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**Case Studies of EU and Member
States' Engagement with Global
Strategic Partner Countries**

**Gustavo Müller, Maria Martins, Karel Brackeniers,
Andriy Tyushka, Benjamin Martill,
Alexander Mesarovich, Meltem Müftüler-Bac,
Senem Aydın-Düzgit & Ezgi Uzun**

**ENVISIONING A NEW
GOVERNANCE ARCHITECTURE
FOR A GLOBAL EUROPE**



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Executive Summary

This working paper delivers a comprehensive examination of the European Union's (EU's) strategic partnerships with Brazil, the United Kingdom, the United States, Russia and Turkey. For each case study, it explores the historical origins and current state of these partnerships, the different forms they can take, and the objectives and challenges they seek to address. By zooming in on critical policy areas of each relationship and the role of EU Member States therein, the paper sheds light on the horizontal and vertical coherence of the EU's external action.

The case studies show the importance of recognising each strategic partnership's unique regional and global context, which is indissociable from the EU's bilateral relationship with the third country. The successes, failures or stagnations of these relationships cannot be attributed solely to the EU's policies or lack thereof, as external factors and the partners' own actions and policies can significantly influence the outcomes. It is argued that strategic partnerships have the potential to establish lasting frameworks for joint action, create momentum for further cooperation, and sustain important relationships amidst potential crises and unforeseen events. However, the partnerships must demonstrate adaptability to geopolitical and geoeconomic changes while maintaining their alignment with the EU's external action objectives.

For More Information

EsadeGeo-Center for Global Economy and Geopolitics
ENGAGE
Avenida Pedralbes, 60-62
08034, Barcelona
Email: marie.vandendriessche@esade.edu



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1 Introduction

The concept of global strategic partnership is a crucial aspect of international relations in the 21st century. While the world has become more interconnected, global actors face challenges linked to systemic competition, growing power rivalry, and disruptive trends such as technology change, demographics and migration, and climate change and environmental degradation (see also Müller et al., 2021 (ENGAGE [Working Paper 1](#))). This context raises the question of how suitable strategic partnerships are to the goals of addressing common challenges, pursuing mutual objectives, and ultimately advancing the EU's interests and values for coherent, sustainable and effective external action. The European Union (EU) has been actively engaging with various partners in an attempt to establish robust and sustainable strategic partnerships. The objective of this working paper is to fulfil Task 7.2 of the ENGAGE project, consisting of in-depth case studies of the EU's relationships with third countries that are – or were – considered to be the EU's global strategic partners. Specifically, we will analyse the cases of the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, Turkey and Brazil, which were selected based on the research output of ENGAGE [Work Package \(WP\) 2](#) on Challenges of Global Governance and International Relations, and the conceptual framework developed in Muftuler-Bac et al. (2022, ENGAGE [Working Paper 13](#)). As such, this paper aims to develop an understanding of how different levels of policy competence affect the EU's effectiveness in its relationships with global strategic partners, distinguishing between the Member States' and the EU's external policies towards the identified partners. Therefore, it will also draw on Member States' foreign policies towards the global strategic partners and assess the possible linkages between these policies and the EU's external action.

Strategic partnerships can be defined as bilateral arrangements between two global actors, (i.e. states or international organisations), often embedded within broader overlapping sets of relations and potentially evolving into more multilateral forms (Muftuler-Bac et al., 2022). These partnerships are generally formalised through written agreements, although the degree of institutionalisation usually involves low commitment costs, with joint statements and regular meetings as the norm instead of treaties. Strategic partnerships are often future-oriented, characterised by a long-term orientation of cooperation, including the progressive deepening of strategic interaction, and a focus on strategic goals. These goals are broadly conceived, targeting identifiable areas where mutual gains can be obtained from cooperation on security or non-security issues with an overarching geo-strategic aim.

By examining the current state and historical origins of the EU's strategic partnerships with Brazil, Turkey, the United States, the United Kingdom and Russia, this paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the different forms that these partnerships can take, as well as the diverse objectives and challenges that they seek to address. This selection of case studies allows us to compare and contrast the EU's strategic partnerships with emerging powers, established global powers, and traditional allies, providing valuable insights into the factors that shape these relationships. As such, the selection of case studies followed a criterion of variation in terms of the current state of the partnership and its evolution. Large countries, both in economic and population size, were also prioritised.



The selection of *Brazil* sheds lights into the EU's relationship with an emerging country from the Global South, where there is a commonly held assumption of shared values and norms. The partnership is particularly impacted by changes of government on the Brazilian side, forcing the EU to reconsider its approach and leading to a partnership in hibernation. In the case of the *United Kingdom*, the study looks at the evolving strategic relation with a former EU Member State. Given the novelty of the partnership, authors in this case made particular use of interviews. In the opposite direction, in the case of *Turkey*, the authors explore a strategic relationship with an EU neighbouring country, with dense interdependencies, in a longstanding accession process to join the EU itself, and in which we often observe clashes of norms and interests. With the case of the EU's partnership with the *United States*, this working paper sheds light on the EU's relation with a superpower and external actor in Europe's security architecture. As in the case of Brazil, the EU-US partnership is also heavily impacted by changes in government on the American side. Finally, with the case of *Russia*, this working paper sheds light on a clear case of a derailed strategic partnership that not only falls far short of expectations, but also sees substantive negative escalations on multiple fronts.

To provide a comprehensive analysis of the EU's strategic partnerships, the authors have focused on two or three policy areas within each relationship. The choice of policy areas for each case was guided by the distinctive treaty-based competences, the goal being to offer a broad and contracting look at coherence in external action that includes different legal and institutional capacities. Furthermore, the case studies also emphasise the role of particular EU Member States in each strategic partnership, prioritising their importance and relevance within the context of the EU's strategic partnership in question. In doing so, we seek to explore both horizontal coherence of EU external action (i.e. across policy areas) and vertical coherence of external action (i.e. between the EU and its Member States). The table below sums up the selection of policy areas and EU Member States for each case study of strategic partnership.

Table 1: Case Studies with Focus Policy Areas and EU Member States

Country	Policy areas in focus	EU Member States in focus
Brazil	Trade; human rights	France, Germany, Portugal, Spain
United States	Defence; trade; science and education	France, Germany
United Kingdom	Security and defence; trade and economics	France, Ireland, CEE States, Baltic States
Turkey	Trade and economics; migration; security	Germany; France; Greece;
Russia	Trade; energy; security	Germany; Poland and other select CEE states; Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania)

Source: own elaboration



Each case study will follow a structure that includes a historical context and overview of the partnership, an analysis of horizontal coherence across policy areas, an analysis of vertical coherence, and a reflection on the current state and prospects of the strategic partnership in view of the challenging international context and its impact on the relationship itself. By employing this systematic approach, we aim to provide valuable insights into the diverse ways in which the EU engages with its partners and navigates global systemic changes. Furthermore, our findings will contribute to the ongoing academic debate on strategic partnerships and inform policymakers seeking to strengthen the EU's role in global affairs.



2 Brazil: A Partnership in Hibernation

“Brazil is an important and valuable partner for the EU, not only due to our historical and cultural proximity, but due to our shared values of democracy, social market economy and human rights. Both the EU and Brazil are strongly committed to strengthening the UN and the multilateral system. We consider Brazil a key partner for the EU in international fora, in line with its increased global weight” (Van Rompuy, 2011).

The EU and Brazil have established diplomatic ties since the 1960s, and a growing commercial interaction that eventually led to the signing of the EU-Brazil Framework Cooperation Agreement in 1992, which expanded the relationship into the political field (Saraiva, 2017). The table below sums up the institutionalisation of the relationship by taking into account the crucial bi-regional level in which the EU-Brazil interactions are embedded. This complex multi-level relationship with Brazil, which includes relations with the Community of Latin America and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the Common Market of the South (Mercosur) (Dominguez, 2015), often generates unintended inconsistencies in the EU’s own external action (Luciano, 2020). While often anchored on a discourse of shared values (Reis da Silva & Volpato, 2019), the partnership has been tested during the Brazilian presidencies of Jair Bolsonaro (2019–2022) and in particular his administration’s insufficient policies of environmental protection. More recently, the government of Lula da Silva and Brazil’s new foreign policy of “active non-alignment” (Rodrigues & Heine, 2023) notably contrasts with the EU’s position regarding the Russian War in Ukraine while finding common ground on environmental protection.

Table 2: EU Bilateral and Inter-Regional Agreements with Brazil

Year	Agreement	Policy Area	Level
1992	Framework Cooperation Agreement	Politics	Bilateral
1995	EU-Mercosur Framework Cooperation Agreement	Trade, politics and security (drug trafficking)	Interregional
1999	EU-LAC (Latin America and Caribbean) Strategic Bi-regional Partnership	Trade and politics	Interregional
2004	EU-Brazil Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement	Science and industry	Bilateral
2007	EU-Brazil Strategic Partnership	Trade, politics, human rights, sustainable development	Bilateral
2008–2016	First edition of the EU-Brazil Sector Dialogues, within the framework and adoption of the first Joint Action Plan (JAP I), during the II EU-Brazil Summit (2007)	Politics, trade, security, environment, science	Bilateral



2017– 2019	EU-Brazil Sector Dialogues	Politics, trade, security, environment, science	Bilateral
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Source: own elaboration

The partnership between the EU and Brazil has deepened since the signing of the Strategic Partnership Agreement in 2007. At the time, the partnership marked “a transition in EU’s approach to South America [with] the recognition of the growing relevance and status of [Brazil] in the international arena” (Blanco & Luciano, 2018, p. 470) It aimed at promoting economic growth, social inclusion and environmental sustainability while strengthening political dialogue and cooperation between the two sides (Blanco & Luciano, 2018). From 2007 to 2016, the EU and Brazil have engaged in a series of initiatives, including summits, high-level dialogues, sectoral dialogues and joint action plans – all of which were given momentum by regular summits. These initiatives have focused on priority areas such as trade and investment, energy, climate change, environment, social policies, research and innovation and regional integration.

The relationship between the EU and Brazil has gone through distinctive moments since the signing of the EU-Brazil Strategic Partnership Agreement in 2007. From 2007 to 2016, it was characterised by regular summits and a renewed commitment to cooperation, evidenced by the adoption of Joint Action Plans (JAPs) and dialogue on various priority areas. However, since 2016, the relationship has gone into a state of hibernation (Interview A01), parallel to changes in government in Brazil, and European concerns regarding human rights violations and environmental policies. The impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and the subsequent election of President Jair Bolsonaro in 2018 led to a shift in Brazil’s foreign policy priorities. This has led to a decreased density of cooperation, particularly in areas such as the environment, which receives constant attention by the international community.

Trade and investment have been central to the EU-Brazil partnership, with the EU and its Member States being amongst Brazil’s largest trading partners and foreign investors. In this context, the negotiations of an association agreement between the EU and the Common Market of the South (Mercosur), a regional bloc assembling Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, has been a crucial component of the EU-Brazil bilateral relationship. Negotiations aiming to liberalise trade between the EU and Mercosur countries and to facilitate greater economic integration and investment began in 1999, but were only concluded in principle in 2019. After two decades of negotiations, the agreement is still pending ratification due to opposition on both sides, which is often linked to divergences in trade, agricultural and industrial policies and environmental protection.

On environment, the EU has provided financial and technical assistance to support sustainable development in the Amazon region and to combat deforestation and illegal logging. Brazil’s environmental policies, particularly President Jair Bolsonaro’s approach to development and economic activities in the Amazon rainforest, led to a decreased density of cooperation (Interview A01). In addition to these areas, human rights have been a key focus of partnership between the EU and Brazil, an area of interaction that has been institutionalised in annual

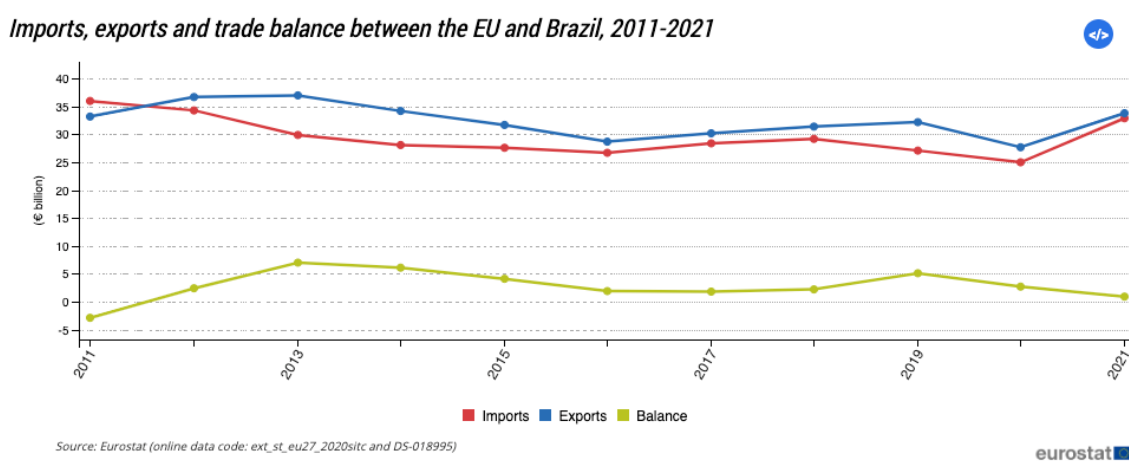


Human Rights Dialogues (HRD) since 2009. HRDs were established by the first EU-Brazil Action Plan of 2008, which foresaw regular meetings with the goal of “greater mutual understanding and a definition of common stances” (Brazil & European Union, 2008, pp. 1–2). More recently, however, the EU has expressed concerns about human rights violations in Brazil, particularly in relation to the rights of indigenous peoples and other minorities.

2.1 A Multi-Level Trade Relation

Brazil is the 13th largest EU trade partner for both export of EU goods (1,6%) and imports (1,6%). The country is also the EU's second-largest trading partner in Latin America, after Mexico. The bilateral trade volume, however, has remained constant over the last decade (see figure below), with a trade surplus benefiting the Union.

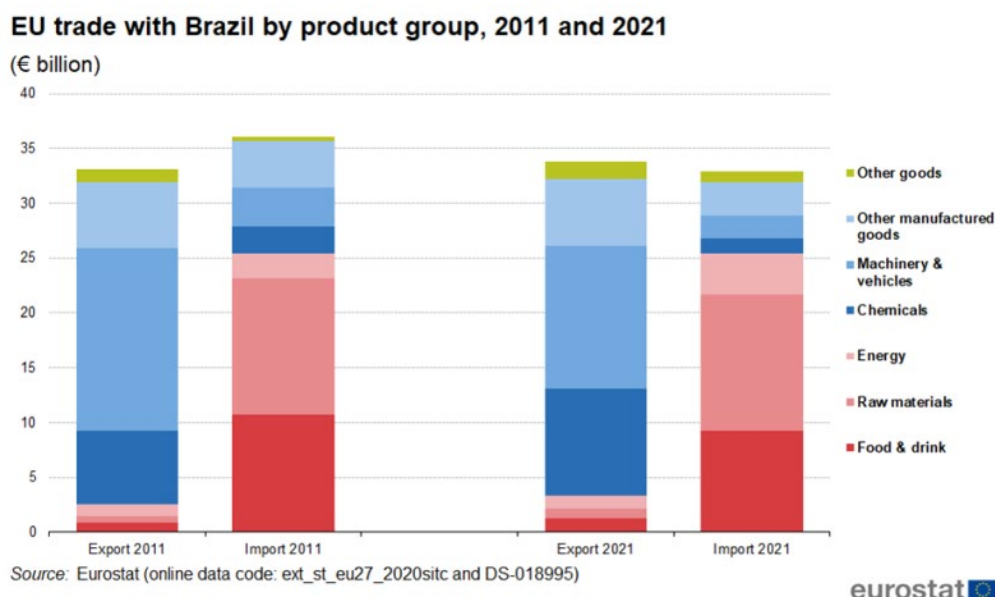
Figure 1 : EU-Brazil Trade Balance



The main products traded between the EU and Brazil are machinery, chemical and other manufactured goods exported by the EU, and agricultural products exported by Brazil. As seen in the figure below, this structural difference in the commerce of industrial and raw materials has also remained constant in the previous decade. While Brazil has a higher industrialisation rate than its neighbours in Latin America, its trade with the European Union largely reflects a North-South dynamic and feeds into the overall trend of *reprimarisation* in Latin America (Müller et al., 2017). This trade profile is currently contested by the new Brazilian administration, whose focus is on the promotion of reindustrialisation or “neointustrialisation” adapted to changes brought about by technology disruptions and green transitions (Oliveira, 2023), adding a more structural obstacle to the EU-Mercosur negotiations beyond the high-profile cases of environmental policies.



Figure 2: EU-Brazil Trade by Product Group



An important benchmark for EU-Brazil trade relations was the signing of the Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Mercosur in 1995, which aimed to deepen economic cooperation between the two blocs. Following this benchmark, negotiations for the EU-Mercosur Association Agreement with a strong trade liberalisation component began in 1999 and, after two decades, an agreement in principle was reached in 2019. The agreement aims to remove barriers to trade between the EU and Mercosur, promoting greater economic integration and investment between the two regions. Beyond trade liberalisation and investment, the agreement also includes provisions on intellectual property rights, protection of geographical indications, opening of government procurement and sanitary and phytosanitary aspects.

Even if the Brazilian economy is much larger than the economies of the other three Mercosur countries combined, EU trade relations with Brazil are indissociable from the Union's relations with Mercosur, a regional economic bloc establishing a customs union with a common external tariff for the four members. Trade relations in the EU-Brazil strategic partnership are multi-level and unbalanced. On the one hand, the European Commission takes a leading role based on the Union's exclusive competence on common commercial policy. On the other hand, Mercosur countries attempt to negotiate as a bloc, but the bloc itself lacks a unified bureaucracy for trade negotiations and relies on policies and actions of national ministries. National interests are still prominent in international negotiations as there is no equivalent of a European Commission with a clear negotiation mandate on the Mercosur side. This institutional asymmetry impacts both Mercosur's internal cohesion and the EU-Brazil strategic partnership, particularly in a context of increased global competition. In recent months, for example, Uruguay has engaged in initial unilateral talks with China, which would all but dismantle Mercosur. This forced the Brazilian president, in a visit to Montevideo, to promise



to “unlock” the EU-Mercosur deal and consider, in a later stage, a bloc agreement with China (Verdélío, 2023).

On the Mercosur side, the agreement with the EU in principle was possible due to a convergence of interests amongst the bloc’s countries, which included a green light from the Brazilian industry federation and an economic liberal administration in Argentina under president Macri (Interview A02). On the European side, the agreement was seen as a message in favor of rules-based trade in a context of increased contestation of the international order by the Trump administration in the United States at the time. However, a final version of the agreement is still pending and full ratification is uncertain. In fact, completion of the EU-Mercosur trade deal faces several challenges, many of which relate to vertical and horizontal coherence in the EU’s external action.

While the European Commission, with its DG Trade, and the EEAS, also in the figure of the HR/VP, have all shown continuous support for the conclusion and ratification of the deal, EU Member States and the European Parliament are not always on the same page. Several EU Member States, including Austria, Belgium, France and The Netherlands, have expressed concerns about the deal, both in terms of the economic impact in Europe and of the environmental and human rights consequences in Brazil. In the European Parliament, some members have expressed similar concerns, particularly in relation to the potential impact of the agreement on the environment and human rights. MEPs have argued that the agreement does not contain strong enough provisions to protect the environment, and that increased trade could lead to further deforestation and other environmental damages. There are also concerns about the potential impact on workers' rights and labour standards, particularly in relation to Brazil's record on these issues. MEPs have called for the inclusion of stronger provisions on labour standards and social protections in the agreement, and for mechanisms to ensure that these provisions are enforced. Similar arguments are made by civil society organisations and environmental groups.

Furthermore, the lack of a coherent front on the European side risks further delaying the agreement, even if the end result of new negotiations ends up being more positive in terms of environmental, labour and animal welfare standards. On the Brazilian side, the current government's policy of re-industrialisation can put a break on the country’s opening of the economy while, in parallel, the Lula da Silva’s administration has also indicated willingness to renegotiate the procurement chapter in the agreement, which could limit or block the ability of EU companies to bid for public contracts in Brazil.

In the EU, there is a need to address the concerns of multiple interest groups, given the need of approval of the European Parliament, the EU Member States, and even of sub-national parliaments in some Member States. In this context, an additional instrument enhancing sustainability standards and environmental protection is under negotiation (Vidigal, 2023). The instrument has, however, so far failed to reduce opposition to the deal. On the Brazilian side, it is largely seen as unnecessary given the country’s already existing multilateral commitments. Furthermore, opposition to the deal on the European side is often linked, by



Brazil, to hidden protectionist measures benefiting the European market, a perception largely enhanced by the EU's most recent unilateral trade measures (Hervé, 2022).

2.2 Asymmetric Competences in the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights

Since the signature of their Strategic Partnership, Brazil and the EU have shared sector dialogues and initiatives, such as the EU-Brazil Sector Dialogues Support Facility launched in 2007, and the EU-Brazil Human Rights dialogue held annually, as well as events at the civil society level and in multilateral forums, such as the UN Human Rights Council. From 2007 onwards, this relationship evolved to include a plethora of actors and institutions. In particular, the EU-Brazil Sector Dialogues Support Facility provided for a significant qualitative leap to other areas of cooperation, namely multilateralism, the promotion of human rights and cooperation in tackling global challenges, such as climate change (Ceia, 2021; Whitman & Rodt, 2012). In this strategic partnership, both partners are seen to follow the Western tradition in the promotion and protection of human rights (Pavese et al., 2014), agreeing in general terms to work towards the same goals and promoting shared norms in the field.

Since the election of Lula da Silva in 2022, which has a more open normative stance that is more aligned with that of the West, the prospects of EU–Brazil relations have substantially changed. As such, EU leaders have been looking forward to Brazil's comeback to the world stage, expecting further cooperation on global issues such as environmental protection through the Amazon Fund, and human rights protection in both bi-regional and multilateral fora, such as the UN Human Rights Council. It is worth bearing in mind that despite sharing similar normative views in the promotion of human rights, the EU-Brazil partnership in this field also displays tensions and ambiguities. Three main axes of ambiguity and potential obstacles are: (1) conceptions of sovereignty; (2) perceived Western interference in the Brazilian Amazon related to environmental protection; and (3) the potentially different conceptualisations of human rights.

