

# European Security after the Cold War: Dutch Strategic Reasoning and European Institutions

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## Introduction

The transformation of the European security landscape after the Cold War compelled governments to rethink their strategic orientation amid a shifting world order. For Western European states, this was a period marked by evolving expectations of NATO, renewed ambitions for European defence cooperation and the emergence of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) as a platform for collective European action. These overlapping institutions created both opportunities and tensions, requiring states to navigate questions of autonomy, alliance loyalty, and multilateral coordination. For Dutch foreign policy, understanding this period in this context involves not only examining formal policy decisions but also the internal processes which shaped national positions. By situating Dutch decision-making within the broader transformation of European security, this study explores how a small but active state interpreted, prioritized, and responded to competing institutional frameworks during a decade of rapid geopolitical and institutional change.

This historical research is situated at the intersection of political history, international relations, and political science. It draws on insights from each field to analyse how ideas about security were constructed, translated into policy advice, and embedded within governmental decision-making. By gradually narrowing the focus from broad conceptual debates on security, to European institutional dynamics, and finally to the Dutch advisory sphere, this introduction establishes the trajectory that ultimately exposes the gap this research wishes to address.

### *Status Quaestionis*

Up to the 1990s, the historiography of 'security' was primarily oriented toward strategic and military history, treating security as an objective condition tied to state survival and defence institutions.<sup>1</sup> This began to change with the cultural and linguistic turns originating in the 1970s, which encouraged scholars to understand security as historically contingent and shaped by discourse and administrative practices.<sup>2</sup> This shift directed attention to security as a product of political discourse, such as parliamentary debates and the language used in official strategy documents. In this context, the Copenhagen School further widened the field by arguing that security is produced through 'securitizing' speech acts, in which political actors construct certain issues as existential threats.<sup>3</sup> Beatrice de Graaf and Cornel Zierlein, both experts on histories of security and international relations, accurately

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of 'traditional' security histories are, including but not limited to; Richard Smoke, *National Security and the Nuclear Dilemma* (1987). And; Stephen D. Krasner, *Defending the National Interest: Raw Materials Investments and U.S. Foreign Policy* (1978).

<sup>2</sup> Beatrice De Graaf, and Cornel Zierlein, 'Historicizing Security – Entering the conspiracy dispositive,' *Historical Social Research*, 38:1 (2014) 49.

<sup>3</sup> A watershed publication of the Copenhagen school; Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde eds., *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (1998).

describe this shift as “viewing security-policy not as a ‘black box’, where only the outcomes are relevant, but to devote our attention to the underlying processes.”<sup>4</sup>

In contrast to the Copenhagen School’s more behavioural and policy-oriented focus on strategic interaction, Critical Security Studies (CCS) from the mid-1990s onward challenged the assumption that security is naturally tied to the state and military threats. Drawing on critical theory and post-structuralist approaches, CCS argues that security is not a neutral objective, but a political construct that privileges certain actors and interests. This movement broadened the idea of security to include individuals and communities, and highlighted how security discourses can legitimize exclusion, control, and unequal power relations.<sup>5</sup>

Building on these conceptual reorientations, the historiography of European security politics in the 1990s reflects a broader debate over how foreign and security policy evolved in the aftermath of the Cold War. Ben Soetendorp, a political scientist with expertise in international relations, portrays this period as one of cautious institutionalisation, in which the Maastricht Treaty and the creation of the CFSP represented important, yet limited, steps towards integration.<sup>6</sup> His intergovernmentalist perspective stresses that national governments, rather than supranational institutions, remained the primary actors shaping European foreign policy. Karen Smith, a political scientist, offers a more constructivist interpretation, arguing that the EU developed a hybrid foreign policy system defined less by state power and more by norms, consensus, and institutionalised procedures. She presents the 1990s as a formative decade in which the EU emerged as a distinctive, if fragmented, international actor.<sup>7</sup> A European integration historian, Benedetto Zaccaria, situates these developments in a longer historical trajectory, showing that European cooperation in security affairs predated the CFSP. By analysing the European Community’s (EC)<sup>8</sup> involvement in Yugoslavia before 1989, he contends that post-Cold War initiatives represented continuity rather than rupture.<sup>9</sup> Together, these authors reveal that the 1990s were not a sudden turning point but a period of incremental adaptation, in which the EU’s security role evolved through the interplay of institutional ambition, intergovernmental control, and the lessons of crisis management.

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<sup>4</sup> De Graaf, ‘Historicizing Security,’ 50.

<sup>5</sup> Examples of Critical Security Studies: Keith Krause, and Michael C. Williams eds., *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases* (1997). And; Ken Booth, *Critical Security Studies and World Politics* (2005). And; Richard Wyn Jones, *Security, Strategy and Critical Theory* (1999).

<sup>6</sup> Ben Soetendorp, *Foreign Policy in the European Union; Theory, history and practice* (1999).

<sup>7</sup> Karen E. Smith, ‘Understanding the European Foreign Policy System,’ in: *Contemporary European History* 12:2 (2003) 239-254.

<sup>8</sup> Throughout this chapter, the terms European Community (EC) and European Union (EU) are used interchangeably. The term EC is used when discussing developments prior to the entry into force of the Maastricht Treaty in November 1993, while EU is employed for the period thereafter.

<sup>9</sup> Benedetto Zaccaria, ‘The European Community and Yugoslavia in the Late Cold War Years, 1976-1989,’ in: W. Loth, N. Păun eds., *Disintegration and Integration in East-Central Europe: 1919 – post-1989* (2014) 264-283.

A second major strand in the historiography of European security is the competing institutional frameworks in the security domain, most prominently NATO, the Western European Union (WEU), the developing CFSP, and in a lesser extent the UN. Historians of the WEU have emphasized its ambiguous position between alliance politics and integration.<sup>10</sup> Wyn Rees, for example, argues that the WEU operated as a bridge between NATO and emergent EU defence ambitions, but ultimately lacked the coherence and political authority required to function as an autonomous security actor.<sup>11</sup> Sally Rohan likewise interprets the WEU as an institutional experiment, reflecting Europe's broader uncertainty over whether security cooperation should remain Atlanticist, prioritizing continued reliance on NATO and transatlantic ties, or evolve toward greater European strategic autonomy within a European institutional framework.<sup>12</sup> Political scientist Heinz Gärtner commented at the time on the persistence of NATO's influence, noting that while the 1990s saw the expansion of multilateral peacekeeping, operational capacity, and command structures, political authority still rested overwhelmingly within the transatlantic framework.<sup>13</sup> More recent historical works, such as Marco Zoppi's study of the Yugoslav wars, shifts attention to the WEU's performance during crisis, demonstrating that its failure to intervene in the conflict on the European continent stemmed not only from limited institutional capabilities but coherently from internal political divisions between Atlanticist and Europeanist member states.<sup>14</sup> Francesco Privitera's article can also be used to show how the Yugoslav conflict exposed the fragmentation of European security crisis response, subsequently catalysing further political integration by revealing the necessity of stronger collective mechanisms.<sup>15</sup> Taken together, this body of literature engages two core debates; whether the 1990s marked continuity of NATO dominance or the beginnings of European defence autonomy, and whether overlapping institutions generated redundancy or provided strategic flexibility.

