

## TOWARDS A GESAMTKONZEPT FOR THE EU'S STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

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### ABSTRACT

This research examines the European Union's (EU) Strategic Partnerships, particularly focusing on the SP10 framework, to assess their role in enhancing global governance amid contemporary geopolitical challenges. The aim is to identify the critical governance mechanisms required to strengthen these partnerships, enabling the EU to advance its strategic interests and maintain its influence in a multipolar world. The central research questions addressed include:

1. What are the current governance challenges faced by the EU in managing its Strategic Partnerships? 2. How can the EU effectively leverage these partnerships to navigate complex global issues such as climate change, economic inequality, and geopolitical rivalries? 3. What policy recommendations can be formulated to enhance the coherence and effectiveness of the EU's foreign economic policies within its Strategic Partnerships framework? Key findings reveal that the effectiveness of the EU's Strategic Partnerships is hindered by political fragmentation, lack of accountability, and insufficient flexibility in engagement strategies. Additionally, the research highlights the importance of adopting a multi-stakeholder approach, fostering transparency, and ensuring equitable representation to address the diverse interests of partner countries. Overall, the conclusion underscores that the EU must adopt a robust, adaptable, and transparent governance framework to capitalize on its Strategic Partnerships. By integrating geoeconomic strategies, enhancing diplomatic engagement, and prioritizing sustainable practices, the EU can position itself as a credible global actor, capable of responding effectively to shared challenges and advancing a stable and prosperous international order. We recommend a three-tiered approach encompassing the reform of the UNSC and policy framework, the great power concert restored out of the UNSC, and this EU-led international society to predominate.

**Keywords:** Strategic Partnership, Global Governance, European Union, Geopolitical Dynamics, Foreign Economic Policy, Multi-Stakeholder Engagement, Sustainability & Accountability.

### I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of growing geopolitical complexity and shifting global power dynamics, the European Union has increasingly sought to redefine and reinforce its role on the world stage. The post-Cold War optimism surrounding a stable, rules-based international order has given way to a more fragmented, multipolar environment marked by strategic competition, normative contestation, and systemic interdependence. The EU, while continuing to espouse multilateralism and normative leadership, recognized that its traditional instruments of diplomacy were insufficient to address the scale and scope of contemporary global challenges—ranging from climate change and technological governance to security disruptions and global inequality. In response, the Union turned to a flexible and interest-driven diplomatic model: Strategic Partnerships.

These Strategic Partnerships, informally referred to as the EP10+1, constitute a cornerstone of the EU's foreign policy architecture. They are tailored, long-term political frameworks that structure relations with a select group of global actors deemed essential to the EU's strategic interests and to the shaping of the international order.

The implementation of an effective external action framework has not been without significant challenges. While the EU is a global economic heavyweight, its geopolitical influence has often been constrained by internal fragmentation, slow consensus-building mechanisms, and divergent national foreign policies among Member States. Additionally, the resurgence of great-power rivalry, particularly the assertiveness of China and Russia, has tested the EU's unity and exposed vulnerabilities in its strategic autonomy. The erosion of multilateralism, compounded by the weakening of

international institutions, further diminished the EU's capacity to act effectively within traditional diplomatic arenas. Moreover, the Union's external policy efforts have sometimes suffered from a disconnect with its internal policy priorities, leading to inconsistencies in areas such as energy dependency, technological sovereignty, and migration governance. In this context, there emerged an urgent need for a more coherent, agile, and strategically aligned foreign policy instrument capable of managing complexity while safeguarding European values and interests.

The Strategic Partnerships were conceived as a flexible, trust-based diplomatic instrument designed to elevate the EU's bilateral and regional relations beyond transactional engagement. Rather than functioning as military alliances or rigid treaties, these partnerships provide an adaptable platform for dialogue, coordination, and joint action in areas of shared concern. They are grounded in mutual respect and reciprocal benefit, and cover a wide spectrum of policy domains, including but not limited to democracy and human rights, trade and investment, security and defense, environmental sustainability, and technological innovation.

At their core, the Strategic Partnerships are intended to bridge normative ambition with pragmatic cooperation. They seek to offer an alternative diplomatic model that aligns with the EU's unique positioning as a civilian power committed to sustainable global governance, while advancing its geopolitical and geo-economic agenda.

The development of the EP10+1 framework reflects a strategic calculus rooted in both principle and pragmatism. The selection of partners is informed by the EU's long-term strategic interests, as well as the global significance of the partner countries in terms of political influence, economic potential, and normative alignment. While the partnerships share a common foundation, each is customized to the political context, capabilities, and mutual expectations of the respective partner.

Strategic Partnerships are structured to be complementary to existing multilateral commitments and internal EU strategies. They operate across multiple levels—bilateral, regional, and multilateral—and are designed to integrate the EU's internal policy objectives, such as the Green Deal, the Digital Agenda, and Global Gateway, with its external relations. The model enables differentiated engagement through high-level summits, sectoral dialogues, thematic working groups, and policy roadmaps, offering the flexibility needed to respond to evolving circumstances without undermining long-term strategic coherence.

The operationalization of Strategic Partnerships involves a dynamic interplay between diplomacy, policy coordination,

and financial instruments. High-level political dialogues, often in the form of annual summits, set the strategic direction and reaffirm political commitment. These are complemented by action plans, joint declarations, and implementation roadmaps that translate diplomatic intent into policy outcomes. Thematic dialogues on digital transformation, climate cooperation, security, migration, and health serve to deepen cooperation in specific policy areas and foster mutual learning.

Execution also entails alignment with broader EU instruments, including development cooperation frameworks such as NDICI—Global Europe, investment packages under the Global Gateway initiative, and collaborative efforts in international fora like the G20, the UN, and the WTO. Over time, partnerships such as those with India, Japan, Brazil, South Korea, and the United States have evolved to reflect new priorities, including digital sovereignty, supply chain resilience, and strategic decoupling from authoritarian regimes.

The EP10+1 Strategic Partnerships represent the EU's evolving approach to foreign policy in a world marked by uncertainty, competition, and fragmentation. They serve as both a reflection of the EU's commitment to principled engagement and a pragmatic tool for safeguarding its strategic interests. Neither rigid nor static, these partnerships are emblematic of a diplomacy that values dialogue over dominance, cooperation over coercion, and adaptability over orthodoxy. In doing so, they enable the European Union to assert itself as a strategic actor in the global arena while reinforcing the principles of multilateralism and shared governance.

## Argument

In this scientific argument, we contend that the European Union must adopt a more coherent and integrated approach to its Strategic Partnerships to effectively reclaim its role as a significant geopolitical actor in an increasingly multipolar world. In light of the escalating great power rivalry, particularly between the United States and China, the EU faces mounting international pressures that challenge its geopolitical influence.

We argue that the integration of geo-economic factors into the EU's foreign policy framework is essential for enhancing its international standing and fostering cooperation with member states and external partners alike. By systematically examining the EU's existing bilateral agreements and promoting a unified Foreign Economic Policy, the EU can leverage its economic power to assert its interests more effectively while upholding its

foundational principles of democracy and human rights.

This strategic alignment enables the EU to navigate the complexities of global affairs and positions it as a key player in shaping a rules-based international order. Reinforcing its legitimacy and credibility on the world stage is not only advantageous but a pressing necessity for the EU to ensure long-term stability and prosperity for its member states.

Theoretical frameworks such as institutional theory illustrate how enlargement and neighborhood policies can foster stability and increase the EU's influence. Furthermore, a geoeconomic approach underscores the importance of economic tools in achieving political objectives, particularly in the context of rising power competition. Constructivist theory highlights the need for the EU to maintain its commitment to shared values and identity, reinforcing its moral authority as a normative power.

Additionally, understanding the dynamics of multilevel governance is crucial for ensuring coherent policies reflect diverse interests throughout the EU and its partnerships. Realist perspectives remind us that assessing power dynamics is vital for navigating partnerships effectively amidst great power rivalry. Lastly, by focusing on adaptation and resilience, the EU can develop responsive strategies to address emerging challenges.

In conclusion, the EU must strategically align its geoeconomic interests with its foundational principles, address power dynamics, and foster multilevel governance to reclaim its status as a significant geopolitical actor. Such an approach will ensure the EU's relevance and effectiveness in promoting stability, cooperation, and shared values both within and beyond its borders. In light of the escalating great power rivalry, particularly between the US and China, the EU faces mounting international pressures that challenge its geopolitical influence. We contend that integrating geo-economic factors into the EU's foreign policy framework is essential for enhancing its international standing and fostering cooperation with member states and external partners alike.

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This strategic alignment will not only empower the EU to navigate the complexities of global affairs but also position it as a key player in shaping a rules-based international order. Thus, reinforcing its legitimacy and credibility on the world

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This has to be compared to the stagnation in EU financial markets of the EU in the context of increased geoeconomic competition. The ECB highlights that the euro area faces a world in transition, with shifting global trade patterns, technological change, and evolving economic power. Euro-area economies must adapt to increased external volatility and reconfigure industrial and trade strategies accordingly. Structural reforms and policies are needed to support long-term growth, rather than relying on short-term fiscal fixes. Strengthening the banking union and capital markets union is essential to enhance financial resilience and cross-border investment flows. Financial institutions must prepare for a changing monetary framework, including shifts in liquidity conditions and collateralized lending operations. The euro area should mobilize internal savings and investments to reduce dependency on external financing and enhance economic sovereignty. Enhancing the international role of the euro is a strategic adaptation to improve global investment demand and reduce external vulnerabilities. Policymakers are encouraged to foster structural, long-term investment in infrastructure, green transition, and industrial capacity. Firms and households need to adjust their financial strategies, including savings, investment, and risk management, to align with the new macroeconomic context. Overall, adaptation involves a coordinated approach across monetary, fiscal, and structural policies to strengthen resilience, competitiveness, and sustainable growth in the euro area (Lane, 2025).

## Objective

The objective of this piece is to advance the European Union's Strategic Partnerships with the aim of restoring European independence, security, and leadership in global affairs, as mandated by the Treaty on European Union (TEU). This study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of EU external relations and the management of these partnerships, thereby contributing to a coherent and strategic EU policy on SP10 in line with the great power strategy in the making since the 2000's.

## Research Questions

- What are the Union's interests concerning Strategic Partnerships?
- How can the EU formulate a more coherent policy integrated at both supranational and member-state levels?

- What strategies can be adopted to enhance the EU's geopolitical presence and effectiveness in managing conflict and cooperation with third states?
- How do the current geopolitical and geoeconomic factors influence the EU's Strategic Partnerships?

The significance of this work lies in its potential to reshape the landscape of EU external relations by providing actionable recommendations for strengthening its Strategic Partnerships. By addressing the legal and political challenges faced by the EU, this piece highlights the importance of a well-integrated approach that considers cultural, economic, and geopolitical factors. Furthermore, it aims to enhance understanding of the EU's role as a competitive global actor, ultimately contributing to its efforts for stability and security in a rapidly changing geopolitical environment.

Having established the context of the European Union's geopolitical landscape, this section reviews existing literature on Strategic Partnerships to highlight the gaps that our research aims to address.

### Litterature review

Michael Smith, *Europe's Foreign and Security Policy: The Institutionalization of Cooperation* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), provides an institutionalist and historically informed analysis of the EU's CFSP and ESDP frameworks. Smith argues that the coherence of EU foreign policy rests on the effective institutionalization of cooperation among member states, emphasizing that legitimacy and adherence to procedural rules are as important as policy outcomes. While his analysis is foundational, it predates the full emergence of Strategic Partnerships and is primarily concerned with internal coordination rather than external projection. For the purposes of this study, Smith's work is instrumental in tracing the institutional incapacity problem—highlighting that the EU's Strategic Partnerships may have faltered not due to flawed concepts alone, but because the internal machinery was underpowered, fragmented, and insufficiently integrated.

Giovanni Grevi, *Making EU Strategic Partnerships Effective* (FRIDE, 2010), adopts a policy-practitioner perspective, concentrating on institutional reform and the role of political leadership. Grevi's work proposes mechanisms to render partnerships more focused, outcome-driven, and responsive to shifting geopolitical dynamics. However, his approach assumes that the Strategic Partnership model is fundamentally viable and only requires better steering. It underestimates the structural misalignments and broader global transformations that shape partner behavior and constrain the EU's leverage. Within this context, Grevi's analysis can be positioned as a useful but ultimately "technocratic fix"—one that this paper moves beyond by

advocating for strategic composition and tailored engagement, rather than simply attempting to optimize an inherently limited model.

Thomas Renard and Sven Biscop (eds.) (2012), *The European Union and Emerging Powers in the 21st Century* (Ashgate), adopts a policy-oriented, empirically grounded approach to mapping the EU's Strategic Partnerships. The volume combines rationalist and constructivist perspectives, offering detailed accounts of each partnership's formal structures and stated objectives. Its central analytical insight frames Strategic Partnerships as the EU's instrument to assert global positioning through flexible bilateral formats, while simultaneously highlighting the persistent gap between declaratory ambition and substantive impact. While this work is invaluable in systematizing intentions and institutional frameworks, it tends to under-theorize the political economy and performative dimensions of partnerships. For the purposes of this study, it provides a solid foundation for defining Strategic Partnerships, which can then be extended to demonstrate how their practical use has drifted from genuine strategic leverage into rhetorical maintenance.

Thomas Renard (2013), "The Strategic Partners of the EU: What Mutual Expectations?" (*European Foreign Affairs Review*, 18(1)), adopts a normative-institutionalist lens, focusing on the asymmetries of mutual expectations between the EU and its partners. The study illustrates that these partnerships are often one-sided: the EU anticipates more commitment and alignment than partners are willing to provide, revealing a mismatch in legitimacy and buy-in. While the diagnosis is compelling, the analysis remains largely premised on the notion that improved management could resolve these tensions, without critically questioning the foundational assumptions of the Strategic Partnership model. Building on this, the current work emphasizes the asymmetrical legitimacy problem identified by Renard but goes further, arguing that the "strategic" premise itself has eroded, leaving partnerships increasingly rhetorical rather than operationally effective.

Here's an enhanced and integrated version of your text, polished for academic clarity and flow:

Wiebke Stumbaum, "The EU's Strategic Partnerships in Asia" (*Journal of European Integration*, 36(7), 2014), adopts a regional policy lens to examine EU-Asia relations. Her analysis reveals that Asia-focused partnerships frequently suffer from underresourcing and mismatched expectations, with the EU often perceived as a normative actor rather than a strategically consequential one. While

the empirical insights are valuable, the study offers limited theoretical innovation and largely assumes the normative power Europe framework as given. This work can be drawn upon to highlight the EU's status deficit in Asia and to justify the need for a compositional framework that leverages shared infrastructure, technological cooperation, and climate initiatives to enhance strategic relevance.

Keukeleire and Delreux, *The Foreign Policy of the European Union* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), provide an institutionalist perspective enriched by layered actorhood theory, emphasizing the interplay between EU institutions, member states, and hybrid actors. Their analysis illuminates the persistent tension between supranational and intergovernmental forces, as well as the trade-offs between values and interests in EU external action. Although less directly focused on Strategic Partnerships, this work underlines the internal misalignment and bureaucratic fragmentation that weaken the EU's ability to project coherent strategies externally, supporting a core diagnosis of this study.

The development of Strategic Partnerships has increasingly allowed the EU to position itself as a global actor and as an alternative interlocutor to emerging powers such as BRICS (Odgaard, Mandrup & Coning, 2015; Stuenkel, 2016; Xing, 2019). A practitioner perspective reinforces this: strategic partnerships serve as essential bilateral tools for fostering international cooperation. The EU recognizes the heterogeneity of these partnerships and the need for dual operational objectives—first, to enable more integrated coordination between EU institutions and member states, and second, to implement tailor-made strategies that account for the distinct dynamics of each partner (Pallas, 2015).

Christopher Hill, Michael Smith, and Sophie Vanhoonacker (eds.), *International Relations and the European Union* (Oxford University Press, 2017), offer a pluralist IR theoretical framework, spanning liberalism, constructivism, and realism. This volume situates the EU within broader debates about sovereignty, actorness, and identity, providing a conceptual scaffold for reimagining Strategic Partnerships not merely as instruments of foreign policy, but as mechanisms for cultivating elements of international society. While not focused specifically on Strategic Partnerships, this work helps frame the argument that the EU can leverage these partnerships to shape norms, institutions, and cooperative structures in the global arena.

It is generally accepted that the EU should prioritize the development of strategic partnerships; Sp10 enhances the EU's presence and position internationally and helps the EU work toward some of its most important objectives. In 2020, the European Parliament's Research

Service provided a rationale for a review of the EU's Strategic Partnerships: (1) Rising above US-China rivalry, (2) The China conundrum, (3) a renewed transatlantic relationship, (4) Supporting the UN reform agenda, (5) from strategic partnerships to strategic partnering, (6) cooperating with likeminded partners, (7) a new approach to regions, (8) a more robust EU foreign policy with a strategic vision, (9) Building EU strategic autonomy, and (10) reforming multilateralism with a vision (Lazarou, 2020).

Pereira and Smith's 2021 book, *The EU Strategic Partnerships: EU Global Diplomacy in a Contested World*, explores the European Union's evolving role in global diplomacy through the lens of its strategic partnerships. Set against the backdrop of a rapidly changing international order, the book examines how the EU attempts to assert itself as a significant diplomatic actor despite structural and geopolitical constraints. The authors frame their analysis around the EU's efforts to engage with major global powers and regional actors while promoting its normative values and navigating a multipolar world increasingly marked by contestation and uncertainty.

A central theme of the book is the concept of strategic partnerships as a cornerstone of the EU's external action. Pereira and Smith trace the development of the EU's foreign policy and argue that these partnerships have been instrumental in the EU's approach to global diplomacy. They explore the nature, structure, and evolution of partnerships with key actors such as the United States, China, India, Japan, and organizations like the African Union. These partnerships, according to the authors, are flexible, interest-based arrangements shaped by both shared goals and geopolitical constraints. The book emphasizes that strategic partnerships are neither uniform nor always coherent; rather, they are dynamic and often reflect a pragmatic balance between normative ambitions and realpolitik considerations.

The authors position the EU as a global diplomatic actor that relies heavily on soft power instruments, such as normative influence, economic diplomacy, and support for multilateral governance. They underscore the EU's use of trade agreements, development aid, and diplomatic engagement to project values like human rights, democracy, and rule of law. However, Pereira and Smith also acknowledge the limitations of this approach, particularly in dealing with assertive powers that do not share the EU's normative agenda. As the world becomes more contested—with growing influence from China, the resurgence of Russia, and the erosion of multilateral norms—the EU's normative strategy is increasingly challenged.

An important analytical point is the tension between the EU's ambition to be a coherent international actor and the internal divisions that often undermine this ambition. The authors point out that while the EU has made efforts to streamline its foreign policy apparatus, disagreements among member states continue to fragment its external action. This lack of cohesion hampers the EU's ability to speak and act with one voice on the global stage, especially when strategic interests diverge. Pereira and Smith note that this internal discord is particularly evident in the handling of security and defense issues, where national sovereignty remains a stronghold and integration is limited.

Another aspect examined in the book is the EU's economic diplomacy. Trade is portrayed as a primary tool through which the EU engages globally, using market access, regulatory standards, and conditionalities to influence partner countries. Economic relationships often serve both political and strategic purposes, though the authors caution that the EU sometimes struggles to balance economic interests with its normative goals, especially when dealing with authoritarian regimes or strategic competitors. In this sense, the book probes the ambiguity and complexity of EU foreign policy, where idealism and pragmatism frequently intersect.

The book situates EU diplomacy within the broader transformation of global politics. Pereira and Smith argue that the post-Cold War liberal order, once dominated by the United States and its allies, is giving way to a more fragmented and contested system. In this environment, the EU faces significant challenges in preserving its influence and credibility. Strategic partnerships, then, are seen not only as diplomatic instruments but also as mechanisms for the EU to assert its relevance in a world where power is increasingly dispersed.

Despite the book's strengths, several critiques can be raised. One limitation is the relative lack of in-depth empirical case studies that could illustrate the practical workings of EU strategic partnerships. While the conceptual framework is robust, readers may find the analysis somewhat abstract or general. More detailed examinations of specific partnerships—how they were formed, how they function, and what outcomes they have produced—would provide greater empirical grounding.

The book also places strong emphasis on the EU's normative power, a concept that, while central to EU foreign policy literature, can appear idealistic or overstated in practice. In cases such as relations with China or Russia, the EU's commitment to human rights and democracy often gives way to economic or security considerations. The authors do acknowledge this tension, but their analysis could go further in interrogating the limits of normative power in a world increasingly governed by strategic interests and power

competition.

Another area where the book could be strengthened is in its treatment of internal EU dynamics. While coordination problems among member states are noted, there is relatively little discussion of how domestic political developments—such as the rise of nationalist governments, democratic backsliding within the EU, or the aftermath of Brexit—affect the EU's capacity to act externally. These internal issues are not merely background noise; they fundamentally shape the EU's global posture and credibility.

In addition, the book pays limited attention to the EU's role in security and defense, focusing instead on diplomacy and economic tools. Given the increasing relevance of security policy in global affairs, and ongoing efforts like the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), a more thorough engagement with the EU's defense dimension would have enriched the analysis.

Lastly, while the book covers the EU's relations with major powers, it gives comparatively little attention to rising regional actors such as Brazil, Turkey, or ASEAN. These players are becoming more influential in shaping regional and global agendas, and their interactions with the EU warrant deeper exploration.

In conclusion, Pereira and Smith's *The EU Strategic Partnerships: EU Global Diplomacy in a Contested World* offers a thoughtful and timely examination of how the EU navigates an increasingly complex international environment through strategic partnerships. It provides valuable insights into the EU's normative ambitions, institutional practices, and diplomatic strategies. However, the book could benefit from deeper empirical grounding, more attention to internal EU political developments, and a broader analysis of both security issues and emerging global actors. Nevertheless, it remains a significant contribution to understanding the EU's place in global diplomacy and the evolving nature of international partnerships in a contested world.

In the concluding sections of Pereira and Smith's *The EU Strategic Partnerships: EU Global Diplomacy in a Contested World*, the authors address a critical challenge: the difficulty that many of the EU's strategic partners face in aligning their interests with the EU's integrated and multi-dimensional approach to foreign policy, particularly as it is practiced by the European External Action Service (EEAS). This tension speaks to the inherent complexity of the EU's foreign policy framework and the challenges of conveying and operationalizing the EU's vision of strategic partnerships.

One of the key points raised is that the very concept of a "strategic partnership" in the EU context is often difficult

to translate into practice for its global partners. While the EU presents these partnerships as mutually beneficial, based on shared values and long-term collaboration, partners outside the EU frequently encounter difficulty reconciling this approach with their own foreign policy objectives, national interests, and strategic calculations. Unlike traditional power-based diplomatic models, where bilateral relations are primarily driven by economic, political, or security interests, the EU's model is underpinned by a deeply integrated, values-driven approach that seeks to combine diplomacy, trade, development assistance, security cooperation, and human rights advocacy within a single framework. This integrated nature, however, is not always easily understood or embraced by external partners.

For many of the EU's strategic partners, especially those in regions where pragmatism and immediate geopolitical interests dominate, the EU's multi-layered approach can seem both overly complex and inconsistent. Countries like the United States, China, or Russia, for example, have their own well-defined foreign policy agendas and are accustomed to more direct, result-oriented forms of diplomacy. When they engage with the EU, these partners often find it challenging to navigate the labyrinthine processes involved in EU decision-making and to align their goals with the EU's broader, sometimes idealistic, long-term visions. The EU's emphasis on normative power—its commitment to promoting democracy, human rights, and rule of law—further complicates these relationships, as many of the EU's partners do not share these values or are willing to accommodate them within their own national contexts.

Moreover, the role of the EEAS in managing and implementing the EU's foreign policy is another point of contention. The EEAS, designed to provide coherence and consistency to the EU's external action, often faces difficulties in coordinating across the different institutional layers of the EU (the European Commission, the European Council, and the European Parliament) as well as with the individual member states. For external partners, this fragmentation can result in confusing or conflicting signals about EU priorities and goals. While the EU may present a unified front through the EEAS, the reality is that there are often competing national interests at play among member states, leading to inconsistent positions or delayed decisions. This internal fragmentation within the EU is not always visible to the outside world but can make strategic partnerships difficult to navigate for countries looking for clear and predictable outcomes.

The EU's model of strategic partnerships is also challenged by the changing dynamics of international relations. As new global players like China, India, and regional organizations such as the African Union gain increasing importance, the EU must balance its traditional relationships with these emerging actors, which often have very different expectations and

priorities. These countries may be interested in economic cooperation or security arrangements but are often less concerned with the EU's normative agenda or its commitment to multilateralism. Thus, while the EU seeks to integrate values with interests, many of its partners may be more focused on immediate, material gains in a world where competition for power, resources, and influence is intensifying.

