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Portugal's strategic response to Brexit: enduring Europeanisation?

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ABSTRACT

Portugal is an often neglected country in the literature on small European states and one which is significantly exposed to the effects of Brexit. While being a core EU member, Portugal has a historic alliance with the United Kingdom, sharing with it an Atlanticist outlook. Drawing on the literature on small states, New Institutionalism and Europeanisation, this article deals with the effects of Brexit on Portugal's European strategy. More specifically, it examines the country's coping strategies vis-à-vis Brexit, the underlying drivers of these diplomatic responses, as well as their implications for the Europeanisation of Portuguese foreign policy. It is argued that Portugal has hedged its bets to balance a firm EU commitment, the protection of important ties with the UK and a strong NATO engagement. In so doing, the country has exhibited an enduring but limited foreign policy Europeanisation, even more cautiously pragmatic than in the past.

KEYWORDS

Portugal; European Union; brexit; small states; foreign policy; Europeanisation

Introduction

The United Kingdom's (UK) exit from the European Union (EU) embodied a disruptive new reality, giving rise to a multitude of far-reaching implications for the EU's internal and external affairs. The departure of such a key politico-diplomatic actor, military power and economic player as the UK is expected to affect all EU member states. However, these effects are likely to be more pronounced for smaller member states due to their lack of capabilities and specific vulnerabilities, which make them more dependent on an international body such as the EU. Portugal is an example of a smaller EU member state significantly exposed to the effects of Brexit. While being a relatively old EU member, it has a centuries-old politico-diplomatic alliance with the UK with which it shares a strong commitment to NATO. In addition to this common Atlantic outlook that has conditioned continued alignment to the United States, the two countries have developed important socio-economic ties. Prior to Brexit, Portugal consistently sided with the UK's positions on European integrationist endeavours in the security and defence area. Even when Portugal became a founding member of the Eurozone in 1999, thereby diverging fundamentally from the British positions for the first time, convergence with London's standpoint on Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) remained unaltered. Indeed, Portugal continued to advocate the primacy of NATO in the post-Cold War European security architecture as well as full complementarity between the CSDP and the common defence policy established under the 1949 Washington Treaty.

Drawing on insights from the literature on small states, New Institutionalism and Europeanisation, this article explores the effects of Brexit on Portugal's European strategy. More specifically, by engaging with the analytical framework of the present Special Issue, the study examines: i) the diplomatic strategies Portuguese authorities have pursued to respond to Brexit (i.e. hiding, shelter-seeking, hedging); ii) the logics of action underlying such strategies (i.e. the logic of appropriateness and consequences); iii) the implications of these strategies for the Europeanisation of Portugal's foreign policy (i.e. undermining or reinforcing). The focus is on the period between the British referendum of June 2016 and the conclusion of the withdrawal process in January 2020, considering Portugal's official positioning during the Brexit negotiations as well as in relation to parallel EU developments in the foreign and security policy realm. Thus, the main concern is with policy positions (or policy output, rather than policy process) as expressed publicly by actors representing the national government. The analysis not only draws on secondary literature, but takes its major strength from the use of primary sources, notably official documents and statements, as well as semi-structured interviews with senior Portuguese diplomats.

This study argues that Portugal has hedged its bets in order to balance a steady commitment to the EU with the protection of relevant links with the UK and a strong engagement within NATO. This adaptive reaction was driven by a mix of normative and instrumental considerations, providing evidence of an enduring foreign policy of limited Europeanisation, even more cautiously pragmatic than in the past. By shedding analytical and empirical clarity upon an often neglected country that is a centuries-old ally of Britain and one of the oldest smaller members of the EU, this article makes a contribution to the emerging literature on strategic responses to Brexit from EU countries (e.g. Krotz and Schild 2018; Raimundo and Ferreira-Pereira 2021), as well as to existing studies on small states' diplomacy (e.g. Thorhallsson and Steinsson 2017) and Europeanisation of national foreign policy (e.g. Wong and Hill 2011).

The article proceeds with a brief overview of past patterns of Europeanisation in Portuguese foreign policy. It then provides a succinct examination of the main challenges and opportunities of Brexit, as perceived from a Portuguese perspective. Next, hedging is presented as the most prominent coping strategy vis-à-vis Brexit adopted by Portuguese authorities. The logic underlying Portugal's hedging is subsequently evaluated, paying attention to both normative and instrumental motivations. Finally, the article discusses the implications of such a strategic response for the Europeanisation of Portuguese foreign policy.