Numerous scholars of Dutch foreign policy have examined how the Netherlands positioned itself amid these competing frameworks. Political scientist Duco Hellema emphasizes continuity in Dutch post-war foreign policy, particularly its enduring commitment to multilateralism, international law, and a strong Atlantic partnership with the United States. At the same time, he notes that the 1990s required a recalibration of Dutch diplomacy as European institutions assumed greater relevance for security coordination.<sup>16</sup> This fits into the wider understanding that Dutch foreign policy of the time reflected a

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<sup>10</sup> Wyn G. Rees, *The Western European Union at the Crossroads; Between Trans-Atlantic Solidarity and European Integration* (1999). And; Sally Rohan, *The Western European Union; International Politics between Alliance and Integration* (2014). And; Marco Zoppi, 'The Western European Union and the Yugoslav Wars,' *The International History Review*, 46:2 (2024) 228-241.

<sup>11</sup> Rees, *The Western European Union at the Crossroads*, I-x.

<sup>12</sup> Sally Rohan, *The Western European Union*, 264-266.

<sup>13</sup> Heinz Gärtner, 'European Security, NATO and the transatlantic link: Crisis Management,' *European Security*, 7:3 (1998) 1-13.

<sup>14</sup> Zoppi, 'The Western European Union and the Yugoslav Wars,' 228-241.

<sup>15</sup> Francesco Privitera, 'The Relationship Between the Dismemberment of Yugoslavia and European Integration', in Morton, Jeffrey S., Nation, R. Craig, Forage, Paul and Bianchini,

<sup>16</sup> Duco Hellema, *Nederland in de wereld: de buitenlandse politiek van Nederland* (2014).

consistent balancing act: moral internationalism remained central, but strategic alignment with NATO continued to define the security dimension.<sup>17</sup> The moral principles inherent to the first half of the Dutch foreign policy balancing is shown in the exemplary work of political historian Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, which examines the normative dimensions of post-war Dutch foreign policy.<sup>18</sup> Kuitenbrouwer argues that human rights served both as a moral principle and as a means of influence for a small state operating within large institutional structures. Dutch governments in the 1990s strived to promote and uphold human rights in the global order, while simultaneously using moral principles as an instrument of soft power.<sup>19</sup> Equally relevant in this context is the impact of memory and trauma. The legacy of Srebrenica shaped Dutch attitudes toward Balkan policy and EU enlargement, illustrating how national experience fed back into European-level decision making.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the historiography around Dutch foreign policy is formed around the Netherlands's role as a normative small power, the interaction between moral commitments and strategic dependence within a shifting European architecture.

### *Research Question*

Despite this extensive body of scholarship, little attention has been paid to how Dutch security thinking in the 1990s was shaped within the domestic advisory and bureaucratic sphere. Existing historiography tends to analyse Dutch foreign policy either through its moral discourse and alliance politics or through retrospective assessments of crisis such as the massacre in Srebrenica. What remains underexplored is how Dutch foreign policymakers and expert advisers internally conceptualised the competing roles of NATO, the WEU, and the emerging CFSP during moments of institutional uncertainty. This research seeks to illuminate the intellectual and strategic reasoning that informed Dutch positions on institutions dealing with European security across the 1990s. To do this, the following research question will eventually have to be answered; *How did Dutch policy makers navigate the competing frameworks of NATO, the WEU, and the EU's emerging CFSP across three key periods between 1989 and 1997?* By approaching Dutch security policy through the lens of advisory expertise, this study aims to bridge the gap between high-level diplomatic analysis and the underlying internal process that shaped it. Eventually, the goal is to contribute to research on the formation of security policy within the Dutch government, revealing how expert knowledge, institutional reasoning and strategic interpretation interacted in shaping foreign policy choices. In doing so, it offers a limited contribution to a deeper understanding of how small European states like the Netherlands interpreted and adapted to the shifting world order of post-Cold War Europe.

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<sup>17</sup> William Mallinson, *From Neutrality to Commitment; Dutch Foreign Policy, NATO and European Integration* (2010). And; Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, 'De rol van de mensenrechten in het buitenlandse beleid van Nederland na 1945: politicologische en historische literatuur,' *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 118 (2003) 179-192.

<sup>18</sup> Kuitenbrouwer, 'De rol van de mensenrechten in het buitenlandse beleid na 1945,' 179-192.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, 184.

<sup>20</sup> Ainius Lašas, 'Legacies of Srebrenica: The Dutch Factor in EU-Serbian Relations,' *Political Psychology* 34:6 (2013) 899-915.

## *Collection of Materials*

The Research will combine both primary and secondary sources to make this analysis. The main primary material will be the advisory reports of the *Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid* (AVV).<sup>21</sup> The AVV was an advisory council to the Dutch ministries of foreign affairs and defence, active between 1985 and 1997. It was established to provide independent policy advice on issues of peace, security, defence and international cooperation at a time of shifting global and European dynamics. Composed of experts from academia, diplomacy and the military, the AVV's task was to inform government decision-making through analytical reports.<sup>22</sup> During the period from 1989 to 1997, the AVV published fourteen reports. Of which eight will be analysed in this study, the remaining six are not relevant to the topic of this research. Each report consists of an advice request by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the advisory report, a summary of policy recommendations, and any necessary attachments. In 1997 the activities of the AVV were transferred to the newly formed *Adviesraad Internationale Vraagstukken*, which is still active today, in a restructuring of external advisory organs.<sup>23</sup> The primary sources of the AVV will be complemented, where necessary, by ministerial notes, and official treaty documents.

## *Methods & Structure*

This research applies a qualitative content analysis of the AVV reports to reconstruct how Dutch policymakers interpreted and prioritised NATO, the WEU and the CFSP.<sup>24</sup> The analysis focuses on how the reports framed institutional roles, assessed strategic options and translated international developments into policy-relevant recommendations. Using concepts from security studies, such as institutional competition, strategic autonomy, and policy framing, the reports are examined for how they defined threats, assigned responsibilities, and evaluated institutional options. These concepts are not imposed as a rigid theoretical model but are used as tools to identify recurring patterns in the AVV's reasoning and to facilitate comparison across time. Particular attention is paid to how those analytical concepts appear or are implicitly embedded in the reasoning of the AVV. The timeframe 1989-1997 is chosen to capture the European institutional building at the end of the Cold War, ending with the signing of the EU's Amsterdam treaty in 1997 and the simultaneous culmination of the AVV's work in the same year.