In the context of a "contested world," as described by Pereira and Smith, the difficulty of aligning the EU's integrated foreign policy approach with the needs and expectations of its strategic partners becomes even more pronounced. The global order is no longer shaped solely by Western powers, and emerging challenges such as the erosion of multilateral institutions, rising populism, and the increasing assertiveness of non-Western powers complicate the EU's diplomatic strategy. Strategic partnerships that were once grounded in shared liberal values may need to be redefined or recalibrated to accommodate new geopolitical realities.

Pereira and Smith conclude by acknowledging that the EU's approach to strategic partnerships is not without its limitations. The ideal of creating a truly integrated, values-driven, and consistent foreign policy that spans economic, political, and security dimensions remains elusive. For the EU, the challenge lies not just in managing its internal complexities but in convincing external partners of the efficacy and relevance of this integrated approach. As global power shifts, and as external partners become more attuned to competing geopolitical realities, the EU may find that its vision of strategic partnerships will need to evolve to maintain its influence and coherence in a rapidly changing world.

Ultimately, the difficulty many partners have in associating with the EU's integrated approach is not just a matter of policy execution but reflects a broader ideological gap in how diplomacy is perceived and practiced. For the EU, this presents both a challenge and an opportunity—an opportunity to refine its diplomatic tools and a challenge to make its partnerships more adaptable to the diverse geopolitical contexts in which they operate.

Laura Ferreira-Pereira and Michael Smith took stock of the state of play for each of the EU's Strategic Partnerships. They concluded that the EU's Strategic Partnerships are a diverse and heterogeneous category that includes different types of partners with varying levels of cooperation and dialogue. The book explores cross-cutting themes and issues, such as soft power, security, democracy promotion, and human rights. Strategic partnerships are

dynamic concepts facing various opportunities and risks for future development. This book identifies some of the main drivers of and barriers to enhancing or diversifying the EU's strategic partnerships in light of the changing global context and emerging issues. The book also proposes some concrete actions and measures to achieve the goals and priorities of the EU's Strategic Partnerships more effectively and coherently (Ferreira-Pereira & Smith, 2021:34-59,2021).

Müftüler-Baç, Aydin-Düzgit, and Uzun-Teker (2024) adopt a theoretically guided empirical analysis to investigate whether and to what extent the EU's strategic partnerships generate evidence of foreign policy maturation. Grounded in foreign policy analysis and European integration theory, their approach relies on three core indicators to assess maturity. They combine legal-institutional contextualization with interpretive analysis of partnership formats, strategies, and institutional coherence. The study positions itself at the intersection of normative theory and practice, exploring how strategic partnerships reflect the EU's evolving identity as a global actor.

First, they examine the tension between normative and strategic rationales in driving the EU's partnerships. While partnerships with countries like Japan and Canada evoke normative affinity, others—such as China or Russia—highlight strategic imperatives. The authors argue that maturation depends on the EU's capacity to reconcile or balance these divergent motivations within its foreign policy framework.

Second, they evaluate the EU's proactive adaptation to the changing global environment. A mature actor, as they assert, anticipates geopolitical shifts, identifies external actors with agency, and institutionalizes partnership frameworks accordingly. Evidence of this is seen in how the EU expanded its partnership agenda through documents like the Strategic Compass and formalized agreements with key players post-Ukraine and pandemic crises.

Third, institutional maturity is assessed through the lens of vertical coherence. The capacity to manage divergence—and sometimes outright friction—between EU institutions and Member States over the modalities and substance of partnerships is considered crucial. Effective vertical coherence involves alignment between supranational strategy (e.g. EEAS, Commission, HR/VP) and national preferences or external engagements.

One critique arises from the tension inherent in combining normative and strategic motivations. The authors note that normative consistency may be sacrificed for strategic expediency in partnerships with countries whose values diverge significantly from EU frameworks. This challenges the credibility of the EU's normative ambition in foreign policy along strategic lines.

Another limitation pertains to the selectivity and coherence of

partner identification. There is insufficient clarity or consistency across Member States and institutions about who qualifies as a "strategic partner" and on what basis that designation is made. This ambiguity hampers formalization and reduces the clarity of the EU's global policy architecture

Moreover, while partnership proliferation—especially through the Strategic Compass—demonstrates ambition, the authors argue that it risks diluting strategic focus. There is a danger that partnerships become symbolic rather than substantive, particularly in security and defence, if tailored objectives and institutional support do not follow semantic declarations with concrete resources or outcome-orientation.

Finally, they identify internal contestation—both institutional and domestic—as a structural barrier. Divergent national agendas, domestic politicization of foreign policy, and fragmentation across EU bodies constrain the Union's ability to act coherently and effectively as a single actor in global affairs.

In summary, Müftüler-Baç, Aydin-Düzgit, and Uzun-Teker argue that the EU's global strategic partnerships present opportunities for the Union's foreign policy to mature, given sufficient alignment across normative vision, proactive engagement, and institutional coherence. Their analysis reveals that maturity remains mixed and uneven across different partnerships. The EU's ability to institutionalize high-level strategic dialogues, reconcile value-driven and interest-based motivations, and manage alignment between EU institutions and Member States determines whether partnerships support or undermine its ambition to become a confident global actor. The study thus offers a conceptually rich and empirically grounded lens through which to assess whether and how the EU is moving beyond rhetorical ambition toward operational maturity in its strategic partnerships.

Across two decades of scholarship on EU external action, a discernible trajectory has emerged in the literature on strategic partnerships. Early analyses, such as Smith (2004), expressed optimism about the EU's institutional capacity to act coherently on the global stage, framing strategic partnerships as instruments of normative influence and multilateral engagement. This was followed by a more critical middle phase, exemplified by scholars like Renard, Grevi, and Stumbaum, who highlighted the persistent mismatch between the EU's rhetorical ambition and its practical delivery. More recently, the literature has shifted toward examining the EU's strategic partnerships through lenses of differentiation, thematic selectivity, and interest-based alignment—reflecting a more pragmatic understanding of the EU's external constraints and opportunities. This paper builds on that scholarly

trajectory but also departs from it in key ways. It rejects the idea that strategic partnerships can or should be restored in their original, comprehensive form. Instead, it recasts them as compositional instruments within a pluralistic and evolving international society—flexible arrangements that reflect the fragmentation and fluidity of global governance. Furthermore, it repositions enlargement, neighbourhood policy, and strategic partnerships not as separate or sequential tools but as interlinked components of a broader geopolitical architecture. Taken together, these elements constitute the strategic scaffolding through which the EU can transition from a normative power to a more fully realised geopolitical actor, with the institutional confidence and policy instruments necessary to navigate great power competition.

Future study must confront the gaps that endure. We must measure the true weight of Strategic Partnerships, observe how shifting powers and domestic strife shape their course, and discern the role of citizens and civil society in their success. We must reckon with emerging economies and the new tools of digital diplomacy. Only by forging clear frameworks to evaluate these bonds can the European Union claim both wisdom and strength in its dealings abroad, ensuring that its strategies endure, its authority is respected, and its influence grows unchallenged.

### **Empirical Assessments**

Despite extensive theoretical exploration of the EU’s Strategic Partnerships, there is a striking lack of rigorous empirical evaluation. Comprehensive case studies or comparative analyses across different partnerships remain scarce, leaving questions of effectiveness and tangible impact largely unanswered. Empirical research could illuminate patterns of success and failure, identify structural bottlenecks, and provide evidence on the conditions under which Strategic Partnerships deliver concrete geopolitical, economic, and normative benefits. Methodologically, this could combine process tracing, mixed-methods case studies, and quantitative metrics such as trade flows, FDI, regulatory alignment, and joint initiatives.

### **Evolving Geopolitical Contexts**

Much of the literature underestimates the effects of rapidly shifting global power dynamics—including the rise of China, transformations in U.S. foreign policy, regional instability, and great power competition—on the EU’s engagement strategies. Research is needed to assess how these external shocks recalibrate the EU’s strategic calculus, reshape partner expectations, and influence the architecture of Strategic Partnerships. Scenario-based analyses, comparative regional studies, and geopolitical modeling could generate both theoretically grounded and practically actionable insights.

### **Inter-institutional Coordination**

The effectiveness of Strategic Partnerships is tightly linked to the coordination among EU institutions—the European Commission, EEAS, and member states. Bureaucratic fragmentation, unclear responsibilities, and divergent national interests can erode coherence and reduce operational efficiency. Research examining institutional interplay, decision-making processes, and organizational culture can inform governance reforms that strengthen the EU’s capacity to implement partnerships strategically. Methods might include network analysis, institutional mapping, and elite interviews.

### **Public Opinion and Civil Society Engagement**

The influence of public opinion, civil society, and grassroots movements on Strategic Partnerships remains underexplored. These actors can shape the legitimacy, perception, and effectiveness of EU initiatives, yet empirical investigation is limited. For instance, Kaja Kallas’ engagement with civil society in Brasilia illustrates the potential of youth and Afro-Brazilian communities as levers for promoting democratic norms and strengthening people-to-people diplomacy. Understanding these dynamics could offer insights into how societal actors facilitate or constrain EU influence, enabling more participatory and socially attuned partnership strategies.

### **The Role of Emerging Economies**

Emerging economies are asserting unprecedented influence on the global stage, yet research on their implications for EU Strategic Partnerships remains sparse. Comparative studies on how the EU can adapt to diverse economic models, political priorities, and governance frameworks of partner states could inform more nuanced and resilient engagement strategies, ensuring that partnerships remain mutually beneficial and strategically relevant.

### **Digital Diplomacy**

The intersection of technology and diplomacy—digital diplomacy—is an underexplored domain with transformative potential for Strategic Partnerships. Research could investigate how digital tools, platforms, and data-driven strategies enhance dialogue, cooperation, and knowledge exchange, while assessing risks such as cybersecurity threats, information asymmetries, and digital inequalities.

### **Framework for Evaluation**

A significant theoretical gap exists in the absence of standardized frameworks to evaluate the governance and operational efficiency of Strategic Partnerships. Developing such frameworks could provide a structured approach to measuring outcomes, identifying areas for

reform, and aligning institutional design with strategic objectives. This would bridge the divide between normative aspirations and measurable performance.

### **Impact of Domestic Politics**

Domestic political dynamics within member states—leadership changes, partisan priorities, electoral cycles, and public opinion—can profoundly shape the EU's external strategy. Systematic research into these influences is necessary to understand how internal political heterogeneity affects collective foreign policy, strategic alignment, and the credibility of EU partnerships in the eyes of external actors.

Addressing these research gaps holds the potential to significantly advance our understanding of the European Union's Strategic Partnerships, illuminating both their limitations and latent capacities. By scrutinizing empirical effectiveness, geopolitical responsiveness, inter-institutional coordination, and the interplay with public opinion and emerging economies, scholars and policymakers alike can move beyond abstract theorization toward actionable insight. My approach seeks to lay the essential organizational and policy foundations—the structural backbone and strategic architecture—necessary to transform these partnerships from nominal instruments into truly operative levers of European influence. This is not merely an exercise in bureaucratic refinement; it is a deliberate effort to enable the EU to act with coherence, credibility, and agility on the global stage, ensuring that its strategic engagements yield tangible outcomes while reinforcing the Union's enduring stature as a force capable of shaping the international order.

### **Scholarly contribution**

This paper contends that the decline of the EU's Strategic Partnerships means the end of them, discerning a tactical retreat due to a mix of failure to stabilize Europe's neighborhood, an inclination in the European Commission for stating objectives and then not carrying through, and for lack of political will and managerial competence amidst a deteriorating regional environment. Therefore, the European Union is not credible. I concur with the need to formulate a strategy for EU partnerships. However, I am not concerned about defining the common interests of the European Union, which falls under the remit of The European Council. Nor do I feel the need to address how and why to augment individual Strategic Partnerships, which were and are the responsibility of EEAS. These two processes are both possible, while we are directed by the initial form of the wood

The paper reclaims and repositions enlargement, neighbourhood policy, and strategic partnerships as the core instruments through which the European Union can reassert itself as a strategic actor and institution-builder in the context of power transition in the international system. It moves

beyond crisis narratives to articulate a positive, theoretically grounded, and policy-relevant vision. Its key scholarly contributions are fourfold:

Rather than dismissing Strategic Partnerships as failed instruments, the paper recasts them as incomplete but foundational expressions of the EU's role in shaping the norms, practices, and institutional architecture of international society. This approach revives the normative ambition of the EU's external action while acknowledging the need for structural recalibration and compositional clarity.

The paper contributes a conceptual synthesis that treats enlargement, neighbourhood policy, and global partnerships not as distinct policy silos but as a strategic continuum of concentric engagement. This reframing allows for a more coherent external posture and offers a grammar for managing gradations of integration, influence, and shared governance across regions and regimes.

Drawing on relational and institutional theory, the paper proposes a compositional model of EU external action structured around four interrelated areas of effort. This framework enables the EU to move beyond fixed bilateralism and legalistic rigidity, toward a more agile architecture that reflects the plural nature of contemporary diplomacy, where order is made through composition, not mere declaration.

The paper challenges the drift toward intergovernmentalism and informalism in EU foreign policy by offering a vision where the Commission, the EEAS, and the Council regain strategic coherence. It argues for managerial competence, long-term commitment, and re-anchoring of partnerships in institutions that are durable, representative, and flexible — essential for sustaining the EU's identity as a global order-shaper.

In doing so, the paper contributes to a revitalised strand of European Studies and Foreign Policy Analysis that rejects both declinist fatalism and managerial minimalism. It speaks to debates on strategic autonomy, regional order-building, and normative pluralism, offering a constructive alternative to the crisis-driven logic of recent years. By reclaiming the strategic imagination behind enlargement, neighbourhood, and partnerships — and recomposing them for a post-unipolar, postglobalisation world — the paper equips both scholars and policymakers with the conceptual tools to relaunch the EU's outward strategy as an integrated project of international society-building.

### **Methodology**

To address the research question regarding the factors inhibiting the European External Action Service (EEAS) from effectively strengthening the

governance of the EU's Strategic Partnerships, a mixed-methods research approach was adopted. This methodology integrates both qualitative and quantitative research techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics at play. Qualitative data were gathered through .In tandem, quantitative analysis was conducted on relevant policy documents and governance frameworks to evaluate existing strategies and their outcomes. This analysis supplemented the qualitative insights by providing empirical evidence regarding the implementation and effectiveness of EEAS's governance practices. Through the combination of qualitative interviews and quantitative document analysis, this study aims to generate a holistic picture of the governing mechanisms within the EEAS and elucidate the multifaceted factors that inhibit its effectiveness in managing Strategic Partnerships.

This study also draws on AI analysis as a digital method to support both empirical mapping and conceptual interpretation. Artificial intelligence (AI), particularly in the form of machine learning and natural language processing (NLP), enables the systematic processing of large, complex, and often unstructured datasets such as policy documents, diplomatic statements, media coverage, or institutional communications. As a method, AI analysis proceeds by training computational models to detect patterns, classify information, and extract semantic or relational meaning from data. This process typically involves the collection and pre-processing of relevant material, the application of NLP techniques to identify recurring themes or shifts in discourse, and the subsequent generation of structured outputs—such as topic clusters, sentiment trajectories, or relational networks. In this study, AI-assisted text analysis was employed to assess changes in the strategic language used by the EU in its engagements with selected partners, trace the salience of specific policy frames over time, and identify latent alignments or divergences in official rhetoric. While AI provides analytical scale and efficiency beyond the capacity of manual coding, its findings are treated as indicative rather than determinative, and are interpreted critically within the broader theoretical and institutional context. The method is thus used not to replace but to augment qualitative reasoning, offering a way to visualise complexity, detect underlying trends, and explore the evolving structure of strategic partnership narratives as they are constructed across multiple levels of EU external action.

We begin by outlining the legal and institutional background underpinning the European Union's emerging strategic partnership architecture, situating it within the broader evolution of the EU's external action framework. This foundation provides the necessary context for understanding both the normative ambitions and the operational constraints shaping these partnerships. Building on this, the paper

identifies four interrelated domains where strategic partnerships must be consolidated to gain greater traction within the EU's foreign policy system. These are: the development of a coherent and autonomous foreign economic policy; the EU's positioning in an era of intensifying geoeconomic competition; the articulation of a human-centred ambition that reconciles values with strategic interest; and the role of regulatory diplomacy and standard-setting in anchoring partnerships with enduring strategic value—exemplified most clearly by the EU-Japan partnership. We then turn to the conditions that have contributed to the stagnation or deterioration of some strategic partnerships, and explore pathways for their revitalisation. Throughout, we engage with the theoretical implications of strategic partnerships as instruments of global governance, arguing for greater conceptual clarity and institutional anchoring within the EU's foreign policy apparatus.

## II. Background

According to TEU 21, the Union shall endeavor "to promote relations and create partnerships with third countries to safeguard its values and fundamental interests and its security, independence, and integrity." Thus, the EU invented a formula for pursuing global actor-hood in the recipe:

Enlargement, Neighborhood, and Strategic Partnerships are at stake. According to TFEU 21 (2) litra h, the "Union decides and implements common policies and initiatives and works for a high degree of cooperation" to "promote an international system, which builds on stronger multilateral cooperation and good global governance." It follows the EU is obliged to pursue both reform of the United Nations Security Council and the WTO.

On all three scores, the EU has demonstrated a singular failure of leadership in fulfilling the founding fathers' intentions.

In light of this, the European Union needs to reflect on how to do a better job of managing its Strategic Partnerships, how to advance the EU's Strategic Partnership at the multilateral level, and explain why the EU's role in the changing global order necessitates adaptation at several levels (Babic & Dixon & Liu, 2022). The departure point for this is recognizing that the strategic imperatives of foreign policy practices are being recast and that the EU is a pre-eminently geoeconomic actor with peers in the United States and China. The EU's implications and benefits, putting order into the shambolic mess, and the management of the EU's Strategic Partnership have deteriorated to enhance its global role and influence, protect its interests and values, and contribute to a more peaceful and prosperous world. Now that the enlargement

process has been reconstructed, actions are being taken to stabilize Europe's neighborhood, the EU integration project is deepened, and the time is right to both give direction to and look at how to make meaningful progress in managing the EU's Strategic Partnership.

The European Union's pursuit of global actor-hood has historically followed a distinctive logic that blends internal consolidation with external projection. In this context, the EU's foreign policy framework can be understood as a three-pillar strategy composed of Enlargement, Neighborhood Policy, and Strategic Partnerships. These are not merely separate instruments of external engagement; together, they constitute an intentional formula for establishing the EU as a normative and geopolitical power on the international stage. Enlargement functions as the EU's most transformative external tool. Through the accession process, the Union extends its legal order, market system, and democratic norms to aspiring members. Enlargement not only consolidates the EU's influence in its immediate region but also projects its identity outward as a community of rules and values. By binding new members into its institutional structure, the EU both expands its political geography and reinforces its legitimacy as a stabilizing power.

### **The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP)**

complements enlargement by targeting countries that are geographically proximate but not necessarily eligible for membership. In the eastern and southern neighborhoods, the ENP seeks to create a "ring of friends" through conditional cooperation, economic incentives, and limited institutional integration. This strand of policy reflects the EU's ambition to externalize its governance model without full-scale accession, thereby shaping the political and economic environment in its periphery in a manner conducive to EU interests and values.

Strategic Partnerships, in turn, represent the EU's effort to move beyond its immediate vicinity and engage with global powers on a bilateral basis. These partnerships, established with key countries such as the United States, China, India, Brazil, and others, are designed to elevate the EU's status as a global diplomatic actor. Unlike enlargement or neighborhood policies, strategic partnerships are less hierarchical and more horizontal in nature. They are intended to function as platforms for dialogue, cooperation, and norm promotion with other influential actors in a multipolar world.

Together, these three pillars express a coherent—albeit evolving—logic of actorness. Enlargement secures the EU's

internal strength and expands its normative reach; neighborhood policy stabilizes the periphery and asserts soft influence; and strategic partnerships position the EU as a global interlocutor capable of engaging with emerging and established powers. This triad reflects an EU-specific recipe for global relevance that prioritizes institutional diffusion, regional stabilization, and multilateral diplomacy over traditional military power projection.

However, this formula also reveals inherent tensions. Enlargement fatigue, democratic backsliding among candidates, instability in the neighborhood, and asymmetrical relationships within strategic partnerships all challenge the EU's coherence as a global actor. The growing demand for strategic autonomy suggests that the EU must adapt this model—by strengthening the strategic rationale behind partnerships and rebalancing soft-power mechanisms with geopolitical realism—in order to sustain its international credibility in an era of contested multilateralism and systemic rivalry.

To clarify the key differences between a managerial and a strategic approach to the EU's ten

Strategic Partnerships (with Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, and the United States), the following cross-tabulation outlines their contrasting features across major dimensions of policy thinking and implementation.

In practice, the managerial approach to the EU's strategic partnerships focuses on the operational delivery of established frameworks. This includes coordinating high-level summits and their follow-up meetings, managing sectoral dialogues across areas like trade, digital, or security, and ensuring that Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) are implemented within agreed timelines. The emphasis is on maintaining institutional continuity, procedural compliance, and delivering outputs as planned. This approach is rooted in a compliance-oriented, transactional mindset, where success is measured by efficiency, predictability, and the ability to manage relationships within predefined parameters. The guiding question that underpins this approach is: "Are we doing things, right?"

Ultimately, both approaches are essential and mutually reinforcing. While the managerial ensures procedural integrity and institutional trust, the strategic ensures that partnerships remain relevant, forward-looking, and responsive to the EU's evolving interests and values in a rapidly changing global environment.

**Table - Managerial vs. Strategic Approaches o EU Strategic Partnerships**

Dimension	Managerial Approach	Strategic Approach
<b>Purpose</b>	Ensure operational efficiency and consistency in partnership delivery	Shape, adapt, and align partnerships with long-term EU interests and geopolitical goals
<b>Time Horizon</b>	Short- to medium-term; focused on current frameworks and deliverables	Medium- to long-term; anticipatory and forwardlooking
<b>Focus</b>	Procedures, workflows, reporting, coordination	Direction-setting, policy shaping, risk anticipation
<b>Key Activities</b>	-Tracking implementation of joint action plans- Organizing technical and political dialogues- Monitoring progress reports and KPIs- Managing institutional processes	- Defining new strategic priorities- Realigning partnerships with geopolitical shifts- Scenario building and policy foresight- Identifying synergies with EU global strategy
<b>Primary Actors</b>	Desk officers, middle managers, working groups, service-level units	Senior policymakers, EEAS top leadership, HR/VP cabinet, strategic planning units
<b>Instruments Used</b>	Operational tools, project management systems, joint programming	Strategic documents, Council conclusions, Global Strategy, strategic communications
<b>Information Flow</b>	Structured, formal, hierarchical	Strategic, often informal, includes political intelligence and external analysis

The managerial and strategic approaches to the EU's strategic partnerships represent two complementary but fundamentally different logics of engagement.

The managerial approach is rooted in operational oversight. It ensures that the existing frameworks—such as joint declarations, action plans, sectoral dialogues, and partnership summits—are implemented effectively and consistently. This approach emphasizes the routine functioning of relationships: logistical coordination, performance tracking, reporting, and compliance with timelines. It is essential for the credibility and stability of partnerships, ensuring that what has been agreed upon is delivered and monitored. Actors at this level tend to operate within formal institutional structures—such as geographic desks, task forces, and inter-service coordination platforms—handling the “nuts and bolts” of external action. In contrast, the strategic approach is future-oriented and policy-driven. It engages with the broader question of why a partnership exists, how it should evolve, and whether it aligns with the EU's shifting geopolitical landscape and strategic interests. This approach often comes into play in moments of crisis or transition—when a new geopolitical reality (e.g., U.S.-China rivalry, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, or climate diplomacy) forces the EU to rethink its bilateral or multilateral

priorities. Strategic engagement requires a high-level view, involving senior leadership within the EEAS, the HR/VP's office, and relevant Council formations. It often draws on strategic foresight, political intelligence, and scenario analysis, and may involve redefining priorities or initiating new areas of engagement (e.g., digital, security, or green transitions).

While the managerial approach ensures continuity, the strategic approach provides direction. One without the other results in either drift (strategic vagueness) or stagnation (routine without innovation). The most effective engagement with EU strategic partners—such as Japan, Canada, India, or the African Union—requires constant calibration between managerial discipline and strategic agility. As global uncertainty increases, the capacity to pivot from a managerial mode to a strategic one becomes ever more essential to maintaining the EU's relevance, autonomy, and impact on the global stage.

In this study, a three-phased sequence is derived: (1) a strengthening of the governance of the EU's SP in terms of a multi-bilateral policy review, (2) the forging of an EU-led international society should the EU strategy on reform of the UNSC fail, and (3) the co-existence between the

restoration of a great power concert from within the UNSC and the forging of an EU-led international society.

