

Master in Advanced European and International Studies

Applied European Policy and Governance Studies

***From Norms to Power Politics? The EU's
Strategic Reorientation and the Case of
Sanctions against Russia***

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I. List of Abbreviations

The following list provides the full terms for the abbreviations used throughout this thesis, in alphabetical order:

Abbreviation	Full Term
ASAP	Act in Support of Ammunition Production
CEPR	Centre for Economic Policy Research
CEPS	Centre for European Policy Studies
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DG FIASMA	Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union
ECJ	European Court of Justice
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EDIPRA	European Defence Industry Reinforcement through common Procurement Act
EEAS	European External Action Service
EEC	European Economic Community
EPC	European Political Cooperation
EPF	European Peace Facility
ERTA	European Road Transport Agreement
ESS	European Security Strategy
EU	European Union
EUGS	EU Global Strategy
G7	Group of Seven
GNP	Gross National Product
HR	High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/ Vice-President of the European Commission
INTCEN	EU Intelligence and Situation Centre
IR	International Relations
ISIL	Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, and other sexual and gender identities
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
MCTR	Missile Technology Control Regime
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NPE	Normative Power Europe (an analytical concept from the academic literature, not an official EU designation)
NSA	National Security Agency (USA)
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
PSC	Political and Security Committee
RELEX	Working Party of Foreign Relations Counsellors
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility
SAFE	Security Action for Europe
SIEPS	Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies
SWIFT	Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication
TEU	Treaty on European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US/ USA	United States (of America)
VEB	Vnesheconombank
VP	Vice-President (of the European Commission)
VTB	VTB Bank

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III. Introduction

On June 17, 2026, the G7 heads of state and government adopted new sanctions against Russia at the summit in Évian, a decision that, in its regularity, has almost become routine. This almost unremarkable moment encapsulates a transformation that would have been unthinkable twenty years ago: The European Union (EU), once a post-sovereign normative project built on dialogue and multilateralism, has become the central architect of an unprecedented economic warfare regime against a major power.

Since the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and decisively since the full-scale invasion of February 2022, the war in Ukraine is no longer an abstract foreign policy issue; it now shapes the daily lives of millions of Europeans. Through energy prices, migration, rearmament, political debates about nuclear deterrence, mandatory military service, and the deployment of European troops of an intensity unseen since the Cold War. The EU's strategic reorientation is therefore not merely an institutional matter; it is a societal one, requiring European societies to renegotiate what kind of power their Union should be, and whether the normative model they have known since the EU's founding remains viable in a world of revisionist powers and returning interstate war.

This thesis examines that question through the EU's sanctions policy against Russia between 2005 and 2025. The Russia case is the ideal case study. It is the longest, most comprehensive and transparently documented regime in EU history. Furthermore, given the political and economic consequences, as a result of energy dependency, Russia's permanent UN Security Council seat structurally prevents UN-mandated measures and strained transatlantic relationship, autonomous EU action was a necessity, making this case especially revealing for assessing the Union's independent foreign policy capacity.

The central argument of the thesis is that the European Union has not abandoned its normative foundations. Rather, these foundations have

increasingly been embedded within a more strategic understanding of foreign policy. The evolution of sanctions policy demonstrates a process in which normative objectives remain important, but are increasingly accompanied by considerations of security, resilience, deterrence and geopolitical competition.

To investigate this development, first, the theoretical foundations of Normative Power Europe, Economic Statecraft, sanctions theory and EU foreign policy are presented. Secondly, the analytical part follows a three-dimensional framework. The first examines the evolution of the sanctions: from the complete absence of coercive measures before 2014, the targeted smart sanctions of 2014-2021, and the comprehensive economic warfare logic since 2022. Second, the three central EU strategy documents of the last two decades, the European Security Strategy (ESS) 2003, the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) 2016 and the Strategic Compass 2022, are analysed to trace the broader strategic reorientation of which sanctions are one expression. The final analytical section analyses institutional adaptation. It also analyses the changing interinstitutional dynamics and the interplay between member states and EU institutions resulting from the sanctions policy. Finally, the discussion applies the theoretical foundations to the empirical results and examines them in light of the research question.

The scope of this study is deliberately limited. It does not seek to evaluate the overall effectiveness of sanctions, nor does it provide a comprehensive assessment of the military dimension of European security policy. Instead, the focus is on sanctions as an indicator of the broader strategic transformation of the European Union. Since its foundation, the European Union has been shaped by crises that exposed weaknesses but also drove deeper integration. Whether the current strategic turn represents another such transformation is the broader question this thesis seeks to address.

IV. Theoretical Framework

1.1 Defining Normative Power:

Traditional International Relations (IR) theories have mainly understood power in material terms, emphasizing military capabilities, economic resources, and the ability to coerce other actors (Wight *et al.*, 1992, cited in Manners, 2000, p.4-5). Although liberal approaches changed this perspective by including institutions and interdependence, exerting influence remains largely associated with tangible and material means of influence (Wight *et al.*, 1992, cited in Manners, 2000, p. 4-5)

In the post-1945 period, especially from the 1980s until the turn of the millennium, the changing understanding of power in modern International Relations became obvious (Wight *et al.*, 1992, cited in Manners, 2000, p. 3-5). Major economic and technological developments, in parallel to transformations in international politics, required IR scholarship to reassess existing theoretical assumptions and contributed to the evolution of liberal approaches to power (Wight *et al.*, 1992, cited in Manners, 2000, p. 3-5). Advancements like the growing intertwining of the global capitalist economy, the emergence of nuclear weapons, which raised the costs of war, and the rise of new social movements exposing the limitations of classical conceptions of power as the central point of reference.

The growing importance of ideas, norms, and shared values in influencing state interests and behaviour was substantial to the rise of constructivist and sociological approaches (Wæver, 1998, cited in Manners, 2000, p. 4-7). Within this broader shift, power was interpreted not only as the capacity to coerce but also as the ability to shape perceptions of legitimacy, appropriateness, and desirability within international relations (Wæver, 1998, cited in Manners 2000, p. 11-13).

It is within this context that the concept of normative power gains analytical and explanatory relevance. Rather than relying on direct coercion or material

incentives, normative power refers to influence through the promotion, diffusion, and internalization of norms and values (Manners, 2000, p. 28-32)

The work of Ian Manners is one of the most influential contributions to the conceptualization of normative power, particularly in its application to the European Union. Within Manners' framework, in international relations, normative power is defined as "the ability to shape conceptions of the 'normal'" (Diez and Manners, 2007, p. 175). Rather than focusing on material capabilities or coercive instruments, this definition emphasizes the essential role of norms in structuring international political life.

To clarify what constitutes the "normal" in the context of International Relations, Manners identifies three core dimensions of norms. First, utilitarian (regulative) norms coordinate state behaviour by maximizing efficiency (Manners, 2000, p. 31). Second, social (constitutive) norms define actor identities and interests (Manners, 2000, p. 31). Third, moral (prescriptive) norms embody ethical imperatives of obligation or "oughtness" (Manners, 2000, p. 31). This way of categorizing enables norms to be understood as shared and binding standards of appropriate behaviour, it tends to minimize the relationship between norms and normality (Manners, 2000, p. 32). Norms often gain their authority from being seen as "normal" they inherently privilege certain standards while marginalizing or excluding others (Manners, 2000).

Building on this idea, Manners adds a fourth dimension: narrative (legitimation) norms. This element creates a dominant narrative that legitimises certain forms of knowledge and marginalizes alternative perspectives (Manners, 2000, p. 32). Normative power therefore extends beyond regulating behaviour, it also shapes understandings of legitimacy, acceptable knowledge and appropriate conduct in international relations. Consequently, the defining characteristic of a normative power lies in its capacity to shape other actors' conceptions of what is legitimate and appropriate (Diez and Manners, 2007, p. 175).

Having established the conceptual foundations of normative power, this section concludes by briefly distinguishing between normative, civilian, and military power. Civilian power refers to an actor's ability to influence international outcomes primarily through economic means, diplomacy, and institutional cooperation rather than through military force (Duchêne, 1973, cited in Manners 2000,p. 26). Military power, by contrast, is based on coercion and the use or threat of armed force (Manners, 2000,p. 27). The following figure illustrates these conceptual distinctions.

Civilian	Military	Normative
Economic	Military	Opinion
remunerative	Punitive	Ideational
Ability to use economic instruments	Ability to use military instruments	Ability to use conceptions of "normal"

Table 1: Civilian, Military and Normative Power (Manners, 2000, p. 29)

In developing his concept of Normative Power Europe, Manners intentionally draws on the English School of International Relations, as it offers distinct conceptual advantages over theoretical approaches (Manners, 2000,p. 3-25). Compared to more strictly realist or liberal perspectives, the English School is better suited to analysing such forms of influence. The ability to bridge material and ideational dimensions of power, in particular, the distinction between pluralist and solidarist conceptions of international society, is a key strength of this concept and highlights the realistic tension between state sovereignty and the promotion of shared values and human rights (Manners, 2000, p. 3-25). This conceptual flexibility and the idea of IR as a "society of states" governed not only by power but also by shared norms, rules, and institutions is particularly suitable for examining the European Union with its unique structure, whose external influence cannot be reduced to traditional forms of military or economic power (Manners, 2000, p. 3-30).

This chapter has outlined the general conceptual foundations of normative power and the theoretical rationale for Manners' reliance on the English School. The following chapter builds on this framework by examining how these conceptual elements, alongside the distinctions between civilian, military, and normative power, become analytically clearer when applied to the European Union in its specific international context.

1.2 Normative Power Europe

To apply the Conceptualisation of the English school to the EU context, Manners conducted two adaptations. First, The Idea of an EU system, which describes the EU as a structured set of relations among Member States and between states and citizens (Manners, 2000, p. 8). While showing a persistent tension between supranational and intergovernmental dimensions of EU governance, it integrates broadly positivist approaches that emphasise both state (EU member States) and non-state actors (EU Commission) (Manners, 2000, p. 8). This concept is necessary because the EU fundamentally undermines the traditional distinction between domestic and international jurisdiction.

Second, the concept of an EU society goes beyond formal relations to analyse the perceived commonality of an EU community composed of states and citizens (Manners, 2000, p. 9). This combines post-positivist approaches that focus on intersubjectivity, knowledge production, and the constitution of norms, values, and identities (Manners, 2000, p. 9). The EU society framework, therefore, relies on normative methodologies and reflects the contested and socially constructed character of European integration (Manners, 2000, p. 9). Together, the concepts of EU system and EU society cover both the formal, institutional side and the more informal, normative based aspects, while explicitly recognising their distinct ontological and epistemological commitments (Manners, 2000).

Building on the preceding discussion of the English School framework and its application to European integration through the concepts of EU system and EU

society, the chapter now turns to the international role of the European Union, with particular attention to the distinction between civilian, military, and normative power outlined earlier.

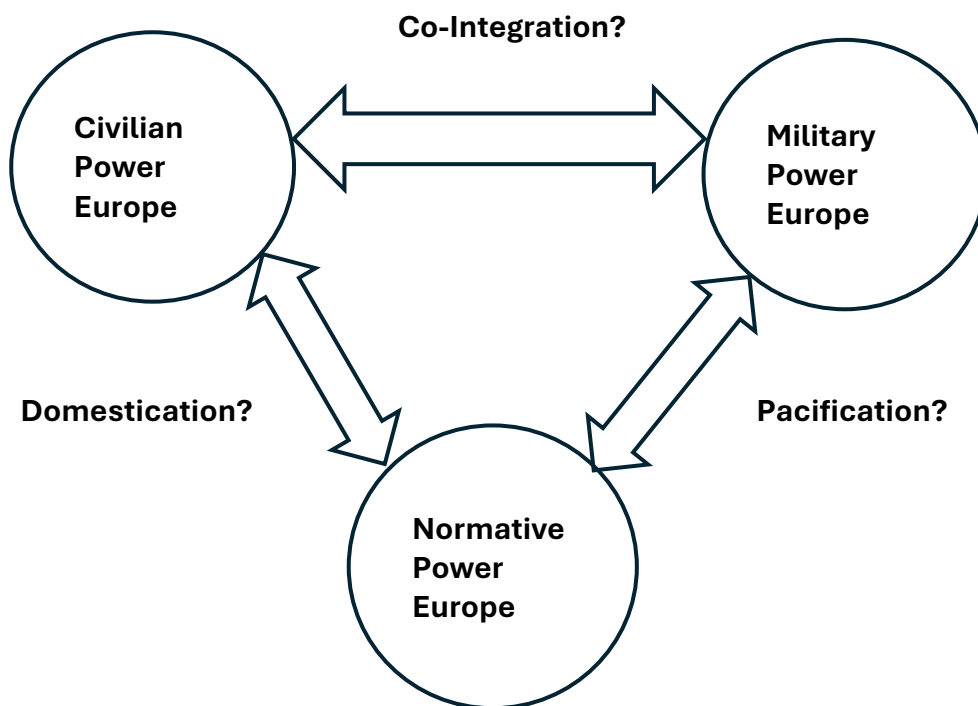


Figure 1: Tri-Power Europe (Manners, 2000, p. 30)

Europe's modern history has been shaped by recurrent warfare, making the post-war project of European integration a deliberate attempt to transform a continent of conflict into a system of institutionalised cooperation. Early interpretations of European integration conceptualised the European Community as a civilian power, an idea most prominently advanced by Duchêne, a leading theorist of civilian power, who highlighted the priority of economic instruments, diplomatic cooperation, and supranational institutions over military force (Manners, 2000, p. 26). This understanding reflected the enhancement of relations among member states and was reinforced by the removal of Cold War constraints on European autonomy (Manners, 2000, p. 26). However, the civilian power concept was sharply criticised by Bull, a leading scholar of the English school, who regarded it as strategically ineffective and dependent on external military guarantees (Bull, 1982,

cited in Manners, 2000, p. 26-28). Bull instead argued for the transformation of the Community into a military power, grounded in greater defence self-sufficiency and strategic autonomy (Bull, 1982, cited in Manners, 2000, p. 28). The tension between these positions, civilian power as a post-sovereign alternative to statehood and military power as the culmination of a state-building project, has structured debates on the EU's international role and has provided the conceptual backdrop against which later formulations, including normative power, have emerged (Makaryčev *et al.*, 2008, p. 315).

