

# Morality Policies

To what extent can the EU create contingency policies in case of immoral actions by critical trading partners?

Master Thesis

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## Abstract

“To what extent can the EU create functioning standardized contingency policies for dealing with misconducts by trading partners it is (partially) dependent on?”. This paper attempts to answer this question through a theoretical framework of the “Failing Forward”, Intergovernmentalism, and “Normative Power Europe” theories, by conducting a comparative case study that observes for 13 different cases whether EU response to external immoral actions are: ‘Fragmented or Collective’, ‘Weak or Strong’, and ‘Normative or Material’. Based on a number of Subquestions, these variables, and a cross-examination of the form of EU response and the EU’s perceived security risks, this paper concludes that the EU is highly unlikely to create any form of standardized response. The paper also concludes that while standardized contingency policies are unlikely, the EU could greatly benefit from a form of contingency policies based on the premise of increased security, both in said security as the internal and external faith in the EU as a functioning world power and at that one with morals.

## Introduction

The EU has struggled with alertly and swiftly responding to the immoral actions of some of their critical trading partners. The response to Russia's transgression came too late. China's continuing harassment of its neighbours and their territorial waters have had relatively little EU response. Iran is still producing armaments for Russia's war efforts. These three examples alone show that such issues are not singular in occasion.

So far EU response has been created on the spot, once a problem occurred. Its systematics of creating assemblies, discussing the issue, voting, and then creating solutions that based on the at that point already existing and evolving issue, fall under the concept of "Failing forward" as explained by Jones et al (2015), which entails that improvised responses to difficult situations may solve those situations through collective EU action and EU integration but in turn create new issues, creating a continuous process of fixing problems created by fixing problems.

Contingency policies can take the shape of policies such as but not limited to: trade restrictions, sanctions and ceasing EU-funded projects in/with these countries. These however, take valuable time to agree on, are often limited in their scope/coverage and are not nearly always properly implemented by all member states, resulting in such policies often not completely succeeding in their intended purpose of deterring further 'misconduct'. If the EU truly wishes to exert a stopping power upon behavior of other states when it deems their behavior as 'not in line with EU morals and values', it might have to respond with swifter, bigger, and more controlled policies. Having such policies ready to be implemented as soon as such behavior is engaged in creates a form of deterrence the EU is lacking as of now, and will significantly reduce EU response time.

The added complexity of EU dependence on trade with such 'misbehaving' nation states (such as Russia and China) only further demands clear EU consensus on whether or not, and if so how, to respond with swift and adequate policies in order to deter further 'misbehavior', while ensuring a "relative gain dynamic" (Grieco et al., 1993). This is necessary in order to justify possible negative consequences of such policies to its citizens, as well as to ensure viability of such policies.

The key question, and thus in this case the research question is "To what extent can the EU create functioning standardized contingency policies for dealing with misconducts by trading partners it is (partially) dependent on?"

## Research Questions

“To what extent can the EU create functioning standardized contingency policies for dealing with misconducts by trading partners it is (partially) dependent on?”

In order to answer the main Research Question, subquestions are necessary. In addition to a theoretical framework that tackles key assumptions and understandings such as: “what does the EU consider as ‘immoral behavior’?” and “what does the EU’s current general response strategy look like?”, they provide clarity and an overview of the different parts of the puzzle. In the case of our research question there are a number of different aspects that need to be considered when attempting to answer the main research question. It is necessary to establish:

What mechanisms were used in previous EU decision making on trade and contingency policies, if responses and incentives came from the EU level or Member state level, to what extent responses were supported and enacted by all member states, and what the gravity of such policies and their outcomes was. Based on these aspects, the following subquestions have been devised:

**SubQ1:** How cohesive is EU policy response?

**SubQ2:** What does the strength of EU response tell us with regard to willingness and ability?

**SubQ3:** What are the mechanisms of EU policy making for trade and contingency policies?

**SubQ4:** In which direction did responses flow? EU to Member State or Member State to EU?

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## Theoretical Framework

In principle, one needs a theoretical foundation as a starting point from which to conduct research. In order to understand EU policy making one needs to understand the motivation behind policy making. Returning to the theory of “Failing Forward”, we can observe how this struggle of problems generated by solving problems has showcased itself well in the case of the EU’s relationship with Russia and its aftermath. The EU’s issue of a need of fossil fuels was solved by engaging in extensive importation of such goods from Russia. This dependency led to Russia attempting to take the EU a hostage through this dependency, a second issue. The EU responded to this issue by sanctioning Russia and stopping nearly all of its fossil fuel imports from Russia. This in turn created an issue of shortage and massive price rises. To counter this, the EU is now importing fossil fuels from different places such as the US, yet this in turn creates a dependency on such nations, resulting in another possible issue.

The EU needs to counter this repetitive cycle in order to escape from its issues, and in order to do so it needs to undertake action. What this action might look like however, depends on what the EU’s true motivations are in its actions to third parties: the Normative Power it proclaims, or perhaps the Material Power most of the world revolves around and seems to either use, or be used by.

One theory behind EU behaviour, is that expressed by the EU itself as well: that the EU is a Normative Power, and therefore Normatively motivated in its actions, including in its policy making. According to this theory the EU’s main organs, the European Commission and the European Parliament, are the main policy shaping instruments. It argues that decisions made here are turned into law and policy, then spreading out downwards through both EU and Member State implementation.

An advocate and founding father of this theory is Ian Manning who, in his paper named “Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?” lays the foundation of how Europe would later come to describe its own acting (Manners, 2002). He describes how, through its historical evolution, Europe has become an international organization that acts first and foremost based on its principles and its understanding of what is ‘right’ and what is ‘wrong’. According to Manners, it is only after this that Europe considers the economy as its second most important motivation (Manners, 2002). Manners states that “The EU is founded on and has as its foreign and development policy objectives the consolidation of democracy, rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” (Manners, 2002). He goes on to identify five core values of EU Normative Power, namely “peace”, “liberty”, “democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” (Manners, 2002).

Manners uses the example of EU international lobbying and actions to abolish the death penalty. In this example he includes the EU's reluctance to extradite suspected terrorists to the USA for trials, because the USA has not abolished the death penalty. He argues that these European decisions had no financial benefit and even had "costly consequences for important economic relations" (Manners, 2002). With this he concludes to have presented proof of the EU's commitment towards its own normative power.

Normative Power can be split up in two parts: Classic Normative Power topics such as described by Manners, and modern Normative Power with regards to Digital Protectionism (Broeders et al., 2023) Normative Power that emerged after Manners' initial theories with the rise of digitalization. The first focusses on issues that have been around as long as the EU itself, such as but not limited to labour standards, environmental standards, and basic human rights. Digital Protectionism deals with issues such as the Digital Market Act (Digital Markets Act, 2025) which "is the EU's law to make the markets in the digital sector fairer and more contestable.", and the Digital Service Act (The EU's Digital Services Act, 2022) which "main goal is to prevent illegal and harmful activities online and the spread of disinformation. It ensures user safety, protects fundamental rights, and creates a fair and open online platform environment."

There are those that disagree with this theory and instead determine that, despite of what the EU itself says, the Union's main motivation is that which motivates most international players: Material Power. Monetary and resource gain/security are, after all, the origin of the creation of the European Union. In contrast to the theory of Normative Power Europe, advocates of the EU's Material Power policy making argue that influence spreads out upwards, with the Member States as main actors that dictate EU policy through bargaining for favourable positions much in the way that Liberal Intergovernmentalists like Moravcsik in his work "The choice for Europe: social purpose and state power from Messina to Maastricht" describe (Moravcsik, 1999).

This theory of Material Power is supported by Mark A. Pollack who, in his paper “Living in a Material World: A Critique of ‘Normative Power Europe’” (Pollack & Temple University, 2020). He argues that, while the EU is seen as, and identifies itself as a Normative Power, this type of power is only used when material gains/losses allow for it. Pollack uses the example of the migration deal with Turkey as well as the intervention in Libya in which EU nations partook as examples of the EU’s shortcomings in Normative Power (Pollack & Temple University, 2020). The first example showed a choice in abandoning the normative ideals altogether (inclusivity of migrants and dealing with authoritarian figures) for personal gains in the form of member state voter support. The second example did see the EU start from a normative perspective (rising up against an authoritarian regime that took away its citizens’ basic human rights), but then saw it implement military power to achieve its normative goals instead of the Normative Power the EU prides itself on.

Based on these two theories, this paper devises the following hypotheses:

- EU trade is based on Normative Power
- EU trade is based on Material Power
- EU trade is equally based on Normative Power and Material Power

Overall, the principle difference is that Material Power thus focuses on economic gain, where Normative Power focuses on ideals regardless of the economic outcomes. The different hypotheses are linked to the different theories. Under scholars such as Manners and Broeders, we would expect so see that EU trade is based on Normative Power. They leave little space for Material interventions. Under Pollack, we could expect to see EU trade being based on Material Power, where the EU chooses to sacrifice its Normative stance when Material interests favor a different approach. Pollack does however leave space for Normative influences when these do not negatively affect Material interests. Pollack thus argues that Normative Power is likely to prevail when there is no Material loss, but in all other cases, Material Power will come out as the deciding factor.

Fundamentally, these two approaches are not supported through the same mechanisms and actors. Identifying the mechanisms through which Powers function is a relatively simple method to test which form of Power is favoured. Normative Power usually is endorsed and pushed by elites, the EU itself through the parliament and commission, and at times, public opinion often in the form of protests, NGO’s, and the EU level electoral system. Material Power on the other hand is often supported through domestic lobbying by manufacturers and other companies with economic interests, as well as public opinion in this case usually through the electoral system and party policy setting for elections.



## Methods

### Research Design

When considering the research question, it becomes clear through the inclusion of moral standards that aspects such as emotions, values, opinions, and irrationality play a role in its answer, as well as in the overall functioning of the European Union. As the EU identifies its own 'power' as "normative", and Normative power inherently consisting of moral standards; it is imperative to observe decision making and policy implementation through an ENP lens. Positivistic and quantitative methodologies are insufficiently capable of predicting the human conditions and aspects involved in EU policy making. It is therefore that this paper will implement a qualitative research methodology in order to reach a conclusion with regards to the research question.

This research paper will be an EU level Case study. This entails that it will examine cases at the different EU levels. This includes the EU commission level, the EU parliamentary level, and the EU member state level. On all of these levels, cases will be assessed in which there was a policy decision made that affected international trade. The cases will be assessed based on their decision making, determining if decisions were made based on Normative or Material Power. Expression of power will be measured through assessing how coercion is used for the distribution of EU influence: whether this is done through normative or material coercion. Based on this analysis, the cases will be coded through the following three questions: "Were responses"

- Collective or Fragmented?
- Strong or Weak?
- Normative or Material?

These variables and their outcomes with respect to EU coercion can then be cross-examined with the mechanisms through which responses came to be as mentioned above (Elites, Lobbying, Protests, etc).

This paper will use triangulation as a means of data collection. The units of analysis for this will be The EU itself, through Foreign Policy and Security Policy analysis, with a focus on leverage through sanctions such as but not limited to economic sanctions. By using the following units of observation: EU policies thus far implemented, which can all be found on the official websites of the EU; News sites and journals that speak on relevant EU policy; changes in implemented policies that could suggest cracks in EU resilience to the negative effects of relevant EU policies and the foreign responses to these policies. By engaging in qualitative data collection through triangulation of data sources all subquestions will be examined, analysed, and to the extent possible, answered. By assessing different cases, it is possible to determine whether or not there is a pattern in EU responses to immoral state X behavior.

**Commented [SE1]:** The EU itself, through Foreign policy and Security policy, with a focus on leverage through sanctions such as economic sanctions.

**Commented [SE2]:** By assessing different cases, it is possible to determine whether or not there is a pattern in EU actions. Such a pattern would support the idea of creating contingency policies that contain a set scale of policies ready to be implemented. The lack of such patterns would not indicate a complete impossibility of such policies, but require further research in order to determine possible policy preparations

**Table 1**

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Collective or Fragmented</b>	Very Fragmented	Somewhat Fragmented	Neither	Somewhat Collective	Very Collective
<b>Strong or Weak</b>	Very Weak	Somewhat Weak	Neither	Somewhat Strong	Very Strong
<b>Normative or Material</b>	Very Material	Somewhat Material	Neither	Somewhat Normative	Very Normative

These three variables will all have 5 values. Table 1 attributes a numerical value to each variable value. These variables and values can be implemented on all levels of case studies (Commission, Parliamentary, Member states).

#### **Timeframe**

The case studies assessed in this paper will fall within a timeframe from 2004 to the present day. 2004 Was selected as it was the EU's largest expansion since its origin, as well as its most Eastward expansion. This Eastward expansion was the beginning of external involvement in EU actions as a result of expression of concerns of this expansion, mostly from Russia (Russia and the European Union, 2004). Considering the current issues, actions, and changes in the face of China's expansionism, Russia's war right on the borders of the EU, and the USA's threats and escalations in, among other things, a trade war, it is imperative that the present day is included in this research to ensure it is up to date and its conclusions are as accurate as possible.

### **How to Implement BATNA**

Considering that a BATNA is a suboptimal solution an actor is willing to live with, this paper will assess what the EU (or, depending on the outcome of subquestion 4, its Member States) see as their BATNA considering loss of Material Power in exchange for its Normative commitments. This BATNA is created through studying case studies with the variables in table 1. Using the coding, this paper theorizes it is possible to see at which issue points and/or timepoint a possible shift from high coding 'grades' to low ones occurs, indicating a shift from the use of Normative Power to Material Power. This 'point' will then thus be considered the EU BATNA to implement its Normative Power. Through this, in combination with the outcomes of the subquestions, it is possible to assess the likelihood of the hypotheses.