This study is in three parts. The first covers the period 1989-1991 and provides an overview of NATO, the WEU and emerging European political cooperation at the end of the Cold War. This chapter examines the immediate post-Cold War context, essential for understanding the baseline assumptions

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<sup>21</sup> Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken: Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, nummer toegang 2.05.400, inventarisnummers 7-21.

<sup>22</sup> Anselm van der Peet, 'Tussen politiek en advisering: De Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid 1983-1996,' *Atlantisch Perspectief*, 22:7 (1998) 17.

<sup>23</sup> Van der Peet, 'Tussen politiek en advisering,' 19.

<sup>24</sup> Miriam Dobson, and Benjamin Ziemann, *Reading Primary Sources. The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth and Twentieth Century History* (2009).

that shaped Dutch policy debates. The second period, from 1992 until 1995, analyses the phase following the signing of the EU's Maastricht Treaty, when the creation of the CFSP and the reactivation of the WEU introduced a new institutional landscape, which came with uncertainty about the division of labour between European and Atlantic frameworks, institutional overlap, and the practical testing of European security cooperation during the Yugoslav conflicts. The third part, from 1995 to 1997, focuses on the years leading up to the EU's Amsterdam Treaty, when debates about coherence, effectiveness and long-term institutional integration intensified and the AVV articulated more explicit forward-looking positions. The research is structured chronologically around the three successive periods. Rather than focusing on single events, the chapters analyse longer phases of adjustment. Within each chapter, the relevant AVV reports are analysed to assess how institutional roles were framed, how threats and responsibilities were defined and how policy options were evaluated. The concluding chapter synthesises these findings to identify broader patterns of continuity and change in Dutch strategic reasoning and to assess the role of advisory expertise in shaping foreign and security policy.

## 1. Reordering Security after the Cold War; 1989-1991

The fall of the Berlin wall in November 1989 represented the first major political rupture of the post-Cold war era and forced European governments to reassess long-standing assumptions about security order and institutional alignment.<sup>25</sup> For the Netherlands, the speed of geopolitical change, set in motion by the collapse of the GDR and the erosion of Soviet influence in Eastern Europe, created an immediate need for conceptual rethinking.<sup>26</sup> The disappearance of the familiar bipolar framework of the Cold War removed the strategic certainty on which Dutch security policy had rested for decades.

The end of the Cold War raised immediate questions about the institutional balance between NATO, the WEU and the evolving mechanisms of European political cooperation that would later form the CFSP. Debates arose over what role NATO should have in this theatre and what the European policy should be for security in Eastern Europe.<sup>27</sup> This chapter analyses how these debates were framed and interpreted in the Netherlands, by examining the competing institutional frameworks that structured security thinking in the years 1989 to 1991. It proceeds by analysing, in the following order, early efforts by the EC to create an exclusively European security forum, NATO as the cornerstone of collective defence and transatlantic stability, and the WEU as an intermediate vehicle for European defence cooperation.

### *European Security Cooperation*

In the years 1989 to 1991, the AVV's work was shaped by uncertainty about Europe's institutional direction, the future of NATO's political centrality and the unclear trajectory of European defence cooperation.<sup>28</sup> As the government faced fast-moving diplomatic developments, the AVV tried to keep up with providing assessments intended to stabilize decision-making by clarifying strategic risks, outlining alternative institutional futures and evaluating how Dutch interests could be safeguarded within a transforming Euro-Atlantic order. In July of 1990, the Dutch Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence requested the AVV to advise on the future direction of conventional arms control in Europe.<sup>29</sup> The advice report that followed this offers valuable insight into prevailing assumptions about institutional balance and security governance in a global order after the Cold War.

In this 1990 report; *Kansen en Risico's: Europa's veiligheid na de Koude Oorlog*, the AVV argues that the end of the Cold war created a historic opportunity to establish a just and durable European Security order, provided that serious political regression in the Soviet Union could be avoided. It calls on the Dutch government to actively support the development of a collective European security system

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<sup>25</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 7. p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> William Mallinson, *From Neutrality to Commitment*, 21.

<sup>27</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 13.

<sup>28</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 7.

<sup>29</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 7. p. 2.

that would include all European states as well as the United States and Canada.<sup>30</sup> In this context, the Council attaches particular importance to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), whose institutional development should be strengthened in the run-up to the 1992 Helsinki follow-up conference. The Dutch EC presidency in the second half of 1991 is identified as a key opportunity for the Netherlands to promote a stronger European role in security affairs through both the CSCE and the EC.<sup>31</sup>

The CSCE occupied a distinctive place in European security thinking at the end of the Cold War. Established through the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, the CSCE originated as a multilateral forum intended to reduce East-West tensions in Europe by promoting confidence-building measures, arms control, and dialogue across the Iron Curtain. This pan-European process included Western states, the Soviet Union, and Eastern European countries on the basis of sovereign equality and consensus-based decision-making.<sup>32</sup> In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the CSCE gained renewed significance as a framework for managing political transformation, fostering transparency, and embedding newly independent or reforming states within a cooperative security order.<sup>33</sup> As such, it reflected an emerging conception of security that emphasized inclusivity, prevention and political consultation rather than military deterrence alone. While the CSCE is different in nature and unrelated to later EC initiatives for a common defence and security policy, it nonetheless embodied an important strand of post-Cold War European security thinking. As argued by the AVV, this is the idea that stability could be generated through institutionalised dialogue, shared norms, and multilateral governance.<sup>34</sup> Introducing the CSCE here is worthwhile because it provides historical context for the development of European security thinking, showing how non-military frameworks for cooperation influenced later debates on the EU's CFSP.

### *NATO*

On a longer time horizon, the AVV does not exclude the possibility of CSCE-led peace operations, potentially involving multinational military units drawn from participating states, though it acknowledges that such ambitions would require substantial political commitment and institutional development.<sup>35</sup> Taken together, these recommendations reveal that the AVV did not view the CSCE as an alternative to NATO, but as a complementary framework aimed at embedding military security within a broader architecture of transparency, cooperation and political restraint.

For NATO, the evolving environment of the post-Cold War global order was marked by significant uncertainty of the transatlantic alliance. Political instability in the Soviet Union, followed by

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<sup>30</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 7. p. 40.

<sup>31</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 7. p. 41.

<sup>32</sup> Ben Soetendorp, *Foreign Policy in the European Union*.