Following the failure of the European Defence Community in 1954, the idea of a military dimension to the European integration project remained politically constrained until the adoption of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) in 1991 (Manners, 2000, p. 27-28). The TEU formally indicated an intention to move beyond a purely civilian conception of the EU by introducing a common foreign and security policy (CFSP) that foresaw the possible development of a common defence (Manners, 2000, p. 27-28). This shift appeared to support Bull's argument that effective international actorhood requires military capability and a movement towards greater political and strategic unity (Manners, 2000, p. 28). However, expectations of a transition from civilian to military power were not matched in the following decade, giving rise to an analysis of a persistent capabilities-expectations gap (Manners, 2000, p. 27).

While the use of military criteria to assess the EU remains questionable, initiatives like the Rapid Reaction Force are often seen as compatible with its civilian role, especially given its ongoing reliance on NATO (Manners, 2000, p. 27-28). The unclear nature of the EU's military capacities, along with the fact that the civilian-military distinction fails to capture the full picture, underscores the need to move beyond these categories and provides a conceptual opening for the notion of the EU as a normative power (Makaryčev *et al.*, 2008, p.303-305).

Duchêne recognised the limits of a solely economic conception of civilian power, he also emphasised the importance of the international spreading of civilian and democratic standards to protect the European Community from power politics, thereby expecting a normative understanding of European influence as an “*idée force*” (Duchêne, 1973 cited in Manners, 2000, p. 28). This perspective reflects earlier accounts of ideational or ideological power, which emphasise the capacity of ideas, norms, and structures to shape preferences and behaviour beyond material coercion (Manners, 2000, p. 28).

Thinking of the EU as a normative power adds a third layer of analysis beyond the usual intergovernmental-supranational divide, because it captures the EU’s specific form of co-integration (Manners, 2000, p. 30). Instead of relying primarily on economic or military coercion, normative power captures the EU’s capacity to shape understandings of legitimate economic relations and the use of force in international affairs (Manners, 2000, p. 30-31). The concept brings together a positivist concern with explaining how EU norms are projected internationally with a normative concern for evaluating the principles and values that support this projection, offering a more comprehensive account of the EU’s international role (Manners, 2000, p. 31). By acting neither as a conventional state nor a super-state, the EU gradually reshapes international norms and contributes to a solidaristic international society (Manners, 2000, p. 21-37).

Seeing the EU as a normative power requires identifying the key norms from which it derives its ideational authority. These foundational principles—including peace, democracy, human rights, and social solidarity—have evolved and helped to shape the EU’s political identity (Manners, 2000, p. 32). Even though putting them into practice is often debated, the EU’s legal system and rulings of the European Court of Justice show a fairly solidaristic approach, since they protect individual rights and go beyond a purely state-focused logic (Manners, 2000, p. 33).

To clarify the normative foundations underpinning the EU's conception as a normative power, the following table provides a concise overview of the core norms embedded in the Union's legal and political acquis.

Founding Principles	Tasks and Objectives	Stable Institutions	Fundamental Rights
• Liberty • Democracy • Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms • Rule of Law	• Social progress • Discrimination • Sustainable development	• Guarantee of democracy • Rule of Law • Human Rights and fundamental freedoms • Protection of minorities	• Dignity • Freedoms • Equality • Solidarity • Citizenship • Justice
Treaty Base - set out in Article 6 of the Treaty on European Union	Treaty Base - set out in Articles 2 of TEC and TEU, Articles 6 and 13 of TEC	Copenhagen Criteria - set Out in the conclusions of the June 1993 European Council	Draft Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union

Table 2: The EU's Normative Basis (Manners, 2000, p. 33)

To enforce its norms internationally, the EU relies on a series of mechanisms. Its normative power stems from a combination of symbolic “power by example” and substantive “power by relations,” operationalized through six key diffusion factors: (Manners, 2000, p. 35)

- **Contagion:** Unintentional diffusion via the EU's “virtuous example” (e.g., regional integration models like Mercosur).

- **Informational:** Strategic and declaratory communications from EU institutions.
- **Procedural:** Institutionalizing relationships through agreements, memberships, or enlargement.
- **Transference:** The direct exchange of goods, aid, or technical assistance, often linked to political conditionality.
- **Overt:** Physical EU presence in third countries via delegations, diplomatic missions, or monitoring teams.
- **The Cultural Filter:** The mediating role of local identity and knowledge in a third country, which determines whether norms are learned, adapted, or rejected (Manners, 2000, p. 35).

Conceptualising the theory of normative Power in general and in the EU context by using the theoretical framework of Manners, it is important to finalise this Chapter by elaborating the Limits of this Theory. This will allow to apply the critical aspects of the theory in the subsequent discussion and analysis.

1.3 Limitations of Normative Power Europe:

Despite its explanatory value, the concept of the EU as a normative power has been subject to criticism and faces analytical and empirical limitations.

While developing the NPE theory, Manners also confesses a tension in Terms of the EU society concept. The contradiction lies in the ambiguity, since the concept or origin of an EU Society is neither a national nor an international society of EU member States, it is somewhere in between (Manners, 2000, p. 43). Manners describes it also as a “neo-mediaeval society with competing claims to difference and similarity according to culturally-constructed cleavages such as nationality, gender, appearance, socio-economic status, and belief-system.” (Manners, 2000, p. 43) Hence, it becomes difficult to treat the EU as one clear, unified actor, as its identity is complex, multiple, and relational, making the normative power

framework both a process of identity construction and a contested analytical category (Diez and Manners, 2007, p. 187-188).

Besides the Contradiction explained by Manners, some IR Scholars, especially with a Realist perspective, such as Hyde-Price, criticize NPE theory for failing to explain under what conditions normative action is limited or overridden by systemic pressures, and that norms are used as a rhetorical legitimisation of Interests (Hyde-Price, 2006, p.222-223). Furthermore, a missing coherent account of coercive Instruments, as the use of sanctions and conditionality, blurs the distinction between normative influence and traditional power politics (Hyde-Price, 2006,p. 218-223). Hyde-Price describes NPE theory as more descriptive than analytical .

This Systematic pressure is one of the major critiques of the NPE Approach, clearly illustrated by the tension between material interests, notably economic ones, and ethical norms (Noureddine, 2016,p. 4). A classic example is economic and trade agreements between the EU or Member States with third parties accused of human rights violations or other ethical violations of the EU (Noureddine, 2016). Arms exports are probably the clearest case of this contradiction. Some studies have shown that, in some cases, a positive correlation exists between human rights violations and arms shipments from the EU(Noureddine, 2016,p. 5)

The constructivist and critical theory Approach of IR scholars argues, especially in the context of the EU as a normative power, that the risk of exporting its internal policies to other multilateral organisations or countries could lead to a “negative spill-over effect” (Diez and Manners, 2007, p. 183). This tends to idealise its own model, which requires a greater self-reflexivity, notably when applying its norms both internally and externally (Diez and Manners, 2007, p. 185)

2.1 EU Foreign and Security Policy

Since the EU’s foreign policy is shaped by its legal competencies and institutional structures, understanding this framework is key to analysing its transformation. This framework serves as a crucial link to the later discussion and analysis, in which

this legal and institutional construct will be applied to the practical case of sanctions policy.

The key difference between states and international organisations in their ability to interact in the international Arena depends on their legal personality. In the unique case of the European Union, the clarity of the legal personality took decades and was finally adopted after the Lisbon Treaty of 2007, which significantly simplified how the EU is represented internationally and introduced important changes (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 1). The reasons for the slow development were, on the one hand, the historically exclusive competencies of member states in their international representation and, on the other, the further development of the Union from the origins of the European Economic Community (EEC) (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 2).

The lengthy process of establishing a legal framework and legal personality can be considered a typical example of the European integration process, which remains ongoing to the present day. It illustrates the spillover effect, whereby integration gradually expands from areas of “low politics”, such as trade (EEC), energy (European Coal and Steel Community, ECSC, and Euratom), and transportation (European Road Transport Agreement, ERTA), toward areas of “high politics,” including foreign policy and international relations (Waechter, 2025).

One of the central legal changes that reflects the unified legal personality in international representation after the Treaty of Lisbon is Article 47 TEU, which clearly introduces a single international legal personality for the EU, replacing the duality of legal personalities of the European Community (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 8). This adaptation simplifies the process of negotiation and the conclusion of international agreements (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 8).

Another important step toward making the EU’s external action more effective, consistent, and visible was the creation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Firstly introduced in the Treaty of Maastricht in 1993, where it had replaced

the European Political Cooperation (EPC), further developed in the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997, and finalised in the Lisbon Treaty, it is considered today as the “Center of gravity” of the EU’s foreign Policy (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 359). Within this new structure, the CFSP is expressly recognized as a competence of the Union (Article 2 TFEU) (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 359).

However, CFSP does not fit cleanly into the traditional categories of EU competences (exclusive, shared, or supporting). Instead, it is generally described as a non-exclusive competence that operates in parallel with the foreign policy powers of the Member States (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 359). While the EU can shape and carry out a common foreign and security policy, the member states still retain significant authority in this field (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 359).

The scope of CFSP is formulated very broadly. According to Article 24(1) TEU, it covers all areas of foreign policy and all questions relating to the Union’s security, including the gradual development of a common defence policy, which could eventually lead to a common defence (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 360). In practice, this means it provides the framework for EU diplomacy, the adoption of sanctions, civilian and military missions abroad (under the Common Security and Defence Policy, CSDP), and coordinating member states’ positions on global issues (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 360)

At the same time, during the 2007 Intergovernmental Conference, Member States, at the insistence of the United Kingdom, adopted Declarations No. 13 and 14 concerning CFSP (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 359-360). These declarations reaffirm that CFSP does not affect the existing competences of Member States in foreign and security policy. This reflects the intergovernmental character of CFSP: decisions in this area are largely taken by unanimity in the Council, the European Parliament has only a limited role, and the Court of Justice of the EU has restricted jurisdiction compared to other areas of EU law (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 359-360).

A last notable innovation of the Lisbon Treaty in relation to the CFSP Framework was the creation of the role of the High Representative (HR) of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. This triple-hatted role, which is simultaneously the Vice-President of the Commission and the Director of the European External Action Service (EEAS), is expected to ensure consistency across the EU's external action (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 362-363).

The EU's external representation is shared between three main actors, depending on the policy as well as the rules and procedures laid down in the CFSP (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 37-38). At the level of Heads of State or Government, the Union is represented by the President of the European Council (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 37-38). The council itself is responsible for shaping and adopting decisions in areas like the CSDP, including key measures such as sanctions or military missions, by unanimity (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 177-178). Supported by the EEAS, the HR plays a central role in representing the EU externally, especially in foreign and security policy and in international organisations (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 37). This role partly overlaps with the European Commission, which represents the EU in areas linked to its own competences, mainly trade and external economic relations, while focusing on promoting the EU's overall interests (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 38).

Although the procedures for the EU's external representation were formalized within the CFSP framework and revised in 2011, ambiguities remain in practice. Heads of State or Government may at times favour certain EU representatives despite unclear competences, and individual Member States occasionally distance themselves from EU statements, emphasizing that they do not speak on their behalf (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 38).

2.2 Main drivers of the strategic Turn:

Since the final and last adaptation of the legal personality of the EU in the international Representation in the Lisbon Treaty 2007, multiple geopolitical crises and challenges have affected the EU's global actorness. To maintain a focus on the

European context and to illustrate how global developments have shaped EU's strategic reorientation, the following section outlines four external and one internal driver, which the later analysis draws on to assess their relative weight.

- **The Arab Spring**

The political uprisings and upheavals between 2010 and 2013 marked an unprecedented case of political and economic instability on the external borders of the EU. Starting in December 2010 in Tunisia, protests, driven largely by younger people calling for more freedom and political reform, quickly spread from North Africa into the Middle East, leading to civil wars in countries like Syria and Yemen (Teti, 2012). In its original Neighbourhood Policy for the early 2000s, the EU focused on development cooperation and economic integration, even though this approach often implied maintaining stable relations with authoritarian regimes (Teti, 2012).

With the onset of the Arab Spring, the EU increasingly aimed at the promotion of democracy (Teti, 2012). However, it soon found itself walking a fine line between supporting democratic reforms and safeguarding its security interests, as rising migration flows, which led to the rise of populism within the EU, and increasing terrorism in the Sahel and the Middle East, created new challenges. Nearly 15 years later, these developments forced the Union to resume cooperative relations with authoritarian regimes to protect its security and implement stricter migration policies.

