through its official policy communication. To address the central research question, this communication serves as the empirical data and is analysed using an abductive critical discourse-analytical approach. CDA is, by its nature, abductive, as it constantly moves between theory and data and between macro- and micro-levels (Cap, 2019, pp. 6-7; Wodak, 2004, p. 200).

The case is "bounded" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 40) to the EC's institutional voice and to the period from the announcement of the *ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030* on 4 March 2025 until the transition into the delivery phase, marked by the presentation of the *Defence Readiness Roadmap* on 16 October 2025 (European Commission, 2025f). From a strategic communication perspective, this delimitation captures the early articulation of meaning and strategic rationale in the policy process. As outlined in the introduction, 2025 represents a significant paradigm shift in European defence policy, characterised by intensified US pressure, heightened threat perceptions, and high but volatile political and public support. The EC's *Readiness 2030* initiative is thus a salient instance be-

cause it proposes a recent and unprecedented expansion of EU-level defence efforts in a traditionally constrained domain (Gorawantschy et al., 2025, pp. 3-4).

4.3 Data Collection and Sampling

Patton (1990, p. 169) notes that purposeful sampling in qualitative research involves selecting information-rich cases that illuminate the phenomenon under question – in this thesis, discursive legitimisation amid a strategic institutional shift as a communicative phenomenon. This study adopted a purposeful sampling strategy, selecting the EC’s *Readiness 2030* initiative and its official policy communication as a *politically important* and information-rich discursive site through which the EC constructs and legitimises increased defence imperatives vis-à-vis diverse stakeholders (Patton, 1990, p. 180; Silverman, 2024, p. 70). This provides a timely case for examining institutional discursive legitimisation efforts amid complex expectations in a new security environment. The EC was chosen as an actor over other EU institutions because it has a crucial agenda-setting and communicative role in EU policy (Garančovská & Brusenbauch Meislová, 2026, p. 8) and has consolidated its authority in the defence domain in recent years, labelled “Brusselisation process” (Håkansson, 2024, p. 39) by some and “power grab” (Sorgi & Faggionato, 2025) by others.

4.3.1 Document Selection

To prioritise depth over breadth in line with a qualitative case study and critical discourse-analytical approach (Silverman, 2024, p. 49; Vaara & Tienari, 2010, p. 245), the empirical material was purposefully selected considering its relevance to the research aim and question. Documents were chosen for analysis because they reflect how institutions and organisations present themselves and their actions, enabling an in-depth understanding of social processes and how they depict reality (Coffey, 2014, pp. 368-370; Silverman, 2024, p. 266).

The following inclusion criteria guided the purposeful selection, aligning with the research aim, question, and theory, while maintaining the scope manageable:

- Documents written in English

- Documents published between March and October 2025 on *Readiness 2030*, focusing on military capabilities, defence investment, and defence industrial policy
- Documents publicly available on the EC’s official website as a primary source, reflecting its collective and public-facing institutional voice¹
- Documents rich in discursive strategies, such as Commission Communications (COM) and Joint Communications with the HR/VP (JOIN), which provide strategic rationales, stimulate debate, and outline policy actions and direction for EU institutions, member states, policymakers, industry stakeholders, and publics (European Union, 2024, pp. 10-12)

First, the EC’s official webpage on *Readiness 2030* was screened to identify key policy documents and their corresponding webpages. The *White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030*, which outlines a new approach to the future of European defence, was selected as the initiative’s central document. It also includes information on the *ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030*, a package that bolsters European defence capabilities through new financial instruments. Two additional key documents were included, namely the *Defence Readiness Omnibus*, presented on 17 June 2025, which proposes regulatory simplification for defence measures, and the *Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030*, presented on 16 October 2025, which operationalises the White Paper into concrete milestones. They were selected because they are listed alongside the White Paper as core policy actions within the broader *Readiness 2030* initiative (European Commission, 2025f) (see Appendix A for detailed descriptions).

Additional related materials (public plenary speeches, press conference remarks/speeches, press releases, Q&A documents, a press statement, and a public letter) were selected because they serve as public, rhetorical, and strategic amplifications of formal policy texts. These were identified using keywords including “defence readiness”, “defence omnibus”, “readiness 2030”, “rearm Europe”, “defence roadmap”, and “defence white paper”, alongside a timeframe filter on the

¹ Speeches and quotes in communication materials are therefore not considered expressions of personal viewpoints but collective and curated representations (see “Collegiality”; European Commission, 2024, p. 3).

EC's Press Corner.² Ursula von der Leyen's SOTEU address was also included because these annual speeches publicly legitimise past and future Commission actions, and the 2025 address specifically foregrounded *Readiness 2030*.

Table 1 summarises the selected documents, and Appendix A provides further details on type, title, date, source/link, context/purpose/audience, and policy status. All documents were downloaded and stored as PDFs for analysis.

Table 1

*Empirical Material Overview*³

Quantity	EC Official Policy Communication – Documents	Source
1	Policy document – Joint White Paper, <i>White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030</i> (22 pages)	EC DG DEFIS webpage
1	Policy document – Commission Communication (COM), <i>Defence Readiness Omnibus</i> (15 pages)	EC DG DEFIS webpage
1	Policy document – Joint Communication (JOIN), <i>Preserving Peace – Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030</i> (16 pages)	EC DG DEFIS webpage
2	Public plenary speeches (transcribed) by Commission President Von der Leyen and Defence Commissioner Kubilius	EC Press Corner
8	Press conference remarks/speeches (transcribed) following College meetings by different Commission officials	EC Press Corner
3	Press releases	EC Press Corner
2	Q&As	EC Press Corner
1	Press statement (transcribed) by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen	EC Press Corner
1	Public letter by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen	EC Press Corner
1	SOTEU address (transcribed) by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen	EC Press Corner
21		

Under the EU's transparency principle (European Union, 2026), interinstitutional policy communication occurs on a public stage and is accessible to citizens. Although policy documents are formally addressed to EU institutions, as indicated on their cover pages, in Goffman's (1956) terms, they can therefore be considered institutional "frontstage behaviour" (p. 78). Together with corresponding speeches and press material, this thesis treats them as an integrated institutional discourse through which the EC collectively articulates and legitimises defence imperatives. Accordingly, the corpus was analysed holistically, enabling an in-depth, varied, and rich analysis of the EC's official, strategic policy communication.

² Social media content was excluded as it tends to be less authoritative and often disseminates claims already constructed in official policy documents and formal (press) communications in condensed form, which places it beyond this study's scope. Media texts were also excluded to keep a focus on the EC's institutional voice rather than its recontextualisation or reception, in line with the research aim and question. Nevertheless, these sources could be valuable for a comparative analysis in a study with a longer timeframe and more available resources.

³ The Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space (DG DEFIS) is the EC's department responsible for policy activities in the European defence and space sectors (European Commission, n.d.-b).

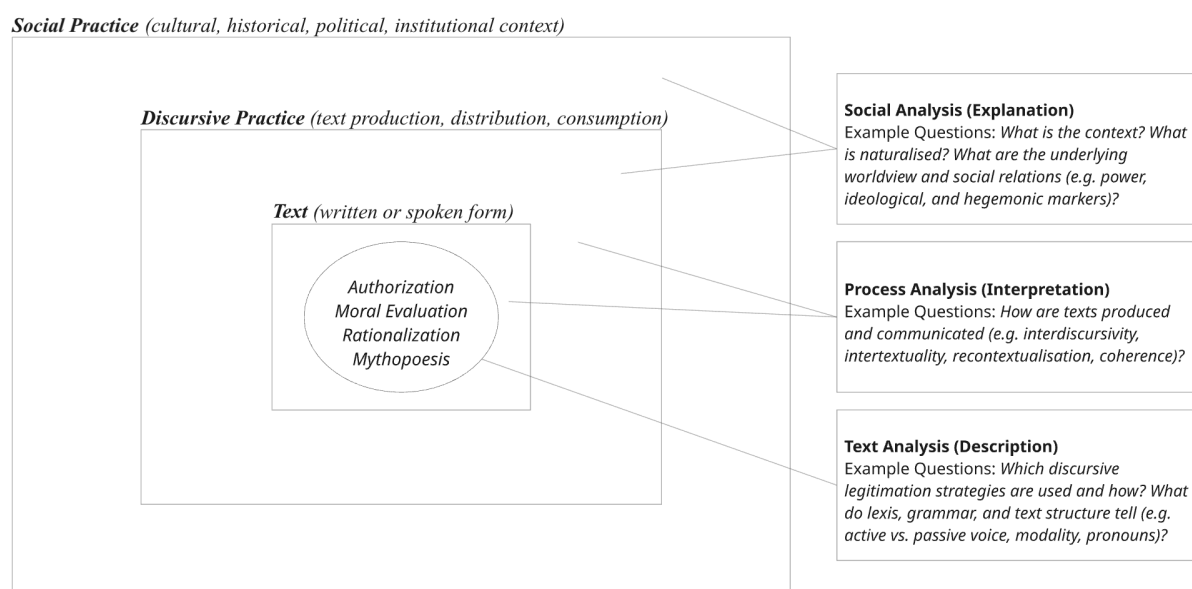
4.4 Analysis Process

Van Leeuwen's (2007) framework is rooted in discourse analysis. As a leading CDA scholar (e.g. Van Leeuwen, 2008, 2018), he emphasises CDA's usefulness for critically analysing how legitimization is constructed in discourse. Fairclough's (1992, 1995) three-dimensional CDA model was chosen as an appropriate analytical tool because it allows linking legitimization strategies to their communicative and (geo)political context, accounting for complexity, ideology, and power in a highly politicised policy field (Canary & Taylor, 2020, pp. 683-684; Van Dijk, 1998, p. 256). The research question supports this choice, focusing on the *discursive* (CDA) *legitimation* (Authorization, Moral Evaluation, Rationalization, Mythopoesis) of increased defence imperatives.

Accordingly, this thesis integrates Van Leeuwen's (2007, p. 92) concepts as analytical categories into Fairclough's (1992, p. 73) model to analyse their linguistic realisation (text level), production and circulation (discursive practice), and broader societal context (social practice) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Integrated Analytical Framework



Note. Adapted from “Critical Discourse Analysis as a Research Tool”, by H. Janks, 1997, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 18(3), p. 330 (<https://doi.org/10.1080/0159630970180302>).

While *Readiness 2030* has still received little scholarly attention from a discursive/communicative perspective (see Pane & Innace, 2025, p. 76), existing work in the field shows that combining CDA with Van Leeuwen's (2007) strategies to study a single actor's policy communication is a solid approach (e.g. Cheng, 2021). Adopting CDA as a method within a (moderate) social constructionist ontology is also consistent with recent work in discursive legitimation studies (see Vaara et al., 2024, p. 2367). The following sections outline the model's methodological foundations⁴ and the analytical procedure.

4.4.1 Analytical Method: Critical Discourse Analysis after Fairclough

Fairclough's (1992) "three-dimensional conception of discourse" (p. 73) offers a comprehensive approach to critically analysing language use in society across three dialectically related levels.

The textual dimension closely examines linguistic features. Drawing on Halliday's (2014) SFL, Fairclough (1992, pp. 73-78) proposes focusing on vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and text structure. This addresses text form, content, and absences (Fairclough, 1995, pp. 5-7). Legitimation strategies are realised at this level through different syntactic, semantic, and rhetorical forms (e.g. goal-oriented instrumental rationalization often appears in purpose clauses with "(in order) to"; Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 102). Importantly, such legitimation forms can occur in combination in a single sentence, be implicit or explicit, and be embedded in broader descriptions, only loosely connected to the institutions or practices they legitimise (p. 92). Identifying them requires close textual analysis and contextual knowledge, making this dimension particularly challenging for this study, as *defence imperatives* in the EU institutional context are legitimised through various sub-practices (e.g. increased deregulation, capability investment, collaboration proposals, competitiveness measures).

The discursive practice dimension connects the first and third levels by analysing how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed within social and historical contexts (Fairclough, 1992, pp. 78-86). Therefore, mapping the background of

⁴ Fairclough's (1992, 1995) three-dimensional CDA model is a theoretically informed methodological approach (see Cap, 2019, pp. 6-7). This thesis deliberately applies his model and its concepts as an analytical tool, given their overlap and shared epistemological assumptions with Van Leeuwen (2007, 2018) and Van Dijk (1998).

policy documents, speeches, and press materials (see Appendix A) was an important preparatory step. This also means considering that policy texts are shaped through complex negotiations and stakeholder consultations before being communicated to audiences “from above” (Wodak, 2000, p. 203). Fairclough (1995) further emphasises the importance of “intertextuality” and “interdiscursivity” (p. 134), that is, how texts explicitly reference or reproduce other texts (e.g. quoting officials or referring to reports) and how they implicitly draw on and combine discourses from other domains (e.g. business discourse in defence policy), thereby often recontextualising meaning.

In the social practice dimension, the focus shifts to situating the identified linguistic and discursive features within broader social and cultural change processes and (geo)political constraints (Fairclough, 1995, p. 19). This allows examining how discourse might reproduce, transform, or contribute to ideologies, power relations, and their legitimisation within the institution of the EU (Fairclough, 1992, pp. 86-96). This is particularly useful considering ongoing geopolitical developments in Europe and globally, and the associated changes in social identities, cultural values, and strategic priorities.

4.4.2 Analytical Procedure: Operationalisation and Coding

The analysis followed an iterative, abductive approach, using a Word-based analysis schedule and the software NVivo and Miro. Following Willig (2014, p. 346) and Silverman (2024, p. 298), I began with intensive familiarisation after skimming and organising the documents. I read and reread each text closely to inductively identify discursive patterns, guided by the research question and without a predefined framework in mind. This produced manual open codes that capture the texts’ broader arguments. I also consulted legal frameworks and reports referenced in the empirical material for intertextual and contextual insights.

In a second step, I revisited these inductive codes with Van Leeuwen’s (2007) framework in mind. This allowed me to develop an operationalisation scheme (see Table 2) for the three-dimensional analysis by translating his legitimisation categories into a policy-communication context. This scheme, alongside an Excel-file detailing each subtype, guided the subsequent analysis, while I remained open to bottom-up insights (Yu & Zheng, 2023, pp. 123-124).

As suggested by Janks (1997, pp. 331-335), I started with close textual analysis, reading each document four times to identify the four legitimization strategies. Following an abductive approach, I coded strategies whenever their function (e.g. means-end logic) was evident, instead of limiting them to fixed grammatical forms. In relation to these legitimization instances, I also manually coded relevant structural, grammatical, lexical, and cohesive features (e.g. modals, pronouns, active/passive voice, value-laden lexis, tone) (Fairclough, 1989, pp. 110-111; see Halliday, 2014). I documented all steps, rationales, and refinements in the analysis schedule. The material's high intertextuality (e.g. press releases rearticulating policy document content) allowed me to comparatively check if my coding remained consistent over time and across the material.