### III. THE EU AS A FOREIGN ECONOMIC ACTOR

At the beginning of the European Communities, foreign policy was a trade policy that concerned imports and exports and was limited to aggregate gains from trade. Today, other objectives are pursued as part of the EU's trade policy rather than purely economic objectives, such as the maximization of societal goals encompassing environmental, human rights, labor, and social concerns ( Kamin, 2021:71). In other words, the EU is the world's most significant trade power. However, it still uses trade as the backbone of its normative power. Moreover, the four structures of the international political economy tie together global, regional, and national decision-making with markets and other actors: production, finance, security, and knowledge. Thus, to enhance European market power and the competitive power of member states, the EU should formulate policies on these four structures. The EU's foreign economic policy does not appear cohesive. Therefore, a more outward-oriented, coherent, and integrated approach is warranted: a Commission conference signed in 2009 (European Commission, 2009).

Foreign economic policy involves the mediation and management of cross-border financial flow. Today, the European Union is the most significant trade power in one of three world economic centers – the Americas, Europe, and Asia—with globally spanning free trade agreements and a justice of the international economic order. Throughout this transformation, foreign monetary policy entailed delicate tradeoffs between diverse interests and political and material, foreign and domestic, and sectional and sectoral. The implication is the application of high politics to low politics of economics, subordinating economics to politics. In the words of Poul Egon Rohrlich" " The concept of national interest dominates; the pursuit of power – which enables the state to achieve its goals of security, welfare, and other societal values – is seen to underlie most actions. Thus, the study of foreign economic policy analyzes power distribution among states within the international system. By understanding a state's sources of strength and areas of vulnerability to other states, analysts can better understand the creation of foreign policy. Krasner views the state as an autonomously motivated actor able to guide policy in pursuit of state priorities while resisting interest groups and ideologies.

According to this "power theory," the state tries to increase its economic competitiveness, ensure the security of material needs, and promote its broad foreign policy objectives. There are three approaches to foreign monetary policy: realpolitik, behavioral analysis, and cognitive and economic culture. This

is valid in a study of British liberalism ( Rohrlich, 2009). Others study, adopt, and emulate Britain's tradition of being a fiscal-military state.

This is the power approach applied in Germany by Breughel et al. Instruments of a strategic foreign economic policy, surveying a mix of tools at the EU-level and member state levels, reflecting the evolving social world, the division of competencies between EU and member states, and the state-centric European identity of German foreign policymaking "Against the backdrop of the increasing great power rivalry between the US and China and the shift from a rules-based towards a more power-based international order, the US and China use economic pressure to assert their geopolitical interests against other countries, including Germany and the EU. In a geopolitical environment where many power poles pursue different interests, and the effectiveness of international and multinational rules decreases the question remains about how Germany and the EU position themselves to address mounting international pressure at the economic level." This proposed power audit will be extended to all 27 member states and Europeans to combine and harmonize European and member state-level approaches for formulating a genuine European Foreign Economic Policy. European institutions are better at demonstrating how and when to address the inherent tensions between politics and economics, international and domestic pressures, and governments and other forces in foreign economic policymaking ( Bayne & Woolcock, 2017:10).

Trade is an exclusive competence of the European Commission, and the EU holds, like the member states, a WTO Trade Profile that provides a series of key indicators of trade in goods and services, highlighting major exports and imports for each economy as their main trading partners. This informs the EU's GDP. Currently, acca outbalance 3,1 of GDP, constituting 15 167 815 with trade former a 21,2 percent share of GDP. The breakdown of exports shows that the EU mainly exports manufactures (81,3%), agricultural products (9,4%), fuels, and mining products (7%). In comparison, the US (18.3%), the United Kingdom (14.4%), Switzerland (7.4%), Russia (4.1%) and others (45.4%) are the main importers of the EU As for EU imports, they originate primarily from China (22,4%), the US (11,8%), the UK (9,8%), and others (44,1%) in terms of manufacture (67,5%, fuels and mining products (22,5%). Thus, the EU is a significant trading nation. Therefore, it is proposed that the EU WTO furnishes the necessary data on agricultural trade and the rank of merchant trade and commercial services to suppress the trade profiles of Member States.

The Eurostat of the European Union published balance-of-payment (BOP) statistics. This statistical statement summarizes the transactions of an economy with the rest of the world. It records all the economic transactions of an economy's residents with non-residents. Transactions are organized into two different accounts: current and capital budgets and financial accounts. The current capital account balance determines the exposure of an economy vis-à-vis the rest of the world, whereas financial performance explains how it is financed (Eurostat, 2022). The current version showed a surplus of €349,1 billion in 2020, corresponding to 2.6% of gross domestic product (GDP). The remaining account balance has increased since 2009 from 0.3% of GDP or €32,8 billion to 3.2% in 2016 or €402,5 billion in 2016. The EU current account surplus was €188 billion in the UK Kingdom, and the deficit in China was €107 billion in 2020. Around three-fifths of EU Member States' international trade in goods and almost half of EU Member States' inter-national service work was with other Member States in 2020.

No later than when EU Member States take one seat at the IMF, it is proposed that balance-of-payments data be issued exclusively for the EU, Eurozone, and EFTA. The European Commission also provides further publicity to BOP stats. It is also annual to give an analytical report titled *The European Union's Foreign Economy - for the conduct of Consultations with the European Parliament, the Council, and the Regions Committee on the initiatives to be undertaken by the EU and Member States concerning the forward guidance*, the stats give rise to in terms of trade policy, competitive power and competitiveness, and the foreign economy of the EU.

Certainly, the publication of an annual foreign economic report to the European Parliament marks a significant institutional advance in enhancing transparency, accountability, and strategic oversight of the EU's external economic policy. To maximize its impact, several policy measures can be adopted to reinforce the discharge process and parliamentary deliberations while ensuring effective executive follow-up and public engagement.

First, the discharge process should be structured to allow in-depth, thematic hearings involving Commissioners, relevant Directorates-General (DGs), and external experts. These hearings would provide Parliament with detailed insights into key challenges such as trade policy implementation, foreign direct investment screening, economic diplomacy, and responses to global economic crises. Enhancing the capacity of parliamentary committees—particularly INTA (International Trade), ECON (Economic and Monetary Affairs), and DEVE (Development)—to conduct coordinated joint sessions would foster a holistic review of the report's findings.

Second, to facilitate informed parliamentary scrutiny, the Commission should complement the annual report with data dashboards and impact assessments. These should include

measurable indicators on the effectiveness of EU policies related to trade, investment, economic sanctions, and financial diplomacy. Transparent benchmarking against strategic objectives and partner country outcomes would empower MEPs to hold the executive to account and propose policy adjustments.

Third, the EU executive must institute a clear follow-up mechanism to the report's parliamentary debate. This could take the form of a publicly accessible, time-bound action plan specifying commitments, timelines, and responsible actors for addressing identified gaps or opportunities. The European Parliament should have the capacity to request mid-term progress updates, thereby institutionalizing ongoing oversight beyond the annual publication cycle.

Fourth, enhancing communication with the public is critical for democratic legitimacy and external visibility. The Commission and Parliament should coordinate on multilingual, accessible communication strategies that translate technical findings into concise policy narratives. These could include interactive online platforms, infographics, and video explainers targeting civil society, business stakeholders, and the general public. Promoting engagement through social media and public events such as hearings or roundtables would help demystify foreign economic policy and underscore its relevance to European citizens.

Fifth, fostering broader multi-stakeholder consultations during the report drafting process could improve policy relevance and inclusivity. Engaging industry representatives, labor unions, academia, and NGOs can enrich the report with diverse perspectives and enhance legitimacy.

Parliament could institutionalize public consultations or expert panels ahead of the report's publication to inform the Commission's analysis.

Finally, to reinforce the strategic dimension of the report, it should be explicitly linked to broader EU foreign policy frameworks and external action instruments such as the Strategic Partnerships, Global Gateway, and the EU Global Strategy. This alignment would clarify how foreign economic policy supports overarching geopolitical goals, facilitating a more integrated approach in parliamentary deliberations and policy follow-up.

In conclusion, by adopting these measures, the EU can transform the annual foreign economic report into a dynamic tool for democratic accountability, strategic policymaking, and public engagement, thus strengthening the EU's capacity to navigate an increasingly complex and contested global economic landscape.

#### IV. THE EU AS A COMPETITIVE GEOECONOMIC ACTOR

Geoeconomics involves using economic instruments to achieve geopolitical goals. The European Union must be more proactive and coherent in its geo-economic strategy especially when facing rising global challenges and competition from other powers. This is not only done with open strategic autonomy but also through better coordination and integration of policies.

The pressing issues in international politics are often geoeconomic problems that could generate disputes of a geopolitical nature. It is imperative to define the toolbox of geoeconomics around which EU policy could be formulated and integrated to increase European power and influence ( Delamotte & Tellenne, 2021). Geoeconomics is an analytical concept that describes the intersection of geoeconomic and geopolitical factors in international relations. This is a way to understand how economic power can be used to achieve strategic goals in the global arena (Babic, Dixon & Liu, 2022). In this piece, I am not very concerned about the EU's role in the changing international order and why it fails to wield power and exercise influence in the contemporary global political economy to answer how to get the emperor dressed practically and purposefully au dela state power projection through economic means. The main geo-economic instruments identified in the literature ( Gresh, 2020:10) .

They are as follows.

- Trade Policy
- Investment policy
- Economic sanctions
- The Cybersphere
- Aid
- Monetary policy ( Exchange rate arrangements)
- Energy and Commodity policies

Geoeconomic instruments have increasingly become central to the strategic calculus of global powers, marking a departure from the European Union's earlier normative and multilateral economic posture. Trade policy, once primarily a mechanism for liberalization and mutual benefit under the auspices of institutions like the World Trade Organization, is now frequently deployed as a coercive tool. States use tariffs, market access restrictions, and supply chain dependencies to reward allies and penalize adversaries. In contrast, the EU's historical approach emphasized rule-based engagement and economic openness. However, recent shifts toward "Open Strategic Autonomy" reflect a growing emphasis on resilience and selective disengagement from vulnerable dependencies.

Investment policy has similarly evolved. While the EU previously encouraged foreign direct investment with minimal oversight, contemporary dynamics have prompted the introduction of screening mechanisms aimed at protecting strategic sectors from potentially hostile acquisitions, particularly from non-EU actors such as China. This reflects a broader trend in which investment flows are scrutinized not merely for economic efficiency but for their geopolitical implications.

Economic sanctions have become more targeted and agile, often deployed unilaterally or in coordination with allies to isolate regimes or coerce behavioral change. The EU's earlier reliance on consensus-based sanctions often resulted in delayed or diluted measures. Recent developments, particularly in response to Russia's aggression in Ukraine, have demonstrated a more assertive and coordinated EU posture, expanding its sanctions toolkit and enhancing its strategic responsiveness.

The cybersphere has emerged as a critical domain of geoeconomic competition. While the EU's initial focus centered on digital regulation and privacy protection, exemplified by the General Data Protection Regulation, there is a growing recognition of cyberspace as a strategic arena. Efforts to bolster cyber resilience and develop offensive capabilities underscore the shift from normative regulation to strategic engagement.

Aid, traditionally framed within humanitarian and development paradigms, is increasingly conditioned on political alignment and strategic interests. The EU's historical emphasis on values-driven aid is being recalibrated to counter rival influences, particularly in regions such as Africa and the Western Balkans. This instrumentalization of aid reflects a broader trend in which economic assistance serves geopolitical objectives.

Monetary policy and exchange rate arrangements, while traditionally focused on macroeconomic stability and inflation control, are now viewed through a strategic lens. Currency manipulation and financial leverage are employed to influence trade balances and capital flows. Although the European Central Bank remains cautious, initiatives such as the digital euro signal an intent to reduce dependency on the US dollar and enhance financial sovereignty.

Consider the nature of energy and commodity policy, which in our age has become a tool not merely of commerce, but of profound geopolitical consequence. Control over resources—oil, gas, rare earth elements—confers strategic influence,

shaping the balance of power among nations. The European Union, reliant in the past upon Russian energy and encumbered by fragmented internal policies, revealed vulnerabilities that could not be ignored. In response, it now pursues a vigorous green transition and diversifies its supply sources, measures designed to reduce exposure to strategic risks and to strengthen resilience.

Thus, the EU's use of geo-economic levers illustrates a transformation both practical and philosophical. No longer a purely market-oriented or idealistically rule-bound actor, it increasingly recognizes the imperatives of strategic power in international relations. This evolution is not merely tactical; it reflects a deliberate shift toward realism, where the conduct of economic policy is inseparable from considerations of security, influence, and long-term stability. Though institutional constraints and internal divisions continue to pose challenges, the trajectory is clear: Europe demonstrates both the capacity and the willingness to employ economic instruments thoughtfully, assertively, and in service of its broader geopolitical objectives.

### **Trade Policy**

The European Union has an exclusive trade competence. It uses this to conduct a strategic trade policy, while its internal market constitutes a magnet of attraction for its trading partners. EU trade policy ensures that Europe's trade adapts to a rapidly changing world. The EU also works with the WTO to keep the world economy open based on fair rules. The EU has 440 million consumers looking for quality goods. The EU is the world's largest single market with transparent rules and regulations. The EU also has a secure legal investment framework that is among the most open in the world.

The European Union includes rules about the environment, labor rights, and sustainable development in its trade deals. Europe has also opened its markets to trade with the world's poorest countries and has helped developing countries take advantage of world trade (European Commission, 2022). The EU has trade agreements with 76 countries. Trade policy supports the EU's pursuit of an "open, strategic autonomy" model. To support this aim, DG Trade will (1) build the foundations for resilience, competitiveness, and growth by choosing to lead and shape the system of global economic governance, (2) develop mutually beneficial bilateral relations, and (3) take the necessary measures internally to strengthen the economy and defend it from unfair and abusive practices<sup>2</sup>. The underlying problem is that a huge part of global growth occurs outside the EU, and the EU needs to connect with these growth centers. DG Trade negotiates a trade agreement and receives a mandate from the council to determine what it will achieve. During negotiations, the Commission works closely with the Council's Trade Policy

Committee (Article 113), keeps the European Parliament fully informed, holds meetings with representatives of civil society, and publishes EU position papers, proposed texts for the agreement, negotiation reports, impact assessments, background papers, and fact sheets (European Commission, 2022).

Despite the undeniable role of the EU in world trade, the study of EU trade policymaking is hampered by public secrecy, and working around the problem in terms of question-driven research and systematic examinations has not yielded the knowledge promised (Dür & Zimmerman, 2007). However, EU Trade Policy literature is progressing, and crossfertilization between mainstream political science literature is occurring (Poletti & Bievre, 2017).

Arguably, Trade Policy is a crucial instrument of geo-economics, as it can influence the behavior and interests of other countries and promote the EU's values and standards. The current state and challenges of the EU's trade policy include a lack of unanimity among its member states, the complexity of negotiating trade agreements, and the need to balance openness and protectionism. Improving the EU's trade policy could further enhance its strategic autonomy, diversify its trade partners, strengthen its enforcement mechanisms, and promote its green and digital agenda.

### **Investment Policy**

Lisbon Treaty's Article 207 innovated in three ways: (1) extension and clarification of EU competence, (2) a more significant role for the European Parliament (EP), (3) inclusion of external trade and investment policy, along with foreign and security, environment and development policies and humanitarian assistance in the now unified European External Action<sup>3</sup>. Initially, integrating an investment policy into the Common Commercial Policy raised questions about how a more coherent EU investment policy should be formulated, integrated, and implemented at both the supranational and member-state levels (Bundenberg, Griebel & Hindelang, 2011; Dimopoulos, 2011). Forging coherence out of over 1200 member-state bilateral investment agreements, the legacy of mixity, has proven challenging. Some political and legal ambiguities surround the EU's authority and autonomy over foreign investment (Meunier, 2012).

Nonetheless, since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, the EU Commission has managed foreign direct investment policies on behalf of EU members as part of the EU commercial policy.

**EU investment policy aims to**

- Secure a level playing field so that EU investors abroad are not discriminated against or mistreated.
- Make it more accessible to invest by creating a predictable and transparent business environment
- Encourage investment that supports sustainable development, respect for human rights, and high labor and environmental standards, including promoting corporate social responsibility and responsible business practices.
- Attract international investment into the EU while protecting the EU's essential interests and 3
- Preserve and protect the rights of the home and host countries to regulate their economies in the public interest.

The EU negotiates or implements investment rules in trade and self-standing investment agreements. Regarding Investment policy, the EU Commission informs: "Businesses or individuals invest in another country to either source components/raw materials, locate their production in costefficient or skills-abundant locations, or get closer to their customers. There are two main types of foreign investments.

- Foreign direct investment, in which an investor sets up or buys a company (or a controlling share in a company) in another country and
- Portfolio investment: an investor buys shares in, or debt of, a foreign company without controlling that company.

The EU is the world's leading provider and top global foreign investment destination. Foreign direct investment stocks held by investors residing in the EU in the rest of the world amounted to €8,990 billion by the end of 2019. Meanwhile, foreign direct investment stocks held by thirdcountry investors in the EU amounted to €7,138 billion by the end of 2019 ( EU Commission,2020b).

Investment policy is essential in geoeconomics because it can attract capital and technology, foster innovation and development, and protect the EU's strategic assets and interests. The current state and challenges of the EU's investment policy include the fragmentation of national policies, lack of coordination and coherence, and vulnerability to foreign influence and interference ( Sattorova, 2023). This sorry state of affairs could be counteracted by creating a common framework for screening foreign direct investments, enhancing the EU's investment facilitation and promotion, and supporting its strategic sectors and regions. A joint EU COM, EIB, and World Bank study examining the effectiveness and efficiency of EU and MS on the four Is: Institutions, innovation, investments, and initial conditions could be conducive to unlocking long-term growth in the context of shifting core-periphery balances ( Fatas & Mihov, 2008, Magone & Laffan, 2018). Ensuring a level-playing field concerning FDI absorption capacity among member states is only the beginning of a coherent EU investment policy.

**Table -EU Investment with the Ten Official Strategic Partners (2023)**

Strategic Partner	EU Outward FDI Stock (€ bn)	EU Inward FDI Stock (€ bn)	Portfolio Investment (Stocks)	Key Notes
<b>United States</b>	€2,437 bn (26.6 %)	€2,299 bn (30.9 %)	Not publicly detailed by partner	Primary investment partner; deep mutual FDI integration
<b>Canada</b>	~2.7 % of EU outward stocks	~2.7 % of EU outward stocks	Not detailed	Stable and diversified economic ties
<b>Japan</b>	Not specified (est. ~2%)	Not specified	Likely moderate	High-tech and regulatory convergence focus
<b>China (excl. HK)</b>	~2.5 % of EU outward stocks	Not disclosed	High EU exposure	Strong trade volumes; restricted FDI environment
<b>India</b>	Minimal, rising slowly	Declared	Limited portfolio integration	Potential growth partner; investment still nascent
<b>South Korea</b>	Not specified (~1-1.5%)	Not disclosed	Not detailed	Industrial and technological cooperation focus
<b>Brazil</b>	~2-2.3 % of EU stocks	Not disclosed	Limited	Leading Latin American partner; resource-based economy
<b>Mexico</b>	~2-2.3 % of EU stocks	Not disclosed	Not detailed	Strategic gateway to North America
<b>South Africa</b>	Limited (<1%)	Not disclosed	Modest portfolio flows	Key African partner; limited capital flows

It must be noted, with both gravity and precision, that the investment relationship between Russia and the European Union has suffered a contraction of remarkable severity since the year 2022. Where once substantial flows of capital moved with regularity, both outward and inward foreign direct investments are now all but frozen, halted by the twin forces of geopolitical tension and sanctionary measures. To recall, Russia previously accounted for approximately 2.4 percent of the EU's outward FDI stock and 2.1 percent of inward investment; today, these figures have sharply declined, as European firms, mindful of reputational risk and constrained by regulation, have withdrawn their holdings, while Russian investors display equal hesitation.

### Summary and Conclusions

The EU's investment footprint across its ten strategic partners in 2023 reveals high concentration in a few transatlantic relationships, notably the United States and Canada, which account for the overwhelming majority of both inward and outward foreign direct investment (FDI) stocks. The United

States alone accounts for over a quarter of total EU outward FDI and nearly one-third of inward FDI, underscoring its centrality to the EU's global economic position.

In contrast, emerging economies such as India, South Africa, and Brazil represent modest but strategic growth potentials. While Brazil exhibits relatively robust FDI stock, others like India and South Africa lag behind, reflecting both structural constraints and the need for enhanced economic diplomacy.

Asian partners such as Japan, South Korea, and China show mixed profiles. Japan and Korea are valuable high-tech partners with moderate investment flows, whereas China maintains a large trade relationship but continues to pose regulatory and transparency barriers that dampen reciprocal FDI flows. EU portfolio exposure to Chinese markets remains high but unbalanced.

Russia's investment profile has sharply contracted due to sanctions and systemic disinvestment following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. While legacy FDI stock remains on the books, the forward trajectory is one of disengagement.

To enhance strategic autonomy and reduce concentration risk, the EU could pursue the following investment policy objectives:

- Deepen sector-specific FDI channels in underperforming partnerships (e.g., green energy in South Africa, digital in India).
- Encourage portfolio diversification and euro-denominated instruments to reduce dollar dependency.
- Promote investment facilitation and regulatory cooperation with countries like Mexico and Brazil, building on existing trade agreements.
- Strategically align Global Gateway and sustainable investment instruments with capital flows to partners outside the transatlantic core.

In sum, the current investment geography of EU strategic partnerships underscores the need for greater balance, resilience, and long-term strategic structuring of economic ties if the EU is to leverage its economic weight in an increasingly multipolar and contested international order.

### Portfolio Investment

There is no transparent breakdown by partner country available for EU portfolio investment stocks (i.e. holdings in equities or bonds). Eurostat and other publicly available data do not publish partner-specific portfolio positions. Aggregate data suggest diverse patterns across EU member states, with some (Germany, Italy, Sweden) net positive in portfolio assets abroad and others (France, Denmark, Netherlands, etc.) net liabilities ([cdp.center](http://cdp.center)).

To complement outward investment efforts, the European Union must also strengthen its capacity to attract inward FDI and portfolio investment from its strategic partners. Despite the EU's position as a leading global investment destination, inward flows remain highly concentrated, with the United States and Canada accounting for a disproportionate share. Other strategic partners—particularly from Asia, Latin America, and Africa—are underrepresented in the EU's capital inflow profile, limiting the EU's geopolitical reach and its ability to shape investment rules, technology ecosystems, and value chains.

A more balanced inbound investment strategy should be pursued across several dimensions:

First, the EU should improve the accessibility and visibility of its capital markets, particularly for long-term portfolio investors from strategic partners such as Japan, South Korea, and India. This may involve harmonizing financial instruments, enhancing transparency, and promoting eurodenominated securities that are attractive to sovereign wealth funds and institutional investors. A more internationalised euro would not only bolster resilience but reduce reliance on US dollar-denominated inflows.

Second, the EU can expand bilateral investment dialogues and framework agreements that provide predictable legal

environments and investment protection. Countries like Mexico, Brazil, and India often seek reassurances about dispute settlement, regulatory stability, and market access. Building on instruments like the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement or the EU-Mexico Global Agreement, future frameworks should more explicitly incorporate investment facilitation provisions, including for small and medium-sized enterprises and green sectors.

Third, leveraging the Green Deal, Digital Europe, and Global Gateway strategies as magnets for foreign investment will be critical. Strategic partners with capital surpluses and aligned interests—such as Japan, South Korea, and Canada—could be encouraged to invest in joint ventures, sustainable infrastructure, and innovation ecosystems in the EU. EU initiatives should be marketed not only as regulatory models but as investment platforms, with stronger public-private cooperation and dedicated investment pipelines.

Fourth, the EU should explore targeted investment promotion through the European Investment Bank (EIB), InvestEU, and national investment agencies to attract strategic FDI from partners beyond the transatlantic core. South Africa and Brazil, for instance, could be offered tailored sectoral investment tracks in renewables, agri-tech, and critical minerals, aligned with EU strategic autonomy goals.

Finally, the EU must ensure that screening mechanisms under the FDI Regulation balance security concerns with openness. Excessive fragmentation or politicisation of investment screening could deter legitimate strategic capital from partners such as Japan or India. A common EU framework, transparent criteria, and enhanced dialogue with third-country investors would help maintain confidence while safeguarding core interests.

In summary, to fully leverage its position as a global investment destination, the EU must move from a passive to a proactive stance—attracting sustainable, diversified, and strategically aligned investment from its strategic partners. This will not only enhance economic resilience but embed the EU more deeply into global financial and industrial networks in line with its geopolitical and geo-economic ambitions.

### Summary

The EU's largest Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) relationships among its Strategic Partners (SP10) remain heavily concentrated in the United States and, to a lesser extent, Canada, reflecting deep transatlantic economic integration and longstanding institutional ties. However, investment flows with other strategic partners—such as China, Brazil, India, Japan, Mexico, South Korea, Russia,

and South Africa—remain relatively underdeveloped or inconsistent, often shaped by political tensions, regulatory divergence, and limited market access.