- **The Russian Revisionism**

A parallel development occurred almost simultaneously on the EU's eastern border with the Russian interventions in Georgia (2008) and the annexation of Crimea (2014), followed by support for and control over separatists in eastern Ukraine. These events created serious challenges for European security and the post-Cold War international order (Cebeci, 2025). In its initial approach, the EU's strategy towards Eastern Europe in the early 2000s, particularly after the end of the Balkan

wars and the 2004 Big Bang enlargement, focused largely on promoting democratization, economic cooperation, and closer integration with the Union (Marocchi, 2017).

Over time, however, security concerns became much more important, especially as tensions with Russia increased (Marocchi, 2017). While the Union continued to support Ukraine and pursue Eastern European integration, this integration has increasingly focused on security and defence. Consequently, the EU adopted sanctions and strengthened its support for Ukraine, reflecting a broader understanding of collective security in its eastern neighbourhood (Marocchi, 2017).

- **US Focus on Pacific and China**

The aftermath of the Second World War and the subsequent confrontation with the Soviet Union compelled the United States to establish and maintain a lasting strategic presence in Europe. The transatlantic economic and political relationship, which remained stable even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, was central in shaping the Western-dominated global order of the twentieth century.

Although a partial shift in U.S. foreign policy attention became visible during the interventions in the Middle East, Washington preserved close ties with its European partners. This was largely due to the strategic importance of European military infrastructure and the extensive intelligence cooperation required to conduct and sustain the War on Terror.

Historically, U.S. engagement in Asia and the Pacific had been primarily concentrated in Japan and on the Korean Peninsula. However, this focus officially broadened under the Obama administration, which announced a strategic “rebalance” or “pivot” to Asia in 2011 (Blackwill and Fontaine, 2024, p. 1-2). Formulated partly to manage the implications of China’s expanding power, this strategic shift declared that “Asia would henceforth serve as its priority region, and

the United States would refocus its military, diplomatic, and economic emphasis on the Indo-Pacific” (Blackwill and Fontaine, 2024, p. 1).

This reorientation of U.S. strategic priorities prompted the European Union to reassess its own geopolitical positioning, contributing to a gradual adaptation of EU strategic thinking in response to shifting transatlantic dynamics.

- **First Trump Administration**

Europe’s fundamental trust in the transatlantic relationship was considered unshakeable, despite crises such as the European restraint during the US Invasion of Iraq or the NSA spying scandal. The Erosion of trust caused by Trump and his “America’s First” approach was significant and had a lasting impact on European foreign policy. One core Element is the “transactionalization” of NATO, treating the alliance as a cost-benefit arrangement, which fundamentally undermined European security confidence (Nielsen and Dimitrova, 2021, p. 709). The tariff policy on steel and aluminium, resulting in a trade conflict with the EU, deteriorated the vital economic Partnership immensely (Nielsen and Dimitrova, 2021, p. 707–709). The open support for Brexit, as well as the continuous renunciation of multilateralism and the international order, led to a historic low point of the transatlantic relationship (Nielsen and Dimitrova, 2021, p. 708).

- **The growing Populism in the EU**

Populism, nationalism, and Euroscepticism have existed since the birth of the EU, but the scale and influence of these political movements on European policy have never been so visible as in the last 15 years. Since 2015, far-right parties have been gaining more votes across Europe and are in governing coalitions in some Countries. The Impact of these parties is therefore also reflected in foreign policy. Populist governments that undermine central elements of the European normative legitimacy, like the rule of law, media freedom, and democratic governance, undermine the foundation of normative power in Europe (Cadier and Lequesne,

2020, p. 3–6). The erosion of the EU’s normative credibility caused by internal democratic backsliding is one of the most prominent elements and diminishes the ability to project these Values (Cadier and Lequesne, 2020, p. 5). Another reflection of the change in the European political landscape is the Discursive shift from liberal universalism to sovereignty and Security. Populism and nationalism are acting more as an accelerator and a framework for political legitimacy, reinforcing a strategic shift that is already underway.

3.1 Economic Statecraft

Economic statecraft provides the analytical basis for the subsequent discussion of sanctions as a foreign policy instrument, including their limits.

To conduct influence as a Nation on the international Arena, different ways were presented in Chapter 1.2. Besides normative and military origins of power, the central elements of civilian power are Diplomacy and especially economic statecraft (Makaryčev *et al.*, 2008, p. 8). The idea of economic statecraft has existed since the emergence of national economies and has become more clearly defined as economic interactions between states intensified. Elements of this concept can already be found in classical economic thought, most notably in *The Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith, particularly in his critique of mercantilism (Xiaotong, 2023, p. 9).

The concept gained particular relevance in the context of globalisation. Complex supply chains and financial integration tied national economies together in ways that created a dual dynamic of both opportunity and vulnerability (Xiaotong, 2023, p. 3–5). Meanwhile, the rising political and legal costs of military force pushed governments toward economic alternatives (Xiaotong, 2023, p. 3–5). Sanctions, export controls and investment restrictions emerged not as supplements to foreign policy but increasingly as its primary instruments (Xiaotong, 2023, p. 34). Consequently, interdependence is becoming more politicised and weaponised: trade, finance, and technology policies are no longer purely economic (Xiaotong,

2023, p. 114). States now treat these areas as instruments of national power, reflecting the growing overlap between economic and security objectives in global governance (Xiaotong, 2023).

David A. Baldwin defines Economic Statecraft in his widely used and cited book “Economic Statecraft” as the use of economic instruments and resources that have a market-place monetary value by a government to influence the behaviour of other international actors in pursuit of foreign policy objectives (Baldwin and Kapstein, 2020, p. 28–30). Economic statecraft is therefore political in purpose but economic in means: it uses tools like export controls, sanctions, or asset freezes not primarily for economic gain, but to shape the policies, decisions, or behaviour of a target state or actor (Baldwin and Kapstein, 2020, p. 29–31).

The three main basic components of the concept are:

1. **Instrument:** The type of Instrument used in the influence attempt (Sanctions, trade Restrictions...)
2. **Domain:** The target of the influence attempt (other states or international actors)
3. **Scope:** the desired change in the target’s behaviour (policies, actions...) (Baldwin and Kapstein, 2020, p. 31)

To gain a better understanding of the thesis’s key analytical tool, the following chapter explains what economic sanctions are and how they can be categorised.

3.2 Theory of Sanctions

To analyse the EU’s sanctions policy, it is primary to outline the theory of sanctions, as this describes the analytical basis for understanding their purpose, functioning and limitations.

The first types and forms of economic sanctions resembling those used today go back to around 432 BCE (5th century BCE), during the Peloponnesian War, with the

so-called Megarian Decree imposed by Pericles (Kagan, 1969, p.268). A later prominent example is the Continental Blockade introduced in 1806 by Napoleon Bonaparte, which aimed to economically isolate Great Britain (Grab, 2017, p. 29). However, the number of imposed sanctions has increased significantly.

Since the creation of the Liberal International Order in the late 1940s, the use of sanctions has grown massively. The systematic monitoring of sanctions by international institutions is one central reason that contributed to this growth. (Xiaotong, 2023). This trend is reflected in the accompanying graph, which shows a sharp rise in sanctions regimes over recent decades, including a fivefold increase between the 1960s and 2010.

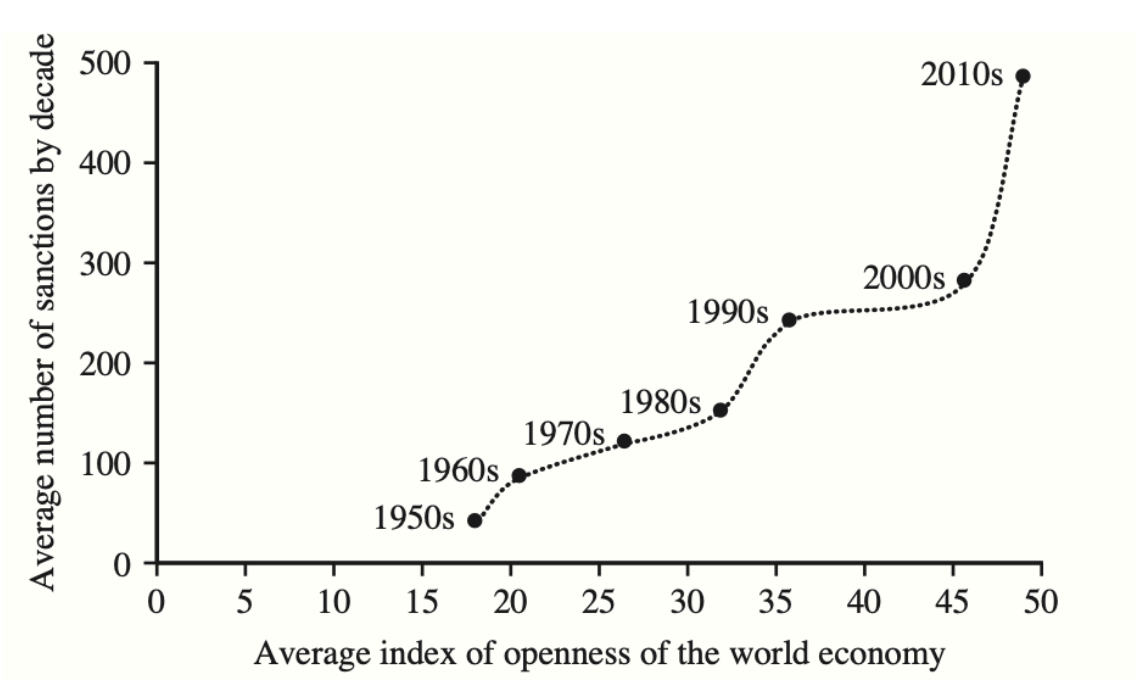


Figure 2: Sanctions imposed and openness of the world economy (averages by decade, 1950-2019) (CEPR, 2021)

The term international sanctions generally refers to non-military actions used by a state, an organisation, or a multinational organisation to put pressure on another state, a group of states, or non-state actors to change their behaviour (Beaucillon, 2021, p. 2).

Sanctions can be differentiated into unilateral or multilateral sanctions. Unilateral sanctions are imposed by a single state or Organisation, while multilateral sanctions are adopted collectively, usually within international Organisations (Beaucillon, 2021, p. 3). Unilateral sanctions tend to be more flexible, since they are linked to the foreign policy interests of the actor imposing them (Beaucillon, 2021, p. 4).

However, a major limitation of unilateral sanctions is that their scope is limited to the jurisdiction of the state or Organisation imposing them (Beaucillon, 2021, p. 5). Primary sanctions apply to individuals and entities within this jurisdiction and prohibit them from engaging in certain activities with sanctioned actors (Beaucillon, 2021, p. 5).

To improve their effectiveness, states and Organisations often try to expand the reach of their sanctions by, for example, encouraging other countries to adopt similar measures (Beaucillon, 2021, p. 6). A more controversial approach is to interpret jurisdiction very broadly by using financial systems or broadly defining connections to the state (Beaucillon, 2021, p. 6).

An even more controversial tool is the use of secondary sanctions, these are aimed at actors in third countries who continue to do business with sanctioned entities, even though they are not under the jurisdiction of the sanctioning state or Organisation (Beaucillon, 2021, p. 6). At the same time, they also pushed companies around the world to adopt strict compliance systems in order to avoid legal and financial risks (Beaucillon, 2021, p. 6).

At international level, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) plays a key role in the adoption of multinational sanctions regimes. Outlined in Article 39 of the UN Charta, as measures that do not require the use of force but are taken in response to threats to peace, breaches of peace, or acts of aggression (Beaucillon, 2021, p. 3). UN sanctions are established together and are binding for all member states, which gives them broader reach and stronger legitimacy (Beaucillon, 2021, p. 4).

Even if, unilateral sanctions only apply within the jurisdiction of the sanctioning state or Organisation they are often used to support or complement UN sanctions (Beaucillon, 2021, p. 4)

As a reaction to humanitarian crises and the negative effects of comprehensive sanctions, targeted or “smart” sanctions were developed (Beaucillon, 2021, p. 4). These focus on specific sectors or individuals instead of entire economies. Targeted sanctions can also focus directly on individuals or entities; the main objective is to affect those who have influence over political decisions (Beaucillon, 2021, p. 5). This is why not only government officials but also companies and banks are often included on sanctions lists.

Sectoral sanctions aim at a nation’s economy, like oil, arms, or the financial sector, and usually involve trade, investment, or financial restrictions (Beaucillon, 2021, p. 5). With the growing importance of combating anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing, fiscal sanctions have become much more important (Beaucillon, 2021, p. 5). In addition, sanctions can also include non-economic measures, such as travel restrictions, reduced diplomatic relations, or cultural boycotts (Beaucillon, 2021, p. 5).

Cross-border threats like human rights violations or cyberattacks led to the development of thematic or horizontal sanction regimes, which target a specific issue (Beaucillon, 2021, p. 5). This approach builds on earlier UN practices, for example, in counterterrorism sanctions after 9/11, which targeted transnational networks rather than specific states (Beaucillon, 2021, p. 5). However, these sanctions also raise concerns about the legal protections of affected individuals.

One of the most prominent actors in the use of international sanctions, and one that represents a distinct approach in its legal, institutional, and regulatory embedding, is the European Union. Against this backdrop, the subsequent analytical part of this Thesis needs to examine the legal and political context of sanctions within the EU’s foreign policy framework.

3.3 EU Sanctions Governance and Decision-Making

This Section outlines EU sanctions governance, providing the institutional framework against which Chapter 8 later assesses shifts in Council and Commission influence.

