



**SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, ARTS AND
HUMANITIES**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, POLITICS AND
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

**European Integration through the prism of Migration and
Internal Security: Is the Creation of Frontex Standing
Corps a step forward to European Integration?**

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Dr. PISTIKOU Victoria

February 2026



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**This thesis was submitted for distance acquisition of a
postgraduate degree in “International Relations Strategic and
Security” at Neapolis University**

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The Denotation

Ioannis Kaliagras

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Abstract

This dissertation examines whether the creation of the Frontex Standing Corps constitutes a step forward in European integration within the field of migration and border governance. By situating the Standing Corps within the broader evolution of EU internal security policy, the study explores how operational capacity, institutional design, and political constraints interact in a domain traditionally guarded as a core state sovereign function.

The analysis employs a qualitative case study approach, guided by an integrated theoretical framework of neofunctionalism, liberal intergovernmentalism, multi-level governance, and Europeanisation. It assesses whether the Corps reflects deeper supranational integration or a politically constrained form of cooperation. Empirically, it analyses EU legal acts, policy documents, and agency publications. Uniquely, it incorporates a reflexive practitioner perspective, which provides critical, ground-level insight into the micro-dynamics of integration—such as operational trust-building, the perception of EU officers as potential oversight agents, and the conditional, experience-based engagement of member states like Poland and France.

The findings confirm that the Standing Corps represents a qualitative shift by establishing a permanent EU-level operational capacity. It strengthens coordination and fosters professional convergence. However, its design and deployment exemplify a form of conditional and negotiated integration: member states enhance collective capacity while meticulously preserving sovereignty, notably through intergovernmental control via Frontex's Management Board and the principle of host-state responsibility. The practitioner lens reveals that integration at the operational level advances through daily practice, experiential learning, and the gradual normalisation of a visible EU presence, even in politically sensitive contexts.

The dissertation concludes that the creation of the Frontex Standing Corps does constitute a step forward in European integration, but of a specific, sectoral kind. It embodies a hybrid model of governance that balances functional necessity against political and sovereignty constraints. Its main significance lies in demonstrating how integration in internal security progresses not through grand constitutional transfers, but through pragmatic, practice-driven, and continuously negotiated processes that characterise the EU's unique political system.

Keywords: Frontex, Standing Corps, Integrated Border Management, European Integration, Europeanisation, Sovereignty, Conditional Integration

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

European integration has traditionally been analysed mainly through the lenses of economic cooperation, legal harmonisation and institutional development. In its early phases, the European project was strongly connected with the creation of a common market and the reduction of barriers between European states. The primary objective was to promote economic interdependence, facilitate the movement of goods, services and people, and establish common legal frameworks that would allow Member States to cooperate more effectively.

Over time, however, the scope of European integration has expanded far beyond purely economic and regulatory issues. Questions related to internal security, migration and border governance have gradually moved to the centre of the European agenda. These policy areas were historically considered sensitive and closely associated with core aspects of state sovereignty. Nevertheless, structural changes in the international environment, increasing global mobility and recurrent migration pressures have progressively pushed the European Union to assume a more active role in these domains.

One of the most important milestones in this transformation was the establishment of the Schengen Area, which led to the abolition of internal border controls among participating states. This development is often presented as one of the most tangible and visible achievements of European integration. At the same time, it also created new and complex governance challenges. Once internal borders were removed, the external borders of the European Union effectively became a shared responsibility. Weaknesses or vulnerabilities in one Member State could potentially affect the security and stability of the entire Schengen area.

These challenges became particularly evident during the migration crisis of 2015–2016. The scale, speed and persistence of migratory movements revealed serious limitations in the EU's existing border management system. National responses were often fragmented, reactive and insufficient to address a phenomenon of such magnitude. At the European level, coordination mechanisms proved to be slow and heavily dependent on voluntary national contributions. As a result, the crisis exposed the structural need for stronger coordination, more permanent operational capacity and more effective forms of collective action.

In this broader context, the role of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) has expanded significantly. Initially established as a coordination body with limited executive powers, Frontex has gradually developed into a central actor in EU migration and border governance. The most significant step in this institutional evolution is the creation of the Frontex Standing Corps, a permanent body of uniformed officers operating under EU coordination and deployed in support of Member States. This development represents an important qualitative shift in EU internal security governance, as it introduces a stable and visible European operational presence in a field traditionally dominated by national authorities.

While the central research question of this dissertation refers to European integration in general terms, the study does not aim to assess integration across all policy domains of the European Union. Instead, it focuses specifically on migration and border governance, which constitute the core operational field of the Frontex Standing Corps. European integration is

therefore examined as a sectoral and functional process, shaped by institutional arrangements, political constraints and everyday operational practices in a highly sensitive policy area.

Against this background, the main research question guiding the dissertation is:

“Is the creation of the Frontex Standing Corps one step forward to European integration?”

To address this question, the study adopts a qualitative and theory-informed approach. It draws on key theories of European integration, including neofunctionalism, liberal intergovernmentalism, multi-level governance, post-functionalism and Europeanisation. These theoretical perspectives provide the analytical tools necessary to understand how integration evolves in sensitive policy areas and how sovereignty is negotiated rather than simply transferred from national to supranational level.

Empirically, the Frontex Standing Corps is used as a central case study through which broader integration dynamics can be examined. The analysis focuses not only on the legal and institutional foundations of the Corps, but also on its operational functioning and its interaction with national authorities. This approach allows the study to link abstract theoretical debates with practical realities on the ground, offering a more nuanced understanding of how European integration is experienced and implemented in practice.

The structure of the dissertation reflects this analytical logic. Chapter 1 presents the main theories of European integration and explains their relevance for migration and border governance. Chapter 2 examines the evolution of EU migration policy and European Integrated Border Management, providing the necessary institutional and policy context. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological framework and research design. Chapter 4 offers an in-depth analysis of the Frontex Standing Corps as an empirical case. Finally, Chapter 5 brings together the main findings and reflects on their broader implications for European integration in the field of internal security.

By placing the Frontex Standing Corps at the centre of the analysis, this dissertation contributes to ongoing academic debates on the nature and limits of European integration. It argues that integration in sensitive areas such as border control and internal security does not develop through linear supranational expansion, but through gradual, negotiated and experience-based processes shaped by both functional needs and political constraints

CHAPTER 1: THEORIES OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND MIGRATION GOVERNANCE

1.1 Introduction: European Integration, Security and Border Governance

Building on the historical context presented in the General Introduction, this chapter develops the theoretical framework for analysing European integration in the field of migration and border governance and not as it has traditionally been analysed through the lenses of economic cooperation, institutional development and legal harmonisation. For much of its history, the European project was understood primarily as an economic and regulatory endeavour, aimed at reducing barriers between Member States and fostering interdependence. Over time, however, the scope of integration has expanded significantly. Issues of internal security, migration and border governance have gradually moved to the centre of the European integration agenda, reflecting both structural changes in the international environment and the internal dynamics of the European Union.

The management of migration and external borders constitutes a particularly sensitive policy domain. As outlined in the General Introduction, the abolition of internal borders under the Schengen framework transformed the management of external borders into a collective European concern. This policy domain therefore constitutes a particularly sensitive one, where integration dynamics, sovereignty claims and security considerations intersect.

These challenges became especially visible during the 2015–2016 migration crisis, which exposed structural weaknesses in the EU's existing border management arrangements. The crisis highlighted the limitations of fragmented national responses and underscored the need for more robust coordination and capacity at the European level. In response, the EU progressively strengthened its institutional and operational framework in the field of migration and border governance, culminating in the creation of new instruments and mechanisms designed to enhance collective effectiveness.

This chapter develops the theoretical framework of the dissertation. It explains how European integration theories can be applied to the field of migration and border governance, establishing the analytical foundations for assessing whether recent developments, and in particular the creation of the Frontex Standing Corps, can be understood as a step forward in European integration. By linking integration theory with migration governance, the chapter provides the conceptual tools necessary for the empirical analysis that follows.

This dissertation does not approach European integration as a purely abstract or institutional process, but examines how integration unfolds through concrete governance practices in the field of migration and border control. In this sense, integration is analysed both at the macro level of institutional design and at the micro level of everyday operational interaction. This dual perspective allows for a more nuanced understanding of how supranational authority is negotiated, enacted and experienced in practice.

1.2 Neofunctionalism and Spillover into Border Governance

Neofunctionalism offers one of the most influential theoretical approaches for explaining the dynamics of European integration. Developed primarily by Ernst Haas and later refined by Philippe Schmitter, this theory emphasises the role of functional spillover, whereby integration in one policy area generates pressures for integration in related areas (Haas, 1958; Schmitter, 1969). Originally applied to economic integration, this logic has increasingly been

used to explain the expansion of EU competences into domains traditionally associated with national sovereignty.