Table 2
Operationalisation and Coding Scheme

Van Leeuwen's Categories	Operationalisation based on Theory	Preliminary Topics emerged from EC Official Policy Communication	NVivo Colour Code
Authorization - Custom - Authority - Commendation	References to authority such as institutions, laws, policies, experts, or widely accepted or majority practices and traditions.	Arguments referring to institutional authorities such as EU officials or institutions, NATO frameworks, member states, or strategic reports and EU regulations/policies.	Blue
Moral Evaluation - Evaluation - Abstraction - Analogies	Statements invoking values, norms, ethical responsibilities, higher purposes, or notions of what is good, right, natural, normal, or desirable.	Arguments framing defence readiness as a collective responsibility to protect European values, democracy, and citizens.	Green
Rationalization - Instrumental Rationalization - Theoretical Rationalization	Statements justifying action through goals, means, effects, or explanations of the strategic environment, often supported by factual claims or quantification.	Arguments presenting defence readiness and policy instruments as necessary and effective for collective security, geopolitical realities, and/or competitiveness.	Red
Mythopoesis - Moral Tales - Cautionary Tales	Narratives and stories about the past and/or future that portray action as leading to positive outcomes or inaction as leading to negative consequences.	Narratives suggesting that decisive European action ensures security, while inaction risks vulnerability or conflict, as well as myths about European history.	Purple

I then moved to the meso-level, examining legitimization as discursive practice, with close attention to history, intertextuality, interdiscursivity, recontextualisation, and the production and communication of the texts. At the macro-level, I situated these legitimization efforts, linguistic realisations, and communicative practices within wider security and defence debates, broader (geo)political contexts, and social change processes in Europe. NVivo memos and annotations, alongside a visual map on Miro (see Appendix B), supported these stages as I used them to develop my findings and draw connections across the three levels. In practice, and consistent with an abductive approach, I often oscillated between analysis levels and returned to particularly revealing passages, thereby deprioritising the more technical sections of the policy documents (Vaara, 2014, pp. 504-505).

A final review of all documents and notes ensured that no further insights or interpretations were missed. I then synthesised my findings and discursive logics into a Word-based table (see Appendix B), using the same template as the analysis overview in Chapter 5 (see Figure 2), which is a condensed version thereof. Ongoing peer discussions, feedback from the academic support centre, and regular check-ins with my supervisor helped address biases and strengthen the analysis's credibility and consistency (Silverman, 2024, pp. 84-91).

4.5 Reflexivity, Trustworthiness, and Research Ethics

Reflexivity is essential to producing meaningful and trustworthy qualitative research (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2021, p. 39), particularly when conducting CDA, which requires constant movement between micro- and macro-analysis (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000, p. 1145). This connects to equally important ethical considerations (Silverman, 2024, p. 113).

Van Dijk (2015) describes CDA as discourse analysis “with an attitude” (p. 466), which necessitates reflexivity about one's personal position. I acknowledge that my Western European/Italian background unavoidably shapes how I interpret EU policy texts and communications, especially as they are produced from and for a European perspective. I therefore adopted Janks's (1997, p. 331) approach of reading both *with* and *against* the text, balancing critical distance with an effort to understand intended meanings. As Machin and Mayr (2012, p. 5) note, being *critical* does not mean arbitrarily *criticising* or accusing, but rather denaturalising assumptions, meanings, and, in this thesis, legitimisation processes. I remained especially reflective on this, as contemporary security and defence issues are highly sensitive and nuanced, and currently affect the lifeworld of many people.

Moreover, while working with public documents reduces data privacy concerns if referenced correctly (Silverman, 2024, pp. 256-257), I remained reflexive about these texts being strategically curated for public and institutional audiences and about much classified information remaining undisclosed. Compiling a detailed overview (see Appendix A) helped me stay aware of the purposes for which these unsolicited documentary data were produced (Coffey, 2014, pp. 367-369).

Overall, to ensure quality and trustworthiness as qualitative equivalents of reliability and validity, I prioritised well-justified, data-grounded analysis (credibil-

ity), rich descriptions (transferability), clear documentation of the replicable analysis process (dependability), and ongoing reflexive awareness of my role in the research process (conformity) (Priya, 2020, p. 102; Silverman, 2024, p. 81). Accordingly, this study seeks “analytic generalisations about social processes” (Silverman, 2024, p. 71). The in-depth analysis and concluding discussion may thus offer broader insights and help transfer findings to deepen understanding of discursive legitimisation as a communicative phenomenon in other contexts of strategic and complex institutional shifts (pp. 72-75).

4.6 Limitations

Nevertheless, this study is subject to limitations related to its scope, resources, and timeframe, which shaped the research design. The case is delimited to a specific policy moment, deeply embedded within an EU policy context, and the corpus prioritised depth over breadth. Consequently, although allowing for theoretical abstraction, the findings cannot be generalised in a representative or universal way to other institutional actors or policy communication processes (Silverman, 2024, pp. 70-75).

Moreover, both the legitimacy-as-process perspective and CDA, as employed in this study, do not capture other actors’ perceptions, interpretations, and receptions in the legitimisation process (Fairclough, 1992, p. 86; Suddaby et al., 2017, pp. 462-463). While acknowledging that stakeholder multiplicity is central to policy communication research (Canary & Taylor, 2020, p. 682), this thesis does not empirically examine audience effects. Instead, it focuses on how legitimacy is constructed through a single actor’s discourse, based only on document analysis (Coffey, 2014, pp. 369-370). While the rationale behind this approach is outlined above in line with the research aim and question, it limits the potential for method triangulation and for identifying alternative discourses or ideological contestation between different actors.

Finally, CDA has been criticised for bias and lack of rigour (Vaara & Tienari, 2010, p. 246). Therefore, this thesis rigorously followed the established quality criteria, engaged in ongoing reflexivity, and provided a transparent account of methodological choices. However, within an interpretivist paradigm, interpretations remain shaped by the researcher’s perspective (Gee, 2011, p. 9).

5. Analysis and Results

This chapter presents the analysis findings and results, informed by the theoretical framework and CDA concepts, and structured according to Fairclough's (1992, 1995) model. Each discursive theme, representing a core discursive logic in the EC's *Readiness 2030* policy communication, is organised across three dimensions: the textual, the discursive, and the social, while accounting for their interconnections. The textual dimension identifies and describes the syntactic and semantic realisation of legitimisation strategies, as defined in Chapter 3. The discursive and social dimensions offer interpretation and critical contextualisation, situating legitimations within broader communicative practices and social, (geo)political contexts. The empirical material is analysed as a collective representation of the EC's institutional policy discourse. All excerpts and quotes are illustrative examples (see Empirical Material References and Appendix A).

5.1 Constructing Europe: “A New Europe Must Emerge”

A central discursive logic underpinning the legitimisation of defence imperatives in the EC's policy communication is here termed *Transformation*. In the context of *Readiness 2030* and the associated unprecedented increase in EU defence investment, the EC discursively constructs a threatening environment and a corresponding sense of urgency, rendering transformation of the status quo inevitably necessary. It also paves the way for what Ursula von der Leyen, in her SOTEU address on 10 September 2025, called “a new Europe”, one that must fundamentally change to meet what the *White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030* terms a “historic challenge” (European Commission, 2025c, p. 21).

5.1.1 Textual Dimension: A Moral Duty in a Changing World

In communicatively constructing threat and urgency and advocating a transformation of Europe's defence approach, Moral Evaluation legitimises defence in-

vestment as a natural obligation, while theoretical rationalization refers to “the way things are” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 103) in the contemporary world. Together, among others, these strategies construct and legitimise defence imperatives and policy responses in the EC’s discourse. This is supported through active voice, an assertive tone, and imperative structures that underscore the EU’s capacity to act (“Europe must”, “we need”). The frequent use of (semi-)modal verbs (“need to”, “must”) signals urgency through strong deontic modality (Halliday, 2014, p. 692). By contrast, passive constructions are often used to describe the threat environment (“are being drawn”, “are ruthlessly weaponised”), reinforcing a sense of inevitability: events are happening *to* Europe, and it *must* respond to them. Across the discourse, global change is thus semantically located in the domain of *is*, as an unchangeable fact, while Europe’s response is situated in the domain of *ought*, as a matter of agency and responsibility.

Van Leeuwen (2007) describes this use of theoretical rationalization as closely related to “naturalization” (p. 103), grounding legitimation in claims to truth through explicit representations of reality. Excerpt (1) illustrates the explanation subtype, which legitimises practices by characterising the actors involved, namely external powers as “ambivalent or openly hostile”, and Europe as threatened and comparatively weak:

(1) *Battlelines for a **new world order** based on power **are being drawn** right now. So, yes, **Europe must fight**. For its place in **a world** in which **many major powers** are either **ambivalent or openly hostile** to Europe. **A world** of imperial ambitions and imperial wars. **A world** in which dependencies **are ruthlessly weaponised**. And it is for all of these reasons that **a new Europe must emerge**.* (Von der Leyen, 2025d, p. 1)⁵

The call for transformation (“a new Europe must emerge”) is grounded in the depiction of “a world”, repeated three times through a rhythmic parallelism that structures and reinforces the argument. Europe’s weakness and ill-prepared, over-regulated defence industry are further constructed through frequent references to “capability gaps and unnecessary red tape” (European Commission, 2025d, p. 14). In excerpt (2), Defence Commissioner Kubilius reinforces this through Moral Evaluation via analogy (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 99), comparing defence prepar-

⁵ The bolded text in this chapter highlights linguistic aspects relevant to the legitimation process.

edness to physical fitness, supported by the metaphor of the EU as a (physical) body:

(2) *As Mark Rutte famously said: 'We are not at war. But we are certainly not at peace, either.' (...) We now urgently need to get into shape. Get our peace time European Union 'body' ready for defence, fit for self defence, fit for defence readiness.* (Kubilius, 2025c, p. 1)

Moreover, Mythopoesis, particularly through cautionary tales, further supports the delegitimation of the status quo and Europe's fragmented defence approach, such as in excerpt (3). This becomes clear in the construction of dichotomies and contrasts, such as "peace" and "war" or "peace dividend" and "security deficit", an antithesis that strengthens the case for change by suggesting that past choices led to undesirable outcomes (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 106). Thereby, the use of personal pronouns ("we", "our") emphasises collective yet diffuse mistakes, action, and responsibility:

(3) *And so, we lowered our guard. We cut our defence spending from routinely averaging more than 3.5% to less than half of that. We thought we were enjoying a peace dividend. But in reality, we were just running a security deficit. The time of illusions is now over. (...) We need a surge in European defence. And we need it now.* (Von der Leyen, 2025c, p. 1)

The term "peace dividend" alludes to the post-war period, when sustained peace enabled reduced defence spending and allocating these funds elsewhere. It also evokes Europe's foundational myth of post-war integration as a peace project grounded in economic cooperation (Bennett, 2022, p. 8). Lexical choices such as "values" and "peace" recur throughout the *Readiness 2030* discourse. This is evident, for instance, in the statement: "Our policy is production, our purpose is peace" (Kubilius, as cited in European Commission, 2025e, p. 3). Similarly, the White Paper's concluding paragraph (4) constructs defence as a moral duty and collective responsibility through the same lexis. Here, Moral Evaluation via abstraction attributes to the practice of defence and rearmament the moral qualities of protecting citizens, interests, and values (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 99):

(4) *The EU is and remains a peace project. It must be able to protect its citizens, defend its interests and the values it stands for.* (European Commission, 2025c, p. 21)

The term "peace project" links EU action to the moral value discourse of peace, which is closely tied to the EU's founding myth. The EU's coherence and

continuity with its identity as a peace project are expressed through the relational clause “is and remains” (Halliday, 2014, p. 259). Notably, as shown in excerpt (5), peace is frequently articulated in connection with the noun “strength” or the adjective “strong”, which carry an inherently positive meaning:

(5) *Yes, there **must be peace**. But a **strong peace**. **Peace through real strength**. (...) A **strong peace** also means a **strong Europe**. Able to **deter aggression** and **prevent war**.* (Kubilius, 2025a, p. 1)

These lexical choices, combined with strong deontic modality (“must”) and theoretical rationalization through definition, link the generalised concept of “strong peace” to the equally abstract and positively valued notion of a “strong Europe” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 104). In doing so, they equate the practices of “deter aggression” and “prevent war” with the practice of upholding peace, framing “a strong Europe” as a condition for “strong peace” and thus legitimising defence imperatives with an appeal to strength.

This culminates in articulating a “new form of Pax Europea”, “shaped” by an “independent” Europe. This is facilitated by the Union, which plays an “enabling” role frequently reinforced by the notion of EU “added value” (Kallas, 2025, p. 1). The *Readiness 2030* policy initiative is thus presented as an “unprecedented” means to realise this vision. Excerpt (6) succinctly captures this logic:

(6) *This **mandates a shift to a defence readiness mindset** (...). To build a **truly independent Europe**, it is **imperative** to develop a **new form of Pax Europaea** for the 21st century – one that is **shaped and managed by Europe itself**. That is why, in an **unprecedented action**, the **Union is enabling Member States** to raise up to EUR 800 billion for their additional defence spending **to defend peace** over the next four years under the **ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030**.* (European Commission, 2025d, pp. 1-2)

Here, the verb “mandates” and the adjective “imperative” convey a sense of obligation and construct external pressures as natural forces that push Europe towards taking action and adopting a “defence readiness mindset”. The aim “to defend peace” functions both as a goal-oriented instrumental rationalization and as Moral Evaluation via abstraction, distilling the value of peace from the practice of territorial defence (Van Leeuwen, 2007, pp. 99, 102, 104).

5.1.2 Discursive Dimension: Recontextualising History and Military Doctrines

In terms of text “production” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 232), the *White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030*, and its consistent referencing across related policy communications, introduces a substantial overhaul of Europe’s defence approach. This transformation is not only material but also discursive and communicative, as the White Paper Q&A states: “The White Paper frames a new approach to defence” (European Commission, 2025b, p. 1). Across the documents, the White Paper serves as an intertextual reference point and argumentative anchor for Europe’s defence transformation. For example, the *Defence Readiness Omnibus* presents an explicit intertextual quote in its introduction: “As noted in the Joint White Paper for European Defence Readiness 2030¹ (‘White Paper’) ‘a new international order will be formed in the second half of this decade and beyond’” (European Commission, 2025d, p. 1). The *Readiness 2030* discourse is thus explicitly grounded in processes of reframing and transforming. Beyond new industrial strategies and policies, and from a strategic communication perspective, the EC’s discourse, however, appears to articulate something more foundational than Europe’s material approach to territorial defence.

In his plenary speech on 11 March 2025, Defence Commissioner Kubilius describes the White Paper as “the basis for our industrial Victory Programme” (Kubilius, 2025a, p. 4), directly invoking the Second World War Victory Programme associated with Jean Monnet (an EU founding figure), Churchill, and Roosevelt, which mobilised US military production against Germany. This reference represents a broader discursive pattern in *Readiness 2030* policy communications, namely references to European history that recontextualise the EU’s foundational myth. In Fairclough’s (1995) terms, this reflects a process of “transforming the past (...) into the present” (p. 134).

Following Berger and Luckmann (1966, p. 85), the EU’s founding myth can be understood as a shared, socially embedded narrative. As Bennett (2022, pp. 3-4, 17) shows, it is repeatedly mobilised to legitimise action, particularly in times of crisis. In this sense, also the *Readiness 2030* discourse recontextualises this myth within the current security environment to reinforce the EU’s institutional legitimacy and justify its policy agenda in the face of new defence imperatives. Manifest intertextual quotes, such as NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte’s claim that Europe is not at war but certainly not at peace either in excerpt (2), fur-

ther reinforce this temporal linkage. This quote situates the present within the area of ambiguity, combining past and present security paradigms into a hybrid situation. This is also an instance of strategic ambiguity in a largely strategically clear and assertive discourse (Hoffjann, 2021, p. 287).

Similarly, in her plenary speech on 11 March 2025, Von der Leyen quotes Alcide De Gasperi (another EU founding figure) to argue that a common European defence is intended to deter and protect, not to attack or conquer (Von der Leyen, 2025c, p. 1). This illustrates how the *Readiness 2030* discourse mobilises foundational narratives while also drawing on historical military doctrines. Most notably, as shown in the textual dimension, it recontextualises the Cold War *peace-through-strength* doctrine, commonly associated with then-US President Ronald Reagan, which posits that credible deterrence is necessary to prevent conflict (Finkelstein, 2026). This logic is adapted to the contemporary security context, particularly regarding Russia and China (European Commission, 2025c, pp. 4-5), and constitutes a central discursive feature of the policy communications. Distinct discursive registers, such as peace and rearmament, are thus coherently integrated and framed as mutually reinforcing, thereby legitimising defence imperatives on both empirical and normative grounds.