### **Conclusion**

After coding the different case studies, it is possible to construct a conclusion. In each of the variable categories, the collected values will be added up and divided by the number of cases assessed. This will be done for the EU level and the Member State level. The value outcome of this equation will show the average level for each variable. Additionally, the values will be plotted on a chart offset to the years included in the timeframe discussed above. This way, it is possible to make conclusions with regards to possible trends throughout the years, which help with the conclusions for the research questions and a prediction of future EU choices and actions. It will do so by showing whether the EU truly acts based on normative principles or ultimately bases its actions on material gains. Knowing this will help us answer the main research question as contingency policies for trade partners are only likely to pass in case of true normative principles, and highly unlikely to pass if the EU bases its decision making on material interests.

## Conceptualization

### Immoral

For the scope of this paper, ‘immoral’ can be used to describe the actions of nation states or governing bodies that do not fall in line with the European Union’s “aims and values” as described on the official EU website (Aims and Values | European Union, n.d.). As the term ‘immoral’ is a subjective assessment, it is important to create a clear baseline definition of the term. By opting for a definition that is taken from the EU website, risks of biasedness by the author in the understanding of the word immoral are minimized and the compatibility with the paper is increased as it assesses EU policy, which will be based on their own perception of right and wrong, and thus likely on their own “aims and values” guidelines. The EU’s aims and values consist of two parts, those within its borders, and those outside of it. In the scope of this research, those outside of the borders are used as the paper treats EU responses to external ‘immoral’ behavior. The EU’s aims for outside its borders are to: “uphold and promote its values and interests, contribute to peace and security and the sustainable development of the Earth, contribute to solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights and strict observance of international law” (Aims and Values | European Union, n.d.). As one can imagine, these all are important to the cases this paper will examine, with different cases observing greater importance of different of these aims. consider for example how the EU’s claim to aim for “free and fair trade” are of vital importance to the DSM and DMA acts it has passed. Through this scope of EU stated explanation, this paper hopes to be as accurate as can be and possibly might shed light on how the EU, its actions, and its members might fall short of their own aims and values, either through actions or responses.

### Condemned

As a means to clarify any statement, action, or policy by the European Union against another state based on their assessment of ‘immoral’ behavior, the term “Condemned” is used in this paper to describe the EU’s official disapproval. This word is chosen as the EU itself, as well as its key figures, use it on a regular basis. Some examples are: the EU condemnation of Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine (EU Response to Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine, n.d.), the EU’s condemnation of Iran’s shipment of ballistic missiles to Russia (Natalia, 2024), and Ursula von der Leyen’s condemnation of antisemitically attacks in Amsterdam (Von Der Leyen, 2024), allowing for relatively easy identification of cases in which the EU disapproves of behavior when combined with other key words while conducting research.

### **State X**

The term “State X” will from here on out refer to any nation state that was, is, or will be, a trading partner of the EU, and was, is, or will be condemned by the EU for engaging in activities that fall outside of the European Union’s “aims and values” (Aims and Values | European Union, n.d.), and are thus considered ‘immoral’ activities. It should be realized that State X does not define a single nation, but can however be used as an expression for a single nation or group of nations that does not adhere to these “aims and values” interchangeably. The goal of the implementation of this concept is to make the paper more concise by avoiding repeatedly using different terms, or overly complicated explanations/terms that could result in confusion and misinterpretations.

### **Functioning Standardized Contingency Policies**

This term, the core of the research question, needs to be made clear by the author as a misunderstanding here could very well create a misunderstanding with regards to the overall conclusion. With this goal in mind, the term will be explained part by part. “Functioning”, in the scope of this research entails that such policies would be implemented by its member states and can be, through scrutiny of mechanisms such as the “European Semester” assessed, reviewed, and revised should the need arise (The European Semester, n.d.). “Standardized”, when considering EU policy in the scope of this research refers to the creation of a single ‘blueprint’ on what series of actions, in the form of a policy, the EU takes when State X conducts immoral behavior. Depending on the outcome of this research paper, this could for example be a set of agreed upon sanctions that are immediately implemented in the case of such immoral behavior by State X. Finally, “contingency policies” are defined as policies that aim to (to some limited capacity) deter, and mostly limit immoral behavior by State X. Contingency plans are put in place to act swiftly in case of sudden changes within specific policy areas. The EU has already implemented such systems in other sectors such as EU food supply and food security (Contingency Plan, 2021).

### **Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA)**

BATNA stands for “Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement”. In essence, this entails that a BATNA is the least amount of gain something needs to result in for one to accept it. In certain cases it may also be defined as the most loss one is willing to accept. In the scope of this research BATNA will refer to both as BATNA decision making can vary widely between different EU issues as explained by Young (Young, 2015). Thus, in this research paper the BATNA will be one Alternative, based on both the gain and losses.

### **EU Normative Power (ENP)**

Normative power can be best explained by the EU itself. The “Treaty on the European Union”, article 21 states that “The Union's action on the international scene shall be guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement, and which it seeks to advance in the wider world: democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law.” (“Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union,” 2012). It is thus the projection of power through the use of norms and values as the core motivation. As explained by Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, there is often a difference between theory and implementation (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009). A rather large part of this difference lies in the projection and enforcement of Normative Power. The EU enforces its Normative implementation for a large extent through the use of its market: when the EU clashes with foreign nations or companies about its aims and values, it restricts the access of those entities to its market. It thus uses a material engine to move its normative machine forward.

### **Scientific and Societal relevance**

Previous research on the topic has mostly been with regard to observed EU response to such cases of dilemma where (critical) trading partners engaged in misconduct towards the EU itself or other nation states. This all falls under the principle of “Failing forward” as explained by Jones et al. (2015). The key difference in research approach is not to simply observe what is happening, but to assess whether the EU should abandon this principle of a form of ‘supply and demand’ for crises. The research would thus add by evaluating if a different approach to emergencies is feasible, and might even be evidently more likely to dissuade ‘immoral’ behavior within a shorter timeframe.

The setup of this paper does beg the question whether or not a combined, EU contingency plan is even feasible. On the other hand, the generality of such a plan may prove to be what is needed for nation states to agree on at least a baseline of action policy. More research will need to be done in order to reach a conclusion on this, which is the main motivation, as well as relevance of this research paper.

## Cases

### Case selection

All case below were selected based on their connection between normative challenges and trade. Some of the better known cases like Russia and China, or the DSA, were selected based on prior knowledge of their existence. Cases that were not previously known to the writer were found through the use of these key concepts, while scrutinizingly assessing different sources and their credibility before including the cases in the research.

Additionally, cases were selected based on how well they were covered by the news, in studies, and by organizations (Both EU and others), as cases with little coverage would make for difficult assessments and a lack of comparative material that would normally allow for any outliers or doubtful information to be filtered out, affecting the overall reliability of this research.

Finally, some of the cases were selected through snowball sampling, as they were mentioned in articles on other cases. An example of this is the Serbia Resource case, a case that was first observed in an article on Turkey. Reasons for such mentioning may include connections between the cases, authors that find examples of similar cases to solidify their own findings, or due to different approaches and responses to the different cases while they may have similar circumstances.

Overall, there were a number of different means and reasons for selecting the cases studied below besides the general requirements such as the time frame in which the cases were selected. All cases included the vital connection between EU trade relations with a foreign nation and, at the very least, questions with regard to the normative (or lack thereof) actions by the foreign nation in question.

## Digital Services Act (DSA)

### Introduction

The Digital Services act is an initiative by the European Union, implemented in 2023 and further expanded in 2024 that, in the words of the EU itself “regulates online intermediaries and platforms such as marketplaces, social networks, content-sharing platforms, app stores, and online travel and accommodation platforms. Its main goal is to prevent illegal and harmful activities online and the spread of disinformation. It ensures user safety, protects fundamental rights, and creates a fair and open online platform environment.” (The EU’s Digital Services Act, 2022). The DSA is thus an EU initiative that observes whether or not EU norms are upheld in the digital realm. Since its creation, the EU’s main enforcing body has been located in Ireland, the same nation in which the European headquarters of Apple, Microsoft, Google, and Meta are based (EU Targeting of Digital Services in Tariff Retaliation Would Present Challenges, 2025). Since its creation, the DSA body has done multiple inquiries into big tech companies, including X and TikTok. While countries may come to the DSA body when they have concerns, it is this EU governing body that ultimately decides the actions that may or may not be taken as responses.

### 2024

In February of 2024, research into TikTok based on the DSA concluded that there were multiple misconducts by the company. It had neglected proper protection of minors through its age verification design, had acted inadequately against harmful content, had not given proper data access to researchers, and had purposefully created its platform with an addictive design according to the DSA’s enforcing body (“Digital Services Act: What Has Enforcement Been Like for the DSA so Far?,” 2024). In April of 2024 TikTok had not submitted the required and mandatory risk assessment report. The EU then threatened to impose a fine of “worth up to 1% annual income” as well as additional fines that “can amount to 5% of their average daily income or their annual turnover worldwide” (“Digital Services Act: What Has Enforcement Been Like for the DSA so Far?,” 2024).

Later that year, in July, the US based company “X” was called send a set of preliminary findings by the EU, in which it was accused of having done inadequate to control the risk management of illegal content, in its combat of content manipulation and, like TikTok not given proper data access to researchers (“Digital Services Act: What Has Enforcement Been Like for the DSA so Far?,” 2024). X was then threatened with a fine of “up to 6% of annual turnover” (“Digital Services Act: What Has Enforcement Been Like for the DSA so Far?,” 2024).



## 2025

On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, the EU found TikTok guilty of inadequate action in relation to the abovementioned issues, mainly user data protection. Because of this, TikTok was fined 530 million euros with further action being taken by the EU should China fail to take actions to combat this (Reuters, 2025).

In April this year, inside sources from the EU also announced it is preparing penalties against X for its failure to combat content manipulation. "The penalties are set to include a fine and demands for product changes" (Satariano, 2025). With the fines likely being larger than those imposed on TikTok, with it being stated that "Total fines for all of the investigations could ultimately surpass \$1 billion, one person said, as regulators seek to make an example of X to deter other companies from violating the law, the Digital Services Act." (Satariano, 2025).

### 3 points

In the year 2024, we see a very collective decision by the EU. There is little to no opposition to the implementation and actions of the DSA governing body. Actions in 2024 show relative strength through the enforcement of EU normative standards. That year included mostly warnings to those not in line with rules and regulations. It is thus strong normative action, yet could be stronger. Some suggest the lack of further strength might have to do with material gains. The EU was thus fully collective, and strong and normative with room for improvement. Resulting in a 5, 4, 4, score respectively. 2025 saw improvements over the last two points through actual implementations of fines based on encroachments on EU Normative laws and regulations. Thus a score of 5 is awarded for each variable.

	2024	2025
Collective VS Fragmented	5	5
Strong VS Weak	4	5
Normative VS Material	4	5

**Response Flow:** EU to Member States

**Security Concern:** No

## Digital Market Act (DMA)

### Introduction

The Digital Market Act “is the EU’s law to make the markets in the digital sector fairer and more contestable.” (About the Digital Markets Act, n.d.). The DMA is thus an EU initiative that observes material equality. It is a material interest flowing forth from EU normative descriptions through its “free and fair trade” aim explained in its aims and values (Aims and Values | European Union, n.d.). It entered into force in 2023 but the idea originates from 2020. Since its implementation, the EU does regular checks on all companies that fall under its lawful jurisdiction.

### 2021

In 2021, the “Copenhagen Economics” conducted a study to the implications of the DMA. It found that the DMA somewhat risks discrimination against US companies. Additionally, it stated that EU based firms may see reduced efficiency. The study also stated that “The US foreign trade representative has identified the DSA and the DMA as posing “significant barriers to US exports.”” (Næss-Schmidt et al., 2021)

Despite these warnings, the EU chose to push through regardless of the possible negative consequences, showcasing its commitment to Normative over Material Power.

### 2025

On March the 25<sup>th</sup> a deadline was set for checking if Apple, Meta and Alphabet have breached the EU’s DMA. If found guilty, they could face fines up to 10% of global turnover. As stated by Bruegel “These would be the first penalties imposed since the DMA obligations became applicable in March 2024.” (Geopolitics and Fines for Breaches of the EU’s Digital Markets Act, 2025). Despite the possibility of a fine of 10% of the global turnover, Reuters signalled minor fines in face of international political pressure. A big part of this was how Trump threatened with tariffs against anyone who fines US compagnies (Foo, 2025). According to some sources, this would fail DMA’s role as deterrence.... (Geopolitics and Fines for Breaches of the EU’s Digital Markets Act, 2025). The article argued that increasing fines would make more sense mathematically from a deterrence view as well as considering the material implications of any fine regardless of its sum (with Trump likely to respond anyways), stating that “An EU country wanting to avoid Trump’s ire can choose not to investigate possible DMA infringements” (Geopolitics and Fines for Breaches of the EU’s Digital Markets Act, 2025). . Thus material gain should in theory also see increase in fines. This indicates that Normative Power and Material Power should both be on the side of a higher fine, which in turn argues in favour of there being a Third Power at play. Despite the logic, signals that the fines would not be significant kept coming in as the case progressed. On the other hand “Teresa Ribera, the second most powerful official at the European Commission after President Ursula von der Leyen, told Reuters that while Europe needs to negotiate with

the White House and hear its concerns on trade, it should not be pushed into making changes to laws that have been approved by lawmakers.” (Hay & Foo, 2025). This difference in statements indicates a fragmented opinion within the European Union. Eventually, at least preliminary findings were pushed through (Lemaire & Lemaire, 2025). Indicating that to this stage the EU did not buckle under US pressure either from administration nor from the big tech giants themselves.