This imbalance highlights a structural gap in the EU's strategic partnership framework, where the economic pillar—particularly investment—is insufficiently leveraged outside the transatlantic space. For many of the SP10 partners, trade and political dialogue are more advanced than mutual FDI engagement, limiting the EU's capacity to build influence through economic interdependence. In some cases, such as China or India, regulatory complexity, state-driven economic models, or geopolitical friction have created barriers to deeper FDI ties. In others, like South Africa or Mexico, untapped potential exists but lacks a coherent EU-level investment strategy.

#### Quick Fixes:

- **Prioritize Bilateral Investment Agreements (BIAs):** Fast-tracking or updating BIAs with key partners like India, Brazil, and Mexico could offer stronger legal protections for EU investors and reduce uncertainty in FDI flows.
- **Enhance the Role of the EU Global Gateway:** Use the Global Gateway initiative more strategically to mobilize private and public investment toward priority sectors in SP10 economies, particularly in infrastructure, green energy, and digital connectivity.
- **Create an EU-SP10 Investment Dialogue Platform:** Institutionalize regular investment-specific dialogues with SP10 partners to address regulatory bottlenecks, promote mutual standards, and increase business-to-business engagement.
- **Leverage the European Investment Bank (EIB):** Strengthen the EIB's mandate to support strategic investments in SP10 countries, particularly where capital access or development finance gaps exist.

#### Recommendations:

To balance its strategic partnerships more evenly, the EU should adopt a differentiated investment strategy tailored to each partner's domestic context and mutual interests. For advanced economies like Japan and South Korea, the focus should be on high-tech sectors, research collaboration, and mutual market liberalization. For emerging economies like India, Brazil, South Africa, and Mexico, the EU should support regulatory convergence, de-risking mechanisms for EU investors, and joint ventures in sustainable development sectors.

Furthermore, aligning investment policies with broader foreign policy goals—such as digital sovereignty, energy transition, and resilience of supply chains—will ensure that the economic dimension of strategic partnerships reinforces the EU's geopolitical positioning. Strengthening FDI relations

beyond the transatlantic core is not only economically beneficial but strategically necessary in an increasingly multipolar and contested global order.

Strategic alignment—especially in innovation, digital, green technologies—combined with regulatory harmonization and better bilateral instruments, would help shift from broad FDI aggregation toward dynamic, partnership-based investment growth.

#### Sanctions

Sanctions are one of the EU's most powerful instruments of geoeconomic statecraft. They serve not only to impose costs and pressure on adversaries but also to deter aggression, signal resolve, and demonstrate the Union's normative commitment to upholding international law. As a key instrument of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), restrictive measures encompass a wide toolkit: trade and financial bans, limitations on investment, restrictions on access to technical and financial assistance, and the freezing of assets belonging to individuals, companies, and state entities. These sanctions pursue multiple functions simultaneously: they act as signals of disapproval, they constrain the target's access to resources and opportunities, and they create leverage to induce behavioral change (Portela, 2016; Giumelli, 2020).

The EU has developed significant competence in the design and enforcement of economic sanctions. Legally, restrictive measures require unanimity in the Council, reflecting both the sensitivity and the high-stakes nature of such decisions (Blanke & Mangas Martín, 2022). This unanimity principle ensures legitimacy but also creates structural challenges: divergent national preferences, economic exposure, and political priorities often lead to protracted negotiations, dilution of measures, or delayed responses. The Russia sanctions packages following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine demonstrated both the strategic importance and the institutional limits of EU sanctions policy. While the Union moved with unprecedented speed and unity, internal contestation—particularly over energy-related restrictions—highlighted how sanctions both unite and divide Member States (Fiott, 2023).

Beyond consensus-building, sanctions policy faces additional challenges. Retaliation and escalation remain significant risks, particularly when targeting systemic rivals such as Russia or China. Sanctions may provoke countermeasures against European exports, energy flows, or critical supply chains, thereby exposing vulnerabilities in the Union's own geoeconomic position. Moreover, the effectiveness of sanctions is often questioned. Research shows that sanctions rarely achieve ambitious political

goals alone and work best when embedded in a broader diplomatic and strategic framework (Biersteker et al., 2016; Giumelli, 2020). The EU must therefore balance effectiveness, proportionality, and legitimacy. Measures that appear overly coercive or unilateral risk undermining the Union's identity as a normative power, while those that are too limited may fail to generate meaningful pressure.

Looking forward, several avenues for improvement in the EU's sanctions policy can be identified. First, closer coordination with allies—especially the United States, the United Kingdom, and likeminded partners in the G7—is vital to maximize reach and minimize loopholes (Leonard et al., 2023). Fragmentation among sanctioning actors allows adversaries to exploit regulatory gaps or turn to alternative markets. Second, the EU must further invest in institutional capacity for monitoring and enforcement. The recent establishment of the EU Sanctions Envoy in 2023 and enhanced cooperation with the European External Action Service (EEAS) mark important steps toward ensuring compliance, combating circumvention, and strengthening the credibility of measures (European Commission, 2023). Third, the EU needs to develop new geoeconomic tools such as secondary sanctions, export controls on critical technologies, and the capacity to rapidly freeze digital and crypto-assets. These tools must, however, be carefully balanced with considerations of proportionality and international law.

At the same time, sanctions should not be mistaken for substitutes for diplomacy. While they can raise costs, deter aggression, and signal resolve, they cannot replace dialogue or negotiated solutions. Their use must therefore remain targeted, proportionate, and sparing, embedded within a broader strategy of conflict resolution and engagement. Overreliance risks entrenching divisions and reinforcing narratives of siege or victimhood in the targeted state (Portela, 2016). The EU's credibility as a global actor ultimately depends not only on its ability to sanction but also on its capacity to offer pathways for de-escalation, compromise, and peace.

In sum, sanctions have become a central pillar of the EU's geoeconomic toolbox, embodying both its capacity for collective action and the tensions inherent in balancing unity, legitimacy, and strategic effectiveness. They represent a field where the EU's identity as a "geoeconomic power" is being forged in real time: able to act, but forced to reckon with the structural vulnerabilities and normative commitments that distinguish it from other sanctioning actors.

### *Cybersphere*

The EU adopted its Cybersecurity Strategy in 2020, as part of a cross-cutting framework tied to the Digital Future strategy, the Recovery Plan for Europe, and the Security Union Strategy. This approach was intended to strengthen Europe's collective resilience against cyber threats, while ensuring that all citizens and businesses could benefit from trustworthy and reliable services and digital tools. The Commission at the time underscored that cybersecurity was not only a matter of technical defense, but also of democratic values and global governance: "The new Cybersecurity Strategy also allows the EU to step up leadership and to strengthen cooperation with partners around the world to promote a global, open, stable and secure cyberspace, grounded in the rule of law, human rights, fundamental freedoms, and democratic values" (European Commission, 2020). In parallel, cyber and physical resilience were jointly addressed, reflecting the increasing interdependence of hybrid security challenges. Cooperation with NATO has deepened since then, especially in threat intelligence sharing and defense coordination, but the EU continues to underline that it is not a subcontractor to the US or NATO. Rather, its departure point remains an understanding of the multi-dimensional politics of cyber defense—before moving into concrete strategies to counter infrastructure attacks, hacking, espionage, and other forms of invisible low-intensity warfare that define today's rapidly evolving threat landscape (Talliat, 2023).

By 2025, the cybersphere has become firmly established as a new domain of geoeconomics, one that both enables connectivity and exposes vulnerabilities. It is the backbone of Europe's innovation capacity, competitiveness, and digital sovereignty, yet it also represents a contested arena where hostile state and non-state actors exploit asymmetries. The diversity of threats, the multiplication of actors, and the complexity of governance present formidable challenges. The post-COVID explosion in internet-related economic crime has shaken citizens' sense of security online and revealed structural weaknesses in the enforcement capacity of Member States. Many governments continue to underfund or fragment the very institutions tasked with cybercrime prevention and prosecution. As a result, the EU's cybersecurity architecture often defaults to preventive and reactive measures at the national level, while cross-border cooperation remains patchy. Investigations and prosecutions are typically pursued only in high-value cases, while police authorities in Member States often cite jurisdictional barriers to justify inaction. This nonchalant approach underlines the deterritorialized nature of cybercrime, where national borders become porous and institutional fragmentation undermines deterrence.

The EU has sought to respond by progressively strengthening its legislative and institutional frameworks. The revised NIS2 Directive, fully in force in 2023, expanded the range of critical sectors subject to cyber resilience obligations, while the Cyber Resilience Act (CRA), adopted in 2024, marked a watershed moment by imposing binding cybersecurity requirements across the lifecycle of digital products and software. These legal innovations move beyond voluntary best practices towards enforceable standards that hold manufacturers, service providers, and operators accountable. Parallel to this, the creation of the European Cybersecurity Competence Centre (ECCC) in Bucharest is beginning to show results, pooling research, innovation, and funding capacities at the EU level. The EU Cyber Solidarity Act, finalized in 2024, has introduced a European-level cyber emergency mechanism, enabling joint incident response and “cyber reserve” capabilities for major cross-border attacks.

The European Union’s cybersecurity strategy in 2025 is articulated through a combination of overarching internal security frameworks and specialized operational guidance, most notably the ProtectEU Strategy (European Commission, 2025a) and the updated Cybersecurity Blueprint (Council of the European Union, 2025). Taken together, these initiatives reflect a decisive evolution in the Union’s approach to cyber resilience, situating cybersecurity at the nexus of hybrid threat management, crisis response, and geo-economic security.

The ProtectEU Strategy, launched in April 2025, positions cybersecurity as an integral element of the EU’s broader internal security architecture. It explicitly links the safeguarding of critical infrastructure, the resilience of democratic institutions, and the fight against hybrid threats to a coherent governance framework. ProtectEU emphasizes whole-of-society resilience, improved information-sharing mechanisms, and a harmonized legal basis for countering cyber-enabled threats. The strategy also advances contentious proposals to provide “lawful and effective access” to encrypted communications by 2030, thereby highlighting the ongoing tension between digital rights, security imperatives, and technological sovereignty (European Commission, 2025a).

Complementing this, the Cybersecurity Blueprint, adopted by the Council in June 2025, updates and replaces earlier fragmented guidance on cyber crisis management. It provides a structured framework for joint preparedness and coordinated response to large-scale cyber incidents, building on instruments such as the NIS2 Directive, the Cyber Resilience Act, and the EU-CyCLONe platform. The Blueprint institutionalizes crisis escalation pathways, standardizes communication protocols, and mandates regular cross-border

exercises to test collective capabilities (Council of the European Union, 2025). In doing so, it responds to the persistent fragmentation among Member States and the demonstrated vulnerabilities exposed by high-profile cyberattacks against critical infrastructure across Europe since 2022.

Taken together, these developments underscore three dimensions of the EU’s evolving cybersecurity doctrine. First, they consolidate the geo-economic framing of cyberspace as both a domain of vulnerability and a pillar of competitiveness, necessitating the defense of digital sovereignty. Second, they strengthen the operational and institutional infrastructure of EU crisis management, embedding cyber resilience within a layered governance model that spans national, supranational, and transatlantic cooperation. Third, they reveal enduring normative dilemmas, particularly in balancing security objectives with the protection of fundamental rights, a tension that will shape the Union’s legitimacy in global cyber governance.

Thus, the EU’s 2025 cybersecurity strategy reflects a dual ambition: to enhance its capacity for autonomous action in defending critical infrastructures and digital ecosystems, while simultaneously positioning itself as a normative actor in shaping an open, secure, and rights-based international cyberspace order.

Trends in threat management—sources, motives, operational methods—continue to evolve rapidly. The rise of AI-enabled cyberattacks and the weaponization of generative models in disinformation campaigns has intensified the demand for coordinated EU responses. These developments invite reflection not only on how to protect, detect, and respond, but also on how to balance freedom and security in a digital environment increasingly marked by pervasive surveillance technologies and state manipulation. International cooperation remains indispensable, yet geopolitics often constrains its scope. As Salamon and Poupard (2020) already foresaw, cyber threats push the EU to navigate the difficult line between sovereignty and interdependence.

The inadequacy of Member State-level responses makes EU-level leadership indispensable. Improvements are gradually materializing: stronger governance structures, clearer enforcement of obligations, and an ambition to assert digital sovereignty as a cornerstone of European autonomy. But challenges remain. Jamet and De Sousa (2022) stress that the cybersphere reflects the geo-economic nature of conflict, with the internet both eroding traditional notions of borders and generating new

dependencies that expose vulnerabilities. For Europe, this translates into a redefinition of security: safeguarding not only infrastructure, but also values, social trust, and citizens' ability to navigate a digital world free from manipulation and exploitation.

As Commission President Ursula von der Leyen declared in her 2023 State of the Union Address: "Trust must be restored, rights respected." This maxim has acquired sharper meaning in 2025. Trust requires credible enforcement, resilience requires shared responsibility, and rights require institutional capacity. In this sense, the EU's cybersecurity trajectory reflects its broader political project: defending the European way of life in a digital age where power, sovereignty, and values are increasingly negotiated through the cybersphere.

#### AID

Article 208 of the Lisbon Treaty (TFEU) requires that development cooperation is conducted within the framework of external action and that 'the Union shall take account of the objectives of development cooperation in the policies it implements, which are likely to affect developing countries. Thus, the EU's development policy constitutes a vantage point for studying the coherence of its external relations and the effectiveness of its external bureaucracy (Furness, 2011). To some extent, this is driven by the increased importance of Chinese foreign policymakers in the Global South, a policy informed by an outlook approach balanced by the tightening of EU markets and the deterioration of the US-China relationship. China's policy toward the Global South is asymmetrical, comprehensive, and interlocking at the global, regional, and bilateral levels. It combines trade, investments, loans, aid, economic diplomacy, non-interference, and the building of infrastructure spruced up by propaganda in the context of China's evolving role conception (Eisenman & Heginbotham, 2020, Blackwell & Harris, 2016:193-151, Gu & Shankland, 2016, Monyae, 2022 ).

Aid is another traditional instrument in geoconomics as it can support development and humanitarian objectives, foster partnerships and influence, and advance the EU's interests and values. The EU and Member States are the most significant development aid donors. However, the EU's aid policy faces challenges such as the fragmentation of donors and instruments, competition from other actors, and the need to adapt to changing conditions and contexts. The EU's development aid must also be effective in reducing poverty. Political action is required to overcome governance, trade regimes, and geographical challenges to use best the opportunities arising from globalization. The EU spends 20% of its development budget on climate finance. The EU and its member states adopted the European Consensus on

Development in 2017 as part of their response to the UN 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals. Consensus defines the union's shared vision and action framework for development cooperation.

#### The Objectives

- Play a vital role in the achievement of 17 Sustainable Development Goals
- Promote democracy, rule of law, and respect for human rights in developing countries
- Ensure sustainable economic, social, and environmental progress in developing countries
- Make development aid from different European countries more effective by deepening cooperation between national governments.
- Launch negotiations on a revised Cotonou agreement with African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries.

Responding to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, EU institutions work together to provide funding to address the following five aspects of sustainable development.

- People: End poverty and hunger in all forms and ensure dignity and equality
- Planet: Protect future generations from environmental destruction and resource depletion
- Prosperity: Ensure prosperous and fulfilling lives in harmony with nature
- Peace: Create peaceful, just, and inclusive societies
- Partnership: implement development work through global partnership
- EU actions per sector (European Commission, 2020d).

The EU's development aid is partly funded by the overall EU budget and partly by a special fund for cooperation with African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries, the European Development Fund (EDF), which amounts together with the member state development budget to €85 billion. To improve public policy on development aid, the EU must increase its coherence and coordination, enhance its visibility and impact, and align its priorities and principles balanced by policies that shape the regional environment through partnership and integration. Geoeconomic packages are needed to become integrated and effective geoeconomic actors when interacting with developing countries.

#### Monetary Policy

Monetary policy is another essential instrument of geoconomics, as it can affect exchange and interest rates and influence the stability and growth of the economy and

the financial system. It is generally assumed that the advent of the Euro signals a potential strengthening of monetary and economic governance and that the Euro will act as a stabilizer in the world economy (Mundell & Cleese, 2000). In practice, the EU's monetary policy is driven by the divergence of economic performance and preferences among member states, the uncertainty and volatility of the global environment, and the need to balance inflation and deflation pressures.

The legal aspects of the Eurozone's external relations are well understood (Zilioli & Selmayr, 1999). Objections have been raised regarding the scope of the ECB's competence and the automaticity of the relationship between internal and external monetary law (Hermann, 2002). The ECB has exclusive competence in financial matters regarding the representation of the Euro area. There is a shared competence between the Eurogroup and ECB regarding exchange rate policies. The ECB participates in group meetings when exchange rates are discussed and decides on and performs exchange rate operations in exchange rate markets (Bini Smaghi, 2006). Policy-making and budgetary, financial, and structural representations are more diffuse, as are the external aspects of the EU economic union (Woolcock, 2016).

The relationship between trade and monetary policy is closely interlinked, because monetary power affects exchange rates, capital flows, and financing conditions, all of which influence trade competitiveness. Monetary power is exercised through interest rates, as central banks influence borrowing costs for businesses and consumers, affecting investment and consumption, which in turn shapes import and export demand. It is also exercised through exchange rates, since monetary policy can indirectly impact the value of the currency, affecting export competitiveness and the cost of imports. Liquidity provision and credit conditions allow central banks to ensure banks have access to liquidity, supporting trade finance and cross-border transactions. Balance sheet operations, such as asset purchases or collateralized lending programs, can stabilize financial markets, reduce risk premiums, and facilitate smoother trade flows. Signaling and forward guidance influence market expectations, impacting trade contracts, pricing, and investment decisions. In essence, trade depends on stable and predictable monetary conditions, while monetary policy must consider external trade dynamics, global capital movements, and the euro area's integration into global markets.

The relationship between trade and monetary policy is closely interlinked, because monetary power affects exchange rates, capital flows, and financing conditions, all of which influence trade competitiveness. Monetary power is exercised through exchange rate arrangements, as these determine the relative value of the currency and directly affect export competitiveness and the cost of imports. It is also exercised

through central bank reserves, the issuance of euro-denominated bonds, and other instruments that provide liquidity and stability to the financial system, supporting trade finance and cross-border transactions. Interest rate policy influences borrowing costs for businesses and consumers, affecting investment and consumption, which in turn shapes import and export demand. Balance sheet operations, such as asset purchases or collateralized lending programs, can stabilize financial markets, reduce risk premiums, and facilitate smoother trade flows. Signaling and forward guidance influence market expectations, impacting trade contracts, pricing, and investment decisions. In essence, trade depends on stable and predictable monetary conditions, while monetary policy must consider external trade dynamics, global capital movements, and the euro area's integration into global markets.

Regarding the institutional aspects of EU external relations, the literature linking monetary power, policymaking, and external relations could be more robust. Financial management is integral to the global balance of power (Cohen, 2018). The EU's foreign policy is based on certain principles and values (Lucarelli & Manners, 2006). The legal basis for coordinating the EU's External Relations can be derived from a balanced weighing of vertical principles of primacy, non-exclusivity, and loyalty in the CFSP with horizontal directions, combined with representatives' activities and apparatus actions (Baere, 2008).

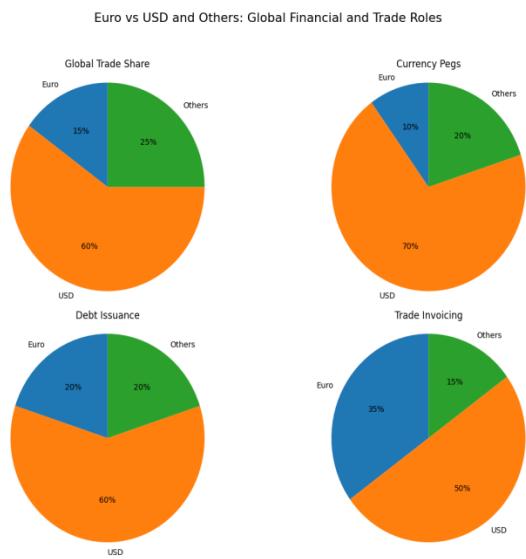
It is a long-standing EU policy that the market share of the Euro in terms of invoice currency, reserves, central bank reserves, and debt issuance should be commensurate with the EU's weight in the composition of its partners' trading relationships with the European Union ( Chauffour & Stemsiotis, 1998). In addition, exchange rate arrangements are sought in conformity with IMF guidelines; the IMF issues an annual report on exchange rate arrangements (Casiraghi & Habermeir, 2022). The ECB's External Department actively pursues relationships with the EU's trading partners to follow which currency blocs compete using the Euro as an invoice currency in bilateral trade, the share of reserves, Euro-denominated bonds, and exchange rate arrangements. It is generally believed that the ECB does so beyond the euro time zone. Public data suggest uneven results for EU public policy, which is not broken-down region-per-region. Most of the EU's imports are invoiced in dollars, not euros. In turn, 60% of the EU's exporters invoiced their trade in the EUR4. Successive studies by ECB staff confirm the disarray and lack of data infrastructure enabling the EU to carry through and anxiety about China's encroachment into emergent economies (Boz & Mehl, 2020). Unfortunately, I

found no data on the breakdown of the EU's trading relationship with the EU's Strategic Partners and the euro's share as an invoice currency, market share in the reserves of the central bank's commensurate with the trading relationship, and exchange rate arrangements. I agree that the Euro is not used extensively in the EU's energy trade and has natural causes, but that is not what my criticism is about.

The extent to which the EU's external policy is integrated at the political and administrative levels is unclear compared with SP10. The ECB has a representation office in Bruxelles but does not partake in the day-to-day coordination forum of the EU: The External Relations group. Thus, my preliminary conclusion is that neither the administrative setup nor the data infrastructure appears to be geared toward providing policymakers with the information they need to make informed choices about integrating the EU as a geoeconomic actor. The EU is governed by unaccountable apparatchiks organized in silos. This has made the EU an ineffective and incoherent foreign policy actor. Suppose the governance framework is fragmented and policy barely articulated, let alone integrated

The international role of the euro can be assessed through three main dimensions: its share in global foreign exchange reserves, the number of currencies pegged to it, and its share in international bond issuance. In terms of reserves, the euro consistently ranks as the second most important currency after the US dollar. According to IMF data, the dollar accounts for close to sixty percent of official reserves, while the euro represents about twenty percent. Other currencies such as the yen, sterling, and the renminbi remain in single digits. This reflects the euro's importance as a store of value, though it is still far behind the dollar in terms of global dominance.

With respect to exchange rate pegs, the dollar is by far the most widely used anchor currency. Many economies, particularly in Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East, maintain formal or informal links to the dollar. The euro, by contrast, is used as a peg primarily in Europe and parts of Africa. Examples include the Bulgarian lev, the Bosnian mark, and the CFA franc zones in West and Central Africa. The number of euro pegs is therefore limited compared to the dollar, but they are regionally significant, reflecting historical and institutional ties.



The charts show that the euro accounts for roughly 15% of global trade, anchors about 10% of pegged regimes, represents around 20% of international debt issuance, and covers approximately 35% of trade invoicing. In each case, the US dollar dominates, while other currencies collectively make up the remainder.

This highlights the euro's dual role: it is globally significant as the second most used currency, but its influence is regionally concentrated, especially in Europe and Africa. The euro area's weight in world trade enhances the euro's role in invoicing, yet in reserves, pegs, and debt issuance, the dollar remains the primary global currency.

In the field of international bond issuance, the euro plays a substantial but secondary role. The dollar dominates issuance across sovereigns, corporates, and financial institutions, benefiting from deep and liquid markets and global investor demand. The euro is the second most used currency, but its share has declined since the global financial crisis, as many issuers outside the euro area shifted toward dollar funding. The yen, sterling, and renminbi remain much smaller in this respect, though the renminbi has been gradually increasing its presence.

When focusing on individual countries, the picture becomes clearer. In the United States, the euro has little direct role, as reserves, pegs, and issuance are overwhelmingly dollar-based. Japan holds euros in its reserves but issues internationally mainly in dollars. Korea, India, and China all rely heavily on the dollar for external issuance, though they hold euros in their reserves for diversification. Canada, Brazil, South Africa, and Mexico follow similar patterns: their external debt markets are dollar-dominated, with occasional euro issuance to tap European investors. In all these cases, the euro is present but secondary, functioning as a diversification tool rather than a primary anchor.

Taken together, the euro's international role is significant but regionally concentrated. It is the second most important reserve currency, it anchors several exchange rate regimes in

Europe and Africa, and it is the second most used currency in international bond markets. However, in each of these dimensions it remains far behind the dollar, which continues to dominate globally. The euro's strength lies in its institutional backing and the size of the euro area economy, but its influence outside Europe is limited compared to the pervasive role of the dollar.