From the perspectives of text “distribution” and “consumption” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 232), the use of foundational narratives and Moral Evaluation, and their recontextualisation into a present account of reality, may serve to convince political audiences, as primary decision-makers, of the urgency of these actions, while signalling alignment and commitment. Simultaneously, it can signal to the public that the EU acts in continuity with its values, even in this process of transformation. The annual SOTEU address is a communicative event and opportunity for the Commission President to legitimise priorities and achievements both institutionally and publicly (Pansardi & Battegazzorre, 2018, p. 854). In her address on 10 September 2025 in the Parliament in Strasbourg, Von der Leyen coined the phrase “a new Europe must emerge”, as shown in the textual dimension. The topic of European security and *Readiness 2030* is prominently featured at the beginning of the speech, right after addressing the severe situation in Ukraine, potentially signalling to audiences that this European transformation is both an urgent and necessary priority. This is reinforced by Von der Leyen’s explicit appeal to political unity, framed as a pitch for unity among member states, EU institutions, and

pro-European forces. By stating that “I am here – and the entire College is here – ready to make this happen with you” (Von der Leyen, 2025d, p. 2), she also positions the EC as a steering force behind this European transformation.

Overall, the *Readiness 2030* discourse thus exhibits a high degree of “interdiscursivity” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 134), blending different “discourses of value” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 109) related to peace, democracy, and soft power with those of defence, militarisation, and hard power (Nye, 2009, p. 160).

5.1.3 Social Dimension: An EU Mindset Shift

To explain this urge for transformation, it is important to consider the (geo)political context in which *Readiness 2030* was introduced. Although the White Paper had been announced in the Commission’s priorities for the 2024-2029 mandate (see Von der Leyen, 2024, p. 13), the *ReArm Europe Plan*, with its proposed financial support for national defence investment, was presented as an emergency measure on 4 March 2025 (Genini, 2025, pp. 536, 542). This followed announcements of reduced US security guarantees for Europe and Ukraine, and intelligence assessments indicating that Russia could attack Europe by 2030 (Forsvarets Efterretningstjeneste, 2025; Gorawantschy et al., 2025, p. 1). As shown in the textual and discursive dimensions, this threat environment is communicatively and discursively mobilised in the EC’s policy communication on *Readiness 2030*.

In a key Parliament debate on Europe’s defence architecture on 11 March 2025, Von der Leyen noted a level of consensus at the European Council meeting on 6 March that was “completely unthinkable only a few weeks ago” (Von der Leyen, 2025c, p. 1). The subsequent discussions also indicated broad cross-party agreement, however, with stronger opposition at the political extremes and concerns over the deprioritisation of diplomatic measures and green and social transitions, as well as overreliance on legal emergency measures (Clapp et al., 2025, p. 11). In this context, the overall discourse signals that the defence readiness debate is shifting from *whether* to act to *how* to act, as captured in Von der Leyen’s press statement following the *ReArm Europe Plan* announcement (7):

(7) *Because the question is no longer **whether** Europe's security is threatened in a very real way. Or **whether** Europe should shoulder more of the responsibility for its own security. (...) The real question in front of us is **whether** Europe is prepared to act as decisively as the situ-*

ation dictates. And whether Europe is ready and able to act with the speed and the ambition that is needed. (...) We are in an era of rearmament. (Von der Leyen, 2025b, p. 1)

The discourse thus constructs and reinforces an ideological doctrine that views increasing military power and strength as the primary political response to current geopolitical conditions (Fairclough, 1995, p. 17). This creates a productive paradox in which preparation for war, that is, rearmament, is constructed as the only means of preventing it and, ultimately, preserving Europe's fundamental values, such as peace, sustainability, and cooperation (Malmio, 2024, pp. 619-620). This also aims to promote a broader cognitive shift among Europeans towards defence readiness (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 260), as made explicit in excerpt (6). The depiction of a changing world through theoretical rationalization reflects a worldview that emphasises objective, realist assessments. Simultaneously, this realpolitik orientation remains infused with foundational European values, as conveyed through Moral Evaluation, naturalising this shift as an inevitable imperative (Van Leeuwen, 2007, pp. 97-104).

As identified in prior research (Ivančik & Andrassy, 2025, pp. 421-422), the communicative challenge for European elites lies in reconciling increased EU-level militarisation with differing strategic national cultures, normative commitments, and the EU's identity as a peace and economic project during this transformation (cf. Manners, 2006, p. 183). The textual and discursive dimensions suggest this is addressed by recontextualising and articulating what it means to be a peace project, and by strategically and coherently calibrating how peace is secured in line with upholding fundamental values in a rapidly evolving security environment. Thereby, the identified discursive and communicative strategies legitimise increased defence imperatives while contributing to the conditions for sustaining political support and unity in a post-2022 world.

5.2 Defence as a “Collective Good”

Another discursive logic underpinning the legitimization of defence imperatives in the EC's policy communication is here termed *Normalisation*. Building on the previous logic, this involves communicatively aligning and mainstreaming increased European defence efforts within a “new” Europe. It is most visible in arguments for adjusting administrative frameworks to enable quicker military ramp-

up and industry investment, described in the *White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030* as “removing obstacles” (European Commission, 2025c, p. 9). Accordingly, the *Defence Readiness Omnibus COM*, which outlines the rationale for regulatory simplification measures, “frames defence readiness as a public good” (Kubilius, 2025c, p. 1). Defence thereby occupies a discursive dual position, constructed as ordinary enough to fit within existing governance processes, yet exceptional enough to justify extensive support and prioritisation. The *Readiness 2030* discourse thus relies on a strategic oscillation between these poles to legitimise the imperative for collective defence readiness.

5.2.1 Textual Dimension: Defence as Exceptionally Ordinary

Building on the discursive construction of threat and urgency outlined earlier, this discursive logic is primarily realised through theoretical and instrumental rationalizations that construct defence and the defence industry as a functional social benefit, moralising them through links to “purposefulness, usefulness and effectiveness” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 102). This is reinforced by Moral Evaluation, which links defence imperatives to broader European values, and Authorization, which refers to EU policy frameworks.

As illustrated in excerpt (8), Defence Commissioner Kubilius invokes the definition of defence as a “collective good” in his press remarks following the White Paper presentation:

(8) *First, - defence is a collective good. The defence readiness of individual Member States is an expression of the basic European value of solidarity. Our security depends on our ability to implement collective defence.* (Kubilius, 2025b, p. 2)

Through the relational attributive clause “is” (Halliday, 2014, p. 264), the statement realises theoretical rationalization by defining defence as an objectivated, generalised, and moralised category (“collective good”). It hints at a utilitarian discourse of value, grounding legitimacy in societal usefulness and appealing to shared responsibility and security. The statement functions as an axiom, referring forward to the normative expectation that member states should contribute to this collective good through their own defence readiness (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 104). Moreover, the clause can be interpreted as a Moral Evaluation via abstraction, linking defence readiness to a solidarity discourse (p. 99). Rhetorically, na-

tional interests are positioned within a collective European framework, combining collective benefit with individual responsibility.

Reyes (2011) describes such political appeals to the collective good as “altruism” (p. 787), used to avoid portraying policies as driven by narrow political or corporate interests. This echoes Rojo and Van Dijk’s (1997) argument that “institutional actions and policies are typically described as beneficial for the group or society as a whole” (p. 528). In the *Readiness 2030* discourse, explicitly invoking the economic principle of defence as a public/collective good thus plays a strong legitimating role. Excerpt (9) illustrates how instrumental rationalization is used in presenting the EC’s solutions to reach this collective EU-level defence:

(9) With these programs we can incentivize Member States to spend together. To overcome fragmentation, to spend smart and to spend European. This is how we will build up our own European defence industry. (Kubilius, 2025a, p. 3)

This is realised as a purpose-driven construction, whereby EC proposals that encourage higher national spending, joint procurement, and regulatory simplification are constructed as efficient means to build a “European defence industry”. The intermediate actions towards this outcome are moralised through terms associated with collaboration, efficiency, and utility, such as “spend smart”, “spend European”, and “overcome fragmentation” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, pp. 102-103). The use of active voice (“we can”) frequently positions the EC as the primary facilitator and enabler, and member states as capable agents of the incentivised actions (e.g. “spend together”). The recurring pronouns “we/our” reinforce the shared yet diffuse responsibility and benefit associated with defence across texts.

The EC also positions itself as a facilitator for the defence industry by aiming “to make it simpler to use exemptions” (Kubilius, 2025c, p. 2) for defence readiness activities under existing EU rules, which functions as a goal-oriented instrumental rationalization (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 102). These exemptions further construct the industry as exceptional within current EU governance. Excerpt (10) reinforces this idea by again drawing on theoretical rationalization to define the defence industry in terms of a “resource” for collective defence, and on means-oriented instrumental rationalization, which constructs the action of “encouraging joint procurement” as serving the purpose of meeting the industry’s needs (Van Leeuwen, 2007, pp. 102-104):

(10) *Defence industry is no ordinary industry. But a resource for our defence. We're encouraging joint procurement. To give European industry the big orders it needs.* (Kubilius, 2025a, p. 3)

The contrastive structure (“no”...“but”) discursively works to reject the classification of defence as an ordinary industry, instead redefining it as essential for collective security and defence. By contrast, excerpt (11) is an especially clear example of how the defence industry is aligned with “any other sector” meeting sustainability criteria. Thus, contrary to excerpt (10), it is normalised as an “ordinary” sector by clarifying compatibility with Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) criteria to facilitate private investment into a sector affected by debate, reputational concerns, and investor uncertainty in 2025 (see Merler, 2025):

(11) *No more controversies with ESG criteria: defence is compatible with sustainability criteria, like any other sector. (...) We want to unlock capital for security and peace. Financing defence can no longer be considered as controversial.* (Kubilius, 2025c, p. 2)

The modal “can” and the temporal negation marker “no longer” (Halliday, 2014, p. 697) can be seen as delegitimising the practice of treating defence financing as controversial, thereby foreclosing debate. This also involves a Moral Evaluation via abstraction, as the practice of financing the defence sector is described in terms of broader collective goals that link it to the moral value discourses of “security and peace” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 99). While concrete military terms do appear in the discourse, often within planning frameworks or investment priority classifications, lexical choices frequently foreground abstract, morally resonant terms (“to unlock capital for security and peace”, “defence readiness”).

The notion that defence investment and readiness are compatible with existing EU frameworks appears across the policy communications. For example, the White Paper clarifies that the “EU’s Sustainable Finance Disclosures Regulation (SFDR) does not prevent the financing of the defence sector” (European Commission, 2025c, p. 17; see European Commission, 2025g, p. 3). The White Paper Q&A constructs defence investment as aligning with EU goals such as “social cohesion through industrial job creation” (European Commission, 2025b, p. 1). References to existing governance frameworks thus serve a legitimising function through their impersonal institutional authority (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 96).

5.2.2 Discursive Dimension: A Collaborative Policy Process

Returning to the definition of policies as “collections of texts, practices, and decisions articulated by an institutional system to solve problems involving people in society” (Canary & McPhee, 2009, p. 148), and assuming that communication about these policies serves to answer different audiences’ “why” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 94) questions, Fairclough’s (1995) notion of text “production” (p. 9) – the processes, conditions, and actors shaping the content and form of institutional texts – plays a crucial role at the discursive level in the case of *Normalisation*. In the *Readiness 2030* discourse, these processes are not merely background conditions but are explicitly foregrounded and mobilised as sources of legitimation. References to the policy production process thus function as a discursive resource in the EC’s policy communication, among others, in arguments for regulatory simplifications, as exemplified in excerpt (12):

(12) *As with all our simplification proposals, we have engaged closely with key stakeholders - the defence industry, national authorities, defence experts and others - to address the challenges they face.* (Dombrovskis, 2025, p. 3)

Such statements foreground the process of policy production within the policy discourse itself. By emphasising that policies are “a shared responsibility also with the Council and Parliament” (Kubilius, 2025c, p. 3) and that “the process has been fast, but inclusive” (p. 1), drawing on “the outcome of wide public consultations” (European Commission, 2025d, p. 14), the EC invokes what previous EU legitimacy research conceptualises as “throughput legitimacy” (Schmidt, 2013, p. 3), meaning the “efficacy, accountability, transparency, openness and inclusiveness” (p. 19) of governance processes. In Berger and Luckmann’s (1966, p. 112) sense, these formulations draw on elements of scientific rationalization, invoking institutionalised knowledge and expert-driven procedures to present these unprecedented policy actions as the result of an evidence-based, rational process that takes all stakeholder views into account, rather than as a detached political choice. References to the White Paper as the outcome of “hundred days of reflection” (Kubilius, 2025b, p. 1) and extensive input from “meetings with Prime Ministers, Ministers, parliamentarians, defence and space industry leaders, experts and associations” (pp. 1-2) further reinforce the notion of a deliberative and collective decision (Reyes, 2011, p. 786). In this way, what Fairclough (1992, p. 78) describes

as the underlying processes of text production and transformation are themselves activated as discursive resources to legitimise defence measures as *exceptional* imperatives that do, however, follow *ordinary* and thoughtful procedures.

Meanwhile, from a text “distribution” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 232) perspective, these references may indicate how the *Readiness 2030* policy content, and by extension the communication about it, are co-constructed through what Fairclough (1992) terms “intertextual chains” (p. 79), integrating and recontextualising different ideological and political interests from involved actors (Wodak, 2000, pp. 192-193; see Hensell, 2021, p. 166). The resulting discourse, including the normalisation of defence and the defence industry, therefore potentially reflects not only collective input and interaction, but also the significant influence of actors with access to the policy process and communicative events surrounding it, such as political, defence, and different industry stakeholders (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 262; see Schmidt, 2013, p. 7).

Notably, civil stakeholder involvement remains largely diffuse, referenced only indirectly (e.g. “others”, “associations”, or “public consultations”), whereas the needs, problems, and involvement of the defence industry occupy a central argumentative position throughout the *Readiness 2030* discourse, e.g. “the challenges they face” (12), “the big orders it needs” (10). Arguably, defining defence as a collective good, as illustrated in the textual dimension, encompasses civil society, yet it does not foreground its active involvement in the policy production process (Van Leeuwen, 2018, p. 142; see Macnamara, 2025, p. 18). Given that the *Readiness 2030* initiative is specifically aimed at scaling up the European defence industry, including militarily supporting Ukraine, this focus is plausible. However, from a critical perspective, this remains noteworthy, particularly in light of the EC’s broader regulatory simplification agenda (see Von der Leyen, 2024, p. 7; Geiser, 2025, p. 8).

Turning to text “consumption” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 232), and from a strategic communication perspective, references to a collective policy process also draw on conformity appeals by discursively constructing the agreement of the very audiences they address, namely institutional decision-makers, industrial stakeholders, defence policymakers, and the public (Van Leeuwen, 2007, pp. 94-97). Together with mentions of existing policy frameworks, as shown in the textual dimension, this discursive organisation suggests alignment with ordinary and lawful govern-

ance processes and “coherence” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 233) with established institutional frameworks. In doing so, the discourse appears to resolve controversy by embedding defence within established and accepted policy categories, such as the EU’s sustainability framework (11).

The *Readiness 2030* policy communication thus discursively constructs increased defence imperatives as collectively endorsed and inclusively coordinated, signalling consensus and alignment. This turns the policy production process itself into a key discursive resource for legitimising unprecedented defence measures as both *exceptional* imperatives and outcomes of *ordinary* procedures, thereby contributing to their discursive normalisation across political and public arenas.