The evolution of migration and border governance within the EU provides a clear illustration of this spillover dynamic. The establishment of the Schengen Area, which abolished internal border controls among participating states, created functional interdependencies that could not be managed effectively through national policies alone. Once internal borders were removed, the management of external borders became a shared concern, as vulnerabilities at one point of entry could affect the entire Schengen zone. This generated sustained pressure for cooperation, coordination and institutional development at the European level.

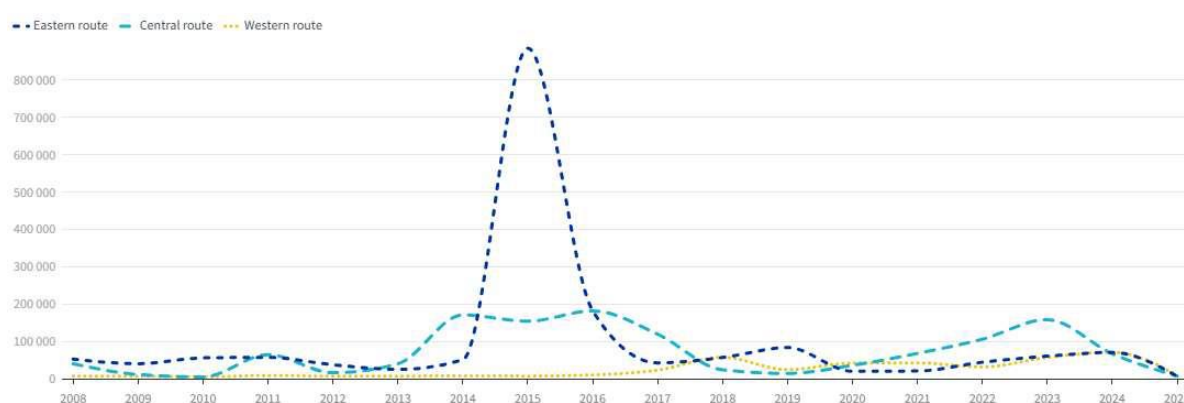
From a neofunctionalist perspective, the gradual strengthening of EU border governance reflects a process of cumulative spillover. Initial cooperation in areas such as information exchange and joint operations led to the creation of common standards, shared risk analysis and specialised agencies. The establishment of Frontex in 2004 marked an important step in this process, providing a focal point for coordinating national border authorities and developing a European approach to border management.

The creation of the Frontex Standing Corps can be interpreted as a further stage in this spillover process. As migration flows became more complex and persistent, the limitations of ad hoc cooperation and voluntary national contributions became increasingly apparent. The scale of this pressure is visually underscored by the unprecedented peak in migration inflows during the 2015-2016 crisis, as shown in Diagram 1. This crisis exposed structural operational shortcomings and acted as a catalyst, intensifying functional pressures for a more permanent and predictable operational capacity at the EU level. In this sense, the Standing Corps represents a qualitative deepening of integration—a direct institutional response to concrete governance needs, extending European coordination into the operational domain.

The diagram below pictures the significance of the 2015-2016 crisis:

Diagram 1

Migration in-flows in EU (2008-25)



Source: Council of the European Union, *Migration flows: Eastern, Central and Western routes*, www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/migration-flows-to-europe/

1.3 Liberal Intergovernmentalism and Sovereignty in Migration Policy

While neofunctionalism highlights the role of functional pressures and institutional dynamics, liberal intergovernmentalism offers a more state-centred account of European integration. Associated primarily with Andrew Moravcsik, this approach emphasises the role of national preferences, interstate bargaining and sovereignty concerns in shaping integration outcomes (Moravcsik, 1998). From this perspective, integration advances not through automatic spillover, but through deliberate political choices made by Member States.

Migration and border governance constitute policy areas where sovereignty concerns are particularly pronounced. Control over borders and migration flows is closely linked to state authority, national identity and internal security. As a result, Member States have historically been reluctant to delegate extensive powers to supranational institutions in this domain. Integration in migration policy has therefore proceeded cautiously and unevenly, reflecting the balance of national interests and political constraints.

Liberal intergovernmentalism helps explain why EU border governance has developed through incremental and negotiated steps rather than through comprehensive supranationalisation. The mandate and limitations of Frontex, including the Standing Corps, reflect political compromises among Member States seeking to enhance collective capacity while retaining ultimate control. The fact that the Standing Corps operates strictly in a supporting role under the responsibility of host states illustrates the continued salience of sovereignty within EU integration. From this perspective, the creation of the Standing Corps does not represent a straightforward transfer of authority, but rather a controlled form of integration shaped by intergovernmental bargaining.

1.4 Multi-Level Governance and the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice

Multi-level governance provides a complementary framework for analysing European integration in complex policy domains. Rather than focusing exclusively on either supranational institutions or national governments, this approach emphasises the dispersion of authority across multiple levels of governance, including supranational, national and subnational actors (Hooghe and Marks, 2001).

The development of the EU's Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (AFSJ) exemplifies this multi-layered structure. Migration and border governance involve a wide range of actors, including EU institutions, specialised agencies, national authorities and local operational units. Authority is shared, negotiated and exercised across these levels, producing hybrid governance arrangements rather than clear hierarchical control.

The Frontex Standing Corps is embedded within this multi-level governance framework. While coordinated at the EU level, its operations are carried out in close cooperation with national authorities and under national legal responsibility. This arrangement reflects the complexity of contemporary EU governance, where integration does not eliminate national authority but reconfigures it through new patterns of interdependence. Multi-level governance is particularly relevant for this study, as it offers valuable insights into how European integration functions in practice. It allows the analysis to move beyond formal competences to examine the daily interaction between EU agencies and national authorities in operational settings. Thus, it highlights that the Standing Corps should not be understood

solely as a supranational innovation, but as a node within a broader governance system characterised by overlapping competences and shared authority.

1.5 Post-functionalism, Politicisation and Migration

Post-functionalism adds an important societal dimension to the analysis of European integration. Developed by Hooghe and Marks, this approach emphasises the role of identity, public opinion and political contestation in shaping integration outcomes (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). According to this perspective, integration is constrained not only by institutional and economic factors, but also by the politicisation of issues that resonate with citizens' identities and security concerns.

Migration is one of the most politicised policy areas within the EU. Public debates over migration often intersect with questions of national identity, cultural cohesion and security, generating strong political mobilisation. This politicisation can limit the willingness of governments to pursue deeper integration, even when functional pressures suggest the need for collective action.

Post-functionalism helps explain why EU migration governance remains contested and uneven. The creation of the Standing Corps can be seen as a response to functional and operational needs, but one that remains carefully framed to avoid triggering excessive political backlash. Its supporting role and emphasis on national responsibility reflect a strategic sensitivity to domestic political constraints and identity-based contestation. In this sense, the development of the Corps itself exemplifies how post-functionalist dynamics—where politicisation constrains integration—shape even functionally-driven security instruments.

1.6 Europeanisation and Policy Transfer in Border Management

Europeanisation focuses on how EU-level norms, rules and practices influence domestic policies and institutional arrangements within Member States. Rather than analysing integration solely in terms of formal competence transfer, this approach examines processes of adaptation, learning and convergence over time (Radaelli, 2003).

In the field of border governance, Europeanisation has manifested through the diffusion of common standards, operational practices and professional norms. Joint training, shared risk analysis and coordinated operations have gradually fostered convergence among national border authorities, even in the absence of full supranational control.

The Frontex Standing Corps represents a significant development in this regard. Through unified training and sustained deployment, it acts as a direct channel for embedding EU-level practices within national operational environments. This process does not imply uniformity or the erosion of national traditions, but rather fosters the gradual alignment of professional standards and operational routines through everyday cooperation. As such, the Corps functions as a practical engine for Europeanisation, where integration advances through the subtle, long-term diffusion of norms and shared professional identities at the operational level.

1.7 Conclusion: An Integrated Theoretical Framework for Analysis

This chapter has examined the main theories of European integration and demonstrated their complementary relevance for understanding developments in EU migration and border

governance. Rather than following a linear or uniform trajectory, integration in this sensitive policy domain unfolds through the complex interaction of functional pressures, political bargaining, institutional layering, and societal contestation. Migration and border governance thus constitute a critical testing ground for assessing both the depth and the limits of European integration.

To this end, the chapter has developed an integrated theoretical framework that combines the insights of:

- Neofunctionalism, to analyse functional spillover dynamics and the role of crises in driving institutional innovation;
- Liberal intergovernmentalism, to examine sovereignty concerns, interstate bargaining, and the political limits of supranational authority;
- Multi-level governance, to map the distribution of authority across EU and national levels in hybrid operational settings;
- Post-functionalism, to account for the constraining effects of politicisation and identity politics on integration projects; and
- Europeanisation, to trace the diffusion of norms, practices, and professional standards across member states.

