



Portugal in the nuclear realm: a case of broad ‘multilateralization’

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Accepted: 27 September 2023
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Abstract

Nuclear proliferation and nuclear disarmament have regained centrality in the global security agenda. The weakening of existing regimes and the search by a growing number of states to acquire or extend their nuclear capacities have contributed to shape recent developments. This paper analyses how Portugal’s foreign policy orientations, grounded on its Euro-Atlantic identity with a global vocation and a colonial past, matter in defining its nuclear policies. We argue that while processes of ‘Europeanisation’ and ‘NATO-isation’ explain their adoption, Portuguese nuclear policies are better explained by the country’s broader multilateralist approach to security.

Keywords Nuclear weapons · Portugal · EU · NATO · Multilateralism

Introduction

Following the democratic transition of 1974, Portugal established the Atlantic and Europe as its foreign policy priorities, in addition to the Lusophone world. The Atlantic had long been a pillar of Portuguese foreign policy, given its peripheral position in continental Europe and the Spanish threat. Concerns over its neighbour’s larger territory and perceived Iberian aspirations, along with Portugal’s strategic distance from other European states, led Lisbon to look at the Atlantic to compensate this strategic condition (Sousa 2022: 316; Teixeira 2010: 6).

Historically, this maritime option was characterized by privileged relations with sea powers—Britain, the USA, and the North Atlantic Council (NATO)—and by the imperial projection in India, Brazil, and Africa. In the aftermath of

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democratization, this pillar was seen as fundamental to security but also to access and influence strategic decision-making processes (Teixeira 2010: 52–54).

As for Europe, previously approached with pragmatism and reserve, it became the main priority of democratic Portugal. It was crucial for the country's political consolidation and economic modernization (Sá, 2015: 55; Teixeira 2010: 53–54). With democracy reinstated, and integration in the European Union (EU), Portugal developed relations within the Euro-Atlantic multilateral frameworks (Vasconcelos 1989: 10). This explains why Portugal emphasized the coordination of deepening EU security policies with NATO (Fernandes and Makarychev 2019: 8).

From its new Euro-Atlantic multilateral insertion, Lisbon also prioritized building bridges across different cultures and regions, particularly between Portuguese-speaking countries and NATO and the EU (Pereira 2018: 269; Teixeira 2010: 55, Robinson 2013: 20). The country has been acting as a 'diplomatic conduit', either through bilateral relations or the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP) (Robinson 2015: 144). The renewal of ties with the Lusophone world, and a close relationship with the USA, prevented the exclusion of the country from multilateral decision-making centres (Cravo 2012: 215).

Since international organizations contribute to peace and conflict resolution, small states usually benefit more than larger states from their effects in the international system (Thorhallsson and Steinsson 2017; Wivel 2020: 101). Participation in multilateral *fora* became the key option for Portugal, a small state with a global vocation inherited from its tradition of openness to the world (Fernandes 2022; Silva 2019: 149, Ministry of National Defence 2013: 8). With the aim of avoiding marginalization, protection against larger states, and to maximize its political relevance, Lisbon has embraced multilateralism as one of its major foreign policy orientations, with predominance of Euro-Atlantic preferences (Vasconcelos 1989: 10; Silva 2018a: 17, 23; Silva 2018b: 13; Duarte 2006: 213, Dobrescu et al 2017: 86; Fernandes 2021: 709–710). Multilateralism has, thus, growingly shaped the Portuguese outlook towards European and Atlantic issues (Dennison and Franco 2019).

Multilateralism is seen by Portugal as a crucial condition of a rule-based and cooperative international order, as shown by the country's commitment to many multilateral organizations (Teixeira and Cunha 2021). Lisbon perceives the United Nations (UN) to be the pillar of multilateralism at the global level and seeks to impact on international security through the organization (Silva 2018a: 22; Teixeira 2010: 54). Multilateralism—either Atlantic, European, or in a broader configuration (i.e. through multiple multilateral frameworks)—is key to define Portugal as an international security actor (Ministry of National Defence 2013: 21–23; SSI 2023: 12). Multilateralism currently stands side by side with the country's Europeanism and Atlanticism in defining its foreign policy identity (Silva 2018a: 21). We expect Portuguese participation in multilateral frameworks to facilitate the circumvention of its resource limitations and motivate coalition-building. We also anticipate Portugal to engage in prioritization, with nuclear issues not being a prime concern and thus giving diplomats greater flexibility. Portugal's condition as a small state with a



peaceful image may also allow it to be entrusted with mediating duties (Thorhallsson and Steinsson 2017; Global Peace Index 2023; Baldacchino and Wivel 2020: 11).

Considering the above-mentioned orientations of Portuguese foreign policy, this article delves into the security domain by analysing the case of nuclear weapons policy.¹ Nuclear weapons are an existential and growing threat. Relationships between some nuclear powers are declining, and nuclear weapons are becoming a more important part of their strategy. Dialogue and transparency between such states is also waning. Competition in new arenas, along with technological progress, have increased the risk of nuclear escalation, which is now at a high point not seen since the Cold War (Guterres 2022).