Sanctions have developed since the 1980s into a central instrument of the European Union's foreign policy, serving objectives such as safeguarding international stability, supporting democratic governance, and upholding human rights (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 177). The first joint European sanctions were adopted within the framework of the then European Economic Community against the Soviet Union in 1981 and Argentina in 1982 (Kreutz, 2005, as cited in Giumelli, Hoffmann and Książczaková, 2021, p. 5). The Maastricht Treaty of 1993, which led to the implementation of the CFSP, institutionalised an independent sanctions policy and granted the EU powers and authority (Giumelli *et al.* 2021, p. 6).

Institutionally, EU sanctions are fixed in a distinct two-step procedure. First, the Council adopts a political decision under the CFSP based on Article 29 of Chapter Two of the TEU, usually by unanimity (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 178). This political decision is mainly proposed by a Member State or the HR, supported by the Commission (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 178). The different working groups of the Council, like the Political and Security Committee (PSC), Coreper, and especially the Working Party of Foreign Relations Counsellors (RELEX), are the leading entities in discussing Sanctions (Giumelli *et al.* 2021, p. 6). The following step is a binding regulation based on Article 215 (TFEU), adopted by qualified majority, which ensures uniform implementation across all member states (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 178). The Council enjoys broad discretion in determining the scope and targets of sanctions, but is assisted by the EEAS and the Commission in the formulation of the legal texts (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 178). Contractually, the use of Sanctions by the EU is disciplined and limited by three main documents: the 2004 "Basic Principles," the 2018 "Guidelines," and the "Best Practices" (Giumelli *et al.* 2021, p. 6).

Together, they establish a targeted sanctions approach aimed at minimizing harm to civilians while focusing pressure on specific individuals, political actors, and leaders, and ensuring consistent implementation across member states (Giumelli, Hoffmann and Książczaková, 2021, p. 6).

At the same time, these policies operate within a comparatively dense legal environment. Sanctions, by design, interfere with certain fundamental rights, most notably the freedom to conduct a business and the property right, as protected under the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 193). However, these rights are not unconditional. Restrictions can be justified where they serve broader objectives of the EU, provided they meet the proportionality requirements set out in the Charter in accordance with Article 52 (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 193). The European Court of Justice plays a key role in ensuring that fundamental rights are respected, even where EU measures give effect to decisions taken at the international level (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 177). As a result, those targeted by sanctions have the possibility to challenge their listing before EU courts.

A way to classify EU sanctions is by their relationship to UN measures. First, there are regimes where the EU implements UN sanctions without modifying their scope or targets, as for example seen in measures against groups like ISIL and Al-Qaeda (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 180). Second, there are cases where the EU builds on UN frameworks but retains some room for flexibility—for instance, by adding names to sanctions lists or introducing additional restrictions (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 180). This applies, among others, to counter-terrorism measures as well as sanctions against countries such as North Korea, Libya, or Iran (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 180). Finally, the EU also adopts fully autonomous sanctions regimes that are not linked to UN decisions, including those targeting countries like Russia, Syria, or Turkey (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 181). The latter constitutes the main category of sanctions against Russia analysed in the analytical section of the Thesis.

EU sanctions may also include elements of other international agreements for export control, like the Missile Technology Control Regime (MCTR), or the UN counter-terrorism regime (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 177). In practice, this creates a flexible system ranging from UN-driven regimes to fully independent EU sanctions.

Another classification of EU sanctions can broadly be conducted by the aimed entities: geographic regimes, which target specific countries and make up the majority of cases, and thematic regimes, which address particular issues—such as terrorism or human rights—across different regions (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 180). This example reflects a more principle-based and cross-cutting approach, focusing on certain behaviors rather than specific states (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 180).

Taken together, these different categories illustrate the flexibility of EU sanctions policy, ranging from strict implementation of international mandates to entirely self-directed measures, while also raising important legal and institutional questions regarding their design and enforcement.

V. Methodology and Research Design

4.1 Case Selection Russia

The Russian case study is well suited to examine the evolution of the EU's sanctions policy and its strategic reorientation, as the post Cold War emergence of a weak Russian state facing European integration and eastward enlargement has constantly posed a foreign policy challenge for Europe and led to growing structural tensions between Russia and the West.

From an analytical perspective, the Russian case is especially useful because it is the largest, best documented and most politically consequential sanctions regime in EU History. Given its long duration, this case can be divided into three analytically distinct phases, which facilitates a systematic analysis of change over time and offers an empirical depth incomparable with any other case. Although EU sanctions against Russia are coordinated with G7 partners, they remain a test of the EU's

independent foreign policy capacity. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Russia can veto any UN-mandated measures, making autonomous EU action a structural necessity. In addition, as the EU's primary energy supplier and a significant trade partner before 2022, Russia represents a challenging case, as sanctions were imposed despite considerable economic costs to the EU itself.

In summary, the Russia case stands out for its duration, depth, and relative autonomy. As such, it provides a particularly rich empirical basis for analysing how sanctions function not only as a foreign policy tool but also as an indicator of the EU's evolving role in a changing global order.

4.2 Three-parameter analytical framework

In order to conduct a holistic analysis of the EU's strategic reorientation on the basis of the sanctions regime against Russia, this study applies a three-parameter analytical framework.

The first dimension focuses on the sanctions regimes; this section examines their scope, design, and development over time, including the number and scope of measures, the types of targets (such as individuals, entities, or entire sectors), and the instruments used. By comparing these elements across different periods, it becomes possible to identify patterns of change in both the intensity and scope of EU sanctions.

The second dimension places sanctions within the EU's broader strategic orientation. It compares key strategic documents — the European Security Strategy (2003), the EU Global Strategy (2016), and the Strategic Compass (2022) — by examining how they define security, frame sanctions, and conceptualize the EU's international role. Rather than focusing on sanctions in isolation, this dimension uses the strategic documents to trace the broader reorientation underlying the EU's foreign policy evolution, of which the changing role of sanctions is only one reflection.

The third dimension examines how the sanctions regime and the strategic reorientation have reshaped the EU's institutional architecture, focusing on shifts in decision-making and the redistribution of competencies. The analysis examines the historically dominant actors like the Council and Commission, the adaptive roles of the Parliament, the EEAS, and the Court of Justice as well as the institutional and evolving role of member states. Together, this dimension traces how sanctions policy has driven inter-institutional adaptation, competency shift, and a broader concentration of executive power in EU foreign and crisis governance.

4.3 Data and Sources

The origin of the data is mainly official sources of the European Union, including legal documents, institutional reports, and research outputs produced by EU bodies. Key datasets are taken from instruments such as EUR-Lex, the EU Sanctions Map, the EU Consolidated Sanctions List, and institutional Thinktanks, which provide detailed and regularly updated information on the design, scope, and evolution of sanctions regimes. The analysis of the institutional Evolution is complemented by selected studies and papers on the subject.

4.4 Limitations and Scope Conditions

The Scope of this study is deliberately limited. Sanctions serve here as an indicator of broader strategic transformation, not as a subject of effectiveness evaluation, and the military dimension of EU security policy lies outside its remit. The 2005-2025 timeframe, while necessary for a longitudinal analysis, inevitably limits analytical depth, and both the sanctions regime and the institutional dimension would each merit standalone studies. The focus on the EU as the primary actor and the reliance on official sources mean that the role of individual member states is not fully captured.

VI. Empirical Analysis:

5. EU Sanctions against Russia

The development of the EU's sanctions against Russia can be broken down into three main phases. As shown in the table below, each phase has its own logic, scope, and level of intensity, reflecting how the EU's response has changed over time. The Council of the European Union's sanctions timeline serves as the primary reference for the chronological development of EU sanctions, as it provides a comprehensive overview of all sanctions packages and major developments since 2014. Where specific legal measures, amendments, or regulatory provisions are discussed in greater detail, the corresponding primary legal documents published through EUR-Lex are cited in addition to the timeline.

Phase	Pre-2014	2014-2021	2022-2025
Nature of regime	No sanctions regime	Targeted „smart“sanctions	Comprehensive economic warfare
Legal basis	None (political dialogue only)	Reg. 269/2014 & 833/2014	Expanded versions of same regulations
Key instruments	Diplomatic pressure, suspended negotiations	Asset freezes, travel bans, sectoral restrictions (finance, energy, dual-use)	Extension of the measures from Phase 2 + SWIFT ban, central bank freeze, price caps, LNG ban, shadow fleet sanctions
Target logic	N/A	Individuals + specific sectors	Whole economy + extraterritorial (third-country actors)
Coordination	EU internal	EU internal	G7 + multilateral

Political function	Engagement & interdependence	Conditional leverage (Minsk link)	Strategic deterrence & war degradation
Number of listings (end of phase)	0	~180 individuals, ~48 entities	>2,100 individuals, >200 entities

Table 3: Overview of the individual phases and characteristics of the sanctions regime. Source (European Council, 2026)

The following sections will analyse each phase in greater detail, examining the specific measures adopted and their political and legal implications.

5.1 Phase 1. 2005-2014: A Complicated Relationship: Historical Legacies and Early Strains

Before 2014, relations between the European Union (EU) and Russia were shaped by alternating political tensions and pragmatic cooperation but notably lacked any systematic sanctions policy. As can be observed from the table, there were no sanctions imposed on Russia between 2005 and 2014. The following two key elements characterise the EU's relations with and sanctions policy towards Russia during this period:

- **Political tensions:**

Before 2014, political tensions between the European Union and Russia were shaped by a mix of human rights concerns, economic frictions, and geopolitical rivalry. A first major turning point was the 2008 war in Georgia, where the EU negotiated a ceasefire and deployed a monitoring mission, while temporarily suspending negotiations on a new partnership agreement. However, the absence of strong sanctions revealed internal divisions within the EU (Council of the EU,

2008; Casier, 2013). The Eastern Partnership, launched by the EU in 2009, was perceived as a direct challenge to the “near abroad” sphere of influence of Russia, a concept central to its foreign policy since the 1990s (Marocchi, 2017).

The establishment of personal sanctions on Russian officials by the United States, as a result of the Sergei Magnitsky Act, has led to a key flashpoint within the EU, due to profound disagreements and differences between member states, highlighting internal divisions (Russel, 2024). Nevertheless, the EU hesitated to follow the step, even as members of the European Parliament in 2013 were calling for sanctions on 32 Russian officials and threatened to block visa facilitation talks if no action was taken (Denton, 2014). Later post-electoral protests in Russia in 2011–2012 and Vladimir Putin’s return to the presidency intensified the tensions which underscored diverging political values (EU Parliament, 2025). The EU criticized restrictions on political opposition, electoral integrity, and civil liberties, but largely limited its response to diplomatic pressure (EU Parliament, 2025).

Finally, Russia’s 2013 laws targeting LGBTIQ+ individuals and broader civil society further worsened the relationship (EU Parliament, 2025,p. 8). The EU strongly condemned these developments through parliamentary resolutions and public statements, framing them as violations of fundamental rights, yet again refrained from imposing binding sanctions (Marocchi, 2017).

- **Economic Cooperation:**

The EU and Russia have agreed on two key economic cooperation agreements during this Period, which were aiming to support the economic development and Russia’s transition to a market economy. First, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), signed in 1994, formed the core legal framework for EU–Russia relations by establishing structured political dialogue, economic cooperation, and regular human rights consultations (EU Parliament, 2025,p. 7). The agreement, which was initially successful and largely effective, was massively undermined by the Russian military intervention in Georgia in 2008, as well as by an increasingly

protectionist Russian policy and trade barriers (EU Parliament, 2025). As a reaction to the Russo-Georgian Conflict, the EU considered sanctions but ultimately failed to agree on strong measures, instead suspended negotiations on a new PCA Agreement (Marocchi, 2017). Later on, Russian efforts to maintain influence in Eastern Europe and hinder EU enlargement ambitions undermined the economic cooperation (EU Parliament, 2025).

The second major Cooperation Agreement was the establishment of so-called “Common Spaces” (economic relations; freedom, security and justice, external security, research and education) in 2005, granting Russia a special status distinct from the European Neighbourhood Policy (Marocchi, 2017). In the long run, this project also failed for the reasons mentioned above, but above all because of the Russia- Ukraine energy crisis in 2006 (Marocchi, 2017). This exposed vulnerability and disunity within the EU, with countries like Germany opposing tougher action due to their dependence on Russian energy, underscoring the bloc’s difficulty in forming a cohesive response to Russia’s political and strategic challenges (Batzella, 2024).

In sum, EU–Russia relations before 2014 can be described as a hybrid of tension and cooperation. The absence of substantial sanctions before 2014 reflects the EU’s predominantly cooperative and normative approach towards Russia, prioritizing economic interdependence and political engagement over coercive instruments. While political conflicts, normative disagreements, and isolated diplomatic measures existed, they did not evolve into a coherent or comprehensive sanctions policy.

5.2 Phase 2. 2014-2021: Responding to the Crimea Annexation: Forging a Legal and Procedural Framework for Targeted Sanctions

In March 2014, Russia annexed the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea following an occupation by Russian troops in breach of international law and a controversial

referendum held on 16 March. These events marked a historic low point in Russia's relations with Europe and a turning point for the EU's sanctions policy.