This framework does not treat these theories as mutually exclusive but as analytical lenses that together illuminate the multifaceted nature of integration in a core state domain. In Chapter 4, this integrated approach will be applied to the empirical case of the Frontex Standing Corps. It will structure the analysis around key questions: Did the Corps emerge primarily from a neofunctionalist logic of spillover? To what extent does its legal and operational design reflect liberal intergovernmentalist bargains over sovereignty? How does it function in practice within a multi-level governance structure? How is its deployment and acceptance shaped by post-functionalist politicisation? And in what ways does it act as an agent of Europeanisation, fostering convergence through professional socialisation and everyday practice?

By applying this structured yet flexible framework, the dissertation will provide a nuanced, theory-informed evaluation of whether the creation of the Frontex Standing Corps represents a meaningful—and characteristically European—step forward in the integration process.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ON EU MIGRATION GOVERNANCE, INTEGRATED BORDER MANAGEMENT AND FRONTEX

2.1 EU Migration Governance as an Integration Outcome

The development of a common European approach to migration and border governance constitutes one of the most significant, and at the same time most contested, dimensions of the European integration process. For decades, issues of migration, asylum and border control were treated primarily as core elements of national sovereignty. However, the abolition of internal border controls under the Schengen regime and the progressive deepening of the internal market generated new interdependencies among Member States, revealing the structural limits of purely national approaches to migration management (Caviedes, 2015; Lavenex, 2015).

From a neofunctionalist perspective, the evolution of EU migration governance can be interpreted as a classical case of functional spillover. Integration in the domain of free movement inevitably created pressures for common mechanisms to manage external borders, control irregular migration and coordinate asylum procedures. As internal borders disappeared, the external borders of the Union effectively became a shared line of defence for all Member States, linking national vulnerabilities to collective security outcomes. This dynamic has been widely discussed in the literature as a structural driver of the Europeanisation of migration and border policies (Haas, 1958; Schmitter, 1969; Lavenex, 2015).

At the same time, liberal intergovernmentalist approaches emphasise that this process has remained fundamentally shaped by interstate bargaining and national political constraints. Migration governance touches directly upon issues of territorial sovereignty, national identity and internal security, making it one of the most politically sensitive domains of integration. Numerous studies have demonstrated how divergences in national interests, geographical exposure and domestic political pressures have led to incremental and often fragile compromises, particularly regarding burden-sharing mechanisms, relocation schemes and the allocation of responsibility among Member States (Moravcsik, 1998; Şahin-Mengütek, 2022).

This process of integration has been critically shaped by the securitisation of migration, whereby migration is framed predominantly as a matter of internal security and risk management (Bigo and Guild, 2010; Perkowski and Stjern, 2023). This securitising discourse has influenced both policy priorities and institutional developments, contributing directly to the strengthening of border control mechanisms, surveillance systems and operational cooperation at the EU level .

Within this evolving framework, EU agencies have acquired a central role in translating political decisions into operational practices. Frontex, in particular, has emerged as a key actor in EU migration governance, linking policy formulation with border management on the ground. While some scholars describe the Agency mainly as a technical and coordination body, others interpret the expansion of its tasks and resources as part of a broader trend towards the partial supranationalisation of internal security and migration control (Caviedes, 2015; Scipioni, 2018). This diversity of interpretations reflects the broader academic debate on whether EU migration governance represents a genuine shift towards supranational governance or remains fundamentally constrained by intergovernmental control.

A significant strand of the literature has also critically examined Frontex in relation to fundamental rights. Concerns have been raised regarding accountability mechanisms, responsibility allocation and alleged involvement in controversial practices such as pushbacks. These critiques raise important ethical, legal and institutional questions within the broader debate on EU border governance. However, as acknowledged in Chapter 1, this dissertation does not seek to resolve these normative debates at this stage. Instead, it recognises them as part of the existing academic discourse, while their empirical relevance and theoretical implications will be examined in more detail in Chapter 4 through a focused and evidence-based analysis of the Frontex Standing Corps (Carrera and Curtin, 2022; Trauner, 2020).

Overall, EU migration governance can be understood as the product of interacting integration dynamics: functional pressures arising from free movement, political bargaining among Member States, securitisation processes, and the gradual Europeanisation of national practices. This complex evolution provides the necessary context for examining the development of European Integrated Border Management and the growing operational role of Frontex, which will be addressed in the following sections.

2.2 European Integrated Border Management as Functional Spillover and Governance Instrument

European Integrated Border Management (IBM) represents one of the most concrete manifestations of how European integration has expanded into the sensitive domain of border control. Initially conceptualised as a response to the challenges created by the removal of internal borders within the Schengen Area, IBM has evolved into a comprehensive framework combining border checks, border surveillance, risk analysis, return operations, inter-agency cooperation and the use of advanced technologies at the external borders of the European Union (European Council, 2002; European Union, 2019).

In the academic literature, IBM is often interpreted as a practical expression of the neofunctionalist logic of spillover. Once the Schengen system dismantled internal border controls, the effective management of external borders became a collective interest, since vulnerabilities at one point of entry could affect the security and stability of the entire Schengen area. Scholars have argued that this created strong incentives for Member States to develop shared standards, common procedures and coordinated operational practices in external border management (Lavenex, 2015; Scipioni, 2018). In this sense, IBM can be seen as the institutionalisation of functional spillover in the domain of territorial control.

However, IBM should not be understood solely as a technical or operational framework. It is also deeply embedded in the broader architecture of multi-level governance within the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (AFSJ). While strategic objectives and legal frameworks are defined at EU level, implementation remains largely dependent on national authorities, which retain primary responsibility for border control on their territories. The IBM framework therefore reflects a hybrid model, where supranational coordination coexists with national sovereignty between Member States (Scipioni, 2018).

Another important dimension highlighted in the literature concerns the role of technology within IBM. The increasing reliance on large-scale information systems, risk analysis tools, surveillance technologies and interoperable databases has transformed border management

into a highly technocratic and data-driven field. Systems such as the Schengen Information System (SIS), the Entry/Exit System (EES) and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) illustrate how border control is increasingly embedded within a broader digital security infrastructure (Sanchez-Monedero and Dencik, 2019; Yang et al., 2024). For some scholars, this reflects a process of “technological governance”, where security practices are mediated through complex technological assemblages that reshape both operational capacity and political accountability (Neal, 2009).

At the same time, critical scholarship has pointed out that IBM may contribute to the further securitisation of migration and the externalisation of border control beyond EU territory. By combining surveillance, risk profiling and cooperation with third countries, IBM extends the reach of EU border governance beyond its physical frontiers, raising important questions about accountability, legal responsibility and the limits of EU authority (Lavenex, 2015; Perkowski and Stjern, 2023). These debates highlight that IBM is not merely a neutral technical framework, but also a deeply political project with significant normative implications.

Within this evolving context, Frontex plays a pivotal role in coordinating and supporting the implementation of European Integrated Border Management. The Agency contributes to risk analysis, operational planning, joint operations, training and the dissemination of common standards across Member States. Crucially, however, in line with its legal mandate, Frontex acts in support of national authorities and does not replace them, as the primary responsibility for border control remains with the Member States (European Union, 2019). Through this supporting role, Frontex facilitates the harmonisation of practices while operating under the ultimate authority of host Member States, reflecting the complex balance between supranational coordination and national sovereignty.

As such, the IBM framework constitutes a crucial analytical bridge between the theoretical dynamics of European integration discussed in Chapter 1 and the focused analysis of the Frontex Standing Corps that will be developed in Chapter 4. It provides the institutional, legal and operational environment within which the Standing Corps operates and through which its potential significance for European integration can be properly assessed.