<sup>33</sup> Karen Smith, 'Understanding the European Foreign Policy System,' in: *Contemporary European History* 12:2 (2003) 239-254.

<sup>34</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 7. p. 40.

<sup>35</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 7. p. 23.

its imminent collapse, and the fragile conditions in Central and Eastern Europe contributed to a fragmented and unpredictable security landscape.<sup>36</sup> The disappearance of a single, clearly defined eastern threat not only transformed the nature of security in Europe but also prompted a fundamental debate about NATO's purpose in the absence of the bipolar Cold War order it had been designed to serve. Within this context, NATO nevertheless remained indispensable as the primary framework for collective defence and deterrence, particularly given the continued existence of substantial Soviet military capabilities in the years before its collapse. This continuity was accompanied by pressures for strategic adaptation, including a reduced reliance on nuclear weapons, greater European responsibility for conventional defence and an increased emphasis on political dialogue with Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.<sup>37</sup>

### *The WEU*

In 1990, the WEU occupied a distinct but somewhat ambiguous position within the emerging European security architecture. Its role was increasingly debated by government officials, particularly as European integration and the EC's evolving political cooperation structures began to gain prominence.<sup>38</sup> The AVV interpreted the WEU as a potential instrument for fostering European responsibility in defence, especially in conventional forces, while simultaneously maintaining close coordination with NATO to ensure transatlantic stability. The AVV emphasised the need to clearly define the respective roles of NATO and the WEU to avoid duplication, inefficiency, or the perception of a 'European rival' to the transatlantic alliance. In practical terms, this meant that the WEU should focus on developing concrete operational capacities, such as joint exercises, multinational units, and crisis management mechanisms. Thereby complementing NATO's strategic and deterrence functions. At the same time, the AVV saw the WEU as an important intermediary in linking broader European political ambitions, including those of the EC, with practical security and defence capabilities.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, during this period the WEU largely remained in the background of European security debates, or at least in the priorities of the Dutch government, overshadowed by NATO and the slowly accelerating political integration within the EC. The WEU's political relevance would increase after the Maastricht Treaty, when it would be more explicitly connected to the EU's emerging foreign and security policy framework.

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<sup>36</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 7. p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 7. p. 23.

<sup>38</sup> Sally Rohan, *The Western European Union; International Politics between Alliance and Integration* (2014).

<sup>39</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 8. p. 11-14.

## 2. The Yugoslav Crisis as a Test for European Security: 1992-1995

In the years following the signing of the EU's Maastricht Treaty in 1992, the optimism that had accompanied the end of the Cold War gave way to a more sobering security environment. Shaped by the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia, the inability of international institutions to prevent or contain armed conflict on the European continent, and the uncertainty of the consequences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union.<sup>40</sup> Especially the wars in Bosnia exposed gaps between ambition and capability in European crisis management and proved to be a litmus test for emerging mechanisms of European security cooperation.<sup>41</sup> This chapter analyses how Dutch institutional thinking and policy on security were shaped within this deteriorating context. This chapter mirrors the structure of the previous, examining each institutional setting in turn, assessing how their evolving roles, limitations and mutual dependencies developed between 1992 and 1995.

### *The CFSP*

The creation of the CFSP in the early 1990s marked a qualitative shift in European foreign policy coordination, formalized with the Maastricht treaty of 1992, entering into force in 1993.<sup>42</sup> Unlike the CSCE discussed in the previous chapter,, the CFSP was explicitly embedded within the institutional framework of the EU. The CFSP sought to give the member states of the EU a collective voice on matters of external affairs. Whereas the CSCE operated based on broad consensus among a varying group of states, the CFSP was narrower in membership and based on unanimity of all its members.<sup>43</sup> Thereby linking foreign and security policy coordination to the broader project of European integration. The CFSP's intergovernmental character and unanimity voting, and the absence of autonomous military instruments meant that it initially functioned as a framework for political coordination and joint declarations, with limited capacity for decisive actions.<sup>44</sup>

Important to briefly note is that Maastricht did not represent a radical rupture in the coordination of national positions on international issues among EC member states. It was more of a formalization and deepening of the pre-existing practices of the preceding European Political Cooperation (EPC), founded in 1970.<sup>45</sup> In this sense, the CFSP marked the point at which European foreign policy coordination attempted to decisively move away from pan-European frameworks such as the CSCE and became anchored within the narrower, integration-driven structures of the newly formed EU.

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<sup>40</sup> Karen E. Smith, 'Understanding the European Foreign Policy System,' in: *Contemporary European History* 12:2 (2003) 244.

<sup>41</sup> Ben Soetendorp, *Foreign Policy in the European Union*, 177-180.

<sup>42</sup> Treaty on European Union (Maastricht Treaty)', signed 7 February 1992, entered into force 1 November 1993, *Official Journal of the European Union* (OJ C191/1).

<sup>43</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 12. p. 17.

<sup>44</sup> Gärtner, 'European Security, NATO and the transatlantic link,' 8.

<sup>45</sup> Ben Soetendorp, *Foreign Policy in the European Union*, 10.

The CFSP's shortcomings in the early 1990s were made particularly evident by the crisis in Yugoslavia, starting in 1991. The AVV emphasized that the CFSP lacked both the operational capacity and the political cohesion to respond effectively to the rapidly escalating conflict in the Balkan. Member states were more concerned with national interests than with coordinated action and could not agree on key decisions, leading to delayed responses and continued reliance on the United States to assume leadership. Spain and the UK for example, feared that supporting secessionist movements abroad could set a precedent that might encourage similar separatism at home, while Germany was advocating for strong military intervention. Furthermore, EU member states disagreed on the timing of recognition for seceding republics, the balance between diplomacy and military action, and the role of the US and NATO.<sup>46</sup> The Yugoslav wars revealed that the CFSP, while still in its formative stage, was structurally ill-equipped to manage rapidly escalating conflicts. It exposed the limits of intergovernmental decision-making under unanimity voting, showing that divergent national interests could easily paralyze collective action. In this sense, the AVV argued that Yugoslavia functioned as an early practical test, concluding that the CFSP could coordinate discussion but not enforce decisions, leaving European security still reliant on NATO and, ultimately, US leadership for effective crisis management.<sup>47</sup>

### *NATO*

In the first half of the 1990s, Dutch policy thinking on NATO, as reflected in the AVV's 1993 report *Welke toekomst voor de NAVO?*, shows a clear shift from viewing the Alliance primarily as a static framework for territorial defence to conceiving it as a dynamic instrument for managing post-Cold War instability.<sup>48</sup> Whereas in 1990, NATO's centrality was still largely justified by the remaining uncertainty of the Soviet Union's threat to the west, by 1993 the AVV explicitly recognised that the traditional foundations of NATO's success had eroded. The disappearance of a monolithic Eastern threat, the emergence of more selective American leadership, and the pressure on the integrated European military structure caused by uncoordinated defence cuts among all NATO members fundamentally altered the conditions under which the transatlantic alliance operated. For the AVV, this meant that NATO could no longer rely on its Cold War rationale to sustain political legitimacy and public support.<sup>49</sup> Against this background, the AVV framed NATO as an organisation at a strategic crossroads. The 1993 report argues that the defence of the treaty area, while necessary, was no longer sufficient to guarantee NATO's relevance. Instead, the alliance had to demonstrate a tangible contribution to stability across Europe as a whole.<sup>50</sup> This reasoning is directly informed by the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, which exposed Europe's inability to manage crises autonomously. In Dutch thinking, NATO's future credibility became increasingly linked to its capacity to act beyond its traditional geographical and functional

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<sup>46</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 12. p. 6-8.