The main obstacle is related to the different interpretations of sovereignty (national or responsible), the appropriate level of interference in internal affairs and the most appropriate instruments to defend democracy and human rights. In multilateral forums, such as the UN Human Rights Council, there has been a gap between Brazil's position and that of the EU, reflecting divergences on how to address human rights issues (Saraiva, 2017). A suitable example is the contestation of the norm of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) under Rousseff's presidency, and its proposal to change it to Responsibility while Protecting (RWP), concerning how to address crises overseas and the importance given to a states' sovereignty (Stefan, 2017). This general approach to sovereignty has become even more salient since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, when the Brazilian president Lula da Silva has voiced different views on the conflict as compared to the EU's. Unlike the EU, Latin American countries seek the concept of 'active non-alignment' (ANA), an approach which refuses to align automatically with one or another of the major powers involved, thus avoiding taking a stance on certain international issues, as Brazil has recently done (Mijares, 2022; Nolte, 2023; Stuenkel, Oliver, 2022). Thus,



identifying a common agenda and a global partnership can be difficult when faced with disparities and possible incompatibilities concerning major international events, such as the war in Ukraine, and how they are dealt with. Different understandings of sovereignty were made particularly visible during Bolsonaro's government regarding deforestation and the protection of the Brazilian Amazon. A great part of the Brazilian military and political elite fear losing the sovereignty of the rainforest to Western powers under the pretext of environmental preservation (Stuenkel, Oliver, 2022). As such, expressions of concern over the preservation of the Amazon, by the EU and its Member States, risk being seen as interventionism and imperialism disguised as environmental protection, a perception often shared by both left and right-wing politicians in Brazil (Phillips, 2019).

Another point of fundamental divergence is linked to the balance between needs of economic development and environmental protection. Rooted in the criticisms made by Latin American scholars (Mignolo, 2002; Quijano, 2000) on sustainable development and environmental governance, Brazil contests the so-called Western understandings of sustainable development. For example, this was visible during the Lula da Silva and Rousseff's government initiative to build the Belo Monte hydroelectric power plant. Faced with anti-dam protests, the Brazilian government challenged the 2011 decision of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) to request the suspension of Belo Monte's environmental licensing process, due to its effect on the indigenous populations of the region (Atkins, 2019). Furthermore, the discomfort with a 'naming and shaming' attitude from EU officials in the EU–Brazil Human Rights Dialogues, and monothematic discussions centred only on environmental preservation, tend to contribute to the idea that Europe often ignores the key problems that Brazilian society and its government face, such as poverty and social development. This issue links to a third potential challenge concerning the different interpretations and conceptualisations of human rights in Latin America vis-à-vis the European region. Latin American countries tend to approach human rights quite differently from the 'universal' liberal and enlightened values of political and civil rights. In this sense, one may argue that there is a potential divergence in the conceptualisation of human rights, as Brazil, as a Latin American country, prioritises more socio-economic, cultural and collective rights. These differences in approach may constitute a challenge in that they lead to different priorities in the partnership's human rights agenda, but also to potentially contradicting standards and ways of assessing the successful protection of human rights.

The EU-Brazil partnership in the field of human rights is particularly impacted by institutional and legal asymmetries and the distribution of competences on both sides. While the Brazilian government is fully accountable for its domestic legislation and protection of human rights, or lack thereof, the EU has limited legislative and enforcement competences regarding human rights. As a matter of fact, the Council of Europe is traditionally seen as the entity, together with individual European countries, behind human rights in Europe and the European Convention of Human Rights. As a consequence, the Union cannot enforce internally many of the human rights standards that it promotes externally, often provoking criticism of applying double standards externally (Wouters et al., 2020). The EU's promotion of human rights and its participation in human rights dialogues, including with Brazil, are asymmetrical by design.



In sum, while the EU can promote human rights in Brazil, addressing human rights issues in Europe is ultimately a responsibility of European countries themselves.

2.3 A Balancing Act: Bi-Regional Coherence Versus Bilateral Incoherence in EU Relations with Brazil

The EU-Brazil partnership has proven to be *sustainable* despite normative and structural economic incompatibilities. A key challenge to the sustainability of the partnership are government transitions, which take place regularly after elections in Latin American presidential systems, and which can substantially impact the countries' foreign policies, and consequently, their relations with the European Union. The EU-Brazil strategic partnership is a clear example of the varying degrees of cooperation and alignment following the federal government's orientation in Brasilia. During Lula's first term (2003–2010), EU-Brazil relations were regular and dense, culminating in the signature of the 2007 Strategic Partnership. At the time, the EU moved its focus from bi-regional relations with Mercosur to bilateralism with Brazil, largely to anchor its position in the region in anticipation of competition from the US and China (Meissner, 2018). The partnership continued during Dilma Rousseff's term as president (2011–2016), but slowed down because of the looming economic crisis in Brazil, the countries' prioritisation of domestic policies and the overall neglect of the strategic partnership model. In general terms, Rousseff's impeachment in 2016 was negatively perceived in Europe as a political rupture, and this perception led to reduced engagement in political areas and loss of momentum (Interview A01). At the same time, the government led by Michel Temer (2016–2018), coupled with a trade liberalisation turn in Brazilian commercial policy, coincided with renewed interactions in the economic domain with the EU, ultimately setting the foundations for the EU-Mercosur agreement in principle during the initial months of Jair Bolsonaro's tenure (2019–2022). Beyond the trade negotiations, however, Bolsonaro's foreign policy was challenging for the EU-Brazil partnership due to the country's contestation of the liberal international order and its relations with likeminded populist leaders (Stolle Paixão e Casarões & Barros Leal Farias, 2022; Wehner, 2022). In sum, while it is true that EU-Brazil relations went into a state of hibernation, when neither of the counterparts were making active efforts to further engage, regular interactions such as the EU-Brazil HRD were maintained.

EU Member States, each to a varying degree and employing their own approach, kept engaging in bilateral relations with Brazil, which resulted in a lack of coordination and *coherence*. Many EU Member States have dense relations with Brazil and prefer to keep these relations at the bilateral level rather than channel them through the EU external action (Interview A01). This choice underpins the prominent position of only a few countries, notably Portugal and Spain, in the making of the EU's foreign policy towards Brazil and the rest of Latin America. In the Latin American region, Brazil due to its geographic and economic weight, is perceived as one of the key countries in this interregional relation. This is the case in particular of some EU Member states which have historically shared economic, political and cultural ties with Brazil, namely France, Germany, Portugal and Spain. These four EU countries, however, have



displayed distinctive visions of the nature of EU-Brazil relations, which, at times, leads to incoherence at the vertical level of this strategic partnership.

Due to their historical ties, and consequently their cultural and linguistic proximity, Portugal and Spain have always had the ambition to be the main interlocutors fostering greater cooperation with Latin America and, in this particular case, with Brazil. Thus, both Portugal and Spain have traditionally pushed for greater cooperation. France and Germany, on the other hand, are often more reluctant in going forward with cooperation with Brazil, especially regarding environmental issues linked to the ratification of the EU-Mercosur agreement. Despite this, Portugal and Spain emphasise the importance of keeping cooperation going. In the last Portuguese presidency of the Council of the EU in 2021, supporting the ratification of the EU-Mercosur agreement was made a target priority, as well as reviving EU-Brazil relations despite the diplomatic stance of Bolsonaro. Similarly, approval of the EU-Mercosur agreement is a priority for the upcoming Spanish presidency in the second semester of 2023.

Conversely, France and Germany, despite both having great ambitions to have a steady influence in Brazil, have shared the same reluctance to develop further cooperation during Bolsonaro's term. For example, the German and the Norwegian governments blocked the allocations for the Amazonian Fund due to Bolsonaro's government weakening of environmental preservation policies. In addition, France and Germany demonstrated little interest in developing further their relations with Brazil, namely because of the government's stance on climate change, multilateralism and the protection of human rights. In this respect, France displayed great concern about the environmental governance of Bolsonaro, frequently urging dialogue among G-7 leaders, and in other multilateral forums, on the rising number of fires in the Amazon rainforest. Consequently, both France and Germany were openly against the ratification of the EU-Mercosur association agreement under the Bolsonaro government, clashing with the vision from Portugal and Spain, which understood this as a great opportunity to strengthen relations with Latin America.

Beyond traditional concepts of horizontal and vertical coherence, it is also crucial to analyse the EU-Brazil partnership in its inter-regional context. This is particularly relevant for the case of Brazil, which occupies prominent economic and political positions in Latin America and has a prominent role behind regional initiatives of integration. EU-Brazil relations may be largely determined by the strategic partnership and Brazilian bilateral relations with individual EU Member States. However, they cannot be reduced to the bilateral level. Rather, bilateral cooperation is extended to the interregional level between the EU and Latin American and the Caribbean (LAC) relations, namely within the EU-Mercosur and EU-CELAC relations.

EU's relations with Brazil impact the Union's relations with Latin and South America, and vice-versa. For instance, Brazil's domestic and international policies, and its (lack) of environmental protection, have played a determinant role in the negotiations of the EU-Mercosur association agreement. Bolsonaro's normative views and actions in the fields of human rights, environmental protection and multilateralism, as well as his diplomacy towards individual EU Member States, have contributed to the delay in ratification of the agreement. On the EU side, contestation of this agreement stemmed not only from European civil society movements,



which contested the EU's political and trade cooperation with the former Brazilian government, but also from EU Member States, namely France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Austria.

In this sense, the strategic partnership is characterised by its multi-dimensionality, as it has a wide array of policy areas in which the EU and Brazil cooperate (i.e., science and technology, trade, human rights, security, political cooperation in multilateral forums), and by its multi-level nature, as it greatly impacts the EU-LAC relations. As such, the question of coherence of the EU-Brazil strategic partnership necessarily includes the EU's approach to the regional institutions and regional integration in Latin America and, more specifically in case of the trade, to Mercosur. More importantly, horizontal and vertical incoherence on the EU's side, due to a divergence of interests and norms amongst institutions and countries, have served as obstacles to the establishment of a deeper relationship with a clear impact on the global order.



3 The United Kingdom: A Partnership After Brexit

“The European Union is ready to negotiate a truly ambitious and comprehensive new partnership with the United Kingdom. We will make as much of this as we can. We will go as far as we can. But the truth is that our partnership cannot and will not be the same as before. And it cannot and will not be as close as before – because with every choice comes a consequence” (von der Leyen, 2020).

The United Kingdom (UK) is one of the major strategic actors in Europe, with a comparatively strong and highly modernised military and capabilities spanning (close to) the full spectrum of force (Ministry of Defence, 2021). It is, moreover, notably willing to deploy troops, with a strategic culture which is both interventionist and supports the deployment of force outside the region, and a hawkish stance on external threats, especially from Russia and China (Ministry of Defence, 2021). In terms of international networks, the UK is a founding member of NATO, a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council, a member of the G7, and – along with France – one of the two countries leading on the creation of the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) (Hofmann & Mérand, 2020); in addition to regional defence networks such as the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), Northern Group of Defence Ministers, and others (RUSI, 2023). Despite clear limits to the UK’s strategic action, including successive budget cutting exercises and conflict between the UK’s role as a residual great power and a sub-contractor of the American-led order (Blagden, 2019; Morris, 2011), the UK remains a major security and defence (S&D) actor.

When the EU sought in the early 2000s to elucidate a list of strategic partners (SPs), the UK’s membership of the Union precluded any mention of that country. Conversely, by the time of the Brexit vote in 2016, when the UK voted to leave the EU (Usherwood, 2021), talk of SPs within the EU had waned, due in part to concerns about their meaning, usefulness, and the changing dynamics of the EU’s relationship with major actors, including Russia and China (see Muftuler-Bac, 2022 (ENGAGE [Working Paper 13](#))). During the time when actors in the UK and the EU were seeking alternative forms and labels for the post-Brexit relationship, the notion of SPs was largely out of fashion and did not provide a model for policymakers to consider (Interview C09).

In the sections below, we address two areas of the UK-EU relationship: (1) the S&D relationship, and (2) the trade and economic relationship. Further, we examine the impact of selected EU Member States on the development of these two policy areas. We show how the dynamics of the S&D domain lend themselves to a future SP-type arrangement, given the absence of institutionalised ties in this field and the added value of even low levels of coordination. Conversely, dynamics in the trade and economic domain go far beyond what can be achieved through a conventional SP, given the complexity of the relationship and their connection to ‘existential’ questions for the EU. Our assessment is informed by interviews on UK-EU relations with a number of policymakers, think-tankers and academic experts conducted in 2022–2023.



3.1 Security and Defence Policy

The evolution of EU S&D policy owes much to the UK – both with respect to its development and its limitations – with the UK having found European security cooperation variously a complement and a threat to NATO and the Anglo-American ‘special relationship’ (Wallace & Philipps, 2009). The origins of CSDP lie in the Anglo-French Saint-Malo declaration in 1998. Tony Blair’s Labour government supported the establishment of a European security capacity in light of the continent’s continued dependence on NATO to guarantee security in Europe’s own backyard (Bergmann & Müller, 2021; Hofmann, 2013). By 2003, after a period of rapid institutional development, the first CSDP deployments took place in the Balkans and in the Democratic Republic of Congo, amidst transatlantic and intra-European tensions over the US-led invasion of Iraq (Menon, 2004). While Iraq proved cathartic for EU security policy more generally, British contributions dwindled after the enthusiasm of these early days, with London seemingly finding non-EU frameworks less cumbersome (Wright, 2017), part of a broader pattern of policymakers regarding CSDP tools (see Gubalova et al., 2022 (ENGAGE [Working Paper 16](#))).

The Brexit vote in 2016 precipitated a rapid re-thinking of this relationship. While the Brexit campaign barely touched on security and defence issues, Britain’s impending withdrawal would see it excluded from the CFSP/CSDP, with limited options for input from the outside (Svendsen, 2022). NATO membership allayed some of these concerns, yet then US President Donald Trump’s fiery rhetoric made it clear the Atlantic alliance had its own issues to contend with (Dennison & Oliver, 2018; Sus & Martill, 2019). The EU viewed Brexit as an existential threat to the Union, where a ‘successful’ Brexit could result in more countries leaving (Figueira & Martill, 2021), yet this brought about countervailing tendencies regarding future cooperation. On the one hand, the EU27 did not want to offer any deal that would undermine the attractiveness of membership. On the other hand, they wanted to maintain close ties with the departing UK. For CSDP, Brexit turned out to be a significant enabler, leading to a host of new initiatives, such as allowing 3rd countries into PESCO (Bérard-Sudreau & Pannier, 2021), further complicating the prospect of UK inclusion in CSDP structures (Martill & Sus, 2022; Sweeney & Winn, 2020; Martill & Gebhard, 2023).

To preclude a security gap post-Brexit, then Prime Minister (PM) Theresa May proposed a ‘deep and special’ S&D partnership as part of the future relationship agreement in May 2018, the aim being to make a positive offer to the EU and to ensure security cooperation was not undermined by the ongoing negotiations (Interview B18). The proposed agreement envisioned regularised meetings across all levels, UK participation in select CSDP operations, British involvement in PESCO and European Defence Fund projects, and a UK contribution to decision-making over operations and projects it took part in (HM Government, 2018). The proposals informed the Political Declaration, appended to the Withdrawal Agreement, yet May found it impossible to ratify this domestically given the extent of opposition to her deal (Martill & Sus, 2022). After several failed attempts to pass the agreement, May resigned her premiership, paving the way for the election of Boris Johnson as Conservative leader and PM in July 2019.



After renegotiating elements of the Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration in late 2019, but failing to gain parliamentary approval, Johnson announced a general election on 12 December, resulting in an 80-seat Conservative majority and allowing for easy passage of the agreement. With the UK in the transition period, negotiations began towards the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), which would establish a framework for the future trading relationship. While the Political Declaration anticipated a security partnership would be one part of this, one of Johnson's first acts in the talks was to remove the partnership from the negotiations (Interview C05). As S&D autonomy could be achieved at low cost, it was one area where the Johnson government could most clearly demonstrate its newfound commitment to autonomy from the EU (Interview C08 & C12). Within the Commission, this decision was considered a clear loss as this was an area where continued cooperation could have added significant value (Interview B04, B08 & B12).

Since the UK's departure, the relationship with the EU has been governed by the provisions of the TCA, with the UK in the EU Third Country category and only limited, ad-hoc security cooperation (Cabinet Office, 2020). This has made cooperation more difficult, as UK policymakers now lack prior informal contacts in EU decision-bodies (Interview C13), making coordination more difficult and denying the UK ready knowledge of the EU position (Interview C08). Moreover, cooperation on S&D issues has been hampered by continuing poor relations at the political level, since lower-level officials do not feel they have the mandate to meet with counterparts in the UK/EU (Interview C02). Tension around the Northern Ireland Protocol, and a sense that the UK is deliberately side-lining the EU through its performance of its Global Britain role has further frustrated Union officials (Interview C17).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 served to concentrate minds in Brussels and London (Interviews C05 & C17), bringing about a partial thawing of political tensions and a more trusting security relationship (Interview C06). The UK's pro-active response to the conflict has helped cement London's reputation as an indispensable actor in European security (Interview C05), and the relatively technical nature of sanctions has assisted cooperation in the face of Russian aggression (Interview C04). Nonetheless, perceptions that the UK seeks to belittle the EU's contribution in service of the "Global Britain" agenda continue to bedevil what cooperation and coordination exists (Interview C02). Moreover, continued distrust towards the UK due to non-implementation of the NIP remains a significant issue (Interviews C17 & C21), while the strong collective response to the crisis still falls short of the benefits a more structured relationship could provide (Interview C02). Neither Liz Truss nor Rishi Sunak, Johnson's successors, proposed any formal changes to the security relationship, although the Labour Party has committed to a new security agreement if and when it returns to power ('Labour's David Lammy', 2023).

3.2 Trade and Economic Policy

The trade and economic relationship straddles the divide between 'low' and 'high' politics, and thus constitutes an important facet of the EU-UK's strategic relationship. As a former Member State, the UK's economic relationship with the EU is characterised by high levels of asymmetric



interdependence, in which the severing of institutional ties was always accepted to be costly for both sides, but especially for the UK (Hix, 2018). Initially, there were several options available for the EU-UK trading relationship ranging from a 'soft' Brexit, with UK membership of the Single Market and/or the Customs Union, to a 'hard' Brexit based on simple FTA. However, as the mandate from the referendum offered no guide to what Brexit would look like, it was also unclear which path the UK government would seek to follow.

The UK's negotiating position under May sought a bespoke Brexit in which the benefits of market access could be combined with an eschewal of the political trappings of integration, with an emphasis on close trade links in key sectors and selective divergence in others. To this was added restrictions on free movement of people, long a Conservative demand, while maintaining the free movement of goods and capital (Figueira & Martill, 2021). However, as became clear throughout negotiations this was viewed as an existential threat by the EU, with such 'cherry picking' considered an unacceptable outcome of the negotiations. From the EU side, maintaining the integrity of the Single Market was more valuable than maintaining access to the UK domestic market for EU firms (Schuette, 2021), rendering UK efforts to leverage their economic clout a non-starter.

The UK's inability to understand the incentives of the EU27 and the failure of May's 'hard bargaining' strategy over the course of the negotiations meant a partial retreat from 'cakeism'. The May government's proposals for the future relationship, the 'Chequers Plan' of July 2018, envisaged a free trade area for goods, a common rulebook, and a facilitated customs partnership. The intention behind Chequers was partly to keep the UK economically close to the EU, but also to obviate the need for border controls on the island of Ireland. A victim of the heightened turmoil in UK politics and the absence of a clear win-set in the negotiations (Schnapper, 2021), the Chequers proposals were rejected by EU leaders and by pro-Brexit Conservatives, leading to the resignation of Boris Johnson and David Davis.

The demise of the May government after the failure of the Withdrawal Agreement in the UK Parliament in 2019 passed the torch to the pro-Brexit faction in the party, represented by Boris Johnson. Under Johnson, the UK renegotiated elements of the Withdrawal Agreement and the Political Declaration, notably removing the Northern Ireland 'Backstop' and the commitment to a level playing field of economic regulations. As regards the future relationship, the Johnson government made clear it would be seeking a more autonomous relationship, based on a Canada-style FTA (Usherwood, 2021). The move towards a more distant relationship would involve more friction between the two economies and bring about higher costs for firms engaged in cross-border commerce, but would give the UK greater regulatory autonomy.

Negotiating an FTA with Johnson – albeit under considerable time-constraints – was arguably simpler for the Commission than negotiating on the basis of May's proposals, as Johnson's more autonomous Brexit was closer to the pre-packaged forms of association the EU27 had insisted were on offer. The EU's principal aim in the TCA negotiations was to lock the UK into a minimal regulatory framework in order to prevent the UK from engaging in competitive deregulation, undercutting the EU model (Interview B04). The Commission was also keen to head off any effort to undermine existing commitments, especially in regard to Northern



Ireland, and insisted on a robust dispute-settlement mechanism to maintain leverage over the UK after the deal was agreed. The final agreement, which provided for free trade in goods, locked the UK into level-playing field commitments and a dispute settlement mechanism, albeit without a role for the Court of Justice, a sticking point for the UK (Usherwood, 2021). The agreement did not cover services, nor did it provide for the ‘frictionless trade’ Johnson claimed he had obtained.

The coming into force of the TCA in January 2021 brought about a more distant economic relationship between the UK and the EU. Within the UK, this has resulted in backlogs, shortages, and protracted difficulties moving goods across borders, but the domestic effects of these challenges have been partially occluded by the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (Interviews B08 & B12). While issues regarding the implementation of the TCA have been relatively minor, the Northern Ireland Protocol has continued to cause upset in the UK-EU relationship (Interviews C05 & C14), with the UK government refusing to implement the required checks in the Irish Sea, and supporting legislation aimed at undercutting select parts of the agreement. These issues have sparked fears of a trade war, but the EU opted for continued negotiations over infringement proceedings and retaliatory measures. The TCA also created institutional bodies such as the Trade and Cooperation Agreement Partnership Council, which met for the first time in 2021, to manage the implementation of the TCA and act as a forum for the discussion of such sensitive issues (TCA Art. 2 & 7.2; HM Government 2023b).

In February 2023, PM Rishi Sunak reached an agreement with Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on the ‘Windsor Framework’ to replace the Protocol. This has resulted in renewed economic relations, beginning with a second meeting of the TCA Partnership Council on 24 March 2023. It is expected that the framework will support future economic cooperation, including a Memorandum of Understanding on intellectual property and financial services, which will continue to regularise UK-EU trade relations (European Commission, 2023e). At present, the new Framework should reduce the customs burden of traders between the UK and NI and the UK remains optimistic that NI can have the benefits of both being in the UK market and single market. However, certain aspects of the Framework, such as expanded ‘green lane’ access for UK-NI traders, still need to be worked out in practice (Birnie, 2023). Agreement on the Windsor Framework has also raised the prospect of improved relations in other areas, including an increase in security and defence cooperation (Foy & Parker, 2023).