5.2.3 Social Dimension: Welcome to the New Normal

To understand the need for normalising common European defence, constructed in the *Readiness 2030* discourse as a *collective good* within an emerging “new world order” (1), it is useful to situate these developments within what Fairclough (1995) terms the “history of the present” (p. 19). This involves attention not only to current (geo)political threats, but also to broader social change processes accompanying what the EC describes as a “once-in-a-generation surge in European defence investment” (European Commission, 2025c, p. 3).

While this has evolved in recent years, the EU has historically been a civilian organisation and defence a matter of national authority, coordinated through intergovernmental frameworks such as NATO and the European Defence Agency, and reliant on US security guarantees rather than supranational policy processes (Andersson & Britz, 2025, pp. 326-330). The *Readiness 2030* initiative is therefore framed as part of a lasting “paradigm shift” (Genini, 2025, p. 550), unfolding against a historically weak and fragmented EU defence-industrial cooperation and integration. Simultaneously, the EC’s policy communication emphasises continuity of existing institutional power structures (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 256), mentioning that “member states are and will remain in the driving seat for defence” (European Commission, 2025b, p. 1) and that the EU will “continue working closely with NATO” (p. 3).

As outlined in the textual and discursive dimensions, constructing defence as a “collective good” (8) communicatively leverages these conditions and arguably

carries a dual meaning. First, it emphasises the value of collaboration, presenting joint investment and industrial coordination as efficient and advantageous, captured in the notion of a “collaborative dividend” (European Commission, 2025c, p. 8). Second, it positions defence as a societal good, linked to protecting broader public interests and European values. In the EU institutional context, European solidarity (8) also alludes to the general principle of mutual support, as outlined in treaty obligations to assist one another in crisis situations (Virkkunen, 2022, p. 23). In Van Leeuwen’s (2007) sense, collaboration and solidarity function as central “discourses of value” (p. 109), grounded in a self-evidently positive moral framework that legitimises and naturalises collective defence readiness. A lack of individual member state investment is thus delegitimised not only on legal but also on normative grounds. The constructed “ingroup” (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 257) consensus among EU institutions, member states, industry actors, and publics around building “our own European defence industry” (9) therefore aligns with Van Dijk’s (1998, p. 258) notion of group-based legitimation grounded in shared values and norms.

Building on the *Transformation* logic, this creates another productive paradox. While *defence* is “defined” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 104) as a collective good in economic, strategic, and moral terms, it ultimately derives legitimacy from *peace* as the underlying *collective good*. Drawing on what Fairclough (1995) describes as “order of discourse” (p. 132), the *Readiness 2030* discourse thus articulates a worldview in which increased defence readiness is constructed as the precondition for peace, thereby discursively foregrounding defence itself as the collective good. In doing so, the discourse moves beyond ideological dichotomies identified in previous literature, such as military-versus-civilian, national-versus-supranational, or security-versus-(social) sustainability (Ivančík & Andrassy, 2025, p. 422; Malmio, 2024, p. 625) by embedding defence within a broader configuration of value discourses and aligning it with existing governance frameworks (Van Leeuwen, 2018, p. 151). The analysis suggests that the EC’s policy communication thereby discursively contributes to the complex normalisation of defence as both an *exceptional* and *ordinary* public good within a new European normal.

5.3 Talking about Defence Means Talking about “Competitiveness”

A further discursive logic underpinning the legitimization of defence imperatives in the EC’s policy communication, building on *Transformation* and closely related to *Normalisation*, is here termed *Integration*. It centres on expanding the scope of defence beyond European and national security by discursively integrating it into a competitiveness agenda. In the *Readiness 2030* discourse, the EC constructs a “new international order” and a “new Europe”, in which a collaborative, aligned defence industry is presented as a condition for a broader objective, namely Europe’s place at the global table. As Kubilius is quoted in the press release after the White Paper presentation: “This is not just about military strength – it is about our readiness, strategic autonomy, and the future of Europe as a global player” (Kubilius, as cited in European Commission, 2025a, p. 3).

5.3.1 Textual Dimension: Unleashing Europe’s Power

Across the discourse, instrumental rationalization foregrounds the positive effects of defence readiness and its role in achieving wider geopolitical, economic, and technological objectives, while theoretical rationalization discursively constructs the competitive strategic environment as a “natural order of things” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 101). Normatively anchored in moral values and supported by institutional Authorization, the EC legitimises increased defence imperatives by embedding them within a broader competitiveness argument. This relies on technocratic and abstract language, an authoritative tone, and recurring lexical choices such as “independent”, “NATO capability processes”, “dual-use”, “strategic autonomy”, “technology”, “innovation”, “resilience”, “sovereignty”, and “competitiveness” (e.g. European Commission, 2025c, pp. 8-18).

Notably, the *Readiness 2030* discourse frequently evokes the metaphor “to unleash” industrial and productive power, framing Europe’s “immense” economic resources as a currently constrained, latent force that can, however, be mobilised (13). This alludes to Europe’s traditional strengths in economic cooperation (Bennett, 2022, p. 15) and legitimises EC intervention to redirect this capacity towards security and defence. In excerpt (13), the metaphor operates within a means-end construction, where “security” is the goal, “unleash” and “direct” industrial power

the means, and “prosperity” and “liberty” the effects, supported by an expression of obligation (“we need”) (Halliday, 2014, p. 145; Van Leeuwen, 2007, pp. 101-103):

(13) *The second is to meet the moment. To mobilise Europe's immense resources. To summon our collective spirit to defend democracy. I believe the second option is our only choice. It is, after all, our very purpose. To make this happen, we need to unleash our industrial and productive power and direct it to the goal of security. Because it is security on which our prosperity and our liberty depend.* (Von der Leyen, 2025a, p. 2)

This is embedded in the broader, more abstract purpose “to meet the moment”, which can be seen as a form of temporal “Naturalization” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 99), constructing the situation as an inevitable unfolding of time and external change. The discursive emphasis on mobilising economic resources for military purposes, which in turn are constructed as having positive economic effects (15), is also captured in HR/VP Kallas’s aphoristic statement (14), which functions as Authorization through a “time summons” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 94):

(14) *It is high time to turn Europe's economic might into military strength, and quickly.* (Kallas, as cited in European Commission, 2025e, p. 2)

This statement legitimises timing through personal authority and, in Berger and Luckmann’s (1966, p. 112) sense, also approximates an experiential rationalization, grounding the functional relationship between economic and military logics in commonsense pragmatism. Authorization is further realised through references to impersonal sources, notably the Draghi report, a 2024 blueprint for reviving EU competitiveness by former European Central Bank President Mario Draghi (see European Union, 2025a). This anchors the argument in excerpt (15), which recurs across the documents, in an official institutional source (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 96), legitimising an “effective” defence sector – and the practices required to achieve it – through its “positive” effects on “overall economic competitiveness and growth”:

(15) *An effective defence sector is not only key for our security, but also an important contributor to overall economic competitiveness and growth. As indicated by the Draghi report, innovation in the defence sector will be key to re-launch our competitiveness and enable positive spillovers in the civilian sector. A strong defence sector supports EU autonomy, industrial competitiveness, and overall resilience.* (European Commission, 2025b, p. 1)

This effect-oriented instrumental rationalization, reinforced by median epistemic modality (“will be key”) (Halliday, 2014, p. 695), constructs “innovation” in the defence sector as a purposeful action with “positive” outcomes, moralised through links to “purposefulness, usefulness and effectiveness” (Van Leeuwen, 2007, pp. 102-103). The *Defence Readiness Omnibus* reiterates this notion by positing that an EU-wide defence market is “putting innovation and competitiveness at the heart of Europe’s renewal” (European Commission, 2025d, p. 2). This metaphorically positions competitiveness and innovation at the core of the European “body” that Kubilius evokes in excerpt (2). It thus directly links to the discursive construction of Europe’s need for transformation in response to external threats, as outlined in the first sub-chapter. Here, “renewal” takes the form of a nominalisation, reifying the process of renewing Europe as an abstract, static entity, thereby diluting agency and reinforcing a sense of inevitability and self-evidence (Billig, 2008, p. 786).

Excerpt (16) exemplifies how references to this technological innovation are realised through theoretical rationalization, specifically the explanation subtype, by describing the general attributes of contemporary geostrategic actors. It also carries an element of prediction (“will be”) (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 104):

(16) *To ensure peace through deterrence, Europe's defence capabilities **must** also be ready for the battlefields of tomorrow. **Those that develop their own technologies will be the strongest and least dependent.*** (Virkkunen, 2025, p. 2)

The urgency and need to act are reinforced through the strong obligation modal “must” (Halliday, 2014, p. 697) and the superlatives “strongest” and “least dependent”. This is further emphasised by recurring references to geopolitical actors such as China, described as both a major EU trading partner and source of strategic concern due to its untransparent military expansion, alongside claims that “geopolitical rivalries have not only led to a new arms race but have also provoked a global technology race” (European Commission, 2025c, p. 5). This constructs enhancing defence capabilities and competitiveness through technological innovation as a legitimate response, given the general nature of the actors involved. Or, as Kubilius quotes Von der Leyen, “[s]elf-sufficiency in defence means Independence, as the Commission President says” (Kubilius, 2025d, p. 1).

In this competitive environment, actions outlined in the White Paper – such as “[s]upporting Ukraine through increased military assistance”, “[d]eepening the EU-wide defence market”, “[a]ccelerating the transformation of defence through disruptive innovations”, and “[s]trengthening partnership with like-minded countries around the world” (European Commission, 2025a, pp. 1-2) – are constructed as means through which the EU can achieve geostrategic independence and safeguard European security and sovereignty. Instrumental rationalization is thus repeatedly used to legitimise defence imperatives and the policy actions they entail as purposeful, while simultaneously drawing on abstract, moral terms such as prosperity, partnership, and resilience (Van Leeuwen, 2007, pp. 98-99, 102).

5.3.2 Discursive Dimension: An Interdiscursive Competitiveness Agenda

Returning to text “production” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 232), the EC’s policy communication on *Readiness 2030* generally displays a high degree of “manifest intertextuality” (p. 105), meaning explicit references to other texts, frameworks, and quotes. Particularly within the *Integration* discursive logic, intertextuality supports integrating defence into other policy agendas, notably economic and geopolitical competitiveness. As illustrated in excerpt (15), this is evident, among others, in references to the Draghi report, which addresses Europe’s stagnating growth and outlines drivers of competitiveness. This report also informed the EC’s 2024-2029 political guidelines (see Von der Leyen, 2024, pp. 6-7), which are reiterated in the *Readiness 2030* discourse, as shown in excerpt (17):

(17) *This Commission put **Defence on the top of the European agenda**. Since before our mandate even started. Defence was **top priority in President von der Leyen's political guidelines**.* (Kubilius, 2025a, p. 2)

This intertextual reference frames *Readiness 2030* as a broader European project and links it to the EC’s overarching political agenda, signalling “coherence” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 233) with its institutional governance strategy. By referring to political guidelines informed in part by the Draghi report, the *Readiness 2030* discourse embeds defence within the EC’s wider competitiveness narrative. This also discursively expands defence readiness to broader EU domains, as made explicit by the Commission President: “The investment boost will be felt well beyond the defence sector – from steel to space, from large transport companies to

innovative AI start-ups” (Von der Leyen, 2025c, p. 2). It thus communicatively links defence and investments therein to Europe’s “prosperity”, as shown in excerpt (13), while integrating defence policy with European economic and industrial priorities (Andersson & Britz, 2025, p. 335).

As outlined in the textual dimension, this discursive integration with competitiveness is primarily realised through instrumental rationalization in a technocratic, strategic-utilitarian vein (Habermas, 1976, p. 22; Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 101). Accordingly, the documents draw on an interdiscursive strategy that blends security and defence discourse with discourses of economic competitiveness, technology and innovation, and business (Fairclough, 1992, p. 232). To cite another example of business lingo, a press release following the *Defence Readiness Roadmap* presentation quotes the Commission President: “Because only what gets measured gets done” (Von der Leyen, as cited in European Commission, 2025e, p. 1). This managerial maxim, associated with efficiency and accountability, also positions the EC and its proposals as facilitating an effective European defence ramp-up in a traditionally fragmented domain marked by different threat perceptions and strategic cultures. Simultaneously, as seen across textual dimensions, the technocratic discourse type is not articulated in isolation, as it remains normatively anchored in the EU’s cooperative, democratic self-image by drawing on both technocratic and moral value discourses – combining what is *necessary* with what is *good* (Fairclough, 1992, p. 232; Van Leeuwen, 2007, pp. 98, 109-111).

Moreover, the recurring emphasis on innovation draws on the long-standing Cold War-era narrative that military innovation stimulates wider civilian technological progress and helps bridge technological dependence gaps on the US (Martins & Mawdsley, 2021, p. 1470). It blends security and defence discourse with that of technological advancement by framing innovation, security, and competitiveness as mutually reinforcing concerns, thereby discursively blurring these domains (Casernatoni, 2022, p. 398). In Fairclough’s (1995) terms, mobilising this notion can be understood as another instance of discursively “transforming the past (...) into the present” (p. 134), recontextualised in relation to contemporary concerns over technological and critical raw materials dependence on geopolitical rivals amid increasingly high-tech warfare (European Commission, 2025c, p. 5).

Overall, both intertextuality and interdiscursivity integrate defence into a broader competitiveness agenda, discursively expanding its scope beyond securi-

ty. Drawing on Fairclough's (1992) notion of "intertextual chains" (p. 79) from text "distribution" and "consumption" (p. 232) perspectives, arguments are reiterated in slightly different forms throughout the analysed documents, thereby producing a heterogeneous yet seemingly coherent communication strategy (pp. 233-234). These interdiscursive arguments circulate across the political sphere – between the EC, policymakers, member states, and industry stakeholders, as seen in the letter, plenary speeches, and policy documents – and in the public sphere, between the EC and wider audiences via press releases, remarks/speeches, statements, and Q&As. From a strategic communication perspective, this discursive integration and expansion might also broaden the range of stakeholders and audiences for whom defence and related activities become relevant – and legitimate.

5.3.3 Social Dimension: Europe at the Global Table, not on the Menu

Within institutional contexts, discourse plays a central role in constructing and reproducing social relations and identities (Fairclough, 1995, pp. 17-19). Across textual and discursive dimensions, the EC's policy communication on *Readiness 2030* is consistently framed within a broader geostrategic context. It situates Europe in a competitive and adversarial relation to other geopolitical actors, notably China and Russia, alongside Belarus, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and Iran (European Commission, 2025c, pp. 4-5). The underlying worldview, often discursively constructed through theoretical rationalization (Van Leeuwen, 2007, pp. 103-104), is thus one in which "major powers" (1) compel Europe to rely more heavily on its own military, economic, and technological capacities – to "unleash" (13) its European power. This is evident in references to dependencies and ongoing military aggression, constructing an increasingly multipolar and less cooperative international order.

Prevailing notions of strategic autonomy, sovereignty, and technological innovation echo earlier research identifying these terms as key, yet vaguely applied, framing and legitimation devices used by the EC across policy domains (Casernatoni, 2022, p. 410; Helwig & Sinkkonen, 2022, p. 17; Roch & Oleart, 2024, p. 560). The *Readiness 2030* discourse, particularly through the discursive logic of *Integration*, appears to reproduce and continue the increasingly hegemonic and taken-for-granted use of these terms. By linking to utilitarian and pragmatic dis-

courses of value (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 102), this naturalises and legitimises EU defence intervention in response to growing geopolitical competition, thereby discursively expanding a “defence readiness mindset” (6) into other domains.