For the United States, Japan, Korea, India, China, Canada, Brazil, South Africa, and Mexico, the dollar dominates both trade invoicing and external bond issuance. The euro plays a secondary role, used mainly for diversification or when trading directly with Europe. For example, Korean and Indian exporters invoice overwhelmingly in dollars, while European trade partners use euros. China's trade invoicing is increasingly in renminbi but still heavily dollar-based. Canada, Brazil, South Africa, and Mexico rely on the dollar for most trade and issuance, with occasional euro use for European investor access.

The euro's international role is substantial but regionally bounded. It is the **second most important reserve currency**, the anchor for several exchange rate regimes, and the **second most used currency in international bond markets**. In trade invoicing, its share is significant but largely confined to Europe and Africa. By contrast, the dollar's dominance is global, spanning reserves, pegs, bonds, and trade invoicing. This asymmetry reflects structural factors: the depth and liquidity of US financial markets, the dollar's entrenched role in commodity pricing, and its widespread use as a vehicle currency. The euro's strength lies in its institutional backing and the size of the euro area economy, but its reach beyond Europe remains limited compared to the pervasive role of the dollar.

This has to be compared to the role of the euro in trade invoicing and its share in the world economy as a trading power. In trade invoicing, the euro's role is more regionally concentrated. Together with the US dollar, the euro accounts for more than four-fifths of global trade invoicing. The dollar dominates worldwide, even in transactions not involving the United States, while the euro is primarily used within Europe and in trade with Africa. This reflects the euro area's position as one of the largest trading blocs globally. The euro area collectively represents close to 15 percent of world GDP and

an even larger share of world trade, making it a major trading power.

When focusing on the SP10 group of economies—United States, Japan, Korea, India, China, Canada, Brazil, South Africa, and Mexico—the euro's role is secondary but visible. In these countries, the dollar dominates reserves, pegs, bond issuance, and trade invoicing. The euro is used mainly for diversification in reserves and for accessing European investors in bond markets. In trade, the euro is relevant when these countries transact directly with the euro area, but otherwise the dollar remains the primary invoicing currency. China is gradually increasing the use of the

renminbi, but even there the euro's role is limited compared to the dollar.

The comparison shows that the euro is a global currency in reserves and bond markets, but its strength is most pronounced in trade, where the euro area's economic weight ensures a significant share of invoicing. As a trading power, the euro area enhances the euro's international role, but outside Europe the currency remains secondary to the dollar. This asymmetry highlights the euro's dual character: globally important, yet regionally concentrated.

The euro's share in central bank reserves is significant but not fully commensurate with its broader position in global markets and trade, especially when viewed against the ten strategic partners you highlighted (United States, Japan, Korea, India, China, Canada, Brazil, South Africa, Mexico, and the euro area itself as a bloc).<sup>1</sup>

In reserves, the euro consistently represents about 20 percent of global holdings, making it the second most important reserve currency after the US dollar, which accounts for close to 60 percent. This reflects confidence in the euro's stability and the depth of euro area financial markets. However, when compared to the euro area's weight in the world economy and trade, the reserve share looks somewhat modest. The euro area represents roughly 15 percent of global GDP and an even larger share of world trade, often close to one-fifth, and the euro is used in about 35 percent of global trade invoicing, particularly in Europe and Africa. In debt issuance, the euro also accounts for around 20 percent of international bonds, again second to the dollar.

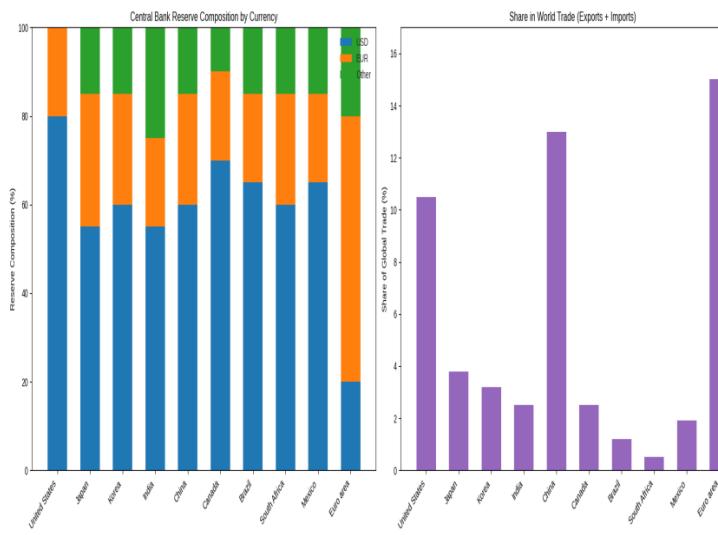
For the ten strategic partners, the pattern is clear. In the United States, Japan, Korea, India, China, Canada, Brazil, South Africa, and Mexico, the dollar dominates reserves, trade invoicing, and debt issuance. The euro is present but secondary, used mainly for diversification in reserves and for tapping European investors in bond markets. In trade, the euro is relevant when these countries transact directly with the euro area, but otherwise the dollar remains the primary invoicing currency. China is gradually increasing the use of the renminbi, but even there the euro's role is limited compared to the dollar.

The comparison shows that the euro's reserve share is broadly aligned with its role in debt issuance but lags behind its weight in trade invoicing and the euro area's share of world trade. In other words, the euro is under-represented in reserves relative to the euro area's economic and trading power. This under-representation reflects structural factors: the entrenched dominance of the dollar in commodity pricing, financial markets, and as a vehicle currency, as well as the euro's more regional concentration.

So, the euro is globally important and the second most used currency, but its role in reserves is somewhat smaller than its

<sup>1</sup> <https://leap-insights.org/2025/07/13/global-foreign-exchange-reserves/>

position in trade and markets would suggest, especially when benchmarked against the ten strategic partners where the dollar remains pervasive.



The stacked bars on the left illustrate reserve composition, where the US dollar dominates across most partners, with the euro playing a secondary but visible role. The bar chart on the right shows each country's share in global trade, highlighting the euro area and China as major trading powers, followed by the United States, Japan, and Korea.

This comparison makes clear that while the euro is under-represented in reserves relative to the euro area's weight in global trade, it remains the second most important currency globally. The dollar's dominance in reserves is disproportionate to its share of trade, reflecting its entrenched role as the world's vehicle currency.

The implications of the euro's position in reserves, trade invoicing, and debt issuance are closely tied to seigniorage—the economic benefits a currency issuer derives from its money being used internationally.

When a currency is widely held as reserves, used for trade invoicing, or dominates debt issuance, the issuing area gains several advantages. First, it can finance itself at lower cost, because global demand for its currency reduces borrowing costs. Second, it earns seigniorage directly: foreign central banks and investors hold euro-denominated assets, which are liabilities for the euro area but provide liquidity and stability benefits to others. Third, it gains indirect influence, since the euro's use in trade and finance creates network effects that reinforce its role.

For the euro, the seigniorage implications are mixed. Its 20 percent share of reserves and 20 percent share of debt issuance generate substantial benefits, but these are smaller than the euro area's weight in world trade and its 35 percent share of trade invoicing. This means the euro area does not fully capture the potential seigniorage that its economic size would suggest. By contrast, the US dollar captures disproportionate seigniorage: it accounts for nearly 60 percent of reserves and 60 percent of debt issuance, far above the US share of world trade.

For the SP10 partners, the asymmetry is clear. They rely heavily on the dollar for reserves and invoicing, which means they effectively transfer seigniorage benefits to the United States. The euro provides diversification, but its role is secondary. China is attempting to build seigniorage benefits through the renminbi, but its global role remains limited.

In short, the euro area enjoys meaningful seigniorage from its international role, but less than its economic and trading power would justify. The United States, by contrast, captures outsized seigniorage because of the dollar's entrenched dominance. This imbalance is one of the structural features of the international monetary system.

The euro's reserve share is about 20 percent, second only to the dollar's dominance. Its role in debt issuance is similar, but in trade invoicing the euro reaches closer to 35 percent. As a trading bloc, the euro area represents around 15–20 percent of world trade flows. This means the euro is under-represented in reserves compared to its economic and trading weight. The imbalance grants the United States disproportionate seigniorage benefits, while the euro captures less than its potential.

Above all, it makes it more complicated to adopt a more integrated geo-economic approach and wield its monetary power to political desirable ends as strengthening Europe's strategic autonomy, reducing vulnerability to external financial shocks, increasing the euro's international role in global markets, shaping trade and investment flows in line with geopolitical priorities, and supporting the resilience of key industries and supply chains. In the absence of deeper financial integration and cohesive policy coordination, the euro area struggles to convert its significant market weight into strategic leverage, limiting its capacity to act as a full geo-economic actor.

If the EU wants to use its biannual summitry with the SP10 to forge a more cohesive international society and provide a diplomatic backup for reform of the UN Security Council, it could significantly upgrade its engagement with these partners in several ways. Strengthening cooperation could involve deepening economic interdependence, enhancing co-investment in critical infrastructure, expanding security and defence dialogues in strategically contested regions, coordinating positions in international financial institutions, and promoting euro-denominated trade and financing mechanisms that increase mutual resilience. The EU could also pursue joint technology partnerships, climate and energy transition compacts, and connectivity initiatives that offer SP10 countries tangible alternatives to competing great-power influence. Finally, a more visible political commitment—including shared declarations on multilateral reform, crisis management, and regional

stability — would reinforce summity as a platform for shaping global governance and collective strategic influence.

In addition, strengthening the working relationship between the European Parliament and ECB must be used to ensure an orderly transition to accountable governance and strategic practices in conformity with public international law and EU law. If the ECB anticipates capturing parliamentarians, knowing who it deals with is not accurate.

Alternatively, the ECB manages the ECB, which annually publishes a report on the international role of the euro. In particular, the euro's share in outstanding inter-national loans, in the stock of global debt securities, and as an invoicing currency for extra-euro area imports have remained broadly stable. The share of the euro in global foreign exchange reserves has declined recently, as has the percentage of the euro in foreign currency-denominated debt issuance and outstanding international deposits (Lagarde,2021). The EU has a dialogue within G-7 on exchange rates and with the IMF and discusses exchange rate issues with their bilateral SP partners, including by setting up a forum with China. The EU does not deliver on its stated policies; there is scant inter-institutional dialogue about the actual conflicts, no understanding of what each actor needs, or discussion about what could be done to move forward, no strategies, no performance of leadership, no integration of policy with strategy, and no coordination between levers.

The European Union's strategic partnerships represent critical platforms for shaping its external relations with key global actors. Despite the EU's significant economic footprint, particularly in trade and investment, there is a notable asymmetry between the volume of bilateral exchanges and the degree to which these are conducted in euro. In most cases, trade is still largely denominated in US dollars, and foreign exchange reserve allocations by partners do not reflect the EU's importance in global trade or investment patterns. This disjuncture not only exposes EU firms to unnecessary exchange rate volatility and costs, but also constrains the EU's financial sovereignty and strategic autonomy.

There is a compelling rationale for the EU to pursue a more proactive strategy aimed at strengthening the international role of the euro through deeper exchange rate cooperation, increased use of the euro in trade invoicing, and a greater presence of the euro in the foreign reserves of its strategic partners. These partners—comprising the United States, Canada, Japan, China, India, Brazil, South Korea, Mexico, South Africa, and Russia—represent both established and emerging global powers with which the EU maintains broad, though varying, degrees of economic and political interdependence. Elevating the role of the euro within these relationships would reinforce the stability of bilateral trade, enhance financial

resilience, and provide the EU with stronger tools for projecting influence in a geoeconomically competitive environment.

To advance this objective, the EU should support the expansion of euro-denominated financial infrastructure in strategic partner countries. This includes facilitating euro clearing and settlement systems abroad, building regulatory cooperation on payments, and promoting the euro as a transactional and reserve currency through financial diplomacy and technical support. Targeted outreach to partner central banks—particularly those in India, Brazil, and South Africa—could help diversify global reserve holdings and reduce exposure to external currency shocks, in line with mutual interest in financial stability.

At the institutional level, the EU could negotiate bilateral or plurilateral frameworks for currency cooperation, including swap lines and contingency mechanisms designed to stabilise exchange rate volatility. Such arrangements would deepen monetary trust, especially during crisis conditions, and encourage broader adoption of the euro in local financial systems. Strategic partners with significant euro-area trade surpluses could be incentivised to rebalance their reserve portfolios accordingly.

The euro's role in international trade could be further reinforced by encouraging European exporters to denominate contracts in euro. This can be achieved by providing financial hedging instruments, trade finance guarantees, and institutional support through mechanisms such as the European Investment Bank or export credit agencies. Within ongoing or future trade negotiations, the EU could include provisions or cooperative frameworks to support the use of the euro in sectors of high bilateral exchange, such as energy, machinery, green technology, and pharmaceuticals.

Citizens of Europe, hear me: if the Union truly desires the euro to assert its rightful place among the currencies of the world, we must persuade those who trade to recognize its advantage, not merely as a tool of convenience, but as a lever of strength. Exporters must be shown that invoicing in euros shields them from the volatility of foreign currencies, reduces transaction costs, and secures steadier revenues. Let the Union provide guarantees and insurance against exchange fluctuations, so that choosing the euro becomes a matter of prudence, not risk.

Those who bill in euros should be rewarded tangibly: priority access to EU financing, reduced fees, and favorable credit terms will make the euro economically superior to the dollar. Importers, too, must see advantage: discounted

settlement rates, participation in euro-denominated trade initiatives, and streamlined customs procedures will incline them toward adoption. By these measures, we can shift the current 60/40 % split to a more balanced 80/60 % arrangement, gradually embedding the euro as the preferred currency in our trade filling the coffers of the central banks of our Strategic Partners with a share, comparable with our trading weight.

The Union must recognize that its central bank reserves and the exchange rate mechanisms of its strategic partners are not mere instruments of bookkeeping or technical adjustment; they are levers of influence and stability. By holding and deploying reserves in euros, the Union can signal confidence in its currency, provide liquidity when needed, and stabilize markets that might otherwise succumb to volatility. In doing so, it reassures both domestic and foreign actors that the euro is a reliable unit of account, a store of value, and a means of exchange capable of underpinning trade and investment.

Indeed, let us consider the channels through which the Union may assert its influence, not by force, but by the artful and prudent management of financial relations. The exchange rate arrangements of our partners present a singular opportunity: through careful coordination, through agreements on pegs or aligned interventions, the Union can harmonize transactions, mitigate the uncertainties of currency risk, and gradually establish the euro as the preferred medium for invoicing and settlement. These measures, executed with foresight and tempered judgment, extend the reach of European policy without oppression or compulsion, relying instead upon the twin virtues of credibility and predictability, reinforced by the mutual advantage they bring.

The aims of such action are plain and noble. First, to strengthen the euro, to ensure that Europe's partners regard it not as a mere instrument, but as a stable and dependable anchor of commerce and finance; second, to advance the strategic interests of the Union itself, fostering cohesion among its members, reducing vulnerabilities in the system, and laying the groundwork for enduring influence upon the broader stage of world affairs. Thus, by deliberate and judicious application of these instruments—by foresight, clarity, and measured resolve—the Union does not wield them as ends, but as instruments of policy worthy of its dignity, capable of securing Europe's stature and protecting the welfare of its citizens.

The Union must communicate with clarity and insistence: using the euro strengthens Europe itself, projecting stability, autonomy, and influence across the globe. Policies must be predictable, transparent, and consistently enforced, so that all traders understand the benefits and the expectations. Over

time, habitual use will take hold, and the euro will no longer be an option—it will be the rational, profitable, and honorable choice.

Thus, through financial incentives, regulatory support, strategic communication, and moral persuasion, Europe will convince its exporters and importers alike to embrace the euro. In doing so, the Union secures economic efficiency and the credibility and autonomy necessary to wield influence among the powers of the world. This is no abstract goal: it is a matter of strategy, prudence, and the enduring strength of Europe.

In addition, stronger alignment between trade patterns and monetary instruments can be achieved by linking the EU's economic diplomacy more explicitly to its monetary strategy. Summits, strategic dialogues, and regional cooperation platforms should be used not only to discuss trade and investment but also to promote euro usage as a mutually beneficial tool for stability, transparency, and efficiency. This approach is particularly relevant in regions where third currencies introduce geopolitical complications, such as in the Indo-Pacific, where the euro can offer a neutral and stable alternative.

Finally, it is necessary that the development of financial markets form an integral part of this strategy. By deepening euro-denominated capital markets and facilitating the issuance of bonds in euros by foreign sovereigns and corporations, the Union can attract sustained portfolio investment and instill confidence in the euro as more than a mere unit of settlement. When combined with harmonised regulation and robust digital financial infrastructure, these measures would persuade foreign financial actors to regard the euro as a central instrument in their strategic planning, rather than a peripheral tool.

Consider the stakes: in an age defined by strategic rivalry, fragmented markets, and the use of economic instruments as tools of leverage, the EU's capacity to expand the international role of the euro is not merely a matter of commerce—it is a question of geopolitical consequence. Wider adoption of the euro among strategic partners would consolidate the Union's financial influence, mitigate systemic vulnerabilities, and reinforce its authority and cohesion on the global stage. In this endeavor, prudence and foresight are not optional; they are indispensable to safeguarding both economic stability and strategic autonomy.

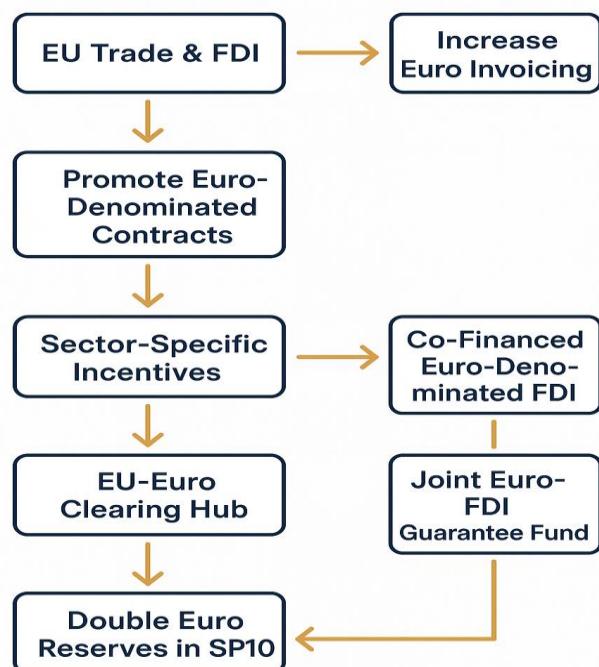
Citizens and stewards of the Union, consider the challenge before us. If the European Union is to deepen economic and financial integration with its ten strategic partners, it

cannot rely upon fragmented practice, nor can it permit the euro to remain secondary in trade. At present, barely sixty percent of exports to these partners are invoiced in euros, and only half of imports follow the same standard. This division weakens the Union's power, diminishes its capacity to exercise monetary influence, and undermines the predictability of cross-border payments. Moreover, it constrains the accumulation of euro-denominated reserves within the central banks of our partners, leaving a foundation of influence incompletely realized.

To remedy this, the Union must act with deliberation and purpose, crafting a strategy both comprehensive and precise.

Trade incentives must align with the goal of euro usage; investment flows must be guided to reinforce financial engagement; and regulatory frameworks must be harmonized to remove obstacles to uniform practice. Only through such coordinated measures can the Union convert latent potential into tangible power, filling the coffers of influence and securing the stability, credibility, and authority of the euro in the broader world. Let action be deliberate, let it be unified, and let it serve the enduring interests of Europe in commerce, finance, and strategic authority.

### EU-Euro SP10 Accumulation Model (Conceptual Framework)



First, mutual trade and invoicing arrangements could be incentivized by promoting euro-denominated contracts in key sectors, particularly those involving high-value technology, critical raw materials, and green transition projects. By coupling preferential trade terms, credit facilities, or supply chain financing with euro invoicing, the EU can gradually encourage partner central banks to accumulate euros as a reserve currency, enhancing monetary stability while reinforcing the international role of the euro.

Second, foreign direct investment (FDI) partnerships can serve as a complementary lever. By structuring joint investments in infrastructure, industrial parks, and technology corridors through special-purpose vehicles

denominated in euros, the EU can increase the circulation of euros in SP10 economies while tying financial flows to strategic industrial objectives. Such euro-based FDI also reduces exposure to currency fluctuations for European investors and provides a stable platform for cross-border capital allocation.

Third, institutional and regulatory alignment can further reinforce euro adoption. Harmonizing financial market rules, payment systems, and settlement infrastructures with EU standards lowers transaction costs and legal risks for firms invoicing in euros. Initiatives such as a dedicated EU-Euro Clearing Hub for SP10 trade or a joint Euro-FDI

Guarantee Fund could operationalize these mechanisms, providing both liquidity and risk-sharing support.

Finally, the EU should pursue a normative and signaling dimension, emphasizing the strategic advantages of euro usage in global trade and investment. By framing euro adoption as a vehicle for resilience, transparency, and reduced exposure to foreign exchange volatility, the EU positions the currency not merely as a medium of payment but as an instrument of strategic economic partnership. Over time, this could shift the balance from partial adoption toward broader euro invoicing and reserve accumulation, creating both financial leverage and deeper integration between the EU and its SP10 partners.

### ***Energy and Commodity prices***

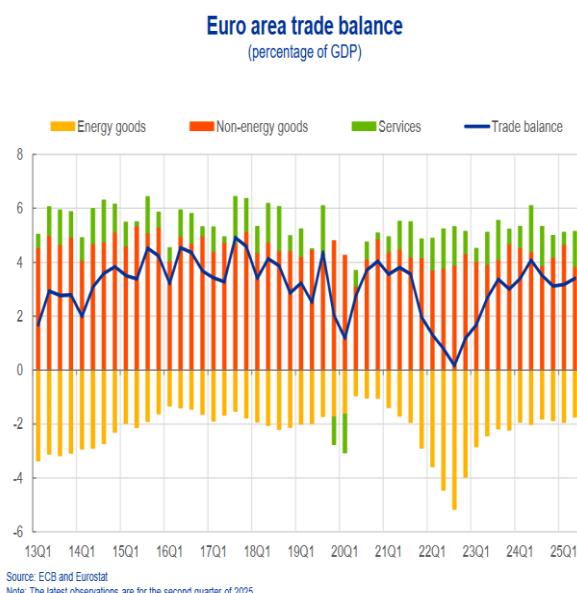
Energy and commodity prices The external aspects of the EU's energy policy are or should be geared toward the collective influence of the EU and Member States over the price of oil and gas, which is enough for everyone for at least 15-20 more years. The EU's high energy dependency, low diversification, and relative fragmentation of energy markets contribute to the EU's collective and member states' sense of insecurity. The EU has been continuously taken off guard and forced to rear-guard actions, most recently during the Ukrainian crisis (Suarrelles, 2015)

Energy and commodity prices are crucial to geoeconomics, as they can affect production and consumption costs and revenues, influencing resource security and sustainability. The EU's energy and commodity policy challenges include dependence on external suppliers, vulnerability to price shocks and fluctuations, and balancing affordability with its environmental goals. The EU's energy and commodity policy can be improved by diversifying its supply sources and routes, enhancing its efficiency and conservation of demand, and promoting green transitions and innovation. Resource economics is a particularly salient issue over which great powers have historically competed. The jury is still unaware of how technology-driven green evolution can change and make the world more peaceful. Indeed, saving the planet's first man remains a priority, but this should not prevent us from integrating energy dialogues into the EU's contractual framework with its Strategic Partners. Energy plays a crucial role in several of the EU's Strategic Partners and north-south relations but is barely integrated into the EU's dialogues with the EU's SP partners (Knott, Müller & Piefer, 2011). This must change.

Interinstitutional relations between the Commission and Member States are crucial in determining the external dimension of EU energy policy (Batzella, 2019:139). However,

complex decisionmaking, normative power, and shallow ambitions have halted progress, notably in the Energy Charter Treaty vis-à-vis Russia. The OECD's guidance for investment in clean energy infrastructure allows EU policies to be exported to developing countries (OECD 2013). The EU is still adopting a concept enabling it to influence and weigh the tug-of-war between energy producers and consumers.

The European Union has all the tools available to become geoeconomic actors. The onus is on the European Union to find synergies, coordinate between the various instruments, and combine European business leaders and investors as it carves out an international role short of geopolitical competition in world affairs. If the European Union is to be dressed up as a geoeconomic actor, what and how can the relevant instruments come into play and be deployed individually or in combination with one another? The EU and Member States could adopt a strategic approach to geoeconomics for genuine competitive advantage while focusing on energy investments in green technologies as a geopolitical asset.



**Source:** Lane (2025)

It is noteworthy that the negative share of energy in the EU's trade balance continues to fluctuate albeit currently the EU's energy bill albeit on a downward trend, which, by implication, eases some inflationary pressures. However, this trend does not absolve the EU from the imperative of pursuing a more coherent external energy and commodity policy, structured around strategic diversification, secure supply chains, and coordinated market engagement, trading relationships and the sale of arms for leverage over the energy games and the price of imports.