3.3 The Impact of EU Member States

Remarkably for such a contentious issue as Brexit, and disappointingly for UK negotiators, the EU Member States maintained a high degree of coherence throughout the Brexit process. This section investigates the impact of this coherence on the outcome of the negotiations in the two preceding policy areas.

The initial phase, from 2016–2018, was marked by a very low intensity of negotiations on both sides in this field. EU Member State coherence was high on all policy areas, including *S+D Cooperation*, and, thus, there was little defection from the EU position that the UK’s exit had to



be negotiated first before the post-Brexit relationship could take shape. Some Member States, especially those in Central and Eastern Europe, were keener than others to negotiate a security agreement with the UK, but the high degree of unity among the EU27 and the Commission's tight control of the process via sequencing prevented the UK from dividing-and-ruling in this area.

Under the Johnson government, tensions began to build between the UK and various EU Member States, with the new PM presiding over a shift in security strategy which emphasised bilateral ties over EU ones and which sought to establish the UK's 'Global Britain' credentials (HM Government, 2021; Weber, 2021). The trilateral AUKUS deal, between Australia, the UK, and the US to provide nuclear powered submarines to Australia (HM Government, 2023a), was seen as a slight to the French who had previously been contracted to upgrade the Australian submarine fleet (Interview C03 & C07). The Johnson government's continued refusal to implement the Northern Ireland Protocol soured relations with the EU more generally, convincing some – especially France – to become more sceptical of UK involvement in EU S+D decision-making structures and programs (Interview C10).

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, UK-EU and UK-EU Member State S+D cooperation increased significantly. The return of the UK to PESCO was assisted by increasing UK-EU Member State bilateral security agreements. In particular, Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic states increased their bilateral ties with the UK (van Ondarza, 2022). These contributed to an increase in the number of such agreements, helping to solidify the UK's ties with EU Member States in the S+D field even as negotiations for a formal UK-EU relationship was ongoing.

Further, 'minilateral' S+D cooperation continued with the Joint Expeditionary Force, Hybrid Threats Centre of Excellence Helsinki, Northern Group of Defence Ministers, or the European Intervention Initiative (E2I) all continuing to operate as 'minilateral' frameworks for UK-EU Member State S+D cooperation (RUSI, 2023). The UK also has joined the European Sky Shield Initiative, a consortium of NATO allies and European states under the leadership of Germany intending to support joint European air defence procurement and development (NATOa, 2023). Thus, the UK and Member States used bilateral and 'minilateral' frameworks to supplement the ongoing EU-UK S+D cooperation with the Russian invasion of Ukraine providing impetus for further development.

Unity between the EU Member States was high in the *trade and economic policy* domain too. While this was partly a consequence of the high level of actorness the EU has in trade and economic policy, it was also brought about by the risk of fragmentation inherent in Brexit. The Member States agreed early on in the process that Brexit presented an existential threat to the Union and to the integrity of the Single Market, and that the UK should not be offered concessions that would undermine the existing balance of rights and obligations or incentivise the exit of other Member States. It was anticipated that the UK would seek to 'divide-and-rule' among the EU27, and that the best way to prevent this would be to agree a common position, and to reinforce this with a clear line of delegation from the European Council to the Commission.



This level of unity held throughout the Withdrawal Negotiations and the talks on the Future Relationship, even as the UK made effort to appeal bilaterally to individual Member States, especially Germany on the economic relationship and East European states on security issues. While individual Member States had their own preferences in relation to, for example, financial services (Luxembourg), fisheries (France, Denmark, the Netherlands), security (the Baltics), and the regulatory border (Ireland), the Commission's constant back-and-forth between national capitals and EU institutions prevented divergent priorities from spilling into disunity in the negotiations. Overall, the Member States had the same preferences when it came to the need to protect the Single Market, not least since the major domestic actors all valued the integrity of the market itself more than they did the potential lost trade with Britain.

The negotiation of the TCA itself – which provides for the current economic and trade relationship between the UK and the EU – was conducted on the basis of the mandate agreed with the EU27 at the beginning of 2020, and at no point did the Member States break rank. While the Commission did not succeed in negotiating everything it wanted, the end-result remained true to the Union's initial goals (Usherwood, 2021). By leveraging the UK's need for a deal, and incorporating the significant needs of individual Member States into its asks (e.g. on fisheries) EU27 unity held relatively easily. Moreover, this unity has held during the implementation phase, with reported UK efforts to use the allocation of fishing permits to France as a political weapon backfiring and producing rather increased unity among the remaining Member States.

3.4 Assessing the EU-UK Relationship

The *coherence* of the EU27 was remarkably high during the conduct of the Brexit negotiations (e.g. Chopin & Lequesne, 2021; Jensen & Kelstrup, 2019; Laffan, 2019; Schuette, 2021; Taggart et al., forthcoming). This reflecting the high degree of shared interests in the outcome, widespread recognition that only a united EU position could offer a strong basis for the negotiations, and the efforts of Michel Barnier as Chief Negotiator, who made a concerted effort to keep all parties apprised. Coherence between the Member States was echoed in strong inter-institutional relationships, especially between the European Council, the Commission, and the Parliament (Bressanelli et al., 2019). The level of coherence in the EU position undergirded the Union's bargaining strength and helped obtain an outcome for Brexit that was close to the EU's desired outcome, whilst also contributing to undercutting UK 'divide-and-rule' efforts (Figueira & Martill, 2021). Whether for good or ill, the EU's approach to the relationship was highly horizontally and vertically coherent, ensuring that the 'no cherry picking' line was thoroughly followed across all policy areas (Interview C11). During the Johnson years, at least, with the post-Johnson era marked by more cooperation across a variety of policy areas in the face of Russian aggression against Ukraine (Financial Times, 2023).

This is not to say that individual preferences were not discernible. Some Member States, especially those closest to the UK, were more exposed economically to harder designs on Brexit and to any decline in access to UK fishing stocks, while some Member States – such as



France – advocated taking a stronger stance with the UK than others, especially after bilateral crises around migration and access for French fishermen (Syal & Henley, 2021; Boffey & O’Carroll, 2021). In the S&D domain, the Baltic and Central and Eastern European states, i.e. members of the UK-led JEF and Northern Group (RUSI, 2023), were keen to maintain their close security relationship with the UK as a hedge against Russian provocation (Interviews C08, C11, C14 & C15), with larger Member States more ambivalent due to either their size (Interview C05), their independent capacity, or their general lack of trust towards the UK (Interview C04). And yet these differences did not alter the EU position, which was based on agreement in the European Council and delegation to the Commission, with no opportunity for London to offer different deals directly to the Member States.

Overall, EU *effectiveness* has been mixed when examined across both policy areas. In the economic and trading relationship, EU effectiveness could be said to be very high as the EU managed to achieve almost all of its goals in the negotiations. While this has not been cost free, with costs borne most by the UK, and by those Member States geographically closest to Britain (Interview C11), the overall result was that the EU successfully protected the integrity of the Single Market and avoided a hard border in Ireland (Schuette, 2021). Johnson’s decision to seek an FTA, while regrettable in the sense it would mean a more distant relationship, solved the issue of ‘cherry picking’ and, combined with the EU’s insistence on robust dispute-settlement and level playing field provisions in the TCA, established a framework in which a more autonomous economic relationship is not a competitive threat to the EU. When compared to the initial post-Brexit fears of either institutional collapse or a British recourse to competitive deregulation, this is a not inconsiderable achievement.

The EU has been less effective in managing the S&D relationship, however. Although this was always going to be an area where the costs of Brexit would be mitigated by the nature of security collaboration and the presence of other institutional actors, many in the Commission see the failure to reach an agreement as a significant loss for the EU (Interviews B04, B08 & B12). Current arrangements are sub-optimal for both sides, making coordination more difficult and hampering a coherent line on foreign policy questions (Interview C08). While the Ukraine War has brought about an increase in ad hoc cooperation and an improvement in relations, this is not regarded as a workable substitute for a structured relationship in securing European interests in the long-term (Interview C02). Responsibility for this outcome lies with the UK, given the current government’s opposition to institutionalised cooperation within the EU framework (Interview C05), but it has also been claimed frequently that the EU’s offer in this domain would never be an attractive one for the UK (Martill & Sus, 2022; von Ondarza, 2022; Svendsen, 2022).

As regards the economic and trading relationship, with the Windsor Framework potentially having solved the *unsustainable* situation vis-à-vis the Northern Ireland Protocol, the broader underlying relationship is sustainable, if not optimal. The EU has succeeded in tying the UK into a framework which will make UK divergence tolerable for the Union, with a toolkit of responses to allow the EU to deal with potential non-compliance on behalf of London. In the longer-term, the TCA is not optimal for the underlying volume of trade between the UK and the



EU, though any discussion of alternative forms of association are likely to raise thorny political questions which neither side has an interest in re-opening. Moreover, future UK or EU divergence under the current framework would greatly increase the transactions costs of any future participation by London in the Single Market.

The security and defence relationship can, similarly, persist into the future without a significant security gap, given the background presence of NATO. But it offers a poor framework when it comes to the task of coordinating the actions of the UK and the EU, which is only going to become more important in the future, given the increase in external challenges and the extend of shared UK-EU interests. An agreement in security and defence would be an easy win for both sides, with low-hanging fruit available in the form of even basic routinisation and institutionalisation, which is potentially one reason why the Labour Party is keen for such an agreement. In this domain, an SP-style framework could pay dividends and be negotiated with relatively little acrimony.



4 The United States: Partnership and Performance?

"The relationship between the EU and the U.S. is one of the most important bilateral relationships in the world. The EU and U.S. are the biggest economic and military powers in the world, dominate global trade, play the leading roles in international political relations, and whatever one says matters a great deal, not only to the other, but to much of the rest of the world" (European Parliament Liaison Office in Washington DC, 2023).

The EU and US are often seen as sharing common values and a desire for a rules-based international order, democracy and free enterprise (Delegation of the European Union to the United States of America, 2021). The US has provided a lot of support for a united Europe, evidenced by post-WWII policies (BBC, 2015; Rappaport, 1981). Besides relieving the need for (expensive) US protection, a strong and united Europe would also ease diplomatic dealings: the US would have a 'single phone number' to conduct European affairs instead of having to negotiate with dozens of partners (Rappaport, 1981, pp. 131-132). Despite this, US support for a unified Europe has not been monolithic. Under the Trump administration and in certain parts of US political life, a desire to leverage the EU's decentralisation has been displayed by either wanting to negotiate trade agreements with individual countries instead of the EU bloc or by denouncing the way European integration has taken place (Malloch, 2017; Schneider-Petsinger, 2019).

EU-US relations were first formalised with the 1990 Transatlantic Declaration, the 1995 New Transatlantic Agenda (NTA) and the 1995 Joint EU-US Action Plan (EC-US Summit, 1990; EU-US Summit, 1995a; EU-US Summit, 1995b). These documents deal with political issues of the time, such as the collapse of Yugoslavia, but they also set out more general shared transatlantic goals such as the promotion of peace and stability, democracy, global development and closer economic relations. When describing the US in its 2003 European Security Strategy, its 2016 Global Strategy and its 2022 Strategic Compass, it is clear that the EU sees the US as its single most important global partner (Council of the European Union, 2003; Council of the European Union, 2009; European External Action Service, 2016; Council of the European Union, 2022). Conversely, the US dubs the EU as its "foundational partner in addressing the deep range of global challenges" (US Department of Defense, 2022, p. 38).

Official forums include diplomatic missions and parliamentary contacts. Formal diplomatic contacts at 'governmental level' are maintained through The US mission to the EU and the Delegation of the European Union to the United States of America. Parliamentary contacts are mainly situated in the US Congress' EU Caucus, the Transatlantic Legislator's Dialogue and the European Parliament's Liaison Office in DC. Besides such specific 'bilateral' contacts, both the EU and the US participate and (sometimes) coordinate in many important multilateral international organisations such as the WTO, IMF, OECD, the G7 and the G20. When it comes to military cooperation, NATO remains an essential factor in transatlantic relations that also impacts the EU – despite the fact that their memberships remain slightly different.



A peak of transatlantic cooperation was arguably in the 1990s during the presidencies of George H.W. Bush and William J. Clinton: with the EU and NATO expanding side by side, a strong US presence was an important stabilising factor for the tumultuous post-Cold War years (Hazleton, 2000; Kornblum, 2018; Lundestad, 2003, pp. 257-264). The George W. Bush presidency, steeped in unilateralism, and the Iraq war already revealed some EU-US tensions that were to show themselves even more clearly two presidents later (Cameron, 2003; Lundestad, 2003, pp. 269-293). Though some argued the tensions arose a lot earlier, a strong shift in European public stances toward the transatlantic relationship came with the presidency of Donald J. Trump (Lamy, 2023). In many mediated performances, president Trump took aim at Europe in two major ways: demanding European NATO members to spend at least 2% of their GDP's worth in defence spending and erecting trade barriers between the EU and the US, sparking fears of a trade war (Emmott, 2018; Rose & Shirbon; Schneider-Petsinger, 2019, pp. 12-13; Shalal & Lawder). President Trump felt cheated by the EU's trade surplus concerning goods (see figure 4 below) and expressed preferences for bilateral agreements at country level, impossible under the EU's Treaties (Schneider-Petsinger, 2019, pp. 12-13). Though such confrontations were not new (think of the so-called 'banana wars' under president Clinton or the beef hormone dispute), previous confrontations were mostly handled in a less confrontational manner or through the WTO/GATT system (Johnson, 2015; Sweeney, 1999).

In a heavily mediated speech in a Munich beer hall, German chancellor Angela Merkel said that "[t]he era in which we could fully rely on others is over to some extent" (Karnitschnig, 2017). This comment was often misunderstood as denouncing transatlantic relations (something that is easily countered by Germany policy and some later clarifications), but it did put into words a European policy shift (Merkel, 2017). EU discussions on 'strategic autonomy' came into higher gear and EU leaders clearly and explicitly articulated the desire for reducing their total reliance on the US (Merkel, 2018). Though the concept of 'strategic autonomy' precedes it, the Trump presidency functioned as a catalyst for EU policymakers' desire to develop more autonomy from the US which was perceived as unreliable in that period of time (Cañas, 2020; Emmott, 2019).¹ The EU takes care to assure that this strategic autonomy does not exist to rival the US or NATO, but is rather complimentary to it (Borell, 2020; Damen, 2022, p. 2).

Despite declarations that 'America is Back', there are some who accuse president Biden of remaining on a course of increased unilateralism or even of continuing president Trump's protectionist path – old wine in new bottles (Adebahr et al., 2022; Lamy, 2023; White House, 2021). Though EU-US tensions existed before president Trump and will exist after him, according to these authors there is a sense that things are different now. Depending on one's view, 'old wine in new bottles' could take on two opposite meanings. One is that there is

¹ Strategic autonomy may be accepted in EU circles as an abstract concept and goal, but what such autonomy would look like specifically is still unclear (Tamma, 2020). This question has triggered much activity in think tanks (Grajewski, 2021). More recently, the concept seems to shift according to EU needs at a given time, with energy, defence and economy indicated as main priorities (Damen, 2022).

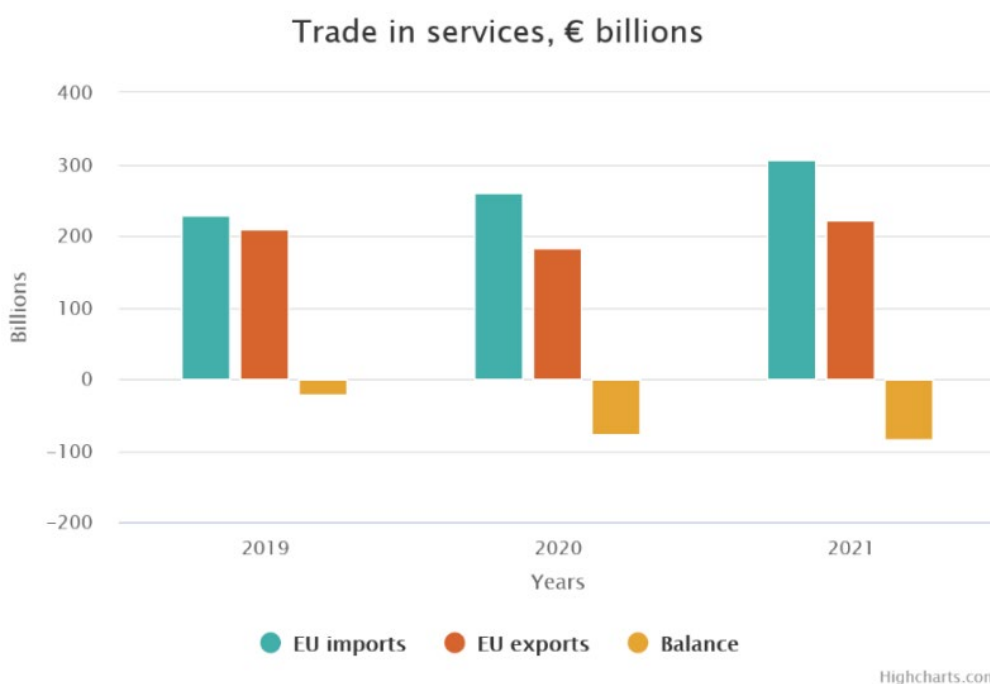


nothing new about the challenges currently facing the EU-US partnership and solutions will present themselves as they have in the past. Another is that the 'turn' commenced since 2003/2016 is in essence continued under the Biden administration and that there will be definite changes to the EU-US strategic partnership.

4.1 Economic Cooperation: Open Markets or Veiled Protectionism?

Besides a large overlap of geopolitical goals and political positions, EU-US cooperation is characterised by incredibly deep economic ties due to similar free market approaches. The EU is the largest exporter of manufactured goods and services, and the world's largest investor: positions it claims to have attained through its incredible economic openness (European Parliament, 2023). At the same time, the EU's agricultural policies have drawn the charge of protectionism for a long time, while the new US Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) often elicits a similar reaction. The EU furthermore exerts an immense regulatory influence on the rest of the world, including the United States, dubbed 'the Brussels Effect' (Bradford, 2020).

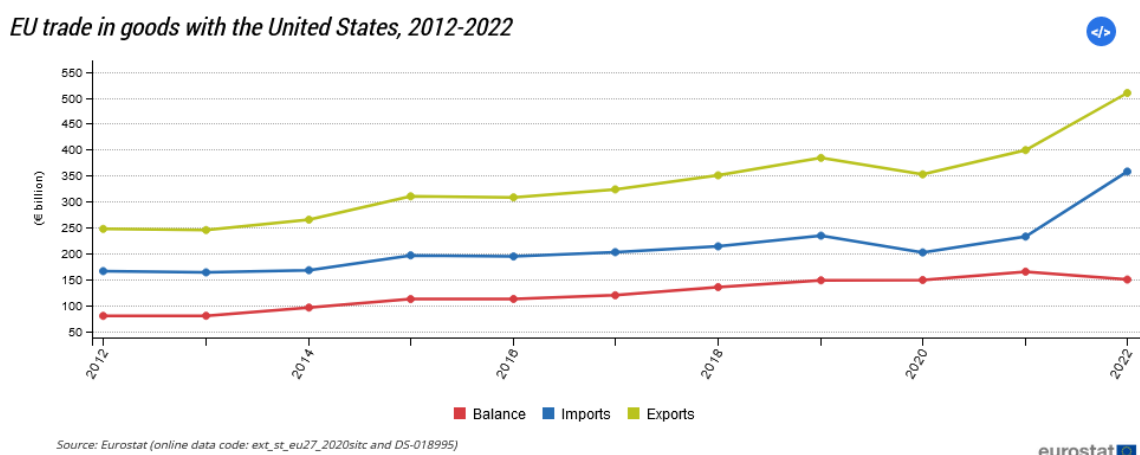
Figure 3: EU-US Trade in Services



Source: Highcharts.com

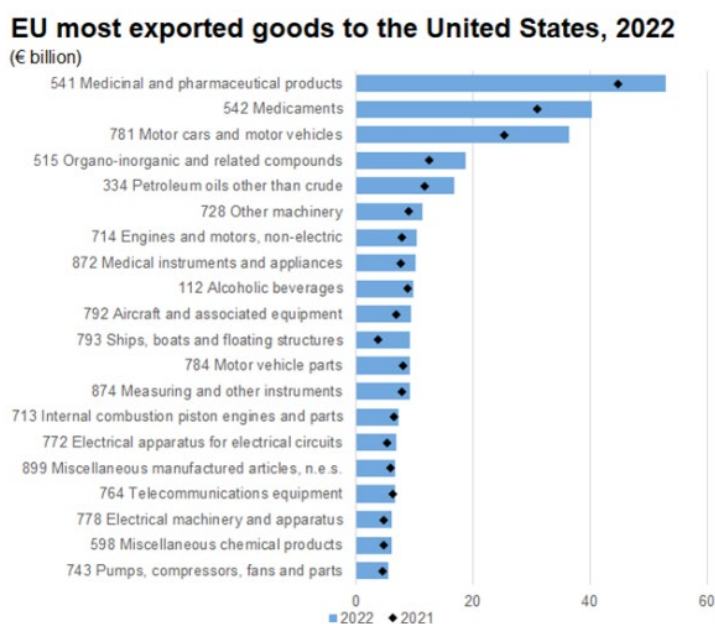


Figure 4: EU-US Trade in Goods



The US is the EU’s second largest market for exported goods, only recently overtaken by China in 2020, and the EU’s largest market for services (European Parliament, 2023). Overall it has been contended that the US remains the EU’s foremost trading partner, as has been the case for decades (Hamilton, 2021). Figures 3 to 8 give an overview of the current EU-US trade relationship, showing a trade surplus in goods, which became the target of US ire under the Trump administration, and a trade deficit in services. Figures 7 and 8 also give an overview of individual EU Member States, showing Germany, the Netherlands and France as top US trading partners within the EU. AmCham EU’s 2023 report on the transatlantic economy offers an overview of the incredible scale and interconnectedness of the EU-US economy (Hamilton & Quinlan, 2023).