- **Initial legal sanctions after the annexation of Crimea:**

Council Decision 2014/145/CFSP and Council Regulation No. 269/2014 were the first legal measures adopted immediately after the annexation of Crimea (EUR-Lex, 2014a). Rather than targeting broad economic sectors, these first measures were targeted 'smart' sanctions against “ (...) natural persons responsible for actions which undermine or threaten the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine, and of natural persons associated with them.” (EUR-Lex, 2014a, p. 4).

As a consequence, the affected individuals were subjected to asset freezing, prohibited from entering or transiting through EU member states, and faced broader mobility restrictions within the Union (EUR-Lex, 2014a, p. 7). The initial designation covered 21 personalities, among them prominent political figures such as Sergey Aksyonov, described as the “new Prime Minister of Crimea,” and Aleksei Chaliy, who declared himself the “new mayor of Sevastopol” (EUR-Lex, 2014a, p. 10-11).

Under Article 3 of Council Decision 2014/145/CFSP, the Council maintained the power to expand the list, which it did on 21 March and 28 April 2014, adding 37 individuals in total (EUR-Lex, 2014b). Further measures included an import ban on goods from Crimea unless certified by Ukrainian authorities, restrictions on EU exports to the region, a prohibition on investment, and a ban on tourism-related services (EUR-Lex, 2014c).

In its initial response to the Ukraine crisis in 2014, the European Union adopted a politically symbolic, legally precise, and economically limited approach. Aiming to signal political resolve while deliberately avoiding far-reaching economic confrontation, this phase laid the foundation for further, broader economic measures.

- **Tightening of measures after July 2014**

Following the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 in July 2014 by Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine, the EU has expanded its existing framework through Council Decision 2014/512/CFSP and Council Regulation No. 833/2014 (Council of the EU, 2026).

The measures introduced limitations on the ability of major Russian financial institutions, including Sberbank, VTB Bank, Gazprombank, Vnesheconombank (VEB), and Rosselkhozbank, to issue bonds and comparable financial instruments with maturities beyond 90 days (EUR-Lex, 2014d). In addition, an embargo on arms-related trade, imposed controls on dual-use goods, and restricted the export of technologies intended for use in Arctic, deep-sea, and shale oil exploration activities was set up (EUR-Lex, 2014d). In this context, sanctions were specifically imposed on key companies in the Russian defence industry, notably Uralvagonzad, Almaz-Antey and Oboronprom (EUR-Lex, 2014d).

In September 2014, the sanctions were further strengthened. The maximum maturity for financial instruments was reduced to 30 days, and additional Russian entities—including Rosneft, Transneft, and Gazprom Neft—were added to the sanctions list (EUR-Lex, 2014d).

Even with the expansion of the sanctions regime, diplomatic efforts were also made to end the crisis. On 12 February 2015, negotiated by the heads of state of Russia, Ukraine, Germany, and France, the Minsk agreement was signed, which was intended to end the war in eastern Ukraine and bring about a political resolution to the conflict (Lonardo, 2022, p. 34).

The year 2015 marked a decisive turning point in the European sanctions regime due to the shift from targeted sanctions to a more comprehensive economic approach, thereby significantly increasing the economic costs for Russia.

- **Stabilisation, conditionality and Institutionalisation after 2015**

From 2015 onwards, the ongoing restrictive measures were regularly renewed. The EU Council established a six-month review cycle for individual sanctions and an annual review for economic measures, requiring unanimous agreement (Council of the EU, 2026). The continued imposition of asset freezes and travel bans on individuals and entities, particularly targeting Kremlin-linked elites and oligarchs such as Arkady Rotenberg, Roman Abramovich, and Gennady Timchenko, is a central component (Council of the EU, 2026). In addition, restrictions specifically related to Crimea and Sevastopol were further reinforced, for instance, through the sanctioning of individuals and companies involved in the construction of the Kerch Strait Bridge connecting mainland Russia and Crimea, thereby reinforcing the EU's policy of non-recognition of the annexation (Council of the EU, 2026).

In terms of scope, this period did not introduce fundamentally new sectors or significantly broaden the range of restrictions. However, the sanctions regime became increasingly institutionalised and routinised, with the number of designated individuals and entities gradually expanding over time. By maintaining the twin legal acts- Regulations No.833/2014 (sectoral measures) and No.269/2014 (individual sanctions) which became the permanent backbone of the sanction regime, the EU revised and updated them continuously Council of the EU, 2026). Another key step towards greater institutionalisation was the establishment of DG FISMA within the Commission to oversee the uniform implementation of economic measures Council of the EU, 2026). This institutional procedure was affirmed by the ECJ's 2017 judgment in Rosneft (C-72/15), which upheld the sanctions regime and confirmed that the Court had jurisdiction to review restrictive measures targeting Russian entities (EUR-Lex, 2017).

In March 2015, the EU formally linked the duration of economic sanctions to the full implementation of the Minsk Agreements, thereby transforming the sanctions regime into a conditional policy instrument (Lonardo, 2022, p. 34). This marked a

shift in the political function of sanctions and decisively shaped this phase. By December 2021, over 180 individuals and 48 entities were subject to EU restrictive measures (Council of the EU, 2026)

5.3 Phase 3: 2022-2025: Sanctions as a Strategic Security Instrument

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on the 22nd of February 2022, the European Union entered a phase of unprecedented escalation, fundamentally transforming the scope, speed, and ambition of its sanctions policy.

- **Rapid escalation and financial isolation 2022**

The first sanctions package after the full-scale invasion was adopted by the EU one day after, on the 23 February 2022, in response to the decision by Russia to proceed with the recognition of the non-government controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts as independent entities, and the decision to send troops into these areas (Council of the EU, 2026). The newly introduced sanctions were targeting 351 members of the Russian State Duma and an additional 27 individuals, as well as to restrict the economic relations with the above-mentioned oblasts (Council of the EU, 2026). The following sanctions packages were adopted very quickly thereafter, with five further packages being adopted between 25 February and 31 May 2022 (Council of the EU, 2026). Apart from the first three packages, these were based on amendments to Regulations 833/2014 and 269/2014, which had been in force since 2014 (Council of the EU, 2026).

What used to be the exception gradually became a central feature of the sanctions packages from 2022 onward. The departure from smart sanctions, which had been designed to minimize consequences for the civilian population, as a result the initial financial isolation achieved by cutting Russia off from international payment systems via the SWIFT system, as well as the freezing of central bank assets, hit the Russian economy hard (Council of the EU, 2026). This also included the Russian access to the EU's capital and financial markets and services. A second central

pillar of the sanctions packages, most of which were adopted in the second half of 2022, was the sanctioning of the Russian energy sector, especially energy exports: in April, the embargo on Russian coal was introduced, and in June 2022, the process to reduce dependence on Russian fossil energy was initiated (Council of the EU, 2026). Together with this was the stoppage of transport and logistics through the closure of EU airspace, and the technology ban, which prohibited dual-use goods, was also a first (Council of the EU, 2026).

The one final, decisive difference is the multilateral coordinated framework with the G7, the US, and the UK, as well as the symbolic effect of sanctioning the highest political leadership for the first time by targeting Putin and Lavrov, and the sanctioning of Russian media outlets such as RT and Sputnik as part of information warfare (Council of the EU, 2026).

- **Sectoral expansion and enforcement 2023-2025**

The coordination of sanctions policy with international partners gained increasing importance as the scope and complexity of measures against Russia expanded. As a result, the EU started moving from directly targeting Russia to disrupting its evasion routes; therefore, enforcement and Anti-circumvention emerged as a core policy pillar and became a central element of this phase.

The 10th and 11th sanctions packages marked a turning point by introducing the first dedicated anti-circumvention tools (Council of the EU, 2026). These measures included listing entities in third countries involved in sanctions evasion and banning the transit of dual-use goods via Russia (Council of the EU, 2026). In response to the increasing technical specialization of the war, particularly in drone warfare and information warfare, the EU also significantly expanded export bans, especially targeting electronics and semiconductors (Council of the EU, 2026).

The 14th sanctions package (June 2024) aimed for the first time at restrictions on maritime services and port access, alongside expanded financial measures and targeting third-country actors facilitating Russia's sanctions circumvention

(Council of the EU, 2026). By late 2024, 15 sanctions packages had been adopted in total (Council of the EU, 2026).

In 2025, the focus increasingly shifted toward closing bypass mechanisms and limiting residual revenue streams, particularly through actions against the “shadow fleet,” including oil tanker networks and opaque shipping structures used to evade price caps (Council of the EU, 2026). Energy pressure entered a new phase with the 19th package (October 2025), which for the first time directly targeted LNG imports, significantly reducing Russian energy revenues after pipeline gas had already been largely diminished, leaving LNG as one of the last major loopholes (Council of the EU, 2026). In parallel, the Council established two price caps for Russian petroleum products (Council of the EU, 2026).

Notably, in the context of the 17th package (20 May), additional human rights-related sanctions were imposed on 28 individuals from the Russian judiciary, many of whom were involved in the persecution of Alexei Navalny and the sentencing of activists and bloggers in politically motivated proceedings (Council of the EU, 2026).

6. Comparative analysis of the phases

Taken together, the three phases do not indicate a linear escalation, but a qualitative transformation in the EU’s use of sanctions, which, on the one hand, reflect the reality on the frontline, but also point to a broader strategic reorientation.

While the pre-2014 phase was defined by the absence of coercive measures, the 2014–2021 period introduced a structured and legally sanctions regime, and the post-2022 phase marks a fundamental break in both scale and strategic intent: sanctions evolved into a comprehensive and adaptive system designed to systematically constrain Russia’s economic, technological, and military capacity, including through extraterritorial reach and considerable economic costs for the EU itself.

Three developments stand out across this trajectory: the objective shifted from influencing behaviour to constraining capabilities, the geographic scope expanded from EU jurisdiction to extraterritorial enforcement, and the target logic moved from individual actors and sectors to entire systems and networks. The following chapters examine whether this trajectory is reflected in the EU's key strategic documents (Chapter 7) and what it reveals about institutional change (Chapter 8), before Chapter 9 returns to the central question of whether this constitutes a departure from, or rather a strategic embedding of, the EU's normative identity.

7. Strategic and Institutional Context

In this chapter, the three key documents on EU foreign affairs and security policy are to be examined in the same way, based on the Security understanding, the Role of Sanctions, and the EU's international Role.

7.1 European Security Strategy (2003)

- **Security Understanding**

The ESS is seeing security with a broad understanding by connecting internal and external threats. The document states explicitly that “the internal and external aspects of security are indissolubly linked”, which is a structural departure from the traditional territorial defense thinking of the last decades (Council of the European Union, 2003, p. 2). Instead, the Strategy treats insecurity as a consequence of interconnected problems which are mutually dependent, like failed states, poverty, organised crime, terrorism, and weapons of mass destruction (Council of the European Union, 2003, p. 3).

To address the threats, the EU has focused on two main priority Areas. First, following 9/11, closer coordination and cooperation with the USA on counter-terrorism, such as the European Arrest Warrant (Council of the European Union, 2003, p. 4). Second and most importantly, emphasis on effective multilateralism and development cooperation, notably within the framework of its Neighborhood Policy (Council of the European Union, 2003, p. 4–6). Building a ring of stable

countries to the east and south can be seen as a classical buffer-zone strategy in liberal vocabulary.

This underlining of development cooperation, governance reform, and the promotion of the rule of law as security issues reflects a broader securitization of non-military issues (Council of the European Union, 2003, p. 3). The ESS constructs a clear causal chain: underdevelopment generates instability, instability enables state failure, and state failure creates space for threats that ultimately reach Europe. Security becomes a precondition for development — and vice versa (Council of the European Union, 2003, p. 3–5).

- **Role of Sanctions**

The ESS does not mention Sanctions as a primary instrument, however, it emphasizes that none of the new threats can be countered by purely military or economic means. Instead, it supports a mixture of instruments, including targeted trade measures, development aid, economic cooperation, and diplomacy (Council of the European Union, 2003, p. 2–5).

Conditionality as an element of leverage is present but mainly normatively. That means countries that violate international norms are told that there is “a price to be paid, including in their relationship with the EU” (Council of the European Union, 2003, p. 6). Access to EU partnership and trade is tied to governance standards, therefore, strategic interests are tied to normative expectations.

- **The EU’s International Role**

The ESS states that the EU is “inevitably a global player”, as a union of 25 states with over 450 million people producing a quarter of the world’s GNP (Council of the European Union, 2003, p. 2). The EU positions itself as a different kind of power by spreading stability through integration and norm diffusion rather than through coercion or force projection.

Nevertheless, the strategy paper recognises the need for the EU to take action and to share responsibility for global security. At the same time, the document notes that no single country can tackle the complex threats alone (Council of the European Union, 2003, p. 2). This thus reaffirms that effective multilateralism, international cooperation, and diplomacy within the framework of the UN, NATO, and other formats is the core EU's foreign policy (Council of the European Union, 2003)

7.2 The EU Global Strategy (2016)

- **Security understanding:**

The EUGS 2016 keeps the main conceptual elements of security from 2003, but the framing shifts noticeably by introducing the idea of resilience as the central feature of security strategy (EEAS, 2016, p. 4). The focus shifted from concentrating on what exactly the threats are, towards strengthening societies and states to absorb shocks and recover effectively (EEAS, 2016, p. 22). This broadens the concept of security beyond classical security and defence actors, as well as beyond its geographical dimension, so that resilience no longer applies only to partner countries but also to Europe itself, explicitly including democratic institutions and civil society.