Then, on the 23rd of April, “The European Union has ordered Apple and Meta to pay a combined €700m (£599m) in the first fines it has issued under legislation intended to curb the power of big tech.”, being separated as follows: “It has issued a €500m (£428m) fine to Apple over its App Store, while Meta has been fined €200m (£171m) over how much choice users had to consent to data collection.” (Rahman-Jones, 2025). While a huge step in general Foo and Strupczewski argued that “The fines are modest compared to the penalties meted out by the previous EU antitrust chief Margrethe Vestager during her term. Sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, have said this is due to the short period of the breaches, a focus on compliance rather than sanctions, and a desire to avoid possible retaliation from Trump.” (Foo & Strupczewski, 2025). The EU stated that the companies would have a set amount of time, namely two months, to comply with their fines before being at risk of further daily fines, indicating that the EU is indeed prepared to take such further steps.

While these are definitely positive sounds in favour of EU Normative Power, there are others that claim the size of the fines meant that no real warning was given to the companies other than a slap on the wrist. Hurst argued that “Instead of a maximum \$39bn (£29bn) fine, Apple will pay \$570m (£430m); instead of \$16bn (£12bn), Meta will pay \$228m (£172m). Let me break down the sheer insignificance of two fines that sound large but aren’t. Apple, with a \$3tn market cap, brought in \$391bn in revenue in 2024. Meta’s revenue was \$164.5bn and it made a \$62.4bn profit. In effect, the EU knocked 46 hours off of Apple’s year of profit, and shortened Meta’s year by 28 hours.” (Hurst, 2025). This entails that only a fraction of what was threatened to be fined was in fact imposed upon the companies. 10% would have been +/- 36,5 day, or 876 hours off of both companies. Apple got a fine of  $(46/876) \times 100 = 5,25\%$  off of its maximum 10% fine, which is a 0,53% annual income fine. Meta got a fine of  $(28/876) \times 100 = 3,20\%$  off of its maximum 10% fine, which is a 0,32% annual income fine. Thus, it is not purely normative power that is at play in the EU, but also Material or Diplomatic Power in play. Despite the relatively low fines, it is still a clear symbolic sign.

### 3 points

Initial EU actions were promising, with EU pushing through on its DSA initiatives despite reports that they might negatively impact economic gains, the only thing lacking that year was actual fines, which resulted in a 5, 5, 4 score respectively. However, by 2025, when the EU finally came out with a conclusion on big tech businesses not in line with regulations, results were somewhat disappointing. Different individuals and agencies within the EU had hinted towards different conclusions, indicating a slightly more divided Union. The EU did eventually come to a collective decision, yet the process showed more fragmentation. The outcome itself was strong in the sense that actual fines were given to the big tech companies, yet the actual weight of these fines can be debated. The symbolic value was significantly higher than its monetary counterpart. The eventual action taken by the EU signals a conflict between Normative and Material interests, resulting in actions that are not fully supporting the one or the other. This reasoning leads to a 4, 4, 3 score respectively.

	2021	2025
Collective VS Fragmented	5	4
Strong VS Weak	5	4
Normative VS Material	4	3

**Response Flow:** EU to Member States

**Security Concern:** No

## Human Rights Clause in Trade Agreements

### Introduction

The EU has Human Rights clauses in its trade agreements with all countries since 1990's (Prickartz & Staudinger, 2019), including countries known for violating human rights such as China (Cayuela, 2021). The European Parliament is the biggest actor in pursuing human rights on EU level (Prickartz & Staudinger, 2019). Through this method, the EU aims to use its economic power in order to advocate its Normative power. The risk with this however is that it has a chance of leading to the blurring of lines between the two and forgetting which of the two should take priority.

### Information

While the EU advocates having human rights clauses in all of its trade agreements, this does not always turn out to be the case. “where the EU is negotiating with a developed country, which will usually be a strong negotiating party, the possibility arises that the human rights clause is foregone when the negotiating party opposes the inclusion of such a clause. Several agreements with developed countries, such as the customs union with San Marino or the cooperation agreement with Andorra, do not contain human rights provisions.” (Prickartz & Staudinger, 2019). This seems to indicate a lack of pure Normative Power, and a superior interest in Material Power. It begs the question if Normative power can be implemented only when the EU possesses superior Material Power? Surprisingly, this isn't always the case. As explained by Prickartz and Staudinger “There is, however, some evidence that the EU insists on the inclusion of human rights clauses in trade agreements with developed countries, even in the face of the latter's opposition thereto: in 1996–1997, the conclusion of a trade agreement with Australia and New Zealand fell through because they refused to sign an agreement including a human rights clause.”. There are thus cases where Normative Power was upheld in case of lack of Material leverage. It should be stated that case of Australia and New Zealand falls outside the scope of this research.

Besides the inclusion of such human rights clauses, there is also the matter of the enforcement and activation of these clauses should a trade partner misbehave. Prickartz and Staudinger have found that “A common denominator in the instances in which the human rights clauses were activated can be found in the reason for their activation. In all cases, there was a component of political unrest: in 15 cases, a coup d'état had taken place, in the other eight cases there were flawed elections, a deterioration of respect for human rights or for the rule of law, or a combination of these elements.<sup>167</sup> In none of the cases was there ‘only’ a deterioration of respect for human rights as a trigger for the activation of the human rights clause.”. This led to the conclusion that “instances of political unrest trigger the activation of a human rights clause, violations of other rights, including, among others, women's rights, minority

rights, LGBT rights and children's rights, do not trigger such a response." Ultimately, Prickartz and Staudinger argue that there may be a conflict of interest in some cases. For example when there is a chance of strengthening international security or possibilities for further integration into the World Economy. These findings all indicate Material Power over Normative Power. This in turn creates issues with Internal vs External as the outward assessment of Human Rights not always in agreement with internal implementation in all member states and institutions. It should also be noted that the EU parliament often criticises EU commission for its actions or inactions and that EU member states don't all adhere to values given to human rights when dealing with third countries. An example would be how the protection of Minority rights advocated outward yet not nearly always prioritised internally (Prickartz & Staudinger, 2019).

### 3 points

In general, the EU seems to be inconsistent on its implementation and enforcement of Human Rights clauses in its trade agreement. There are cases of such clauses being left out in favour of material gains, yet at the same time there are cases of the EU giving up on material gains over disagreements with regards to the Normative agreements. There are strong and weak actions. Overall however, the EU seems more in favour of Material agreements when faced with a choice between the two. These inconsistencies however, lead to the EU being somewhat fragmented, especially between the different levels of the EU like the EU as an organisation, member states, and civilians. These conclusions result in overall scores of 2, 3, 2 in general.

	General
Collective VS Fragmented	2
Strong VS Weak	3
Normative VS Material	2

**Response Flow:** EU to Member States

**Security Concern:** No

## **The Israel-Palestine Case**

### **Introduction**

Between the European Union and the state of Israel there is the so called “EU-Israel Association Agreement”. This agreement came into force in 2000 and allows for trade on multiple levels (EU-Israel Association Agreement | Access2Markets, n.d.). This includes military equipment. The agreement states that “the parties establish the association “considering the importance which the Parties attach...[ ] to the principles of the United Nations Charter, particularly the observance of human rights and democracy, which form the very basis of the Association.” Article 2 states that “relations between the Parties, as well as all the provisions of the Agreement itself, shall be based on respect for human rights and democratic principles, which guides their internal and international policy and constitutes an essential element of this Agreement.”” (Statewatch | Call to Suspend EU-Israel Agreement Over Violations of Palestinian Rights, 2024). Despite the agreement being based on Human Rights ideologies, there have been multiple violations of human rights. The International Court of Justice, which is recognized by the EU but not by Israel condemned and ordered to cease Israel’s behaviour on three separate occasions, namely: January 2024, March 2024 and May 2024. So far, there has been no response from Israel.

### **2024**

After the start of Israel’s response to the October 7 attacks by Hamas, reports of Human Rights violations started to mount up. On February 2024 a joint letter by Ireland and Spain “seeking an “urgent review” of whether Israel is complying with human rights obligations under its trade agreement with the EU” (Brzozowski, 2024) was submitted to the EC president and Chief Diplomat. It asked for EU to propose “appropriate measures” instead of the countries proposing its own measures. Additionally, the latter was no direct call for stepping out of the agreement between the Union and Israel.

### **2025**

In January 2025 a report came out that “Over 250 Parliamentarians from 17 EU countries called for the suspension of the EU Association Agreement with Israel citing Israel’s breaches of the art 2, so called ‘human rights’ clause of the treaty.” (Aneta, 2025). The call for the suspension included signatories from: Ireland, Slovenia, France, Belgium, Spain, Finland, Czech Republic, Italy, Sweden, Germany, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Denmark, Poland, Luxembourg. (Walsh, 2025). This means there were signatories from 16 out of 27 Member States. The document was not signed by: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania Slovakia. Which logically is 11 out of 27 Member States. It was thus a fragmented move by those who felt it was necessary to speak up.

In April 2025 the “European Union External Action” site, the site of the Diplomatic service of the European Union responded to an EU civilian Petition that called for dissolving the trade agreement between the two. The response read “The EU is not planning to suspend its cooperation with Israel, nor to impose economic sanctions against it. The Association Agreement with Israel is the legal basis of our ongoing dialogue with the Israeli authorities and it provides important mechanisms to discuss problematic issues and advance our point of view.” (Petition Response - Letter From Citizen Urging the Suspension of EU-Israel Association Agreement, 2025). The statement was clear, yet also clearly ignored the Normative Power many expected the EU to enforce as it had done before.

In May of 2025, the Dutch Foreign Minister speaks out. As written in the Guardian “Explaining his position Veldkamp said: “You cannot starve the people of the Gaza Strip. It is against international law. It’s morally wrong. It’s dangerous. I don’t think it’s in Israel’s own interest.” Chances for a ceasefire appeared “very, very slim,” he said, making the situation “unbearable”. The Dutch government would veto any extension of the EU-Israel action plan, the agreement implementing the association agreement that came into force in 2000, he added.” (Wintour, 2025). This signalled yet another increase in opposition from EU member states and citizens towards the current EU stance.

### 3 points

There was never an EU-wide consensus on a response to Israel. Despite the ICJ, which the EU supports and claims to adhere to, judging against Israeli actions, there has been no general statement or action against Israel. In fact, in 2024 the EU was less fragmented as most of the EU member states refrained from openly support further EU action against Israel. In 2025, under clear pressure from its populations, additional member states spoke up, yet the EU seems to be equally divided on the topic. The inaction of the EU as an organization despite these protests shows further fragmentation between the EU, its member states, and civil society. This results in a score of 2 in 2024 and 1 in 2025. With little to no action, there is neither strong nor weak action, resulting in a score of 3 in both years. EU action in both years can be seen as Material interested. The protests of member states and civilians show that influences are still not fully Material. There was not enough of a shift between the years to move from 2 to 3.

	2024	2025
Collective VS Fragmented	2	1
Strong VS Weak	3	3
Normative VS Material	2	2

**Response Flow:** Member States to EU

**Security Concern:** Yes



## **EU-Vietnam**

### **Introduction**

The most recent trade agreement between the EU and Vietnam entered into force in August 2020. It included a near total erasure of tariffs between the two as well as numerous other trade barriers. The European Parliament voted the agreement into life. The Investment Protection Agreement, a secondary agreement to the trade agreement will only go into force when all members have ratified it. So far multiple are still to do so (EU-Vietnam, 2024). Before the current trade agreement, there was a previous one. Already at that point, there were indications of human rights violations.

### **2016**

In 2016, the European ombudsman concludes investigation on human rights assessment that the European Commission should have done. The ombudsman urges commission to do so without delay. Instead of agreeing, the Commission refuses. As the agreement was already signed, the ombudsman could do nothing more than to leave a critical remark in her report (European Ombudsman, 2016).

### **2020**

A new Trade agreement signed in 2020. Euronews stated that “The trade agreement signed in 2019 entered into force in 2020 but the investment protection agreement also signed in 2019 has not yet been ratified by nine EU member states.” (Corlin, 2025). This trade agreement already included the Human Rights clause that all modern EU trade agreements have. Despite previous comments from the European ombudsman, the EP votes in favour.

### **2021**

As authoritarianism increases in Vietnam, “EU was hesitant on Wednesday (6 January) to resort to trade sanctions following the announcement of heavy sentences of journalists in Vietnam, a latest development in the communist country's crackdown on dissent.” (Makszimov, 2021). Despite the human rights clause in the trade agreement, the EU did not act swiftly. A EU commission spokesperson called the matter “a very negative development”. The EU seemed to be very careful in threatening with sanctions, calling it a “last resort mechanism” (Makszimov, 2021). This refusal to call upon its rights through the agreement signed, is an indication of lack of Normative Power.

### **2024**

While the EU keeps its trade agreement with Vietnam active and does not impose any implications on the issues pointed out in 2021, the situation in Vietnam does not become better. Human Rights Watch urges to EU to reconsider its bilateral human rights dialogue (“Vietnam: EU Should Better Address Intensifying Repression,” 2024). It

points out that “Vietnam has not ratified International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize, despite a specific pledge to do so by 2023, made ahead of the European Parliament’s February 2020 vote on the trade agreement.”. Despite proper action, the negative developments have been acknowledged by: All member states, members of the European Parliament, and EU members of the Domestic Advisory Group, according to HRW. However, there has not been any action taken. This lack of action makes Human Rights Watch call for “targeted sanctions and concrete consequences”.