2.3 Frontex through the Lens of European Integration Theories

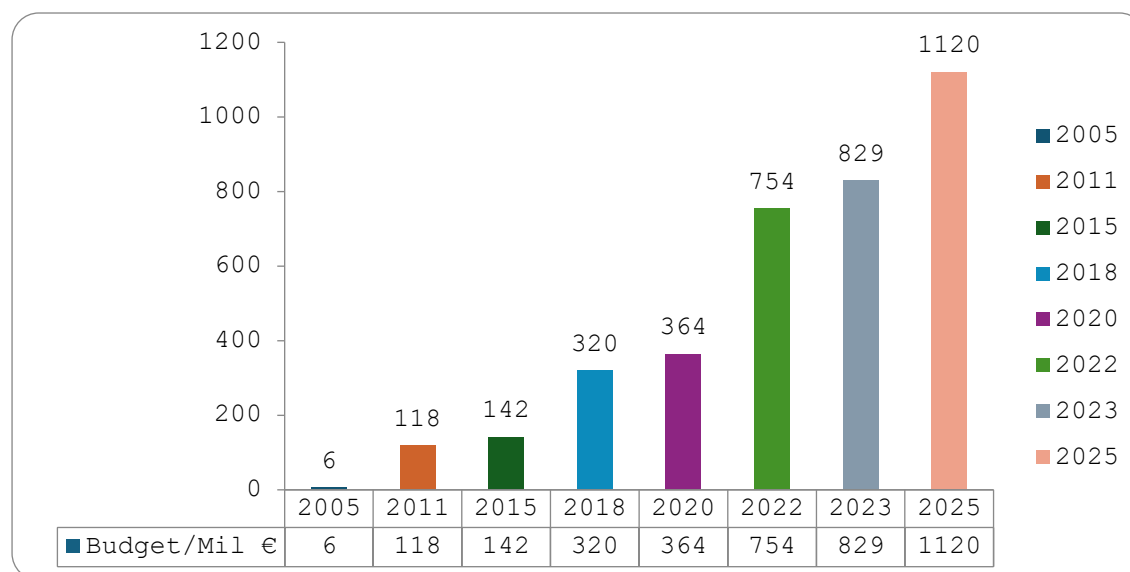
The European Border and Coast Guard Agency, widely known as Frontex, has become one of the most visible and politically contested actors in the field of EU migration and border governance. Since its establishment in 2004, the Agency has undergone a profound transformation, evolving from a relatively limited coordination body into a central operational pillar of the EU’s border management system. This evolution has attracted significant academic attention, with scholars interpreting Frontex through different theoretical perspectives, as outlined in Chapter 1.

From a neofunctionalist perspective, Frontex can be seen as a product of functional spillover resulting from the deepening of the Schengen system and the removal of internal borders. As Member States progressively lost the ability to rely on internal border controls, the need for a coordinated and effective external border management mechanism became increasingly evident. Several authors argue that Frontex emerged as an institutional response to these new functional demands, aiming to compensate for the security gaps created by internal openness

(Caviedes, 2015; Lavenex, 2015). Its gradual empowerment, especially after the 2015–2016 migration crisis, reflects the classic logic that integration in one domain (free movement) generates pressures for integration in adjacent sectors (border security and migration control). The substantial and sustained growth of the Agency's budget, particularly following the 2015–2016 crisis and the establishment of the Standing Corps provides a clear quantitative indicator of this institutional and operational spillover dynamic. The diagram below depicts the budget changes from 2005 to 2025.

Diagram 2

Frontex Budget Growth (2005–2025)



Source: Frontex Annual Accounts and Budget documents (European Border and Coast Guard Agency, official publications), frontex.europa.eu/document/budget-2025/

However, liberal intergovernmentalist accounts offer a more cautious and critical interpretation. From this viewpoint, Frontex's evolution is not simply the outcome of automatic integration dynamics, but rather the result of strategic bargaining among Member States. Governments remain highly sensitive to sovereignty issues in the field of border control and the exercise of coercive power at their borders. As such, they have supported the expansion of Frontex only to the extent that it does not undermine their ultimate authority over territorial control (Moravcsik, 1998; Şahin-Mengütek, 2022). This explains why, despite its expanded mandate, Frontex continues to operate strictly in a support capacity, assisting national authorities while the primary responsibility for border management remains with the Member States, as enshrined in Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 (European Union, 2019).

Multi-level governance approaches further illuminate the role of Frontex within the complex architecture of the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice. The Agency does not act as a hierarchical superior of national authorities, but as part of a dense network of actors including EU institutions, national ministries, border police, coast guards, and other EU agencies such as Europol and EUAA. Authority in this context is dispersed, negotiated and constantly reshaped through practice (Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Monar, 2010). Frontex therefore represents a form of networked security governance, where supranational coordination and

national control coexist in a relationship of structured interdependence rather than substitution.

A further important analytical dimension concerns the role of Frontex in the process of Europeanisation. Beyond its formal tasks, the Agency contributes to the diffusion of common professional norms, operational standards and training frameworks across Member States. Through joint operations, risk analysis procedures and standardised training curricula, Frontex influences how border management is conceptualised and practiced at national level, contributing to the emergence of a shared European border management culture (Radaelli, 2003; Scipioni, 2018). This sociological dimension of integration is particularly relevant for understanding the longer-term significance of the Agency beyond its immediate operational outputs.

At the same time, Frontex occupies a highly contested position within critical security and migration studies. A growing body of scholarship has examined the Agency through the lens of securitisation and critical border studies, raising concerns about accountability, transparency, and alleged involvement in practices such as pushbacks or non-refoulement violations. These critiques reflect broader tensions within the EU's approach to migration, where humanitarian commitments often clash with security-driven policies (Bigo and Guild, 2010; Trauner, 2020). Without adopting these critiques uncritically, this dissertation acknowledges them as an integral part of the academic debate and treats them as a relevant point of reference, which will be examined in a more empirical and contextualised manner in Chapter 4 through the specific case of the Frontex Standing Corps.

Finally, Frontex's evolution highlights a central paradox of European integration in the field of internal security: while Member States increasingly rely on supranational structures to manage transnational challenges, they remain reluctant to fully relinquish control over core sovereign functions. In this sense, Frontex represents both the expansion of EU operational capacity and the strategic preservation of national sovereignty. It embodies a form of "controlled integration", where supranational empowerment is carefully balanced against political sensitivities and constitutional limits at national level.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives allow Frontex to be understood not merely as a technical agency, but as a crucial institutional node located at the intersection of integration dynamics, sovereignty politics and evolving European security governance. This analytical framing is essential for assessing the deeper significance of the Frontex Standing Corps, which will be further developed in the following section.

2.4 Gaps in the Literature: The "Why" the Standing Corps Matters for Integration Theory

Despite the growing body of academic literature on EU migration governance, European Integrated Border Management and the evolution of Frontex, a clear analytical gap remains regarding the specific role of the Frontex Standing Corps within these broader processes. While numerous studies examine Frontex as an agency, its mandate, its accountability structures and its operational activities, far fewer focus explicitly on the Standing Corps as a distinct innovation in European integration and security governance (Mungiaiu, 2013; Trauner, 2020).

Most existing research tends to approach Frontex either as a coordination mechanism supporting Member States or as an instrument of the securitisation and externalisation of migration control. In both approaches, the Standing Corps is often treated as a secondary or technical development, rather than as a potentially transformative step in the integration of operational capacities at EU level. This represents an important analytical limitation. The establishment of a permanent, uniformed and increasingly professional EU border corps introduces a qualitatively new element in the institutional landscape of the Union, with implications that go beyond routine capacity building (De Bruycker, 2016; Scipioni, 2018).

From an integration theory perspective, the Standing Corps raises fundamental questions that remain underexplored in the literature. First, it challenges traditional distinctions between coordination and execution in EU governance. While EU agencies have long been involved in regulatory, advisory and coordinating functions, the deployment of an operational corps with executive tasks at the external borders marks a significant shift in practice. This directly touches upon classical debates on sovereignty, statehood and the limits of supranational authority (Moravcsik, 1998; Hooghe and Marks, 2001). Yet, most studies have not fully theorised the implications of this development for the evolution of the EU as a security actor.

Second, the Standing Corps offers a concrete opportunity to revisit the concept of Europeanisation beyond formal policy harmonisation. Through joint deployments, common training standards, shared operational culture and daily interaction with national authorities, members of the Standing Corps may contribute to the diffusion of professional norms and practices across Member States. This sociological and organisational dimension of integration has been recognised in the literature on Europeanisation (Radaelli, 2003), but has rarely been applied specifically to uniformed operational forces at EU level. As such, the Standing Corps provides a unique case for exploring integration as a lived and practiced process, rather than solely as a legal or institutional project.

Third, while critical scholarship has extensively debated Frontex in relation to accountability and fundamental rights, there is limited empirical research specifically focusing on the internal functioning, professional identity and operational practices of the Standing Corps itself. Much of the existing critique is built on external observation, policy analysis or NGO reporting, without systematic access to the internal organisational dynamics of the Agency (Bigo and Guild, 2010; Carrera and Curtin, 2022). This creates both a methodological and analytical gap, which this dissertation seeks to address through a more nuanced and context-sensitive approach in Chapter 4, drawing on policy documents, operational framework

Finally, the Standing Corps represents a crucial test case for the future of EU internal security integration. If the EU can maintain and expand a permanent operational force in the highly sensitive field of border management, this may signal a broader transformation in how Member States perceive and accept supranational involvement in core security functions. Analysing its design, mandate, and operational reality—as this dissertation does—therefore provides critical insight into the enduring negotiation between intergovernmental control and functional supranationalism in this domain (Şahin-Mengütek, 2022; Monar, 2010).