New threat categories also appear compared with 2003; notably, hybrid threats, cyberattacks, energy insecurity, and disinformation are mentioned as a score of security concerns (EEAS, 2016, p. 21-22). The listing of climate change as a threat multiplier that can trigger conflict, displacement, and resource competition reflects the EU's adaptation to the changing state of the world (EEAS, 2016, p. 18).

- **Role of Sanctions:**

One of the most significant differences from the 2003 strategy is the direct mentioning of sanctions, described as “restrictive measures, coupled with diplomacy” to trigger peaceful change (EEAS, 2016, p. 32). This represents a more

realistic and transparent approach than the ESS and the experiences gained with the Minsk agreement. Hereby Interestingly, the Iran nuclear deal is cited as a model, where combining economic pressure with diplomatic engagement led to a concrete Agreement (EEAS, 2016, p. 15). This reflects the EU's position on sanctions by first seeing it as leverage in negotiations and second to pursue the long-term goal of behavioural change. Nevertheless, by pointing to the compliance of sanctions with international and EU law, the normative framing is still there, but the strategic logic is front and center in a way it was not in 2003 (EEAS, 2016, p. 16).

- **The EU's International Role**

The most prominent shift in the EUGS 2016 is the explicit push for strategic autonomy, the document openly states that Europe needs to be able to act independently and can no longer afford to rely on others, notably the United States, to guarantee its security (EEAS, 2016, p. 17–20). Another important change in perception is that the EU is not seen only as “civilian power”, by recognising the seventeen military and civilian operations running under EU Flag (EEAS, 2016, p. 4). Further, the Strategy argues that soft power operations alone are not enough in a more dangerous world, so defence investments, military capability development, and a European defence industry are presented as priorities (EEAS, 2016, p. 45-46).

One final key development in contrast with 2003 is the clear shift towards Russia. While treated as a potential Partner and called for deeper cooperation in the ESS, the EUGS explicitly condemns Russia's violation of international law regarding the annexation of Crimea, and the tone shifts from engagement-first to conditional engagement (EEAS, 2016, p. 33). The EU will cooperate with Russia only where interests align, but normal relations depend on Russia respecting the rules-based order, applying sanctions logic to a great power relationship (EEAS, 2016, p. 33). Overall, the EUGS shows continuity from the ESS by upholding multilateralism, the UN, and Human Rights, but acknowledges that values and interests often clash, and hard power is needed to back its values and norms.

7.3 Strategic Compass (2022)

- **Security understanding:**

Security in the Strategic Compass 2022 is entirely framed by the context of Russia's war in Ukraine. The protection of physical borders, critical infrastructure, and access to strategic domains in sea, space, cyber, and air is being viewed for the first time as a holistic strategy, as well as arenas of active contestation that the EU must be prepared to defend (Council of the European Union, 2022, p. 5–9). What in 2016 was framed as a challenge for integrated governance and societal resilience is reframed in 2022 as a challenge for military response capacity and strategic deterrence (Council of the European Union, 2022, p. 22).

The 2022 Strategy Paper recenters security around military readiness and territorial defence. This shift is also reflected in the frequent use of “hard power” terminology such as rapid deployment forces, live exercises, non-permissive environments, and command structures (Council of the European Union, 2022, p. 3). Climate change appears, but mainly as a “threat multiplier” for military planners, which is a stark departure from 2016 (Council of the European Union, 2022, p. 2).

- **Role of Sanctions**

The 2022 strategic document does not substantially change the definition of sanctions compared to 2016, but the functional framing changes considerably. In 2016, restrictive instruments were mentioned as measures, tools to trigger peaceful change or disapproval of violations of international law, operating within a wider diplomatic and multilateral logic (EEAS, 2016, p. 32). In 2022, equivalent measures are integrated into “toolboxes”, like hybrid or cyber, designed to detect threats, impose costs on target entities, and enable rapid retaliation (Council of the European Union, 2022, p. 22–28). This likely reflects the urgent security context, where sanctions are seen as part of a rapid, multi-instrument response rather than a tool for long-term behavioural change. The normative justification is not

considered a priority therefore, the aim is less to bring adversaries back into compliance with shared norms but to make them pay for departing from them (Council of the European Union, 2022, p. 22–28). However, sanctions are clearly maintained as an essential component of EU external action.

- **The EU's International Role**

In response to the rapidly changing geopolitical security situation, the Compass aims to describe the EU as a geopolitical actor and security provider, which should act “alone when necessary” (Council of the European Union, 2022, p. 3). Reducing technological and industrial dependencies by performing a “quantum leap” highlights not only the urgent need for action, but also the realisation that, due to the strategies of recent years, there is a great deal of ground to make up, particularly with regard to strategic autonomy (Council of the European Union, 2022, p. 2–33).

The 2022 Strategic Compass further defines the EU's role as globally oriented, a notable new development, particularly with regard to the Indo-Pacific and the Arctic, which are integrated into an EU strategy for the first time (Council of the European Union, 2022, p. 9–10). China is described as a 'partner, economic competitor, and systemic rival', reflecting the growing complexity of the EU's relationship with Beijing (Council of the European Union, 2022, p. 8). Key partners include NATO, the UN, and above all, the US as the EU's most important strategic partner, with the long-term aim of defending the EU's position within a rules-based international order (Council of the European Union, 2022, p. 41). The overall tone is urgent, geopolitical, and military-oriented, emphasising that the EU must act decisively because others are filling the space – “the moment for decisive steps is now” (Council of the European Union, 2022, p. 12)

7.4 Cross-analysis:

Taken together, the analysis of the three strategic documents, in relation to the thesis's central question, suggests that, overall, EU's normative principles were

consistently present in the alignment of foreign and security policy, even if the importance of strategic elements has steadily increased.

The conceptualisation of Security has progressively narrowed and undergone a transformative process. In 2003, security was primarily political and institutional, addressed through civilian instruments and multilateral cooperation. In general, it can be said that the ESS Strategy is very closely shaped by the US National Security Strategy adopted in the wake of the 9/11 attacks and the military interventions in the Middle East, reflected in the perceived threats, Terrorism, and weapons of mass destruction, and the frequent emphasis on the Transatlantic security partnership. Whereas, with the comeback of armed conflicts to Europe, the 2016 EUGS emphasised resilience in European societies and institutions, the 2022 Strategic Compass distinctly transforms this concept into a military and territorial dimension. As a result, resilience becomes a function of armed readiness rather than democratic governance, and the central question shifts from how to build stronger institutions to how to defend strategic interests. The sharpest conceptual break is therefore not between 2003 and 2016, but between 2016 and 2022.

The role of sanctions never appears as a standalone instrument across all three documents, but always as part of a toolbox, likely because they were considered too limited and diplomatically sensitive to highlight on their own. This is notable given that the EU was simultaneously expanding its use of sanctions regimes throughout this period. What actually changed is not the framing but the underlying purpose. In 2003 and 2016, toolbox elements were meant to bring actors back into line with shared norms, while by 2022, as a reaction to Russia's war in Ukraine, the goal had shifted toward deterrence and making violations costly. The normative justification is still there, but has faded into the background.

Finally, the shifting international role of the EU across the three documents is perhaps best understood against the backdrop of the parallel erosion of the international order itself. While the normative foundations were never fully

abandoned, as with the two preceding analytical dimensions, the strategic reorientation is most clear here, and most legible in the language used to describe the EU's place in the world. In 2003, the EU defined itself almost entirely through its ability to spread values within the framework of multilateral institutions. As that framework came under increasing pressure, through the annexation of Crimea, Brexit and Trump's first presidency, a quiet reorientation took shape, finding its first formal expression in the 2016 EUGS by concepts like strategic autonomy and principled pragmatism. The full-scale Invasion of Ukraine then accelerated that process decisively, lending it both urgency and direction. By 2022, the EU explicitly positions itself as a security provider capable of acting alone, reducing strategic dependencies, and projecting military force. What began in 2003 with a clear normative framing based on multinationalism developed after two decades and a neighbouring war into a clear strategic perspective that, while maintaining a commitment to international cooperation, increasingly calls for strategic autonomy. Clear signs of a strategic reorientation.

The geopolitical changes described in Chapter 2.2 and the resulting adjustments to European security strategy, as outlined in this chapter, generated pressures on the EU's institutional architecture. This pressure led to informal adaptation, executive creativity, and the stretching of existing legal bases.

8. Institutional Evolution

This chapter examines how competencies shifted institutional interplay adapted as result of the strategic reorientation. This is best illustrated by looking at the elaboration of the sanctions regime. The chapter focuses first on the Commission and the Council, as these institutions have been at the centre of strategic decision-making and policy implementation since 2014, making them the most relevant actors for understanding the changing of power within the EU. The focus then turns to an overview of the Parliament, the EEAS, and the European Court of Justice, before concluding with the role of member states.

8.1 Growing Role of the European Council

As already described in Chapter 3.3, ‘EU Sanctions Governance and Decision-Making’, the Council has historically enjoyed considerable discretion and decision-making power – particularly since the Treaties of Maastricht and Lisbon – as well as the right of initiative when it comes to shaping European foreign, security and, above all, sanctions policy (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 178). In this context, the Commission, the EEAS and the Parliament play more of an advisory and supporting role (Wouters *et al.*, 2021, p. 178). At the same time, the CFSP is deliberately designed on an intergovernmental basis and is subject to limited review by the ECJ. However, since 2014, the literature has identified that in crisis situations, the Council shifts towards a more executive-dominated crisis governance and exercises decision-making powers beyond the letter of the treaties (Capati *et al.*, 2026, p. 160). A prominent example is Article 122 TFEU, which is increasingly being used controversially, as it was originally intended only for exceptional economic difficulties faced by member states, now it also serves as a general legal basis for crisis management, for instance in the energy and financial sectors in the context of the war in Ukraine (Kreiling, 2025). According to an analysis of the Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies (SIEPS), this may lead to foreign and security policy decisions being shifted into an economic emergency regime by circumventing unanimity in the Council, with national veto rights effectively losing their significance (Kreiling, 2025).

Another notable case is the establishment of the European Peace Facility (EPF). Since Article 41 of the TEU generally excludes military expenditure from the EU budget, a financing instrument was implemented by the Council outside the EU budget, which systematically enables the financing of arms supplies to third countries, in particular Ukraine. So in practice, the Council initiated and agreed on the EPF’s structure, set its financial framework outside the EU budget, and continues to decide on its use (by consensus or unanimity among member states) (Schulz, 2024). By bypassing the EU budget constraints, Blockmans refers to this

policy as off-budget governance and regards it as a typical example of a legal circumvention strategy within the treaties rather than outside them (Blockmans, 2025).

Another study by Capati, Hegedus and Zgaga concluded that during major crises, the Council expands its role beyond its formal treaty mandate by shaping key political decisions at the highest level (Capati, *et al.*, 2026). It frames crises, pre-defines policy outcomes, and thereby limits the room for other EU institutions, which are often reduced to implementing agreed positions (Capati, *et al.*, 2026). This creates a “lock-in” effect in which major decisions, such as sanctions, financial instruments like the RRF, or crisis responses, are effectively determined at summit level (Capati, *et al.*, 2026, p. 168). The study shows that across different crises, the European Council can exert quasi-legislative influence, effectively strengthening its control over EU crisis governance while limiting the autonomy of other EU institutions (Capati, *et al.*, 2026).

This trend, which has been ongoing for years and has gained particular momentum since the COVID-19 crisis, is consolidating the Council’s accumulation of power in the long term and reflects the strong intergovernmental focus of EU foreign policy.

8.2 Increasing Role of the Commission

Compared with the Council, which has historically been endowed with exceptional powers in foreign and security policy under the Treaties and has been able to expand these powers in the wake of crises, the Commission has gained significantly more powers in areas that were previously outside its remit, particularly in connection with the war in Ukraine. The drafting of the sanctions regime against Russia is the most obvious example of this expansion of powers and serves as the central analytical starting point.

According to Lepeu, the key factor behind this steady increase in power is the effect of the ‘de-targeting’ of EU sanctions, moving away from selective, ‘surgical’

individual listings towards comprehensive, sectoral economic sanctions (Lepeu, 2025, p. 975-976). The logic behind this is that sectoral sanctions, such as oil embargoes, export controls and financial restrictions, are closely linked to EU internal market competencies (Lepeu, 2025, p. 978). Their design relies mainly on the Commission's technical expertise in areas like trade, energy, and financial regulation rather than on diplomacy. This allows the Commission to leverage existing supranational linkages between the internal market and external policy areas, strengthening its role in sanctions policy (Lepeu, 2025, p. 978). This has resulted in a clear division of responsibilities, whereby individual listings remain the responsibility of the EEAS and continue to be handled by the Member States in the intergovernmental format, sectoral sanctions have been taken over by the Commission, notably DG FISMA, the General Secretariat and the President's Office (Lepeu, 2025, p. 982-984). Lepeu describes this as 'the cherry on the cake', as sectoral measures form the core of the sanctions – and thus the Commission holds the upper hand (Lepeu, 2025, p. 984). The extent to which the Commission has successfully exploited this grey area is evident in the drafting of the first three packages of sanctions in February/March 2022 (Lepeu, 2025, p. 983). These were drafted autonomously by the Commission's services without going through the Council working groups, like RELEX, and were submitted directly to COREPER (the Ambassadors) for ratification (Lepeu, 2025, p. 983). This has led to the creation of an informal forum known as "The Confessionals" and has brought a lasting change in the sanctions-making process in favour of the Commission (Lepeu, 2025, p. 983). The process works through informal consultations led by Commission's Secretary General, meeting Member State ambassadors individually or in small groups to test political red lines and support for different measures (Lepeu, 2025, p. 983). The key factor is that at this stage, unlike in the RELEX Working Party, draft texts are shared directly at COREPER level, effectively bypassing the Council's expert working groups that normally shape decisions (Lepeu, 2025, p. 983). As a result, the role of Member States, especially for smaller ones, is largely limited to approving or vetoing packages at a late stage, with design and strategic direction mainly determined,

normally shaped through RELEX, leading to a significant weakening of the Council working groups influence (Lepeu, 2025, p. 983-984).