Nuclear weapons are an agenda addressed in various multilateral frameworks, including the UN, NATO, and the EU. Portugal is a member to most of the relevant treaties and mechanisms of the ‘nuclear weapons complex’ (UN 2015b) demonstrating its claim to be ‘at ease’ and competent in multilateral settings and to contribute continuously at that level (Fernandes 2022: 148–149). The ‘complex’ refers to a cluster of institutions, treaties, and treaty bodies which overlap to some degree (Raustiala and Victor 2004: 333). This complex oversees ‘the possession and renunciation of nuclear weapons, nuclear weapons technology, and their testing’ (Dee 2023: 41). The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is frequently described as the cornerstone and focal point of the complex. Besides the NPT, the complex is comprised by a vast grouping of deliberative and negotiating bodies, including the UN Disarmament Committee and the UN First Committee. It also includes, among others, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO), which take on crucial technical functions (2023: 40).

The paper analyses how broad multilateralist preferences, coupled with a strong Euro-Atlantic identity, matter in determining national nuclear policies. We question which of Lisbon’s foreign policy priorities best explains those policies. In doing so, the analysis sheds light into how the various orientations can interact or overlap in a national foreign policy formation. This is relevant research in a field that is inherently multilateral, and where Portugal, like other states, is both an EU and NATO member.

Our timeframe encompasses the period from the early 1990’s to the present. It comprises initial key developments—such as the EU’s first attempts at a common approach to nuclear export control (1991–1992) and the indefinite extension of the NPT (1995)—and recent evolutions, such as the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). Given Portugal’s narrower interests, limited foreign policy resources, and absence of impending existential security threats, one shall not expect nuclear policies to be a national priority (Maass 2009: 78; Fernandes 2021:

¹ In tackling nuclear issues, our focus is non-proliferation and disarmament, leaving the peaceful uses of nuclear energy outside of our scope. Non-proliferation means the ‘prevention of wider dissemination of nuclear weapons’, whereas nuclear disarmament refers to the states’ ‘total absence of nuclear weapons in their respective territories’ (UN 1968).



709–710; Fernandes and Makarychev 2019: 2; Pedi and Wivel 2023). Thus, we hypothesize that such policies are formed not as result of direct national interests, but of Portuguese membership in various multilateral frameworks, where participation is regarded as crucial. Our paper aims at clarifying, thus, to which extent and through which processes Portugal is a regime-taker from the key multilateral *fora* of the nuclear weapons complex.

This research adds to the study of the EU and nuclear weapons, a research area that is typically policy-oriented and lacks theoretical engagement (Kienzle 2010: 4; Kienzle and Vestergaard 2013: 372; Blavoukos et al. 2015b: 5). It also highlights the limits of Europeanization in the security realm in one of the least researched countries on that subject (Raimundo 2013: 1).

In the first section, we identify Portugal's foreign policy preferences in articulation with the theoretical framework that we apply to identify the dynamics explaining the adoption of nuclear policies by the country. In the second section, we unpack the processes of 'Europeanisation' and 'NATO-isation' in framing Lisbon's engagement in the nuclear realm. In the third section, we identify instances of policy overlap between Portugal's actions within the EU and NATO and the other multilateral organizations that integrate the nuclear complex.

Portuguese foreign policy: Europeanisation, NATO-isation, and multilateralization

Considered a feature of the Portuguese democratic path, multilateralism explains why the country remained in NATO, and why it sought to join and contribute to the EU and various frameworks. Portugal perceives itself as strongly involved in multilateral settings, a defender of multilateralist ideas, and a creator of added value to an international order based on law and diplomacy. In recent years, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has urged the inclusion of multilateralism among the pillars of national foreign policy, citing a need to adjust discourse to practice. Considering the responsibilities that the country had taken on, multilateralism should be enforced as the 'basic orientation' of current Portuguese international relations (Silva 2018a: 20–23).

Portuguese diplomacy strives to achieve equilibrium and identify points of convergence between commitments made at the European, Atlantic, Lusophone, and multilateral levels (Fernandes and Makarychev 2019: 12). Proximity to the Atlantic as a pivot in the tripartite Europe-Africa-Americas relationship is an asset that extends to the rest of the Lusophone world, including Mozambique, East Timor, and Macau (China) (Galito 2019: 18–19). The country aims at capitalizing on these multiple geographies by engaging in multilateral frameworks such as the EU, NATO, the UN, and the CPLP (Palmeira 2019: 220–221, 230).

For Portugal, EU and NATO memberships go hand in hand. On the one side, Lisbon's peripherality and secondary role in Europe would be aggravated without a strong NATO (Fernandes and Makarychev 2019: 5, 8). On the other side, European integration allows Lisbon to offset strategic dependence on the USA (Vasconcelos 1989: 10). Thus, American unilateralist tendencies during the Trump administration



led Portugal to drift closer to European decision-making centres (Dennison and Franco 2019). Portuguese citizens display a high level of trust in European institutions, and their perceptions of the EU are more positive than the Member State average (Eurobarometer 2023). There is also above EU average support for membership and more supranational decision-making (Eurobarometer 2022). As a deeply pro-European country, Portugal is fully committed to European integration and is willing to contribute to various dimensions of the EU external action, and the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in particular (Coutinho and Correia 2012: 149; Presidency of the Council of Ministers 2013; Silva 2018b: 13). The EU is in all regards Portugal's main partner in multilateral cooperation (OECD 2022).