Then, later in the year, Nguyen Phu Trong, leader of Vietnam dies. The new president is To Lam, who worked under Trong as minister of public security. In this role, he oversaw a kidnapping in Europe for which he nor his accomplices have never been arrested. This sensitive change of leadership puts a new strain on the relationship between the EU and Vietnam as human rights violations expected to increase. Political reporter Hutt wrote “For now, as Gerstl put it, “the EU is rather cautious in its criticism of human rights violations in Vietnam, especially compared to China.”” (Hutt, 2024). This lack of action compared to other nations seems puzzling as logically it would not have more Material Power implications than criticism of China would have. Vietnam is the 17<sup>th</sup> largest trade partner only, seemingly lacking a better reason as to why it dodges scrutiny than larger trade partners such as China and the US. This implies that besides Normative and Material Power, there is a likely Third Power at play.

## 2025

As matters still don’t improve, the International Federation for Human Rights, and its member organization, the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR), filed a complaint to the European Commission's trade department on February 4 (Hutt, 2025).

In their complaint, they argue that basic rights such as but not limited to: international labour rights and environmental convections freedom of association, were included in the trade agreement, and that these should be adhered to.

Yet the EU seems keen on only further consolidating its ties with Vietnam. An example of this is how the EU is planning to help with cleanup chemically infected areas, but for economic purposes. Reuters reported that “Belgium is setting up a fund that would contribute to restart the temporarily suspended recovery of areas contaminated with agent orange sprayed by U.S. forces during the Vietnam War, the country's ambassador to Vietnam Karl Van den Bossche said, noting the plan was to turn the reclaimed land into profitable industrial zones.” (Guarascio, 2025).

As the EU and Vietnam grow closer, more voices rise in protest, with the International Federation for Human Rights states that “It is high time the EU held Vietnam accountable for these gross violations of the trade agreement.” (Vietnam’s Systematic Attack on Civil Society Breaches the Free Trade Agreement With the EU, New Complaint

Argues, 2025). Yet, despite these asks, a month later Euronews stated that “EU senior officials including Commission President Ursula von der Leyen are set to go on a scoping trip to intensify trade bonds with Vietnam five years after signing a free trade agreement with the south-east Asian country.” (Corlin, 2025). Multiple Commissioners are said to travel there in April. New reports showed that EU interest in resources are likely a big factor in its acting after all, with Euronews indicating that “According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS), in 2022 Vietnam was the world’s second greatest producer of tungsten. It also possesses important deposits of rare earths - for which it is ranked sixth in the world - essential for the production of electric vehicles, wind turbines and solar panels.” (Corlin, 2025). Additionally, Corlin states that “The EU is one of the largest foreign investors in Vietnam. It exports mainly high-tech products, aircraft, vehicles and pharmaceutical products, and imports electronics, footwear, textile, clothing, coffee and rice.” (Corlin, 2025).

Due to the current state of international politics, including the Trump Tariffs and China’s increased aggression, increased closeness between the EU and Vietnam is only expected to grow. With reports stating that “Fearing retaliatory U.S. tariffs, Vietnam is turning to Europe” (Firn, 2025) and that “While Brussels and Southeast Asia’s governments have not always seen eye to eye on questions like climate change, environmental protection, and human rights their areas of shared interest are becoming more apparent with every step the Trump administration takes toward dismantling the current global order.” (Strangio, 2025). This increase only seems to grow further despite the issues clearly showcased by a number of parties. Vietnam is a clear case of European Material Power being more important in the current global situation than Normative Power is. It guarantees more security, which both Europe and Vietnam seem to feel like its lacking from the Trump administration. For now, ties are only likely to deepen, with Radio Free Asia stating that “Since an EU-Vietnam free trade agreement came into force in 2020, two-way trade has risen almost 48% to US\$68.4 billion last year.” (Firn, 2025).

### 3 points

As the research above shows, there has never been a consensus within the EU on the violations of Normative agreements of Vietnam. What is sure is that, over the years there has been an increase in Material interest, an increase in individual protests, and yet at the same time an increase in acceptance of trade with Vietnam. Additionally, the EU itself has become more open in its own continued trade with Vietnam, thus strengthening its actions despite action in general still being weak rather than strong. These findings result in a shift from Fragmented to Collective, with the camps splitting in two clear camps, resulting in scores of 2, 2, 3, 3, 4 over the various years. EU response, has become stronger, yet not in the way that those opposed to the trade would like to see, resulting in a shift from scores of 1 in 2016 and 2020, to a score of 2 in the years after that. Finally, the clearest of the three variables in this case is that of Normative vs Material. The EU is definitely moving to a completely Material approach in the case of Vietnam, where in the earliest year it still seemed to aim for Normative involvement as well, resulting in scores of 3, 3, 2, 2, 1 over the respective years.

	2016	2020	2021	2024	2025
Collective VS Fragmented	2	2	3	3	4
Strong VS Weak	1	1	2	2	2
Normative VS Material	3	3	2	2	1

**Response Flow:** Member States to EU

**Security Concern:** No

## **EU-Myanmar**

### **Introduction**

The EU is the 4<sup>th</sup> largest trade partner of Myanmar. In 2024, the overall trade between the two was worth 3,6 billion euros (EU Trade Relations With Myanmar, 2024). The EU mainly imports textiles from Myanmar.

### **2017**

In 2017, the world was made aware of a big humanitarian issue in Myanmar: the persecution of the Rohingya people. The wave of ethnic persecution was observed with great concern all around the world. As a response, the European Parliament adopts resolution that calls out the government of Myanmar and its security forces on the matter. The EP called for sanctions against Myanmar as well as a repercussion through a change in Myanmar's trade preferences should issues continue. (Myanmar : European Parliament (EP) Adopts Strong Resolution on the Situation of Rohingyas, 2017).

### **2018**

As a result of the ongoing violence and the plead of the European Parliament, the EU strengthens arms embargo against Myanmar (EU Arms Embargo on Myanmar (Burma), 2025). Additionally, the EU imposes sanctions on individuals linked to the persecution of the Rohingya minority (EU Sanctions Against Myanmar, 2025). The EU continues its overall trade with the nation. As the issue slowly settles down, the sanctions and embargo remain against those considered guilty. From here on, relations seem balanced.

### **2021**

Then, in 2021, a second issue comes up in Myanmar: the 2021 military coup and its suppression of peaceful demonstrators. The military takes control from the democratically elected government and installs its own government. Any forms of demonstration against this are forbidden and met with violence. In response, EP agrees on resolution that calls for a reinstatement of the democratically elected party and the release of prisoners (Resolucije EP | Dokumenti | DASE | Delegacije | Evropski Parlament, 2023). As resolutions alone do not have much direct effect on the situation on the ground, the EU increases its pressure on the Junta. Between 2021 and 2025, EU has "adopted eight packages of sanctions targeting Myanmar's military regime, which is responsible for overthrowing the democratically elected government. Sanctions are crafted in such a way as to avoid harm to the people of Myanmar." (EU Sanctions Against Myanmar, 2025). These sanction packages have, in some cases, been implemented in cooperation with allies such as the sanctions imposed in October 2024 with Canada and the UK (Foreign, 2024).

In both cases, Normative power is the clear important factor, showing an undivided EU in agreement. It should be observed that, considering the nature of trade with Myanmar, there is not much risk in loss of Material power.

## **2022**

Interestingly, despite sanctions, trade between the EU and Myanmar grows (Welle, 2023). In 2022, there was an 80% increase compared to 2021. This falls in line however with the statement the EU made in 2021, that the sanctions were avoiding harm to the civilians of Myanmar.

## **2023**

Further sanctions are implemented, aimed at individuals as well as at means of conflict and oppression, not general businesses. This form of sanctions, as argued by some, ensures that money that the junta receives through taxation of the trade in these normal goods and services keeps the junta in power. These people support the argument that total trade block would be better. The EU on the other hand argues that this would affect the average Myanmar citizen more than it would the junta. This EU rhetoric was explained by Professor Zachery Abuza, stating “While I am all for choking off the SAC and military-owned corporations of funds, there is an imperative to keep people employed, especially women who dominate the textile sector,” (Welle, 2023). As we see an increase in Material interests in Myanmar, as well as an increase in Normative arguments, it is difficult to determine the exact reasoning of the EU. Considering the nature of trade however, the normative arguments for further trade with Myanmar may be legit.

### 3 points

In the case of Myanmar, there was never any discussion within the EU of what the EU stance on the matter would be. There was an undivided agreement that Myanmar, and in particular its government, should be held accountable. This stance did not change over the course of the years, and thus we can observe a score of 5 for collectiveness in all of the years. Considering the size of the atrocities committed, the EU actions in the first year were not as strong as their words. Sanctions did not come into action until the year after, and in the following years sanctions remained focussed on specific fields, regardless of the limited results this provided. Considering an increase after 2017, and there still being room for stronger action, the scores are a 3 in 2017 and 4's in all the years after that. While actions and words in the first two years were fully Normative, the change in the nature of Myanmar's issues seems to have slightly changed the EU approach as well. With a clear argument that Material interests are of interest to the people of Myanmar mostly, the EU chooses to spread its interests despite its main focus on the Normative aspect. This results in scores of 5, 5, 4, 4, 4, 4 respectively.

	2017	2018	2021	2023	2024	2025
Collective VS Fragmented	5	5	5	5	5	5
Strong VS Weak	3	4	4	4	4	4
Normative VS Material	5	5	4	4	4	4

**Response Flow:** EU to Member States

**Security Concern:** No

## **The Serbia Resource Deal**

### **Introduction**

Serbia has had a “Stabilisation and Association Agreement” with EU since 2013. In this deal, as in most modern-day deals the EU has implemented a human rights clause which states: “CONSIDERING the commitment of the Parties to increasing political and economic freedoms as the very basis of this Agreement, as well as their commitment to respect human rights and the rule of law, including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, and democratic principles through a multi-party system with free and fair elections;” (EUR-LEX - 22013A1018(01) - EN - EUR-LEX, 2013).

More recently, a deal was signed with the EU to extract critical raw materials (Freedom House, 2024) such as lithium. This deal is of great value to the European Union in the face of the green transition and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Additionally, it ensures the EU is less dependent on Chinese resources.

The deal comes in face of rising authoritarian tendencies, large scale protests and increased encroachment on NGO’s in Serbia. The developments over the past couple months show that it is now the EU’s move to make.

### **2024**

Despite an increasingly Autocratic regime “In July 2024, the European Union (EU) and the Serbian government signed a strategic raw materials partnership.” (Müller et al., 2025). According to an article published by the German founding for Science and Politics “The case of Serbia illustrates that the EU can only exert limited influence on the country’s authoritarian government in a geopolitically tense context.”

Besides scepticism of the lack of Normative Power, there is also fear for the possible impact on humans and nature feared by citizens and NGO’s (Schmitz, 2024).

Months after the signing of the resource deal, the collapse of a train station triggers widespread protests in the nation against its government. Aggressive means are then allegedly used to disperse peacefully protesting crowds. As a response “the Council of Europe right body said it was “very concerned about the escalation of tensions in the country” and called for a thorough investigation.” (Afp, 2025)

The resource deal nor the trade agreement are brought into question by the EU, signalling a lack of Normative Power enforced in the matter.



## 2025

Pushback against EU-Serbia resource deal persists in Serbia as “for many Serbians, it symbolized yet another case of unaccountable governance, environmental risks, and foreign interests taking precedence over local well-being.” (Iliriana Gjoni, 2025). The EU is blamed for choosing short term regional stability over enforcing its Normative Power. With an article by an independent EU analysis body stating “Instead of pushing for real reforms, Brussels has opted for partnerships with strongmen who can guarantee short-term stability.” (Iliriana Gjoni, 2025).

As tensions rise, the European Parliament held a debate on increasing authoritarian tendencies in Serbia (Ewb, 2025). In this debate, a Commission spokesperson “expressed concerns”, yet no further action was taken despite various calls for practical solutions by MEP’s.

In response there is an increase in statements by EU civil society movements support protestors and call out for action with the Netherlands Helsinki Committee emphasizing that “Clearer messages and concrete actions are urgently needed to show citizens and civil society organisations that they are not alone in this fight, and that the EU truly upholds the values it claims to stand for.” (Intern, 2025). The European Policy Centre also argued that “The EU and member states have a long track record of being ‘loudly silent’ about the political situation in Serbia. The EU has often turned a blind eye to the deterioration of the country’s democratic standards for the sake of stability and to win Vučić’s cooperation, for example, in the resolution of the Belgrade-Pristina dispute, to distance Serbia from the Kremlin, and to supply the European economy with critical materials such as lithium.” (Belgrade Mass Protests: What Are the Implications for Serbia and the EU?, 2025).

European inaction with regard to the Serbian President’s actions causes a lack of trust in the EU in Serbia which, according to a Euronews article resulted that “Some also feel the EU response to their perception of democratic erosion has been weak, and this is fueling an already latent euroscepticism in younger generations, claims Dragana Djurica, expert in Serbia-EU relationships and Secretary General at European Movement Serbia” (Gomez, 2025)

After months of numerous groups calling out the EU for its lack of Normative Power use in Serbia “the EU has finally broken its silence — offering a rare yet measured rebuke to Belgrade.” (Ahmatović, 2025). A comment from EU Commission president von der Leyen warning the Serbia government that it “needs to deliver on EU reforms” (Ahmatović, 2025). This does show that the matter has moved from not being just a concern from the EP any more and shows a shift in use of Normative Power instigated by civilian and EP efforts.

At the same time, EU further integrated Serbia through a step towards integrating into the Euro zone (European Commission Welcomes Inclusion of Serbia in the Single Euro Payments Area, 2025).