The Europeanisation of Portugal's foreign policy

Portugal's foreign policy in the European context is an under-researched topic, especially from a Europeanisation perspective. After decades of relative isolation and socioeconomic backwardness under an authoritarian and colonialist regime, Portugal joined the then European Economic Community (EEC) in 1986 with the aim of getting support for its democratisation, economic development and international reorientation. Coming after the collapse of its centuries-old and highly mythified Empire, accession to the EEC presented itself as a sort of material and symbolic compensation that the liberal Europhile political elites driving the process were able to mobilise to legitimise changes within Portugal's society (Pinto and Teixeira 2004). Since then, the country has consolidated its democracy and cemented a Euro-Atlantic external orientation, balancing the European option as the new foreign policy priority, with the permanence of traditional transatlantic and post-colonial ties (Cravo 2012). Yet fully-fledged participation in the EU has remained critical for buttressing Portugal's political stability, socioeconomic development and international credibility (Teixeira and Pinto 2017).

Whereas Portugal's initial involvement in the EEC/EU was cautious, pragmatic and pro-Atlanticist, seeking to build credibility and highlight some of its specificities, from the mid-1990s the country started to display a more pro-active and open stance on new integration steps, even in the foreign and security policy domain (Ferreira-Pereira 2007). This shift was seen as driven by fears of being

marginalised in the new European dynamics triggered by the end of the Cold War (Gaspar 2000). It also coincided with high levels of domestic public opinion support for European integration (Goucha Soares 2007). Accordingly, Portuguese policy makers sought to position the country at the forefront of European construction, joining Schengen, the Euro area and contributing to the development of the CFSP. Since the turn of the century, Portuguese attitudes towards the EU have gradually become less enthusiastic and more critical. This was especially due to a broadly negative perception of the Nice Treaty and the implications of the Eastern enlargement, as well as the reversal of Portugal's hitherto trend of economic convergence, which was aggravated by the post-2008 global and Eurozone crises. Despite this waning enthusiasm for the European project, Portugal has remained a committed EU member, with European integration continuing to enjoy a central role in the country's external outlook, albeit recalibrated with a renewed emphasis on the Atlantic dimension of its foreign policy (Teixeira and Pinto 2017).

The level of EU engagement described above was not without consequences for Portuguese foreign policy. The country's participation in the European integration process helped reshape its national foreign policy identity and role. By moving away from a traditional Atlanticism and redefining itself as a Euro-Atlantic country with its democratisation, Portugal reconstructed its main foreign policy dimensions as complementary but with Europe taking a more central position than in the past (Teixeira 2005). Participation in the EU diplomatic system led to the adaptation of national foreign policy-making structures and processes, as well as the socialisation of Portuguese actors. Moreover, it widened Portugal's options, contributing to broadening the scope of its external objectives and activities (Cravo 2012, 223). It has been argued that since the 1990s Portuguese and EU foreign policies have become more intertwined (Magone 2000, 173). Much of Portugal's external action would be conducted through the EU framework, particularly in domains such as trade, humanitarian aid, development cooperation, democracy and human rights, environment, sanctions, non-proliferation, anti-terrorism, United Nations, peace and conflict management (Tomé 2007, 218). Shared definitions of Portuguese and European values, interests and objectives emerged. While some constraints are sometimes acknowledged, most evaluations stress the EU's added value for Portugal's foreign policy, amplifying its voice internationally (Magone 2000, 175; Tomé 2007, 220).

More recent assessments have, however, argued that the Europeanisation of Portugal's foreign policy has been more limited than often assumed. Like other member states, the EU's impact was stronger in terms of foreign policy processes than outputs (Wong and Hill 2011; Robinson 2013). While the expansion of Portugal's external agenda suggests the presence of a deeper impact for new domains of interest (such as Eastern Europe and the Middle East), it has been noted that there was no detachment from old national priorities, notably transatlantic relations and the Lusophone world. NATO remained Portugal's main defence reference and postcolonial ties continued to be nurtured, including through the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries created in 1996. Although conducted chiefly through alternative channels, Lisbon has brought these traditional national priorities to Brussels, pressing for greater EU-NATO cooperation and drawing attention to Africa, Latin America and Asia, where all its former colonies are located (Ferreira-Pereira 2007). However, Atlantic motivations have moulded Portugal's involvement in CSDP, which has developed as complementary to NATO (Ferreira-Pereira 2014). Moreover, Lisbon was relatively successful at uploading its Lusophone priorities during its previous Council presidencies, contributing to the upgrading of EU policies on Africa and Brazil (Ferreira-Pereira 2008; Robinson 2015). The importance given to other international fora and the instrumental projection of national preferences onto the EU level would have prevented a deeper Europeanisation of Portuguese foreign policy (Raimundo 2013; Robinson 2016). This idea of a shallower EU effect receives further credence by considering the extent of the recent de-Europeanisation in Portugal's foreign policy during the Eurozone crisis (Raimundo, Stavridis, and Tsardanidis 2021).