For these reasons, the Frontex Standing Corps should not be understood merely as an operational innovation, but as a critical analytical entry point into the study of contemporary European integration in the field of security and migration governance. By addressing this gap, the following chapters aim to contribute not only to the policy debate on Frontex, but

also to the theoretical discussion on the evolving nature of sovereignty, authority and integration within the European Union.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter presents the methodological framework of the dissertation and explains how the central research question is addressed. It outlines the research design, data collection strategy, analytical methods and the main limitations of the study. Given that the dissertation examines the Frontex Standing Corps as a potential instrument of European integration, a qualitative and theory-informed approach is adopted.

The methodological choices reflect the nature of the research question, which seeks to assess integration dynamics, institutional developments and operational practices rather than to measure causal relationships or statistical correlations. As such, the chapter clarifies how theory and empirical material are combined to produce a structured and analytically grounded assessment.

3.1 Research Design and Epistemological Approach

The central research question guiding this study is: Is the creation of the Frontex Standing Corps one step forward to European integration?

To address this question, the dissertation adopts a qualitative case study design, focusing on the Frontex Standing Corps as its primary unit of analysis. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for this type of inquiry, as the study aims to interpret political and institutional developments, rather than to test hypotheses through quantitative measurement (Creswell, 2013; Bryman, 2016).

The research follows an interpretivist epistemological orientation. This approach emphasises the understanding of social and political phenomena through the meanings attributed to them by institutions, policymakers and practitioners (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006). The Standing Corps is therefore not treated as a purely technical or administrative innovation, but as a politically and institutionally embedded development shaped by broader integration dynamics, sovereignty concerns and governance practices.

The case study method allows for an in-depth and context-sensitive analysis of a complex phenomenon. The Frontex Standing Corps is selected as a critical case, as it represents the first permanent operational body of EU uniformed personnel in a sensitive policy domain traditionally associated with core state powers such as border control and internal security. This makes it particularly suitable for examining questions of supranationalisation, negotiated sovereignty and institutional change within the EU (Yin, 2018).

3.2 Data Collection and Sources

The study is based primarily on qualitative document analysis, a method widely recognised as appropriate for research focusing on institutions, public policy and governance (Bowen, 2009).

Primary sources used in this dissertation include:

- EU legal acts, most notably Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 on the European Border and Coast Guard
- Official policy documents, communications and conclusions issued by the European Commission, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament concerning migration, border management and the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice.

- Strategy papers, annual reports, operational documents and risk analysis publications produced by Frontex.
- Official documents related to the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum and the European Integrated Border Management framework.

These primary sources provide direct insight into the legal, political and institutional construction of the Frontex Standing Corps and the broader governance environment in which it operates.

Secondary sources consist of academic literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy-oriented studies and published postgraduate theses. These sources situate the empirical analysis within existing academic debates on European integration, migration governance, securitisation and EU internal security (Geddes and Scholten, 2016; Lavenex, 2015; Carrera and Curtin, 2022).

The research also incorporates a practitioner-informed perspective, drawing on the author's professional experience within the field of European border management. This perspective enhances contextual understanding and supports a more nuanced interpretation of operational practices. However, it does not replace systematic document analysis or academic scholarship. Instead, it is used reflexively and cautiously, in line with established methodological discussions on insider research (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007; Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009).

3.3 Analytical Method and Theoretical Framework

The primary analytical method employed in this study is qualitative content analysis. This method enables the systematic interpretation of meaning within textual material and is particularly suited to the analysis of policy documents, legal texts and institutional communications (Schreier, 2012; Krippendorff, 2018).

The analysis focuses on identifying key themes, concepts and narratives related to the Frontex Standing Corps and its role within EU migration and border governance. Particular attention is paid to how institutional developments, operational arrangements and political discourses reflect broader integration dynamics.

The empirical analysis is guided by the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 1. Specifically, the study draws on:

- Neofunctionalism, to assess functional spillover and integration pressures.
- Liberal intergovernmentalism, to examine sovereignty concerns and interstate bargaining.
- Multi-level governance, to analyse the distribution of authority across EU and national levels.
- Europeanisation, to explore the diffusion of norms, practices and professional standards.
- Post-functionalism, to understand the role of politicisation and societal contestation.

These theoretical perspectives are used as analytical lenses rather than as hypotheses to be tested. The research therefore follows a theory-guided interpretive approach, in which

theoretical concepts structure the analysis and support the interpretation of empirical material (George and Bennett, 2005).

3.4 Case Selection: The Frontex Standing Corps

The selection of the Frontex Standing Corps as the central case study is based on both empirical relevance and theoretical significance.

Empirically, the Standing Corps represents a major institutional innovation in EU border governance. The establishment of a permanent body of up to 10,000 operational staff coordinated at the EU level marks a departure from earlier reliance on temporary national contributions and ad hoc operational arrangements.

Theoretically, the Standing Corps lies at the intersection of key debates in European integration studies. It raises fundamental questions about the extent to which the EU can exercise operational authority in policy domains closely associated with state sovereignty, and whether such developments indicate deeper supranational integration or more limited forms of coordinated cooperation (Trauner, 2020; Lavenex, 2015).

As such, the Standing Corps constitutes a particularly rich case for examining how European integration unfolds in the sensitive field of migration and border governance. The empirical analysis of this case is presented in depth in Chapter 4.

3.5 Reflexivity and Researcher Positionality

An important methodological consideration concerns the researcher's positionality. As the author has professional experience within the field of European border management, this presents both opportunities and challenges for the research process.

On the one hand, insider knowledge enhances contextual awareness and facilitates a more informed interpretation of institutional and operational practices. On the other hand, it creates the potential risk of bias or over-identification with institutional perspectives.

To address this challenge, the study adopts a reflexive approach, explicitly acknowledging the researcher's position and critically reflecting on its potential influence on the analysis (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). The practitioner perspective is used to enrich the analysis, while systematic reliance on documentary sources and peer-reviewed academic literature ensures analytical distance and academic rigour.

3.6 Limitations of the Study

Several limitations of the study should be acknowledged. The most significant methodological limitation is the reliance on document analysis and secondary literature, which excludes primary empirical data such as interviews or surveys. While this approach is appropriate given the scope and objectives of the dissertation, it limits direct insight into internal decision-making processes and informal organisational dynamics.

Moreover, access to classified or internal Frontex documents is inherently restricted. This constraint limits the extent to which internal operational procedures can be examined directly and necessitates reliance on publicly available materials.

Lastly, as a single-case study, the findings are not intended to be generalised across all EU policy domains. Instead, they provide in-depth insights into a critical case that reflects broader integration dynamics in the field of internal security.

These limitations do not undermine the value of the study, but they define its analytical boundaries and clarify the scope within which its conclusions should be interpreted.

3.7 Conclusion: Methodology as a Bridge to Empirical Analysis

This chapter has outlined the methodological framework of the dissertation. By adopting a qualitative, theory-informed case study design based on systematic document analysis and supported by a reflexive practitioner perspective, the research is well suited to address the central research question.

The methodological choices align with established approaches in political and social research and provide a robust foundation for examining the Frontex Standing Corps as an evolving institutional actor within EU migration and border governance.

The following chapter applies this methodological framework to the empirical case of the Frontex Standing Corps, analysing its institutional development, operational functioning and significance for European integration.

CHAPTER 4: The Frontex Standing Corps as an Instrument of European Integration

Building on the institutional evolution and governance dynamics analysed in Chapter 2, this chapter examines the Frontex Standing Corps as an empirical case through which to assess whether and how European integration advances in the sensitive field of migration and internal security.

By applying the theoretical lenses developed in Chapter 1 and the methodological framework outlined in Chapter 3, the analysis moves beyond descriptive accounts and evaluates the Standing Corps as a negotiated and contested form of supranational operational integration.

4.1 Introduction to the Frontex Standing Corps

The creation of the Frontex Standing Corps represents a major institutional innovation in the history of European border governance. For the first time, the European Union has established a permanent operational corps of uniformed officers under the authority of a European agency, tasked with supporting Member States in the management of the EU's external borders. This development reflects a broader transformation in the EU's approach to internal security and migration governance, moving from ad hoc coordination mechanisms to more stable and institutionalised forms of operational capacity (Lavenex, 2015; Trauner, 2020).