Most recently, Serbia’s president has attended Russia’s Victory Parade (Stojanovic, 2025). In response, EU foreign policy chief Kallas warns Serbia that, despite its dependency on Russian energy, it should choose sides wisely or risk losing the EU. There were however no concrete consequences for the Serbian ties with Russia, nor for the Serbian President, showing that the shift is towards a more Normative stance, but has not reached the European Union’s possible support of the Normative cause just yet.

### 3 points

The EU had clear Material interests in 2024, choosing not to act at all and avoiding the topic at all cost. While the EU did not act, there was significant protest against this, showing a somewhat fragmented EU. With fragmentation mostly between the levels of EU, no EU response, and Material gains as the clear focus of the EU, the variables score 2, 1, 1 respectively. In 2025, after mostly a loud protest from the public in the EU combined with the failure of the ‘turning a blind eye’ tactic of the EU with Serbia seemingly growing closer to Russia, the EU finally chose a more Normative approach to the issue. There is an increased EU voice against the Serbian government and president. These changes result in a growing Collective, Strong, and Normative approach that across all variables can still improve. Thus, all three have a score of 4 in 2025.

	2024	2025
Collective VS Fragmented	2	4
Strong VS Weak	1	4
Normative VS Material	1	4

**Response Flow:** Member States to EU

**Security Concern:** Yes

## **Refugees**

### **Introduction**

The refugee crisis that started in 2015 saw a great division in the EU, from those that called for voluntary to forced intake of migrants, to big shifts in both national and supranational voter decision making. As a result, the EU made a number of deals with nations on its borders in an effort to curb the number of immigrants and relieve the strain on the EU as a system.

### **Turkey**

One of these nations is Turkey, a long time candidate-state that has seen its fair share of issues. For the scope of this research this paper will only assess Turkey on the basis of its immigration policies and the EU's response to this.

#### **2016**

A 2016 report by amnesty international indicated mistreatment of asylum seekers by Turkey. The report was presented to the Dutch government, who were a major drive force behind the deal between the EU and Turkey. Multiple parties wanted the deal to be reversed based on the report (this did not end up happening despite protest) (Times, 2020). The deal continued and EU funded refugee camps were constructed in Turkey.

#### **2017**

The next year, the European Ombudsman got involved as complaints were raised. The official site stating that "Following complaints on the issue, the European Ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly, has asked the European Commission to carry out a more thorough assessment of the human rights impact of the EU-Turkey Agreement" (European Ombudsman, 2017). The complaint was launched by "Spanish NGOs (the Spanish Committee for Helping Refugees (CEAR), the Spanish Association of Young Lawyers and Women's Link Worldwide) and individual citizens". There were no further actions taken that year based on the request by the European Ombudsman that year.

#### **2018**

In 2018, a study found that "the EU – Turkey Statement is not in accordance with European law and does not safeguard human rights." (The EU - Turkey Statement: A Design for Human Rights Violations?, 2018). Despite these findings, the EU carried on with its funding of Turkish efforts to curb refugee influx and refugee processing.

#### **2019**

"The European Parliament raised concerns about deportations as early as 2019." (Weise et al., 2024). Despite these concerns, it undertakes little further action.

## **2021**

“A 2021 Commission report on the EU’s refugee aid similarly noted “concerns of enforced returns.” NGOs say they have raised the issue repeatedly with senior Commission staff.” (Weise et al., 2024). The report is not acted upon. No actions, resolutions or sanctions are adopted/implemented.

## **2022**

After 4 years of little to no consequences, the EU Commission publishes report that “503,000 Syrians were “voluntarily repatriated” by that year but that UNHCR only monitored “approximately 125,000” of them.” (Weise et al., 2024). Despite contradictory numbers, the EU seems to care little and undertakes no forms of action against Turkey.

## **2024**

As stated by an article from POLITICO the “UNHCR itself states it has verified 186,400 voluntary returns between 2016 and June this year; in the first half of 2024, it has monitored fewer than 10,000.” (Weise et al., 2024). These reports by politico and other news outlets all call out against a seemingly overwhelming number of cases of severe mistreatment of refugees/immigrants. Reports by these outlets state that an anonymous former member of EU Commission claimed EU members were aware but choose to ignore Turkish mistreatments. Refugees were forced to sign return papers. An example of this showcased how “Two Syrian border officials said they had been asked not to record statistics about deportations, but that some data was collected. One official shared figures for the Bab al-Hawa checkpoint, saying that between January 2023 and August 2024, they registered nearly 27,000 returns as forced — approximately half of all crossings during that time.” (Weise et al., 2024).

POLITICO sharply addressed the issue and the apparent lack of involvement from the EU, writing “ Conditions apply to all EU funding, and in theory, Brussels could recoup money if it were misused; the EU diplomat said that if there was evidence of abuse involving “projects that have been funded by us, that would also have financial consequences.” Yet so far, Brussels has shown little interest in what its money facilitates. The conditions inside EU-funded centres and the forced deportations have been extensively documented, and the former Commission official said these issues were “constantly” talked about internally. “These human rights concerns, the pushback policies, the return policies, they have been common concerns throughout the period I was dealing with Turkey,” said the official, who was granted anonymity to candidly discuss internal conversations. The Commission’s annual reports on Turkey noted reports of forced deportations as early as 2015. Its 2023 report acknowledges “recurrent allegations of human rights violations in the field of migration, particularly in removal centres.”” (Weise et al., 2024). These cases show that there are a clear number of cases, combined with a promise for action if such cases came to light but despite the promise of Normative consequences, none have been applied so far.

In 2024, after feeling unheard and ignored for years, NGO’s sue the Dutch government for its involvement in the EU-Turkish agreement on migration as the Netherlands were EU president at the time of the deal (Times, 2024). Considering the size of the lawsuit, the results have not yet been at a level that shows any indication for its likeliness of success.

### 3 points

The fragmentation between the parties involved in creating the EU-Turkey deal was an indicator for the rest of the years. After a great fragmentation in this process, the EU seems to have moved to acceptance of the circumstances. In 2019, MP's tried once more, but seemingly gave up after this as the EU collectively seemed to accept the status quo. Then, in 2024 as all issues finally came to light, once more voices from within the EU, through NGO initiatives, rose, fragmenting the collective acceptance of the situation. These events lead to scores of 1, 2, 3, 1, 4, 4, 2 respectively.

The only reason that responses are not considered 'weakest' through a score of 1, is that each year reports were still produced by EU NGO's and individuals. The actions of the Ombudsman in 2017 and the first report in years by the Commission (that did not do much in the form of action implications) result in a higher score than all the other years around it. These two years receive a score of 3, while the others get a score of 2.

Finally, while the initial deal between Turkey and the EU attempted to at least keep its Normative values included in the Material interests behind the deal, the lack of controlling for this Normative aspect can be seen through a decrease in score for the "Normative VS Material" variable. The report by the Commission was a good step towards something better, but the lack of follow-up action in the following years resulted in a decrease in score once more. Upwards (Member States to EU) Normative pressure keeps the score from reaching 1 in the last years. This all results in scores of 3, 2, 1, 1, 3, 2, 2 respectively.

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2021	2022	2024
Collective VS Fragmented	1	2	3	1	4	4	2
Strong VS Weak	2	3	2	2	3	2	2
Normative VS Material	3	2	1	1	3	2	2

**Response Flow:** Member States to EU

**Security Concern:** Yes

## North-Africa

In addition to the deal with Turkey, the EU also made deals with a number of North-African states. Reports from this region are at times more extreme than those from the Turkish side of the issue.

### 2023

A report by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles stated that “the United Nations found that Libyan security forces and armed militias, including some that had received EU funding, may have been involved in war crimes and crimes against humanity, including the detention, enslavement and torture of migrants and asylum seekers.” (EU External Partners: MEPs Renew Criticism of EU Migration Deals — Aid Organisations Sue Dutch Government Over EU-Turkey Agreement — More Reports of Interference and Violence by Libyan Coast Guard — NGOs Express Concerns Over Human Rights Violations in Tunisia — Call for Donations and Resumption of Funding for UNRWA — Possible EU-Morocco Migration Deal in the Pipeline | European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), 2024). Despite the Concerns, no big actions have been undertaken against Libya.

### 2024

The same report by the ECRE wrote that “MEPs have criticised the European Commission for signing controversial deals that give North African countries huge sums of money in return for curbing migration to Europe. “Throwing money at dictators is not migration policy;”” (EU External Partners: MEPs Renew Criticism of EU Migration Deals — Aid Organisations Sue Dutch Government Over EU-Turkey Agreement — More Reports of Interference and Violence by Libyan Coast Guard — NGOs Express Concerns Over Human Rights Violations in Tunisia — Call for Donations and Resumption of Funding for UNRWA — Possible EU-Morocco Migration Deal in the Pipeline | European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), 2024). The report continued to explain that “The MEPs’ criticism follows the signature in March of the EU’s latest externalisation deal: a €7.4 billion agreement with Egypt.”. There are arguments that that deal was struck to stabilize Egypt as it functions as balance in for Gaza and Sudan. The report went on to explain that the Egyptian economy was doing extremely poorly and that through this EU deal, the EU hoped that there would be a big stable regional power that could keep unrest in the region in check.

That same report stated that in 2024, “the EU is planning to provide up to €164.5mn over three years to Tunisian security forces, some of whom have been accused of human rights violations.”. These remarks show that, to the EU the stability within its own member states and their support for the EU are certainly more important than the proper implementation of its Normative Power.

### 3 points

Despite some protests by MEPs, the EU’s plans have gone through without much opposition. The 2025 statement that the EU is likely to increase its spending in the region indicates that lack of opposition and through it the collective acceptance within the EU, resulting in scores of 4 and 5 respectively. EU action against those that do not adhere to its Normative rules and regulations are practically non-existent. The only change in action is a slight increase within member states and NGO’s with regards to awareness to what is happening. This slight change results in a score of 2 in 2024 compared to the score of 1 in 2024. Finally, the EU’s motivations are only becoming more Material as it plans to increase the number of countries it intends to involve in the region. The research awards scores of 2 and 1 for this variables for the respective years.

	2023	2024
Collective VS Fragmented	4	5
Strong VS Weak	1	2
Normative VS Material	2	1

**Response Flow:** Member States to EU

**Security Concern:** Yes



## **EU-Russia**

### **Introduction**

The relationship between Russia and the EU has long been a delicate balance. After more than a decade of coming closer together, the two disagreed more and more under increasingly changing geopolitical situations. Despite the strained relationship. Trade between the two remained high, with the EU depending on Russia for most of its gas and oil imports (Statistics Explained, 2025). This reliance on Russia as a critical trading partner turned out to be a flaw in European thinking.

### **2004**

Russia complained about European Enlargement as 2004 saw a “historic expansion in 2004 marking the re-unification of Europe after decades of division.” (From 6 to 27 Members, 2019). At the beginning of this historic expansion, Russian complains started. Russia changed its stance of approachement to isolation as “geopolitical considerations, such as preserving Russia’s status as a former imperial power, is more important to Moscow than economic issues when it comes to foreign policy.” (Russia and the European Union, 2004). Despite these complaints the EU continues to enlarge under the argument of its Normative Power and voluntary joining of the new member states.

### **2014**

The 2014 annexation of Crimea resets the relationship with Russia, the result being that “some of the policy dialogues and mechanisms of cooperation, including in the area of trade, have been suspended.” (EU Trade Relations With Russia, 2024) as explained by the EU itself. This suspension was, relative to the total trade with Russia, still quite small. In hindsight, they were certainly not enough to dissuade Russia from further aggressive actions on the European continent.

### **2022**

Russia launches its ‘special military operation’ and invades Ukraine. 4 Days after the initial invasion Ukraine applies for EU membership. Up until this point, EU enlargement had been seen as defence mechanism by experts (Orenstein, 2023), (Anghel & Džankić, 2023), stating that “the EU used enlargement as a stabilization and security-building mechanism without guaranteeing membership as the end state.” (Anghel & Džankić, 2023).

Trade Changed after the full scale invasion in 2022 (Statistics Explained, 2025). There was a 62% decrease in exports as well as an 85% decrease in imports.

## 2023

The EU recommends to open accession negotiations for Ukraine, Moldova, and grant candidate status to Georgia (Enlargement - Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia - EU NEIGHBOURS East, 2024). This signals the EU will continue its Normative Power expansion wishes despite Material drawbacks in the form of the threat of more conflict with Russia, thus less trade and more expenses. The EU increases its sanctions against Russia and those it holds responsible for the actions against basic Human Rights.

## 2024

Interestingly, in 2024, the EU still has a trade deficit to Russia as the EU buys more from Russia than Russia does from the EU. There is a trade deficit of 2.1 billion (Statistics Explained, 2025). Compared to its 46 billion deficit in 2022 however, this entails the EU only has cut its deficit by 95% within 2 years. As Russian aggression continued, the EU further sanctioned Russia. However, Fertilisers and Natural gas imports by the EU were both higher in 2024 than in 2023 and 2022. The last quarter 2024 imports slightly increased compared to previous quarter and in part compared to same quarter 2023. There thus seems to be an increase in trade in some areas, and while some of this increase might be explained by a harsher winter in 2024, it does beg the question whether the European Union does indeed place its Material needs over Normative demands?

## 2025

Seemingly having picked up on its own trends in 2024, the EU imposed “New tariffs on agricultural products and fertilisers from Russia and Belarus” (Timeline - EU Sanctions Against Russia, 2025), indicating its commitment to further pressure and less dependence. In part, civil protests ongoing against Russia might have been of influence on this, showcasing a correction towards normative power compared to 2024.