Our paper applies the framework of 'Europeanisation' to our case study based on a bulk of the literature that assesses Member States' integration under this framework to analyse change in national foreign policy resulting from EU membership (Tonra 2015: 2). Europeanisation consists of 'processes of construction, diffusion and institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (...) discourse, political structures and public policies' (Radaelli 2003: 30). Europeanization encompasses three interconnected processes: downloading (influence of European integration on national institutions and policies), uploading (projection of national interests to the EU-level), and cross-loading (that occurs when member states learn and share with one another within the EU) (Weiss and Edwards 2021; Tonra 2015: 2, 5–6).

Nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament are intergovernmental matters, requiring unanimity in the EU, even in cases of overlap with trade policy such as export control of nuclear-related items. In this case, the EU is merely an arena for exchanging ideas, given that supranational institutions have no formal power (Major 2005: 185–186; Wong and Hill 2011: 3). However, despite the less powerful and direct pressures from the EU (Gross 2007: 503), downloading still occurs in the realm of foreign policy as an established practice, and the final EU policy is usually upheld by the Member State (Weiss and Edwards 2021).

Some researchers have proposed the use of the concept of NATO-isation in a similar vein to Europeanisation. NATO Member States' positions and practices are expected to be influenced by those of other members (Rieker 2013: 380). Membership also allowed for countries to set their footprint on the Alliance's developments. These two aspects of policy transfer are termed, respectively, as downloading and uploading in the Europeanisation literature, above-mentioned. NATO-isation corresponds to the similar development of relations as in the EU 'which included mechanisms of adjustment to NATO standards and characteristics' (Violakis 2016: 214). Given our main research hypothesis, we expect downloading to be predominant at the EU and NATO levels for Portugal.

While the EU, NATO, or the CPLP constitute regional or cultural expressions of multilateralism, intra-organizational politics are primarily viewed by Portugal through the lens of international cooperation (Dennison and Franco 2019; Silva 2018a: 21). Moreover, considering its small state condition, history, and geography, Portugal favours the strengthening of links, cooperation, and



complementarity between different multilateral initiatives in the security realm. Lisbon also seeks to strengthen ties between third states and the multilateral settings in which it participates. Thus, broad multilateralism occurs when the underlying organizational principle, and basic orientation of national foreign policy formation, is international cooperation at all levels. This preference can manifest even within more circumscribed multilateral configurations such as the EU and NATO, which are fundamental for Portugal. In this broader context, the UN is central, but coexists and can overlap with the other expressions of ‘Portuguese’ multilateralism.

Despite coexistence and overlapping, coordination between different multilateral settings is not guaranteed. Although joint initiatives can occur, each multilateral framework has its own objectives and activities, thus eliciting distinct downloading processes. If broad multilateralism is the main national foreign policy orientation in a certain policy area, downloading occurs, for the most part, due to a pre-existing national preference for multilateral action across different multilateral configurations. That preference can act, thus, as a facilitating mechanism for downloading at the EU or NATO levels. Multilateral frameworks can also act as ‘flag-wavers’ for broad multilateralism and promote, themselves, membership and participation in other multilateral configurations with identical goals and carrying out similar efforts. Such scenarios generate points of convergence that can be explored by small states with little resources and more limited interests. As result, small states can more easily fulfil international commitments and increase their visibility as promoters of international cooperation, further strengthening broad multilateralist national preferences.

We consider that broad multilateralization occurs when we identify instances of policy overlap with the outcomes of Europeanisation and NATO-isation. Many Portuguese diplomats working on nuclear issues at the EU-level were the same dealing with nuclear matters in other *fora* (Interview 1), opening the possibility for further political processes in other contexts. As a small state with limited resources and personnel, this overlapping of responsibilities is expected. If these processes occur across multiple frameworks on the same issue, then broad multilateralization would best explain Portuguese nuclear policies. In other words, our analysis aims at identifying the processes in and outside the EU and NATO.

Our paper builds upon qualitative research and relies on the triangulation of sources including the analysis of official policy documents, secondary literature, and semi-structured interviews with eleven officials. The variety of sources are used not only to identify instances of Europeanisation and NATO-isation, but also detect overlap with broader multilateralization in the nuclear weapons complex.

Europeanisation and NATO-isation of national nuclear policy

In this section, we identify key policies of the EU and NATO, respectively, in the nuclear realm and the ensuing Europeanisation and NATO-isation processes in the context of Portuguese nuclear policy. The domains of Europeanisation that are



analysed include discourse, contributions to nuclear regimes, export control, and training and outreach. We consider instances of NATO-isation that include discourse, military preparedness, and science and outreach.

Europeanisation

Despite the strive for more progress towards the goals of the NPT, Portugal has not taken special interest in any specific project, nor received remarkable pressure to do so. By and large, more involvement is not deemed necessary, and there is satisfaction with the output (Interviews 3 and 4). No civil society organizations in the nuclear realm exist in Portugal, which limits initiative for a different national approach and position (Interviews 1 and 9). Lisbon can adhere to common EU decisions on nuclear matters without significant drawbacks (Interview 9). Thus, downloading is the core expected process in the context of EU membership.