Portuguese foreign policy facing Brexit

The triggering and unfolding of the Brexit process was far from good news in Portugal in view of the country's deep European engagement and close bilateral ties with the UK. Early reports described Portugal as significantly exposed to Brexit, albeit less so than other EU members such as Ireland, the Netherlands, Cyprus and Malta (e.g. Irwin 2015; Selfin 2017). While this disruptive development was mainly seen domestically in a negative way, once it started to materialise Portuguese authorities made an effort to present it publicly as an opportunity (Raimundo 2017). Despite the wide-ranging potential effects of Brexit in different areas, it was generally felt that from Portugal's viewpoint the impact would be particularly important in strategic and foreign policy terms. As implied by the then Portuguese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Augusto Santos Silva, Brexit threatened 'the balancing between Atlantic and continental factors, which sustains the European continent itself and is so strategic for countries like Portugal' (Santos Silva 2017, 8).¹ This geopolitical challenge to Portugal's Euro-Atlantic balance was further compounded by the context of successive crises in the EU linked to Eurozone difficulties, the refugee crisis, terrorist attacks, the rise of populist movements, as well as the new uncertainty in transatlantic relations brought about by the Trump administration. Taken together these different dynamics were casting serious doubts on the stability of both the European integration process and the transatlantic community, the two main pillars or shelters of Portugal's foreign policy.

From Lisbon's perspective, the main challenges stemming from Brexit related to its implications for the EU itself, rather than for Portugal's bilateral ties with the UK, which were expected to remain close in the future. Like all other member states, Portugal had much to lose from a diminished EU, both in Europe and globally. The notion that the EU would be weakened after the withdrawal of one of its largest and most powerful member states was widely shared domestically. Speaking ahead of the 2016 UK referendum, the Portuguese foreign minister, Santos Silva, alluded to the risk of 'a breach in the European security and defence architecture' as well as a detachment of the 'British economic engine' (de Sousa 2016). As a member state with no opt-outs, Portugal was likely to be particularly hit by the implications of the Brexit process for EU integration. Portuguese decision-makers spoke publicly of a 'risk of disintegration' and the importance of being able to 'avoid a domino effect', especially in countries feeling closer to Britain, such as the Netherlands, Denmark and Poland (de Sousa 2016). Concerns were also expressed that the Brexit process might lead to 'dangerous disturbances, particularly in the economic and financial environment' (Santos Silva 2016). Such instability was seen as likely to generate further Euroscepticism and fragmentation dynamics in Europe.

By contrast, Portuguese policy-makers expressed little enthusiasm about the possibility of greater EU integration as a result of Brexit, at least during an initial phase. National attitudes were rather cautious, rejecting 'new integrationist drifts' and presenting 'European unity' as the immediate priority (Santos Silva 2016). Leading Portuguese commentators and observers depicted Brexit's effects on the EU's internal balance of power as unfavorable to Portugal. They drew attention to the possible emergence of a more centralised EU (around a *directoire* or core group) due to the disappearance of Britain's counterweight against the Franco-German tandem. Also, with the loss of one of the top European maritime powers and the leader of the Atlanticist group, the EU's geostrategic axis could shift more eastward, leading to a more continental and inward-looking bloc in which Portugal's peripheral position would be exacerbated (Palmeira 2020). This weakening of the 'Atlantic influence' in the EU would go against Portugal's strategic interests, inducing a need for 'adjustments' (Pereira 2018, 275). Such views were shared more widely within Portuguese society. For instance, a report by the largest business confederation raised similar concerns regarding a less Atlantic and less open EU due to Brexit (CIP 2019, 10). The exit of an influential liberalising member was expected to trigger a protectionist turn and a less ambitious trade agenda towards regions of great interest for Portugal, such as the Americas. Furthermore, with the withdrawal of a major

budgetary contributor, it was anticipated that Portugal could be affected by a less solidarity-driven EU, while its own bill for the joint budget would increase, including for CFSP/CSDP matters (*Visão*, 13 April 2017).