Figure 5: Most Exported EU goods to the United States



Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-018995)





Figure 6: EU Most Imported Goods from the United States



Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-018995)



Figure 7: Largest EU Importers from the United States

EU imports of goods from the United States, 2022

	€ million	% of the United States in extra EU imports
Germany	69 893	11.9
Netherlands	68 243	13.0
France	53 535	17.8
Belgium	35 217	14.3
Spain	30 359	13.0
Italy	24 904	7.7
Ireland	20 370	22.4
Poland	11 737	9.0
Sweden	7 258	10.3
Denmark	4 914	12.2
Austria	4 620	8.3
Lithuania	3 995	20.6
Czechia	3 631	5.8
Portugal	3 505	10.5
Greece	3 455	6.5
Croatia	3 176	24.5
Finland	2 956	9.3
Hungary	1 924	3.9
Romania	1 347	3.7
Bulgaria	811	3.3
Slovakia	658	2.7
Luxembourg	648	25.7
Slovenia	382	1.2
Estonia	272	4.9
Malta	260	7.8
Latvia	257	4.2
Cyprus	89	1.9

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext_st_eu27_2020sitc and DS-018995)





Figure 8: EU Exported Goods to the United States

EU exports of goods to the United States, 2022

	€ million	% of the United States in extra EU exports
Germany	155 737	21.8
Italy	65 121	22.0
Ireland	59 444	48.3
France	46 586	18.0
Netherlands	37 389	14.1
Belgium	35 410	18.3
Spain	18 910	13.0
Sweden	17 354	20.1
Austria	12 948	21.2
Denmark	11 975	21.5
Poland	10 247	12.2
Finland	7 785	21.8
Czechia	5 778	13.6
Portugal	5 076	21.9
Hungary	4 263	13.6
Slovakia	3 502	17.3
Lithuania	2 360	14.1
Romania	2 270	8.9
Greece	2 220	9.0
Estonia	1 161	17.9
Bulgaria	994	6.2
Slovenia	908	3.7
Latvia	588	7.6
Croatia	553	7.2
Luxembourg	509	16.0
Malta	136	8.1
Cyprus	97	3.2

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext_st_eu27_2020sitc and DS-018995)



A potential EU-US free trade agreement dubbed ‘*Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership*’ (TTIP) failed in 2016 (Council of the European Union, 2019; European Commission, 2023f). This lack of free trade agreement means that WTO rules govern the EU-US trade relations. Nevertheless, EU-US trade still enjoys some of the lowest average tariffs in the world at around 3% (European Commission, 2023a). At present, after a rise under the Trump presidency, there are some 40 running cases involving the US and EU before the WTO where the EU is applicant or defendant, affecting some 2% of EU-US trade (European Commission, 2023a, 2023g).

Besides the multilateral WTO, there have been attempts to create bilateral EU-US forums for economic coordination and consultation. The *Transatlantic Economic Council* (TEC), established in 2007, meets once a year to coordinate economic cooperation between the EU and the US (EU-US Summit, 2007). It “seeks to eliminate trade barriers, implement best practices, harmonize standards, and develop market access” (U.S. Department of State Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, 2023a). Though with some activity, the TEC as a forum has arguably been surpassed by a more recent organisation (e.g. U.S.-EU Transatlantic Economic Council, 2010). The new *EU-US Trade and Technology Council* (TTC), founded after the Trump presidency which included some rocky years for EU-US relations, arguably has the most momentum as a bilateral EU-US trade forum (European Commission, 2023c; Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2023; U.S. Department of State Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, 2023b). The TTC “serves as a forum for the United States and European Union to coordinate approaches to key global trade, economic, and technology issues and to deepen transatlantic trade and economic relations based on these shared values” (European Commission, 2023c). It has proven to be more active than its predecessor, releasing longer



and more detailed joint statements indicating its progress (EU-U.S. Trade and Technology Council (TTC), 2022a, 2022b). The TTC has ten working groups which focus on: (1) Technology Standards; (2) Climate and Clean Tech; (3) Secure Supply Chains; (4) ICTS Security and Competitiveness; (5) Data Governance and Technology Platforms; (6) Misuse of Technology Threatening Security & Human Rights; (7) Cooperation on Export Controls of Dual Use Items; (8) Investment Screening Cooperation; (9) Promoting SME Access To and Use of Digital Technologies; and (10) Global Trade Challenges (U.S. Department of State Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, 2023b).

Despite both proudly claiming to be free market systems, some discussions surrounding (veiled) protectionist measures by both the EU and the US remain. In ensuring food security for its citizens, the EU has instated a 'Common Agricultural Policy' (CAP). The CAP accounts for around 30% of the entire EU budget (European Commission, 2021a). It arguably resorts to some protectionist measures such as market price policies and extensive development subsidies to protect food security (Marković & Marković, 2014, pp. 428-430; Rydén, 2013, pp. 6-7, 10-12). This and other EU agricultural policies have drawn ire from the US and agriculture has been a major obstacle when negotiating free trade agreements ('US dubs EU's', 2020; Levy-Abegnoli, 2016; Sarmadi, 2016).

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) ushers in a green transition for the United States, but is also meant to give a boost to US domestic industries, often at great cost for foreign manufacturers and industrial research. By offering a great amount of incentives to companies to relocate through massive state aid packages, the IRA is a tough competitor for the EU economy (von der Leyen, 2022). This has sparked a lot of worry from the EU's (and also the UK's) side, including accusations of protectionism (Fahy, 2022; Honeycombe-Foster & Blanchard, 2023; Majkut, 2023). Both France and Germany have made efforts to challenge the IRA (e.g. Kraemer & Lawder, 2023).

4.2 Military Cooperation: NATO and the EU

Though different institutions with different memberships, NATO and the EU are a part of the same Transatlantic ecosystem and heavily influence each other. Arguably the pinnacle of (non-economic) transatlantic cooperation, NATO is a crucial player. The Treaty on the European Union mentions NATO explicitly in its article 42(2) and every EU Member State except for Austria, Cyprus, Malta and Ireland is also a member of NATO or in the process of joining NATO. That means 22 (and soon probably 23) out of 27 EU members are also members of NATO.

NATO and the EU recognise each other as essential partners (European External Action Service, 2023a; EU & NATO, 2018; NATO, 2023c). Yet some important differences remain. The US' massive influence within NATO due to much higher defence spending is undeniable. Another important point of tension is different approaches to nuclear disarmament. Whereas Austria and Ireland are important proponents of accelerated nuclear disarmament, NATO has reaffirmed its status as a 'nuclear alliance' and its members have kept their distance from new initiatives such as the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (e.g. Meier & Vieluf, 2021).



The EU has become more active in the fields of security and defence, but it remains to be seen whether such efforts will be sustained and how its generally more neutral Member States like Ireland and Austria will fit into this (Besch, 2022; European Council, 2023a; European External Action Service, 2022; Ewers-Peters, 2021; High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2023). The EU's expressed desire for 'strategic autonomy', the development of its own Common Security and Defence Policy, and its recent foray into military matters following the Russian invasion of Ukraine begs the important long-term question: in taking up more military tasks, in what way will the EU come to resemble, cooperate or even compete with US-led NATO?

4.3 Intellectual Cooperation: Research, Development and Education

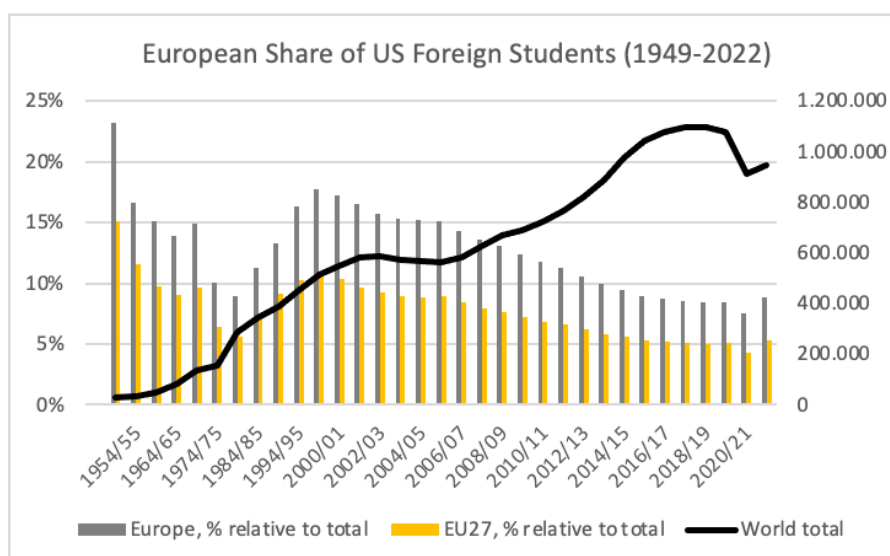
In 2020, there were some 1.46 million foreign students in EU tertiary education (including intra-EU), of which some 1 million were non-EU students. Of these non-EU students, some 25.000 were US students (around 1.7% of total mobility, around 2.4% of non-EU mobility) (Eurostat, 2023).

The United States is the number one individual country destination for student mobility, receiving some 950.000 students in the 2021–2022 academic year with half coming from India and China (Institute of International Education, 2023). A number that is still recovering post-COVID, seeing as this number topped one million between 2015 and 2020 (Open Doors, 2023a). Of the total amount of incoming foreign students in the US, some 50.000 come from the EU27 (5.2% of total foreign students) (Open Doors, 2023b). The amount of EU27 students has steadily floated around 50.000 students since the 1990s, though the relative share of EU27 students has halved from 10% in the 1990s to around 5% today due to an explosive increase of Asian students (see Figures 9, 10) (Open Doors, 2023b).

Despite such a relatively low number of exchange students, there is a lot of high-level research cooperation between the US and the EU, as well as a lot of R&D investments (European Commission, 2023d; Hamilton & Quinlan, 2023, pp. 19–20). Particular mention should go to the Horizon project, which allows non-EU companies and research institutions to participate and acquire EU funding, where the US has the highest level of cooperation of any non-EU State. Most private company R&D spending is done by US corporations (Hamilton & Quinlan, 2023, p. 20). In 2020, European affiliates of US owned companies spent 31.6 billion dollars on R&D in Europe, accounting for some 54% of total US R&D (Hamilton & Quinlan, 2023, p. 19). US affiliates of European businesses, headed by Germany, spent 47.8 billion dollars in the US, 67% of the total foreign research spending in the US (Hamilton & Quinlan, 2023, pp. 19–20). The TTC, discussed above, in December 2022 also called for further EU-US research collaboration on AI and quantum technologies (EU-U.S. Trade and Technology Council (TTC), 2022a; Sabin, 2023).

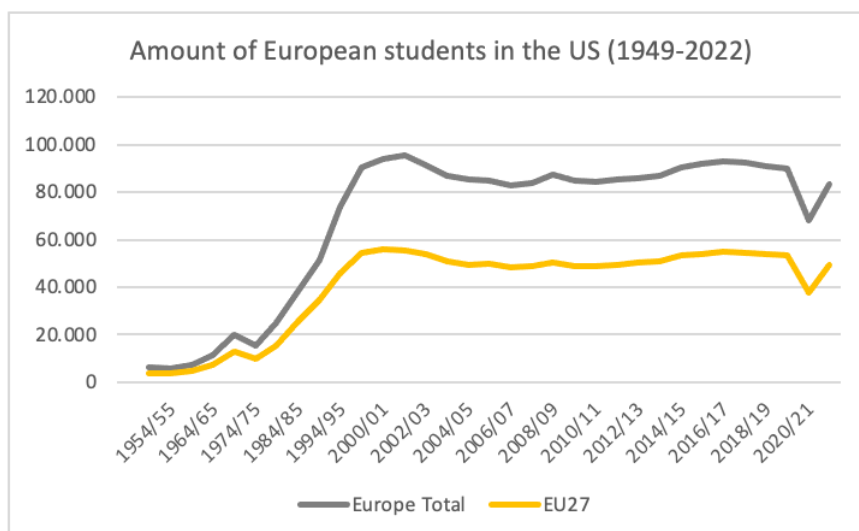


Figure 9: European Students in the US



Source: Open Doors (2023b)

Figure 10: European Share of US Foreign Students



Source: Open Doors (2023b)

4.4 Coherence: Leveraging Decentralisation?

Concerning trade, Germany is convincingly the EU's largest economy, the US' 5th most important trading partner and the US' largest EU trading partner when it comes to goods (with more than double the amount of trade than France which is number 3 from the EU and 12th overall) (US Census Bureau, 2023). This helps to explain why Germany was targeted to such



an extent by the Trump administration *and* why Germany is most in favour of an EU-US free trade agreement (Moens, 2022; Sims, 2022). On the contrary, France was often seen as an obstacle to TTIP negotiations, possibly linked to it being a great supporter of the CAP ('Germany and France divided', 2016; Ministère de l'agriculture et de la souveraineté alimentaire, 2017; Rankin, 2016).

Concerning military cooperation, France has historically been more sceptical of NATO cooperation and US primacy and more in favour of EU based military cooperation. Already in the 1960s, France withdrew from NATO's military structure to obtain greater military independence from the US and to change NATO's form without changing its foundational alliance (Ministère de l'Europe et des affaires étrangères, 2023; NATO, 2023b). Cyprus, Ireland, Malta and Austria are not (in the process of becoming) NATO members.

When it comes to EU coherence regarding the EU-US partnership in general, both at present and historically, France seems most eager to resist US dominance concerning trade, defence and the overall policy towards China (Chivvis & Droin, 2022; Rich, 2023). Whether this is perceived as troublesome or useful depends on the issue, one's personal views and, seemingly, on the US president at the helm. Determining whether France's push for strategic autonomy vis-à-vis military matters, agricultural policy and China is to be cheered or jeered is not the purpose of this paper. It is however abundantly clear that France, sometimes supported by Germany, is the main actor bringing nuance to the transatlantic partnership, challenging the US and aiming for the EU to become a 'third superpower' (Macron et al., 2023). Generally, Central and Eastern European Member States are more pro-US and more in favour of NATO for their national security (Barigazzi, 2023; Zachová & Kurmayer, 2023).

4.5 Challenges and Future of the Transatlantic Relationship

With semiconductors, green energy and green vehicles gaining increased economic importance, their production and supply lines are gaining political attention. Though these industries greatly profited from economic openness, there has been a push through the US' CHIPS Act and Inflation Reduction Act to 'onshore' them (US Congress, 2022a; US Congress, 2022b). An EU response is in the works in the European Chips Act (Bertuzzi, 2023; European Commission, 2023b; Van Haver, 2023). The importance of semiconductors in future economic development can hardly be overstated. Though promises of greater transparency and cooperation between the EU and the US to counter China are made, these often remain at the level of rhetoric (EU-U.S. Trade and Technology Council (TTC), 2022a; Hayashi, 2022). The IRA has also triggered wider protests over perceived US protectionist impulses or lack of good faith towards the EU (Daalder, 2022; Moens et al., 2022). The question remains whether the EU-US tradition of economic openness and free trade can be sustained in times of heightened geopolitical tensions and resulting economic instability (Gehrke & Ruge, 2022; Tchernookova, 2022).

Certain strands in US politics, mostly in the Republican party, are openly critical of EU-US relations, shared support of the Ukrainian government or president Macron's calls for strategic



autonomy (Daalder, 2022; Gramer & Lu, 2023; Malley, 2023; Vinocur, 2023). Such views critical of Europe are not new. President Eisenhower once (allegedly) sneered:

I get weary of the European habit of taking our money, resenting any slight hint as to what they should do, and then assuming, in addition, full right to criticize us as bitterly as they may desire. In fact, it sometimes appears that their indulgence in this kind of criticism varies in direct ratio to the amount of help we give them (Lundestad, 2003, p. 71).

The advent of more isolationist strands in US domestic politics would put even more pressure on the EU-US partnership. Similarly, it remains to be seen what form the EU's proposed 'strategic autonomy' could take. As stated earlier, the EU is always quick to reiterate that such autonomy should function as complementary to EU-US cooperation. The question remains to what extent this might change in the future, depending on either the EU's changing foreign policy goals or the EU's response to changing leadership in the US.

The US political establishment has for a while been seeking to refocus its attention on Asia and competition with China (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023; Garamone, 2023; Gramer & Lu, 2023). Compare, for example, the subtle change in wording and order of regions in consecutive US national security strategies: since 2015, Asia consistently features before Europe (compare e.g. US Department of Defense, 1987 and US Department of Defense, 1999 with US Department of Defense, 2015; US Department of Defense, 2017 and US Department of Defense, 2022). It seeks support from Europe and the EU in cutting economic ties and more aggressively confronting China (Lynch et al., 2023). The EU is more reluctant to do so. It criticises China for its domestic policies and calls it a 'systemic rival', but at the same time also recognises it as a valuable trade partner and pursues a 'flexible and pragmatic' policy (European External Action Service, 2023b). The EU-US partnership seems at present divided on the third dimension China represents. How the EU-China-US triangle manages to shape its relationship will have immense consequences for the world.



5 Turkey: Accession Country or a Strategic Partner for the EU?

"Turkey remains a key partner for the European Union in essential areas of joint interest, such as migration, counterterrorism, economy, trade, energy, food security and transport" (European Commission, 2022a).

Turkey is frequently referred to as a key partner by the EU and its Member States, yet this has certainly not been an easy partnership to navigate. In addition to being designated a partner, in recent years, it has also become commonplace in the EU to refer to Turkey among its key external challengers in the wider neighbourhood (Aydın-Düzgüt & Noutcheva, 2022). Turkey is also a unique case in its own right, in terms of the evolution of its relations with the EU from other third countries as well as the EU's officially designated strategic partners. While Turkey has an Association Agreement dating back to 1963 and is a candidate country since 1999, with an ongoing accession negotiation process since 2005, its relations with the EU are ambivalent. Accession negotiations have been de facto frozen since 2013. Yet, Turkey is not officially designated as one of the strategic partners for the EU. Nonetheless, one could observe that the EU is increasingly referring to Turkey as a key partner in its official documents and reports on Turkey. According to the European Commission, "Türkiye is a key strategic partner of the EU on issues such as climate, migration, security, counter-terrorism and the economy" (European Commission, DG NEAR, n.d.). The 2022 Strategic Compass made that also clear in terms of the EU's stance towards Turkey, where rather than an accession country, it is referred to as a strategic partner. This is precisely why this section takes upon the case study of Turkey, as an illustration of how a candidate country in the EU's periphery could move from an accession status to a strategic partner. While this categorisation is different than the EU's official designation of strategic partners – as demonstrated in Muftuler-Bac (2022, ENGAGE [Working Paper 13](#)) – Turkey's multiple ties to the EU in different policy areas bring forth an informal reference to Turkey as one of the strategic partners, similar to the UK case.

One of the key reasons behind the EU's ambivalence has to do with the divide among the EU as a whole and the EU Member States in terms of their approach towards Turkey. One could argue that some EU Member States have vested interests in building solid ties and engagement with Turkey while others are using their own EU Member status to settle their own scores with Turkey as veto players. In particular, and especially after Brexit, Germany is solidifying its role as a key and leading player in shaping Turkey's relations with the EU in policy areas such as economic integration and migration, while Greece, France and Cyprus are advancing their own security interests in the Eastern Mediterranean especially with regards to energy and security. In a similar vein, the Member States have diverging preferences in terms of their preferred forms of relationship with Turkey. While some EU Member States such as Hungary and Italy prefer a continuation of the accession track-based relationship with Turkey, others such as France prefer a revision of the accession track with a new model of relationship. Therefore, this section identifies the key challenges in Turkey's newly emerging status as a strategic partner, and the policy areas where this partnership is essential. In



addition, an in-depth analysis is conducted of the EU's position, on the one hand, and the Member States' on the other, to assess policy coherence for the EU's external action with regards to its strategic partnership with Turkey.

For the empirical assessment of Turkey's position as a strategic partner, an in-depth overview of the official documents was conducted which included all the EU Strategic Partnership documents (4 in total), all the European Commission Progress Reports on Turkey (17 in total) as well as 150 official documents on the partnership with Turkey. This in-depth analysis reveals Turkey's ambivalent position from the European Union's perspective. Despite several academic and policy-relevant work evaluating the prospects for a Turkey-EU strategic partnership, the EU has not officially designated Turkey as a strategic partner in any of its strategy documents, Progress Reports, or other official documents by the Commission, the Council, and the European Parliament published in the Official Journal of the European Union. Interestingly, the first reference to Turkey as the EU's strategic partner in an official document was from the Turkish government. In 2014, the Turkish Ministry of European Union Affairs in its "Turkey's New European Strategy" pointed out to Turkey's increased relevance for the EU in the face of new global and regional threats ranging from Syria to Ukraine and referred to Turkey as "still an important strategic partner for the EU despite the problems encountered during the negotiation process" (Republic of Turkey Ministry for EU Affairs, 2014). The reference to the problematic course of accession negotiations is quite telling in the sense that the official documents released by the EU after this date employ a new terminology referring to Turkey's status in addition to its position as 'a candidate country'. As Table 3 shows, from 2016 onwards, all the EU Progress Reports for Turkey begin with the opening statement "Turkey remains a key partner for the European Union" (see European Commission, 2016b; European Commission, 2019; European Commission, 2021b). Following this opening statement, the tone of the progress reports gradually shifts to the negative concerning Turkey's progress towards full membership. This is mainly due to its lack of progress on the political criteria, especially following the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, after which the accession negotiations finally came to a standstill in 2019 (Official Journal of the European Union, 2020). Notably, an inverse relationship exists between Turkey's accession progress as a 'candidate country' and its consistent designation as 'a key partner' in the progress reports. Since then, all official documents released by the Commission, Council, and the Parliament refer to Turkey as a 'partner country' at best, while retaining the official 'enlargement country', 'pre-accession country', and 'candidate country' categories for Turkey along with the countries of the Western Balkans (Official Journal of the European Union, 2020). 'Partner' is a rather vague term as used in these documents though, which seems to refer to rather more specific cooperation areas that fall outside of the candidacy criteria with candidate and non-candidate countries, but still require the EU's urgent and close cooperation with these countries due to their relevance given the rapid changes in global and regional politics. Accordingly, the documents published in the Official Journal between 2016 and 2022 refer to Turkey as a partner for a myriad of specific issues that fall into the fields of migration, climate change, security, trade, and energy, among others (see Official Journal of the European Union, 2017; Official Journal of the European Union, 2019; Official Journal of the European Union, 2022). This finding fits well with the results



of our previous research in ENGAGE, specifically with Muftuler-Bac (2022, ENGAGE [Working Paper 13](#)).