In the Union, nuclear issues are discussed in the Working Party on Non-Proliferation (CONOP) and on the Political and Security Committee (PSC). Formulating common positions is challenging, because Member States work other alongside other international organizations in defence of their highly diverse national interests (Dee 2015: 78–79; Sperling 2015: 165). Some EU members are members of nuclear-armed NATO; others are nuclear weapon states or host NATO nuclear weapons; and a few are very strong proponents of nuclear disarmament (Portela and Kienzle 2015: 50). Due to its smaller dimension, political weight, and relative disinterest in nuclear issues, Portugal maintains a flexible position in EU-level coordination (Interviews 1, 3 and 4). Despite comfortably aligning with a common EU position, one of Lisbon's red lines concerns discourses that are excessively laudatory towards larger countries. Portuguese reports of CONOP and PSC meetings, which reflect a common EU position, are used by the national delegations that intervene in the main international *fora*, influencing their preparation. Still, the national interest has basically remained unchanged since the 1990s (Interview 1).

Most EU Member States, including Portugal, can be placed in the 'like-minded' group within the CONOP. That group favours a policy of small steps towards disarmament (e.g. stockpile reductions), in cooperation with the nuclear weapon states (Interviews 3 and 4), with all three pillars of the NPT being pursued simultaneously (Interview 9). This is the approach advocated by NATO as well (NATO 2023a).

Still, Lisbon is often critical of the slow pace of nuclear disarmament: 'step by step means one step at a time, but it does imply taking steps' (UN 2015d). This was visible for instance when Lisbon pressured the United Kingdom to undertake measures towards nuclear disarmament (Interview 9). The endeavour demonstrates Portugal's will to pursue objectives in the nuclear realm that go beyond minimum positions, impacting on a close ally. Both diplomatic and military officials understand that Portugal seeks to leverage its flexible and moderate position to facilitate diplomatic consensus, thus taking on a mediating role (Interviews 1, 3, 4, 10, 11).

However, military officials attached less importance to Portugal's contributions, describing the country as a 'follower' on nuclear issues (Interviews 10 and 11). This



perception is contradicted by the context of the 2021 Portuguese presidency of the Council of the EU. Initiatives in the nuclear realm are not a common practice for the rotating presidencies but Portugal expressed a commitment to assure that the EU would remain one of the strongest defenders of nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament. The EU would also promote, strengthen, and universalise the international legal instruments and other agreements for the reduction, control, and verification of nuclear arsenals (Silva 2021).

While the nuclear realm is critical for the EU (Council of the EU 2003a), the Union has struggled to obtain access and act within it. Despite participating in meetings and negotiations, the EU is not a member of the multilateral *fora* that constitute the nuclear complex and has no explicit legal competence to act on behalf of its Member States. Still, it has successfully implemented its WMD strategy through intermediaries such as the UN, the CTBTO, and the IAEA (Dee 2015: 78; Dee 2023: 41, 46; Portela and Kienzle 2015: 59). A multilateralist approach to disarmament and non-proliferation, and security in general, constitutes for the EU the best way to preserve international order (UN 2007; Council of the EU 2003b). Portugal joined EU non-proliferation efforts in the context of the Cooperative Threat Reduction Programme, albeit not systematically (Interview 1). The programme aimed at preventing proliferation in the former Soviet Union (Höhl et al 2003: 12–13). Additionally, Portugal has helped several countries, such as Mozambique, develop their legislation concerning nuclear weapons through EU-funded projects of the IAEA, in alignment with Council Joint Actions of the EU on the IAEA (Interviews 1 and 5; Council of the EU 2004). Brussels provides the IAEA with funding for technical assistance projects, such as the IAEA Nuclear Security Fund, to which Portugal contributes (UN 2013).

Portugal has actively engaged in several political initiatives in support of the CTBT with other EU Member States (UN 2004a; Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2020, 2021b). Examples include EU-funded training activities of the CTBTO, support for an EU action plan, and bilateral contacts for the treaty's entry into force (CTBTO 2019; CTBTO (2021), Interview 1). Lisbon also made voluntary contributions in support of the CTBT Organization through five EU Joint Actions in the framework of the CFSP (CTBTO n.d.). Thus, Portugal institutionalized new ways to engage in activities in the nuclear realm that are a demonstration of downloading.

Another line of action in contributing to nuclear regimes is the conduction of *démarches* to third countries and international organizations with Member State involvement, as Brussels may lack resources or information (Interview 1, Blavoukos et al 2015a, b: 235). Concerning Council Common Position 2003/805/CFSP on strengthening and universalization of multilateral agreements, Portugal undertook several *démarches* encouraging the conclusion of the IAEA Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement, the adherence and ratification to the IAEA Additional Protocol, and the adherence to the Hague Code of Conduct (UN 2004b).

By the same token, due to a common language and similarity of legal frameworks, Portugal has been designated to carry out *démarches* to Portuguese-speaking countries. In the case of Angola and Mozambique, the *démarches* are usually conducted by the local EU delegation, although Portugal is involved. Lisbon has, thus, maintained regular pressure among countries of the CPLP through specific



bilateral démarches, and inclusion of non-proliferation matters in other bilateral relations. Nonetheless, progress occurs slowly, as nuclear matters do not constitute a priority for Lusophone countries (Interview 1). Portuguese interest in strengthening ties with Africa also led the country to submit to its EU partners a proposal for the organization of the first EU-Africa summit (UN 1997a), which addressed nuclear issues (European Council 2000). In contrast, despite additional démarches in Brazil, very little was done (Interview 1) and Portugal did not develop an active policy on nuclear non-proliferation concerning Brazil (Interviews 1 and 5).