After the US’s ‘betrayal’ of Ukraine and the crisis in the oval office between Trump and Zelensky, the EU reaffirmed its support of Ukraine, showing its determination to stand with Ukraine. This includes renewal of previously imposed sanctions against Russian individuals until at least September 2025 (Timeline - EU Sanctions Against Russia, 2025). While the US’s betrayal saw a loud response from within the European Union in favour of Ukraine, this was not the only drive for EU response to Russia. The US ‘betrayal’ was 28<sup>th</sup> of February (BBC News, 2025), but the EU’s 16<sup>th</sup> package of sanctions against Russia (and Belarus) was imposed on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February (Timeline - EU Sanctions Against Russia, 2025). Besides this package, there were also general economic sanctions against the state in January 2025. It is thus not only a response to US, yet also a clear message that EU does not simply follow US, which in turn is favourable for the Normative argument.

Besides the well-known case of sanctions against Russia due to its war against Ukraine, there are a number of different reasons for EU sanctions (EU Sanctions Against Russia, 2025).

The first of these reasons is Russia's continued Human Rights Violations. "They consist of travel bans for individuals, an asset freeze for individuals and entities, and a prohibition on making funds or economic resources available to those listed." (EU Sanctions Against Russia, 2025)

Secondly, the EU acts against those actively supporting Russia in its aggression on the European continent. A report by the European Council explained it as follows: "In this context, the EU has also adopted sanctions against Belarus, Iran and North Korea in response to those countries' involvement in the Russian aggression against Ukraine." (EU Response to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine, 2025).

Thirdly and finally, the EU has placed sanctions upon Russia in response to Russia's 'covert' threats and disruptions within the EU. Russia has a number of ways it conducts these threats and disruptions. It does so through: Pro-Russian politicians in EU, an example being Slovakia's recent 'Russian' law against NGO's (Waijers, 2025); EU satellite disruptions (Farge, 2024); Russian misinformation campaigns (Payne, 2024); and Russian influence in the Baltic States (Adler, 2025). On all these matters, the European Council stated that "The EU has detected a broad range of hybrid activities, including cyber-attacks, information manipulation and interference campaigns, cases of arson, vandalism and sabotage and the instrumentalisation of migration. Russia also continues to disrupt satellite communications, violate European airspace and conduct physical attacks against individuals on EU territory." (EU Sanctions Against Russia, 2025). With regards to sanctions related to these incursions, the Council stated that "Restrictive measures relating to hybrid attacks from Russia include travel bans for individuals, freezing the assets of individuals and entities and a prohibition on making funds or economic resources available to those listed."

### 3 points

The EU has largely become more collective since the start of Russian aggression. Where there was no particular united or divided stance on Russia in 2004, the invasion of Crimea saw a fragmentation, as all agreed that Russian aggression was wrong, but some sought to appease while others wished to punish. The full scale invasion however saw a very clear and united stance. War fatigue after 4 years has shown some cracks in the EU resolve, but overall the EU agrees on its stance against Russia. These findings result in scores of 3, 2, 5, 5, 4, 4 respectively.

EU determination to continue down its Normative expansion path despite Russian complaints showed strength, while the relative inaction from the EU in the face of the invasion of Crimea showed weak EU resolve, likely as the EU still did not see much threat to its own borders. After the start of the full scale invasion however, EU resolve thus far has remained strong, even when that of its major allies wavered. These findings translate into a score of 4 for 2004, 2 for 2014, and 5 for all the other years.

Except for 2014, the EU's response to Russia has been very Normative. In 2024 we saw a slight increase in Material interests, but the EU seems to have readjusted itself from this so far in 2025. For these reasons 2014 receives a score of 2, 2024 a score of 4, and all the other years a score of 5.

	2004	2014	2022	2023	2024	2025
Collective VS Fragmented	3	2	5	5	4	4
Strong VS Weak	4	2	5	5	5	5
Normative VS Material	5	2	5	5	4	5

**Response Flow:** EU to Member States

**Security Concern:** Yes

## EU-China

### Introduction

China is the EU's second largest trading partner overall (EU Trade Relations With China, 2025), just behind the USA. EU exports to China are good for 8,3% of all total EU exports, while the EU imports 21,3% of its goods from China (Statistics Explained, 2025). With so much of the total EU imports coming from China, the EU had a trade deficit: 27,3 billion euros by the end of 2024. While this is a lot, it is still significantly less than the trade deficit it had to pre-war Russia (46 billion Euros in 2022 (Statistics Explained, 2025)). The European Union mostly imports telecommunication and electrical equipment from China.

### 2020

In 2020, the EU and China signed an “agreement in principle of investment”. The EU stated that “The CAI will bind the parties into a values-based investment relationship underpinned by sustainable development principles. This is the first time that China agrees to such ambitious provisions with a trade partner.” (EU And China Reach Agreement in Principle on Investment, 2020). It showcased the EU's efforts to implement its Normative Power even with trade partners it was reliant on.

### 2021

The agreement was not made to last. As explained by a report on the matter “The agreement had a relatively short tenure in public debate. In March 2021, Beijing sanctioned 10 individuals and four entities within the European Union in retaliation for EU sanctions that same month targeting Chinese individuals and entities involved in the persecution and mass detention of Uighurs in Xinjiang.” (McElwee, 2024). This shifted perspectives on China from within the EU. A mistrust towards Chinese commitment to the normative clauses of the trade agreement grew, and the ratification of the agreement was frozen through a vote of the EP. This has remained the status quo till this day.

Besides human rights issues in China there is a second issue that has caused friction between China and the EU, and EU member states. The issue involves the island of Taiwan. It should be stated that there is no common EU stance towards the recognition of Taiwan as rulers over Taiwan. The EU does recognize the “One China policy” in the way that it does not recognize the Taiwanese rulers as having any right to claim rightful rule over the Chinese mainland (EU-Taiwan Ties After Taiwan's 2024 Elections | Think Tank | European Parliament, 2024). The EU has simply not agreed on Taiwan falling under China. This is not to say that there have not been any EU statements. For example “In its resolutions, the European Parliament has, among other things, called repeatedly for closer cooperation with Taiwan, notably for the negotiation of agreements on supply

chain resilience and bilateral investment relations.” (EU-Taiwan Ties After Taiwan’s 2024 Elections | Think Tank | European Parliament, 2024). In this, EU tries to balance between appeasing China and working more closely with Taiwan. There have also been statements against China’s increased aggression. Both by MEP’s (MEPs Set to Criticise China’s Aggressive Stance on Taiwan | News | European Parliament, 2024) and by the EU diplomatic service (Taiwan: Statement by the Spokesperson on China’s Latest Military Drills, 2024). However, so far, no more than just statements, disapproval and call for keeping status quo by the EU as an institution.

Member states are different cases. Lithuania allowed the opening of a new Representative office of Taiwan. “The new office bears the name Taiwan rather than “Chinese Taipei”, the name used by many foreign nations to avoid offending China.” (BBC News, 2021) as explained by the BBC. This is the first new office in 18 years in the EU, as well as it being the first time the name Taiwan was used in such an office in the EU.

## **2022**

In response to this action, China reduced its diplomatic engagement with Lithuania. Despite the fact that Lithuania did stress still believing in One China Policy. Chinese sources wasted little time aggressively belittling Lithuania, stating that “Lithuania was “just a mouse, or even a flea, under the feet of a fighting elephant” (Nevett, 2022).

Consequently, trade restrictions were imposed on Lithuanian companies and those with ties to them by China. What worked in Lithuania’s favour was that only 1% of Lithuanian exports go to China, meaning that there was not a huge direct risk/impact. Comparatively this would be bigger for other EU countries. Taiwan returned dedication to Lithuania, further reducing the impact of Chinese trade restrictions, with reports stating that “Taiwan said it was planning to invest \$200m (£147; €176) in Lithuania to shield the country from China’s pressure.” (Nevett, 2022).

## **2023**

In 2023 Lithuania reiterated its commitment to Taiwan through its Indo-Pacific regional strategy document (Lithuania's Bet on Taiwan and What It Means for Europe - Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2023), showcasing a resilience and reaffirming its belief and commitment to Normative Power.

Czechia is a second example of an EU member state that has opposed China in its stance on Taiwan. The Czech Republic has called for Taiwan to be granted a seat in the UN (Haas, 2023). While previously, in 2013, it had sought closer ties to China for economic reasons, after internal scandals and cases of Chinese bribes, the Czech government became more divided on the matter of China. The current president of Czechia promised to visit Taiwan and was the first EU head of state to have a call with a Taiwanese ruler.

Despite his promise, he ended up declining a visit to Taiwan for economic reasons, stating that "The president's trip would certainly cause even more negative reactions. It would not be reasonable to put business relations at risk and thus endanger Czech companies" (Newsdesk, 2023). This shows how Material Power are still in play.

## **2024**

Last year, China's support of Russia further deteriorated relations between the EU and China. A report stated that "The relationship has been undermined by China's support for Russia's aggression in Ukraine and its increasingly anti-Western foreign policy that aims to alter the international rules-based system." (Updating the EU Strategy on China: Co-existence While Derisking Through Partnerships, 2024). However, deteriorated relations do not equal deteriorated trade. Despite disagreements, "Europe has increased imports from China massively since the pandemic, deepening its dependence". However, despite this seeming increase, EU is working on initiatives to become less dependent on China, but this has less to do with Normative power and ideologies and more to do with de-risking and security concerns in face of the resource issues resulting from Russia's aggression against Ukraine. We see a combination of Normative, Material, and Security Power at play in China's case, with the EU seemingly divided on where its priorities should lay

### 3 points

While initially the EU was undivided on the topic of China and its support of deepening trade relations, as China's stance on the international playing field became more aggressive, the EU opinion on China and how to deal with it fragmented. In 2024 however, there seemed to once again be an upward trend in accepting Chinese actions for the sake of a more stable market. These shifts resulted in awarding scores of 5, 4, 2, 2, 3 to the respective years.

In all the years, we see the EU and its member states making choices to call China out that may risk Material gain. For this reason the EU, in general, keeps its stance strong despite Chinese pressure. However, the EU could be much more direct, and could act more in the case of immoral actions by China. This form of half-action has remained relatively unchanged over the years, and so all years receive the same score of 4 in the "Strong VS Weak" variable.

Considering actions taken by member states as well as the support these have had from the EU, all be it often indirectly, as well as the EU speaking out against Chinese misconducts, the EU is attempting to keep true to its Normative values despite the conflicting Material interests we do see however that even nations who have done more than simply speak out eventually choose Material interests, or at least choose a Normative path with some form of damage control rather than full commitment to the Normative path. For these reasons, this variable has gotten scores of 4, 4, 4, 2, 3 respectively.

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Collective VS Fragmented	5	4	2	2	3
Strong VS Weak	4	4	4	4	4
Normative VS Material	4	4	4	2	3

**Response Flow:** Member States to EU

**Security Concern:** Yes



## US Tariffs

### Introduction

As stated in the words of the EU itself, “The European Union and the United States have the world’s largest bilateral trade and investment relationship, and enjoy the most integrated economic relationship in the world. Taking goods, services and investment into account, the EU and the US are each other’s largest trading partners by far. “ (EU Trade Relations With United States, 2025). This entails that there is a huge Material interest. However, in contrast to the other main nations the EU trades with, trade in total is about equal import and export. There is only a minor 3% deficit in EU favour. The US is the third largest exporter after China and EU (Statistics Explained, 2025). It is one of the three major global market players.

### April 2025

On April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2025, Trump launched his “Liberation Day” tariffs (Harithas et al., 2025). Undergoing a similar faith to the rest of the world, the EU was targeted too. “hit with a 20 percent blanket tariff, while several non-EU European countries—like Bosnia and Herzegovina (36 percent), Switzerland (32 percent), and Serbia (38 percent)—face rates well above the average.” (Harithas et al., 2025). The base tariff of 20% was paused within a day, seemingly as a form of damage control as US markets plummeted down.

This act of economic aggression did not come without repercussion, The EU responded, and on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April the European Commission stated that it would respond to the US’s tariffs on steel and aluminium (not the blanket 20%) by implementing a tariffs package of approximately 21 billion euros. (Verhelst & Gijs, 2025). The EU plan was planned to be implemented in three phases: “Measures covering €3.9 billion in trade will go into force next week, with a further €13.5 billion from mid-May and a final round of €3.5 billion following in December.” (Verhelst & Gijs, 2025). This swift response was decided upon fairly quickly as, apart from Hungary, the EU member states voted in favour unanimously.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of April the EU stated that it would hold off on the Tariffs voted in favour of by its members (Mazumdaru & Kapoor, 2025). EU spokespeople explained that this was done so to leave room for negotiations. In the statement, it was expressed that this would be a 90 day pause. Finally, the EU stated it would “prefer to avoid retaliation” for the 20% blanket tariff. Whether this was a Normative or a Material Power based decision is hard to say as one could argue the EU stayed cautious for further US economic actions, but there is also the argument that a longer US economic campaign leaves room for an increase in EU Material Power worldwide as more and more nations look for an alternative to US hegemony over parts of their markets.

## May 2025

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2025 the EC stated that it was looking into “a list of US imports which could become subject to EU countermeasures, if ongoing EU-US negotiations do not result in a mutually beneficial outcome and the removal of the US tariffs.” (Commission Consults on Possible Countermeasures and Readies WTO Litigation in Response to US Tariffs, 2025). This seemingly was a stark warning to the US to continue to work together with the EU. Considering Trump’s way of dealing, a move that has the potential to work against EU material interests in the US. It is however not a direct indication for Normative Power motivation. The EU does play the ‘morally better card’, stating things such as “Since the US imposed its unjustified and harmful tariffs, the EU has prioritised finding a mutually beneficial and balanced solution through negotiations, including within the framework of the 90-day partial suspension of tariffs announced by the US.” (Commission Consults on Possible Countermeasures and Readies WTO Litigation in Response to US Tariffs, 2025).