Apart from the above, the Brexit process brought the risk of affecting both the EU27's and, albeit indirectly, Portugal's bilateral ties with the UK. The possibility of a hard Brexit was perceived as particularly problematic for Portugal, considering its keen interest in preserving close relations with the UK, especially in the security/defence and economic domains (Santos Silva 2016). As anticipated by the Portuguese foreign minister: 'If the UK leaves the EU, it will be necessary to find institutional, political and economic forms of maintaining a strong and lasting insertion of the UK in Europe' (Santos Silva 2017, 8). In turn, Portugal's finance minister, Mário Centeno, declared that Brexit represented a 'structural' change for his country's economy, requiring close monitoring and adjustments (*Público*, 29 June 2016). Such views are more easily understood if one bears in mind the substantial links Portugal has cultivated with the UK at different levels.

The two countries hold historic ties of friendship based on the Anglo-Portuguese alliance (the world's oldest alliance, founded on the 1386 Treaty of Windsor), which for many centuries was Portugal's main external reference point (Newitt 2009). Although the old alliance lost much of its past importance after the Second World War, it continued to be valued. Prior to accession to the EEC, Portugal aligned itself with the British vision on European economic cooperation by joining the European Free Trade Association in 1960. At the EEC/EU level, Portugal and Britain held similar positions on foreign policy, both favouring greater openness towards the Atlantic and NATO's primacy in security and defence matters (Ferreira-Pereira 2007). Additionally, the two countries have important social and economic ties in sectors such as migration, tourism and trade. In recent years, the UK has become the main destination of Portugal's vast emigration flows, pushed by the economic crisis that hit Portugal so hard in 2011. In turn, the UK is the main source of visitors to Portugal and a relatively large community of British nationals currently lives in Portugal. Moreover, the UK has been the fourth destination for Portuguese exports, accounting for about 10% of its total.

Albeit with less emphasis, Portuguese decision-makers also identified some opportunities deriving from Brexit. In particular, it was claimed that Portugal could attract UK investments and other assets wishing to remain in the EU following the British withdrawal (Governo de Portugal 2016c). Other opportunities related to the possibility of strengthening the country's representation in EU bodies, such as the European External Action Service, occupying positions left vacant by the British (*Visão*, 13 April 2017). The view that Portugal's pro-Atlantic role could benefit from greater room within the EU27 was also highlighted, especially among business and conservative political circles. Furthermore, once Brexit became more of a reality, Portuguese authorities gave greater visibility to the idea that such a development might present an 'opportunity to step up' the country's bilateral relationship with the UK, namely in areas such as economic cooperation, science and defence (Reis 2020, 2016c).

Portugal's hedging strategy vis-à-vis Brexit

Portugal's official response to Brexit corresponded largely to a hedging strategy as the country sought to balance a firm EU commitment with the safeguarding of important socio-economic and political ties with the UK. Indeed, rather than adopting a passive or straightforward strategy, Lisbon followed a nuanced approach combining three elements: a clear, yet prudent support for EU unity, active involvement in the definition of the Union's positions vis-à-vis the UK and an exploration of complementary extra-EU channels, such as bilateral contacts with London and broader European coalitions. This coexistence of important, albeit unsurprising, elements of shelter-seeking with more novel and proactive strategies attests to a hedging behaviour that was spurred by the new challenges and uncertainties brought about by the Brexit process (Raimundo and Ferreira-Pereira

2021). Next, Portugal's hedging strategy is described in greater detail by focusing on Lisbon's positioning in the Brexit negotiations and in relation to EU foreign policy developments that occurred during the period under consideration in this article.

Brexit negotiations

Keen to avoid a 'hard' British withdrawal, Portuguese authorities were actively involved in the Brexit negotiations and, whenever possible, sought to give visibility to the country's specific positions. While acting consistently in the sense of promoting EU27 unity and coherence, Lisbon also strived to shape in advance the definition of EU joint negotiating stances. Moreover, Portuguese representatives maintained frequent bilateral contacts with the UK and repeatedly stressed the importance of preserving close reciprocal ties beyond Brexit. This balanced position was discernible in Lisbon's general approach to the Brexit negotiations where, unlike some member states, Portuguese authorities advocated positive and friendly future discussions from the very beginning. Indeed, before the first EU27 discussion on the 2016 UK referendum outcome, the Portuguese Prime Minister, António Costa, said that exit negotiations should 'follow the pace they need to have and, above all, must be conducted in a friendly manner', rejecting any sort of 'punishment' (Governo de Portugal 2016b). Lisbon also stressed the continuity of Portugal's bilateral ties with Britain, based on their historic friendship (Governo de Portugal 2016a; Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros 2016).