The Standing Corps was formally created through Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 on the European Border and Coast Guard, which significantly expanded the mandate, tasks and resources of Frontex. While the Agency had previously relied on temporary personnel contributions from Member States, the new framework introduced a permanent corps gradually built up through direct recruitment and long-term secondments (European Union, 2019; Gkliati, 2022).

This decision emerged in the context of the migration and border management challenges that intensified after the 2015–2016 migration crisis. That period revealed structural weaknesses in the EU's previous operational model, particularly its dependence on voluntary national contributions and its limited capacity to sustain long-term deployments (Geddes and Scholten, 2016; Trauner, 2020). The Standing Corps was therefore designed as a more predictable and sustainable operational instrument, capable of responding to both emergency situations and structural border management needs.

Importantly, in accordance with its legal mandate, the Standing Corps does not replace national border authorities. It operates strictly in a supporting role and under the ultimate responsibility of the host Member State (European Union, 2019). This reflects the continued centrality of national sovereignty in border control, even as EU-level operational capacity expands.

Beyond its practical purpose, the Standing Corps carries significant political and symbolic meaning. The presence of officers wearing EU insignia across different national territories represents a visible manifestation of European authority in a domain traditionally associated with core state powers. As such, the Standing Corps is not only an operational tool but also a symbol of evolving European integration in the field of internal security (Carrera, 2020; Neal, 2009).

4.2 Institutional and Legal Foundations

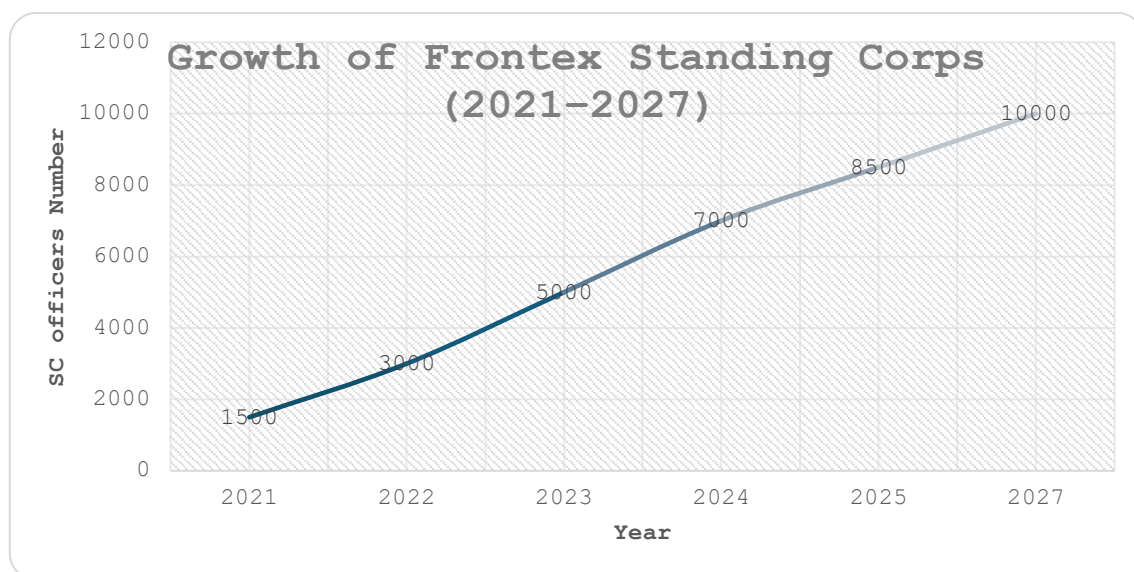
The institutionalisation of the Frontex Standing Corps is rooted in the gradual expansion of the EU's legal and political competence in the field of borders, migration and internal security. While Frontex was initially created in 2004 as a coordination agency with a limited mandate, successive reforms have incrementally strengthened its operational role (Neal, 2009; Monar, 2010).

The most significant legal foundation for the Standing Corps is Regulation (EU) 2019/1896, which redefined the role of Frontex within the European Border and Coast Guard. This Regulation established the legal basis for a permanent corps of up to 10,000 operational staff and expanded the Agency's responsibilities in areas such as return operations, training, risk analysis and cooperation with third countries (European Union, 2019). This legal provision is reflected in the gradual institutional planning for the expansion of the Standing Corps over time.

The following diagram illustrates how the provision has already been translated into practice through the gradual deployment of operational Standing Corps personnel with projections extending to 2027.

Diagram 3

Projected Growth of the Frontex Standing Corps (2021-2027)



Source: Frontex official data on Standing Corps planning and staff projections (European Border and Coast Guard Agency), <https://www.frontex.europa.eu/about-frontex/standing-corps/>

This planned expansion underscores the EU's long-term institutional commitment to making the Standing Corps a central pillar of its border governance. However, the realisation of these targets is not merely a technical or budgetary matter. It is deeply contingent on sustained political will from Member States, reflecting the liberal intergovernmentalist reality that functional ambitions are ultimately subject to intergovernmental bargaining. Furthermore, the Corps' growth trajectory and eventual size will be a key indicator of whether functional pressures (neofunctionalism) can consistently outweigh periods of low migration politicisation, or if its development will stall in the face of renewed post-functionalist

contestation. Thus, the diagram projects not only staff numbers, but the future balance of the very integration dynamics analysed in this chapter. Institutionally, the Standing Corps is embedded within a hybrid governance framework. On the one hand, it enhances the EU's operational capacity by allowing Frontex to recruit, train and deploy staff directly. On the other hand, it preserves the principle that border control remains a national competence, with the Agency acting only in support of Member States (Carrera and Curtin, 2022).

This dual structure reflects broader tensions within European integration. The EU seeks to strengthen collective capacity in security-sensitive domains, while Member States remain cautious about delegating authority in areas closely linked to sovereignty (Moravcsik, 1998; Trauner, 2020). Crucially, this sovereignty concern is not only a general principle but is institutionally hardwired into Frontex's governance, most visibly through the Agency's Management Board. The Management Board constitutes the main governing body of Frontex and is composed primarily of representatives from the Member States, alongside representatives of the European Commission. It is responsible for adopting the Agency's strategic priorities, approving its budget, endorsing operational planning and supervising the overall implementation of Frontex activities (European Union, 2019; Carrera and Curtin, 2022).

From an integration perspective, the Management Board functions as the key intergovernmental mechanism through which Member States retain political oversight and influence over EU-level operational capacity. The predominance of national representatives allows governments to shape priorities, constrain autonomy and indirectly limit the scope of supranational action. This governance structure crystallises the hybrid nature of the Standing Corps: while operational execution increasingly occurs at EU level, political authority and strategic control remain firmly anchored in intergovernmental decision-making processes. As such, the Management Board embodies the institutional expression of sovereignty preservation within an otherwise expanding framework of European operational integration. While formally anchored in legal mandates, the practical implications of this tension become most visible at the operational level, where EU-level norms intersect with national authority.

4.3 Operational Role and Practical Functioning

Operationally, the Standing Corps is designed to provide sustained and structured support to Member States in areas such as border surveillance, border checks, return operations and migration management. Unlike earlier models based on short-term secondments and emergency deployments, the Corps offers continuity and long-term operational presence (European Union, 2019).

Its structure includes staff directly employed by Frontex alongside officers seconded by Member States, all operating under common training standards and within EU-defined operational frameworks. This contributes to greater standardisation and interoperability across national border authorities (Scipioni, 2018; Carrera, 2020).

In practice, the Standing Corps supports national authorities while remaining under the legal responsibility and command framework of the host Member State. This supporting role is fundamental, as it strengthens collective capacity without encroaching upon national sovereignty. From an integration perspective, this operational model reflects a shift from

reactive crisis management towards a more institutionalised and permanent EU presence at the borders.

4.4 Limits, Tensions and Political Sensitivities

Despite its integrative potential, the Standing Corps also reveals the limits of European integration in the field of internal security. Member States retain decisive control over deployment decisions and remain cautious about transferring operational authority (Moravcsik, 1998; European Union, 2019).

Migration and border control remain highly politicised and closely linked to national identity and sovereignty. As a result, EU-level involvement in this domain is often framed through domestic political considerations and societal sensitivities (Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Sahin-Mencutek, 2022).

Beyond these structural and political constraints, additional tensions emerge at the operational level, where everyday cooperation and professional interaction shape how EU integration is experienced in practice. These dynamics are explored in the following section through a reflexive practitioner perspective.

4.5 The Practitioner's Lens: Micro-Dynamics of Integration

An important analytical dimension of this study concerns the inclusion of a reflexive practitioner perspective, informed by the author's professional experience in the field of European border management. This perspective does not claim to offer a comprehensive or objective account of institutional reality, but rather a situated viewpoint shaped by everyday operational interaction. Such an approach is consistent with reflexive qualitative methodologies, which emphasise transparency regarding the researcher's positionality and the contextual nature of knowledge production (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009).