Despite inconsistencies in the institutional and legal infrastructure of the EU's existing 'strategic partnerships', they are more comprehensive and increasingly more institutionalised cooperation frameworks compared to 'partners', which are categorically more limited in scope. 'Strategic partnership' is not a term officially employed in the European Union documents for Turkey, but it is used by the EU policymakers and in EU websites as a part of their statements and country descriptions. In 2017, the European Commission's then vice president for jobs, growth, investment, and competitiveness, Jyrki Katainen, referred to Turkey as the EU's "strategic partner" in the areas of economy, business and trade (Erkul, 2017). The European Commission's website openly calls Turkey "a key strategic partner of the EU on issues such as climate, migration, security, counter-terrorism and the economy" (European Commission, DG NEAR, n.d.). Although the European Council's 2009, 2016, and 2022 strategy documents refer to Turkey as a "potential candidate for cooperation", "partner", and "tailored bilateral partner", they have not located Turkey within the more comprehensive category of strategic partners yet (Council of the European Union, 2008; Council of the European Union, 2022c; European External Action Service, 2016). Nevertheless, the relevance of Turkey for the EU has increased in addressing several regional and global challenges such as the question of Syrian migrants, counterterrorism, energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean, Ukrainian conflict and global economic shifts, which put Turkey as a 'tailored partner' for cooperation in the 2022 Strategic Compass, thereby raising the prospects for a more comprehensive strategic partnership in the years to come. Table 3 below summarises the EU's official documents on Turkey and the framing of its status as a 'strategic partner', albeit in an informal manner.

Table 3: The EU's Identification of Turkey²

Document Type		Identification by the EU	Proposed Areas of Cooperation
Strategy Documents	Report on the Implementation of the 2003 European Security (2009)	Potential candidate for cooperation Regional player	Middle East region, energy security
	Shared Vision, Common Action, A Stronger Europe: A Global Strategy for The European Union's Foreign and Security Policy (2016)	Enlargement country Partner	State and societal resilience, sustainable peace, counterterrorism, hybrid threats, economy, climate change, energy security, transport, migration

² All the EU's strategy documents (4 in total), all the EU's Progress Reports (17 in total) since 1998, and 150 official documents released by various EU agencies and published in the Official Journal of the EU have been surveyed for this analysis.



	A Strategic Compass for Security and Defense (2022)	Tailored bilateral partnership	CSDP missions and operations, issues of common interest
Progress Reports	Turkey Report, Communication on EU Enlargement Policy (2016–2022)	<p>Candidate country</p> <p>Key partner for the European Union</p> <p>An important but challenging partner for NATO and the USA</p>	Trade, regional cooperation in the West Balkans and Southeast Europe
Official Documents by the European Council, European Commission, and the European Parliament	Official documents published in the Journal of the European Union (2016–2022)	<p>Enlargement country (along with Western Balkans)</p> <p>Pre-accession country (along with Western Balkans)</p> <p>Candidate country</p> <p>A country of key strategic interest</p> <p>Partner</p> <p>An increasingly problematic NATO partner</p> <p>Key energy partner</p> <p>Partner in the [Middle East] region</p>	Climate change, Syrian migration issue, counterterrorism, security, economy, sustainable energy, energy security, Eastern Mediterranean issue, transport, non-proliferation and disarmament, cybersecurity, sanctions, CSDP, trade, the modernisation of the Customs Union

Source: own elaboration

While the EU’s official position is determined by the legal documents that the EU has signed with Turkey, the recent stance on reformulating EU-Turkish relations from a strategic partnership viewpoint is indicative of a new crossroads in this rather complicated relationship. The following sections address the internal and external policy challenges for the EU in terms of its evolving relations with Turkey as among its key strategic partners in three key policy areas, namely economics, migration and security, as they are identified in the EU’s official documents as the cornerstone of its cooperation with Turkey. These policies also relate to other EU policies in ways in which that the resulting policy incoherence prevents them from becoming building blocks for a more comprehensive strategic partnership between the EU and

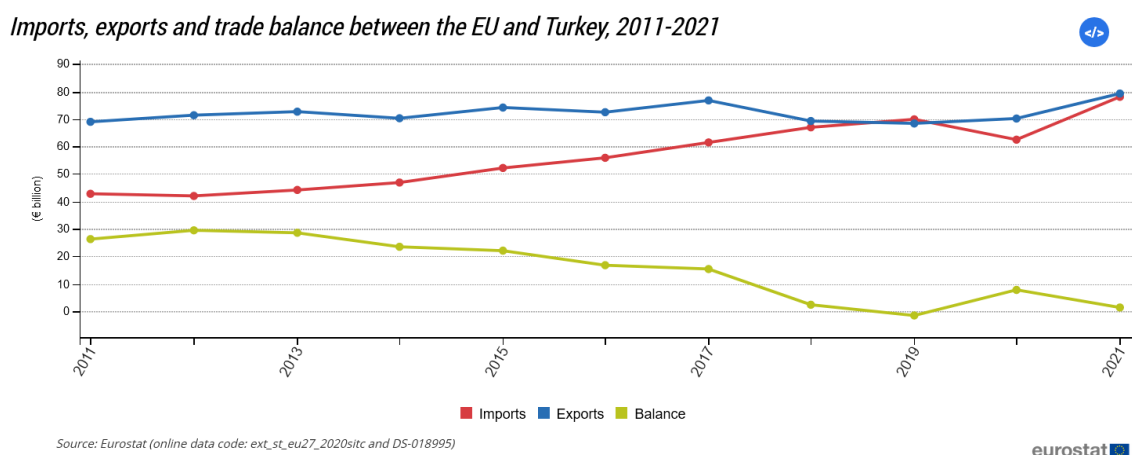


Turkey. The dynamics of horizontal and vertical policy coherence in these policy areas are critical in determining the modalities of the EU's strategic partnership with Turkey and could also be used to compare EU's other strategic partnerships assessed in this working paper.

5.1 The Turkey-EU Relationship in the Economics, Migration and Security Fields

Turkey is a long-standing *economic partner* of the EU. In 2021, Turkey was the sixth largest partner in EU trade whereas the EU consistently ranks as the top partner in Turkey's trade with the world. Germany is the EU Member which by far enjoys the highest trade volume with Turkey (Eurostat, 2022b). The contractual basis which underlies the fundamentals of the EU-Turkey trade relationship (in industrial goods and processed agricultural products) is the 1996 customs union agreement, which is legally based in the 1963 Association Agreement and its 1970 Additional Protocol.

Figure 11: Trade Balance Between Turkey and the EU



The customs union agreement revealed both the flexibility of the Turkish economy, and its ability to cope with competitive pressures from EU Member States. Turkey successfully implemented many of the necessary measures to ensure the free movement of industrial goods and processed agricultural goods and greatly benefited from these arrangements. The EU-Turkey customs union also provided a further anchoring of the Turkish economy to the path of economic reform. Nonetheless, the customs union between the EU and Turkey was not tension free. The EU continues to lament the fact that Turkey does not endorse and transpose into national legislation all the directives related to the customs union in areas spanning from conformity assessment and market surveillance to pharmaceuticals, chemicals, cosmetics and textiles, amongst others. It is also critical of the way in which Turkey imposes additional duties on a large volume of its imports, in violation of its commitments under the customs union agreement (European Commission, 2022d). For its part, Turkey complains about the asymmetry in the EU and Turkey's obligations with respect to third countries (Muftuler-Bac, 2023). Furthermore, the customs union agreement continues to



exclude trade in services, right of establishment, public procurement, foreign direct investments and agriculture.

These bilateral complaints have ignited discussions highlighting the need to upgrade the customs union agreement. Trade is an area of exclusive competence whereby the EU acts with one voice in the global stage. Yet, the European Commission requires the unanimous mandate of the Member States in the Council to negotiate customs union agreements which involve comprehensive trade arrangements including trade in services and foreign direct investments. Upon the request from both sides, the European Commission has finally recommended on December 21, 2016 for a “Council decision authorizing the opening of negotiations with Turkey on an agreement on the extension of the scope of the bilateral preferential trade relationship and on the modernization of the Customs Union” (European Commission, 2016a). Nonetheless, the further deterioration of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Turkey following the failed coup attempt of July 15, 2016 has led the Member States to take the General Affairs Council decision of June 26, 2018 which ruled out any progress towards the upgrading of the customs union (Council of the European Union, 2018b). The Customs Union modernisation goal re-emerged within the framework of the Positive Agenda proposed by the European Council in 2020 to engage with Turkey and ease tensions with it amidst the escalating conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean (Council of the European Union, 2020). However, negotiations could not begin due to problems regarding the extension of the Customs Union to all Member States (most notably Cyprus, which Turkey does not recognise).

Migration constitutes one of the key policy areas around which the EU’s relations with Turkey as a strategic global partner have evolved. The EU’s immigration and asylum policies are shared competence areas, with EU Member States playing a central role in their management “on asylum, immigration and external border control, based on solidarity between Member States” under Article 67/2 of the Lisbon Treaty (Boswell, 2003, p. 623). In 2015, the EU faced a major crisis in its external borders following the Arab Spring and the Syrian civil war when millions of refugees from the Middle East and Africa region tried to reach the EU countries. The EU has already adopted multiple tools and instruments for the control of its external borders that rested on cooperating with third countries. The main legal documents for the EU’s management of its borders are the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam, 1999 Tampere Presidency Conclusions, the 2007 Lisbon Treaty and the 2020 European Pact on Migration and Asylum. However, the 2015 migration crisis tested the strength of these agreements and demonstrated the role that Turkey plays as a strategic partner. To be specific, when faced with a major flow of refugees in 2015, the EU outsourced the control of its external borders to Turkey. This was managed with the adoption of 2015 Joint Action Plan and the 2016 Turkey-EU Refugee Statement.

The EU does not have a supranational immigration policy binding all EU Member States to a common practice in managing migration (Adamson et al., 2011, p. 845). As a result, the EU’s external migration policy “attempts to manage migration through cooperation with migration sending or transit countries” (Boswell, 2003, p. 623). In a similar vein, when faced with the migration crisis in 2015, EU Member States considered a proposal by the European



Commission to establish a permanent quota system for the allocation of asylum seekers, which did not pass as it was only supported by Italy and Germany (Moravscik & Schimmelfenning, 2019, p. 78). On October 8, 2015, the European Council declared “we are facing a common challenge. As partners, we need to respond collectively with solidarity” and suggested engaging with partners like Turkey (Council of the European Union, 2015b). In October 2015, at the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council meeting, the EU Member States stressed that “Cooperation with the countries of origin and transit is key to successful return operations” (Council of the European Union, 2015a). The deal with Turkey for controlling migratory flows onto the European territories was negotiated on behalf of the EU Member States by the European Council, with its President at the time, Donald Tusk declaring that: “I would like to express our appreciation for the impressive work Turkey has been doing” (Council of the European Union, 2018a). The migration deal turned out to underline the Turkish role in a critical policy area – migration – as a global strategic partner, with Germany playing the leadership role in making it possible. The current European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen declared in 2021 that the deal “remains valid and has brought positive results” (Terry, 2021). The Turkey-EU refugee deal was an effective concerted external action to manage the EU’s foreign policy in one policy area through cooperation with a global strategic partner. At the same time, it also demonstrated a first instance where the EU Member states were unified in their stance on managing the EU’s external borders through this cooperation. As such, it signified the Turkish role as a global strategic partner for the EU’s external action in migration policy.

Security as a policy area is increasingly referred to in EU documents as a critical aspect of the Turkish-EU strategic partnership. This partnership in security matters goes back to the Cold War years. Turkey joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1952 and became a key country of the ‘Western security community’ which ensured European security against the communist threat in Southeastern Europe. Following the end of the Cold War, it became an associate member of the WEU and through this enjoyed “privileged access to and generous participation rights in WEU activities” (Missiroli, 2022, p. 12). A major tension emerged between Turkey and the EU with the adoption of new security policies after 1999 when the EU took steps to build its own defence capabilities with the adoption of the Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) and asked for automatic access to NATO assets for the RRF. Turkey’s reluctance to give its approval in NATO, based largely in the fear of being excluded from the newly emerging European security architecture, was ultimately resolved with the 2001 Ankara Agreement and the 2003 Berlin plus arrangements, making it possible for Turkey to contribute to EU military operations. Turkey participated in 9 out of 16 operations (European External Action Service, 2019) and became the fourth largest contributor to these missions after the United Kingdom, France and Germany (Öztürk, 2021).

The major hurdle to EU-Turkey strategic partnership in the field of security emerged with the accession of Cyprus to the EU in 2004. Hence it was ultimately the EU’s enlargement policy, and in particular Cypriot accession, which imported a frozen conflict into the Union, that constituted the major stumbling block to a closer security partnership between the EU and Turkey. In response to Turkey’s veto of Cyprus’ inclusion into the NATO-EU cooperation



framework, including the sharing of sensitive information with countries that do not have an agreement with NATO – namely Cyprus – Cyprus vetoed Turkey’s inclusion into the European Defence Agency (EDA). When the EU adopted the Permanent Structured Cooperation in Defence (PESCO) in 2019, specific clauses were inserted specifying that only third countries sharing European values would participate. According to EU officials, the negotiations for the adoption of PESCO from 2017 to 2019 partly lingered on because Cyprus was adamant on finding a bulletproof way of keeping Turkey out of PESCO (Brzozowski, 2020). The agreement on PESCO ultimately clarified third country participation as “it must not contravene the security and defence interests of the Union and its Member States” (Wichmann, 2021).

5.2 Assessing the EU-Turkey Relationship

This section assesses the EU’s evolving relationship with Turkey from an accession country to a strategic partner with reference to the coherence, effectiveness and sustainability of EU action with a view for comparison with the other cases in the working paper.

In all the three policy areas under analysis, the EU faces significant problems regarding both *horizontal and vertical coherence*, which in turn hinders the effectiveness and sustainability of the deepening of the strategic partnership. In the case of trade, the modernisation of the customs union contrasts primarily with the EU’s goal of upholding democracy, the rule of law and good governance in EU candidate states. Furthermore, and more recently, it also conflicts with the principle of solidarity in the EU and the coherence of EU foreign policy, given that the Union does not wish to appear as ‘rewarding’ a country which does not comply with democratic standards and contests certain Member States’ (Cyprus, Greece, France) foreign policies. For example, the European Council in October 2020 agreed to launch a positive agenda with Turkey including the modernisation of the Customs Union on the condition that Turkey suspends its current policy in the Eastern Mediterranean vis a vis Greece and Cyprus (Stanicek, 2020). This is a solid illustration of the clash between horizontal and vertical coherence where a group of Member States (Germany, France, Greece and Cyprus) oppose the EU’s mandate – modernisation of the customs union – for their own material interests.

Migration cooperation with Turkey, however, brought forth problems of coherence with other EU policies, such as upholding the rule of law and promoting democracy in Turkey. Turkey threatened the EU with annulling the deal and allowing the free movement of refugees into the EU in the aftermath of the failed coup attempt in 2016, in the way of silencing the EU’s criticisms towards massive purges and increased repression in the country; and later during the constitutional referendum campaign in 2017 when several EU Member States cancelled local rallies organised by the Turkish government in support of the referendum for a presidential system (Leonard & Kaunert, 2021, pp. 741–742). The threats on both occasions paid off, with the gradual toning down of EU’s criticisms of Turkey’s democratic violations (Saatçioğlu, 2020, pp. 169–187), culminating in an official visit by the former Chancellor Merkel in the run up to the constitutional referendum which was heavily criticised by the Turkish opposition for providing Erdoğan with support and legitimacy at a turning point for the fate of Turkish democracy (‘President Erdoğan to present’, 2017). Migration policy despite the



lack of an EU level external mandate illustrated a greater degree of consistency between the EU and its Member States in terms of its strategic partnership with Turkey.

The unresolved state of the bilateral conflicts between Turkey and Cyprus, as well as with Greece, meant that despite Turkey's geostrategic position, its NATO membership, and its increasing strategic weight in the wider European neighbourhood, the largely intergovernmental decision making in EU foreign and security policy prevented a closer strategic partnership between the EU and Turkey in the field of security. For instance, in January 2021, the EU Military Committee recommended the basic conditions for a third country to become a CSDP partner include 'good neighborly relations with the EU', which directly hinges upon Turkey's foreign policy in the EU's Southern neighborhood, including in the Eastern Mediterranean, Syria, Libya, and bilateral relations with countries in the region, notably Greece and Cyprus (European Parliament, 2022).

Table 4 summarises the ongoing clashes between the EU and Member States in the EU's external action with regards to a strategic partnership with Turkey. Germany is the EU Member State which often facilitates, but also constrains the partnership, depending on the context and the policy area concerned. In the case of the modernisation of the Customs Union, Germany continues to veto the opening of modernisation talks between Turkey and the European Commission, where the coalition government formed in 2018 declared openly that the Customs Union modernisation talks could not begin due to concerns about the rule of law and independence of the judiciary in Turkey (Muftuler-Bac, 2023). The migration deal was made possible after German Chancellor, Angela Merkel declared "we will not solve the refugee problem completely; we need, among other things, further talks with Turkey for that. It is very important that the (European) Commission discusses further the migration agenda with Turkey" (Emmott & Sekularac, 2015).

On the other hand, Turkey has conflictual relations with Cyprus and Greece due to unresolved bilateral disputes and a foreign policy discordance in the Southern neighborhood. The Cyprus conflict has been one of the central obstacles to Turkey's accession talks and has had a negative impact on the furthering of the strategic partnership with Turkey in all issue areas involved. When it comes to the modernisation of the customs union agreement, the issue is raised by the European Parliament with reference to Turkey's resistance to implement the Additional Protocol of the customs union by opening its ports and airports to Cypriot vessels (Stanicek, 2020). Greek and Cypriot members of the European Parliament even asked the European Commission to fully suspend the customs union agreement with Turkey (Stanicek, 2020). On the security front, the failure of the 2017 Cyprus peace talks at Crans Montana inflamed the conflict between Turkey and Cyprus concerning the natural gas maritime exploration and monetisation efforts in the Eastern Mediterranean (Grigoriadis, 2022). The Eastern Mediterranean crisis saw Greece and Cyprus joined by France and other countries of the region – with France having conflicting interests with Turkey in Libya, and others like Egypt and Israel also having strained bilateral relations with Turkey – ultimately forming the East Med Gas Forum to the exclusion of Turkey. The Eastern Mediterranean Crisis stands as one of the key obstacles before a deeper strategic partnership with the EU. As discussed above,



Greece and Cyprus were also instrumental in the exclusion of Turkey from EDA as well as from PESCO. Cyprus and Greece have also uploaded their national agendas with Turkey onto the European level in the case of migration. While Germany played the leadership role in negotiating the EU-Turkey migration deal, Cyprus threatened to veto the deal unless Turkey recognised the Republic of Cyprus (“Cyprus Warns It will”, 2016).

Table 4: Policy Coherence in the EU's External Action

Policy Area	EU mandate (horizontal coherence)	Member States playing a critical role (vertical coherence)
Trade/Economics	The Customs Union Agreement/ the European Commission	Germany France Greece Cyprus
Migration	2015 EU Joint Action Plan 2016 Turkey-EU Refugee Statement The European Commission	Germany (driver) Greece/Cyprus
Security	Turkey's NATO membership WEU association RRF participation Headline Goals	United Kingdom (Driver before 2016) Germany (driver) France/Greece and Cyprus (brakemen)

Source: own elaboration

More recently, in addition to Cyprus and Greece, France has emerged as another EU Member State whose uploading of national foreign policy priorities to the EU level has hindered closer foreign policy cooperation with Turkey. France and Turkey supported opposing factions in the Libyan civil war, with both countries pushing to extend their presence and influence in the country. This puts Turkey and France at loggerheads in the Eastern Mediterranean, leading France to side with Cyprus and Greece in calling for harsh EU sanctions against Turkey. Thanks to Germany's mediation efforts, only limited sanctions targeted at specific Turkish individuals and companies engaged in the unauthorised drilling of hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean was adopted by the EU in October 2019. Foreign policy issues also seem to stand in the way of more favorable political relations with France including an upgraded customs union. Although the French business sector seems to support an upgraded customs union due to its economic potential, the Turkish-French standoff in Libya and Syria complicates the official stance of the French state (Denizeau & Schmid, 2020).

The EU has a mixed record regarding *effectiveness* of its foreign policy action towards Turkey. In the case of trade, there is a consensus that the modernisation of the EU-Turkey customs union may be the most important mechanism that could be employed to upgrade the trade and economic relationship between the EU and Turkey, which the EU also needs from an economic-trade policy point of view. The upgrading of the customs union seems to be in the interest of all the EU Member States (Adar et. al., 2020). Yet, due to problems resulting from both horizontal and vertical coherence, a closer and a modernised economic relationship



between the two sides cannot be forged. As for migration policy, the internal discordance initially had a direct impact on the European foreign policy action with regards to the strategic partnership with Turkey – where Germany’s policies aligned largely with the overall EU interests while other Member States’ did not. However, in this policy area, Germany was ultimately able to upload its preferences onto the EU level, while Cyprus failed to do so. Migration constituted a significant threat to all the EU Member States to the extent that Germany’s leadership role together with the EU institutions’ common position enabled the formulation of a strategic agreement with Turkey, which proved effective from the EU’s point of view as the deal led to a decline in the number of refugees who reached the EU via Turkey.

Finally, on security, there is hardly any effectiveness of EU policy as cooperation is minimal in this area, largely due to matters of vertical coherence concerning the split between Member States on whether or not and, if so how, to integrate Turkey into the evolving European security framework. Hence, these divergences among the Member States on cooperation with Turkey impeded the effectiveness of the EU external action.

Sustainability of EU action in these areas hinge on a range of factors: (a) Turkey’s democratic progress; (b) Turkey’s foreign policy stance on a myriad of issues concerning the Southern and Eastern neighborhood; and (c) the protracted unresolved issues in bilateral relations with certain member countries. On trade, the current customs union agreement is unsustainable for both sides from a purely economic interest driven perspective. Two factors might contribute to an increased German support for the modernisation of the customs union talks which would significantly ease progress on this front towards a sustainable and mutually beneficial strategic cooperation. First, like the accession talks, the modernisation talks are also intrinsically tied to internal political dynamics in Turkey, which are open to change. As a matter of fact, the coalition partner FDP’s election manifesto explicitly states that ‘there will be a Turkey after Erdoğan’, suggesting that the EU should be ready to more closely engage with Turkey if there is a change of government in the country (Seufert, 2021, pp. 2–5). Democratic progress in Turkey could thus add up to a greater German support for the modernisation of the customs union. Regarding migration policy, there is a possibility that the sustainability of the existing cooperation may be challenged in the case of a change of government in Turkey.