In doing so, the *Readiness 2030* discourse constructs a power-relational distinction between Europe and external others (Fairclough, 1995, p. 17; Van Dijk, 1998, p. 260), positioning the EU as a defensive actor responding to a “deteriorating strategic context” (European Commission, 2025c, pp. 4, 19). Notably, as shown in the textual dimension, references to “like-minded” partners, alongside the recurring use of pronouns like “we” and “our”, construct and naturalise a distinction between aligned and non-aligned groups, reinforcing an “Us and Them” (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 257) logic to legitimise defence imperatives within a competitiveness agenda. Regardless of whether such a depiction is warranted, uncovering the discursive construction of this worldview is analytically fruitful, as it provides the very foundation on which the legitimisation of increased defence imperatives through their integration into a competitiveness agenda rests. Foregrounding strategic competition and threat, compared to alternative constructions centred on cooperation or diplomacy, can render defence imperatives as necessities of global competitiveness more self-evident and less open to contestation (Van Dijk, 1998, pp. 257-259; see Bisiada, 2023, p. 637; Krzyżanowski, 2015, p. 127).

Simultaneously, often through Moral Evaluation (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 97), the discourse maintains a normative commitment alongside its more competitive geopolitical orientation, balancing Europe’s expanding defence role with its identity as a rules-based actor focused on trade and cooperation (Bennett, 2022, p. 15; Ivančík & Andrassy, 2025, p. 421). This is captured, for example, in the White Paper’s introduction: “Upholding the international rules-based order will remain of utmost importance, both in our interest and as an expression of our values” (European Commission, 2025c, p. 2), or in HR/VP Kallas’s statement that “[w]hile some look to destabilise others, a stronger EU can keep working to support others because we have never seen the world as a zero-sum game” (Kallas, 2025, p. 2). This positions the Union as distinct from destabilising actors and preserves continuity with cooperative, democratic values.

Maintaining the communicative balance between a cooperative, rules-based worldview and a competitive, geopolitical stance may therefore be an attempt to bridge what Fairclough (1995) describes as “ideological dilemmas” (p. 79) – not

only an institutional and material, but also a communicative balancing act that “Europe has yet to carve out a fully coherent response to” (European Commission, 2025c, p. 4). As the identified legitimisation strategies suggest, this is discursively managed by integrating different concerns into a coherent policy agenda framed to support both Europe’s prosperity and competitiveness and its rules-based role in the post-2022 world.

Overall, the *Integration* logic closely connects to *Normalisation*, as the discursive integration of defence into a competitiveness agenda is enabled by its construction as normal and legitimate, while the integration itself, in turn, reinforces that normalisation – both of which build on the perceived need for *Transformation* within a fundamentally changing security environment.

5.4 Synthesis

Figure 2

Analysis Overview

Discursive Logics	Text Analysis	Discursive Practice	Social Practice
Transformation – Constructing Europe: “A New Europe Must Emerge” (identity)	Moral Evaluation (Evaluation/Naturalization & Abstraction) Theoretical Rationalization (Explanation/Naturalization) Supportive: Mythopoesis (Cautionary & Moral Tales) Supportive: Authorization (Personal/Role Model/Tradition) Key Features: Strong deontic modality/imperative structures, active voice, passive constructions, relational/material transitivity, collective pronouns, value-laden/abstract lexis, evaluative adjectives, metaphors/analogies, antitheses, repetitions, temporal framing, assertive tone	-White Paper as manifest intertextual reference point and argumentative anchor -Recontextualisation of EU’s foundational myth and military doctrine into present security paradigm (“peace through strength”) -Interdiscursive strategy blending different discourses of value and contrastive discursive registers -Emphasising political and public unity	Contemporary threat context triggers transformation -Discourse constructs urgency and inevitability of change -Discourse promotes European mindset shift towards “defence readiness” -Productive paradox constructs rearmament as primary means to protect European values and peace -Coherent calibration and articulation of peace project identity, value consistency, and need for transformation
Normalisation – Defence as a “Collective Good” (alignment)	Theoretical Rationalization (Definition) Instrumental Rationalization (Goals & Means) Supportive: Moral Evaluation (Abstraction) Supportive: Authorization (Impersonal/Expert/Conformity) Key Features: Active voice, collective pronouns, value-laden/abstract lexis, economic-utilitarian lexis, relational/material transitivity, contrastive structures (“no ordinary industry/like any other sector”), assertive tone	-Defence as “collective good” occupies an ordinary and exceptional discursive dual position -Collective policy production process itself mobilised as resource of legitimation -Resolving controversy by discursively aligning defence with established, accepted policy frameworks and processes -Construction of consensus/alignment across political and public audiences	Historical defence context situates the need for normalisation -Productive paradox defines and foregrounds defence readiness as the “collective good”, deriving legitimacy from underlying value of peace -Defence as an industrial-collaborative and societal “collective good” -Reconciling defence with existing values and frameworks, moving beyond ideological dichotomies -Normalisation of defence readiness as part of a “new European normal”
Integration – Talking about Defence Means Talking About “Competitiveness” (expansion)	Instrumental Rationalization (Effects, Means & Goals) Theoretical Rationalization (Explanation/Naturalization) Supportive: Authorization (Personal/Impersonal) Supportive: Moral Evaluation (Evaluation/Naturalization & Abstraction) Key Features: Technocratic/economic-utilitarian/pragmatic lexis, value-laden/abstract lexis, strong deontic modality, median epistemic modality, evaluative adjectives, superlatives, metaphors, nominalisations, temporal framing	-Intertextuality integrating defence readiness into broader European competitiveness agenda -High interdiscursivity blending defence/security discourse with economic, technological innovation, and business discourses, expanding defence to other domains -Intertextual chains circulating coherent competitiveness argument across political and public arenas	Geostrategic power context frames competitive integration -Bidirectionality of competitiveness argument integrates defence into a broader political agenda, expands it to other policy domains, and links it to European-internal prosperity, while naturalising defence as a global strategic autonomy/competitiveness concern -Reinforcing Us and Them distinctions -Discursive management of “ideological dilemma” between geostrategic and rules-based, cooperative stance
Cross-Cutting: Positioning the Commission as an Enabler (role)			

6. Concluding Discussion

Building on the interpretive CDA in the previous chapter, this final chapter synthesises the analysis's core findings and results, considering the research aim and question. It reflects on their relevance to existing research on discursive legitimisation within the broader context of EU legitimacy and recent security and defence debates, and discusses their implications for strategic (policy) communication practice. It concludes by addressing the research question and contributions, and by outlining directions for further research.

The results demonstrate that the EC discursively constructs and legitimises increased defence imperatives through three interrelated logics here termed *Transformation*, *Normalisation*, and *Integration*. These discursive themes have been identified as central logics organising the *Readiness 2030* discourse by constructing a necessary transformation, normalising defence as a collective good, and integrating it into a broader competitiveness agenda. These discursive logics work together, articulating what Europe is and why it must transform, how it governs defence in a new reality, and how defence readiness relates to its global role and prosperity. Across this discourse, the EC is constructed as an enabler, discursively contributing to the conditions for consolidating the institutional authority of the Union, and the EC, in Europe's defence ramp-up (Fairclough, 1995, p. 17; Van Dijk, 1998, pp. 257-258).

In line with expectations derived from Van Leeuwen's (2007, p. 92) framework, legitimisation strategies are intertwined and overlapping, unfolding as a layered process throughout the discourse. Moreover, the findings suggest that within the three logics, discursive legitimisation strategies are mobilised in patterned ways, as synthesised in the analysis overview (see Figure 2). Overall, the results indicate that the discourse integrates a moralised, rational construction of the imperative with an instrumental, moralised legitimisation of resulting policy action.

Particularly striking is the interaction between Rationalization and Moral Evaluation in the EC's policy communication on *Readiness 2030*, grounding the legitimacy of defence imperatives in both what is necessary and effective and what is morally right (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 100). The prominence of instrumental rationalization reflects a policy-oriented, technocratic discourse that recasts political choices as technical necessities, aligning with established accounts of the EC's "communication deficit" (Meyer, 1999, p. 635) and technocratic institutional communication style (e.g. Pane & Innace, 2025; Rauh, 2023). While expected in this highly technical policy domain, the discourse remains infused with moral values, evident in the parallel prominence of Moral Evaluation across the material. Moreover, consistent with Van Leeuwen (2007, p. 100), the critical discourse-analytical approach allowed detangling the utilitarian and pragmatic value discourse underlying many Rationalizations (Habermas, 1976, p. 22).

This complements earlier research by suggesting that the EC's security and defence policy communication is largely technocratic in form but normative in substance, representing a dual-legitimation strategy and layered communication approach. While Pansardi and Battezzar (2018, p. 867) identified Rationalization-based and Moral Evaluation-based legitimation strategies as distinct approaches used in SOTEU addresses by two Commission Presidents in different mandates, the *Readiness 2030* initiative, as one of the EC's current key policy priorities, appears to combine both rational and value-based legitimation approaches. This may reflect the current (geo)political context and the nature of security and defence policy, where both technical justification and the need to address sensitive issues such as national sovereignty, European identity, and political/public unity are necessary.

Concerning *Transformation*, the findings reveal clear parallels with the construction of threat, us-and-them distinctions, and moral-inevitability discourses identified in Olaf Scholz's watershed policy statement (Bisiada, 2023, p. 643). This suggests that three years on, similar constructions are mobilised at the EU level to legitimise an institutional "paradigm shift" (Genini, 2025, p. 550) in EU defence expansion. Building on this, the results further clarify how the constructed necessity for transformation translates into constructing defence readiness and the historically national defence industry as a collective good within a broader European readiness project. Interestingly, although the discourse includes explicit

calls to renew Europe, continuity with fundamental values is emphasised throughout, mirroring the recontextualisation of Europe's foundational myth observed in earlier European crises (Bennett, 2022, pp. 16-17). This aligns with Ivančík and Andrassy's (2025, p. 422) idea of a recalibration rather than an abandonment of European normative identity, while also echoing claims of a transition from a primarily civilian organisation to a defence actor (Andersson & Britz, 2025, p. 324). Contextually embedded in a debate that seems to shift from *whether* to *how*, the results thus specify how this development is legitimised at the communicative micro-level in the case of *Readiness 2030*.

Regarding *Normalisation*, the results suggest that solidarity, responsibility, and collaboration function as central legitimising "discourses of value" (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 109) that foreground defence as a collective good, deriving legitimacy from peace as the underlying collective good. Thus, as shown by the interdiscursive registers employed throughout, coherence and consistency with fundamental values are managed through ongoing engagement with ambivalences and paradoxes (Ågren & Sataøen, 2022, p. 65; Hoffjann, 2021, p. 293; Malmio, 2024, p. 618). Consequently, the findings provide new insights into how the EC works to discursively reconcile traditional dichotomies discussed in previous literature (Ivančík & Andrassy, 2025, p. 422; Manners, 2006, p. 194) by aligning rearmament with peace, exceptional imperatives with ordinary governance procedures, and defence readiness with competitiveness.

Considering *Integration*, the results indicate that, although ambiguous and vague terms such as strategic autonomy, technological innovation, and sovereignty identified in recent literature (e.g. Casernatoni, 2022; Helwig & Sinkkonen, 2022; Roch & Oleart, 2024) are mobilised, they are combined with a strategically clear communicative framework tied to concrete, measurable objectives and milestones (Hoffjann, 2021, pp. 297-298). While still flexibly applied to expand defence into other domains, their use as discursive legitimisation devices thus appears assertive and accountable. This might reflect a consolidation of the European defence debate around action and implementation in a shifting geopolitical context. Parallels emerge with Krzyżanowski's (2015) analysis of the EU's discursive construction as a global climate leader and with research on the EC's politicised, expanding, and geopolitical defence role (e.g. Andersson & Britz, 2025; Capati, 2024; Davies, 2025; Håkansson, 2024). Notably, the competitiveness argument

works bidirectionally, constructing defence as both a generator of competitiveness (instrumental rationalization) and a response to it (theoretical rationalization). This makes the *Integration* logic particularly discursively powerful in legitimising defence imperatives and, arguably, difficult to contest from both economic and security standpoints. The growing geopolitical dimension of defence policy may thus shape the EC's policy discourse (Krzyżanowski, 2015, pp. 127-128), both vis-à-vis external geopolitical actors and in its internal positioning within Europe's defence build-up.

Accordingly, the use of collective yet diffuse pronouns, emphasis on cooperation with like-minded partners, and self-positioning as a steering force align with Garančovská and Brusenbauch Meislová's (2026) finding that the EC publicly constructs its role as a geostrategic "orchestrator" (p. 17). The identified discursive logics and legitimisation strategies offer further insight into how the EC legitimises its competencies as an enabler in security and defence policy while preserving member-state sovereignty, suggesting that it attempts to reconcile supranational and national authority and power relations through appeals to unity (Van Dijk, 1998, pp. 257-258). However, such self-positioning also raises political and public expectations, and the EU, via EC governance, has yet to convince member states of its added value in this area (see Besch, 2025, p. 4).

6.1 Implications for Strategic Communication Practice

This thesis examined policies and their communication as an institutional strategic effort to answer different audiences' "why" (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 94) questions and reach political goals in times of change and crisis (Hallahan et al., 2007, p. 3; Van Dijk, 1998, p. 257). Examining the EC's discursive legitimisation from a communicative perspective also yields practical implications for the interdisciplinary field of strategic communication (Falkheimer & Heide, 2014, p. 133; Werder et al., 2018, p. 334).

CDA served as a powerful analytical tool to reveal the communicative *craft* behind legitimising strategic institutional shifts vis-à-vis political and public stakeholders. As discussed above, legitimisation strategies are embedded in three discursive logics that can be interpreted as interrelated communicative strategies through which political-institutional actors legitimise increased imperatives and

the policy actions they entail. First, constructing the need for change and articulating identity. The imperative is anchored in fundamental values, reducing perceived rupture and framing *Transformation* as both change and continuity. Then, discursively aligning the contested domain with existing governance structures and articulating it as serving the collective good, contributing to its *Normalisation*. Finally, expanding the imperative to other domains through *Integration* into a broader political agenda, thereby increasing its perceived relevance and benefits. In short, beyond explaining threats and policy instruments, unprecedented imperatives and their policy implications may be legitimised by constructing the need for change while articulating coherence with fundamental commitments, by normalising and aligning the domain, and by integrating and expanding it into other areas. The identified strategic lexical choices and micro-level legitimisation strategies underpin these communicative macro-mechanisms.

Concurrently, the findings indicate scope to more explicitly address potential “trade-offs” (Malmio, 2024, p. 620) and civil stakeholder influence (see Hensell, 2021; Macnamara, 2025; Schmidt, 2013) to maintain legitimacy. This is essential to meet political and public information needs and sustain volatile support amid unprecedented yet lasting institutional shifts beyond moments of acute crisis (see Hoeffler et al., 2024; Pane & Innace, 2025; Prochwicz Jazowska & Zerka, 2025).

6.2 Knowledge Contribution

In conclusion, this thesis has applied an integrated analytical framework, drawing on Van Leeuwen’s (2007) legitimisation theory and Van Dijk’s (1998) insights on legitimisation, power, and ideology, operationalised through Fairclough’s (1992, 1995) three-dimensional CDA model, to answer the central research question: *How did the European Commission discursively construct and legitimise increased defence imperatives through its official policy communication on the Readiness 2030 initiative?* The research question was addressed by identifying three distinct yet interrelated discursive logics that structure the discourse and the patterned operation of legitimisation strategies within them, embedded in broader discursive practices and the wider geopolitical and social context. In doing so, the thesis offers insight into discursive legitimisation amid a strategic institutional shift as a broader communicative phenomenon (Vaara et al., 2024, p. 2343), situated

within the legitimacy-as-process strand (Suddaby et al., 2017, p. 460) and disciplinarily anchored in strategic communication. It concludes that the EC legitimises increased defence imperatives by constructing defence as a necessary and collectively beneficial European project, reconciling fundamental values with the emergence of a “new Europe” (Von der Leyen, 2025d, p. 1) in a geopolitical context constructed as one of inevitable change.