<sup>47</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 12. p. 27.

<sup>48</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 12. p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 12. p. 25.

<sup>50</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 12. p. 23-24.

boundaries, particularly in peace operations and, where necessary, coercive interventions mandated by the UN Security Council or the CSCE.<sup>51</sup>

A central element in this reorientation was the recalibration of transatlantic burden-sharing. The AVV explicitly acknowledged that the United States would remain engaged in European security, but no longer as an automatic leader willing to intervene at any cost, as might have been the case during the Cold War. This change in American leadership led to a greater responsibility for European members of NATO.<sup>52</sup> Crucially, the AVV interpreted this not as a challenge to NATO's cohesion, but as a precondition for sustaining American commitment. A more capable European pillar within NATO was thus presented as the best safeguard against US disengagement. In this sense, Dutch policy thinking increasingly linked the survival of NATO to progress in European security cooperation, rather than treating the two as competing projects.

At the same time, the creation of parallel military structures outside of NATO was firmly rejected. In the years before 1995, NATO is described as the only European security organisation possessing an integrated military command. The AVV saw any duplication of this capacity, albeit it in the newly formed CFSP or in the existing WEU, as inefficient and politically risky.<sup>53</sup> Especially in an era of shrinking defence budgets.<sup>54</sup> The preferred solution by the AVV, was a functional division of labour in which NATO assets could be made available for operations led by the WEU. Simultaneously, the CSCE provided a normative diplomatic framework for conflict prevention, with NATO acting as the executive instrument capable of implementing decisions requiring military force.<sup>55</sup> Together, these institutions reflected a coordinated, multilayered European security order in which NATO retained its unique operational capacity while other bodies aimed to contribute political, preventive, and crisis-management support.<sup>56</sup>

### *The WEU*

After a period of relative dormancy, the WEU was reactivated in the early 1990s as part of the broader reconfiguration of European security, as discussed before. The Maastricht Treaty formally associated the WEU with the newly created EU, assigning it the task of elaborating and implementing EU decisions with defence implications.<sup>57</sup> The 1992 Petersberg Declaration reinforced the position of the WEU, expanding its mandate to include peacekeeping and crisis-management operations under UN or CSCE initiatives.<sup>58</sup> However, Maastricht left the division of labour between the EU, WEU and NATO

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<sup>51</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 12. p. 23-24.

<sup>52</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 12. p. 25.

<sup>53</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 12. p. 23-24.

<sup>54</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 11. p. 18-19.

<sup>55</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 12. p. 23-24.

<sup>56</sup> Gärtner, 'European Security, NATO and the transatlantic link,' 12.

<sup>57</sup> Zoppi, 'The Western European Union and the Yugoslav Wars,' 232.

<sup>58</sup> Rohan, *The Western European Union*, 268.

undefined in these early stages of EU's CFSP. Interpretations of the made agreements varied by member states which limited the WEU's ability to develop into an autonomous operational actor. But most notably, internal divisions between Atlanticist member states, favouring NATO, and Europeanist states, advocating greater strategic autonomy, especially constrained institutional consolidation of the WEU.<sup>59</sup> The Dutch government evidently positioned itself with the Atlanticist states, firmly rejecting the creation of parallel European military structures outside NATO.<sup>60</sup> Within this view, the WEU was seen by the AVV as an instrument to facilitate European-led operations making use of NATO assets, providing a forum for preparing and politically framing such operations. This approach was further institutionalised with the acceptance of the NATO Combined Joint Task Forces (CJTF) concept in 1994, which formally allowed the WEU to conduct operations using NATO command structures.<sup>61</sup>

The WEU was considered as the institutional bridge between the CFSP and NATO. In relation to the CFSP, the WEU functioned as its prospective defence component: it was expected to elaborate and implement EU decisions with military implications, without itself becoming supranational.<sup>62</sup> At the same time, the WEU was envisioned as the European pillar of NATO, enabling European-led operations by drawing on NATO assets, while explicitly avoiding duplication of NATO's integrated command structure.<sup>63</sup> This bridge function was put to an early test during the Yugoslav wars. Although the CFSP generated diplomatic initiatives and political declarations, it proved unable to translate these into effective decisions. And the WEU was unable to arrive at a common decision due to the internal disagreements among its member states, which prevented it from providing the political direction necessary to activate NATO's military capabilities.<sup>64</sup> European-led responses through the WEU were limited to marginal tasks, such as naval embargo enforcements in the Adriatic.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the WEU's intermediary role remained largely theoretical in practice. CFSP decisions were too fragmented to provide clear guidance and NATO retained control over the decisive military instruments.

All this does not surprise that the AVV remained sceptical about the WEU in its forward-looking assessment in 1994. The AVV envisaged a role for the organisation in engaging with Central and Eastern Europe through differentiated forms of association but warned that such arrangements risked creating expectations of security guarantees that the WEU lacked the military means to fulfil. The AVV was equally sceptical about proposals to absorb the WEU into the EU, arguing instead that its added value lay in serving as a flexible platform for a core group within the CFSP.<sup>66</sup> This position ultimately did not

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<sup>59</sup> Zoppi, 'The Western European Union and the Yugoslav Wars,' 232.

<sup>60</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 12. p. 25.

<sup>61</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 14. p. 16-17.

<sup>62</sup> Rohan, *The Western European Union*, 272.

<sup>63</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 14. p. 16.

<sup>64</sup> Zoppi, 'The Western European Union and the Yugoslav Wars,' 238-239.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, 239.

<sup>66</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 14. p. 17.

prevail, as the WEU was slowly integrated into the EU framework in the second half of the 1990s and its functions were incorporated into the EU's emerging security and defence policy.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Zoppi, 'The Western European Union and the Yugoslav Wars,' 229.