Portugal's authorities also exhibited an active and specific stance with respect to the format of the EU27–UK negotiations. While aligning itself with the general EU preference for a phased approach – opposing the UK's preference for simultaneous talks on exit terms and future relations – before the adoption of the EU negotiating guidelines in April 2017, Portugal's authorities expressed an apparent degree of flexibility. Indeed, in late March that year the Portuguese Junior Minister for European Affairs, Margarida Marques, said publicly that 'from a formal perspective, the negotiations on the exit terms and the future relationship are sequential', yet some pragmatism would be needed, as 'from a political point of view, the two processes cannot be completely separated' (Lusa, 29 March 2017). Similarly, in relation to the timetable of the Brexit negotiations, Lisbon favoured a more flexible and patient stance towards London. For example, at the European Council summit of March 2019, where the first Brexit extension was agreed, Portugal was among the most benevolent member states, pushing back against the stricter stance adopted by countries such as France. On that occasion, the Portuguese Prime Minister, António Costa, said that the UK should be able to stay in the EU for as long as it deemed necessary, provided that it held European elections in May that year (*Financial Times*, 22 March 2019).

EU foreign policy developments

In view of the significant challenges posed by the end of the UK's participation in EU foreign policy, Portugal's reactions in this policy domain showed no signs of passivity. Instead, Lisbon followed an active and versatile approach encompassing cautious support for the reinforcement of the EU's CFSP/CSDP shelter, mixed with the pursuit of other simultaneous options outside the EU framework. These included the activation of the old political-diplomatic alliance with Britain, participation in the France-sponsored European Intervention Initiative (EII), the promotion of a coalition of small European Atlantic states aimed at counterbalancing the mounting weight of continentalism in Europe, as well as an enduring firm support for the US-led Atlantic Alliance, Portugal's other main shelter in this domain (Raimundo and Ferreira-Pereira 2021).

Lisbon's cautious support for the deepening of the EU's CFSP was evident in relation to the EU Global Strategy (EUGS), launched a few days after the 2016 UK referendum. Despite Portugal's active engagement in its preparation, it advocated a 'balanced, realistic and sustainable' implementation of the EUGS in the security and defence sphere, 'pursued in complementarity with the role of NATO', 'avoiding duplications' and bearing in mind its 'financial implications' (Ministério dos Negócios

Estrangeiros 2017, 250–253). This prudent approach was noticeable in Portugal's involvement in the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). Against a domestic context of economic difficulties and vocal political pressure from Eurosceptic sectors, the Portuguese government was not among the first group of 23 member states (including most NATO members) that signed the joint notification on PESCO on 13 November 2017 (Ames 2017). Lisbon only notified its decision to join the following month, on 7 December, but eventually taking part as one of PESCO's founding members.² Moreover, Portugal's participation in implementing PESCO started rather hesitantly, joining only six of the 34 projects adopted in 2018 (Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros 2019, 276). This lukewarm engagement was acknowledged by a Portuguese diplomat who stated that: 'it took some time for us to show our ambition'.³ Yet by the end of 2019 the country was participating in 10 out of 47 projects, leading two of them in the areas of cyber and maritime security (Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros 2020, 298–299).

As for Portugal's official strategies outside the EU, from an early stage of the Brexit process Lisbon sought to activate its bilateral relationship with Britain, building on their deep-rooted diplomatic friendship. The various visits to the UK by Portuguese representatives from 2016 onwards, with Brexit on the agenda, attest to this.⁴ Besides, a few months after the establishment of PESCO, Portugal was among the first group of nine European countries that joined the E12. Proposed initially by Paris to operate outside the EU and NATO, but including the UK, this initiative was consistent with Lisbon's backing of a solid 'Franco-British axis' in post-Brexit European security, which should continue counting on London's important military role both inside and outside the Atlantic Alliance.⁵ Throughout this period, Portuguese authorities also intensified bilateral contacts with northern European maritime states, such as Denmark, Ireland, Norway and Sweden.⁶ This move sought to mobilise support for increased cooperation among European Atlantic countries, to 'direct Europe outwards' and 'secure the balance between the continental and maritime dimensions' of post-Brexit Europe (Santos Silva 2019b). Similar strategic considerations and the perception of a broader 'Anglo-Saxon retreat' also contributed to a stepping-up of Lisbon's transatlantic ties during this period (Santos Silva 2018, 7–9).

The logic behind Portugal's hedging: both normative and instrumental?