The discourse’s fundamental ideological assumption appears to be that defence readiness has become a condition for peace in a threatening, competitive environment (Fairclough, 1992, p. 17), necessitating a mindset shift (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 260) to protect foundational European values such as peace and prosperity, alluding to the Cold War *peace-through-strength* doctrine. Peace is thus not replaced by rearmament but discursively made dependent on it. This is embedded in contextual developments, including the war in Ukraine, reduced NATO security commitments, a fragmented European defence market, projections of a potential Russian attack, and the intensified shift towards a European Defence Union since 2022, which provide the EC with discursive opportunities to draw upon and create meaning in its policy communication (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000, p. 1134; Fairclough, 1995, p. 88; Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 109).

In sum, this thesis makes three contributions. Empirically, it offers one of the first critical discourse-analytic examinations of the EC’s official policy communication on the *Readiness 2030* initiative through the lens of Van Leeuwen’s (2007) legitimisation theory. Analytically, it identifies three interrelated discursive logics – *Transformation*, *Normalisation*, and *Integration* – structuring the EC’s legitimisation of increased defence imperatives and their policy implications in the case of *Readiness 2030*. Theoretically, it identifies how discursive legitimisation strategies, namely *Authorization*, *Moral Evaluation*, *Rationalization*, and *Mythopoesis*, are mobilised in patterned ways across these logics, thereby focusing on the “discursive enactment” (Karlsson, 2024, p. 2) of EU defence policy communication and complementing existing strategic communication research on CSDP legitimacy from a different angle (see Doyle & Desta, 2020; Molnár et al., 2021).

6.3 Suggestions for Further Research

As specified in Section 4.6, audience reception and comparative analysis between different actors were beyond this study's scope. Future research could therefore adopt a multi-stakeholder approach to examine legitimisation strategies across EU institutions, political parties, national levels, and civil society, including international organisations, which have recently raised concerns about peace preservation, rearmament, and regulatory simplification (see Haar, 2026; Mutschler, 2026; United Nations, 2025). This could further illuminate processes of delegitimation.

Future work could also extend to the (social) media and public sphere, assessing how the EC's discursive legitimisation strategies are taken up and interpreted by journalists, policymakers, and citizens. Engagement with paradoxes and dichotomies, such as the simultaneous pursuit of defence investment and sustainable finance goals, was also notable throughout the policy discourse and could be further explored through a paradox-theory lens (Smith & Lewis, 2011).

Importantly, the cross-cutting insight of the EC's positioning as an enabler merits further examination. It would be interesting to examine its positioning strategies in more detail, thereby advancing research into the EC's evolving role as a defence enabler from a communication perspective.

References

- Aggerholm, H. K., & Thomsen, C. (2016). Legitimation as a particular mode of strategic communication in the public sector. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 10(3), 195–206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118x.2016.1176570>
- Ågren, M., & Sataøen, H. (2022). Becoming a “normal” and “ordinary” organization through strategic communication? Discursive legitimation of the Swedish Armed Forces. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 16(1), 50–69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118x.2021.2014500>
- Alvesson, M., & Kärreman, D. (2000). Varieties of discourse: On the study of organizations through discourse analysis. *Human Relations*, 53(9), 1125–1149. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726700539002>
- Alvesson, M., & Sandberg, J. (2021). *Re-imagining the research process: Conventional & alternative metaphors*. SAGE Publications.
- Andersson, J. J., & Britz, M. (2025). The European Union’s role in European defence industry policy. *Defence Studies*, 25(2), 322–341. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2025.2472694>
- Beetham, D., & Lord, C. (1998). *Legitimacy and the European Union*. Routledge.
- Bennett, S. (2022). Mythopoetic legitimation and the recontextualisation of Europe’s foundational myth. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 21(2), 370–389. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.21070.ben>
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality*. Penguin Books.

- Besch, S. (2025). *EU defence industrial policy in a new era*. Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung European Union. <https://eu.boell.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/hbs-eu-defence-industrial-policy-sophia-besch-final.pdf>
- Biegoń, D. (2013). Specifying the arena of possibilities: Post-structuralist narrative analysis and the European Commission's legitimation strategies. *JCMS Journal of Common Market Studies*, 51(2), 194–211. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2012.02310.x>
- Billig, M. (2008). The language of critical discourse analysis: The case of nominalization. *Discourse & Society*, 19(6), 783–800. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926508095894>
- Bisiada, M. (2023). The discursive construction of a new reality in Olaf Scholz's *Zeitenwende* speech. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 21(6), 629–646. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2023.2186450>
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, A. D., Ainsworth, S., & Grant, D. (2012). The rhetoric of institutional change. *Organization Studies*, 33(3), 297–321. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840611435598>
- Burilkov, A., Bushnell, K., Mejino-López, J., Morgan, T., & Wolff, G. B. (2025). *Fit for war by 2030? European rearmament efforts vis-à-vis Russia* (Report No. 3). Kiel Institute for World Economy. https://www.bruegel.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/e880656a-f9f2-47d4-845c-136cea3e4b11-Kiel_Report_no3.pdf
- Canary, H. E., & McPhee, R. D. (2009). The mediation of policy knowledge: An interpretive analysis of intersecting activity systems. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 23(2), 147–187. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318909341409>
- Canary, H. E., & Taylor, J. L. (2020). Policy communication: Engaging multiplicity. In H. D. O'Hair & M. J. O'Hair (Eds.), *The handbook of applied communication research* (Vol. 1, pp. 675–691). Wiley-Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119399926>

- Cap, P. (2019). Discourse studies: Between social constructionism and linguistics. A critical overview. *Topics in Linguistics*, 20(2), 1–16.
<https://doi.org/10.2478/topling-2019-0006>
- Capati, A. (2024). The discursive framing of European integration in EU-wide media: Actors, narratives and policies following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. *Comparative European Politics*, 23(2), 271–299. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41295-024-00397-1>
- Carta, C., & Morin, J. F. (2014). *EU foreign policy through the lens of discourse analysis: Making sense of diversity*. Ashgate.
- Casernatoni, R. (2022). The EU’s hegemonic imaginaries: From European strategic autonomy in defence to technological sovereignty. *European Security*, 31(3), 395–414.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2022.2103370>
- Cheng, X. (2021). Legitimation strategies in discourse surrounding Sino-American trade friction: A case study of Chinese government white papers. *Discourse & Communication*, 15(3), 241–259. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481321989837>
- Clapp, S., Höflmayer, M., Lazarou, E., & Pari, M. (2025). *ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030* (Briefing No. PE 769.566). European Parliamentary Research Service.
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2025/769566/EPRS_BRI\(2025\)769566_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2025/769566/EPRS_BRI(2025)769566_EN.pdf)
- Coffey, A. (2014). Analysing documents. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis* (pp. 367–379). SAGE Publications.
- Davies, C. (2025). ‘The need to be seen to be taking action’: How legitimacy drives the European Commission’s behaviour. *Journal of European Integration*, 48(3), 531–551.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2025.2503218>

- Dellanna, A., & Yilmaz, M. C. (2025, July 17). Are EU citizens on board with higher defence spending? *Euronews*. <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2025/07/17/are-eu-citizens-on-board-with-higher-defence-spending>
- Diez, T. (2005). Constructing the self and changing others: Reconsidering 'Normative Power Europe'. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 33(3), 613–636.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298050330031701>
- Dowling, J., & Pfeffer, J. (1975). Organizational legitimacy: Social values and organizational behavior. *The Pacific Sociological Review*, 18(1), 122–136.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1388226>
- Doyle, K., & Desta, T. (2020). An analysis of Common Security and Defence Policy's (CSDP) strategic communication (StratCom). *Journal of Politics and Law*, 14(2), 56–73. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jpl.v14n2p56>
- Erickson, J. L. (2011). Market imperative meets normative power: Human rights and European arms transfer policy. *European Journal of International Relations*, 19(2), 209–234.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066111415883>
- Erkama, N., & Vaara, E. (2010). Struggles over legitimacy in global organizational restructuring: A rhetorical perspective on legitimation strategies and dynamics in a shutdown case. *Organization Studies*, 31(7), 813–839.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840609346924>
- European Commission. (n.d.-a). *Defence*. Retrieved February 20, 2026, from https://commission.europa.eu/topics/defence_en
- European Commission. (n.d.-b). *Defence industry and space*. Retrieved March 1, 2026, from https://commission.europa.eu/about/departments-and-executive-agencies/defence-industry-and-space_en

- European Commission. (2024, December 1). *Communication from the President to the Commission: The working methods of the European Commission* (Report P(2024)5).
https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/4b958a25-a16a-4ac2-bda8-c14a18bd117c_en?filename=Working%20Methods%20of%20the%20European%20Commission.PDF
- European Commission. (2025f, November 19). *Acting on defence to protect Europeans*. Retrieved March 2, 2026, from https://commission.europa.eu/topics/defence/future-european-defence_en
- European Commission. (2025g, December 30). *Commission notice on the application of the Sustainable Finance Framework and the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive to the defence sector* (Report C/2025/4950). Official Journal of the European Union. <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2025/4950/oj>
- European Union. (2024, January 30). *DGT's guide to documents* (Report Ref. Ares(2024)685279). European Commission.
https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2024-02/DGTguide_to_documents_for_external_use_27.02.2024.pdf
- European Union. (2025a). *The future of European competitiveness: Part A, A competitiveness strategy for Europe*. Publications Office of the European Union.
<https://doi.org/10.2872/9356120>
- European Union. (2025b, May 28). *Standard Eurobarometer 103 - Spring 2025*. Retrieved April 6, 2026, from <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3372>
- European Union. (2026, March 3). *Access to information*. Retrieved March 4, 2026, from https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/principles-and-values/access-information_en
- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. Longman.

- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Polity Press.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Longman.
- Falkheimer, J. (2021, September 29). Legitimacy strategies and crisis communication. In E. Hannah (Ed.), *Oxford research encyclopedia of politics*. Oxford University Press. Retrieved February 14, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1567>
- Falkheimer, J., & Heide, M. (2014). From public relations to strategic communication in Sweden: The emergence of a transboundary field of knowledge. *Nordicom Review*, 35(2), 123–138. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2014-0019>
- Finkelstein, P. (2026, February 19). *Peace through strength: Doctrine, dilemma, or delusion?* The SAIS Review of International Affairs. Retrieved April 8, 2026, from <https://saisreview.sais.jhu.edu/peace-through-strength-doctrine-dilemma-or-delusion/>
- Forsvarets Efterretningstjeneste. (2025, February 9). *Opdateret vurdering af truslen fra Rusland mod rigsfællesskabet* (Document No. 145496). https://www.fedd.dk/globalassets/fe/dokumenter/2025/trusselsvurderinger/-20250209_opdateret_vurdering_af_truslen_fra_rusland_mod--.pdf
- Garančovská, K., & Meislová, M. B. (2026). In whose name? Construction of the European agency in the European Union's institutional discourse on the war in Ukraine. *European Security*, 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2025.2608606>
- Gee, J. P. (2011). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Geiser, C. D. (2025). *Cutting red tape, preserving standards: Rethinking the EU's omnibus agenda*. Bertelsmann Stiftung. <https://doi.org/10.11586/2026021>

Genini, D. (2025). Restructuring the EU's defence industrial base amid geopolitical shifts.

Maastricht Journal of European and Comparative Law, 32(5–6), 530–551.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1023263x251394132>

Goffman, E. (1956). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Centre.

Gorawantschy, B., Körner, T., & Lenzner, M. (2025). *White Paper for European Defence*

Readiness: A paradigm shift? Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Europe.

<https://www.kas.de/documents/284153/0/KAS+Security+Snapshot+IV+-+White+Paper+on+European+Defence+Readiness+-+A+Paradigm+Shift+-+March+2025.pdf/9e511b27-6773-a82f-82b8-f8b0ac82cc61?version=1.0&t=1742402110423>

Gralewski, M. (2011). The philosophical underpinnings of social constructionist discourse analysis. *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics*, 7(1), 155–171.

<https://doi.org/10.2478/v10016-011-0007-4>

Haar, K. (2026). *This is what corporate capture looks like! How corporations run the EU deregulation agenda*. Corporate Europe Observatory. <https://shorturl.at/tku49>

Habermas, J. (1976). *Legitimation crisis*. Polity Press.

Hacking, I. (1999). *The social construction of what?* Harvard University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1bzfp1z>

Håkansson, C. (2024). The Ukraine war and the emergence of the European Commission as a geopolitical actor. *Journal of European Integration*, 46(1), 25–45.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2023.2239998>

Hallahan, K., Holtzhausen, D., Van Ruler, B., Verčič, D., & Sriramesh, K. (2007). Defining strategic communication. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 1(1), 3–

35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15531180701285244>

- Halliday, M. A. K. (2014). *Halliday's introduction to functional grammar* (4th ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203431269>
- Helwig, N., & Sinkkonen, V. (2022). Strategic autonomy and the EU as a global actor: The evolution, debate and theory of a contested term. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 27(Special Issue), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.54648/eerr2022009>
- Hensell, S. (2021). Getting cozy, or how the European Commission produces legitimacy in the EU. *International Studies Perspectives*, 23(2), 151–168. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isp/ekab011>
- Hoeffler, C., Hofmann, S. C., & Mérand, F. (2024). The polycrisis and EU security and defence competences. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 31(10), 3224–3248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2024.2362762>
- Hoffjann, O. (2021). Between strategic clarity and strategic ambiguity – oscillating strategic communication. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 27(2), 284–303. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ccij-03-2021-0037>
- Hoijtink, M., & Muehlenhoff, H. L. (2019). The European Union as a masculine military power: European Union security and defence policy in ‘times of crisis’. *Political Studies Review*, 18(3), 362–377. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478929919884876>
- Hurrelmann, A., Schneider, S., & Steffek, J. (2007). *Legitimacy in an age of global politics*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230598393>
- Hyde-Price, A. (2008). A “tragic actor”? A realist perspective on “ethical power Europe”. *International Affairs*, 84(1), 29–44. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25144713>
- Ivančík, R., & Andrassy, V. (2025). Discussing EU’s security identity: Defence spending, strategic autonomy and transition from normative ambition to geopolitical reality. *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Sustainability Issues*, 13(1), 411–425. <https://doi.org/10.9770/c2892383535>

- Ivančík, R., & Dušek, J. (2026). Transforming European security: Industrial resilience, institutional adaptation, and strategic autonomy for sustainable development. *World*, 7(5), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.3390/world7050070>
- Janks, H. (1997). Critical discourse analysis as a research tool. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 18(3), 329–342. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0159630970180302>
- Johnson, C., Dowd, T. J., & Ridgeway, C. L. (2006). Legitimacy as a social process. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 32, 53–78. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29737731>
- Jørgensen, M., & Phillips, L. (2002). *Discourse analysis as theory and method*. SAGE Publications.
- Karlsson, I. (2024). Legitimizing policy branding: Constructing “sellability” of Sweden’s feminist foreign policy. *Media and Communication*, 12, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.7772>
- Krzyżanowski, M. (2015). International leadership re-/constructed? *Journal of Language and Politics*, 14(1), 110–133. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.14.1.06krz>
- Kutter, A. (2020). *Legitimation in the European Union: A discourse- and field-theoretical view*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-33031-6>
- Lefsrud, L. M., & Meyer, R. E. (2012). Science or science fiction? Professionals’ discursive construction of climate change. *Organization Studies*, 33(11), 1477–1506. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840612463317>
- Liboreiro, J. (2025, March 21). Brussels rebrands “Rearm Europe” plan after backlash from leaders of Italy and Spain. *Euronews*. <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2025/03/21/brussels-confirms-rearm-europe-rebrand-after-backlash-from-italy-and-spain>

- Lischka, J. A. (2019). Strategic communication as discursive institutional work: A critical discourse analysis of Mark Zuckerberg's legitimacy talk at the European Parliament. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 13(3), 197–213.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118x.2019.1613661>
- Machin, D., & Mayr, A. (2012). *How to do critical discourse analysis*. SAGE Publications.
- Macnamara, J. (2025). Strategic communication and public policy: A major gap and opportunity for research, practice, and democracy. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118x.2025.2572076>
- Majone, G. (1998). Europe's 'democratic deficit': The question of standards. *European Law Journal*, 4(1), 5–28. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0386.00040>
- Malmio, I. (2024). Can security be sustainable? Three perspectives on security and social sustainability: paradox, co-production, and deconstruction. *Sustainability Science*, 19, 615–627. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-023-01450-w>
- Manners, I. (2002). Normative Power Europe: A contradiction in terms? *JCMS Journal of Common Market Studies*, 40(2), 235–258. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00353>
- Manners, I. (2006). Normative power Europe reconsidered: Beyond the crossroads. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 13(2), 182–199. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760500451600>
- Martins, B. O., & Mawdsley, J. (2021). Sociotechnical imaginaries of EU defence: The past and the future in the European Defence Fund. *JCMS Journal of Common Market Studies*, 59(6), 1458–1474. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13197>
- Maxwell, J. A., & Chmiel, M. (2014). Notes toward a theory of qualitative data analysis. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis* (pp. 21–34). SAGE Publications.