### 3. From Fragmentation to Coherence; the Road to Amsterdam: 1995-1997

In the second half of the 1990s, European security debates unfolded in a context shaped by both cautious stabilization and lingering uncertainty. The legacy of the violent dissolution of former Yugoslavia prompted deep reflection on Europe's inability to prevent or manage conflict on its own continent. This sense of failure coincided with a broader reassessment of the post-Cold War order and the continuation of EU's development of a common defence and security policy, culminating in the Amsterdam treaty in 1997.<sup>68</sup> The assumed peace dividend proved elusive, ethnic conflict persisted on Europe's periphery and Russia's future trajectory remained unclear. At the same time, NATO enlargement towards Central and Eastern Europe gained political momentum, prompting a necessary reflection on the institutions' structures.<sup>70</sup> This chapter examines how European security thinking evolved in the years leading up to the Amsterdam Treaty, taking the signing in 1997 as a natural endpoint given the simultaneous dissolution of the AVV in this year.<sup>71</sup> As in the previous chapters, the analysis is structured around the competing and complementary roles of the CFSP, WEU and NATO, tracing how their interaction shaped the development of the European security architecture.

#### *The CFSP*

Although Maastricht formally endowed the EU with an external identity and ambitious objectives within the CFSP, in 1996 the AVV characterised the policy framework as the product of a fragile compromise, shaped by urgency rather than consensus.<sup>72</sup> In practice, the CFSP activity concentrated on relatively uncontroversial areas, such as arms control and economic dimensions of security, while the CFSP proved incapable of acting decisively in high-stakes crisis where member states could not agree on a direction.<sup>73</sup> In the early stages of the CFSP after Maastricht, larger member states preferred to act outside the CFSP because alternative frameworks offered greater flexibility, speed, and control over outcomes. Within the CFSP, decision-making was slow and consensus-based, requiring compromises that could dilute national preferences. By contrast, ad hoc arrangements such as the Contact Group for Yugoslavia allowed major European powers to coordinate directly with one another and with key external factors, notably the United States and the Russian Federation, thereby maximising their own diplomatic influence.<sup>74</sup> This enabled larger states to shape policy in line with their national strategic interests, without being constrained by smaller member states or by the institutional limitations

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<sup>68</sup> Treaty of Amsterdam, amending the Treaty on European Union, the Treaties establishing the European Communities and certain related Acts, signed 2 October 1997, entered into force 1 May 1999, *Official Journal of the European Union* (OJ C340/1).

<sup>69</sup> Soetendorp, *Foreign Policy in the European Union*, 178.

<sup>70</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 16. p. 6.

<sup>71</sup> Van der Peet, 'Tussen politiek en advisering,' 16.

<sup>72</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 16. p. 19.

<sup>73</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 16. p. 21.

<sup>74</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 16. p. 22.

of the CFSP. As a result, larger EU states such as Germany, France and the United Kingdom were to a lesser extent motivated to invest in strengthening EU-level mechanisms.

According to the AVV, this problem could only be addressed by strengthening the coherence and credibility of the CFSP itself. This required clearer political leadership, earlier and more systematic coordination among member states and a greater willingness, particularly from larger states, to commit to common positions rather than defaulting to national or ad hoc frameworks.<sup>75</sup> The AVV also emphasized the need to equip the CFSP with more effective instruments and procedures, so that acting through the EU would become politically meaningful and practically advantageous compared to alternatives such as the Contact Group for Yugoslavia.<sup>76</sup> To address the challenges present in the CFSP framework, the AVV proposed a series of institutional reforms aimed at integrating the CFSP more effectively within the European security architecture. Central to this vision was the creation of a 'security official' to lead a dedicated analysis and policy centre, working closely with the European commission and potentially holding a dual role with the WEU Secretary-General to ensure synergy between the institutions.<sup>77</sup> In these recommendations, the AVV shifted from its earlier stance by promoting the integration of the WEU into the CFSP framework. Whereas the AVV previously emphasized the WEU's role as a NATO-dependant bridge, in 1996 it argued that the WEU could serve as a specialized operational arm of CFSP, linked to EU decision-making.<sup>78</sup>

### *The WEU*

Between 1995 and 1997, the WEU entered a qualitatively different phase from the period immediately following Maastricht. While the earlier years had been characterized by institutional ambiguity and political hesitation, the mid- 1990s marked a shift toward consolidation debates and forward-looking institutional choices shaped by perceived failures of European crisis management in the former Yugoslavia. Rather than reassessing the WEU's foundational mandate, discussions increasingly focused on whether the organization still served a viable purpose as a separate intermediary, or whether it should be structurally absorbed into a more coherent EU security framework. In institutional terms, the WEU's role in these years was less about redefining tasks than about operational clarification and political positioning. The Petersberg tasks and the CJTF framework were no longer new initiatives but formed the accepted basis for the WEU's limited operational profile.<sup>79</sup> What changed after 1995 was the recognition that these instruments, while symbolically important, had not resolved the underlying coordination problems between the CFSP, the WEU and NATO. The WEU had acquired modest planning structures and identified multinational forces, yet it remained unable to translate

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<sup>75</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 16. p. 30-33.

<sup>76</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 16. p. 22.

<sup>77</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 16. p. 31.

<sup>78</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 16. p. 28-29.

<sup>79</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 16. p. 20.

political intent into decisive action without NATO's command structures and crucially, US leadership.<sup>80</sup> Compared to the 1992-1995 period, the WEU was thus more institutionalized, but its dependence on external frameworks had become more visible rather than less.

This growing awareness fed directly into debates surrounding the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference (IGC), which would result in the EU's Treaty of Amsterdam signed in 1997. Unlike the AVV's sceptical assessment in 1994, which emphasised the risks of overloading the WEU with expectations it could not meet, later advice reflected a more pragmatic reassessment of the path the EU was headed. By the second half of the 1990s, the existence of parallel structures was increasingly seen as part of the problem rather than a safeguard. The AVV therefore moved away from its earlier preference for the WEU as a flexible, semi-detached platform and instead endorsed the gradual integration of the WEU into the CFSP as a long-term objective.<sup>81</sup> This shift reflected the limited autonomous capabilities of the WEU, reinforcing the need to reduce institutional fragmentation.