Portugal's hedging behaviour in response to Brexit can be seen as being driven by both a neo-institutionalist logic of appropriateness and a logic of consequences. Following the former logic, options are chosen when they match the actor's normative identity (March and Olsen 2011). In that sense, it can be argued that Lisbon's nuanced reaction to the British exit was an enactment of Portugal's conception of its Euro-Atlantic role, driven by rules of appropriate behaviour. In view of the country's mixed loyalties, Portuguese decision-makers deemed it right to adopt a stance balancing the two dimensions of its foreign policy identity. Hence, against the uncertainties and challenges Brexit raised for European integration, it was considered appropriate to show continued support for EU unity, thereby fulfilling the obligations inherent to the country's membership status. This is illustrated by a statement released immediately after the 2016 UK referendum by Portugal's president, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, voicing 'certainty that the European project remains valid in the defence of the values that, for many centuries, have marked our common identity', while further clarifying that Portugal:

should keep its commitment to the ideals of peace, freedom, democracy, well-being and common development, which are at the heart of the European construction, as a central axis of the national vision and strategy for the future of the Portuguese and our country (Presidência da República Portuguesa 2016).

Similarly, Portugal's active engagement in Brussels' emphasis on pro-Atlantic norms as well as its exploration of complementary extra-EU channels were presented as based on a sense of belonging and appropriateness. As the Portuguese Foreign Minister put it when referring to the Brexit negotiations: 'Portugal, which belongs to the Union, is also part of the Atlantic front: for us,

Europe is both things, continental space and maritime space' (Santos Silva 2017, 8). Much emphasis was also placed on the special nature of Portugal's bilateral relationship with Britain: 'We are proud to have the oldest alliance in the world with the United Kingdom, dating back to the 14th century, and we share an Atlantic vocation that must remain an essential dimension of Europe' (Marques 2016). Crucially, these bilateral ties were officially linked to and framed within the EU system. Indeed, Lisbon's contribution in reaching the Withdrawal Agreement, providing for the UK's orderly exit from the EU, was described in these terms: 'As the British authorities vividly acknowledge, Portugal was among those that most contributed to this outcome. We lived up to the old alliance, but always within the framework of our belonging to the EU' (Santos Silva 2020, 7). As for the next steps of the Brexit process, the country's posture was envisaged as follows:

We will support the European negotiating team in the way we like to do this: in unity with the other Member States, knowing how to listen and understand the arguments from the United Kingdom (...) we know how to cultivate the multi-century link with the United Kingdom, placing it also at the service of European consensus (Santos Silva 2020, 7–8).

What underlies this is the fulfillment of a bridging role between two sources of identification, a behaviour seen as appropriately matching Portugal's conception of itself as an Atlantic European country.

According to the logic of consequences, actors choose among alternative options by evaluating their likely consequences for individual or collective objectives. This sort of instrumental calculation also informed Portugal's hedging behaviour vis-à-vis Brexit, as adopting a balanced strategy was seen as the best way to protect both national and collective EU interests. An official account of the country's overall stance in the Brexit negotiations, made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, was not lacking in this utilitarian reasoning, as the following excerpt illustrates: 'We pursued the dual objective of preserving European unity, so that we could negotiate with one voice, and seeking at all costs a withdrawal agreement that could reconcile European and British interests and give confidence to people and businesses' (Santos Silva 2020, 7). Thus, displaying continued support for EU unity appears to be not only due to a feeling of identity-belonging, but also as driven by Portugal's self-interest. This reasoning was conveyed by a senior Portuguese diplomat in the following terms:

for those who see the EU as a matter of vital importance, as is the case of Portugal, we have every interest in preserving the EU as we understand it (...). As part of the EU27, it was in our interest to have a coherent negotiation without playing into a divisive logic, since in case of divergences we would stand to lose.⁷

By the same token, Lisbon's active participation in the definition of the EU's positions as well as its simultaneous exploration of complementary options were presented as motivated by interest-driven concerns. Portugal's cautious support for the deepening of CFSP, described above, reflected its strategic interests and preferences quite clearly. Indeed, it was in direct accordance with the country's Atlantic leanings and limited capabilities to press for the implementation of the EUGS in the security and defence domain, in complementarity with the role of NATO and bearing in mind its financial implications. More explicitly, an official explanation of Portugal's participation in PESCO displayed strong instrumental motivations, including the need for this defence initiative 'to go hand in hand with the reform and completion of the Monetary Union', 'advance the industrial and technological base of European defence', and 'drive the broader economic and social dynamics of convergence among Member States' (Santos Silva 2018, 5–6). As for Lisbon's extra-EU initiatives, their public justification was permeated with strategic utilitarian reasons, as this statement by the Minister of Foreign Affairs illustrates:

[Portugal] always advocated a cautious handling of 'Brexit', safeguarding the essential link with the United Kingdom and increasing cooperation with northern maritime countries, to preserve the balance between the Atlantic projection and the continental projection in post-Brexit Europe (Santos Silva 2019a).