The relative scale of these efforts becomes particularly salient during a period of energy transition, when dependency on fossil fuels is declining but new vulnerabilities—such as critical minerals and green technologies—emerge. Shared interests between the EU and its Strategic Partners underscore the need for a stable and predictable energy transition, as disruptions in supply or price volatility could disproportionately affect the world economy and compromise regional development objectives.

Finally, the geoeconomics of the green transition demand that the EU balances climate ambitions with energy security and competitiveness, ensuring that technological leadership, infrastructure investment, and trade partnerships are leveraged to maintain strategic autonomy while fostering a resilient, decarbonized energy system.

#### **Outlook: Packaging the Strategic Partnerships ?**

Strategic Partnerships remain the cornerstone of a forward-looking European Union foreign policy. By engaging with key partners through integrated, regionally calibrated approaches, the EU can project influence, promote shared values, and secure both normative and geopolitical objectives. Central to this effort is the deployment of coherent policy packages that combine geoeconomic instruments—trade incentives, investment facilitation, development aid, regulatory alignment, and technological cooperation—tailored to the specific political, economic, and security dynamics of each partner region. For example, renewable energy collaborations in Southeast Asia or green transition infrastructure in Eastern Europe illustrate how these instruments can reinforce one another to produce tangible outcomes while advancing EU norms.

Strategic Partnerships are further strengthened when closely aligned with the EU's enlargement and neighbourhood policies. Engagement with neighbouring states and prospective members fosters regional stability and creates

durable platforms for cooperation with global strategic partners. This interlinkage enables the EU to synchronize local, regional, and global objectives, ensuring that interventions are mutually reinforcing and strategically coherent.

Operational effectiveness requires acknowledging persistent administrative challenges, including institutional fragmentation, uneven capacities across Member States, and overlapping responsibilities. Addressing these limitations necessitates a professionalized, strategically oriented leadership at the European External Action Service (EEAS) and related Commission services, capable of designing, managing, and monitoring partnerships systematically.

To ensure accountability and continuous improvement, Strategic Partnerships should be accompanied by robust evaluation frameworks. These frameworks would measure performance through quantitative indicators—such as trade volumes, investment flows, and joint initiatives—and qualitative assessments, including partner satisfaction, policy coherence, and alignment with EU values. Regular policy reviews, scenario-based stress tests, and adaptive learning mechanisms will provide actionable insights, enabling the EU to refine strategies in response to evolving geopolitical, economic, and societal conditions.

Ultimately, Strategic Partnerships—when structured as integrated geoeconomic packages, regionally focused, institutionally supported, and systematically evaluated—allow the EU to navigate complex global dynamics with credibility, coherence, and resilience. This approach positions the Union not merely as a normative or market actor, but as a strategically sophisticated global power, capable of shaping outcomes, safeguarding its interests, and restoring its stature in a multipolar and contested international system.

Strategic Partner	Key Priorities	Geoeconomic Instruments	Integration with EU Policies
<b>Russia</b>	Energy security, tech cooperation	Trade agreements, joint infrastructure, investment facilitation	Linked to EU energy diversification, CSDP energy security planning
<b>China</b>	Supply chain resilience, green transition	Investment treaties, regulatory alignment, joint R&D	Coordinated with EU industrial strategy, Green Deal initiatives
<b>South Africa</b>	Regional stability, sustainable development	Development aid, trade incentives, infrastructure projects	Aligned with EU-Africa partnership and neighborhood policy in Southern Africa
<b>India</b>	Trade expansion, technology transfer	Bilateral trade agreements, FDI facilitation, digital cooperation	Tied to EU digital strategy, sustainable tech initiatives
<b>Japan</b>	High-tech collaboration, investment security	Investment treaties, R&D programs, regulatory convergence	Linked with EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and innovation goals
<b>South Korea</b>	Technology, renewable energy, industrial cooperation	Joint ventures, trade facilitation, investment promotion	Coordinated with EU Green Deal, industrial competitiveness frameworks
<b>Mexico</b>	Trade integration, energy and tech cooperation	Trade agreements, investment facilitation, regulatory alignment	Integrated with EU-Latin America trade frameworks and neighborhood policy
<b>Brazil</b>	Climate cooperation, sustainable agriculture	Joint R&D, environmental standards alignment, investment incentives	Tied to EU climate diplomacy, sustainable development programs
<b>Canada</b>	Energy transition, digital and tech collaboration	Investment treaties, trade facilitation, joint innovation	Linked to transatlantic policy, EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)
<b>United States</b>	Strategic trade, innovation leadership	Trade agreements, joint R&D, regulatory alignment	Coordinated with EU-US Trade and Technology Council, innovation and standards policy

The strategic map is conceived not merely as a schematic but as a living instrument of policy, wherein each partner's priorities are addressed through a deliberate orchestration of trade, investment, regulatory, and innovation levers, producing effects that are mutually reinforcing and coherent. It achieves a harmony between regional focus and global reach, aligning geoeconomic initiatives with enlargement ambitions, neighborhood strategies, and broader EU objectives, thereby constructing a layered architecture of influence and engagement. Embedded within this design is rigorous evaluation and monitoring: performance indicators—ranging from trade flows and foreign direct

investment to research outputs, regulatory convergence, and sustainability metrics—serve as the compass by which progress and impact are continually assessed. The framework relies upon institutional coordination, drawing together the EEAS, the European Commission, and the Member States in a concerted effort to manage, guide, and refine strategic partnerships, ensuring that learning informs action and that policy adapts to emerging realities. Above all, the map embodies strategic flexibility, enabling the Union to respond with prudence and foresight to geopolitical shifts, partner-specific dynamics, and unforeseen challenges, while safeguarding cohesion,

credibility, and the enduring capacity of the European Union to act as a decisive, principled, and coherent actor upon the global stage.

## Summary

In summary, the SP10 Strategic Partnerships framework represents a deliberate and ambitious vision for the European Union's external action, one that fuses prudence with strategic boldness. Through integrated packages of trade, investment, regulatory, and innovation instruments, the Union engages each partner in a manner that is both coherent and responsive to local and global dynamics. By aligning these initiatives with regional policies, enlargement agendas, and neighborhood strategies, the EU constructs a layered architecture of influence capable of projecting its values, interests, and economic weight across continents. Embedded evaluation, monitoring, and institutional coordination ensure that action is guided by evidence, refined through learning, and executed with precision. Above all, the framework is suffused with strategic flexibility, enabling the Union to navigate geopolitical upheavals, emerging challenges, and partner-specific dynamics while safeguarding cohesion, credibility, and the enduring capacity to act as a principled and coherent actor on the world stage. In this endeavor, the SP10 map is not merely a tool, but a statement of purpose: a testament to the Union's resolve to translate vision into action, influence into partnership, and strategy into sustained global impact.

## V. AN AMBITION ABOUT MAN

However, for all its achievements in integrating Europe, the EU still needs a human rights policy that is coherent, balanced, and subject to constant surveillance. Whether about access to Community justice, sex equality, race, and disability discriminations, or policing or in its external policies such as the strategic partnerships, the Union needs new principles, procedures, and institutions to design and implement a practical set of human rights policies (Alston, 1999). The EU is built on fundamental rights, democracy, and the rule of law. Article 2 of the TEU contains provisions for Fundamental Rights: The Union is founded on respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are expected to Member States in a society in which pluralism, nondiscrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity, and equality between women and men prevail." These values are closely linked and guide the EU's internal and external actions (European Commission, 2021).

The Charter for Fundamental Rights of the European Union brings together the essential personal freedoms and rights that EU citizens enjoy in one legally binding document. The

charter was drafted under the chairmanship of former German president Herman Herzog and was declared in 2000. It came into force in December 2009 along with the Treaty of Lisboa. The purpose of the Charter is to promote human rights within the EU territory. The catalog of the charter is sourced from various documents: (1) The EU Treaties, (2) The European Convention on Human Rights, (3) the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union, and (4) national constitutions. The Charter has the same legal power as the EU Treaty. This means that it is superior to the domestic laws of the member state. However, it only applies when European institutions and Member States' governmental authorities implement EU law, a strictly legally binding international law. An agency of the European Union supervises the application of the Charter, the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), which issues annual reports on the Charter's application, providing comparable data and analysis on fundamental rights to support the work of EU institutions and Member States. The Charter's application to the EU's External Relations is undisputed (Kellerbauer & Klamert, 2019). In cases where the Charter does not apply, the protection of human rights is guaranteed under the constitutional order of the Member States and the international conventions they ratified.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (CFR), divided into six chapters—Dignity, Freedoms, Equality, Solidarity, Citizens' Rights, and Justice—serves not only as the internal constitutional compass of the Union but also as a normative benchmark in the EU's external relations. In its dialogue with its ten strategic partners (European External Action Service, 2021), the Charter functions as both a reference framework and a projection tool, shaping the contours of political cooperation, trade, and diplomacy.

Internally, the Charter codifies a progression from first-generation rights (civil and political freedoms), to second-generation rights (socio-economic entitlements), and to third-generation rights (emerging rights such as data protection, bioethics, and transparent administration). Externally, these categories are selectively foregrounded depending on the partner in question. For instance, with the United States and Canada, transatlantic dialogues often emphasize *data protection, privacy, and surveillance*, where the EU asserts the primacy of Article 8 CFR on data protection as a fundamental right, shaping negotiations on data flows (e.g. the EU-U.S. Data Privacy Framework). With Japan and South Korea, the Charter underpins agreements on consumer rights and digital standards,

helping the EU present itself as a regulatory model in the digital domain.

In relations with India, Brazil, and Mexico, the Charter's "Solidarity" chapter resonates with socio-economic rights, social protection, and sustainable development. These partnerships reveal the EU's effort to frame cooperation not only in terms of trade liberalization but also in promoting inclusive growth and rights-based governance. Similarly, in cooperation with South Africa, the Charter's emphasis on equality and non-discrimination plays a prominent role, echoing the shared post-apartheid commitment to combating systemic inequalities and fostering human rights dialogue.

The application of the Charter is more contested in strategic partnerships with China and Russia. With China, the EU emphasizes *fundamental freedoms, transparent administration, and human dignity*, which underpin debates over surveillance technologies, digital authoritarianism, and bioethical standards. The EU invokes Charter principles to justify restrictions on Chinese firms in sensitive sectors (such as 5G infrastructure) and to frame dialogues on human rights. In the case of Russia, the suspension of its strategic partnership after the annexation of Crimea in 2014—and its further deterioration following the invasion of Ukraine in 2022—illustrates how Charter-based values such as human dignity, freedom, and justice provide the justificatory basis for sanctions, restrictive measures, and political isolation. Here, the Charter is not a mechanism of cooperative projection but of defensive norm-setting, defining the outer limits of acceptable conduct in the EU's external relations.

Theoretically, the Charter exemplifies the EU's self-understanding as a "normative power" (Manners, 2002), where the export of values and rights is as important as economic and geopolitical considerations. It serves as a filter through which strategic partnerships are legitimized or constrained, providing the EU with both soft power leverage and normative justification for hard power measures such as sanctions or regulatory exclusion. At the same time, the selective application of Charter principles across partners highlights the pragmatic dimensions of EU foreign policy, as the Union balances its rights-based identity with geo-economic and security interests.

In sum, the Charter of Fundamental Rights is not confined to the EU's internal legal order but operates as a strategic instrument in external relations, shaping the Union's engagement with its ten strategic partners. Whether through trade, digital governance, or human rights dialogues, the Charter offers the EU both a language of cooperation and a boundary-setting device, reinforcing its claim to be a distinctive actor in global governance.

## VI. THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS OF THE EU

The European Union has ten strategic partnerships: the United States, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Russia, China, South Africa, South Korea, Japan, and India. There are three elements to EU's Strategic Partnerships

- Promoting trade and investment
- Looking for allies to promote multilateralism and strengthen international cooperation
- Burden-sharing in security matters Economics remains the basis for partnerships.

The EU is the largest trading partner of six of its ten strategic partners: Brazil, China, India, Russia, South Africa, and the US. In addition, the EU is the second-largest trade partner in Canada (Pallasz, 2015). In every case, the contractual basis is not a Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) or an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). For example, the EU entered a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Russia from the Strategic Partnership concept. Additionally, the EU has a comprehensive investment treaty in China.

### NOMENKLATURA OF A STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

The EU-Japan Strategic Partnership Agreement contains provisions for

- Promotion of peace and security, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, fundamental freedoms, regional and interregional cooperation, and reform of the United Nations
- Tackling weapons of mass destruction; severe international crimes; terrorism (including financing); chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear risks; illegal trade in small arms; corruption and organized crime; money laundering; illicit drugs; cybercrime.
- Supporting crisis and disaster management, humanitarian activities, sustainable development, and poverty eradication
- Cooperating in several domestic policy areas, such as - Economic, financial, and judicial affairs - Science, technology, and innovation - Customs, taxation, energy, agriculture, and employment
- Exchanging views, information, and best practices on issues ranging from climate change and outer space to the information society and environment.
- Provisions for a joint committee to coordinate the overall partnership and dispute settlement procedures.

Legal basis: General provisions on the union's external action and specific CFSP Section 1 and

TFEU Article 37 requirements. Cooperation with third countries and humanitarian aid, ch.2,

Economic, Financial, and Technical Cooperation with Third Countries, Article 212. ECONOMIC

PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT In parallel with the strategic partnership agreement, in 2019, the EU and Japan agreed on an economic partnership agreement (EPA) to improve the access of EU exporters and investors to Japanese markets (EEAS,2021). The EPA seeks to strengthen the EU's role in shaping global trade rules and contains provisions for

Elimination of customs duties

- Agriculture and food products
- Geographical indications
- Industrial products
- Fisheries
- Forestry
- Non-Tariff barriers
- Trade in Services
- State-owned enterprises
- Public procurement
- Investment
- Intellectual property rights
- Data protection
- Sustainable development
- Corporate governance
- Competition
- State-to-state dispute settlement mechanism
- Anti-Fraud (European Commission, 2022)

First, the Strategic Partnership Agreement and Economic Partnership Agreement between Japan prove that the EU has inserted itself into the broader power equation of Eurasia. During the Cold War era, the Soviet geopolitical (as opposed to nuclear) threat was twofold: conquering and dominating the economic and industrial resources of Western Eurasia and controlling the oil reserves of the Persian Gulf. Europe and the Persian Gulf constituted two of the five power centers of the world during the Cold War: Japan, the Soviet Union, and the United States being the other three. If the Soviets had succeeded in dominating Europe and the Persian Gulf through either conquest or political-military intimidation, then it would have controlled three of the five power centers of the world. That would have been a significant power transition' (Art, 2008:272). Thus, the EU-JapanSPA and EPA are signals to Russia and the US. The EU is a trading power that cares about weak revisionist Russia. However, we are no threat to the US as a Eurasian balancer who may inflect broader geopolitical partnerships. Second, the political dimension of the Strategic Partnership (SPA) points to an increase in dialogue and cooperation across the competencies of Union bodies, including UNSC reform, discussions on global problems, and collaboration on global challenges with a domestic impact.

Third, the EU-Japan SPA and EPA are excellent examples of the benefits of a managerial approach towards the ten strategic partners in terms of a more integrated policy by EU institutions and Member States and a tailor-made strategy to better factor in the peculiarities of each partnership, potentially conferring politico-administrative coherence to the ten Strategic Partnerships.

Key Areas Added in 2025 to the EU-Japan SPA and Why In 2025, the European Union and Japan significantly deepened their partnership, expanding cooperation across multiple strategic areas in response to evolving global geopolitical and technological shifts. These initiatives built upon the foundation of the 2018 EU-Japan Strategic Partnership Agreement, while directly addressing urgent global challenges and emerging security and economic imperatives.

One key area of expansion was defense industry collaboration and maritime security. Rising tensions in the Indo-Pacific, including developments in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea, as well as the EU's interest in supporting regional stability, prompted both partners to enhance joint capabilities. New measures included coordinated naval training and maritime surveillance, sustained dialogue on defense technologies with particular focus on drones, surveillance systems, and dual-use technologies, and the establishment of port call agreements between EU naval missions and Japanese bases.

Semiconductors and advanced technologies also became a central focus. The global chip shortage, coupled with heavy dependency on production in Taiwan and China, drove the EU and Japan to secure and diversify their supply chains. Joint research and development projects in next-generation semiconductors, co-investments in resilient supply chains, and the alignment of export controls and security standards were introduced to bolster technological sovereignty and supply chain resilience.

Critical raw materials and battery supply chains were addressed with equal urgency. Both Japan and the EU rely heavily on imports of lithium, cobalt, and rare earth elements, rendering alternative sources strategic. Responses included shared stockpiling strategies, collaborative green mining initiatives in Africa and Latin America, and the development of joint standards to ensure sustainability and circularity in battery production.

The partnership also extended into AI governance and digital infrastructure, reflecting the rapid expansion of generative AI technologies and regulatory frameworks.

The EU's AI Act and Japan's G7 Hiroshima AI Process provided a basis for transregional alignment, resulting in interoperable AI regulations, joint audits of high-risk AI systems, and coordinated cyber-resilience standards for critical digital infrastructure.

Climate adaptation and green hydrogen corridors became a further pillar of cooperation, aligning with both partners' commitments to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. The initiatives focused on establishing green hydrogen trade corridors, particularly from EU ports to Japan, developing joint standards on carbon certification and hydrogen purity, and sharing technology for carbon capture and storage.

Finally, space policy and satellite cooperation were elevated to strategic significance due to the increasing weaponization of space and the need for resilient satellite networks, including compatibility between Galileo and QZSS systems. New measures encompassed debris monitoring, the establishment of space traffic management protocols, cooperation in Earth observation for disaster response and climate monitoring, and strengthened cyber protection of space infrastructure.

Through these comprehensive expansions, the EU-Japan partnership in 2025 reflects a multidimensional strategy, integrating defense, technology, critical resources, digital governance, climate action, and space resilience into a cohesive framework for transregional stability and shared prosperity.

#### **Summary: Why These Were Added in 2025**

Area	Why It Was Added
Defense & Maritime Security	Indo-Pacific tensions and EU naval projection ambitions
Semiconductors & Chips	Tech sovereignty and China risk mitigation
Raw Materials & Batteries	Green transition dependency and supply chain fragility
AI & Digital	Aligning ethical, legal, and security frameworks
Hydrogen & Climate Tech	Mutual green industrial strategy goals
Space	Geopolitics, satellite security, and environmental monitoring

In summary, in 2025, the EU-Japan SPA was significantly expanded to reflect shared responses to rising geopolitical volatility, technological risk, and climate imperatives. New cooperation tracks were launched in defense industry collaboration, semiconductor resilience, and raw material

security. Digital infrastructure and AI governance were aligned to reflect converging regulatory frameworks, while hydrogen corridors and space security became emerging priorities. These additions illustrate how the SPA has evolved into a strategic governance platform fit for a multipolar, post-carbon world. The expansion affirms the EU-Japan axis as a critical pillar of transregional order-building.

#### **The EU-Japan Competitiveness Alliance**

The EU-Japan Competitiveness Partnership (launched in 2022) aims to enhance cooperation on industrial policy, green and digital transitions, supply chain resilience, and innovation. While it represents a strong political commitment, implementation has been slow, and its full potential remains untapped.

The EU-Japan Competitiveness Alliance is not merely a bilateral framework for industrial and technological cooperation; it also functions as a strategic counterbalance and complement to EU-China interactions. In the realm of semiconductors, for example, both the EU and China are vying for technological leadership and supply chain dominance, yet the EU-Japan alliance seeks to mitigate overreliance on Chinese suppliers by fostering diversification, co-investments, and joint R&D initiatives. This creates a competitive edge while simultaneously reinforcing EU resilience in sectors where China has historically been dominant. Similarly, critical raw materials and battery supply chains, heavily dependent on Chinese production and logistics, are targeted through shared stockpiling strategies and green mining initiatives, both of which reduce exposure to single-source dependencies.

At the same time, the EU-Japan framework complements broader EU strategies vis-à-vis China by embedding normative and rule-based elements. While EU-China relations are often transactional, punctuated by trade disputes, regulatory friction, and geopolitical tension, the EU-Japan alliance emphasizes transparent governance, sustainability, and shared industrial standards. By aligning regulatory approaches on AI governance, digital infrastructure, and clean technology, the alliance strengthens the EU's normative influence globally, providing a model for values-driven industrial engagement that China's state-led approach cannot easily replicate.

The alliance also operates in strategic and geoeconomic spaces where EU-China cooperation is limited or constrained. Joint initiatives in green hydrogen corridors, maritime security exercises, and space technology provide

both operational complementarity and a hedging function against potential disruptions from Chinese-dominated supply chains or regional assertiveness. In this sense, the EU–Japan partnership functions not only as a competitive foil but as a stabilizing lever, allowing the EU to pursue technological sovereignty and strategic autonomy while maintaining channels for pragmatic engagement with China where interests converge.

Finally, by combining industrial, technological, and regulatory alignment with Japan’s regional expertise and EU global reach, the alliance offers a template for diversified engagement: it simultaneously pressures China to adhere to rules-based trade and investment practices and strengthens EU capacity to act independently in critical sectors. In essence, the EU–Japan Competitiveness Alliance amplifies Europe’s strategic leverage, compelling China to reckon with a more resilient, normatively anchored, and technologically self-sufficient Europe, without foreclosing the possibility of cooperation where convergence of interest exists.

The EU–Japan Competitiveness Alliance, while symbolically robust, requires more concrete operationalization to realize its full potential. First, the alliance must transition from dialogue-heavy formats to action-oriented roadmaps. High-level exchanges and working groups should be complemented by structured, time-bound projects that target key sectors, including semiconductors, critical raw materials, clean hydrogen, battery technologies, digital infrastructure, and AI governance. For instance, a co-financed EU–Japan Semiconductor Resilience Task Force could coordinate investment, harmonize export controls, and foster joint research and development, transforming strategic intent into measurable outcomes.

Second, the partnership needs a joint R&D and innovation framework. Establishing a bilateral innovation fund under Horizon Europe and Japan’s Moonshot R&D program would allow co-application for funding, mutual recognition of intellectual property, and streamlined certification processes for technologies in critical sectors. This would accelerate the commercialization of innovations while deepening transregional integration in research ecosystems.

Third, enhancing supply chain resilience is essential. The creation of a joint EU–Japan Supply Chain Observatory could systematically map vulnerabilities, anticipate geopolitical and environmental risks, and coordinate contingency planning for critical technologies. This approach would reduce dependence on single-source suppliers and improve strategic autonomy, while allowing the EU and Japan to respond proactively to market shocks or geopolitical disruptions.

Fourth, fostering people-to-people exchanges and strategic talent pipelines would solidify long-term collaboration. Academic programs, industrial training initiatives, and innovation incubators can cultivate expertise aligned with both EU and Japanese industrial and regulatory frameworks, ensuring that human capital underpins technological and industrial cooperation.

Finally, embedding strategic foresight mechanisms into the alliance would ensure responsiveness to emerging global trends. An EU–Japan Policy and Innovation Lab could monitor developments in technology, sustainability, and geopolitics, providing actionable intelligence for coordinated investment, regulatory alignment, and industrial strategy. By operationalizing these measures, the EU–Japan Competitiveness Alliance can evolve from a primarily symbolic commitment into a dynamic, results-oriented engine for industrial competitiveness, technological sovereignty, and strategic resilience.

#### Areas Where the Alliance Can Serve as a Model for Other EU Strategic Partnerships:

Area	Application	Model for Partnerships With...
<b>Green &amp; Digital Twin Transition</b>	Joint development of standards, R&D in clean tech and AI governance	South Korea, Canada, India
<b>Resilient Supply Chains</b>	Bilateral observatories and strategic stockpiles	ASEAN, Australia, Latin America
<b>SME &amp; Cluster Cooperation</b>	Digital platforms for matchmaking and coinnovation	Africa, Western Balkans
<b>Values-Based Tech Standards</b>	Ethical AI, data sharing frameworks, digital identities	United States, Taiwan.

To transform the EU–Japan Competitiveness Alliance from a primarily diplomatic initiative into a robust strategic engine, the European Union should focus on translating shared values into tangible, high-impact outcomes, such as joint ventures and co-funded research and development programs. This requires building resilient and interconnected ecosystems across critical sectors, including advanced technologies, semiconductors,

renewable energy, and digital infrastructure, ensuring both partners can withstand geopolitical shocks and global market volatility. Beyond sectoral resilience, the alliance should serve as a model for the creation of rule-based, value-driven industrial partnerships, demonstrating how normative alignment and economic cooperation can reinforce global governance standards while fostering innovation, competitiveness, and strategic autonomy. By operationalizing these principles, the EU-Japan Competitiveness Alliance can evolve into a cornerstone of a broader, transregional framework that advances sustainable growth, technological sovereignty, and collective security.