At the same time, the AVV remained sensitive to the political constraints within the EU. Integration was not conceived as an immediate or uniform process. The AVV's proposal to treat the WEU as a temporary 'military pioneer group' illustrates this caution. This concept sought to reconcile deeper defence cooperation with the realities of differentiated integration, allowing willing EU member states to proceed with military integration without forcing neutral states into unwanted security commitments. The WEU's value in this phase thus lay less in what it could do militarily, and more in how it could function as a transitional platform for experimentation within the evolving EU framework.<sup>82</sup>

Within the broader European security landscape, the WEU's position between 1995 and 1997 was therefore increasingly transitional rather than foundational. NATO remained the undisputed provider of collective defence and robust military capability, while the CFSP was slowly being considered as the central political framework for European external action. The WEU occupied the narrowing space between these two, increasingly perceived as an interim solution whose long-term relevance depended on its absorption into the EU.<sup>83</sup> The WEU was no longer defended as an end in itself but reframed as a means to overcome institutional fragmentation in European security, a logic that would ultimately shape its gradual disappearance into the EU's security and defence policy after Amsterdam.

## *NATO*

After 1995, NATO consolidated its position as the central executive institution of European security. Whereas earlier debates focused on NATO's relevance in the absence of a direct territorial threat it was created to serve, the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia decisively demonstrated that no

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<sup>80</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 16. p. 20.

<sup>81</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 16. p. 22.

<sup>82</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 16. p. 32-34.

<sup>83</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 16. p. 20.

alternative framework possessed comparable operational capacity.<sup>84</sup> NATO thus redefined itself as an organization capable of conducting complex crisis-management operations beyond its treaty area. This transformation was most clearly reflected in NATO's operational engagement in Bosnia. The deployment of the Implementation Force (IFOR) in 1996, following the Dayton accords, constituted the first large-scale land operations in NATO's history conducted outside the Alliance's original geographic scope. These missions established NATO as the primary instrument for implementing internationally mandated military decisions in Europe. For the AVV, these operations confirmed that European crisis management remained structurally dependent on NATO. Compared to the earlier period discussed in the previous chapter, NATO's relevance was no longer theoretical, but empirically demonstrated through the IFOR in Bosnia.<sup>85</sup> In contrast to the transitional and increasingly provisional role of the WEU, NATO functioned as the stable anchor of the European security architecture, providing the practical foundation upon which all other institutional arrangements ultimately depended.

Alongside operational engagement, NATO's role between 1995 and 1997 was shaped by the prospect of enlargement. The AVV framed enlargement as an integral element of NATO's post-Cold War adaptation. By offering membership to Central European states, NATO aimed to stabilize the post-communist space embedding new democracies within a dense web of military and political commitments.<sup>86</sup> At the same time, the AVV stressed that enlargement carried strategic risks, particularly in relation to Russia. To mitigate these risks, it advocated a two-track policy that combined enlargement of NATO with improved relations with Russia, designed to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines in Europe.<sup>87</sup> NATO enlargement could not be treated in isolation but had direct implications for membership of the EU and the WEU. While parallel accession of the three institutions was desirable in specific cases, the AVV rejected it as an automatic rule and instead stressed a differentiated and chronological approach. NATO membership was seen as a necessary precondition for accession to the WEU, since the latter relied structurally on NATO for the implementation of collective defence commitments. Allowing non-NATO states into the WEU would therefore risk granting security guarantees 'through the backdoor' without meeting NATO standards. Conversely, the AVV considered it undesirable for Central and Eastern European states to join the WEU prior to EU accession, as they would skip the political-economic requirements necessary for joining the EU. For states entering NATO but not yet the EU, intermediate arrangements such as WEU observer status were deemed appropriate.<sup>88</sup> Taken together, NATO enlargement implied that security integration should proceed in a controlled and hierarchical manner.

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<sup>84</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 20. p. 10.

<sup>85</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 20. p. 11-13.

<sup>86</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 20. p. 15.

<sup>87</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 20. p. 19-20.

<sup>88</sup> NL-HaNA, Buza / Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid, 2.05.400, inv.nr. 20. p. 42.

## 4. Analysis

The Analysis of Dutch security thinking between 1989 and 1997 reveals a pattern of strategic continuity combined with incremental, experience-driven adaptation. Rather than undergoing abrupt ideological shifts in response to the end of the Cold War, Dutch policy evolved through a gradual process of reassessment shaped by institutional performance, crisis experience, and changing expectations of multilateral cooperation. The AVV played a central role in structuring this process by translating international developments into coherent interpretative frameworks for policymakers, thereby stabilising decision-making during a decade of profound uncertainty. This chapter will analyse the findings of the three previous chapters to eventually come to a final conclusion.

### *Atlanticism & Learning through Crises*

Across all three periods examined, Dutch security policy remained firmly anchored in NATO. This continuity was not merely rhetorical but reflected a deeply embedded hierarchy of institutions within Dutch strategic reasoning. NATO was consistently conceptualised as the only organisation possessing the integrated command structures, political authority, and military capabilities necessary for credible deterrence and effective crisis management. Even after the collapse of the bipolar order and the disappearance of the single adversary for which NATO had originally been designed, neither the AVV nor Dutch policymakers treated the alliance as obsolete. Instead, NATO was reinterpreted as adaptable, capable of redefining its purpose in response to new forms of instability. This institutional hierarchy structured Dutch evaluations of all other security frameworks. European initiatives were assessed not in isolation, but in relation to NATO's executive capacity. The AVV repeatedly rejected proposals that risked duplicating NATO's military functions, framing such duplication as inefficient and politically destabilising, particularly in an era of declining defence budgets and uncertain American commitment. European cooperation was therefore consistently legitimised only insofar as it complemented, rather than challenged, the transatlantic alliance.

While Atlanticism remained constant, the meaning of 'security' within Dutch policy discourse changed significantly over time. In the immediate post-Cold War years, Dutch strategic thinking was characterised by optimism regarding the prospect for a cooperative European security order. The emphasis on pan-European frameworks such as the CSCE reflected a belief that dialogue, transparency and institutionalised norms could mitigate insecurity and prevent the re-emergence of bloc confrontation. Security was conceived broadly, encompassing political consultation and confidence-building as much as military deterrence. By the mid-1990s, however, this inclusive vision had been tempered by experience. The wars in the former Yugoslavia constituted a critical turning point. They demonstrated that dialogue-based frameworks and political coordination mechanisms were insufficient in the absence of enforceable authority and military capability. As a result, Dutch reasoning increasingly prioritised institutional executability; the ability to act decisively under conditions of political

fragmentation and time pressure. This shift did not entail a rejection of multilateralism, but rather a reorientation toward institutions capable of producing concrete outcomes. The AVV's evolving assessments reflect this learning process. Early expectations that European institutions might gradually assume greater responsibility for security were replaced by a more sober evaluation of their limitations. The emphasis shifted from designing an ideal institutional architecture to managing an imperfect one, in which effectiveness, coherence, and clarity of responsibility became central concerns.