As often pointed out in the theoretical literature, appropriateness and consequentiality are not easy to separate in practice. Rather than mutually exclusive, the two logics are better seen as complementary or interacting in often subtle ways (March and Olsen 2011). An example of this difficulty can be found in this statement by a Portuguese diplomat, when alluding to the Brexit negotiations: 'We remained *loyal* to the Union of the 27 and everyone realised they had *interest* in that'.⁸ It is plausible to question whether statements made along a logic of appropriateness are often no more than simple rhetoric to justify decisions, hiding or downplaying more utilitarian considerations. Likewise, expressed arguments of consequentiality could be seen as a mere rationalisation of rules and norms, emphasising interests or benefits to better sell decisions domestically. Another possible interpretation, more dynamic and composite, would take into account the level of uncertainty and complexity of the specific context of Brexit to highlight the importance of rule-driven considerations, especially during a first phase when the implications for preferences were less clear. Regarding a second stage, when expected consequences became easier to calculate, a logic of consequences would gain more relevance, as a complementary explanation.

The implications of Portugal's hedging: enduring but limited Europeanisation?

Portugal's hedging behaviour in reaction to Brexit did not imply a transformation of its traditionally favourable position towards CFSP/CSDP. Rather than paradigmatic change, it entailed a degree of adaptation that in turn was indicative of a persisting pattern of limited foreign policy Europeanisation, even more cautious and pragmatic than in the past. Indeed, such a national response to Brexit neither reversed nor undermined previous trends of cooperation on foreign and security policy matters, in what would represent a de-Europeanisation dynamic. There was no opposition, resistance or even disengagement vis-à-vis EU initiatives, as the options Portuguese representatives pursued outside the CFSP/CSDP framework were not kept completely detached. As seen above, national *démarches* such as stepping up Portugal's bilateral relationship with Britain and promoting a new coalition of European Atlantic states were rather presented as linked or compatible with EU goals. In that sense, there was no re-nationalisation shift since, notwithstanding a certain emphasis on national priorities, these did not take precedence over previously established EU objectives.

A clearly more significant dynamic throughout the Brexit process was an enduring trend of downloading or national adaptation to EU developments. This was visible, for instance, in the continuing salience of the EU agenda in Portugal's foreign policy as well as in the country's adherence to CFSP/CSDP initiatives, such as the EUGS and PESCO. This important dynamic of downloading was, however, not devoid of some foot-dragging, as demonstrated by Portugal's cautious involvement in PESCO projects, described above. As explained by a Portuguese diplomat, while some of these CFSP/CSDP developments were already under negotiation before Brexit, 'their implementation without the UK required some adaptation from our side'.⁹ This adaptation would have consisted of finding ways to materialise some new and other well-known conditions, such as preserving close EU27-UK relations in the area of security and defence, safeguarding the importance of NATO and transatlantic relations, as well as guaranteeing 'inclusive' forms of cooperation.¹⁰ Thus, the degree of national adaptation accepted by Portuguese authorities did not go as far as to compromise traditional national positions in this policy domain.

The considerations above point away from the idea of a deep Europeanisation, as the advances in the CFSP/CSDP domain remained relatively limited in their reach and mostly in accordance with Portugal's preferences. Moreover, despite some evidence of learning processes and socially appropriate actions, such as valuing European unity and a collective EU common approach as part of the national reaction to Brexit, as previously discussed, there was also a strong attachment to Atlanticist norms and ideas as well as strategic rational calculation in Portugal's overall diplomatic response. In fact, it was attempts at uploading or projecting national ideas, interests and preferences onto the EU

level that gained visibility. This was discernible, for instance, in Portugal's advocacy of an EUGS along pro-Atlantic lines and in its endeavours to balance EU foreign policy developments with parallel advancements in other European policy domains in which the country has a keen national interest, such as the Economic and Monetary Union. Another indicator of uploading dynamics involved the use of the EU level as an influence multiplier. There were signs of this, for example, in Portugal's involvement in the implementation of PESCO. By deciding to lead a PESCO project in the area of maritime security, the country was clearly privileging a domain where it can not only bring added value, but also derive national benefits in terms of its prestige and influence in Europe and internationally.