The EU also stated it would launch a dispute with the World Trading Organization against the US, an action it did against China as well in the Lithuania-Taiwan case. This is seemingly indicating it sees US actions similarly harmful/threatening as Chinese actions. This equal treatment for similar meddling, shows a lack of biasedness in this case. EU decision making on the matter could have to do with the gravity and reach of the tariffs. What if they had only been against Lithuania? There is a chance countermeasures would have been much less stark in that case, as it would not threaten EU security and stability in the same way. This remains speculation and, regardless of this possible motivation, it is still clear collective message.

### 3 points

The EU response was, for EU standards, swift and collective. With only one member state (and a notoriously rogue one at that) disagreeing, as well as a general consensus between the EU and its civil society, there is little more the EU could do to be more collective. EU response was, as stated, swift. There was however room for an even stronger condemnation and response, resulting in a score of 4 for the “Strong VS Weak” variable. Finally, the EU followed a path that was mostly Normative yet left room for Material interests to be taken into consideration.

	2025
Collective VS Fragmented	5
Strong VS Weak	4
Normative VS Material	4

**Response Flow:** EU to Member States

**Security Concern:** Yes

## Results

In order to answer the research question “To what extent can the EU create functioning standardized contingency policies for dealing with misconducts by trading partners it is (partially) dependent on?”, it is imperative to first answer the subquestions. Each of the first three subquestions is related to one of the three independent variables.

**SubQ1:** How cohesive is EU policy response?

This subquestion relates to the variable “Collective VS Fragmented”. By assessing the collectiveness (or lack thereof) for the different cases, as well as the averages over the years, it is possible to discover if, and what kind of, trends there are.

**SubQ2:** What does the strength of EU response tell us with regard to willingness and ability?

This subquestion relates to the variable “Strong VS Weak”. By assessing the strength (or lack thereof) for the different cases, as well as the averages over the years, it is possible to discover if, and what kind of, trends there are.

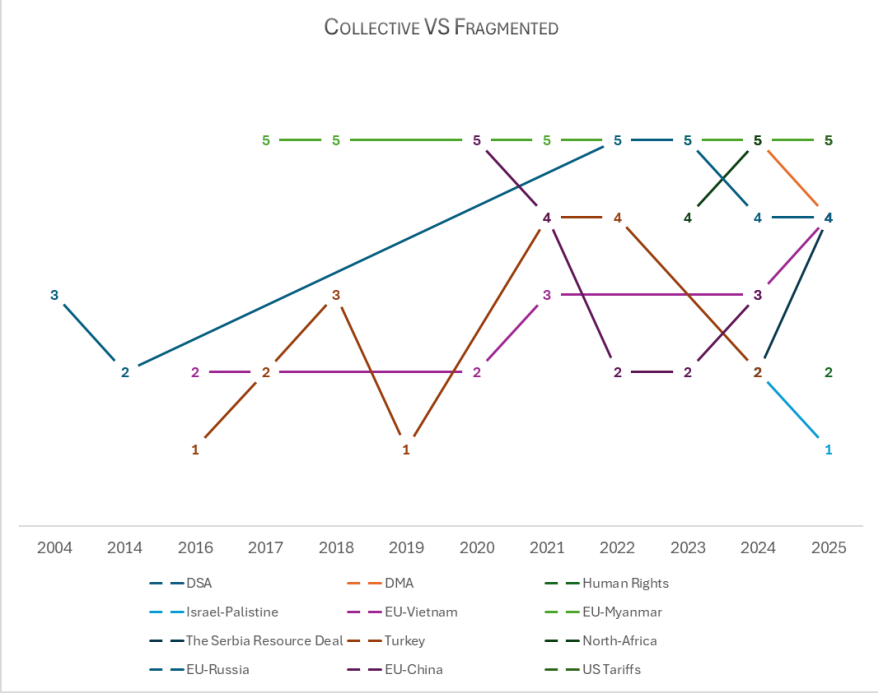
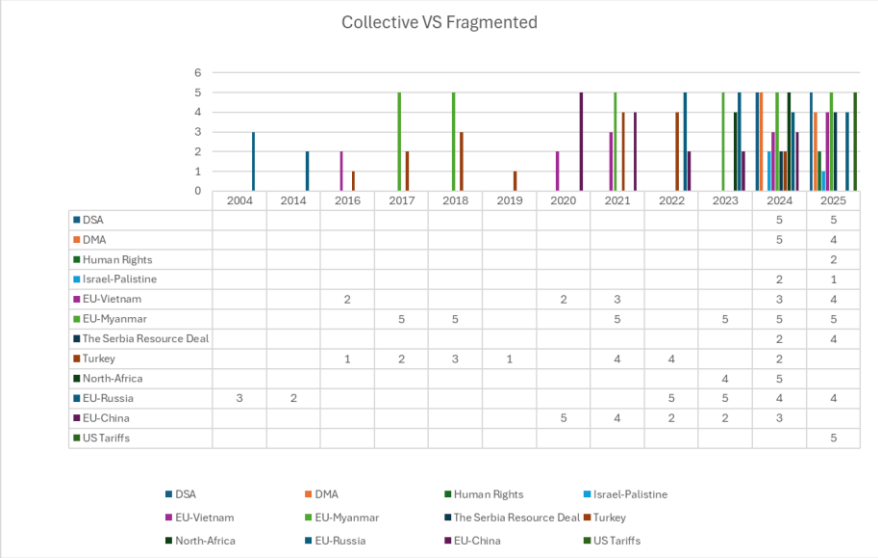
**SubQ3:** What are the mechanisms of EU policy making for trade and contingency policies?

This subquestion relates to the variable “Normative VS Material”. By assessing the Normative (or Material) Power for the different cases, as well as the averages over the years, it is possible to discover if, and what kind of, trends there are.

**SubQ4:** In which direction did responses flow? EU to Member State or Member State to EU?

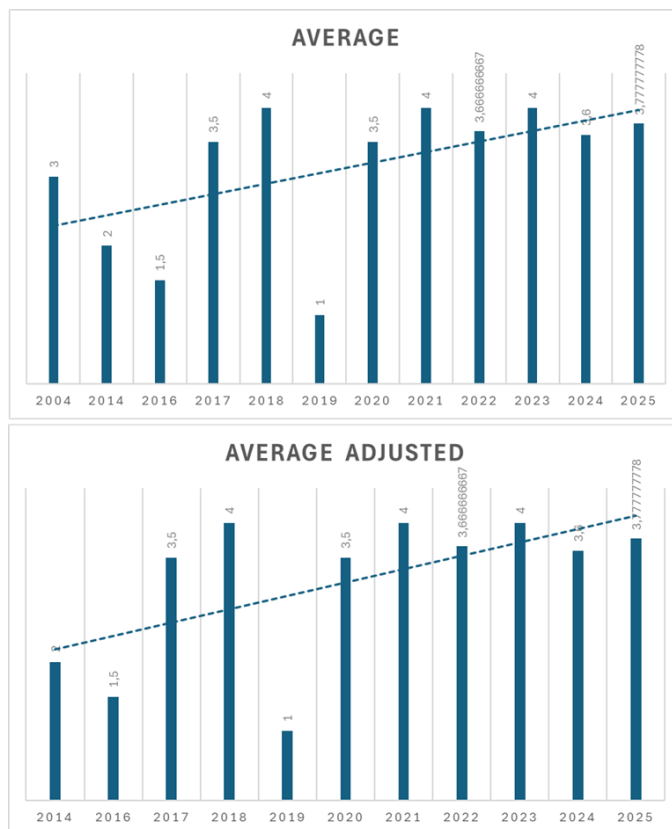
While this Subquestion does not relate to any of the variables directly, by examining the different cases we can distinguish the flow of response for each and compare them across time to see if there are patterns.

Collective VS Fragmented

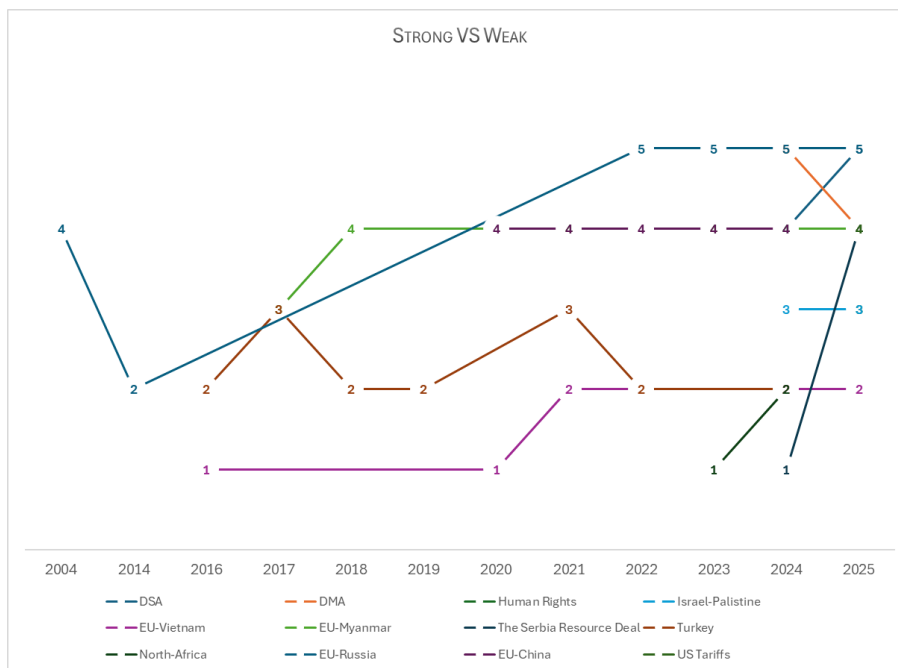
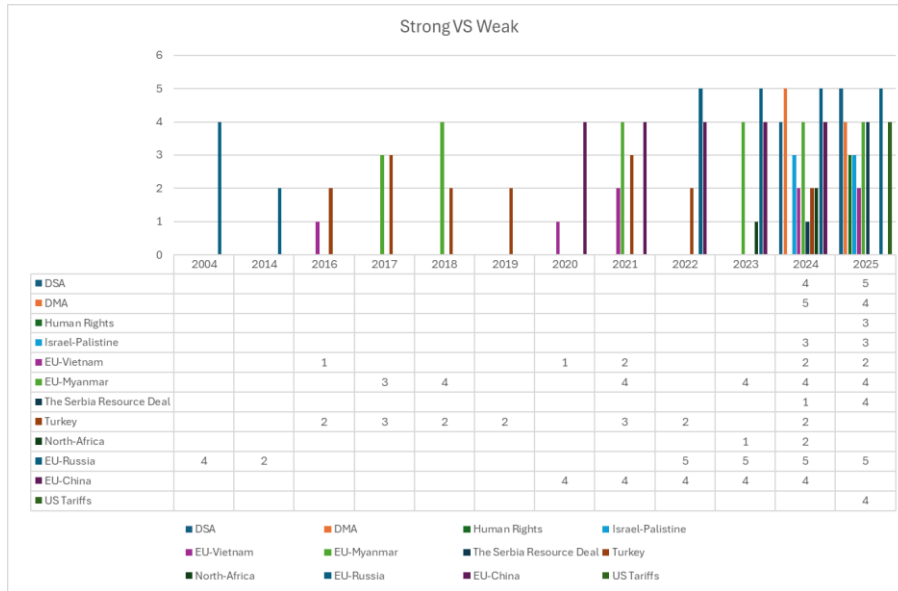


The data above shows, as one can ascertain, that there is no general trend in all the cases at the same time. This shows that for individual cases, the EU has not become more or less collective. EU response is still to a degree dependent on the specific cases. We can also observe rather large fluctuations in the EU responses for one and the same case over the years. This could be an indication for an instable decision making organ in the EU. This can to some degree be explained by changes in member state governing parties.

However, below we can observe that, when looking at the average levels of EU collectiveness, this has increased over the years, thus indicating that, while case specifics matter, there is an overall increase in collectiveness occurring. When correcting for the outlier 2004 (there is a decade in EU decision making between that data point and later ones), the increase in collectiveness is steeper.