Finally, on security, the current arrangements where Turkey is no longer actively present, are not sustainable, given the changing security landscape in Europe which may necessitate a closer engagement with Turkey. Turkey’s greater alignment with CFSP, especially in the Southern neighborhood might contribute to progress on this front. As discussed above, Germany, along with the UK, was in the driving seat for Turkey’s inclusion into the EU’s defense frameworks as a NATO country. It should be noted that Turkey was included in the CSDP missions where Turkey’s foreign policy and the EU’s CFSP aligned. However, this alignment has gradually declined in the Southern and Eastern neighborhood due to Turkey’s confrontation with other European countries in the Eastern Mediterranean, purchase of S-400 missile defense system from Russia, military operations in Syria, and its role in Second Karabakh War, all of which made Turkey an unstable partner on security policy in the eyes of



the German coalition partners (Seufert, 2021). Greater foreign policy alignment between Turkey and the EU can lend impetus both to the modernised customs union talks as well as Turkey's greater inclusion into CSDP mechanisms.

As previously demonstrated in Muftuler-Bac (2022, ENGAGE [Working Paper 13](#)), the EU does not have a uniform, legally based strategic partnership formula. Consequently, there is an ad hoc formulation of agreements and/or policies with global partners. Almost all the global partners are power brokers with high political, economic standing in global politics such as the US, Japan and Russia. Turkey's inclusion into this camp of global strategic partners is not fully justified with Turkish global military and economic ranking even though Turkey is in the G20 and is one of the top 15 militaries in the world. This presents a puzzle as to why the EU has increasingly emphasised Turkey as one of its strategic partners in the absence of a legal framework to do so. While the EU does not officially refer to Turkey as a strategic global partner in its official and legal documents, there is an increased rhetoric in that manner following this. Yet, it could be argued that this was due to the EU's decade long concern of preserving the accession track – however far the prospect of actual accession may be – in the event of a domestic change in power constellations. In that case, the EU's leverage could be reenergised through the prospect of accession. This would enable a formula to be developed in order to keep Turkey anchored to the EU in the case that the former possibility does not materialise in the foreseeable future. Turkey's geographical proximity to the EU as a country of high economic and power standing, as well as its key role in the shaping of key EU policies, most notably migration, can be considered be the main facilitating factors for this emphasis.



6 Russia: A Partnership that Never Was

"[W]e have to be prepared for a lot of hard work. Building a partnership with Russia will not be easy, but I would argue most strongly that it is an opportunity we cannot afford to miss. [...] We must now take active steps to encourage Russia in its turn to push towards us to establish a partnership. The effort must be mutual if it is to be effective" (Solana, 1999).

The EU and Russia have had a strategic partnership (SP) since the late 1990s. Within a thirty-year span, this partnership has seen both periods of (highly asymmetrical but still) cooperation until the early 2000s, rising 'coopetition' (a mix of cautious cooperation and growing competition) in the noughties, with three critical junctures: the 2004 launch of the EU's neighbourhood policy (ENP), including the articulation of its double regional dimensionality in 2009, Russia's 2008 war with Georgia, and, last but not least, Ukraine's 2013/2014 Euromaidan revolution, that all saw the consolidating shift towards contestation between Russia and the EU. The post-2014 period was marked by a mounting confrontation between Russia and the EU as well as the broader collective 'West', as Russia went on a hybrid incursion in Ukraine, annexed its Crimea peninsula and triggered the armed conflict in Ukraine's eastern areas of Donets river basin, the Donbas. In response, the EU and other actors from within the liberal-democratic community of states had been repeatedly imposing sanctions against Russia to punish and contain its international wrongdoings. The relations between the two have been further strained by disagreements over human rights and the rule of law (or, to be more precise: *unrule* of law) situation in Russia, as well as issues related to energy and trade interdependence in the age of unpeace. The EU and Russia have also had divergent stances over various international issues, such as the civil war in Syria, the developing of the Arctic, as well as regarding the political and economic developments in their proximity – the evolving (from a 'common' to a 'shared' and later on 'contested') adjacent neighbourhood. As a result of growing tensions in EU-Russia bilateral relations, and particularly as regards their neighbourhood (chiefly: Ukraine) policies, as well as the escalating broader geopolitical and geoeconomic conflict between Russia and the collective 'West', the start of the 2020s was marked by a genuine divergent break in the relationship between the EU and Russia. Russia's war of aggression, starting with its unprovoked and unjustified full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, brought not only immense human suffering and destruction in Ukraine, but also an end to illusions of any return to cooperation anytime soon, which has lately been part of heated intra-EU debates and tensions. The beginning of 2022 marked a true Copernicus turn in EU's Russia policy, with the latter one being for the first time ever formulated in non-situational (but strategic and visionary), non-equivocal (but clear and straightforward) and non-compromising (but with values and principles trumping economic interests) manner. It effectively marked, as well, the beginning of a new stage in EU-Russia bilateral strategic interaction: conflict, accompanied with mutual estrangement and isolation – akin to the mutual neglect and isolation politics between the Soviet Union and the European Communities. One might argue, thus, that in just thirty years (1992–2022), the EU-Russia strategic interaction has come full circle: from mutual neglect and isolation to cooperation,



coopetition, confrontation, conflict – and back to mutual estrangement and isolation (see Table 5).

Table 5: EU-Russia Relations Coming Full Circle in 30 Years (1992-2022)

Strategic interaction rationale		Time period	Power relationship	Partner status and perception	
				<i>EU's vision of Russia</i>	<i>Russia's vision of EU</i>
Mutual neglect (ignorance) and isolation		1970s–1991		Strategic adversary	Strategic adversary
COOPERATION		1992–2003	Highly asymmetrical (EU-favouring)	Junior partner	Senior partner and a force for good
(Pragmatic) COOPETITION	<i>Cautious cooperation</i>	2004–2008	Shift towards selective parity	Regional strategic partner	Regional economic superpower
	<i>Growing competition</i>	2008–2013	Shift towards contestation	Regional strategic competitor	Regional normative hegemon
CONFRONTATION		2014–2021	Heyday of Russian anti-hegemonic revisionism and mutually impairing FP assertiveness	Normative challenger and revisionist power	Part of the 'evil West', illegitimate global hegemon and/or 'U.S. puppet'
CONFLICT incl. mutual estrangement and isolation		2022–onwards	Mutual coercion and containment	Strategic adversary	Strategic adversary
Mutual neglect (ignorance) and isolation?		Post–Russia/Ukraine war	?	Strategic adversary?	Strategic adversary?

Source: own elaboration

In the literature, there is a growing understanding that the EU-Russia relations are inherently bound to a 'conflict-cooperation dichotomy' (Nitoiu, 2014; Casier, 2020). Thereby, distinct rupture points are identified: the 2003 and 2004 colour revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, the 2008 NATO's Bucharest summit and Russia-Georgia war, or 2014 'Ukraine crisis', with the latter one evidently constituting the "culmination of the long-term crisis" in EU-Russia relations, as put by Haukkala (2015).

This raises legible concerns and questions as to whether there ever was an EU-Russia 'strategic partnership', or whether this had been just an empty rhetoric? Given that the EU-Russia 'strategic partnership' got terminated even before it reached its (human) age of



maturity, the questions on the partnership's rationale and the goals individually and jointly pursued, the joint-institutional design and practices of partnership (partnering), as well as the partnership (un)sustainability factors, loom large. This section will probe into theoretical propositions from the strategic partnerships and examine in that light the EU-Russia strategic interactions for the past three decades.

6.1 The EU-Russia Strategic Partnership: Origins, Legal Basis and Political (Il)development

There is widespread view that the EU and Russia have had a strategic partnership since the late 1990s, when the EU signed in 1994 a *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA)* with Russia,³ which entered into force in 1997 and was originally due to expire in ten years. It established a framework for political and economic cooperation between the EU and Russia (Haukkala, 2010, pp. 68–90) – but did *not*, in fact, *formally* establish a 'strategic partnership' relationship.⁴

The EU-Russia strategic partnership was first officially announced at the 1999 EU-Russia Summit in St. Petersburg. At this summit, the European Union and Russia issued a *Joint Declaration on the EU-Russia Partnership for the 21st Century*, in which they agreed to establish a strategic partnership based on common values and shared interests. The Joint Declaration emphasised the importance of the EU-Russia partnership for ensuring stability, security and prosperity in Europe and beyond.

The Declaration recognised the importance of strengthening political dialogue, cooperation in *key areas* such as *economy, energy and security*, and the need to improve the overall relationship between the EU and Russia⁵. Additionally, in 2008, during an EU-Russia summit, both parties adopted a Joint Statement on the EU-Russia Strategic Partnership, which reaffirmed the commitment of both sides to the strategic partnership.

³ Agreement on partnership and cooperation establishing a partnership between the European Communities and their Member States, of one part, and the Russian Federation, of the other part. (1997). *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L 327/3, pp. 3–69. [Document 21997A1128\(01\)](#).

⁴ Nor was there even an explicit mention of a 'strategic partnership' – only rich references to 'partnership' and 'cooperation' instead.

⁵ In the 2003 *European Security Strategy*, the EU named Russia as its strategic partner along with other then already established partnerships with the US, Japan and Canada, as well as the then to be launched partnerships with China, India, Brazil, South Korea, South Africa, and Mexico. An act of similar strategic-level documented formalisation of the EU as Russia's strategic partnership cannot be identified. While Russia has been employing the 'EU as a (strategic) partner' rhetoric in bilateral meetings and documents, it largely spoke elsewhere of 'our European partners' (*nashi evropeiskie partniori*), implying in both positive (France, Germany) and negative (Poland, the Baltic states) cases EU Member States rather than the EU as such. In his analysis of Russia's strategic foreign-political manifestos, that is Foreign Policy Concepts (FPC) from the years 1993, 2000, 2008, 2013 and 2016, Neimark (2020, p. 33), observes that even in the latest-analysed 2016 Russian FPC, the EU was named as "a key partner in trade and economy and an important partner in foreign policy".



However, as the EU-Russia PCA was set to expire in 2007, the parties began the same year negotiations to renew it, but the talks were not successful and the agreement was *not updated* – *nor* was it substituted by then-debated ‘*New Comprehensive Bilateral Agreement*’⁶, negotiations over which started in June 2008 at the EU-Russia summit in Khanty Mansiysk, but were effectively halted in 2012. The main reasons for the failure to renew the PCA were differences over issues such as human rights, the rule of law, and energy security. At that time, concerns were already rising within the EU about the state of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Russia, as well as issues related to the EU’s energy security and the lack of a level playing field for EU businesses operating in Russia.

Against this background, the ‘minimal’ consensus among both EU Member States and between the EU and Russia proper brought about a few *partnership-substituting* – rather than partnership-constituting – alternative arrangements, including the 2005-enacted ‘Four Common Spaces’ (4CSs) as a reactive solution to Russia’s decisive non-participation in the EU’s 2014-launched European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), or the 2010 ‘Partnership for Modernization’ (PfM) – a technical and issue-limited interaction arrangement (see Table 6). That even a low-politics ‘technical’ cooperation project, such as the PfM, failed to eventually deliver is indicative of substantial commitment issues. Not only did ambiguity abound as to what both ‘partners’ regarded as ‘modernisation’, the understanding of the rationale and prospects of it was missing – and so was the mechanism of its implementation, all in all rendering this initiative a low-priority exercise in window-dressing ‘interaction’ (Kortunov, 2020).

Table 6: EU-Russia SP Key bilateral Agreements and Declarations

Date	SP-constitutive act	Document type	Key points documented
1994 (1997)	EC/EU-Russia PCA	EC/EU-provided template PCA agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established a framework for political and economic cooperation • Recalled the parties’ ‘shared respect for democracy and human rights....’
1999	Joint Declaration on the EU-Russia Partnership for the 21st Century	Joint Declaration adopted at the First EU-Russia Summit in St. Petersburg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bid to establish an SP based on ‘common values and shared interests’ • Emphasised the importance of EU-Russia SP for ensuring ‘stability, security and prosperity in Europe and beyond’ • Declaration to establish cooperation in key areas such as: economy, energy, and security
Esp. since 2000s	Various (PCA-based) sectoral cooperation agreements	Bilateral agreements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A growing web of bilateral sectoral cooperation agreements and other institutional and political arrangements (ca.60) in various areas such as: financial

⁶ Already in 2005, the EU-Russia PCA was proposed to be replaced by a ‘New (Basic) Agreement’ (NBA), aka ‘New Comprehensive Bilateral Agreement’ (NCBA).



			coop.; trade in varied goods and services; environment; research and innovation; etc.
2005	The Four Common Spaces (4CSs)	Incepted at the St. Petersburg summit in May 2003; a single package of Roadmaps on 4 Common Spaces adopted in May 2005 at the Moscow summit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established the 'Four Common spaces': <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a common economic space; a common space of freedom, security and justice; a space of cooperation in the field of external security; a space of research, education, and cultural exchange
2008	Joint Statement on the EU-Russia Strategic Partnership	Joint Statement following the EU-Russia summit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reaffirmed the commitment of both sides to the SP Highlighted the importance of cooperation on trade, energy and security
2008	[Failed draft] New EU-Russia Agreement	A new comprehensive bilateral agreement (negotiations started at June 2008 EU-Russia summit in Khanty Mansiysk; halted in 2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new comprehensive bilateral agreement, meant to substitute the expired PCA, with legally binding obligations for both parties [failed] An agreement meant to formalise EU-Russia SP [failed]
2010	Partnership for Modernization (PfM)	Joint Statement following the 25th EU-Russia summit on May 31 – June 1, 2010, in Rostov-on-Don	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launched a PfM, comprising areas such as judicial and economic reform as well as support to civil society in Russia, with the goal of assisting Russia in solution of problems of modernisation of economy and the corresponding adjustment of the whole bulk of EU-Russia (sectoral) relations
2015	European Parliament Resolution (June 10, 2015)	EU's unilateral political declaration (non-legislative act)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EP stated that 'Russia, because of its actions in Crimea and in Eastern Ukraine, can no longer be treated as, or considered, a "strategic partner"' EP called EU institutions to review the EU-Russia relations and consider further measures (including the PCA suspension)
2021	Russian FM S. Lavrov's statement (March 23, 2021)	Russia's unilateral non-legislative act (political statement)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Russian FM pronounced EU-Russia relations as 'dead': 'There are no relations with the European Union as an organisation.'; however, Russia was to keep relations with 'individual EU nations'

Source: own elaboration

In spite of rich rhetoric, especially during the bilateral meetings, about the EU-Russia SP, the partnership's legal basis has remained unfit for the changing external realities as well as the evolving Brussels-Moscow bilateralism; it furthermore has nearly exceptionally revolved around a narrow field of cooperation – trade, energy and security – and served as a vehicle for the inward-looking agenda. One could not but notice a significant narrowing of the areas of EU-Russia cooperation: from 16 ambitiously outlined under the 1994/1997 PCA to 6 areas still



spotted by 2022 (Muftuler-Bac et al., 2022, p. 61 (ENGAGE [Working Paper 13](#))), including the key three areas of strategic cooperation – trade, energy and security. The nature and patterns of interaction across the key three areas are uneven, and both positive and negative consequences of the EU's and Russia's interdependence in these areas deeply intertwined.

6.2 Trade: Asymmetric Interdependence and a Failure to Repeat the '*Wandel Durch Handel*' Miracle

Power asymmetry has defined the vast bulk of EU-Russia relationship from the beginning. Russia is the largest country in the world and has a four times bigger territory than the EU. It also is the largest EU neighbour. In around 2021, the EU had three times bigger population than Russia, with 447.3 million citizens living in the EU and 144.4 million citizens inhabiting Russia. In 2021 the EU's GDP was nearly ten times bigger than Russia's: the EU's GDP of EUR 13 trillion made up 16% of the global GDP's share, while Russia's EUR 1.39 trillion accounted for some 3.2% of the world's GDP (EU Council, 2021).

Strong asymmetry generally characterised the EU-Russia trade and economic relations that have widely been seen as *the* key pillar of EU-Russia bilateralism from the beginning – a “natural partnering” area and “the true foundation of EU-Russia relations” (Haukkala, 2018, p. 53). This area of the EU-Russia bilateralism has both *steep turns*, *false starts* as well as *false promises*.

After the lost decade of the 1990s, a steep growth in bilateral trade dynamics was recorded since then and up until 2008. After a short stagnation period, positive dynamics returned in 2010, reaching record levels in 2012: a triple increase since 2002. Following the introduction of the EU's sanctions against Russia in response to the annexation of Ukraine's Crimea in 2014, the post-2015 dynamics was that of a decline, which since 2022 is on its steep downward turn.

The eventually abandoned idea of an EU acquis-based FTA between the EU and Russia, first mandated by their PCA, and the failed 2004 Common Economic Space as well as Russia-proposed 'mega-regional FTA' (an FTA between the EU and the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union) were among key economic false starts in EU-Russia SP.

The Germany-inspired 'change through trade' (*Wandel durch Handel*) approach, which the EU persistently pursued in its trade relations with Russia, turned out to be false already in the early 2010s. Beyond this EU member state-driven dynamics, the EU's external policy, including that on Russia, has similarly – and inherently so – drawn on the EU's key foundational narratives about it being 'a peace project', the sense that “deeper economic interdependence fosters political change”, and the idea that “law can replace power politics” within and outside the EU (De Vries, 2022, pp. 1, 4–10).

Notably, already five years into the operation of the EU-Russia SP, the volume of Russia's trade with the EU reached USD 177.1 billion in 2005, thus accounting for 61.4% of Russia's turnover with non-CIS countries and 52% of its total foreign trade turnover. The next year saw a similar and slowly growing trend, whereby over 80% of the Russian exports were energy, raw materials and minerals. In the period from 2002 to 2012, the volume of exports of goods from Russia to



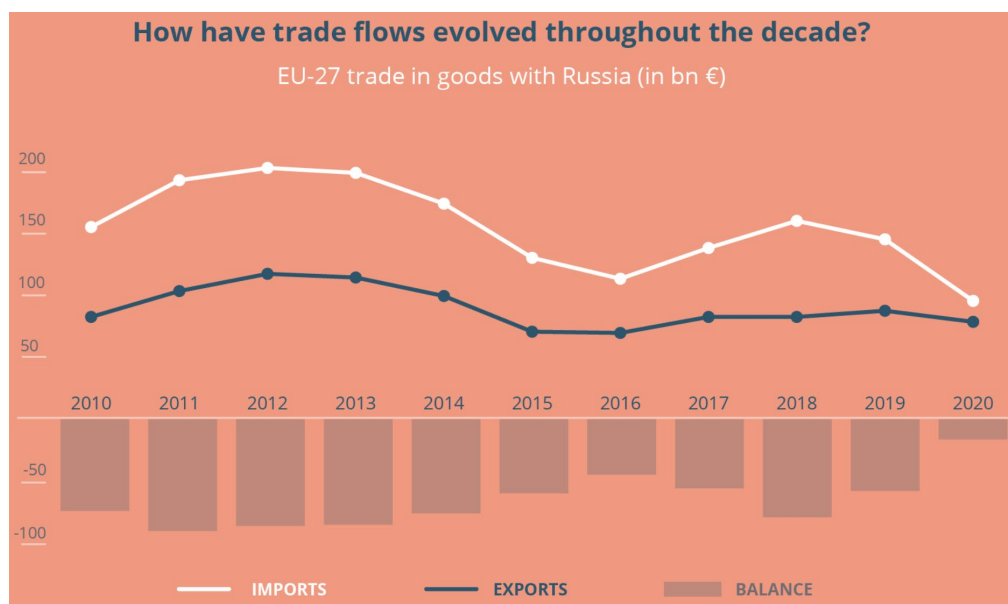
the EU increased by 3.5 times – from EUR 64.49 billion to EUR 213.3 billion, the volume of Russian imports from the EU followed a similar trend, that is increased by 3.5 times from EUR 34.42 billion to EUR 123.2 billion. By 2012, the volume of trade between Russia and the EU, thus, reached EUR 336.5 billion. (Russian Permanent Representation to the EU, n.d.).

Even in times of hardship, and then-peaking EU sanctions against Russia following the 2014 annexation of Crimea and incursion in the Donbas region (European Commission, n.d.), the trade between the EU and Russia first halved from a record USD 417.7 billion in 2014 to USD 200.4 billion in 2016, and then started slowly recovering as already in January 2017 it grew by 32.3% compared to the January 2016 volume (Degtereva, 2019, p. 85).

In the 2016 EU Global Strategy, Russia featured as a “key strategic challenge” (European External Action Service, 2016, p. 33) whereas EU’s economic relations with Russia *in any form* did not feature in the strategy document. This disappearance, from the EU rhetoric, of the symbolism of the economic underpinning of the EU-Russia strategic interactionism is quite telling. Still, the volume of trade between the EU and Russia remained relatively high even if fluctuating and gradually declining, with the EU maintaining a trade deficit with Russia in terms of goods while running a large surplus in trade in services (Tajoli, 2022, p. 824). Notably, the EU had also been the largest investor in Russia. In 2019, its estimated stock of EUR 311.4 billion made up 75% of total FDIs in Russia. In turn, Russia’s EUR 135.9 billion worth stock of FDIs in the EU represented merely 1.9% of the total FDIs in the European Union (EU Council, 2021).

The year 2020 saw some significant drops in the EU-Russia trade volume (see Figure below).

Figure 12: The Dynamics of EU-Russia Trade in 2010–2020



Source: EU Council (2021)

Still, even eight years into the Russian war on Ukraine, EU’s imposition of sanctions and Russia’s introduction of ‘counter-sanctions’, the EU remained in 2021 Russia’s first trading



partner. In 2020, trade exchange reached EUR 174.3 billion, making up 37.3% of Russia's total trade volume and 4.8% of the overall extra-EU trade. Thereby, the EU had been Russia's number-one trade partner, followed by China (18.3%), Belarus (4.4%), US (3.8%), Turkey (3.8%), UK (3.4%) and Kazakhstan (2.7%); in turn, for the EU, Russia had been the fifth largest trading partner preceded by Switzerland (6.9%), UK (12.2%), US (15.2%) and the number-one trade partner, that is China (16.1%) (EU Council, 2021).