Viewed through this lens, the Frontex Standing Corps can be understood not only as a legal and institutional innovation, but also as a lived organisational reality. Its presence at the operational level brings together EU-level norms and national practices, creating a space in which integration is enacted through daily cooperation rather than formal mandates alone. These dynamics are often overlooked in policy-focused analyses, yet they are crucial for understanding how European integration functions in practice.

4.5.1 Trust, Accountability, and the "Oversight" Perception

At the operational level, a recurring perception among some national officers concerns the role of Standing Corps personnel as potential agents of oversight rather than as purely supportive partners. Irrespective of the political intentions of EU institutions or Member State leaderships, a degree of mistrust may emerge in everyday professional environments. This mistrust is not necessarily directed at European integration as a political project, but is more closely linked to concerns over accountability, responsibility and professional exposure.

In particular, Standing Corps officers are formally mandated to respect, protect and promote fundamental rights, and to report potential violations through established internal mechanisms, including the Fundamental Rights Office and the Agency's chain of command. These obligations are binding, and failure to comply may entail professional consequences. While this framework is designed to strengthen accountability and rights protection, it may be

perceived differently by local operational counterparts. In some contexts, the reporting obligation is informally reframed as a form of external surveillance, extending beyond fundamental rights concerns to include broader fears of scrutiny over routine operational practices. Such perceptions can become amplified and detached from their original legal purpose, affecting trust and cooperation on the ground.

Importantly, these perceptions should not be understood as static. Field experience suggests that, over time, initial reservations and prejudices tend to diminish as the Standing Corps becomes an established and routine presence in everyday operations. Through sustained cooperation, repeated interaction and shared deployments, EU officers increasingly demonstrate in practice that their role is supportive rather than punitive. As familiarity grows, the Standing Corps is more often perceived as an additional operational resource contributing to workload sharing, capacity enhancement and professional cooperation.

4.5.2 Practical Challenges: Communication and Operational Adaptation

Alongside issues of trust and accountability, everyday cooperation is also shaped by practical factors related to communication and professional interaction. In certain national contexts, limited proficiency in a shared working language—most commonly English as the operational lingua franca—can complicate coordination between Standing Corps officers and local personnel. While such linguistic differences do not prevent cooperation, they may slow decision-making, increase reliance on informal mediation and reinforce perceptions of distance in high-pressure operational environments. These challenges are particularly relevant at the micro-level of integration, where effectiveness depends on rapid information exchange and shared situational awareness. Over time, however, sustained joint deployment and practical familiarity tend to mitigate these difficulties.

4.5.3 Conditional Integration: Two national case studies on engaging with the Standing Corps (Poland and France)

These contrasting national experiences serve as case studies of how Poland and France negotiate terms of their engagement with the Standing Corps, reflecting the broader concept of conditional integration – the process by which the Member States engage with supranational operational capacity based on perceived utility, retained control and evolving trust. the concept of conditional integration—the process by which Member States engage with supranational operational capacity based on perceived utility, retained control, and evolving trust.

An illustrative example can be observed in the case of Poland. Despite hosting the headquarters of Frontex, Poland has made limited use of Standing Corps deployments at its external borders. This apparent paradox highlights the distinction between institutional hosting, political cooperation and operational engagement. While deployment decisions are formally justified through assessments of operational need, the Polish case raises broader analytical questions related to sovereignty, control and the perception of supranational involvement in a highly symbolic domain of state authority..

A contrasting yet complementary trajectory can be observed in the case of France. Initially, French authorities displayed a degree of caution regarding the operational deployment of Standing Corps officers, reflecting concerns over operational control and the integration of EU-level personnel into national security frameworks. This position evolved in the context of

heightened security demands associated with the preparation and hosting of major international events, most notably the Olympic Games. France opted for a targeted and experimental use of the Standing Corps, deploying EU officers primarily at airports and external entry points. This enabled national personnel to be redeployed to urban policing and patrol duties, while maintaining full national command authority.

Following this experience, and based on its operational outcomes, French engagement with the Standing Corps gradually expanded. Initial hesitation gave way to increased confidence in the practical value of EU operational support, leading to broader acceptance of Standing Corps deployments beyond exceptional circumstances. This evolution suggests that experiential learning and demonstrated effectiveness can play a significant role in reducing sovereignty-related concerns and normalising supranational involvement in sensitive security domains.

These contrasting cases offer a clear illustration of the conditional and differentiated nature of European integration in this field. The Polish stance can be interpreted through a post-functionalist lens, where high domestic politicisation of migration and sovereignty-focused political narratives constrain the government's operational engagement with the Corps, despite the functional logic of hosting Frontex's headquarters. The French trajectory, conversely, demonstrates a pragmatic liberal intergovernmentalist calculus: initial sovereignty reservations were strategically reassessed and overcome once the tangible operational utility of the Standing Corps was demonstrated during a high-stakes, high-visibility event. This comparison underscores that Member States' engagement with the Corps is not predetermined by EU law, but is a negotiated political choice, continuously reshaped by domestic priorities, functional needs, and experiential learning. Consequently, a clear implementation gap emerges between the uniform legal framework of Regulation 1896/2019 and the divergent national operationalisations. This gap is not a flaw but it's the very manifestation of EU's hybrid governance, where European integration is ultimately defined through differentiated practices on the ground.

4.5.4 The "Everyday Europeanisation" of Borders: Visibility and Socialisation

Beyond institutional design and operational cooperation, the Standing Corps also generates a subtle but potentially significant social dimension of European integration. The regular presence of uniformed EU officers in airports, ports and land border crossings introduces a visible and everyday representation of the European Union in citizens' daily lives. Unlike abstract symbols such as EU flags or institutional buildings, the Standing Corps embodies EU authority in concrete human form, making integration tangible at the level of social interaction.

This dynamic is particularly noteworthy because it often unfolds in locations that are geographically distant from the traditional centres of EU governance. While European institutions are primarily concentrated in major capitals and administrative hubs, the Standing Corps operates mainly in peripheral, border and remote areas, where direct contact with EU institutions has historically been limited. In these settings, EU presence is not experienced through policy discourse or media representation, but through face-to-face interaction with EU personnel in everyday contexts.

From a sociological perspective, this visibility contributes to processes of everyday Europeanisation. As citizens become accustomed to interacting with Frontex officers—both in professional contexts and in informal social settings—EU-level governance gradually becomes normalised rather than perceived as distant or exceptional. In operational areas where Standing Corps members reside for extended periods, their participation in local social life further reinforces this dynamic, fostering informal familiarity between local communities and EU personnel.

This form of micro-level integration is particularly significant because it operates below the level of formal political discourse. Rather than being driven by treaties or institutional reforms, it unfolds through routine encounters, symbolic presence and interpersonal relations. Over time, such everyday interactions may contribute to the gradual internalisation of the EU as a legitimate and ordinary actor in domains traditionally associated with national sovereignty, such as border control and internal security.

In this sense, the Standing Corps not only represents an institutional innovation, but also a social and cultural vector of European integration. Its integrative impact therefore extends beyond legal competences and operational capacity to include the reshaping of public perceptions and collective imaginaries regarding the role of the European Union in everyday governance. While social dynamics cannot be easily quantified or causally isolated, they nonetheless offer valuable insight into the micro-foundations of European integration.

A further dimension of micro-level integration emerges from the internal socialisation processes within the Standing Corps itself. As a multinational body composed of personnel from across the European Union, the Standing Corps functions as a transnational professional environment in which officers are required to cooperate across linguistic, cultural and national differences. Through joint deployments, shared living arrangements and informal social interaction, officers gradually develop mutual understanding, adaptive communication practices and a form of transnational professional identity. This everyday socialisation may also contribute to the gradual erosion of national stereotypes and prejudices, both within the organisation and through officers' interaction with local communities. In this sense, the Standing Corps does not only perform an operational function, but also acts as a micro-social laboratory of European integration, where cooperation across difference becomes a lived and embodied experience. Such dynamics illustrate how integration unfolds not only through institutional design, but also through interpersonal relations, cultural exposure and everyday social practice.

Taken together, these experiences illustrate how European integration in border governance unfolds through negotiated, selective and context-dependent practices. The Frontex Standing Corps emerges not only as an institutional instrument of integration, but also as a site of everyday negotiation between EU norms, national sovereignty and operational realities. Integration is therefore not simply implemented from above, but continuously produced and reinterpreted through daily professional interaction on the ground.

From an integration perspective, these operational dynamics reveal how Europeanisation unfolds at the micro level. The gradual normalisation of the Standing Corps within national operational environments demonstrates that European integration is not only shaped by legal and institutional reforms, but also by everyday professional routines, trust-building processes

and shared operational experience. Over time, repeated cooperation transforms abstract supranational arrangements into familiar and taken-for-granted practices.