Conclusion

Three decades of full participation in the European integration process brought with it the Europeanisation of Portugal's internal and external affairs. This involvement also allowed the country to reinvent its foreign policy, while gaining international weight transcending its size, geography and economy. The Brexit question erupted at a time when Portugal was still dealing with the consequences of a serious economic crisis and it was perceived domestically as highly disruptive in many regards. This was particularly so in connection to the turmoil it generated within the EU, one of Portugal's main shelters. Those negative views were also related to the expected withdrawal of a powerful military and maritime member state, behind which national authorities were accustomed to hiding during the most difficult politico-diplomatic battles related to transatlantic issues, notably to ensure continued complementarity between CFSP/CSDP and NATO, another key shelter for Portugal.

From a Portuguese perspective, Brexit represented a major geopolitical challenge given the realignments and reconfigurations it entailed within the EU, with major implications for Portugal's external relations and for its European strategy in particular. There were fears that Brexit could cause the emergence of a more centralised, continental, protectionist and less open and Atlantic EU. All of these prospects, wrapped with the looming threat of a hard Brexit, were significantly detrimental to Portuguese national strategic interests. This helps explain the initial reservation regarding a swift integrationist turn as a possible response to Brexit. In fact, the national motto was more (political) unity and (institutional) integrity, rather than a pro-federalist drift conducive to more Europe. The loss of the British ally within CFSP/CSDP and uncertainty regarding the future EU27-UK relationship in foreign and security policy matters further aggravated national authorities' concerns. Overall, Portuguese fears were related to the weakening of the EU as a major bloc and to the risks for its integrity, considering that the Union has represented the most important economic and social shelter for Portugal since the mid-1980s. That being said, there was some confidence in what the revival of centuries-old bilateral ties with the UK might bring about in terms of new cooperative opportunities in the economic, science and defence domains. Of the different coping strategies vis-à-vis Brexit examined in this Special Issue, hedging was the most prominent for Portugal. This more nuanced, diffused and somewhat ambivalent approach (than hiding or shelter-seeking) was visible in Lisbon's reactions during the Brexit negotiations and regarding specific foreign policy developments such as the formal establishment of PESCO and the launching of the EI2. That same strategy allowed the country to exhibit flexibility and prudence while striking a delicate balance in its triple challenging endeavour to keep up a firm EU commitment, safeguard important political and socio-economic ties with the UK and ensure strong engagement within the Atlantic Alliance.

As demonstrated by this study, Portugal's hedging strategy in response to Brexit was driven by both a neo-institutionalist logic of appropriateness and consequences. On the one hand, Portuguese authorities positioned themselves in a way perceived to be appropriate in light of the country's acknowledged Euro-Atlantic identity. This sense of identity impelled them to show loyalty to Portugal's dyadic bonds to the EU and the Atlantic (embodied in the country's historic relationship with the UK and longstanding commitment to NATO). On the other hand, calculations of possible

consequences, springing from concrete options in response to the British withdrawal, led Portuguese authorities to follow more interest-driven considerations. This sort of utilitarian reasoning, stressing Portugal's self-interest, was visible in both the contours of the country's involvement in PESCO and the official justifications underpinning Lisbon's intensification of cooperation with North Atlantic maritime states.

Along these lines, the combination of appropriateness and consequentiality that informed Portugal's hedging strategy vis-à-vis Brexit contributed to an enduring but limited Europeanisation of its national foreign policy. As seen above, rather than paradigmatic change, Lisbon's reaction to Brexit entailed a degree of adaptation that neither reversed nor undermined preexisting patterns of foreign policy cooperation at EU level. However, this continuing trend of Europeanisation acquired an even more cautious and pragmatic nature than in the past, with Portuguese authorities paying greater attention to the fulfilment of national criteria for participation, namely on national economic benefits. Ultimately, these results highlight the EU's continuing importance for small European states such as Portugal, while illustrating the types of challenge and effort put in place by those smaller international actors to preserve a degree of national autonomy and influence in a more complex and volatile European political landscape.

Notes

1. All quotations in this article originating from non-English sources are the authors' own translation.
2. The document approving Portugal's participation in PESCO included a detailed clarification of the terms of this involvement, explicitly stating that PESCO would not affect the 'specificity' of Portugal's defence policy nor its commitments towards NATO (Presidência do Conselho de Ministros 2017).
3. Phone interview by the authors, 12 January 2021.
4. Apart from several visits and other contacts by Portugal's foreign minister, the Portuguese President was received in Downing Street and Buckingham Palace in November 2016.
5. This point was further elucidated during an interview with a Portuguese diplomat (Lisbon, 2 September 2019).
6. Those contacts included official visits made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2017 onwards.
7. Videoconference interview by the authors, 22 December 2020.
8. Videoconference interview by the authors, 22 December 2020. Emphasis added.
9. Phone interview by the authors, 12 January 2021.
10. Ibid.

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