The EU is a pioneer in the establishment of multilateral standards concerning the circulation of proliferation-sensitive civil technologies (Bailes 2008: 378; Council of the EU 2003b). Legislation on trade policy is adopted by consensus when it touches on matters of foreign and security policy, which is the case of dual-use item legislation. After their adoption, Member States are required to implement or transpose the EU legal acts to the national legislation within a given deadline. EU legal instruments cover a considerable part of Portugal's export control laws (UN 2020; Meier 2015: 102), but the country is also a member of all major multilateral export control organizations (UN 2020).

Early legislation regarding the transfer of products with defence uses in Portugal includes Decree-law 436/1991. Over the next two days, from 28 to 29 June, the European Council adopted the Declaration on Non-Proliferation and Arms Exports. This timeline suggests that Lisbon decided to take steps towards developing legislation on the transfer of defence-related products in anticipation of the EU meeting. The national export list eventually adopted did include nuclear-sensitive goods and technology (Ministries of National Defence [...] 1994).

Portugal has contributed to the establishment of effective EU non-proliferation policies (UN 2004b) that were transposed into its legal framework (UN 2020). Such efforts led to harmonization between EU and Portuguese legislation on dual-use items such as Decree-law 130/2015 implementing Regulation 428/2009. Portuguese progress was under scrutiny because Lisbon was 'light-years' behind on dual-use items export control legislation (Interview 2). While the 2004 UN Resolution 1540(2004)² encourages the adoption of export control lists such as the one included in the 428/2009 Regulation, Portugal had already endorsed EU policies through the Dual Use Regulation 1334/2000 (UN 2004b).

Decree-law 37/2011 transposes EU Directive 2009/43/CE and Commission Directive 2010/80/EU on the transfer of defence-related products, following the rules and procedures mapped out in Common Position 2008/944/CFSP (Ministry of National Defence 2020). While Portugal adds to the list relevant items in the realm of small arms and light weapons, it has not chosen to do the same regarding nuclear-related items (Interviews 3 and 4).³ Transit of military items with nuclear

² Resolution 1540 (2004) enforces binding obligations to all signatories to adopt non-proliferation legislation. It encourages international cooperation and upholds support for multilateral non-proliferation treaties (UN n.d.a).

³ Such a decision suggests that the proliferation of conventional weapons is a greater concern for Portugal than nuclear proliferation, given that the country is willing to go, by its initiative, beyond EU regulations to prevent the former, but not the latter.



applications in Portugal is negligible or non-existent, and the focus of the Ministry of National Defence is placed on conventional arms exports (Interviews 7 and 8). Overall, the influence of the EU led to considerable changes in Portugal's legal framework on export control (downloading).

As for outreach activities, Lisbon has voluntarily taken part in several seminars organized by the EU. For example, Portuguese instructors participated in dual-use items workshops in Malaysia and Cape Verde (Interviews 2, 3, and 4). Other EU-sponsored outreach initiatives have taken place in the country for the industrial and academic sectors (Interview 2). In 2010, after the Council established a network of non-proliferation think tanks (Zwolowski 2015: 218), the Portuguese government succeeded in assuring the affiliation of a national research centre (Interview 6). Europeanisation in this domain is clear, with Lisbon being responsive to EU political processes to become involved in a variety of initiatives.

When it comes to training, Portuguese customs and licensing officers have participated in EU initiatives in the realm of dual-use items (Interviews 2 and 5). In addition, Lisbon has promoted good practices by sending Tax and Customs Authority officials to EU Commission technical cooperation groups dealing with dual-use export control. As a result, for example, a correlation table was adopted, an important tool in export control that makes a correspondence between Annex 1 of the 428/2009/CFSP Regulation, and the classification of a given good (Interview 2). Member States are also able to consult with each other before issuing licenses for the transfer of nuclear-sensitive products (UN 2004c). Europeanisation here corresponds to the adoption of new ways to implement export control.

NATO-isation

NATO's nuclear policy exists in a state of 'delicate balance between deterrence and disarmament' that is potentially inconsistent with the commitment to nuclear disarmament pledged by all NATO members under the NPT. NATO's nuclear status reaffirms the role of the USA as the nuclear protector of its European allies, 'who cannot disown nuclear weapons' (Ruzicka 2017: 381).

Portugal shares the view that as long as there are nuclear weapons in the world, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance (NATO 2022a). The country wants to remain under NATO's nuclear umbrella and accepts the obligations that come with those security guarantees (Interview 9). Thus, the influence of the Alliance is observable at the level of national discourse in international *fora*. While the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons is a common trend in Lisbon's discourse in those settings, as above-mentioned, the country opposes the TPNW. The latter is considered unrealistic, ineffective, dismissive of national and international security concerns, and conflicting with national obligations and commitments to NATO (Interviews 3 and 4; UN 2017).

Moreover, in formulating common positions with other states, Lisbon's most important concern on nuclear matters is assuring that its NATO obligations are not compromised by the positions taken by the EU (Interview 9). Thus, Portugal cannot always side with groups or states seeking international consensus and progress



on nuclear disarmament (Interviews 1 and 9) despite its pro-disarmament Constitution, and self-perception as a committed advocate and contributor to existing nuclear regimes (Silva 2021). NATO-isation is, thus, clear at the level of Portuguese discourse.