While initial scepticism and concerns over sovereignty, accountability and fundamental rights monitoring have generated resistance among some national authorities, the increasing routinisation of cooperation illustrates how integration becomes embedded through practice rather than formal authority transfer. This micro-integration dynamic complements the institutional analysis developed in Chapter 2 and highlights the sociological dimension of European integration in the field of border governance.

Importantly, these dynamics suggest that the integrative impact of the Frontex Standing Corps extends beyond measurable policy outcomes and formal governance structures. Everyday interaction, interpersonal familiarity and shared professional cultures contribute to the gradual normalisation of European authority in sensitive security settings. In this sense, integration is not only produced through legal competences or political agreements, but also through lived experience, symbolic presence and routine social interaction.

This perspective allows the Standing Corps to be understood not merely as an operational tool, but as a micro-social environment in which European integration is enacted and internalised. Through sustained contact between EU officers, national authorities and local communities—often in peripheral and remote areas far from the traditional centres of EU governance—the European Union becomes a tangible and visible actor in everyday life. Integration thus unfolds not only through institutional design, but also through cultural exposure, professional socialisation and interpersonal relations that reshape perceptions of authority, legitimacy and belonging.

4.6 Concluding Analytical Remarks

This chapter has examined the Frontex Standing Corps as a concrete empirical case through which to analyse how European integration unfolds in the field of migration and border governance. The analysis has demonstrated that the Standing Corps embodies a hybrid model of operational integration, in which EU-level coordination is expanded while core elements of national sovereignty are formally preserved.

From a neofunctionalist perspective, the emergence of the Standing Corps reflects functional pressures generated by the Schengen system and the structural limitations revealed during the 2015–2016 migration crisis. The establishment of a permanent operational corps represents a practical response to governance needs that could not be effectively addressed through ad hoc or purely intergovernmental mechanisms. In this sense, the Standing Corps confirms the relevance of spillover dynamics in driving institutional innovation within sensitive policy domains.

At the same time, the analysis highlights the continued explanatory value of liberal intergovernmentalism. The legal mandate, governance structure and operational limitations of the Standing Corps illustrate how Member States have carefully negotiated the scope of supranational authority. Strategic control remains embedded within intergovernmental structures, particularly through the Management Board and the principle of host state responsibility, which constrain the autonomous exercise of EU-level operational power.

The multi-level governance perspective further clarifies how authority is distributed in practice. Standing Corps officers operate within EU coordination frameworks while remaining embedded in national legal and operational environments. This layered arrangement produces a form of networked security governance, where integration does not replace national authority but reconfigures it through structured interdependence.

Finally, Europeanisation processes are visible at the micro-operational level. Through common training, shared professional standards and sustained joint deployments, the Standing Corps contributes to the gradual diffusion of operational norms and practices across national border authorities. These processes do not eliminate national differences, but they facilitate convergence through everyday professional interaction and experiential learning.

In sum the empirical findings of this chapter suggest that the Standing Corps constitutes a significant case of operational integration within EU border governance. Rather than reflecting a simple transfer of authority, it illustrates how integration in internal security develops through negotiated institutional arrangements, functional necessity and gradual professional socialisation while accommodating enduring sovereignty concerns. These dynamics provide a solid empirical basis for the broader theoretical conclusions drawn in the final chapter.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation examined whether the creation of the Frontex Standing Corps constitutes a step forward in European integration, with a specific focus on the field of migration and border governance. By combining classical and contemporary theories of European integration with a qualitative case study approach, the research aimed to move beyond purely abstract discussions and offer an empirically grounded assessment of how integration unfolds in a highly sensitive policy area traditionally associated with state sovereignty.

The analysis demonstrated that the Frontex Standing Corps represents a significant institutional and operational development in EU internal security governance. Unlike earlier coordination mechanisms, which relied mainly on temporary national contributions and emergency-driven cooperation, the Standing Corps introduces a permanent and structured operational capacity under EU coordination. This marks a qualitative change in the way the European Union manages its external borders, particularly in terms of continuity, predictability and long-term operational planning.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings largely support neofunctionalist interpretations of European integration. The abolition of internal borders through the Schengen system created functional pressures for stronger collective management of the EU's external borders. These pressures became even more visible after the migration crisis of 2015–2016, which exposed the structural limits of fragmented national responses and ad hoc forms of cooperation. In this sense, the creation of the Standing Corps can be understood as a practical and institutional response to concrete governance challenges.

At the same time, the study clearly confirms the continued relevance of liberal intergovernmentalism. The legal mandate, organisational structure and operational limitations of the Standing Corps reflect political bargaining among Member States rather than a straightforward transfer of sovereignty to the EU level. While the Union has strengthened its operational capacity, national authorities retain ultimate responsibility for border control on their territory, and deployment decisions remain closely linked to national political preferences and strategic considerations. This indicates that integration in the field of internal security remains fundamentally constrained by sovereignty concerns.

The multi-level governance perspective further helps explain how the Standing Corps operates in practice. EU coordination, common training standards and shared operational frameworks coexist with national legal responsibility, command structures and administrative systems. Integration therefore does not take the form of hierarchical centralisation, but rather of layered and negotiated governance arrangements, where authority is distributed and continuously renegotiated across different institutional levels.

In addition, the analysis highlighted the importance of Europeanisation processes in shaping the longer-term integrative impact of the Standing Corps. Through joint training programmes, sustained deployments and everyday professional cooperation, the Corps contributes to the gradual diffusion of common operational practices, professional norms and organisational cultures among Member States. These processes of convergence develop incrementally and often unevenly, but they play an important role in shaping how European integration is experienced, internalised and reproduced in daily practice.

A central contribution of this dissertation is the emphasis on micro-level operational dynamics. The practitioner perspective revealed that integration is not only shaped by legal frameworks and institutional reforms, but also by everyday professional interaction on the ground. Issues such as trust, communication, language barriers and professional identity influence how Standing Corps officers are perceived and how cooperation functions in practice. Initial scepticism, particularly linked to the Corps' fundamental rights mandate and reporting obligations, may create hesitation or resistance in some national contexts. However, empirical experience suggests that such concerns often decrease over time, as cooperation becomes more routine and the supportive role of the Standing Corps is demonstrated through concrete operational outcomes.

National experiences further illustrate the conditional and negotiated nature of European integration in this domain. Different Member States engage with the Standing Corps in different ways, depending on political sensitivities, operational needs, administrative traditions and institutional cultures. The contrasting examples of Poland and France show that integration does not follow a uniform or linear path, but develops through selective, experience-based and context-dependent engagement. These cases highlight that European integration in internal security is shaped by learning processes, trust-building and practical evaluation rather than by formal authority transfer alone.

Taken together, the findings allow for a clear but nuanced answer to the central research question. The creation of the Frontex Standing Corps does represent a step forward in European integration, but not in the sense of full supranationalisation or federalisation. Instead, it constitutes a sectoral, functional and operational form of integration, driven by practical necessity and constrained by political and sovereignty-related considerations. Integration advances through incremental institutional innovation, negotiated authority, professional socialisation and the gradual normalisation of EU-level operational presence.

More broadly, this study suggests that in sensitive policy areas such as migration and border control, European integration is more likely to progress through pragmatic and experience-based pathways than through radical constitutional change. The Standing Corps illustrates how the European Union can strengthen collective capacity while still accommodating national sovereignty, resulting in a hybrid model of governance that reflects both supranational ambitions and intergovernmental limits.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. As a relatively recent development, the Standing Corps remains a process in formation rather than a fully mature institutional model. The reliance on document analysis and secondary literature limits access to internal decision-making processes and informal organisational dynamics. Future research could build on this work by including interviews with policymakers, operational personnel and EU officials, or by conducting comparative studies across different Member States. Longitudinal research could also provide valuable insight into how the role, perception and legitimacy of the Standing Corps evolve over time in response to changing political contexts and migration pressures.

In conclusion, the Frontex Standing Corps should not be seen as a definitive breakthrough towards full political integration, but as a meaningful and empirically grounded step within a broader, negotiated and evolving integration process. Its main significance lies in demonstrating how European integration in internal security can advance through operational

practice, institutional adaptation, professional interaction and gradual trust-building. In this sense, the Standing Corps embodies the complex and often paradoxical nature of contemporary European integration: a real step forward, but one that remains carefully balanced between functional integration and the continued importance of national sovereignty. The Corps stands as a powerful symbol that in the EU, even the most sensitive domains of state power can become arenas for a unique, pragmatic, and ever-evolving form of collective governance.

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