### **The EU-Japan security and defence partnership**

The EU's Strategic Defence and Security Policy is designed to safeguard the Union's sovereignty, values, and global interests while enhancing stability in the international system. At its core, the SDP aims to integrate civilian and military tools to address complex, transnational security challenges, from hybrid threats and cyberattacks to regional conflicts and crises that affect EU stability and interests. Its rationale rests on three interlinked objectives: first, ensuring collective security through operational readiness, crisis management, and civil-military coordination; second, projecting normative influence, enabling the EU to promote rules-based order, human rights, and multilateralism; and third, fostering strategic autonomy by reducing dependency on external powers for security, defence, and technological capabilities. The policy thus seeks to reconcile the EU's global ambitions with its internal diversity, balancing the interests of member states while maintaining cohesion in external action.

### **How the EU-Japan Partnership Stands Out**

The EU-Japan partnership illustrates the SDP's objectives in practice, but it also stands out in several distinctive ways. Unlike other partnerships that may be predominantly transactional or regional, the EU-Japan relationship combines normative alignment with operational collaboration, linking shared values—such as democracy, rule of law, and respect for multilateral norms—to tangible security outcomes. The partnership addresses both traditional and emerging threats, from maritime security in the Indo-Pacific to cyber resilience, dual-use technologies, and space security, reflecting the SDP's emphasis on integrated, forward-looking security. Moreover, the EU-Japan alliance leverages complementary capabilities: the EU contributes regulatory expertise, crisis management experience, and a transregional strategic perspective, while Japan offers operational capacity, technological sophistication, and deep regional knowledge. Finally, the partnership serves as a template for EU strategic engagement beyond NATO, demonstrating how long-term alignment,

institutionalised dialogue, and co-investment in critical capabilities can operationalise value-driven foreign policy, creating a model for other partnerships in Asia and globally.

Can the EU truly assert its presence in the Indo-Pacific if it merely whispers while others roar? The EU-Japan security and defence partnership, though mature in intent, often feels like a ship with sails too small for the stormy seas of global geopolitics. Are we to settle for minor gestures when the tides of Chinese assertiveness, North Korean provocations, and maritime instability demand coordinated, decisive action? Strategic convergence is not merely desirable—it is indispensable, an absolute necessity if the EU hopes to be anything more than a polite observer in the corridors of power.

Yet alignment alone is not enough. Should institutional dialogues be tokenistic nods, or must they become the beating heart of a robust EU-Japan Security Council, throbbing with purpose and policy? Even the most ambitious working groups risk being paper tigers, producing reports that flutter but never bite, if operational coherence is not forged through joint exercises, embedded liaison officers, and real deployments in peacekeeping or humanitarian missions. Technology and cyber defense, though often treated as minor appendages, are the backbone, the sinews, and the lifeblood of credible deterrence; to ignore them would be a folly bordering on negligence.

And what of culture, of people, of the slow weaving of understanding through exchanges and dialogue? Can strategic partnerships survive on principles alone without the human glue that binds nations, academies, and think tanks in a shared vision? Lessons for other partnerships scream at us: tailor strategies to local realities, operationalise values beyond mere declarations, cultivate patience, and leverage niche capabilities. Would the EU achieve global influence by mere imitation, or only by daring to be distinct, deliberate, and doggedly determined?

In the end, the EU-Japan alliance must become more than an agreement on paper, more than a polite handshake; it must be a living, breathing engine of power, perception, and principle—a colossal mechanism of influence, whose every cog, every wheel, every spark drives Europe toward a security role commensurate with its ambition, its values, and its very identity.

### **ACTION PLAN EUDELJAP**

A Strategy is an overarching plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall objective. It implies a structured orientation: what to do, how to and why to reach a goal. A politician strategy may be to appear inclusive and cooperative by consistently emphasizing shared values. An agenda is more specific and operational. An action plan mentioned in the Treaties is the concrete set of tasks, timelines and resources, and responsibilities for implementing the agenda. It is operational, detailed and time-bound. It is a prioritized set of issues, actions or talking points that are to be advanced in line with the strategy. Strategy is the long-term vision; the big picture and the agenda is the roadmap of priorities and discourse actions. Action plan outline who will do what, when and with the resources to advance the agenda.

At its most simple, the ten EU Delegations in the EU's Strategic Partnership countries are to elaborate action plans dovetailing with the respective country strategies. The EU-Japan Strategy is a comprehensive partnership on shared values like democracy, human rights, and multilateralism, aiming to strengthen peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region and address global challenges. Key pillars of the strategy encompass economic cooperation, particularly in areas like critical minerals and digital technologies, to enhance resilience and competitiveness. It also focuses on global challenges such as climate change, economic security, pandemic preparedness and fostering people-to-people exchanges. The foundation, off course, is the EU-JAPAN SPA, ratified in 2024.<sup>2</sup>

The EU-India SP Strategy emphasises prosperity, sustainability, technology and innovation, security and defense, connectivity on global issues in a multi-level and cross-pillar governance structure.<sup>3</sup>

The action plan for the strategic partnership by the EU Delegation to Japan (EUDelJP) centers on deepening cooperation across critical sectors by combining economic, security, scientific, and values-driven goals between the European Union and Japan. This plan reflects recent summit agreements and evolving geopolitical priorities for 2025 and beyond.

#### **The EU-Japan Strategy outlines several areas of priority:**

- Security and Defence Cooperation: Strengthen joint responses to cybersecurity threats, hybrid risks like disinformation, and maritime security, including formal negotiations for secure information sharing and future defense industry projects.

- Economic Security and Competitiveness: Launch the EU-Japan Competitiveness Alliance focusing on critical minerals, semiconductors, battery supply chains, and reducing strategic dependencies. Enhance collaboration to counter economic coercion and unfair trade practices, while supporting WTO reform.
- Digital and Green Transitions: Expand partnerships on artificial intelligence, digital governance, circular economy, and decarbonisation. Intensify joint climate action and environmental commitments, including support for COP30 and tackling biodiversity loss and pollution.
- Multilateral Diplomacy and Scientific Cooperation: Accelerate Japan's association with the EU's Horizon Europe research programme and strengthen shared international engagement in human rights, peacebuilding, education, and culture.
- Regional and Global Stability: Uphold unified positions on geopolitical crises (Ukraine, Taiwan, Gaza, North Korea, Iran), and emphasize the importance of the rules-based order and mutual support in Indo-Pacific regional stability.
- Public Diplomacy and People-to-People Exchanges: Conduct joint public outreach, academic exchange, and policy seminars to build understanding and promote the partnership across civil society and economic actors.

#### **Implementation Mechanisms**

- High-Level Economic Dialogue: Regular meetings to advance priorities with strong private sector involvement and monitoring of trade and investment opportunities.
- Joint Policy Mapping and Technical Seminars: Identification of best practices through comparative mapping of public policies in connectivity, climate change, development cooperation, and digital sectors.
- Committee Coordination: Ongoing sessions of the Joint Committee established under the Strategic Partnership Agreement ensure continuous strategic direction and oversight for all partnership initiatives.

#### **Guiding Principles**

- Openness, transparency, inclusiveness, and a level playing field
- Commitment to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law
- Compliance with international standards, G20 infrastructure investment guidelines, and the Paris

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.eujapanspa.jp>

<sup>3</sup>

[https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2025/documents/Join\\_2025\\_50\\_1\\_EN\\_ACT\\_part1\\_9.pdf](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2025/documents/Join_2025_50_1_EN_ACT_part1_9.pdf)

Agreement commitments.

An action plan positions the EU-Japan partnership as a foundational pillar for Europe's Indo-Pacific strategy and a leading example of global cooperation based on shared values, innovation, and mutual security. The Action Plan operationalizes the SPA Strategy by outlining specific objectives and initiatives.

### **Political and Security Cooperation**

The objective is to enhance bilateral political dialogue and security collaboration. High-level contacts will be maintained through regular exchanges between EU and Japanese leaders. Political consultations will be held at the deputy foreign minister level on a biennial basis and at the senior officials' level annually, covering Europe, Asia, security policy, and foreign policy planning. Security dialogue will be strengthened through regular meetings of relevant high-level officials responsible for national security and defense cooperation. The timeline for these measures runs throughout 2025-2029. The responsible parties are the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), and national defense agencies. The resources include allocated budgets for diplomatic missions, staffing for bilateral meetings, and logistics support.

### **Economic and Trade Cooperation**

The objective is to promote sustainable economic growth and trade liberalization. Trade facilitation will be pursued by reducing barriers and enhancing market access for businesses. Investment promotion will be advanced by encouraging mutual investments through joint initiatives and information sharing. Regulatory cooperation will be undertaken to align standards and regulations and thereby facilitate smoother trade flows. The timeline is continuous, with annual reviews. The responsible parties are the European Commission (DG Trade), the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), and the EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation. The resources include funding for trade missions, research on regulatory alignment, and support for business networking events.

### **Climate Action and Environmental Cooperation**

The objective is to collaborate on combating climate change and promoting environmental sustainability. The Green Alliance will be implemented through initiatives focusing on renewable energy, carbon neutrality, and sustainable development. Research and innovation will be supported by jointly funding projects on clean technologies and environmental conservation. Policy coordination will take place through alignment of national policies with international climate agreements and the exchange of best practices. The timeline foresees initiatives commencing in early 2025, with ongoing evaluations. The responsible parties are the European Commission (DG Climate Action), the Japanese Ministry of the Environment, and research institutions. The resources come from the EU's Horizon Europe program, Japanese government funding, and private sector investments.

### **People-to-People Exchanges**

The objective is to strengthen cultural ties and mutual understanding between EU and Japan citizens. Educational programs will be expanded through student exchanges and academic collaborations. Cultural events will be organized in the form of festivals, exhibitions, and performances showcasing each other's cultures. Tourism promotion will be carried out through campaigns to encourage travel between the regions. The timeline sets programs to be launched in 2025, with annual events thereafter. The responsible parties are EU Member States' cultural ministries, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), and local governments. The resources include budgets for cultural exchanges, promotional materials, and event organization.

### **Table Model SP Action Plan**

### **Alignment with Strategy**

The Action Plan is a direct extension of the SPA's strategic objectives. While the SPA outlines the broad vision and shared values, the Action Plan specifies the concrete steps, timelines, and responsibilities to achieve these goals. This structured approach ensures that both parties are aligned in their efforts and can effectively monitor progress.

Area	Objective	Actions	Timeline	Responsible Parties	Resources
Political and Security Cooperation	Enhance bilateral political dialogue and security collaboration	Maintain regular high-level exchanges between EU and Japanese leaders. Hold biennial deputy foreign minister-level consultations and annual meetings of senior officials for Europe, Asia, security policy, and foreign policy planning. Strengthen discussions on national security and defense cooperation through regular meetings of high-level officials.	2025-2029 (ongoing)	EEAS, Japanese MOFA, national defense agencies	Allocated budgets for diplomatic missions, staffing for meetings, logistics support
Economic and Trade Cooperation	Promote sustainable economic growth and trade liberalization	Reduce trade barriers and enhance market access. Encourage mutual investments through joint initiatives and information sharing. Align standards and regulations to facilitate smoother trade flows.	Continuous with annual reviews	European Commission (DG Trade), Japanese METI, EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation	Funding for trade missions, research on regulatory alignment, support for business networking
Climate Action and Environmental Cooperation	Collaborate on combating climate change and promoting environmental sustainability	Implement the EU-Japan Green Alliance with focus on renewable energy, carbon neutrality, and sustainable development. Jointly fund projects on clean technologies and environmental conservation. Align national policies with international climate agreements and share best practices.	From early 2025, ongoing evaluations	European Commission (DG Climate Action), Japanese Ministry of the Environment, research institutions	Horizon Europe funding, Japanese government funding, private sector investments
People-to-People Exchanges	Strengthen cultural ties and mutual understanding between EU and Japan citizens	Expand student exchange programs and academic collaborations. Organize cultural festivals, exhibitions, and performances. Launch campaigns to promote travel and tourism.	Programs launched in 2025, annual events thereafter	EU Member States' cultural ministries, Japanese MEXT, local governments	Budgets for cultural exchanges, promotional materials, event organization

## Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation will rely on regular reporting and joint reviews by both sides. Political and security cooperation

will be assessed through the frequency and outcomes of high-level meetings. Economic and trade progress will be measured by changes in trade flows, investment levels, and regulatory alignment achieved. Climate and

environmental cooperation will be monitored through joint project results, renewable energy adoption, and alignment with global climate targets. People-to-people exchanges will be evaluated by the number of participants in student programs, cultural events, and tourism flows. Annual joint reports will summarize achievements and challenges,

providing transparency and accountability. Mid-term reviews in 2027 will adjust timelines and resources as needed. Final evaluation in 2029 will measure the overall contribution of the Action Plan to the SPA objectives.

#### Table EU-JAPAN ACTION PLAN

##### Monitoring and Evaluation Criteria for EU-Japan Action Plan

<b>Political &amp; Security</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Frequency of high-level meetings</li> <li>- Quality of security consultations</li> <li>- Joint policy coordination outcomes</li> </ul>
<b>Economic &amp; Trade</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Trade flow increases</li> <li>- Mutual investment growth</li> <li>- Regulatory alignment progress</li> </ul>
<b>Climate &amp; Environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Joint project outcomes</li> <li>- Renewable energy adoption</li> <li>- Policy alignment with climate targets</li> </ul>
<b>People-to-People</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Student exchange participation</li> <li>- Cultural event attendance</li> <li>- Tourism flow increase</li> </ul>

First, monitoring is embedded in the political reporting function of the Delegation. Officers in political, trade, climate, and cultural sections draft regular reports on the implementation of Action Plan activities, drawing on inputs from EU institutions, Member State embassies, Japanese ministries, and local stakeholders. These reports are then transmitted to the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Commission services in Brussels, ensuring a continuous flow of information.

Finally, the Delegation integrates evaluation findings back into strategy. Lessons learned from project performance, participation levels, or diplomatic traction are used to adjust programming, reallocate resources, or refine timelines. This adaptive feedback loop makes M&E not just a compliance exercise, but a practical instrument of diplomacy, ensuring that the Action Plan contributes effectively to the SPA's long-term goals.

Second, evaluation is handled through structured reviews and performance indicators. For example, in political and security cooperation, EUDEL Tokyo tracks the number and substance of high-level dialogues held each year. In economic cooperation, metrics such as trade growth or regulatory convergence are monitored, often in coordination with the EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation. Climate initiatives are evaluated through project outcomes under Horizon Europe and Green Alliance frameworks, while people-to-people exchanges are assessed using participation and cultural impact indicators.

#### Status and Outlook on Actual and Existing Metrics and Data

Third, EUDEL Tokyo plays a convening role: it organizes mid-term stocktaking exercises with Japanese counterparts and Member States' embassies, where progress and bottlenecks are jointly assessed. It also coordinates inputs for annual implementation reports to Brussels, which are then used in decision-making at the EU-Japan Joint Committee.

In the area of trade growth and trade volume, total trade in goods and services between the EU and Japan in 2024 exceeded one hundred ninety billion euro, with goods trade alone above one hundred thirty billion. EU exports to Japan were slightly higher than imports, showing balanced flows. Since the entry into force of the Economic Partnership Agreement, trade has expanded strongly, with double-digit growth in both goods and services. Even in 2022, bilateral trade flows showed a sharp increase compared to the year before, confirming steady expansion under the EPA framework.

On regulatory and trade liberalization, the EU-Japan EPA foresees near-complete tariff liberalisation, covering virtually all tariff lines on both sides. At the same time, landmark arrangements on digital trade and cross-border data flows have been concluded, signaling a gradual

convergence of standards in sensitive areas such as data protection, even if some provisions still await full implementation and monitoring.

In climate action, research, and innovation, cooperation has been extensive. More than two hundred projects have linked European and Japanese institutions under Horizon 2020 and its predecessor programs. A recent example is a cluster of joint projects on advanced biofuels and renewable alternatives, with combined funding exceeding ten million euro from both the EU and Japan. These projects serve as tangible indicators of joint investment in clean technologies and sustainable energy solutions.

People-to-people and cultural exchanges provide another important metric. During the EU-Japan Year of People-to-People Exchanges, close to two thousand events were held across both regions, offering a benchmark for measuring cultural impact. That same year, structured programs for youth mobility set ambitious participation goals, including thousands of student placements and a steady stream of high school participants, creating a measurable standard for educational exchange.

### Potential and Additional Metrics for Stronger Monitoring and Evaluation

Future monitoring could usefully include indicators of regulatory convergence, such as the number of mutual recognition agreements signed, the time taken to adopt shared standards, and the breadth of sectors with aligned technical regulations. Implementation and compliance can be tracked by recording trade barriers raised and resolved under the EPA, as well as reductions in tariffs and non-tariff obstacles. Climate cooperation can be evaluated by measuring reductions in emissions, renewable energy capacity installed, and the level of private investment mobilized. Research impact could be assessed through the number of patents, publications, and collaborative outputs, alongside the proportion of project budgets disbursed. For people-to-people exchanges, participation rates in student mobility, attendance at cultural events, media reach, and feedback surveys would provide a clearer picture of outcomes. Tourism flows, revenues, and connectivity through flights and routes also offer useful metrics for assessing broader societal impact.

### Key Takeaways

The Action Plan establishes a concrete roadmap that translates the SPA's broad strategic vision into tangible, measurable initiatives. Its effectiveness hinges on sustained political commitment, a well-defined allocation of responsibilities across institutions, and the provision of

adequate financial and human resources. By embedding systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, the Plan ensures both flexibility and accountability, allowing for timely adjustments in response to evolving political, economic, or environmental conditions. Furthermore, the Plan emphasizes the interdependence of multiple policy areas, highlighting how progress in trade, climate, and education can reinforce each other to create a cumulative impact on regional integration and cooperation.

### Actionable Insights

- **Prioritize early wins:** Focus initial efforts on high-impact areas such as trade facilitation and climate cooperation. Achieving visible results early builds credibility and political momentum for longer-term initiatives.
- **Maintain consistent political engagement:** Regular consultations and coordination at the highest political level are critical, even during crises, to safeguard continuity and maintain stakeholder trust.
- **Invest in people-to-people exchanges:** Expanding funding and opportunities for student, academic, and professional exchanges strengthens mutual understanding and builds the social foundation for long-term cooperation.
- **Leverage mid-term reviews strategically:** Use structured mid-term assessments to identify successes, gaps, and underperforming areas, and reallocate resources to initiatives demonstrating the highest promise or urgent need.
- **Enhance cross-sectoral integration:** Encourage collaboration between trade, environmental, and educational programs to maximize synergies and create mutually reinforcing outcomes.
- **Strengthen accountability frameworks:** Introduce clear metrics and reporting standards to track progress, facilitate transparent evaluation, and ensure timely corrective action.

### Summary

In essence, the Action Plan transforms strategic vision into an actionable roadmap. By combining early achievements, sustained political commitment, robust monitoring, and targeted investment in human capital, it creates a dynamic framework capable of adapting to changing circumstances while steadily advancing the SPA's overarching goals.

### The case for standardization

Applying Japan's SPA and EPA models to other Strategic

Partners of the EU, except for China and Russia, could benefit both parties. These agreements could foster closer political ties between the EU and its strategic partners and promote economic growth through increased trade. The deals could also help promote shared democratic values and principles while ensuring closer cooperation on bilateral, regional, and multilateral issues. However, it is essential to note that each strategic partner must consider unique circumstances when negotiating such agreements. Therefore, it is necessary to approach each negotiation with an open mind while also being mindful of each partner's needs ( Brauer & Takiguhi, 2020).

Standardization in contractual terms ensures that both parties are on the same page when implementing these agreements. This would reduce confusion and misunderstandings while ensuring both parties are held accountable for their commitments under these agreements. Standardization would also help to ensure that these agreements are implemented consistently across all strategic partners in the EU, except for China and Russia. From an administrative perspective, standardization helps streamline the implementation process by ensuring that all strategic partners follow the same rules. This would help reduce administrative costs while ensuring that these agreements are promptly implemented. From a legal point of view, standardization would help ensure that these agreements are legally binding and enforceable. This would help protect both parties' interests while ensuring that the SPA EPA is implemented by international law. In short, The EU has a wave of catches. The mission brief is to shape and mold the global system in Europe's image and create a wave structure that would peacefully and spontaneously facilitate and underpin the transition from nonpolarity to multipolarity.

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peacefully and spontaneously facilitate and underpin the transition from nonpolarity to multipolarity.

If the EU adopts a strategy appropriate to its Strategic Partnerships, then the push-ups undertaken on the standardization of contractual arrangements would not only counteract an inappropriate inertial bureaucratic logic but also pave the way for a nodal point inside the EEAS's structure from which the European Foreign Service could draw organizational advantage in terms of an EU-SP10 Unit to align diplomatic requirements with a political purpose. In addition, the management of the EU as an integrated geoeconomic actor would also need to be backed up and coordinated by an organizational reality at the supranational level for the EU to become a more compelling and influential actor. Consider a pol-eco SP10-unit. Most DG INTPA can be merged into the EEAS structure if a DG defense is created. The European Union has to do so to become a more influential actor in the struggle for world products and as part of a deliberate strategy to better manage conflict and cooperation in the global economy from within the EU-SP10. By doing so, the EEAS is entitled to think it will finally have found a formula for integrating strategy, structure, and processes with policy coordination, projects, and performance criteria as it sets about managing the EU's Strategic Partnerships. European identity is for winners, and consistency is for losers. As an EU-led international society is gradually phased in and biannual summits are transformed into an EU-led global community, this unit could be redesigned to provide direction to policy

## Summary

To advance the EU-Japan defence partnership under the SP10 Policy framework, Brussels and Tokyo must—if they are to move beyond the comfortable hum of dialogue—transition from talk-heavy engagement to structured, operational cooperation that responds not only to immediate regional crises but also to the broader, unpredictable tides of global security imperatives. Is it enough, one might ask, to align in principle yet drift apart in practice? The challenge is to move beyond symbolic gestures and ceremonial nods, and instead to embrace joint strategic planning, capability development, and coordinated action across maritime security, cyber defence, and emerging technologies—where the future is made and remade faster than any policy document can track.

For the European Union, this partnership offers more than bilateral value—it is a lens, a prism, through which the Union can recalibrate its entire strategic posture. Here lies the paradox: to wield normative influence, the EU must not

only advocate, but act; to project stability, it must be agile; to protect values, it must embrace capability, and not simply declare them. Lessons from EU-Japan cooperation are stark and instructive: tailor defence initiatives to the contours of specific geopolitical terrains, preserve flexibility in execution when circumstances shift without warning, and place technology-centric collaboration at the very heart of modern security architecture. These lessons resonate beyond a single partnership, echoing in the corridors of EU engagement across the Indo-Pacific, and with democratic middle powers, where strategic convergence is forged not merely by shared interests, but by shared vulnerabilities, shared values, and shared stakes in resilient supply chains, digital infrastructure, and the quiet engines of global connectivity.

By embedding these principles into its strategic partnerships, the EU can inch closer to a defence identity that is at once assertive and adaptive, one that fuses normative power with operational credibility, one that speaks not only in declarations but in deeds, in deployments, in coordinated responses, in exercises, and in innovation. The maturation of EU foreign policy thus becomes evident: diplomacy is no longer a series of eloquent speeches, no longer a cadence of lofty statements; it is the tangible, the measurable, the actionable, it is the movement of ships across contested waters, the securing of networks against unseen adversaries, and the shaping of alliances that endure, evolve, and persist. And if the EU can do this here, then why not elsewhere? If it can turn principle into praxis with Japan, why not with the partners whose landscapes are as diverse, as fraught, and as promising?

## VII. FACTORS MITIGATING PROGRESS

By executing this action plan effectively, the EEAS can overcome the inhibiting factors and enhance its governance capabilities in managing the EU's Strategic Partnerships, ultimately leading to strengthened EU global influence and cooperation.

Examining the factors that inhibit the European External Action Service (EEAS) from effectively strengthening the governance of the EU's Strategic Partnerships requires a nuanced consideration of both internal institutional dynamics and external geopolitical pressures. One of the primary obstacles is the fragmentation of Member State interests. Divergent national priorities and competing foreign policy agendas often impede the formation of coherent strategic objectives, leaving the Union vulnerable to disjointed action and inconsistent messaging. Closely linked is a lack of institutional cohesion: the EEAS frequently operates in silos, with insufficient coordination between its own departments and other EU institutions, including the European Commission and the European Parliament. Integration with national

foreign ministries is also uneven, limiting the EU's capacity to present a unified front in strategic partnerships.