This remarkable persistence of trade intensity and interdependence amidst war makes analysts wonder whether the EU-Russia trade is not "too much of a good thing" (Tajoli, 2022), after all? Conventional wisdom suggests that the truth and trade are the first casualties of war. Grinberg (2021, p. 9) observes that "the empirical record of wartime trade, however, suggests otherwise". She explains the wartime-continued trade by the presence of at least one of the conditions: (1) when trading with the enemy does not help the enemy win the current war, or (2) when ending trade would damage the state's long-term security (Grinberg, 2021, pp.19–29). Considering the substantial share of energy imports in the EU's trade with Russia, which accounted for EUR 148 billion out of the EUR 193.1 billion total volume of bilateral trade in 2011 and EUR 99 billion out of the total EUR 158.5 billion turnover in 2021 (Estrada & Koutronas, 2022, p. 603), a radical reduction of trade ties implied the affection of the EU's long-term energy security situation. However, as Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine threatened both immediate and longer-term security constellations, the EU enacted 10 rounds of sanctions that resulted in a radical cut of trade relations with Russia. Between February 2022 and December 2022, the value of EU imports fell by 51% (Eurostat, 2022a).

The EU-Russia trade has rarely, if at all, been seen by either party as being just a business matter: trade's inherently instrumental logic came with the purview of security or geopolitics and thus with the pursuit of non-economic aims *along* with trade objectives.

6.3 Energy: A Troubled Nexus of Trade, Security and Geopolitics

Energy has traditionally dominated trade relations between the EU and Russia. This relationship materialised well before the EU and post-Soviet Russia were born, that is, during the Cold War period. As such, the EU-Russia energy relationship has always had historical and economic significance (Siddi, 2018, pp. 1554–1556). Until end-2022, the European Union had been Russia's first energy export destination and Russia had been the EU's first energy provider, accounting for 66% of EU oil and gas imports in 2021. Energy also presented the fastest-growing trade area between the EU and Russia: back in 2013, 39% of gas imports came from Russia, with further 33% arriving from Norway and 22% from North Africa (Algeria and Libya). At the same time, energy represented a truly vulnerable trade area for both. The EU's quest to diversify energy supplies following Russia's 2014 incursion in Ukraine, alongside the long-charted path toward decarbonisation, stirred uncertainty in Russia as to the prospects of further revenue and effectiveness of its energy leverage in European and regional politics. In turn, Russia's ever-growing weaponisation of energy interdependency, especially vis-à-vis EU Member States and neighbour countries that vastly depended on the Russian energy supplies,



presented a real concern for some EU Member States and EU institutions by and large. Still, the bilateral relationship in this area had been substantially path dependent, with only rhetorical changes charted.

The year of Russian full-scale military aggression against Ukraine led to the breakup of this path dependency, as incrementally radical steps (sanctions, voluntary energy use reductions) have been taken by the EU to pursue emancipation from Russian energy dependence, as well as some mis-developments, such as the blowing up of the Nord Stream I and II gas pipelines, led to energy connectivity between Russia and the EU reaching its lowest point towards winter of 2022/2023.

The EU-Russia energy partnership was launched in 2000 with the establishment of the EU-Russia Energy Dialogue. As Russia failed to ratify the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT), this partnership had been drawing on a thin bilateral basis.

Far from being straightforward and uncontroversial a domain, the EU-Russia energy relationship became particularly complex after the EU's 2004/2007 enlargement eastwards, as countries from among the former Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact members made their choice for Europe and the 'West' (Neuman, 2010). As soon as in 2006 and 2009, due to the 'price disagreements' (or geopolitical 'gas wars') between Russia and Ukraine on gas transportation to Europe, the effects of variegated energy dependency on Russia were acutely felt across the EU, and especially along its eastern flank. The fears stirred as well in Moscow as it saw itself vulnerable, too: after all, European energy demand was not an absolute guarantee (nor guaranteed) for Russia's own security, which in 2003 declared energy security to be the 'most important element in Russia's national security' (Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, 2003). At the same, the EU's emerging energy policy, outlined inter alia in the European Commission's 2007 Communication 'An Energy Policy for Europe' (also known as '20-20-20 proposal'), aimed at decreasing and diversifying the Union's energy imports, in particular by achieving 20% higher energy efficiency, 20% renewable resources in the EU's energy mix and 20% lower CO₂ emissions (European Commission, 2007).

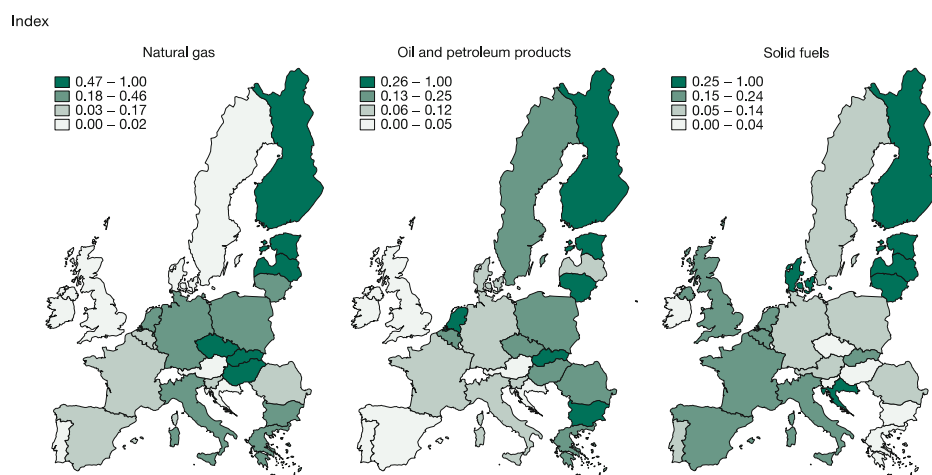
Hence, the tensions and uncertainties had been growing since the mid-2000s already. In fact, throughout the 2000s, the EU Member States' dependence on Russian energy supplies had been tremendous, with 11 out of then-27 EU Member States depending in their 2007 gas imports on Russia by 50% or more, with Finland, Slovakia and Bulgaria reaching a 100% dependence rate (Harsem & Claes, 2013, pp. 787–789). In dyadic terms, East European countries had been more dependent on Russian gas, with Germany – heavily and growingly – relying on Russian energy imports, too. On the other hand, Russia's overall gas exports to the EU, while being huge (making up 39.3% in 2006 already), had a different centre of gravity, that is, Western Europe, with Germany, France and Italy alone accounting for 20–25% of Russia's total exports (Harsem & Claes, 2013, p. 790). Up until mid-2010s, Russia's share in the EU's energy imports oscillated between 32% and 41% (Siddi, 2018, p. 1559).

From 2011–2020, the EU's dependency rate on Russian energy imports, including natural gas, oil and petroleum products as well as solid fuels, was largely sustained; and in what regards solid fuels, it was even constantly growing. In 2019, Russia's share in EU energy imports was



the largest, amounting to 35% for oil, 40% for natural gas and 20% for solid fuels consumption in the EU. However, the heterogeneities among EU Member States were stark: a “clear East-West divide” appeared to be emerging, as observed by Celi et al. (2022, p. 144), as Hungary, Czechia and Slovakia obtained virtually all of their natural gas imports from Russia, whereas Estonia, Latvia and Finland were importing over 80% of natural gas from Russia (see also Figure below).

Figure 13: EU Member States' Dependency on Energy Imports from Russia, 2019



Notes: The energy import dependency rate for each country is defined as the share of net energy imports (imports minus exports) in total available energy – separately for natural gas, oil and petroleum products, and solid fossil fuels. We standardise indicators on a scale of 0 to 1, where zero stands for the lowest position in the ranking and 1 for the highest. The distribution of the indicator is then divided into quartiles to compare the relative position of member states.

Source: Celi et al. (2022, p. 144)

Russia's incursion in Ukraine resulting in the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the hybrid conflict in Ukraine's eastern regions of Donbas was a critical juncture in the mutual reassessment in the EU and Russia of being partners in energy. The EU's search for alternative (Caspian Sea, Nabucco, Qatar, among others) and renewable energy sources, which commenced with the 2001 Green Paper, saw a true boost in 2020 with the adoption of the European Green Deal and the EU's Hydrogen Strategy. Notably, Germany's strategy on production and use of hydrogen, adopted in June 2020, preceded the EU-level consensual course in this regard. Thereby, both German and EU's strategies *unmention* Russia as a prospective partner for hydrogen supplies nor as a key, at that moment, supplier of fossil fuels, which triggered suspicion and dissatisfaction in the Kremlin as well as among the key German beneficiaries and lobbying companies and associations formed around German-Russian business circles (Belov, 2020). To add to that, the Court of Justice of the EU issued in July 2021 its final decision in the Poland-Germany/EU Commission dispute regarding Russia's overuse of the OPAL pipeline capacity, which imperilled the EU's 'energy solidarity' principle that Poland wanted to be duly observed as part German-Russian bilateral energy deals.

The tension grew even further as, six months before launching its military assault on Ukraine, Russia suddenly stopped gas deliveries to the EU (Meredith, 2021), arguably hoping to torpedo the halted commissioning of the Nord Stream II gas pipeline and/or to leverage the energy



weapon in the winter season so that the European countries would face a hard choice: energy or solidarity with Ukraine. No less suddenly, explosions on both Nord Stream I and II pipelines underneath the Baltic Sea were recorded on 26 September 2022, rendering Russian gas deliveries to Europe through these pipelines from then on unfeasible.

With February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Putin's Russia risked many things, including its energy superpower status. Already in May 2022, the European Commission unveiled a *REPowerEU* strategy to end the Union's dependence on Russian gas (decreasing the dependence by at least two-thirds already in 2022) and fossil fuels (eliminating dependence by 2030 completely), chiefly by saving energy, diversifying energy sources and accelerating clean energy transition (European Commission, 2022b). Furthermore, Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine has pushed the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) even further away from Moscow. In the aftermath of Russia's first wave (hybrid) incursion in Ukraine in 2014, Lithuania built an LNG terminal in Klaipeda. In 2018, Estonia and Finland started the construction of their bi-directional gas pipeline, the 'Balticconnector', which became operational in mid-December 2019. In January 2020, Poland and Lithuania started the construction of the 'Gas Interconnection Poland – Lithuania' (GIPL) pipeline, which became operational just two months after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, on 1 May 2022. In March 2022, Estonia started constructing its own floating LNG terminal in Paldiski, expected to be operational in 2024-2025. In April 2022, Latvia, too, decided to build an LNG terminal, eyeing 2023/2024 as the terminal's start of operation (Andžāns, 2022).

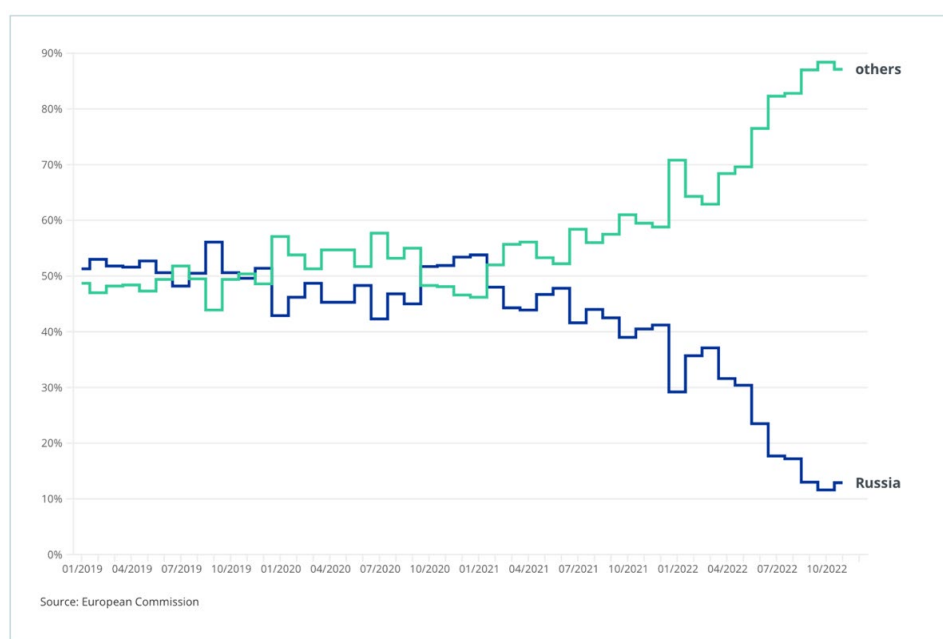
In November 2022, the EU's course on (Russian) energy independence further consolidated as its Member States and G7 members eyed another round of sanctions (including the introduction of price caps for Russian crude oil). The EU also supported the nationalisation or overtake of the control of Russian Gazprom affiliate companies operating in Europe. To this end, on November 12, 2022, the European Commission allocated EUR 225.6 million to support the Security Energy for Europe (SEFE) company, formerly Gazprom Germania, in an endeavour to facilitate Germany's full nationalisation of the company. This is not only a symbolic political move. By 2004, Russian Gazprom already owned shares, at times over 50%, in gas trading and transporting companies across at least 14 EU Member States. By the beginning of 2022, Gazprom Germania occupied 14% of the German gas transportation market and 28% of the country's gas storage facilities. In January 2023, Germany furthermore made operational its second LNG terminal in Lubmin. Thus, from being a firm monopolist on the German gas market in 2021 (with a share of 40% in coal and oil deliveries and over 55% in gas deliveries), Russia completely disappeared from German gas market in January 2023 (its share is equalling 0% at the time of writing) as Germany imports ca. 40% of gas from Norway, ca. 30% from the Netherlands and 25% from other sources while own production ranges at 4–5%.

The EU's thus far 10 packages of sanctions against Russia helped reshape the EU's internal energy market and Russian energy dependency, too. In the sixth package, adopted in June 2022, the EU banned imports of Russian crude oil (effective from December 2022) and refined petroleum products (effective from February 2023), with limited exceptions; reductions also affected coal and other solid fossil fuels. The ninth package of sanctions from 16 December 2022 introduced a price cap on Russian oil at USD 60 per barrel. Russia's overall share of EU



energy imports sharply declined from the first quarter of 2022 onwards: from ranging at ca. 27% in 2021 to accruing to just 15.1% in the third quarter of 2022; it is still falling further (see Figure 14). In its stead, EU imports more gas from the US (imports in 2022 rose by 75% compared to 2021) and Qatar.

Figure 14: The EU's Diversification Away from Russian gas



Source: European Council (2023b)

It is fair to state that, because of its risky military adventurism, Russia has lost – perhaps for good – its position as the EU's preeminent energy supplier, and with it, leverage against Europe.

6.4 Security: Talking the Talk but not Walking the Walk

While always mentioned third as a key area of EU-Russia cooperation in bilateral documents, security, in fact, presents the cross-cutting dimension in this bilateral strategic interaction: it underpins the actors' diverging conceptions of interdependence in two other areas (trade and energy) as well as is thickly manifested in their interactions in and through the 'common' neighbourhoods. Highly salient especially in the regional context, security issues have somewhat less prominently featured as factors of EU-Russia cooperation in international and global contexts.

Regarding *European security governance*, the EU–Russia relations have to be unavoidably seen as “part and parcel of the wider post-Cold War settlement and attempts at ordering the pan-European space” (Haukkala, 2015, p. 26). Questions of whether Russia is ‘part of Europe’ or ‘apart of Europe’ in this political space-ordering process have boggled minds of policymakers and scholarly communities up until the divergent break of 2022. The interaction in the security sphere was not well articulated in the EU-Russia PCA. In practice, too, there was a state of



initial mutual neglect up until the 1999 NATO intervention in Kosovo. While this critical juncture led to a breakdown in Russia's relations with the US and NATO, the EU was seen by Russia as being "the 'acceptable face' of the West and, as a result, [Moscow] courted Brussels as a negotiating partner" (Foxall, 2019, p. 178). Moreover, Russia met the 1999 creation of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) with enthusiasm rather than suspicion as it was giving it a hope for Europe's 'detachment' from the US/Western core and, thus, could facilitate the emergence of a new – multipolar – world order (Giegerich et al., 2006).

European Commission's President R. Prodi and EU's first-ever High Representative for Foreign Affairs J. Solana both voiced the enthusiasm, on the EU's side as well, about the possibility of constructing a 'Pax Europea' – a wider European area of peace, stability and prosperity – on par with Russia as an 'equal partner'. The EU-Russia Paris Declaration on Political and Security Cooperation, adopted in 2000, formalised such an ambition. In 2003, 'external security' was identified as one of the four 'common spaces' of interaction. The scope and rationale of this 'common space' governance largely remained unclarified, however, – even in the roadmaps elaborated in 2005. As Zaslavskaya and Averre (2019, p. 149) systematically observe, the "launch of the Common Space on External Security in 2005 represented 'another exercise in a reasonably courteous management of ambiguity', one in which only vague and limited commitments were made about conflict settlement and crisis management". The lack of a common vision on what the European political and security order should entail is not surprising: while the EU's idea of Pax Europaea was innately tied to the liberal-democratic ideas and the rules-based liberal international order, Russia's preference persistently has been to get back to Yalta, with clear (even if largely informal) divisions of the spheres of influence and the great-power political balance (Forsberg, 2019, p. 161).

It is for this reason and the strikingly geographically divisive dictum of the Russian President D. Medvedev's 2008 Draft European Security Treaty (EST), that this Russian initiative on ordering European security space was not met with approval in Europe. The problem with accommodating Russia's quest for status and say in governing all-European security space, as encompassed in the EST proposal, was that it would inevitably lead to the emergence of a bipolar Europe and thus again trigger divides – rather than concert – within the post-Cold War European security order.⁷

Dwelling on the (inter-)institutional complexity of governing European security since 1989, Hill (2018, p. 3) posits that "neither Russia, the major European powers, nor the United States have been successful since 1989 in defining a place for Russia in the European or Euro-Atlantic security architecture". First competing and, later on, growing increasingly incompatible, Russian and European/Western narratives on the European political and security order

⁷ To help remedy the repercussions of a European 'no' to Russian EST proposal, which was (mis)perceived in Russia as a sign of humiliation, Germany advanced the so-called '*Meseberg Initiative*' in 2010 that supported the establishment of the *EU-Russia Committee on Foreign Policy and Security*. The conflict in Transnistria was the key pilot case in the Committee's portfolio, and failure to deliver on it soon rendered the format dormant and irrelevant, see Fix (2021, pp. 91–118).



provided all too little common ground for mutual accommodation without hampering both parties' own values, principles and goals pursued.

It should be also added that Russia, too, saw little (if any) role for the EU to play in the construction of a European political order, as its key interlocutors have either been Germany (and occasionally France) or the US directly. A recent example of such a disregard of the EU as a political and security actor was Russia's direct ultimatums to the US and the demand for the Russia-US/NATO settlement of an arrangement for European security made in December 2021, which deliberately excluded the EU from negotiations. Russia's deputy foreign minister Alexandr Grushko openly stated back then that 'in military security, the European Union is under full control of NATO' and the EU's 'ambitions to play a sovereign military-political role and to become less dependent on the US have no practical significance' (Grushko, 2021).

The imminence of Russian military invasion of Ukraine in January 2022 finally prompted the EU to recognise the obvious – that, since 2014, Russia has been a party to – not a mediator in – the Donbas conflict and that its military adventurism and world-order revisionism present a serious threat to the European security architecture (Borrell, 2022).

An even more unsubstantial – while highly politicised and normatively divergent – has been the EU-Russia security cooperation in the wider framework of regional and global security issues. If one discounts the empty rhetoric and declarations on cooperation on a whole range of international security issues, cooperation on crisis management and *fight against terrorism* in Syria was one of the key, albeit not long-lasting, areas of cooperative Russia-EU/West engagements. What first presented an attempt, on Russia's side, at restoring the Russia-West dialogue after the Russian debacle in Ukraine in 2014, soon turned into Russia's go-it-alone move, which, in turn, evolved into a coalition with non-Western and regional MENA powers (Iran) and Turkey, with mounting criticism unleashing upon 'liberal interventionism of the West' (Wilhelmsen, 2019).

Yet also beyond Syria, Russia's reliability as a partner for the US (and the West more broadly) in fighting terrorism has been repeatedly questioned. Borshchevskaya (2017) argued that "[f]rom Syria to Afghanistan, Putin has done more to encourage terrorism than fight it, with Moscow maintaining ties to terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and the Taliban". The rise of Russia's own home-grown and Kremlin-controlled private military grouping – the Wagner Group PMC can, too, hardly be seen as a resolve to fight (rather than weaponise) terrorism, especially as the group's illegal deployments and brutal warfare in Syria, Africa (Mali, Central African Republic) and Ukraine triggered the debate in the US about designating it a terrorist organisation. In its ninth and tenth packages of sanctions against Russia, adopted in December 2022 and February 2023, the EU Council targeted both the Wagner Group itself (named as 'Russia-based unincorporated private military entity'⁸) as well as several entities and individuals linked with the group.

⁸ Rather than the official label suggests, the Russian 'Wagner Private Military Company' (PMC Wagner, or Wagner Group) is a hybrid formation which substantially embodies a state-sponsored organised crime group, see: Stanyard et al. (2023).



On other security issues, such as (illegal and irregular) migration, Russia was more of a problem than partner. The 2015 refugee crisis, spurred by the unrest in the MENA region, in particular the wars in Syria and Libya, presented a significant challenge for both the EU's security and cohesion as the dilemma that erupted in receiving and (re)locating over 120,000 refugees among EU Member States to help alleviate the burden of the most-affected Member States (Greece, Italy and Spain) was that of solidarity versus security. Russia's bold decision to capitalise on this development and help reinforce (through fake news offensives and antagonistic official rhetoric as well as trans-ideological alliances formed) within-EU disagreements largely premised on its 'discovery' of a new ally – national conservative groups in Europe ties with whom were used by Russia to instil split between a 'true' (orientalised and to-be-salvaged from liberal tolerance and political correctness) and a 'false' (old, liberal-democratic occidental) Europe (Braghiroli & Makarychev, 2018).

The story repeated, albeit from different side, in 2021. In July 2021, the Belarus-EU refugee and border crisis emerged as the self-proclaimed President A. Lukashenka orchestrated 'tourist' travels of would-be migrants from Iraq, Syria and other MENA countries to Belarus, with their subsequent 'funneling' by Belarusian security forces to the EU's external borders of Poland, Latvia and Lithuania. Arguably, this confrontational move was coordinated with Russia and presented yet another Russia's attempt to directly or indirectly 'weaponise' migration in its standoff with the EU (Bachmann, 2021).

Frictions and (in)direct confrontation, rather than cooperation, also characterise the EU-Russia interaction in other areas such as human rights and human security, humanitarian aid (including, more recently and globally, to help remedy the COVID-19 global pandemics), cyber security, or even food security, which emerged as an issue in the wake of Russia's 2022 all-out military aggression against Ukraine.