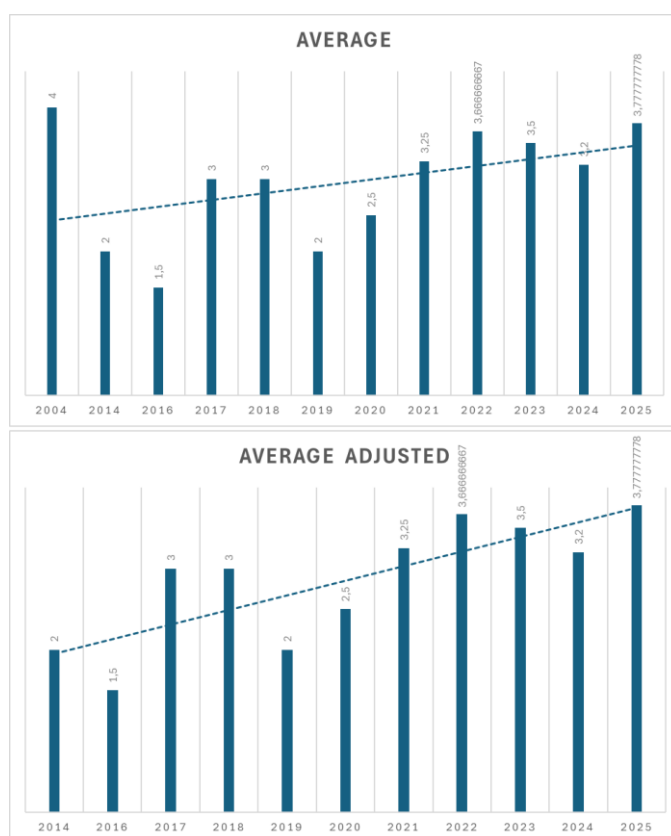


## Strong VS Weak

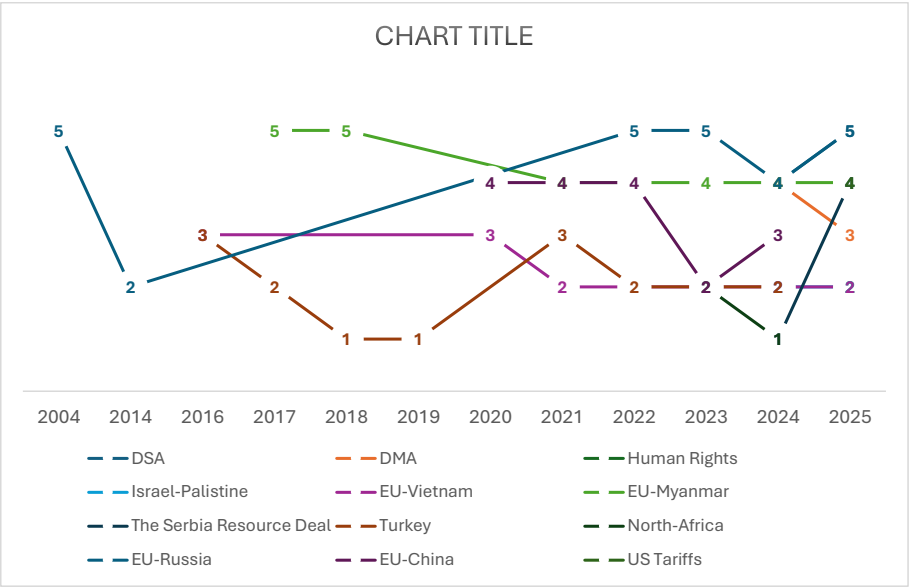
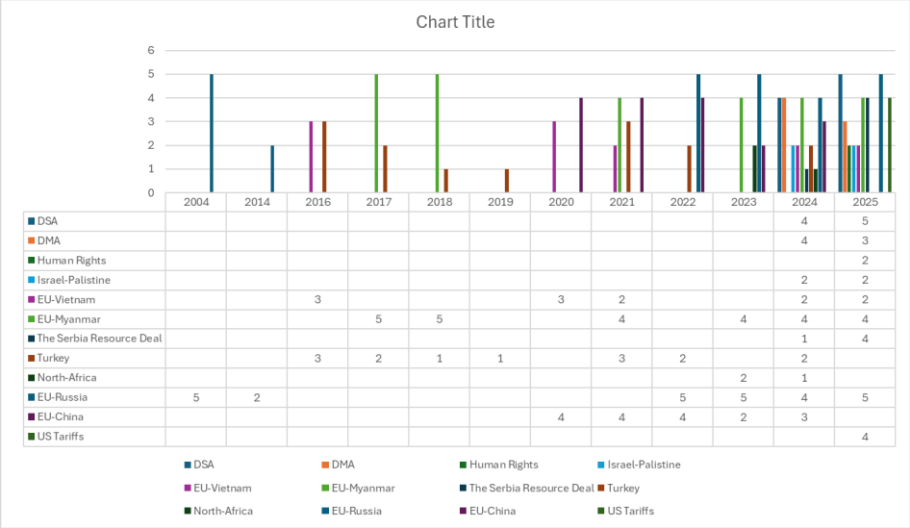


The data on strength of EU actions and decisions shows both similarities and differences to that of EU collectiveness. Similarly, we still see significant differences between the different cases, indicating that for this too, case specificity is still relevant. On the other hand, we can also observe that there are less sharp fluctuations within the cases themselves for the most part. The strength of EU actions and decisions is thus somewhat more predictable and stable than its collectiveness. This also indicates that different bodies have less to say about the eventual actions the EU takes than on the EU's overall agreement. This is in agreement with how the European Commission does the bulk of the eventual decision making, and is thus, as a singular source, more stable.

Observing below, we can see that in this case, just as with the collectiveness data, there is a, all be it slight in the non-adjusted data, upwards trend in the strength of EU decision making. This indicates more resolute resolve of the EU in its own capacity. It should be noted that strength can also be increasing from a feeling of necessity instead of normative reasoning.



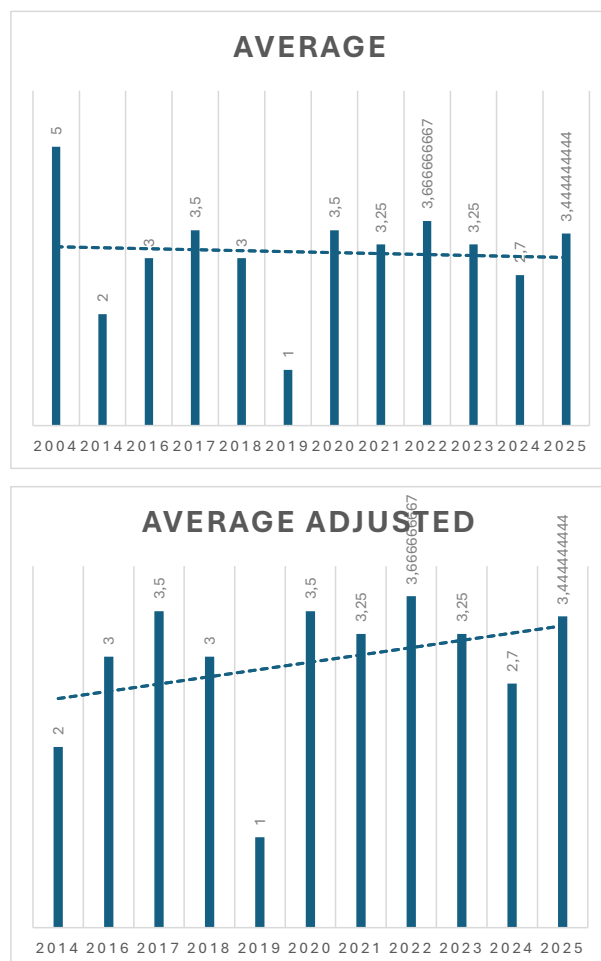
Normative VS Material



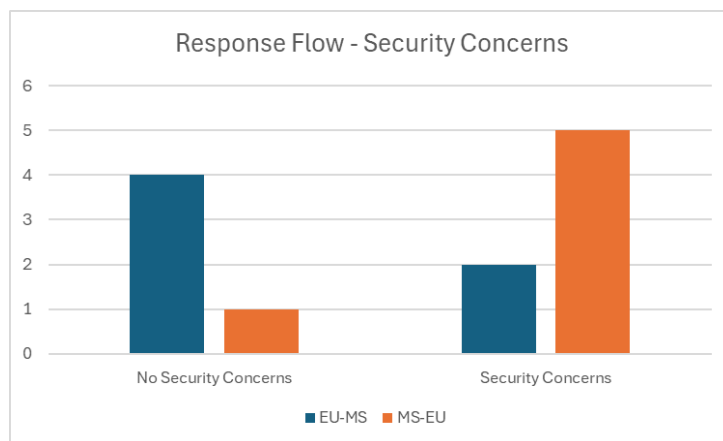


In the third and final of the variable data collections, there are a number of observations to be made. While more stable than the data from the collectiveness data, the data that assesses the level of Normative Power (or the lack thereof), also has less extreme highs, indicating that, yes there is still a case dependency, yet there is also a lack of general normative commitment, certainly in the long run.

On the graph below, we can even observe a downward trend for the unadjusted graph. Compared to the other two graphs, the 2025 data is also statistically significantly lower. Besides the 2004 year, where there were little other worries for the EU than its own expansion, the year with the highest levels of Normative Power displayed was 2022, during the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the clash of cultures that was, in part, used as the scapegoat by both parties.



Then finally, there is the matter of response flow and its explanation. As can be observed in the graph below, when comparing response flow to EU security concerns, there seems to be a clear correlation. In the face of security concerns, the EU itself seemed, in most cases, reluctant to act. The cases in which this isn't the case are easily explained as follows. When the EU's security concerns are more likely than unlikely to increase due to EU action, it will be hesitant to act based on its Normative Power and the feeling for justice and Normative action comes from the Member States/members of the public. When the EU perceives the security concerns as 'only getting worse' regardless of it acting (take the case of Russia for example), it implores on its Normative Power, rallying the support of its citizens to make changes that would be difficult under normal circumstances.



## Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper will formulate a concrete answer for each subquestion, and based on these answers will attempt to answer the main research question.

**SubQ1** While there is an overall increase in collectiveness within EU decision making, the EU is not nearly always cohesive in its policy responses. Oftentimes there is a disagreement on how to act, especially between the different levels of governing and consulting. This case dependency of cohesiveness will make a general approach more difficult.

**SubQ2** The strength of action taking is perhaps the most promising of the three variables observed in this research. It is the most stable and seemingly also increased. This could indicate that, should a contingency policy pass, it is likely to be a stronger response than we have seen before and is likely to retain its strength over time.

**SubQ3** EU policy making does not nearly depend as much on Normative Power as the EU advocates. As can be observed in the data, there is even a case to be made that EU Normative Power is decreasing over time. This makes the chances of a contingency policy passing on the basis of the EU Normative Power alone are increasingly slim worst case scenario, and barely improving/likely in the best case scenario.

**SubQ4** This subquestion offers perspective. It is an indication that, the EU almost exclusively undertakes Normative action from its own initiative when it feels that not acting Normatively will not offer a less worse outcome for the EU. Intuitively, this also entails that the chances of the EU acting in accordance with its Normative claims are likely to increase when it feels that this will put it in a better security position.

## Hypotheses

- EU trade is based on Normative Power
- EU trade is based on Material Power
- EU trade is equally based on Normative Power and Material Power

Based on the cases studied and the data observed, hypothesis 1 and 2 are out of the question, as there are clear indications that EU trade is based on neither exclusively. The issue with Hypothesis 3 is its indication that EU trade is “equally” based on the two. This study has shown that for different cases, the ratio between Normative and Material power as a basis of trade, differs. Hypothesis 3 is thus also inconclusive. We can however conclude that “EU trade is based on both Normative and Material Power”.

## The Research Question

The answer to the question “To what extent can the EU create functioning standardized contingency policies for dealing with misconducts by trading partners it is (partially) dependent on?”, according to the outcome of this research and based on the assumptions made through the use of the theoretical framework, is as follows:

When arguing that from an ‘immoral’ form of misconduct by the trading partners (State X) as explained at the beginning of this paper, the chances of the EU creating such a functioning standardized contingency policy are very slim. The EU simply does not act enough in accordance with its own Normative claims to seem to be willing to risk the possible negative responses such policies might bring about. Part of the argument here is that imposing such threats on trading partners limits the EU’s access to the market through retaliation and missed deals, which in turn might lead to material scarcity. A material scarcity the EU in its current state seemingly does not believe it can afford in its quest to reestablish its own security. These findings seemingly support Intergovernmentalists such as Pollack more than they do NPE approaches like Manning’s, which on its own is an interesting finding and discussion point (outside the scope of this research).

Additionally, the difference in EU actions between the different cases indicate that “standardized contingency policies” are highly unlikely, as the EU does not make many standardized decisions in trade agreements, even when the agreements themselves hold the same demands and clauses.

The only situation in which any form of contingency policy might be passed and implemented by the EU would be if it was argued upon from a security point of view. Security seemed to motivate EU action more than Normative Power or Material Power on its own. A combination of the two was visible in nearly all the cases studied in this research and it was often the deciding factor for EU action.

There are obvious security benefits to contingency policies as they would force the EU to consider which alternatives it has in case of the activation of such a clause beforehand, which would avoid cases such as the sudden panic around the EU dependency on Russian gas and oil, making EU security more stable. Secondly, it can justly be argued that contingency policies may very well function as a deterrence to immoral actions by State X. For this to succeed however, the EU would need to be strict in the implementation of such policies, where such strictness has been a clear weakness of the EU so far.

Yet this lack of strictness often comes forth from a lack of direct alternatives, which in turn would be solved should contingency policies be implemented. A renewed strictness would also aid in the increasingly bad reputation of the EU as an unreliable organisation, which for a value based power whose creation and sustained existence depend on the belief that the EU itself strives after the values it imposes on others. It might very well be a great opportunity for the EU to regain its power and faith.

Ultimately, the paper concludes that while standardized contingency policies are unlikely, the EU could greatly benefit from contingency policies based on the premise of increased security, both in said security as the internal and external faith in the EU as a functioning world power and at that one with morals, which the world could certainly use in these volatile times.

## Discussion

As with any paper, there are margins to improve upon. The number of cases studied, timeframe, and scope of the research could all be expanded upon given enough time and resources as with almost any research.

As this research has looked at the theoretical likeliness of implementation, before actual implementation further research could be done with regards to the law-aspects of implementing such contingency policies at the European Union level, as well as on the actual economic consequences.

The findings of this study can be used to further elaborate on the debate between Intergovernmentalists and “Normative Power Europe” theorists, as they clearly favour the first to a greater extent than the latter.

Finally, a study among actual members of the EC and EP would be an interesting addition to construct an opinion poll and the concept considering their role in implementing such a policy.

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