- Merler, S. (2025, July 8). Can defence investment be sustainable? The European Commission thinks so. *Bruegel*. <https://www.bruegel.org/first-glance/can-defence-investment-be-sustainable-european-commission-thinks-so>
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Meyer, C. (1999). Political legitimacy and the invisibility of politics: Exploring the European Union's communication deficit. *JCMS Journal of Common Market Studies*, 37(4), 617–639. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00199>
- Molnár, A., Takács, L., & Urbanovics, A. (2021). Strategic communication of EU CSDP missions – measuring the EU's external legitimacy. *Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy*, 15(3), 319–334. <https://doi.org/10.1108/tg-11-2020-0314>
- Müller, P., Slominski, P., & Sagmeister, W. (2023). Supranational self-empowerment through bricolage: The role of the European Commission in EU security and defence. *JCMS Journal of Common Market Studies*, 62(6), 1672–1691. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13564>
- Mutschler, M. (2026). *Gut gerüstet? Bedrohungsszenarien, militärische Fähigkeiten und Strategien gegenüber Russland*. Greenpeace. https://www.greenpeace.de/publikationen/Studie_Gut_Geruestet.pdf
- Neubert, K. (2025, October 7). Public support for EU defence spending past its peak, says poll. *Euractiv*. <https://www.euractiv.com/news/public-support-for-eu-defence-spending-past-its-peak-says-poll/>
- Nicoli, F., Burgoon, B., & Van der Duin, D. (2025). Citizen support for a European defense union: An international conjoint experiment on security cooperation in Europe. *International Studies Quarterly*, 69(3), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqaf044>

- Nye, J. S. (2009). Get smart: Combining hard and soft power. *Foreign Affairs*, 88(4), 160–163. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20699631>
- Özdemir, S. F., Graneng, K., & De Wilde, P. (2025). EU executives on social media: Assessing the potential and trajectories of legitimation via public communication on Twitter. *European Union Politics*, 26(2), 255–280.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/14651165251320881>
- Pane, S., & Iannace, D. E. (2025). Epistemic intermediaries and Europe’s defence turn: Expert knowledge and the communication of the CSDP. *European and Global Studies Journal*, 8(1), 61–81. <https://doi.org/10.13135/2611-853x/12371>
- Pansardi, P., & Battegazzorre, F. (2018). The discursive legitimation strategies of the president of the Commission: A qualitative content analysis of the State of the Union addresses (SOTEU). *Journal of European Integration*, 40(7), 853–871.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2018.1482286>
- Patala, S., Korpivaara, I., Jalkala, A., Kuitunen, A., & Soppe, B. (2017). Legitimacy under institutional change: How incumbents appropriate clean rhetoric for dirty technologies. *Organization Studies*, 40(3), 395–419.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840617736938>
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Peters, D. (2014). European security policy for the people? Public opinion and the EU’s common foreign, security and defence policy. *European Security*, 23(4), 388–408.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2013.875531>
- Pollack, M. A. (2005). Theorizing the European Union: International organization, domestic polity, or experiment in new governance? *Annual Review of Political Science*, 8, 357–398. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.8.082103.104858>

- Prasad, P. (2017). *Crafting qualitative research: Beyond the post-positivist traditions* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Priya, A. (2020). Case study methodology of qualitative research: Key attributes and navigating the conundrums in its application. *Sociological Bulletin*, 70(1), 94–110.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0038022920970318>
- Prochwicz Jazowska, M., & Zerka, P. (2025, April 2). Guns and butter: How to keep Europeans on board with higher defence spending. *European Council on Foreign Relations*.
<https://ecfr.eu/article/guns-and-butter-how-to-keep-europeans-on-board-with-higher-defence-spending/>
- Rauh, C. (2023). Clear messages to the European public? The language of European Commission press releases 1985–2020. *Journal of European Integration*, 45(4), 683–701.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2022.2134860>
- Reyes, A. (2011). Strategies of legitimization in political discourse: From words to actions. *Discourse & Society*, 22(6), 781–807. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926511419927>
- Roch, J., & Oleart, A. (2024). How ‘European sovereignty’ became mainstream: The geopoliticisation of the EU’s ‘sovereign turn’ by pro-EU executive actors. *Journal of European Integration*, 46(4), 545–565. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2024.2326831>
- Rojo, L. M., & Van Dijk, T. A. (1997). “There was a problem, and it was solved!”: Legitimizing the expulsion of ‘illegal’ migrants in Spanish parliamentary discourse. *Discourse & Society*, 8(4), 523–566. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42888841>
- Scharpf, F. W. (1998). *Interdependence and democratic legitimation* (MPIfG Working Paper No. 98/2). Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies.
<https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/41689/1/639568173.pdf>

- Schmidt, V. A. (2008). Discursive Institutionalism: The explanatory power of ideas and discourse. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11, 303–326.
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.060606.135342>
- Schmidt, V. A. (2013). Democracy and legitimacy in the European Union revisited: Input, output and ‘throughput’. *Political Studies*, 61(1), 2–22.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2012.00962.x>
- Schneider, S., Nullmeier, F., & Hurrelmann, A. (2007). Exploring the communicative dimension of legitimacy: Text analytical approaches. In A. Hurrelmann, S. Schneider, & J. Steffek (Eds.), *Legitimacy in an age of global politics* (pp. 126–155). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230598393_7
- Schrag Sternberg, C. (2013). *The struggle for EU legitimacy: Public contestation, 1950–2005*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137327840>
- Scott, W. R. (1995). *Institutions and organizations*. SAGE Publications.
- Silverman, D. (2024). *Interpreting qualitative data* (7th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Sjursen, H. (2004). Changes to European security in a communicative perspective. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 39(2), 107–128. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836704042864>
- Sjursen, H. (2006). The EU as a ‘normative’ power: How can this be? *Journal of European Public Policy*, 13(2), 235–251. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760500451667>
- Smith, W. K., & Lewis, M. W. (2011). Toward a theory of paradox: A dynamic equilibrium model of organizing. *Academy of Management Review*, 36(2), 381–403.
<https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2009.0223>
- Sorgi, G., & Faggionato, G. (2025, March 3). EU leaders fear Commission power grab on defense after Trump’s exit. *POLITICO*. <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-leaders-fear-european-commission-power-grab-defense-donald-trumps-exit/>

- Suchman, M. C. (1995). Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(3), 571–610. <https://doi.org/10.2307/258788>
- Suddaby, R., Bitektine, A., & Haack, P. (2017). Legitimacy. *Academy of Management Annals*, 11(1), 451–478. <https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2015.0101>
- Suddaby, R., & Greenwood, R. (2005). Rhetorical strategies of legitimacy. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 50(1), 35–67. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30037175>
- Tonra, B. (2018). Legitimacy and EU security and defence policy: The chimera of a simulacrum (part of the collection “understanding legitimacy in EU foreign policy”). *Global Affairs*, 4(2–3), 265–275. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2018.1532306>
- Tyler, T. R. (2006). Psychological perspectives on legitimacy and legitimation. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 57, 375–400. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.57.102904.190038>
- United Nations. (2025). *The security we need: Rebalancing military spending for a sustainable and peaceful future*. https://front.un-arm.org/Milex-SDG-Study/SG_Report_TheSecurityWeNeed.pdf
- Vaara, E. (2014). Struggles over legitimacy in the Eurozone crisis: Discursive legitimation strategies and their ideological underpinnings. *Discourse & Society*, 25(4), 500–518. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926514536962>
- Vaara, E., Aranda, A. M., & Etchanchu, H. (2024). Discursive legitimation: An integrative theoretical framework and agenda for future research. *Journal of Management*, 50(6), 2343–2373. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01492063241230511>
- Vaara, E., & Tienari, J. (2008). A discursive perspective on legitimation strategies in multinational corporations. *Academy of Management Review*, 33(4), 985–993. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20159457>

- Vaara, E., & Tienari, J. (2010). Critical discourse analysis. In A. J. Mills, G. Eurepos, & E. Wiebe (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of case study research* (Vol. 1, pp. 244–246). SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412957397>
- Vaara, E., Tienari, J., & Laurila, J. (2006). Pulp and paper fiction: On the discursive legitimation of global industrial restructuring. *Organization Studies*, 27(6), 789–813. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840606061071>
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1998). *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. SAGE Publications.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2015). Critical discourse analysis. In D. Tannen, H. E. Hamilton, & D. Schiffrin (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis* (2nd ed., pp. 466–485). John Wiley & Sons.
- Van Leeuwen, T. (2000). The construction of purpose in discourse. In S. Sarangi & M. Coulthard (Eds.), *Discourse and social life* (pp. 66–101). Routledge.
- Van Leeuwen, T. (2007). Legitimation in discourse and communication. *Discourse & Communication*, 1(1), 91–112. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481307071986>
- Van Leeuwen, T. (2008). *Discourse and practice: New tools for critical discourse analysis*. Oxford University Press.
- Van Leeuwen, T. (2018). Moral evaluation in critical discourse analysis. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 15(2), 140–153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2018.1427120>
- Van Leeuwen, T., & Wodak, R. (1999). Legitimizing immigration control: A discourse-historical analysis. *Discourse Studies*, 1(1), 83–118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445699001001005>
- Virkkunen, H. (2022). The EU’s mutual defence clause? Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union. *European View*, 21(1), 22–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17816858221089370>

- Von der Leyen, U. (2024, July 18). *Europe's choice: Political guidelines for the next European Commission 2024–2029*. European Commission.
https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.pdf
- Wagner, W. (2005). *The democratic legitimacy of European security and defence policy* (ISS Occasional Paper No. 57). European Union Institute for Security Studies.
<https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/occ57.pdf>
- Werder, K. P., Nothhaft, H., Verčič, D., & Zerfass, A. (2018). Strategic communication as an emerging interdisciplinary paradigm. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 12(4), 333–351. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118x.2018.1494181>
- Willig, C. (2014). Discourses and discourse analysis. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis* (pp. 241–253). SAGE Publications.
- Wodak, R. (2000). Recontextualization and the transformation of meanings: A critical discourse analysis of decision making in EU meetings about employment policies. In S. Sarangi & M. Coulthard (Eds.), *Discourse and social life* (pp. 185–206). Routledge.
- Wodak, R. (2004). Critical discourse analysis. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. F. Gubrium, & D. Silverman (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice* (pp. 197–213). SAGE Publications.
- Yu, X., & Zheng, H. (2023). An overview of research on discursive legitimation. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 11(10), 112–127. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2023.1110008>
- Zelditch, M. (2001). Processes of legitimation: Recent developments and new directions. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 64(1), 4–17. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3090147>
- Zerfass, A., & Viertmann, C. (2017). Creating business value through corporate communication. *Journal of Communication Management*, 21(1), 68–81.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/jcom-07-2016-0059>

Empirical Material References

Dombrovskis, V. (2025, June 17). *Remarks by Executive Vice-President Virkkunen and Commissioners Dombrovskis and Kubilius on the Defence Omnibus* [Speech transcript]. European Commission Press Corner.

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/en/speech_25_1532/SPEECH_25_1532_EN.pdf

European Commission. (2025a, March 19). *Commission unveils the White Paper for European Defence and the ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030* [Press release].

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/en/ip_25_793/IP_25_793_EN.pdf

European Commission. (2025b, March 19). *Questions and answers on the defence package: White Paper for European Defence - Readiness 2030* [Q&A document].

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/en/qanda_25_794/QANDA_25_794_EN.pdf

European Commission. (2025c, March 19). *White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030* [White paper]. <https://shorturl.at/qZXI6>

European Commission. (2025d, June 17). *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Defence Readiness Omnibus* (Report

COM(2025)820). https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/document/download/b2bcc9a0-5259-4543-9e1c-3af1dde8fbec_en?filename=Defence-Simplification-Omnibus.pdf

European Commission. (2025e, October 16). *Commission and High Representative present new defence roadmap to strengthen European defence capabilities* [Press release].

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/en/ip_25_2396/IP_25_2396_EN.pdf

- Kallas, K. (2025, March 19). *Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Kallas and Commissioner Kubilius on the White Paper for European Defence and the ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030* [Speech transcript]. European Commission Press Corner.
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/en/speech_25_834/SPEECH_25_834_EN.pdf
- Kubilius, A. (2025a, March 11). *Speech by Commissioner Kubilius at the European Parliament plenary on the White Paper on the Future of European Defence* [Speech transcript]. European Commission Press Corner.
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/en/speech_25_743/SPEECH_25_743_EN.pdf
- Kubilius, A. (2025b, March 19). *Remarks by Commissioner Kubilius on White Paper for European Defence* [Speech transcript]. European Commission Press Corner.
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/en/speech_25_829/SPEECH_25_829_EN.pdf
- Kubilius, A. (2025c, June 17). *Remarks by Commissioner Kubilius on Defence Readiness Omnibus* [Speech transcript]. European Commission Press Corner.
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/en/speech_25_1533/SPEECH_25_1533_EN.pdf
- Kubilius, A. (2025d, October 16). *Remarks by Commissioner Kubilius on “Preserving Peace - Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030”* [Speech transcript]. European Commission Press Corner.
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/en/speech_25_2408/SPEECH_25_2408_EN.pdf

- Virkkunen, H. (2025, October 16). *Remarks by Executive Vice-President Virkkunen, High Representative/Vice-President Kallas, and Commissioner Kubilius, on the Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030* [Speech transcript]. European Commission Press Corner.
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/en/speech_25_2399/SPEECH_25_2399_EN.pdf
- Von der Leyen, U. (2025a, March 4). [Letter to the European Council on the ReArm Europe plan]. Brussels. Retrieved April 22, 2026, from
<https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/attachment/880628/Letter%20by%20President%20von%20der%20Leyen%20on%20defence.pdf>
- Von der Leyen, U. (2025b, March 4). *Press statement by President von der Leyen on the defence package* [Statement transcript]. European Commission Press Corner.
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/en/statement_25_673/STATEMENT_25_673_EN.pdf
- Von der Leyen, U. (2025c, March 11). *Speech by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament plenary joint debate on European Council meetings and European security* [Speech transcript]. European Commission Press Corner.
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/en/speech_25_739/SPEECH_25_739_EN.pdf
- Von der Leyen, U. (2025d, September 10). *2025 State of the Union address by President von der Leyen* [Speech transcript]. European Commission Press Corner.
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/document/print/ov/speech_25_2053/SPEECH_25_2053_OV.pdf