NATO's influence at the national level is also effective in the military sphere. Portugal hosts annually the international military exercises Orion to enhance Allied military integration and interoperability of capabilities. The exercises are realized in the context of NATO's Article 5, and include chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) scenarios (Ministry of National Defence 2010; Observador 2022). Lisbon is a first mover (2003) in the multinational CBRN battalion that ensures Allied freedom of action (NATO 2003; NATO n.d.). This points to a degree of institutionalization of military preparedness in nuclear environments at the military level. However, Portugal does not appear strongly involved in CBRN defence, given its lack of involvement in multinational cooperative projects (NATO 2023b).

NATO-isation is also identifiable in science and outreach. Despite not being a party to any treaty, the organization enables dialogue among Allies, partners, and other countries in the implementation of their international obligations in the nuclear realm (NATO 2023c). The Alliance promotes the development of the capabilities of its members and other countries to thwart proliferation activities. It also incentivized Allies to increase their outreach to scientists, universities, think tanks, and other bodies (NATO 2022b), namely by funding the NATO's Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Programme (NATO 2021a) or its network of Centres of Excellence (CoE) (NATO 2022c; NATO CoE 2023). Portugal organized a SPS Information Day in 2014, bringing together stakeholders to discuss ideas on CBRN resilience and others. The Permanent Representative to NATO claimed that the country was a strong believer in the SPS' potential and stressed 'its value for and application in security' (NATO 2014). Thus, Lisbon institutionalized a new way to conduct outreach in a process of downloading from NATO.

Additional examples of Portuguese participation in scientific projects include 'Advanced Nanotechnologies for Detection and Defence Against CBRN Agents' (NATO 2018) and the Maritime Security CoE (NATO CoE 2023). Portugal took on the role of country director of the projects ESiCure and ESiCure2, which aimed at developing devices for detection of special nuclear materials. Given that the later projects were intended to reinforce multinational scientific collaboration (NATO 2017a, 2021b), opportunities for learning and sharing can be expected.

Broad multilateralism at play

Portugal's official position on nuclear matters emphasizes above all the implementation of the NPT and coordination with NATO partners, and within the EU in a second position (Silva 2017). In this section, we explore how and to what extent broad multilateral engagement influences Lisbon's nuclear policies. To do so, we analyse below plenary meetings and national reports related to the following *fora*: the General Conference of the IAEA, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the NPT, the Disarmament Commission, and the UN First Committee.



Portugal is a strong believer in the power of international cooperation and effective multilateralism. To promote multilateralism in the nuclear realm, the country participated in outreach activities to universalize the main treaties and legal instruments on non-proliferation and disarmament. Those activities included seminars, workshops, and meetings, as well as formal and informal contacts, especially among CPLP countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2021a; UN, 2018). Moreover, under UN Resolution 1540(2004), the country has offered its assistance in outreach and awareness-raising non-proliferation activities (UN n.d.b). It has also sought official contacts with private companies and academia to spread information and stress the risks brought on by proliferation. Lisbon's assistance has focused on Portuguese-speaking countries (UN 2004c, 2010, 2020).

The strengthening of the existing regimes, such as the CTBT, the IAEA, and the NPT (Interview 9) includes the promotion of the IAEA among non-members and especially in Cape Verde, Saint Thomas and Prince, and Guinea-Bissau (IAEA 2015, 2016). Several démarches were conducted among African Portuguese-speaking countries and East Timor regarding the signature and ratification of IAEA safeguards agreements and additional protocols, under the Action Plan of the 2010 NPT Review Conference (UN 2015a). Indeed, Portugal perceives itself as rigorous in the enforcement of the cornerstone provided by the NPT (Interview 10). These actions show that EU-coordinated démarches need to be understood in the context of Portuguese commitments to the IAEA and the NPT (which precede EU membership), the prominence of multilateralism, and foreign policy identity linked to the promotion of ties with Portuguese-speaking countries.

In line with these démarches, Portugal has also provided its own version of the safeguard agreements to other Portuguese-speaking countries to encourage and facilitate the signature and ratification of IAEA agreements by other states (UN 2015a). Lisbon's assistance in the development of nuclear-related legislation in the Lusophone world falls both under the scope of the EU's Council Joint Actions on the IAEA and of the 2010 NPT action plan (Interviews 1 and 5; Council of the EU 2004; UN 2015a). Furthermore, Portuguese participation in international organizations such as the European Atomic Energy Community and the EU is understood to fall under the country's technical and political obligations to the IAEA (UN 2015a). This suggests that the determining process informing Portuguese diplomatic efforts to promote the IAEA is not Europeanisation, but its commitments in multilateral platforms such as the NPT (UN 2015a) and the IAEA (IAEA 2015).

The CTBT has featured highly in Lisbon's discourse on nuclear issues (UN 2001; UN 2019b; CTBTO 2011). Besides being party to the treaty, Portugal has participated in all conferences to facilitate its entry into force; endorsed its universalization through bilateral and multilateral démarches; promoted the provision of training to other countries; defended the establishment of moratoriums on nuclear tests; engaged in political initiatives in support of the CTBT under UN auspices; and participates in the CTBT verification regime. These actions are described by the country as national contributions to the implementation of the NPT and the 2010 NPT action plan (UN 2004a, 2015a). Lisbon has also offered technical support to the Provisional Technical Secretariat on training courses and document translation for Portuguese-speaking countries (Interview 1).