6.5 The Concept of 'Strategic Partnership' and the EU-Russia SP: A Reality Check

Strategic partnerships (SPs) resemble goal-driven bilateral undertakings that are based on political declarations or agreements that are usually grounded in a comprehensive cooperation basis on a number of policy fields, thereby advancing both actors' own and shared interests and, in some cases, also underpinned by shared values. An SP usually rests on a set of joint institutions that govern and help sustain it. Trust is fundamental in sustaining an SP (Tyushka & Czechowska, 2019; Tyushka et al., 2022). In assessing the effectiveness of strategic partnerships, several of the above aspects warrant careful consideration, including such as shared goals, converging interests, "longevity, institutionalisation, routinisation, value-congruence, security interdependence, etc." (Muftuler-Bac et al., 2022, p. 32 (ENGAGE [Working Paper 13](#))). In turn, the sustainability of a given SP is highly correlational with its durability. At the EU level, both the effectiveness and the sustainability of an EU SP may also be affected by the issues in both horizontal and vertical coherence. The former is understood as a coordinated and congruent stream of *other* EU policies and undertakings that directly or indirectly relate to a given SP's pursuit, while the latter one is related to the relationship



between the EU-level and its Member States' politics, not least as "the existence of a strategic partnership [may be] undercut by, or supported by, existing policies on the member state level" (Muftuler-Bac et al., 2022, p. 33).

From the beginning, this partnership rested on a 'fairly low' 'level of commonality' that was reflected in how the 'strategic partners' framed each other, their normative and institutional foundations of cooperation, as well as given their variance in preference for material (Russia) over normative and values-based (EU) objectives in bilateral and wider regional interactions (Haukkala, 2010, p. 109; see also: pp. 92–110). The lack of genuine rapprochement, if not convergence, was not only premised on Russia's resistance to the EU's norm-driven agenda but, more profoundly, on the irreconcilable nature of two contradicting impulses in Russian foreign policy, that is "forging deeper ties while retaining complete sovereignty" (Lynch, 2004, p. 100).

This sovereigntist approach is neatly reflected in the design of, and (lacking) power conferral upon, EU-Russia joint institutions. Whereas the density of formal institutional arrangements governing EU-Russia SP is rather high, such state of art should not be taken at face value as even the highest-level bodies like the Cooperation Council (later on: Permanent Partnership Council) lack necessary decision-making authority, and decisions are exceptionally adopted at the strategic level (see Table 7). Such non-delegation of power to joint bodies on Russia's side has a knockoff effect on the operation of the established institutions.

Table 7 : EU-Russia SP Constitutive Dimensions

SP dimension	Description
'Common values'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NPE/EU's key emphasis on values vs RU's initially overly legalistic/formalistic approach to values and later growing contestation and value revisionism (values gap)
'Shared interests'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Declaratory 'sharedness' vs real-political growing divergence and incompatibility (competing and incompatible interests)
Shared goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not detected; all too vaguely mentioned, if at all (issue of vagueness and formally declared vs actually pursued goals)
Joint institutional Frameworks (JIFs)	<p>(Chiefly/nearly exclusively PCA-based):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular (semi-annual/every 6 months) Summits of RU & EUCO Presidents, assisted by FM and HR/VP, respectively → frequency to demonstrate the 'importance' of EU-Russia relations; frozen after 2014 From PCA-mandated dialogue between RU's PM and EU COM's President to a wider framework of interaction bringing in ca. 15 EU Commissioners and Russian ministers → an overly symbolic body, rather than a forum for discussion; frozen after 2014 Cooperation Council (under PCA) an intergovernmental annual meeting format, esp. between EU MS and RU energy and foreign ministers → transformed into the Permanent Partnership Council (PPC) in 2003, again, to denote the 'importance' of bilateral relations → a misleading name (PPC is still a session body – not a permanent one), and largely irrelevant (except for socialisation's sake) outcomes; frozen after 2014



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee for Parliamentary Cooperation (CPC) bringing together EP and RUS Duma delegations, with little real discussions and more of an information exchange function on new legislation... • Cooperation Committee (CC) – under PCA, a ‘preparatory body’ bringing together senior officials from the EU and RU; featuring also 9 sectoral sub-committees → <i>due to insufficient delegation of authority on the Russian side, the subcommittees were abandoned in the early 2000s; the CC, too, fell the victim of irrelevance; frozen after 2014</i> • Sectoral Dialogues (emerged beyond PCA’s foreseen structure, in response to CC failure) involving relevant ministers, lower-level officials, and business and academia representatives in various Working Groups (the Energy Dialogue being the first in line; later on, dialogues on investments, IPR, environment protection, competition, etc., emerged) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The EU-Russia Roundtable of Industrialists, est. in 1997, is the central body of the Business Dialogue</i> • Civil Society Forum (CSF) launched in May 2011 in Prague but... → <i>the meeting outcomes ignored by Russian gov’t; also, since 2012, GONGOs in Russia...</i>
Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Half-hearted approach of both sides: largely absent EU-level Russia policy (with national, chiefly Germany-inspired/-driven policies as EU policy substitutes); fluctuating and self-contradictory RU’s view of EU (US ‘puppet’ vs ‘evil and expanding hegemon’ vs ‘not a sovereign power at all’) and preference for dialogue with EU national capitals
Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First fragile and overshadowed by Russia’s US/NATO/West-prismatic view of the EU; then, growingly suspicious (since early 2000s) and deeply distrustful (post–2008) relationship, including deeply paranoid in Russia’s case (since 2014 onwards)

Source: own elaboration

More than strategic, the EU-Russia partnership had rather been pragmatic: a partnership of necessity and inconvenience – not a partnership of strategic choice.

Whereas in trade, energy and security, the interactions between Russia and the EU had critical significance for both parties, they failed to explicitly and unequivocally state what had been the shared goals of their SP-based engagement. Furthermore, in the regional dimension and at the global level, the EU’s and Russia’s interests all too often competed and became growingly incompatible, particularly as Russia tightly embraced, since 2007, its revisionist agenda (Krickovic, 2022).

So did the gap in their value systems. From the mid–1990s and until the early 2000s, the rhetoric of the arguably ‘shared values’ underpinned the EU’s approach to cooperation with Russia and, to an extent, was echoed in Russia’s discourse as well, even if there was a conviction in the Kremlin that these were European values offered to be shared – not common ones. Even the diverging reactions to the Kosovo crisis and Russia’s brutal two wars in Chechnya did not substantially undo such rhetoric. In late 2000s, however, and particularly after Russia’s 2008 invasion of Georgia, the glaring ‘gap in values’ (Yaroshenko, 2011) got all too well exposed to be concealed in the ‘shared values’ talk. Whether in neighbourhood or wider regional and global politics, Russia has increasingly been contesting EU’s identity as a



liberal-democratic power, its normative authority and hegemony (Tyushka, 2022). Russia's belligerent 'we can do it again' and the proof thereof, which ensued with its February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, sharply and irreconcilably clashed with the EU's 'never again' ontology.

The issue of trust is central in EU-Russia strategic interactions and is inherently overshadowed by Russia's trust issues vis-à-vis the West as such. Seeing the current peace order as imposed by the US/West (an imposed 'victor's peace'), which has been celebrating the triumph of liberal democracy since the 1990s, the post-2000s Putin's Russia, furthermore, embraced the belief and narrative of an (arguably existing and) 'broken promise' of the US not to enlarge NATO eastwards (Tyushka, 2015, pp. 12–15), which for the past two decades has become the key lens and filter for Russia's perceptions of the EU's and NATO's as well as the U.S.' actions within and outside the region (Wintour, 2022). The lack of trust, or rather deep mistrust, among the Russian and EU leaderships, has been a key driver of the confrontational logic particularly since 2013 as the 'attributional bias' in gauging actors' mutual intentions was on the rise (Casier, 2016). Given this unfavourable endogenous dynamic, including low level of trust in its strategic culture more generally as well as Europe's split and cautious attitude toward (post-) Soviet Russia, and the persistent exogenous 'Western' shadow over Russia's perception of Europe, the partners did not move from trust to mistrust but, rather, 'failed to trust' in principle (Haukkala & Saari, 2018, pp. 114–120).

Remarkably, the EU-Russia SP had seen periods of stagnation, and thus proved to be *unsustainable*, even before its clinical death in 2014. The early cracks upon it were inflicted by Russia's 2008 military aggression in Georgia and the 'strategic pause' taken in January 2013, well before Ukraine's Euromaidan revolution in November 2013–February 2014. As Trenin (2013) pondered back then: "Business [was] running and gas [was] flowing, but Russia's behaviour [became] unacceptable in Europe". In a year, this strategic rupture became impossible to hide, as Russia invaded Ukraine, annexing Crimea and covertly igniting a conflict in Ukraine's eastern areas of Donbas (Barburska, 2014). As earlier noted, the conflict in Ukraine is "a culmination of a long-term crisis in EU-Russia relations" (Haukkala, 2015). Just before assuming her position as the EU's HR/VP, F. Mogherini was the first to state, in September 2014, that Russia no longer was a 'strategic partner' of the EU – and thereby countered the validity and relevance of then still legally dominant (and present across hundreds of EU-Russia bilateral documents) paradigm and discourse. Legally and institutionally, however, this tacit turn from 'partner' to 'non-partner' was not anyhow proclaimed at the EU level back then. The European Parliament did pass a resolution on June 4, 2015, in which it stated that Russia no longer was a strategic partner of the EU. In this resolution, the European Parliament also called on the EU institutions to review the EU-Russia partnership and to consider further measures, including the suspension of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, in response to Russia's actions in Ukraine. However, even after the EU's foreign-policy turns of 2016 (when Russia was named a 'strategic challenge' in the EU's Global Strategy and five principles were introduced to the EU's Russia policy) and 2021 (when the EU adopted a three-pronged Russia approach: 'push back – constrain – engage'), nor after the 'grand split' following Russia's February 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the EU-Russia strategic partnership has not been



officially terminated by either side – and the EU-Russia PCS is still in force, though not updated anymore.

To what extent, however, the PCA has informed both EU institutional actions, EU-level and national policies vis-à-vis Russia – and their overall *coherence* – is a key issue. The EU's overall strategic indecisiveness and ambiguity in its Russia (and, as a result, its neighbourhood) policies has it that there is little coherence among the EU's trade, energy, security and neighbourhood policies altogether. That the latter one – neighbourhood policy – served as a substitute for both the EU's and Russia's direct bilateral strategic engagement brought also little clarity as to what the means and end goals in both cases are. Essentially, the EU's lasting lack of a long-term and strategic Russia policy is the produce of internal disagreements and disunity among EU Member States in that “the relationship with Russia has arguably been the most divisive factor in EU external relations policy” (Schmidt-Felzmann, 2008, p. 170). This disunity is well-documented in both EU and EU Member States' official discourses and in the scholarly analyses. Roughly, it can be distinguished between EU Member States that are drivers of the EU's Russia policy (Germany, joined by France), veto players (Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, lately also Czechia and Slovakia as well as Nordic EU Members) and spoilers (Hungary).

Germany and France have been key players in EU's relations with Russia. As Siddi (2020, pp. 34–55) vividly explores, Germany's lasting *Ostpolitik* discourse also in the post-reunification period kept advocating dialogue, partnership and interdependence with Russia, whereas Poland's view of Russia was that of an imperialist, aggressive, undemocratic and oriental (and thus un-sharing the European/Western values) 'other', and Finland's discourse entailed a mixture of alternating positive and deeply negative representations of its huge eastern neighbour. EU's big economies, such as Germany, France and Italy, consistently – though, to a varying degree – pursued individual bilateral tracks with Russia, oftentimes neglecting the common interest (or even the need to formulate such!) of the European Union. Russia, too, massively invested in bilateral relations with select EU Member States as part of both its economic interests and its geopolitical strategy that has sought to undo the European unity. Such splits were manifested on multiple occasions, including when in 2019 France decided to 'charm' Russia one more try and engage it in dialogue in view of resolving the 'Donbas conflict' – a salient issue on which there had been little agreement within the EU Council at that time.

At the same time, Russia's incursion in Ukraine in 2014 has triggered positive dynamics in that German and British threat perceptions towards Russia started converging – and so their mutual perceptions of reliability, especially – and paradoxically so – after the 2016 Brexit referendum (Driedger, 2021).

Importantly, discord and differences in positions on Russia run not only across the arguable East/West divide in the EU, but also within the groups. As the initial reactions to Russia's hybrid incursion in Ukraine since 2014 showed, discord within Central and Eastern European countries was also noticeable and extending beyond the dichotomic line of support/non-support of Ukraine (Forbrig, 2015). Hungary's lasting – diverging – position, even after



February 2022, keeps imperilling the sustainability of the EU's consensus and action in deterring and punishing Russian aggression.

The EU's search for a coherent voice and action on the international stage has become one of the mantras in European official parlance (Thaler, 2020). The Russia case has persisted as the epitomic evidence that mantras not always work.

Haukkala's (2021, p. 178) most recent retrospection on, and revisiting of, his own and much of the scholarship's take on 'the so-called EU-Russia strategic partnership' posits that "[t]he EU– Russia SP was the first of its kind in the EU's external relations with non-western partners and it is the oldest but also unarguably the most difficult strategic partnership it has sought to promote". While there are multiple reasons to question the existence of the phenomenon of a 'strategic partnership' between the EU and Russia in principle, it is easy to agree with Haukkala's (2021, p. 178) that "the strategic nature of relations between the EU and Russia had not been in doubt". It is not in doubt even now, one year into Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine. What changed, though, is the position of the pointer on the EU's strategic compass, where Russia no longer is a 'strategic partner' but has become a "key strategic challenge" (European External Action Service, 2016, p. 33), that is 'rival' if translated from the EU's official speak. Mutual distrust, misunderstanding, the neglect of salient issues and, in particular, the permeating ambiguity on the strategic rationale and the future of the EU-Russia SP have it that the relationship immediately stagnated, and entirely collapsed in 2014. Since February 2022, a deep and at the moment irreconcilable antagonism has underpinned the logic of EU-Russia strategic interaction, that is mutual containment, disengagement and overall isolation.



7 Conclusion

This paper has presented a detailed examination of the European Union's strategic partnerships with Brazil, the United Kingdom, the United States, Russia and Turkey. Given the large variation in terms of partners and the partnerships' historical evolutions, each case has offered unique insights into the complexities and dynamics of EU's approach towards third countries, illustrating the nuanced actions and policies required to maintain or even enhance these relationships. In parallel, the paper has focused on the coherence of EU's external action and foreign policy towards strategic global partners, both in the horizontal and vertical sense. The analysis of the case studies has allowed for a more holistic understanding of how incoherence, vertical or horizontal, can affect strategic relationships over time.

The analysis of the EU partnership with Brazil highlights the importance of a 'third layer of coherence', between bilateral and regional policies of the EU and its Member States. On the one hand, the EU has a web of interactions with CELAC, Mercosur, and other regional organisations in Latin America of which Brazil is part. On the other hand, the EU has bilateral policies and interactions with Brazil. It is therefore crucial to ensure coherence and synergies between both levels of interaction with the global partner. The case study of Brazil sheds light on the aspects of resilience of a partnership when there are major changes in domestic and foreign policy following democratic transitions after elections.

Like the case of *Brazil*, the study of the EU partnership with the *United States* also shows the crucial aspects of a partnership that relate to changes in policies and approach to world order following a presidential election. While the EU-US strategic relation is marked by deeply rooted historical and present interdependencies, the relationship is relatively less institutionalised in the absence of an association agreement or formal mechanisms of cooperation, which makes it more vulnerable to political changes. A partnership with a global superpower also calls attention to the EU's level of autonomy in the relationship itself and in its overall role in global governance, especially in times of normative divergence. Historically, these concerns translate into debates on the Atlanticist components of European external action. More recently, there is potential for vertical incoherence as EU Member States share concerns about the EU's strategic autonomy, most notably in relation to the United States.

The case study of the EU-*United Kingdom* relations sheds light on the Union's most recent strategic partnership with a complex bilateral history that includes former UK membership of the EU and high levels of interdependency and geographical proximity. During the Brexit negotiations, which set the basic framework for the partnership, the Union's action benefited from a unified position of its Member States and from an inter-institutional coherence, avoiding a British 'cherry picking' of cooperation in certain policy areas. While individual EU Member States had their own preferences, the European Commission's constant back-and-forth between national capitals and EU institutions prevented divergent priorities from spilling into disunity in the negotiations, ensuring overall coherence.



The case study of EU's relationship with *Turkey* explores critical layers of complexity in a heavily interdependent relationship, which cannot be reduced to a single policy dimension in isolation. The study reveals clashes between the EU and Member States in the EU's policies towards Turkey as well as horizontal incoherence across EU policy areas relating to modernisation of the customs union, migration cooperation, promotion of norms, and unresolved Turkish bilateral disputes with two EU Member States, Cyprus and Greece. These challenges hinder progress in achieving a closer partnership, which is further complicated by the long-lasting process Turkish accession to the EU and the country's increasingly geopolitical presences in the Eastern Mediterranean context.

Finally, the analysis of the EU's relations with *Russia* reveals the consequences of a neglected and ambiguous partnership. This case study explains that a lack of coherence, aligned with permeating ambiguity on the strategic rationale on the future of the EU-Russia strategic partnership led to its collapse in 2014 and the current state of Russia as a 'key strategic challenge'. In short, disunity among EU Member States has been one of the most important factors behind the EU's relationship with Russia and internal EU disagreements amongst Member States explain the lack of a long-term policy for Russia.

The case studies show that strategic partnerships are not isolated bilateral relationships between the EU and a third country, but that each relationship is deeply embedded in larger regional and global contexts. As it is difficult to dissociate strategic partnerships from the dynamics of global and regional orders, it is equally challenging to attribute success, failure or stagnation of such relationships solely to the EU's actions and policies. External factors as well as actions and policies of the partners themselves are equally important to determine the fate of a strategic partnership and its contribution to global order. Hence, at a policy level, the question of EU's strategic partnerships in its external actions is whether a partnership is adaptable to the current geopolitical and geoeconomic changes at the world stage while being suitable to the objectives of EU's external action. Such partnerships can create momentum and serve as frameworks for joint action and cooperation, and may help to sustain relationships despite challenging endogenous and exogenous crisis and challenges.



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Interviews

- A01 Brazilian Diplomat
- A02 Official, European Commission
- B04 Official, European Commission
- B08 Senior Official, European Commission
- B12 Senior Official, European Commission
- B18 Former Senior Official, Cabinet Office
- C02 Senior Official, EEAS
- C03 Senior Fellow, think tank
- C04 Academic expert, EU external relations
- C05 Senior Fellow, think tank
- C06 Academic expert, EU external relations
- C08 Official, German Foreign Ministry
- C09 Senior Fellow, think tank
- C11 Senior Commission Official
- C12 Senior Fellow, think tank
- C13 Official, German Foreign Ministry
- C14 Senior Fellow, think tank
- C15 Senior Fellow, think tank
- C17 Senior Officials (x2), EEAS
- C18 Academic expert, EU external relations
- C21 Senior Official, Dutch Foreign Ministry



Authors

Gustavo Müller is a senior researcher at the Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies at KU Leuven. He holds a double PhD from the University of Warwick (UK) and the Université libre de Bruxelles (Belgium). His research focuses on the external action of the European Union, EU-Latin America relations, comparative and inter-regionalism, and the legitimization of global governance institutions.

Maria Martins Maria is a luzo-brazilian young researcher, having been a research assistant at the Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies and currently working at UNU-CRIS. Her academic background is from European Studies, holding a bachelor degree from the University of Coimbra, and a master degree in European Studies: Transnational and Global Perspectives from KU Leuven. Maria's research focuses on inter-regional relations between the European Union and Latin America, in particular, Brazil, and its cooperation in the field of human rights.

Karel Brackeniers is a PhD candidate and teaching assistant at the KU Leuven Institute for International Law and the Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies' America Europe Fund. Karel has a keen interest in international law and its interactions with constitutional law, nuclear weapons, legal theory and history. He is also interested in transatlantic relations and has written on US constitutional history. Karel completed the KU Leuven's Research Master of Laws, including one Semester abroad at the University of Edinburgh.

Andriy Tyushka is senior research fellow in the European Neighbourhood Policy Chair at the College of Europe in Natolin (CoEN). Previously, he held research fellowships and teaching positions in Spain (University of Deusto), Germany (German-French Institute in Ludwigsburg), and Estonia (Baltic Defence College). He received his PhD in International Relations and World Politics from the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (Ukraine), where he co-authored the first Ukrainian Handbook on International Organizations (Znannia, 1st edn 2005; 2nd edn 2007). More recently, Dr. Tyushka authored and co-edited *States, International Organizations, and Strategic Partnerships* (Edward Elgar, 2019) and *The European Union and its Eastern Neighbourhood: Whither 'Eastern Partnership'?* (Routledge, 2022).

Benjamin Martill is a lecturer in Politics and International Relations and associate director of the Europa Institute at the University of Edinburgh. His research examines the politics of European security collaboration and the changing UK-EU relationship, with a particular focus on the Brexit negotiations. He is an associate of LSE IDEAS, the foreign policy think-tank of the London School of Economics, and has taught at University College London, Canterbury Christ Church University, and the University of Oxford.

Alexander Mesarovich is a postdoctoral career researcher at the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Edinburgh, where he completed his doctoral studies in 2022. He specialises in the politics of the European Union, in particular accession and external



policy, and has published on a variety of subjects including accession, populism, international relations, and informal politics.

Meltem Müftüler-Bac is dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Sabancı University, Istanbul. She is professor of International Relations with areas of concentration in Turkey's relations with the European Union, European integration, Turkish foreign policy and international relations theory. Her work has been funded by multiple EU research grants; her publications appear in top ranking peer-reviewed journals and is widely cited. Her multiple affiliations include the University of Chicago, the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Stockholm.

Senem Aydın-Düzgit is a professor of International Relations at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Sabancı University, and research and academic affairs Coordinator at the Istanbul Policy Center. Her main research interests include European foreign policy, Turkish foreign policy, EU-Turkey relations, discourse studies and identity in international relations and in European foreign policy. Her articles have been published in journals such as the European Journal of International Relations, Journal of Common Market Studies, West European Politics, Democratization, Cooperation and Conflict, Third World Quarterly, among others.

Ezgi Uzun-Teker is a political scientist and instructor at Sabancı University. She earned her PhD in Political Science from Sabancı University in 2018 and joined Columbia University Arnold A. Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies as a visiting researcher in 2017. Her main area of expertise is Middle East and Iranian Studies, with a specific focus on religion and international politics, security and strategic culture studies, nuclear proliferation, and EU Middle East relations.



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