Appendices

Appendix A. Detailed Documents Overview

As described in Chapter 4, the EC’s webpage on *Readiness 2030* and the future of European defence, “Acting on defence to protect Europeans” (https://commission.europa.eu/topics/defence/future-european-defence_en), managed by the Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM), was consulted first to identify the key policy actions and their corresponding documents and webpages within the *Readiness 2030* initiative, as outlined in the table below. The aforementioned Empirical Material References list the documents from which excerpts and quotes are cited in Chapter 5, while the following table contains information on all analysed documents:

Policy Document	Document Type	Title	Date	Source	Document Link	Description (Purpose & Audience)	Policy Status (as of March 2026)
n/a	SOTEU address	<i>2025 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen</i>	10/09/2025	EC Press Corner	Link	A public annual September speech delivered by the Commission President to the Parliament in Strasbourg outlining key achievements, future priorities, and policy initiatives, here including <i>Readiness 2030</i> . While directly delivered to members of the EP, it is also live	n/a

						streamed and distributed to European citizens.	
White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030 and ReArm Europe Plan	Joint White Paper	<i>White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030</i>	19/03/2025	<u>EC DG DEFIS webpage</u>	<u>Link</u>	White Paper stimulating debate among key stakeholders, in this case setting out a strategic framework for action to rebuild European defence, increase support for Ukraine, and achieve European defence readiness by 2030. The White Paper had already been announced in Ursula von der Leyen’s political guidelines for the 2024-2029 mandate in July 2024, whereas the ReArm Europe Plan was a fast-tracked initiative based on the economic emergency legal basis outlined in the Article 122 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).	<u>Legislative Train Schedule: Adopted</u> -19 March 2025: EC presented/adopted the White Paper -20 March 2025: European Council referenced and politically backed it in conclusions -2 April 2025: EP formally welcomed it and urged implementation
	Public letter	n/a	04/03/2025	<u>EC Press Corner</u>	<u>Link</u>	Public letter to the European Council (the heads of the 27 EU member states) proposing the ReArm Europe package to rapidly boost European defence	<u>SAFE (Security Action for Europe) Defence Investment Instrument (Key Pillar of the ReArm Europe Plan):</u>

						capabilities.	-As of July 2025, 18 member states have requested access to funds under the SAFE defence instrument -As of January 2026, the first and second wave of SAFE funding have been approved for 16 member states in total -As of March 2026, the first, second, and third wave of SAFE funding have been approved for 18 member states in total
	Press statement	<i>Press statement by President von der Leyen on the defence package</i>	04/03/2025	EC Press Corner	Link	Statement to the press by President Von der Leyen announcing the ReArm Europe Plan, ahead of a special European Council meeting on 6 March 2025.	
	Public plenary speech	<i>Speech by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament Plenary joint debate on European Council meetings and European Secu-</i>	11/03/2025	EC Press Corner	Link	Public speech by President Von der Leyen delivered at the opening of a key EP plenary debate on European security architecture , addressing the European Council conclusions of 6	

		<i>rity</i>				March 2025 and preparing for the meeting of 20-21 March 2025. Plenary debates are open for the public to attend.	
	Public plenary speech	<i>Speech by Commissioner Kubilius at the European Parliament Plenary on the White Paper on the future of European Defence</i>	11/03/2025	EC Press Corner	Link	Public speech by Commissioner Kubilius delivered in the <u>EP plenary to present and justify the White Paper for European Defence</u> and initiate debate among members of the EP. Plenary debates are open for the public to attend.	
	Press release	<i>Commission unveils the White Paper for European Defence and the ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030</i>	19/03/2025	EC Press Corner	Link	Official and targeted communication accompanying the formal presentation of the White Paper for European Defence and the ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030.	
	Press conference remarks/speech	<i>Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Kaja Kallas on the White Paper for European Defence and the ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030</i>	19/03/2025	EC Press Corner	Link	Speech by HR/VP Kallas at press conference following the College meeting decision on the White Paper for European Defence and the ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030. These sessions inform the public and media about new policy proposals.	

	Press conference remarks/speech	<i>Remarks by Commissioner Andrius Kubilius on the White Paper for European Defence and the ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030</i>	19/03/2025	EC Press Corner	Link	Speech by Commissioner Kubilius at press conference following the College meeting decision on the White Paper for European Defence and the ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030. These sessions inform the public and media about new policy proposals.	
	Q&A	<i>Questions and answers on the Defence Package: White Paper for European Defence - Readiness 2030</i>	19/03/2025	EC Press Corner	Link	Questions and answers published by the Commission services to clarify complex policies for diverse stakeholders, in this case relating to the White Paper for European Defence.	
	Q&A	<i>Questions and answers on ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030</i>	19/03/2025	EC Press Corner	Link	Questions and answers published by the Commission services to clarify complex policies for diverse stakeholders, in this case relating to the ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030.	
Defence Readiness Omnibus	Commission Communication (COM)	<i>Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: De-</i>	17/06/2025	EC DG DEFIS webpage	Link	Communication from the Commission to the Parliament and the Council, setting out its position and proposing	<u>Legislative Train Schedule: Tabled</u> -17 June 2025: EC tabled the proposal/package

		<i>Defence Readiness Omnibus</i>				measures to simplify EU rules and support defence readiness by 2030. A Communication from the Commission (COM) is a soft-law instrument and non-binding official policy document used to present analysis, set priorities, outline policy options or strategies, and stimulate debate and feedback among EU institutions, member states, and diverse stakeholders, thereby reflecting the EC's position.	-26 November 2025: Council agreed on position on simplification package Omnibus V -January 2026 until mid-2026: Trilogue negotiations between EC, EP, and Council
	Press release	<i>Commission proposes simplification to speed up defence investments in the EU</i>	17/06/2025	EC Press Corner	Link	Official and targeted communication accompanying the official proposal of the Defence Readiness Omnibus.	
	Press conference remarks/speech	<i>Remarks by Executive Vice-President Henna Virkkunen on the Defence Omnibus</i>	17/06/2025	EC Press Corner	Link	Speech by Executive Vice-President of the College of Commissioners Virkkunen at press conference following the College meeting decision on the Defence Readiness Omnibus. These sessions inform the public and me-	

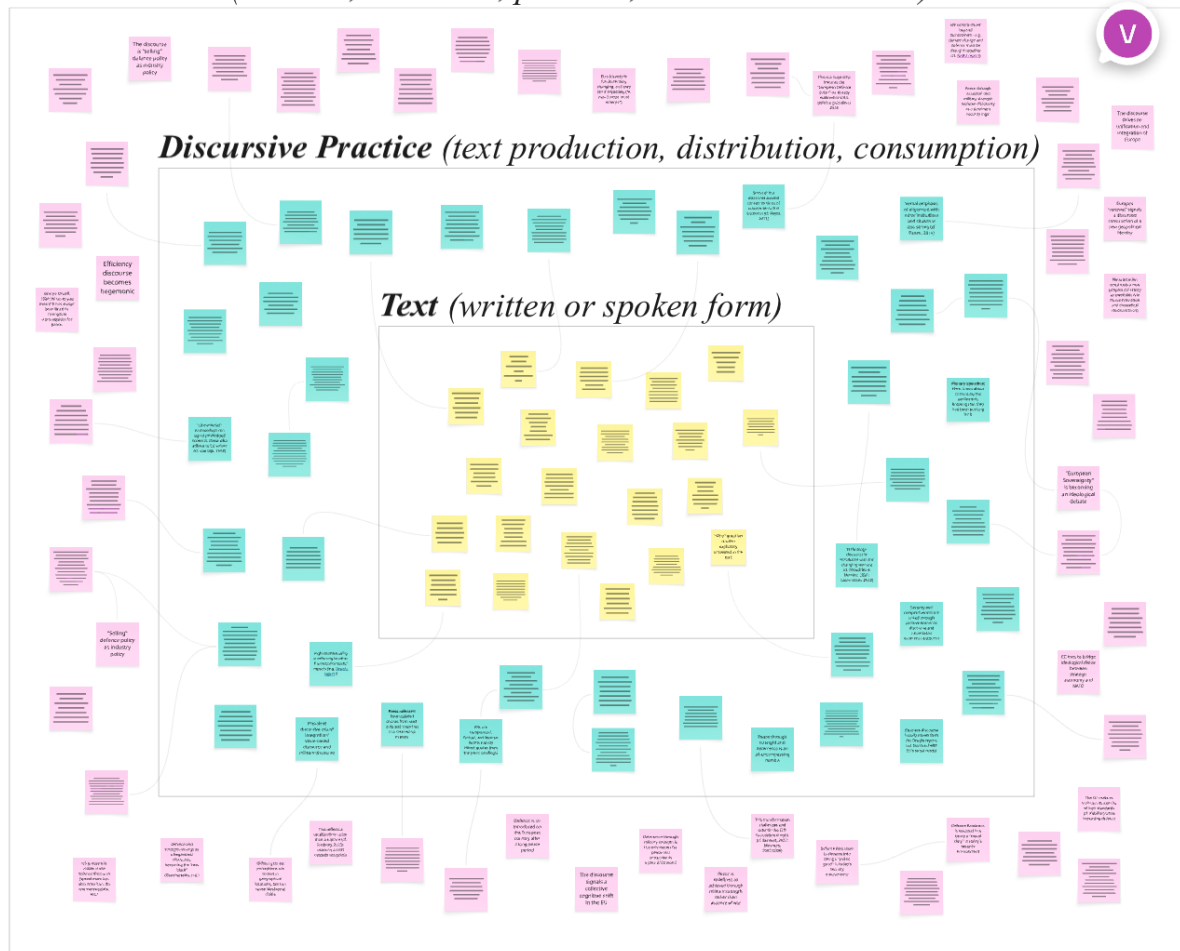
						dia about new policy proposals.	
	Press conference remarks/speech	<i>Remarks by Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis on the Defence Omnibus</i>	17/06/2025	EC Press Corner	Link	Speech by Commissioner for Economy and Productivity; Implementation and Simplification Dombrovskis at press conference following the College meeting decision on the Defence Readiness Omnibus. These sessions inform the public and media about new policy proposals.	
	Press conference remarks/speech	<i>Remarks by Commissioner Andrius Kubilius on the Defence Omnibus</i>	17/06/2025	EC Press Corner	Link	Speech by Commissioner Kubilius at press conference following the College meeting decision on the Defence Readiness Omnibus. These sessions inform the public and media about new policy proposals.	
Preserving Peace – Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030	Joint Communication (JOIN)	<i>Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council: Preserving Peace – Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030</i>	16/10/2025	EC DG DEFIS webpage	Link	Joint Communication from the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to the Parliament, the European Council, and the Council, setting out a	<u>Legislative Train Schedule: Announced</u> -16 October 2025: EC and HR/VP presented/announced the roadmap -23 October 2025: European Council

						strategic roadmap with objectives, milestones, and indicators to guide EU efforts to achieve defence readiness by 2030. A Joint Communication (JOIN) is a non-binding official policy document used to present analysis, set priorities, outline policy options or strategies, and stimulate debate and feedback among EU institutions, member states, and diverse stakeholders, issued jointly by the EC and the HR/VP, particularly in the field of external action and foreign policy.	referenced and politically backed it in conclusions -Following stages: Serves as a guiding framework for member-states implementation
	Press release	<i>Commission and High Representative present new Defence Roadmap to strengthen European defence capabilities</i>	16/10/2025	EC Press Corner	Link	Official and targeted communication accompanying the official presentation of the Defence Readiness Roadmap.	
	Press conference remarks/speech	<i>Remarks by Executive Vice-President Henna Virkkunen on the Defence Readiness</i>	16/10/2025	EC Press Corner	Link	Speech by Executive Vice-President of the College of Commissioners Virkkunen at press conference	

		<i>ness Roadmap 2030</i>				ference following the College meeting decision on the Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030. These sessions inform the public and media about new policy proposals.	
	Press conference remarks/speech	<i>Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Kaja Kallas on the Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030</i>	16/10/2025	EC Press Corner	Link	Speech by HR/VP Kallas at press conference following the College meeting decision on the Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030. These sessions inform the public and media about new policy proposals.	
	Press conference remarks/speech	<i>Remarks by Commissioner Andrius Kubilius on the Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030</i>	16/10/2025	EC Press Corner	Link	Speech by Commissioner Kubilius at press conference following the College meeting decision on the Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030. These sessions inform the public and media about new policy proposals.	

Appendix B. Illustrative Three-Dimensional Mapping

Social Practice (cultural, historical, political, institutional context)



Legend: Blue = Authorization, Green = Moral Evaluation, Bright Red = Instrumental Rationalization, Dark Red = Theoretical Rationalization, Purple = Mythopoesis

Discursive Logics	Text Analysis (Example Excerpts)	Discursive Practice	Social Practice
Transformation – Constructing Europe: “A New Europe Must Emerge” (identity)	“As noted in the Joint White Paper for European Defence Readiness 2030 (1) (“White Paper”) “a new international order will be formed in the second half of this decade and beyond. Unless we shape this order – in both our region and beyond – we will be passive recipients of the outcome of this period of interstate competition with all the negative consequences that could flow from this, including the real prospect of full-scale war.” (Omnibus, 17 June 2025, page 1) Mythopoesis (Cautionary Tale) “Alcide de Gasperi said: ‘We do not just need peace among us, but to build a common defence. This is not to threaten or conquer, but to deter any attack from the outside, driven by hatred against a united Europe. This is the task of our generation.’ 70 years have gone by, but our generation is faced with the very same task. Because peace in our Union can no longer be taken for granted. We are facing a crisis of European security. But we know that it is in crisis that Europe has always been built. So, this is the moment for peace through strength. This is the moment for a common defence. And at the European Council, I saw a level of consensus on European defence, which is not just unprecedented but was completely unthinkable only a few weeks ago. There is a new understanding that we must think differently and act accordingly.” (Plenary speech, Von der Leyen, 11 March 2025) Authorization (Personal + Conformity), Mythopoesis (Moral Tale), Theoretical Rationalization (Explanation) “To rethink European defence at this strategic moment. Let me close with some inspiration from history. I recently read the memoirs of Jean Monnet. Jean Monnet was a founding father of the European Union, our great project of peace. But did you know Jean Monnet was also a father of victory in the Second World War? Jean Monnet helped Churchill and Roosevelt to prepare the so called “Victory Programme” – to ramp up military production in US to defeat the Nazis. He would have recognised many of our current challenges. Jean Monnet also said: people only make great decisions when crisis is on their doorstep. This is the greatest security crisis of our lifetimes. And we must now take the great decisions. All of Europe is target of Russian aggression We are all frontline Member States. The White Paper is the basis for our industrial Victory Programme. Victory in	-The frequent use of “defending peace through strength” alludes to the “Peace through Strength” foreign policy doctrine. -Historical references (e.g. WWII) are recontextualised to legitimise present action (cf. Fairclough, 1995), particularly at the beginning of the policy roll-out. -Historical analogies (e.g. WWII, “D-Day”) are used to legitimise urgency and scale of action. -This fundamental shift in European identity, and a shift in European minds, requires massive discursive and communication efforts. -Peace in Europe is redefined as something that is not achieved through absence of militarisation and war,	-The discourse shifts from “whether” to “how”, presupposing defence as necessary and limiting contestation. -The discourse signals a collective cognitive shift in the EU. -Naturalisation constructs a new geopolitical reality as inevitable (via moral evaluation and theoretical rationalization). -Defence and strength emerge as a hegemonic discourse, becoming the “new black”. -Peace is constructed as achieved through military strength rather than absence of war. -This transformation challenges and extends the EU’s foundational myth (cf. Bennett, 2022;