If the EU has played an important role in supporting and strengthening the monitoring capabilities of the CTBT (Grip 2015: 131), with Portugal contributing on a Member State capacity (see above), the EU might appear as an additional multilateral mechanism for Lisbon through which it can pursue its nuclear policy that exist independently of the EU policies. For instance, Portugal had limitations to organize a CTBTO training programme in Angola and resorted to the EU (Interview 1). CTBT activity reports identify some Portuguese démarches made on behalf of the EU (CTBTO 2007), while other démarches resulted from bilateral engagements (CTBTO 2009). Again, Lisbon's emphasis on Portuguese-speaking countries is clear, although there were other bilateral contacts (CTBTO 2009). Thus, Portuguese involvement in activities led or orchestrated by the EU to strengthen nuclear regimes overlaps with engagement on a national capacity.

While Portugal participated in the CTR programme and the Global Partnership against WMDs through the EU (Nuclear Threat Initiative 2015), such involvement occurs against the backdrop of Lisbon's active collaboration in other US-led non-proliferation initiatives—the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), the Container Security Initiative, the Megaports Initiative, and the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism (Committee on Foreign Relations 2009: 831). A key ally of Portugal, the USA considers Lisbon an important friend and leader in the global fight against nuclear proliferation, resulting in American nuclear detection equipment deployment in a Lisbon port since 2008 (Nuclear Threat Initiative 2008). A Memorandum of Understanding with the USA on the prevention of nuclear traffic and other radioactive materials has also been signed (SSI 2017).

Portugal is a frontrunner in the American-led 2003 PSI. The country organized its fifth plenary meeting and a regional outreach meeting with African states, which included Portuguese-speaking states, with the goal of raising awareness and enhance Africa's role in fighting WMD proliferation (UN 2004b). Lisbon hosted the 2005 PSI exercise (NINFA) on WMD proliferation off Portugal's West coast, inviting all CPLP states (Interview 5; Mascarenhas 2005). Portugal's involvement is demonstrative of the relevance placed on the USA and the Lusophony. The PSI, like other American initiatives, constitute a broad multilateral effort that is viewed by Portugal as a contribution to the UN Resolution 1540(2004) that can also be supported through the EU that has pursued actions to complement or support those initiatives (Durkalek 2012: 11; European Commission n.d.; GICNT n.d.; Henderson 2013).

Portugal has also highlighted efforts to include non-proliferation and disarmament education in university curricula and to organize learning opportunities in the nuclear realm, under the scope of the 2010 NPT action plan (UN 2015a). It resulted in various training courses and lectures, and trainees in First Committee meetings (UN 2022). There is, thus, overlap between Portuguese actions in this domain in several configurations (EU, NATO, and nuclear regimes).

As security threats become progressively more global, Portugal has promoted the idea that the UN should be the main agent of multilateral cooperation in the nuclear realm (UN 2012b, UN 2017, UN 2018b), and that multilateral mechanisms are the most effective way to 'manage shared disarmament responsibilities and devise collective non-proliferation initiatives' (UN 2017). Accordingly, the country has



expressed concern at the erosion of the disarmament regime affecting the First Committee, the Disarmament Commission, and the Conference on Disarmament (UN 2019a). Lisbon frequently targeted states in violation of their international obligations per the NPT and the IAEA—Iraq and North Korea during the late 1990s, and Syria, Iran, and North Korea since the early 2010s. It endorsed, as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, several draft resolutions in that sense (UN 1997b, c, 2011a, 2012a). Lisbon supports North Korea’s irreversible denuclearization in various international *fora*, especially the UN First Committee, and contributes in that sense to the formulation of the EU position (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2020, 2021b). On the Middle East region, Portugal participated in all the conferences to implement the 2010 NPT Action Plan and promoted initiatives to foster discussion (Interview 9; UN 2018a). It supports, in line with the resolution of the 1995 NPT Review Conference, a nuclear-weapon-free-zone in the region (Interview 9), which is also a goal of the EU since the 2000 NPT Review Conference (Dee 2015: 82).

Lisbon expresses transversally the view that the three pillars of the NPT (disarmament, non-proliferation, and peaceful uses of nuclear energy) represent ‘complementary and mutually reinforcing priorities in the multilateral context’ (UN 2022). Progress on all three pillars should ‘be simultaneously pursued and advanced in a balanced way’ (UN 2015c). This understanding results from the Portuguese membership, above-mentioned, since the Alliance frames its position identically. While NATO supports the NPT, it defends a step-by-step framework for nuclear disarmament (NATO 2017b). Thus, NATO-isation explains how Portugal articulates its position vis-à-vis the NPT and the goals it codifies.