This has put the Commission also in a position to represent the Union in external coordination formats, including the transatlantic sanctions dialogue, which is conducted by the Commission President and her Chief of Staff rather than by Member States or the High Representative, as well as G7/G7+ coordination, which is led by the Commission instead of the President of the European Council (Lepeu, 2025, p. 984).

The Study of Lepeu illustrates clearly that the Commission has effectively appropriated the operational and structural core of sanctions policy, illustrating a clear case of supranational Entrepreneurship in times of crisis and a broader “comunitarisation” of EU foreign policy-making.

8.3 EEAS, ECJ and Parliament

The strategic reorientation and communatarisation of EU foreign policy-making have mainly affected the Commission and the Council, other Institutions, such as the EEAS, the Parliament, or the European Court of Justice, have tended to undergo a process of adaptation, specialisation, or limited expansion of competencies, rather than to strengthen their position within the institutional framework and in shaping foreign policy.

While the previous chapter demonstrated how the Commission emerged as the main architect of the sanctions regimes in terms of technical and economic expertise, the EEAS has expanded its role in three areas: the coordination of sanctions implementation, diplomatic alignment with third countries and strategic communication(Juncos,et al., 2025). A clear illustration of this growing competence is the EEAS’s coordination of a comprehensive review involving 22 member states as they worked together to review over 1400 individual sanction listings (Juncos, et al., 2025, p. 128). The Service functioned as a bridge between

national capitals and EU institutions, facilitating dialogue and consensus-building (Juncos, et al., 2025, p. 128). Additionally, the EEAS took a pivotal role in sharing intelligence with national delegations through its Intelligence and Situation Centre (INTCEN), which has significantly strengthened cooperation between national sanctions units and Institutional experts (Juncos, et al., 2025, p. 128).

However, even though the Commission remains the central actor in the technical preparation of sanctions, by expanding its remit, particularly its diplomatic coordination powers, the EEAS was able to build on its treaty-given role of providing support and advice and increase its influence in shaping European foreign and security policy.

Historically, the European Parliament plays a marginal role in EU foreign policy, however, since 2022, it has exercised its co-legislative and budgetary powers in response to the war in Ukraine.

In September 2023, the Parliament adopted EDIPRA (the Instrument for the Strengthening of European Defence Industry through common Procurement), the first instrument to use EU budget funds for joint defence procurement (EU Parliament, 2023b). Interestingly, Parliament raised its budget proposal from the 500million euros proposed by the Commission to a negotiating position of 1.5 billion euros, with a final agreement reached at 300 million euros (EU Parliament, 2023b). Secondly, with regard to the ASAP (Act to Promote Ammunition Production), which allocated €500 million to scale up ammunition production for Ukraine, MEPs broadened the scope of eligible projects and secured better funding conditions for SMEs, whilst safeguarding existing cohesion funds (EU Parliament, 2023a). In doing so, Parliament used its co-legislative and budgetary powers to shape the instruments proposed by the Commission. The decisive factor in Parliament's ability to act in both cases was that both initiatives were underpinned by Article 173 TFEU (industrial policy), which triggers the ordinary legislative procedure and places Parliament on an equal footing with the Council (Clapp, 2023,p.2). This influence

proved short-lived. The Commission's 2025 SAFE programme, a 150 billion defence loan instrument, was based on Article 122 TFEU, discussed in the previous chapter, an emergency clause that bypasses Parliament entirely. Parliament has since initiated proceedings before the Court of Justice, exposing a persistent structural tension, even where Parliament gains ground through budgetary instruments, the Commission and Council can route major decisions around it via emergency legal bases (Repasi, Mendes, 2025).

As regards the ECJ, it has gradually expanded its formally limited role in the CFSP – not through treaty amendments, but through judicial development of the law concerning the protection of fundamental rights and the review of sanctions (Höpner, 2011). Critics refer to this as 'judicial activism', whilst supporters see it as the necessary constitutional oversight of a foreign policy that would otherwise have little democratic legitimacy (Höpner, 2011, p. 221).

8.4 The Role of Member States

The preceding institutional analysis has focused primarily on the Commission and the Council, but member states have played a variable and often decisive role across different stages of the EU sanctions regime.

Before 2014, different threat perceptions among member states constrained a more robust EU policy towards Russia. While Poland and the Baltic states advocated a firmer stance, countries such as Italy, France and especially Germany were more cautious about measures that could affect economic and energy ties (Batzella, 2024). While these divisions gradually narrowed after the Crimea Crisis in 2014, the full-scale invasion in 2022 led to an unprecedented consensus, and member states increasingly relied on the Commission to coordinate, design and implement sanction regimes (Batzella, 2024).

A clearer example of the extent to which individual member states influence the direction of the EU's sanctions policy is the tight linkage between sanctions and the

Minsk agreement implementation in March 2015 . This resulted from pressure by France and Germany, who had negotiated the agreement and needed a mechanism to maintain EU unity (Alcaro and Siddi, 2021). Smaller member states, sceptical of Russian compliance, accepted the conditionality framework as a compromise that preserved the sanctions regime without requiring unanimous agreement on further escalation (Alcaro and Siddi, 2021). By requiring only qualified majority voting, Article 122 TFEU has bypassed member state vetoes, while accelerating decisions, it has also generated friction, particularly from Hungary and Slovakia, which have repeatedly sought to delay packages (Ukrinform, 2025).

Taken together, the role of member states has evolved from consensus blockers to conditional coalition builders to partially sidelined actors in a Commission-led and efficiency-driven process.

8.5 Summary of the Institutional Analysis

The analysis across the previous sections indicates a broader process of communitarisation of EU foreign and Security policy where decision-making shifts from intergovernmental cooperation to EU institutions, a structural change accelerated through the war in Ukraine. As one official commented, “the war inaugurated a completely new era with regard to the EU policy towards Russia and Ukraine” and the changed institutional landscape of the EU (Juncos, *et al.* 2025, p. 127).

The institutional Analysis suggests a dual centralisation of power. The Council was able to expand its role, as set out in the Treaties, in providing strategic political guidance, mainly through its intergovernmental format. While policy design, technical drafting and external coordination, most visibly in the Russia sanctions regime and G7 engagement, have been led by the Commission, not by the intergovernmental bodies originally intended to exercise EU foreign policy, the clearest evidence of accumulation of power and expansion of competencies. The Commission has actively pursued its position, by for example, its proposal to re-

examine Article 40 TEU, with a view to financing arms procurement through the EU budget, which reflects a deliberate attempt to reduce dependence on the European Peace Facility and, therefore, reduce the Council's financial gatekeeping role in defence matters (Miadzvetskaya, 2025, p. 279).

Member states have nonetheless remained a relevant, if increasingly constrained, variable in this process. Before 2022, different threat perceptions functioned as a brake on a more assertive EU-Russia policy. After the full-scale invasion, member states became increasingly reliant on the Commission to coordinate and design sanction packages, while their individual leverage was progressively absorbed into Commission-led formats. Which is in parts contradictory to the intergovernmental CFSP baseline reaffirmed by Declarations 13 and 14, described in chapter 78. The Commission's lead role in drafting sanctions, G7 coordination, and the use of Article 122 TFEU marks a striking departure, suggesting crisis pressure has hollowed out Lisbon's declaratory framework. Where member state influence did persist, it operated through conditionality frameworks, as with the Minsk linkage in 2015, or through deliberate obstruction, as Hungary and Slovakia have demonstrated in blocking or delaying subsequent packages.

To date, neither the ECJ nor national constitutional courts have issued an "ultra vires" decision or a violation of the treaties against the Commission or the Council in this domain; the accumulation of power rarely takes the form of outright treaty violations (Lepeu, 2025). What can be observed is a phenomenon described by Koops as function creep, "the expansion of a system or technology beyond its original purposes " (Koops, 2021, p. 29). Operating in this case through four interlocking mechanisms: the normalisation of emergency legal bases (most notably Article 122 TFEU), off-budget solutions such as the EPF that circumvent the treaty prohibition and the pre-formalisation of political decisions within the format of "the Confessionals", in which the Commission and Council, with coordination by the EEAS, act as a self-reinforcing executive entity with limited legislative oversight. These developments illustrate how the Union's executive institutions have adapted

their modes of operation in response to a more volatile security environment. The need for rapid and coordinated action has encouraged more flexible and executive-centred forms of governance, reducing reliance on lengthy legislative procedures and consensus-building. As a result, the EU increasingly displays characteristics commonly associated with states-like strategic action, while remaining formally embedded within its existing treaty framework.

The other institutions analysed, like the EEAS and ECJ, have also adapted to this process in some respects and have been able to consolidate and expand their existing competencies. By comparison, the Parliament is reaching its limits when it comes to foreign and security policy, or is being sidelined by the Commission in its budgetary oversight powers. Every treaty reform that nominally strengthened Parliament's role has in practice been outpaced by executive adaptations that render those gains marginal. Also, the EEAS has the expertise to take on greater responsibility in the design of the sanctions, and with regard to the HR/VP, the Treaty conferred rights, in terms of high-level external representation; however, this has been taken over by the Commission President and Heads of State.

Whether this Trend proves to be durable depends, as Lepeu cautions, on whether the exceptional features of the Russia sanctions regime, Commission dominance, sectoral scope and external coordination through the G7 become the new standard or remain an anomaly (Lepeu, 2025, p. 985). There are already signs that elements of the Russia sanctioning process, in both substance and procedure, are being inverted onto sanctions regimes with no direct connection to the war in Ukraine, a phenomenon described by Lepeu as cross-contamination (Lepeu, 2025, p. 985). If this out of necessity interinstitutional interplay consolidates, it may become constitutional practice, not through deliberate institutional design, but through the growing weight of precedents, without democratic legitimacy and without treaty amendment, could significantly impact the EU's identity shift towards a more strategic acting global player.

VII. Discussion:

The preceding chapters have traced three parallel developments. Chapter 5 showed how the sanctions regime against Russia evolved over the last decade, Chapter 7 demonstrated how the EU adjusted its Strategic framework and Chapter 8 revealed a corresponding institutional modification. This final chapter aims to integrate these three strands analytically and reads them against the theoretical foundations of the thesis. The Discussion will follow the three phases of the EU's sanctions regime described in Chapter 5, which centers sanctions at the heart of the discussion while allowing to apply the theoretical frameworks of Normative Power Europe, Economic Statecraft, and EU foreign policy theory where they are most analytically relevant.

The following table presents a clear overview of the empirical findings and their application to the theoretical frameworks.

Dimension	Phase 1 Pre-2014	Phase 2 2014–2021	Phase 3 2022–2025
Sanctions regime	No sanctions regime .Diplomatic pressure only .Eastern Partnership (EaP) . PCA framework .Normative engagement	Targeted smart sanctions .Reg.269/2014 (individual listings) –Reg.833/2014 (sectoral) . Asset freezes, travel bans . Minsk conditionality (2015) . ~180 individuals, 48 entities	Comprehensive economic warfare . SWIFT exclusion . Central bank asset freeze .Energy embargo (coal, oil, LNG) . Extraterritorial reach .Anti-circumvention (10th/11th pkg.) . >2,100 individuals, 200+ entities
Strategic orientation	ESS 2003 .Effective multilateralism	EUGS 2016 .Principled pragmatism	Strategic Compass 2022 .EU as geopolitical actor

Dimension	Phase 1 Pre-2014	Phase 2 2014–2021	Phase 3 2022–2025
	.Russia as potential partner .Civilian instruments .Normative engagement	. Strategic autonomy (first mention) . Sanctions explicitly acknowledged .Conditional engagement with Russia	. Military deterrence . Sanctions as cost-imposition tool . Act alone when necessary
Institutional architecture	Council-led intergovernmental .Member state divergence . No consensus on coercive measures . CFSP baseline	Council + EEAS framework . DG FISMA established . ECJ jurisdiction confirmed (Rosneft) . Six-month review cycle . RELEX working group central	Commission-led supranational . 'Confessionals' format (bypasses RELEX) . G7 coordination via Commission . Art. 122 TFEU normalised . EPF off-budget governance . Communitarisation of CFSP

Table 4: EU Sanctions against Russia — Three-Dimensional Transformation Matrix (2005–2025)

9.1 Phase 1 (2005-2014): The Normative Baseline

The complete absence of a systematic sanctions regime against Russia between 2005 and 2014 provides a clear illustration of the EU operating as a normative power in the sense defined by Manners. The procedural and transference diffusion mechanisms described in chapter 1.2 are reflected in the design of the Eastern Partnership, the PCA and the Common Spaces, which were designed to extend the EU's normative standards eastward through integration incentives, aiming at gradually socialising Russia into the EU's normative order rather than confronting it. This also applies to the norm dimensions, described in chapter 1.1, where the constitutive dimension dominates, as the EU treated Russia through the shared institutional frameworks as a potential norm recipient, not a strategic adversary.