### *Institutional Deliberations*

The CFSP occupied an increasingly prominent place in Dutch security thinking, yet its role remained fundamentally constrained before Amsterdam. Initially welcomed as a formalisation of European foreign policy coordination, the CFSP was quickly exposed as structurally ill-equipped to manage high-intensity crises. Its intergovernmental character, unanimity requirements, and lack of autonomous military instruments limited its ability to respond effectively when member states' interests diverged. For small states like the Netherlands, these limitations had particular implications. Larger EU member states were able to bypass the CFSP in favour of ad hoc arrangements, such as the Contact Group for Yugoslavia, which allowed them to retain greater control over outcomes. Smaller states, by contrast, depended more heavily on formalised multilateral procedures to exert influence. The AVV implicitly recognized this asymmetry, which explains the Dutch preference for strengthening rather than abandoning the CFSP. Dutch support for the CFSP was therefore pragmatic rather than ideological. The CFSP was valued as a framework for political coordination, agenda-setting and legitimacy-building, but not as an executive instrument. Over time, the AVV increasingly argued that the credibility of the CFSP depended on improved coherence, clearer leadership structures and stronger links to operational capabilities. These recommendations reflected a broader shift toward prioritising functionality over symbolism in European security cooperation.

The WEU's trajectory illustrates most clearly how Dutch security thinking evolved in response to institutional experience. In the early 1990s, the WEU was conceptualised as a useful intermediary; a bridge between European political ambition and NATO's military capacity. This role aligned well with Dutch preferences, as it allowed for greater European visibility in security affairs without undermining NATO's primacy. Instruments such as the Petersberg tasks and the CJTF framework institutionalised this division of labour. However, the Yugoslav conflicts exposed the limits of this arrangement. Despite its formal mandate, the WEU proved unable to act decisively due to internal political divisions and its dependence on NATO assets. Its intermediary position, initially perceived as a strength, increasingly appeared as a source of ambiguity and inefficiency. By the mid-1990s, overlapping competences and unclear lines of authority were no longer viewed as providing flexibility, but as undermining Europe's capacity to respond effectively to crisis. This reassessment explains the AVV's shift from scepticism toward the integration of the WEU into the EU framework to conditional support for such integration in

the second half of the 1990s. The WEU was no longer defended as an end in itself, but reframed as a transitional mechanism whose value lay in facilitating a move toward greater institutional coherence. This shift reflects a broader pattern in Dutch strategic reasoning: tolerance for institutional ambiguity declined as the costs of fragmentation became more apparent.

Parallel to the reassessment of European institutions, Dutch views on NATO underwent a process of adaptation. NATO's role expanded beyond collective territorial defence to include crisis management and the projection of stability, most visibly through its interventions in Bosnia. These operations empirically confirmed NATO's continued indispensability and reinforced its position at the apex of the European security hierarchy. At the same time, NATO's adaptation introduced new strategic dilemmas, particularly concerning enlargement and relations with Russia. The AVV consistently framed enlargement as a stabilising mechanism for Central and Eastern Europe, while cautioning against actions that might create new dividing lines or provoke Russian insecurity. Dutch policy sought to reconcile these objectives through a differentiated and sequential approach to NATO, WEU and EU membership for Eastern European states, reflecting a preference for controlled integration over rapid expansion. Crucially, the persistence of American leadership remained a defining feature of Dutch security thinking in the 1990s. Even as European responsibility within NATO increased, there was no expectation that Europe could, or should, replace the United States as the primary security provider. European autonomy was therefore understood not as independence from NATO, but as enhanced capacity within a transatlantic framework.

### *Advisory Expertise & Policy Stabilisation*

The AVV played a crucial role in mediating these developments. Its reports did not simply reflect government positions but actively structured how policymakers interpreted institutional capacity, division of labour and political feasibility.<sup>89</sup> The AVV contributed to a stabilisation of Dutch policy during a period of rapid change. Importantly, the AVV demonstrated adaptability. Early commitments to pan-European inclusivity and scepticism toward institutional consolidation gave way to more pragmatic positions as experience accumulated. This adaptability underscores the value of advisory expertise in foreign policy.

Taken together, the analysis suggests that Dutch security thinking in the 1990s was defined less by ideological transformation than by pragmatic learning. Continuity in Atlanticism provided a stable foundation, while crisis experience prompted a gradual reordering of priorities within the European security architecture. The movement from inclusive, dialogue-oriented frameworks toward a more capability-driven and integration-focused approach reflects a learning process shaped by institutional performance rather than abstract preference. Rather than choosing between Atlantic and European

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<sup>89</sup> Van der Peet, 'Tussen politiek en advisering,' 19.

frameworks, Dutch strategic reasoning sought to balance them through a clear hierarchy; NATO as the executive core, the CFSP as the political coordination framework, and the WEU as a transitional mechanism whose relevance declined as institutional coherence became priority. This balance, articulated and refined through advisory expertise, shaped Dutch positions leading up to the Amsterdam Treaty and defined the Netherlands' approach to European security in the post-Cold War decade.

## Conclusion

This thesis asked how Dutch policymakers navigated the competing frameworks of NATO, the WEU and the EU's emerging CFSP between 1989 and 1997. It has shown that this navigation was neither ad hoc nor driven by a search for institutional alternatives, but rather by a structured interpretative process in which overlapping frameworks were ordered, prioritised and combined. Dutch policymakers, as advised by the AVV, approached the post-Cold War security environment not as a choice between Atlantic and European paths, but as a problem of institutional differentiation within a rapidly changing European order.

Returning to the concerns outlined in the introduction, the transformation of European security after the Cold War confronted states with uncertainty about autonomy, alliance loyalty and multilateral coordination. The Dutch response to this uncertainty was characterised by continuity rather than rupture. NATO remained the indispensable executive framework, while European initiatives were evaluated according to their capacity to complement rather than replace transatlantic security.

The central contribution of this study lies in its focus on advisory expertise as a site of security policy formation. By analysing the AVV's reports, this thesis has demonstrated that Dutch security policy was shaped through internal processes of interpretation that translated international developments into policy-relevant knowledge. The AVV did not determine policy outcomes, but it structured how choices were understood and justified. Future research could extend this approach with comparative analysis of advisory bodies in other European states to establish whether similar patterns of institutional ordering characterised post-Cold War security thinking elsewhere. Additionally, extending the chronological scope beyond 1997 could clarify how the interpretative frameworks identified here shaped Dutch responses to later debates on European security and defence integration.

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**List of abbreviations:**

- AIV = Adviesraad Internationale Vraagstukken
- AVV = Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid
- CCS = Critical Security Studies
- CFSP = Common Foreign and Security Policy
- CJTF = Combined Joint Task Forces
- CSCE = Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
- EC = European Community
- EPC = European Political Cooperation
- EU = European Union
- IGC = Intergovernmental Conference
- NATO = North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
- WEU = Western European Union