In NPT Review Conferences, all EU members, including Portugal, submit more working papers with other EU members, than with fellow non-EU and NATO allies (Onderco and Portela 2023: 164–165). Lisbon has also vocalized support for cooperation between international organizations, echoing a message that is also conveyed by the EU and NATO. For instance, the country considered that forms of cooperation between the UN and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) should be explored under UN Resolution 1540(2004). Portugal underscored, in the UNSC, EU contributions to the work of the OSCE on non-proliferation (UN 2011b), and the relevance of the joint EU-US declaration concerning resolutions 1540(2004) and 1977(2011) (UN 2011c). Indeed, many Portuguese activities in the nuclear realm fall under the scope of UN Resolution 1540(2004) (UN 2004b).

Conclusion

The paper unpacked the dynamics at play in the formulation of Portuguese nuclear policy. It contributed to the analysis of national engagement within a lower-priority foreign policy realm and focused on a small state’s external action in a domain dominated by larger states’ interests.

We demonstrated that despite core downloading (Europeanisation and NATO-isation) derived from its membership in the EU and NATO, Portuguese nuclear



policy is better explained by a broader choice for multilateralism as a key foreign policy orientation.

Using the Europeanisation approach, we determined that political processes emanating from Portugal's Euro-Atlantic integration (EU and NATO) informed the country's actions in the nuclear realm. Lisbon acts on EU and NATO's terms, explained by similar processes of Europeanisation/NATO-isation, instead of 'leading the way'. The country is, by and large, a regime-taker, not a regime-maker.

Downloading was observed in several different contexts. In the EU context, Portugal has participated in a variety of activities coordinated or funded by the Union, aimed at the universalization, or strengthening of nuclear regimes. In that context, Lisbon prioritized activities that involved Portuguese-speaking countries. EU membership led to the harmonization of Portugal's export control legislation and provided training and outreach opportunities. However, as far as Portuguese discourse on nuclear issues is concerned, little has changed since the 1990s despite the EU's increased profile since then. In the NATO context, Lisbon's obligations established red lines regarding the country's position and discourse about nuclear issues. The country downloads NATO's shared beliefs about nuclear weapons that are incorporated in its national policies. Within the Alliance, Portugal has institutionalized new practices in the CBRN sphere. Portugal's behaviour in the nuclear realm confirmed expectations linked to its small state condition. The country showed signs of prioritizing other matters and possesses a flexible position of nuclear affairs, often taking a mediating role. It engages in coalition-building with like-minded states and has resorted to the EU to overcome its resource limitations.

Furthermore, the paper has demonstrated that Europeanisation and NATO-isation—with downloading as its core process—need to be understood under the country's concomitant prioritization of multilateralism. This is particularly relevant as nuclear policies are produced in a 'nuclear weapons complex'. As expected, downloading was observed but Europeanisation and NATO-isation denote little of unique. Those processes mostly concern the creation of opportunities to increase national engagement on nuclear issues, which is then repeated or even preceded in the context of other multilateral settings. Indeed, the EU and NATO coexist alongside, and overlap with, other multilateral configurations, including, but not limited to, the UN system, which together form a broader multilateral context. No multilateral framework prevails over the other; rather, they complement and reinforce one another. This lack of a preference in Portuguese engagement indicates that downloading is primarily informed by broader multilateralist considerations. As a small state, Portugal benefits from the overlapping agendas, which allow the country to remain active on all fronts despite resource limitations and other foreign policy priorities. When Portugal carries out specific actions in the nuclear realm, they are often presented as national contributions to the agendas of multiple regimes. This broad multilateralization of nuclear policy is also encouraged by the EU and NATO, reinforcing Portugal's preferences for global and cooperative approaches to international security.

This study has found that European integration likely contributed to make Portugal a more involved actor in the nuclear realm, albeit not a different one. With national beliefs and priorities remaining essentially unchanged despite the occurrence of downloading, the EU mostly provided Lisbon with opportunities to



contribute to the multilateral goals it articulates in international *fora*. Portuguese Europeanization in the nuclear realm is also demonstrative of the limited impact of the EU in shaping member states' attitudes towards nuclear weapons. Our paper evidences that a strong overlap with other regimes and the Union's lack of a more prominent and unique role in nuclear affairs are explaining factors.

Portugal might also find increased legitimacy in negotiations or bilateral contacts (such as *démarches*) by acting in the quality of Member State, and not just on a national capacity. The identified preference for acting towards Lusophone countries when acting in the nuclear realm is also explained by a general priority of Portuguese foreign policy. Likewise, Lisbon's involvement in many American-led projects is unsurprising. Still, actions connected to the Lusophony and the USA fall under a broader multilateralist umbrella.

Thus, Europeanisation does not happen in a vacuum. Lisbon has also called for further inter-organizational cooperation, welcoming further multilateralization. If NATO-isation influences Portugal's stance on implementing goals of the NPT, and its national position on the TPNW, the country does not perceive NATO membership as incompatible with the NPT, and continuously voices its dissatisfaction with the slow pace of nuclear disarmament. It remains, above all, a fierce promoter of multilateralism in the nuclear realm. Ultimately, despite the causal effects of EU integration and NATO membership, Portuguese policies in the nuclear realm are, fundamentally, multilateral, and marked by a Lusophone preference and ties to the USA.

Funding Funding was provided to David Silva Ferreira by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (Grant Number SFRH/BD/144062/2019). Sandra Fernandes conducted research for this article at the Research Centre in Political Science, University of Minho, and was supported by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology and the Portuguese Ministry of Education and Science through national funds.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors have no conflicts of interests to declare.

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