Also, Duchêne's concept, in which the EU's *idée force* reshapes neighbouring countries without coercion, is reflected here.

The concept of economic statecraft can be applied only to a limited extent, as the economic leverage existed, but the EU deliberately chose not to deploy it. One example of this is the suspension of negotiations on the extension of the PCA and Common Spaces agreements, which cannot, however, be interpreted as coercive economic behaviour. This, however, serves to position it firmly at the civilian pole of Manners' Tri-Power triangle, Figure 1. The EU framed its restraint as a principled choice, constructing a legitimate narrative around engagement and interdependence as the most effective way towards a normative approach.

This restraint also exposes tensions that would become evident later, like energy dependency, unanimity requirements and diverging member states interests, limiting the EU's capacity to translate normative condemnation into binding policies, confirming Hyde-Pice's critique that NPE underestimates the conditions under which material interests override normative commitments. This tension is further illustrated by Nouredine's critique explained in chapter 1.3, which points to a systematic contradiction within the NPE approach. The coexistence of human rights rhetoric with economic and trade agreements with states accused of precisely such violations.

In the first Phase, guided by the 2003 ESS, the EU treated Russia as a partner and prioritized normative engagement over coercion. Despite emerging threats, political will for change was absent due to diverging positions among member states. A possible theoretical explanation could be the EU society contradiction described in chapter 1.3, reflecting the neo-medieval fragmentation among member states. The first Phase thus establishes a baseline of Normative Power Europe against which later strategic shifts can be measured. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 ultimately exposed the limits of this approach and forced the EU to do what it had consistently avoided: deploy sanctions against a major power.

9.2 Phase 2 (2014-2021): Smart Sanctions within a Normative Framework

Building on this rupture, this second Phase examines how the EU adapted its actions to counter this breach of international law. The use of coercive instruments for the first time in its relationship with Russia serves as an analytical guideline for the second phase, not as a departure from NPE logic but as its adaptation under pressure. The initial response through Regulations 269/2014 and 833/2014 can be illustrated by applying Beaucillon's classification of sanctions, as on the one hand, the imposed measures were autonomous, unilateral, imposed without UN mandate, which is impossible given Russia's veto right, and were based exclusively on the CFSP framework. On the other hand, the measures remained within the scope of primary sanctions, applied exclusively within EU jurisdiction without extraterritorial reach, and followed a geographically defined rather than a thematic logic.

In Manner's norm dimensions, the prescriptive dimension is the clearest during this phase, the EU framed its response as a reaction to a violation of international law, signalling that normative violations are followed by consequences. The tightening after MH17 through Regulation 833/2014 shifted the regime beyond individual listings into broader sectoral pressure (financial restrictions and arms embargo), marking a further transition to the utilitarian or regulative norm dimension. Sanctions function here as a coordination mechanism of coercive pressure aimed at causing compliance and bringing Russia back into alignment. This also finds its first strategic expression in the EUGS 2016, described as concept of principled pragmatism.

An element that can also be applied to Baldwin's three-part framework of the Instrument-Domain-scope conceptualisation, described in chapter 3.1. By adopting a clearly defined scope, a specific behavioural objective, and a reversible instrument aiming at compliance rather than damage. Which is probably the most theoretically significant development of the second phase, due to the formal Minsk conditionality established in March 2015, explicitly linking the duration of economic

sanctions to Russia's compliance with the Minsk Agreements. The embedding of measures in a diplomatic process, the six-month review cycle, the ECJ's Rosneft judgement (C-72/15) confirming judicial oversight, and the gradual institutionalisation through DG FISMA all reflect that the EU's reaction is consistent with its self-understanding as a rule-based actor.

Viewed through the Tri-Power framework, this Phase marks the first visible movement away from the purely civilian pole. As sectoral restrictions introduce coercive elements beyond Duchêne's civilian power concept, the normative framing remains dominant. This is reflected in the EUGS 2016, which mentions sanctions explicitly for the first time, but still links them to diplomatic and multilateral logic, closer to principled pragmatism than to strategic deterrence.

Nevertheless, the second Phase also reveals the limits of this hybrid approach and Hyde-Pice's critique remains partially valid here: the conditionality framework was normatively coherent, but the structural constraints (unanimity requirements and the diverging member state interests) limit its effectiveness. By December 2021, over 180 individuals and 48 entities were listed (European Council, 2026), yet Russia's behaviour had not fundamentally changed, a failure of conditionality that would become the key contextual factor explaining the shift in the last Phase.

9.3 Phase 3 (2022-2025): From Economic Statecraft to Economic Warfare

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 triggered a fundamental transformation across all three analytical dimensions. The speed and scale of response (six sanctions packages between February and May 2022) signalled that the EU was no longer operating within the hybrid normatively anchored logic of phase2.

The most significant theoretical break lies in the nature of the instruments. The SWIFT exclusion, central bank asset freeze, energy embargoes, and airspace closure abandon completely the smart sanctions paradigm that had guided EU

policy since the 1990s. In Beaucillon's typology, this Phase moves away from primary, geographically targeted measures toward restrictions aiming at the Russian economy as a whole. Also, the first use of secondary sanctions logic, while simultaneous expansion into cyber, disinformation, and human rights listings reflects the horizontal turn in EU sanctions design that Beaucillon identifies as a broader structural trend. While nominal conditionality exists in Phase 3, sanctions linked to a full withdrawal from Ukraine, the decisive difference from the Minsk framework: no negotiated practicable criteria exist, rendering it effectively open-ended and reflecting a shift from conditional leverage to sustained economic exhaustion. The anti-circumvention measures of the 10th and 11th packages, moreover, introduced extraterritorial reach, targeting third- country entities.

In Baldwin's concept the third phase reflects a fundamental break. The previous phase had a clearly defined scope (compliance with Minsk). This phase has no equivalent conditionality; the objective shifted from influencing behaviour to degrading Russia's capacity to sustain war. This is no longer economic statecraft in Baldwin's classical sense but economic warfare.

Manner's framework reaches its empirical limits at the stage. The normative prescriptive remains visible (human rights sanctions in the context of Navalny's persecution in the 17th package in 2025), but none of the six diffusion mechanisms, described in chapter 1.2, is applicable to the SWIFT exclusion or central bank freezes. By increasingly using market power and coercion, the EU undergoes a transformation in which Manner's EU system dimension (institutional and positivist) progressively overrides the EU society dimension (The normative and intersubjective) without either being formally abandoned. The normative identity is mainly retained as a legitimising framework but no longer drives the operational logic. Viewed through the Tri-Power Concept, Phase three marks a qualitatively distinct moment because the EU simultaneously expanded across all three poles: economic warfare at the civilian-coercive extreme, the EPF and EDIPRA frameworks representing a clear shift towards the military pole, and the continuous normative

justification anchoring the normative dimension. Here, Bull's critique, described in chapter 1.3, that civilian power requires military backing is partially confirmed here, yet this occurs through the described mechanisms above rather than Bull's state-building path. What Manners conceived as analytically distinct categories became empirically simultaneous, and reveals that the framework is better understood as capturing tendencies than fixed identities.

The findings of the institutional analysis strongly indicate that the reorientation is structural rather than merely reactive. The Commission's autonomous drafting of the first three packages, bypassing RELEX through the Confessionals format, G7 coordination led by the Commission President and the normalisation of Article 122 TFEU as an emergency legal basis reflect a shift from treaty-mandated intergovernmental logic of CFSP towards Commission-led supranational governance. This crisis governance extends beyond Russia, Lepeu's cross-contamination suggesting consolidation into a new spillover effect, a historically crucial element of deeper EU integration. Yet inviting Diez and Manners critique that exporting an executive-centred, urgency-driven model risks negative spill over. Unlike the first Phase, the developments of Phase three shows that sufficient pressure can subordinate national interests, suggesting Manners neo-medieval fragmentation is contingent rather than absolute.

A final aspect of this phase is the sharp conceptual break embodied in the Strategic Compass 2022, published less than a month after the invasion. Building on the empirical findings, the Compass reframes EU security around military readiness, deterrence and capability development – reflecting that the sharpest strategic reorientation falls between 2016 and 2022, and phase 3 is the empirical expression of this break.

VIII. Conclusion

The thesis demonstrates that the EU's strategic reorientation cannot be explained as a sudden transformation triggered mainly by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Rather, the return of large-scale interstate war to European soil accelerated a process already underway. As shown in Chapter 2.2, the drivers of strategic change (mainly growing Russian revisionism and the gradual shift of US strategic attention towards the Indo-Pacific combined with Trump's erosion of transatlantic relations) have been accumulating for more than a decade, challenging the sustainability of EU's traditional normative approach. This is particularly illustrated by the evolution of the sanctions regime: from the complete absence of coercive measures before 2014, through the legally precise and conditionally anchored smart sanctions of the second Phase, to the comprehensive economic warfare logic of the third Phase. A path that is reflected in both the strategic documents and the adopted institutional architecture.

Despite the far reaching sanctions imposed on Russia, the findings suggest that the EU's strategic reorientation should not be understood as a turn away or rejection of its normative identity. The continued reliance on the EU's legal framework described in chapter 3.3 (the 2004 Basic Principles, the Best practices and the proportionality requirements under Article 52 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights) ensured that sanctions remained embedded in a rule-based and legally constrained logic. Instead, it reflects the growing limitations of a framework developed under comparatively favourable geopolitical circumstances. As external threats intensified, the EU was increasingly required to ensure its security, resilience, and capacity to act alone, terms that are appearing more frequently in the strategic documents. In this sense, the strategic reorientation emerged less from a deliberate ideological choice than from the necessity to remain an effective actor in a more competitive and conflict prone geopolitical environment. A point clearly reflected in the persistent gap discussed in previous chapters: EU strategic practice increasingly relies on instruments like sanctions, even as its strategic documents continue to frame the EU in normative terms.

The interplay between member states and EU institutions in crisis management has followed a shifting dynamic, from which two findings emerge. First, large member

states, thanks to their military, economic and diplomatic weight, have retained a structurally significant role outside formal EU frameworks, most visibly through conditionality mechanisms and bilateral formats such as Minsk or the Weimar Plus format. This capacity will prove decisive in shaping any future peace agreement, where the leverage of individual member states may outweigh that of the EU as an institutional actor. A most recent illustration of this tension between institutional and member-state EU external representation has been strikingly illustrated on the margins of the G7 summit of June 18 where European Council President Costa faced sharp criticism, described by the German government as an “affront” (had/dpa, 2026). The reason for the disagreement is an unannounced back-channel call of Costa’s chef of cabinet with the Kremlin (had/dpa, 2026). While Costa defended the move as falling within his treaty-given right, Merz, Macron and Starmer insisted diplomatic initiatives remain the preserve of the E3, illustrating precisely the continuous power struggle (had/dpa, 2026).

Second, the institutional Practice and the need for faster, more coordinated responses pushed the EU to increasingly rely on executive-centered forms of governance, enabling a functional adaptation of its architecture to occur without formal treaty change. Practice has thus evolved faster than narrative, a fundamental characteristic of the EU. A historical example is the evolution of EU foreign policy cooperation (EPC to CFSP), which similarly demonstrates how practice outpaced narrative. Informal cooperation began in the 1970s, but only gained formal recognition with the Maastricht Treaty in 1992.

Despite the analytical elements outlined above, several limitations must be acknowledged. The 2005-2025 timeframe is too broad for a Master’s thesis, limiting analytical depth. Both the sanctions regime and institutional analysis would each merit standalone studies. A cross-analysis examining how institutional shifts enabled or constrained specific sanctions measures would go beyond the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, the focus on the EU as the main protagonist, as well as the

reliance on official EU sources, means the role of individual member states is not fully captured.

These limitations thus serve as a starting point for future research. Empirically investigating whether EU sanctions against Russia have meaningfully constrained its war capacity and examining whether identified institutional trends persist beyond the current conflict. Beyond the Russia case, the analytical framework developed in this study could be applied to other contemporary geopolitical and diplomatic flashpoints. For instance, by analysing how the EU's institutional architecture and sanctions mechanism would adapt common sanctions against Israeli officials and settler-linked networks, as well as against actors involved in the blockage of the Strait of Hormuz, a scenario that would test whether the communitarisation of sanctions policy remains confined to the Russian case or represents a more general shift in EU crisis governance.

So, has the EU moved from norms to power politics? This analysis suggests an ongoing, unfinished process rather than a clear shift. The EU has not become less normative; rather, it has increasingly been obliged to secure its normative objectives through strategic and executive-centred instruments, as the geopolitical environment has increasingly revealed the limits of its traditional model, forcing a gradual yet profound adaptation. Consequently, the Strategic Reorientation is best understood as a transformation in how values are defended and translated into practice in an increasingly contested order. The EU today is neither purely normative nor a purely strategic geopolitical actor; it remains as Jacques Delors once famously put it, an “Unidentified Political Object”—ever evolving, never final.

IX. Bibliography

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X. Annex

During the preparation of this thesis (January-June 2026), the author made limited use of AI tools (Claude, ChatGPT, and Grammarly) as supplementary for:

- The identification of relevant academic sources
- To verify format, theoretical consistency, and academic contribution
- The design of figures and tables
- The translation of supporting documents
- Grammarly was used for spelling, grammar, and stylistic corrections

All arguments, Ideas, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions presented in this thesis are the author's own. No AI-generated text was incorporated into the final writing.