Resource constraints further exacerbate these challenges. Insufficient funding undermines the implementation of initiatives and governance frameworks, while shortages of trained personnel restrict the EEAS's ability to exercise effective leadership and oversight. Bureaucratic challenges compound the problem, as complex decision-making processes and rigid institutional structures slow responses and reduce flexibility, leaving the EU ill-equipped to adapt to rapidly shifting global circumstances. External geopolitical pressures—ranging from the rise of other global powers to ongoing regional conflicts—add additional layers of complexity, diverting attention and resources away from partnership governance. These obstacles are reinforced by a lack of clear strategic vision. Ambiguity in objectives and insufficient stakeholder engagement hinder cohesion and reduce ownership of governance initiatives. Moreover, the absence of robust metrics for success, including clear Key Performance Indicators and systematic evaluation protocols, makes it difficult to monitor progress and identify opportunities for improvement. Institutional inertia and skepticism toward reform further inhibit innovation, slowing the adoption of new governance models and processes.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive, multi-layered strategy. Fragmentation of Member State interests can be mitigated through regular consultations and the development of joint action plans that align individual national priorities with overarching EU objectives. Institutional cohesion may be enhanced by creating cross-functional teams and inter-agency workshops to promote collaboration across the EEAS, the European Commission, and other relevant bodies. Resource allocation should focus on securing dedicated funding and investing in human capital through recruitment and targeted training programs that build expertise in negotiation, strategic governance, and diplomatic engagement. Bureaucratic inefficiencies can be addressed by establishing rapid response units to facilitate swift decision-making and by reviewing and simplifying procedural frameworks to increase flexibility. External geopolitical pressures should be managed through continuous strategic assessments, including SWOT analyses, and by strengthening diplomatic outreach to key global partners. Clarifying the EEAS's strategic vision entails defining explicit objectives and engaging member states, civil society, and other stakeholders to ensure broad-based buy-in. To improve accountability, comprehensive KPIs and regular evaluation protocols must be instituted, providing data-driven feedback for

continuous refinement of governance processes. Finally, fostering adaptability and change requires cultivating an organizational culture that values innovation, piloting new initiatives, and embedding mechanisms for iterative learning.

The implementation of these reforms should follow a phased timeline. In the short term, spanning the first six months, the focus should be on initiating consultations, defining strategic objectives, and securing necessary funding. The medium term, extending from six to eighteen months, should prioritize the establishment of inter-agency workshops, streamlining of bureaucratic processes, and development of measurable performance indicators. Over the long term, from eighteen to thirty-six months, the EEAS should systematically evaluate the impact of these changes, adjust strategies accordingly, and embed a culture of innovation to ensure that governance of Strategic Partnerships remains agile, coherent, and capable of advancing the EU's broader foreign policy objectives.

To remedy the EEAS's fragmented might, **streamline, synchronize, and soar, letting silos shrink and shadows shorten. Stake, staff, and strategy** must meld, weaving wills into a single **woven will. Funds flow, foresight fuels**, framing flexible frameworks for foresight and action. Dialogue **dances, deliberation deepens**, drawing distant partners into a **dense, decisive domain**. Metrics **measure, mend, and mold**, making motion meaningful in the maze of governance.

## VIII. ORGANISATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

An organization fundamentally revolves around the **division of labor**, the **coordination of efforts**, and the **regulation of information flow**. Division of labor enables specialization, allowing individuals or units to focus on specific tasks to enhance efficiency and expertise. The interaction and integration of these specialized efforts ensure that the organization functions as a coherent whole, aligning diverse activities toward common goals. Meanwhile, clearly defined rules and systems governing the flow of information are critical for maintaining transparency, enabling decision-making, and ensuring that all parts of the organization remain informed and responsive.

To support our argument for a strengthening the governance of the EU's strategic partnerships, here's a cross-tabulated structure that outlines:

- **A proposed unit** for strategies, themes, and tools.
- **Core functions** within EU Delegations and the EU10 Summits.
- **Role distribution** compared with EEAS desks by region (Asia, Americas, Russia, Africa).

**Table -Proposed Governance Structure: Strategic Partnership Governance Unit (SPGU)**

Function	SPGU	Country Desks (EEAS)	Regional Desks (EEAS)
<b>Strategy Formulation</b>	Develop cross-regional partnership strategies (10-year cycles, 3-year operational updates)	Tailored bilateral strategic roadmaps	Thematic and regional strategic frameworks
<b>Thematic Integration</b>	Coordinate strategic themes (e.g. Green Deal, Digital, Migration, Resilience, Security)	Feed national inputs and constraints	Align thematic goals with regional coherence
<b>Tool Development</b>	Create instruments: dashboards, performance metrics, scenario planning, strategic foresight	Deploy and evaluate instruments bilaterally	Promote region-wide coherence and benchmarking
<b>Delegation Planning Oversight</b>	Coordinate annual and 3-year programming with EU delegations	Consult on national execution	Ensure regional synergy and coherence with EU external objectives
<b>Summit Preparation (EU10)</b>	Curate strategic agenda for EU10 summit format	Provide state-specific position input	Help align regional blocks' voice with global EU strategic posture
<b>Scenario Analysis</b>	Run foresight labs on global power shifts, disruptions, tech, and energy	Validate from national perspective	Grounded analysis of regional vulnerabilities and openings
<b>Monitoring &amp; Evaluation</b>	Set KPIs, review impact of strategic partnerships	Report on bilateral indicators	Benchmark regional progress against EU thematic goals

In support of dialogue facilitation, the role of the EU then involves driving cross-regional coordination by engaging strategically with EU partners to identify shared interests and promote collaborative initiatives. It also requires tracking and leveraging synergies across regions to ensure coherence with EU foreign policy goals. Maintaining and deepening bilateral diplomatic relations is essential, fostering mutual

understanding and responsiveness to evolving priorities. Additionally, the role facilitates regional dialogues and supports discreet backchannel consultations to navigate sensitive discussions, build consensus, and de-escalate tensions where formal diplomatic avenues may be constrained.

**Table-Application in Delegation and Summit Planning**

Unit	EU Delegations Role	EU10 Summit Contribution
<b>SPGU</b>	Coordinates programming based on global trends and EU thematic priorities	Frames summit-level discussion topics, prepares synthesis memos
<b>Country Desks (EEAS)</b>	Serve as focal points for Member State interests and diplomatic coherence	Provide national-specific analyses and inputs
<b>Regional Desks (EEAS)</b>	Ensure that regional frameworks (e.g. Africa-EU, Asia Connectivity) stay aligned with EU goals	Harmonize positions across blocs for global advocacy

Next, we need to clarify region-by-region and tie in to the vested institutional interests: policy jig-saw the desks to mitigate the negative effects of

**Table-Clarification by Region**

Region	Country Desk Role	Regional Desk Role	SPGU Role
<b>Asia</b>	Track bilateral partnerships (e.g. with India, Japan, ASEAN states)	Align subregions (Central Asia, Indo-Pacific) under regional logic	Integrate digital, maritime, security strategies across Indo-Pacific + EU
<b>Americas</b>	Maintain bilateral ties (e.g. Brazil, USA, Canada, Mexico)	Monitor Latin American integration, US-EU ties	Identify levers for green, digital, resilience strategies across Atlantic axis
<b>Russia</b>	Navigate high-sensitivity bilateral track (e.g. sanctions, outreach)	Track neighborhood dynamics incl. Caucasus	Provide strategic scenarios and risk-based toolsets for evolving engagement
<b>Africa</b>	Facilitate bilateral ties (e.g. Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa)	Link AU-EU frameworks with subregional dynamics	Design impact evaluation and partnerships in climate, mobility, digital

The Strategic Partnerships and Global Unit emerges as the EU's central hearth, where the scattered sparks of diplomacy, development, and security converge into a single flame of strategic purpose. Anchored within the European External Action Service and reporting to the Vice President/High Representative, the SPGU transforms the often-tangled vines of bureaucracy into a garden of actionable influence, pruning redundancies while nurturing cross-cutting collaboration. Its meetings, co-chaired with thematic directorates such as climate, digital, and environmental affairs, resemble a symphony of desks, each note contributing to a harmonized policy score, while the annual Strategic Partnership Governance Scorecard casts the kaleidoscope of progress into visible, tangible form. External voices, from think tanks to regional blocs like the African Union and ASEAN, are invited

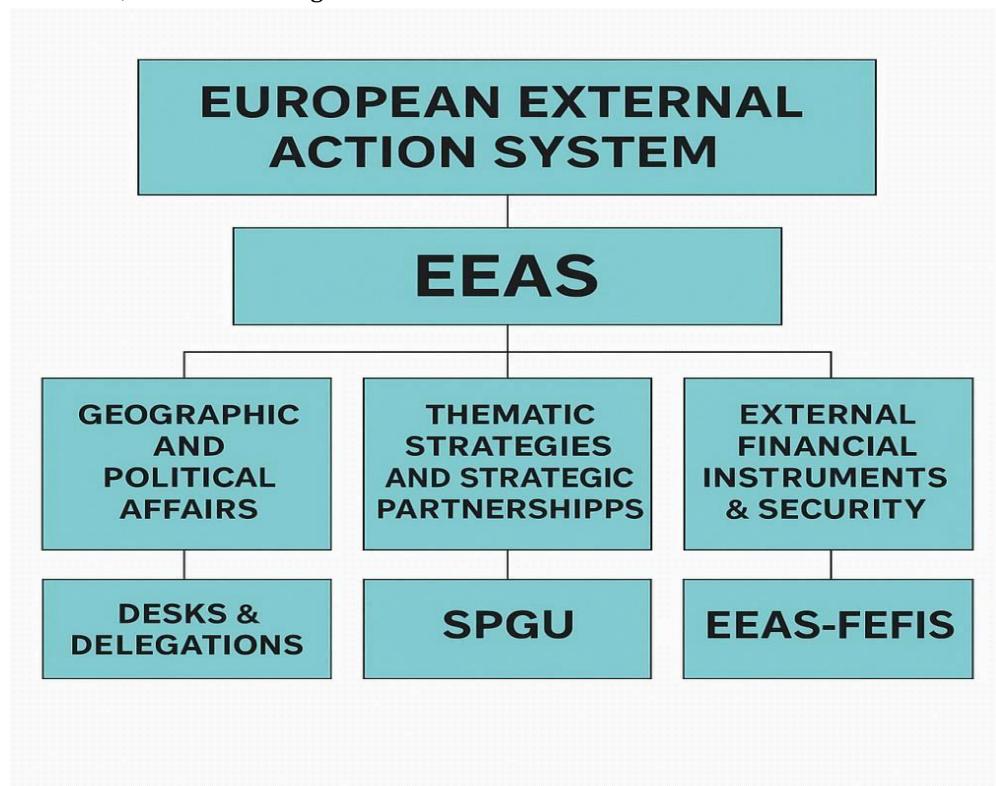
as navigators in the labyrinth, guiding the bureaucratic ship through complex corridors of regulation and protocol.

The reimagined EEAS is itself an allegorical forest, in which DG INTPA has become the EEAS Development and Partnerships Service, a tree whose roots entwine aid, investment, and normative outreach, while DG FPI and the former ESDP service merge into EEAS Foreign, External, and Financial Instruments Service, a bough bearing the

fruits of financial and security tools. Across this forest, three pillars rise like temples of governance: Geographic and Political Affairs, whose desks and delegations map the contours of global presence; Thematic Strategies and Strategic Partnerships, where the SPGU serves as the altar

of convergence; and External Financial Instruments and Security, through which resources and authority flow like rivers sustaining the entire ecosystem. In this allegorical landscape, bureaucracies cease to be inert mazes and instead become living instruments, conduits through which the EU

channels its norms, influence, and leadership, transforming scattered administrative machinery into the engine of international society.



#### Updated Delegation Planning Framework (Post-Merger)

Function	New Responsible Actor	Role of SPGU (Strategic Partnership Governance Unit)
Strategy Programming (MIP)	EEAS-DPS + Geographical Directorates	Ensure long-cycle alignment with thematic and strategic foresight priorities
Annual Action Plans (AAPs)	Delegations + EEAS-DPS + EEAS-FEFIS	Ensure harmonized tools across regions, inject crosstematic synergies
Scenario Foresight	EEAS Strategic Unit + SPGU	Design future pathways into delegation planning
Security/Resilience Tracks	EEAS-FEFIS	Ensure integration of defence, crisis response, and CSDP into partnerships
Human Rights & Values	EEAS-DPS + Thematic Unit on Democracy & Rule of Law	Frame global dialogues and value-based metrics into Delegation action plans
Budget & Instruments	EEAS-FEFIS (formerly FPI)	Implement flexible funding tools with SPGU alignment checks

### How This Enhances Strategic Governance

Delegation-Level Action	Pre-Merger Structure	Post-Merger with SPGU and Unified EEAS
Multi-Annual Planning (MIPs)	INTPA + EEAS	EEAS-DPS (ex-INTPA) with strategic toolkits from SPGU
Crisis Programming (e.g., Ukraine)	EEAS + FPI	EEAS-FEFIS handles instruments, SPGU ensures long-term strategic linkages
Green Deal Externalisation	DG CLIMA + INTPA + Delegations	EEAS-DPS integrates directly, SPGU ensures coherence across continents
Delegation Foresight Input	Sparse, often ad hoc	SPGU delivers structured trend and scenario planning input
Thematic Flagship (e.g. Global Gateway)	Commission-led with EEAS role	SPGU and EEAS-DPS manage planning, FEFIS enables rapid deployment

### Revised Role of Regional and Country Desks within Integrated EEAS

Desk Type	New Role Description
Country Desks	Primary point for bilateral context, report into both Geographic DG and Strategic Unit
Regional Desks	Ensure that horizontal themes are integrated into region-wide programming
SPGU	Supports both with toolkits, foresight, scenario prep, and tracking cross-regional coherence

**Sample Policy Implication:** Africa Delegation Planning 2026

An organization fundamentally revolves around the division of labor, the coordination of efforts, and the regulation of information flow. Division of labor enables specialization, allowing individuals or units to concentrate on distinct functions, thereby enhancing efficiency and operational depth. These specialized efforts must then be effectively integrated to ensure alignment with overarching strategic objectives. Within the EU's external action framework, this coordination is exemplified by the Security and Policy Guidance Unit (SPGU), which plays a central role in integrating efforts across

the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Foreign Policy Instruments Service (FEFIS), and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) Mission Leads. The SPGU ensures that strategic guidance, operational planning, and field-level implementation are synchronized. This integration is further supported by structured rules and mechanisms governing the flow of information, which are essential for informed decision-making, situational awareness, and adaptive responses across all levels of the EU's external action apparatus.

Planning Item	Actor	SPGU Integration
MIP: Africa-EU Green Deal	EEAS-DPS + African regional desks	SPGU aligns with Latin America and Indo-Pacific frameworks
AAP: Sahel Stabilisation	EEAS-FEFIS + Delegations in Mali/Burkina	SPGU stress-tests against regional security foresight outputs
Human Rights Programming	Delegation + EEAS-DPS + Thematic Desk	SPGU ensures KPIs align with Global Human Rights Indicator Set
CSDP/Crisis Protocol	EEAS-FEFIS + CSDP Mission Leads	Ensures strategic coherence and operational alignment through SPGU integration across headquarters and field missions.

## Summary

The Strategic Partnerships and Global Unit (SPGU) would serve as the central coordinating mechanism for the European Union's strategic partnerships, orchestrating a coherent and integrated approach across multiple domains of external action. Its remit would encompass foreign economic policy, including development aid, energy security, commodity price stabilization, monetary cooperation, investment facilitation, trade regulation, and the governance of the increasingly critical cybersphere. In parallel, the SPGU would ensure that the EU's commitment to human rights is systematically embedded within each partnership, translating normative objectives into operationally actionable initiatives. A further core responsibility involves fostering geoeconomic alignment among strategic partners, aligning infrastructure projects, investment flows, and industrial standards to reinforce collective resilience and reduce systemic dependencies. Finally, the unit would provide strategic coherence across the EU's external action, ensuring that diplomatic, economic, and security initiatives are mutually reinforcing, oriented toward long-term influence, and calibrated to advance the Union's global objectives. By centralizing these functions, the SPGU would transform strategic partnerships from discrete bilateral engagements into an integrated, policy-driven engine for EU influence and leadership in global governance.

The Strategic Partnerships and Global Unit would act as the EU's keel, steadyng its vast ship of external action through the choppy seas of geopolitics. Each partnership becomes a thread in the Union's tapestry, weaving economic leverage, human rights, and geoeconomic alignment into a single, resilient fabric. The unit's oversight of trade, investment, and cybersphere governance functions as the compass, pointing toward coherence amid competing interests. Human rights and normative promotion are the lighthouses, casting their beams across murky waters, guiding partners toward shared values. In uniting these strands, the SPGU transforms

scattered sails into a single mast, catching the winds of global influence with purpose and direction.

The Strategic Partnerships and Global Unit (SPGU), situated within the European External Action Service (EEAS), is uniquely positioned to function as the coordination nexus for the EU's strategic partnerships, especially when dealing with cross-cutting policy domains that require both horizontal and vertical alignment across EU institutions and member states. Its role becomes particularly central in the context of the growing complexity of global interdependence, where traditional foreign policy divides no longer map cleanly onto sectoral domains such as trade, development, or monetary affairs. Rather, these spheres are increasingly interlinked, demanding integrated responses that balance normative commitments, geopolitical pragmatism, and institutional coherence.

First, in the domain of foreign economic policy, the SPGU would play a convening and strategic design role in formulating partnership packages that align external economic engagement—such as aid, investment guarantees, digital infrastructure, and commodity access—with broader strategic objectives. The unit would ensure that sectoral policies in energy security, digital connectivity (including cybersphere standards), and sustainable value chains are embedded within the architecture of the Union's strategic dialogues. By coordinating inputs from DG INTPA, DG TRADE, DG ECFIN, and relevant CSDP structures, the SPGU would guarantee that each partnership package reflects the geopolitical weight of the relationship and maximises coherence between EU trade, investment, and external financing instruments. Furthermore, the SPGU would act as a focal point for incorporating monetary cooperation—such as euro internationalisation strategies or swap lines—into relevant partnerships, particularly where bilateral trade imbalances or financial vulnerabilities intersect with strategic dependency.

Second, the SPGU would be mandated to integrate human rights and democratic governance priorities across all SP packages, ensuring consistency with the EU's normative

foreign policy identity. Rather than treating human rights promotion as a stand-alone track, the unit would embed rights-based conditionalities, governance dialogues, and civil society participation mechanisms into economic and political partnership frameworks. This approach reflects the EU's evolving commitment to principled pragmatism—where the promotion of rights is not sidelined, but operationalised in tandem with geopolitical engagement.

Third, in the context of geo-economic competition, the SPGU would ensure that partnership frameworks act as platforms for economic resilience and strategic autonomy. This involves aligning EU positions on investment screening, export controls, subsidy rules, and supply chain security with partnership dialogues. For instance, the unit would be responsible for ensuring that strategic partners are engaged constructively in the implementation of EU instruments such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), critical raw materials strategy, and digital trade principles. The SPGU would facilitate the horizontal integration of such tools into bilateral or regionally tailored SP packages, advancing both normative convergence and economic self-protection.

Fourth, the SPGU would contribute to the strategic coherence of EU external action by overseeing the aggregation and prioritisation of sectoral inputs into unified packages that reflect the EU's overarching foreign policy aims. By working across institutional boundaries—between the EEAS, European Commission services, and Council structures—the unit ensures that SP frameworks reflect a coherent geopolitical narrative. This includes the orchestration of Team Europe Initiatives within SP countries, the coordination of summit deliverables, and the linkage between EU foreign policy messaging and the operational logic of Global Gateway investments, green transition diplomacy, and Indo-Pacific engagement strategies.

In sum, the SPGU's role in managing strategic partnership packages across complex, cross-cutting domains is not only administrative but also conceptual and diplomatic. It is tasked with moving beyond sectoral silos to forge comprehensive, coherent, and politically calibrated frameworks that reflect the EU's values, economic interests, and strategic ambitions. Its function is to ensure that every strategic partnership is more than the sum of its parts—that each reflects an adaptive synthesis of political dialogue, economic statecraft, regulatory diplomacy, and principled engagement, tailored to the Union's evolving global role.

To forge integrated and coherent approaches to the direction and management of the EU's strategic partnerships, it is essential to streamline decision-making processes, enhance coordination between EU institutions, and ensure a unified vision for external relations. This requires better integration of the European Commission, the European Council, and the European External Action Service (EEAS) to align their goals

and policies in a consistent and pragmatic manner. A clear, cohesive strategy would ensure that the EU can present itself as a unified actor on the global stage, minimizing fragmentation caused by the divergent national interests of member states.

Firstly, a coordinated approach is needed where the EU's foreign policy is not just reactive but anticipates challenges and opportunities in strategic partnerships. This involves aligning the EU's economic, security, trade, and development policies under one umbrella, reinforcing its values while also engaging with partners on common interests. To achieve this, the EU must actively engage in regular dialogues with partners and create long-term, mutually beneficial frameworks. It should also adapt its diplomatic and economic tools to reflect the unique needs of each partner, building deeper relationships that are not just based on trade or security concerns, but also on shared global challenges, such as climate change, digital transformation, and sustainable development.

Moreover, to avoid failure in fulfilling international obligations and leading effectively on the global stage, the EU needs to overcome organizational and mental barriers that hinder its actions. Organizationally, it is critical that the EU avoids siloed approaches where the Commission, Council, and EEAS work in isolation or compete for influence. A more integrated approach would foster agility and responsiveness, ensuring the EU can act decisively when needed.

The European Union must, in thought and in action, rise above the narrow view that the interests of individual member states alone dictate the conduct of its external affairs. While the concerns of each nation are not to be dismissed, the Union must embrace the broader perspective of collective strategic interests, seeking what benefits all its members together. This requires cultivating a shared sense of purpose, a commitment to the Union's global ambitions, and the alignment of national policies with objectives that serve the Union as a whole.

Should the Union fail in this endeavor, it risks more than inefficiency; it risks the loss of credibility and authority upon the world stage. A body divided in purpose, torn by internal competition, cannot hope to shape global norms, respond effectively to crises, or honor its commitments with the force and consistency expected of a true leader. Partners who look to the EU for reliability and vision will find only uncertainty and inconsistency if cohesion is lacking. The Union's stature as a global actor depends upon its capacity to harmonize internal policies, to act in concert, and to present a unified vision amidst a world that grows ever more complex and contested. Only through

such discipline, unity, and foresight can the European Union fulfill the duties entrusted to it by its members and the world alike.

In this context, it becomes increasingly important to focus on the core concept underpinning the EU's SP10—namely, the idea of "strategic autonomy" and its role in fostering a more integrated, influential, and reliable Union on the global stage. This concept not only reflects the EU's desire to assert its own strategic interests but also underscores the added value of international society in today's interconnected world. By strengthening its internal coherence and external partnerships, the EU can contribute meaningfully to shaping global norms, promoting multilateralism, and ensuring a more balanced and inclusive international order.

Amidst relative administrative disarray, the EEAS senior leadership has never been in doubt the EU's ability to rise a great power is hinged on its ability to sweep its neighbourhood, above all the Middle East. Now that the EU's border has been defined and the governance of the EU's Strategic partnerships are to be strengthened, the question arises how to define the regional order on Europe's Eastern border. Enter also the situation in the Holy Land. Israel will prevail militarily, the Palestinians be weakened and state of Jews stand every chance to loose themselves, following the onset of warfare with Iran in the context of the use of Jordan as an arena for the Hamas Israel rivalry by Iranian stooges acting in collusion with sinister forces in Amman.

## IX. THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY LOAD OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

**The Role of Biannual Summits and Structured Dialogues –** Strategic Partnerships are not merely bilateral instruments but constitute vital tools for sustaining the European Union's global objectives and projecting its values in the service of international security and global politics. They function as a fallback mechanism in the absence of meaningful reform of the United Nations Security Council and, simultaneously, as a

vehicle through which the EU asserts leadership in world affairs. In this sense, they embody the essence of international society: a community of states bound together by shared diplomatic rituals, normative commitments, and multilateral obligations.

The institutional expression of these partnerships is multifaceted. Biannual summits, joint declarations, and comprehensive action plans reaffirm mutual commitment, provide visibility to the relationship, and regularly update the framework of cooperation. In parallel, high-level dialogues are convened across thematic tracks such as digital governance, human rights, environmental protection, and defence, engaging not only the Commission's directorates-general but also the Council's policy services. This creates a dense bureaucratic fabric that requires significant investments in staffing, coordination within the European External Action Service, and the maintenance of joint working groups. Such institutional multiplication produces what may be termed an "international relations overhead," a constant demand for resources that necessitates careful prioritisation among competing global commitments.

Equally important is the signalling function of strategic partnerships in the multilateral arena. Summits and high-level engagements are not confined to bilateral objectives but serve as symbolic and strategic messages to other powers. An EU-India summit, for example, is simultaneously a gesture of solidarity with New Delhi and a signal directed towards Beijing, positioning the EU as both a partner and a shaper of geopolitical balance. Through such mechanisms, the Union projects its normative and political influence beyond the bilateral sphere, embedding its partners within a wider framework of global governance and reinforcing its identity as a convenor of international society.

Table - Cross-tabulation of the EU's Ten Strategic Partners

Partner	Summit Frequency	Geopolitical Function	Geo-economic Role	Security/Defense Engagement	Normative Alignment	Regional Multilateral Leverage
<b>United States</b>	Annual + TTC	NATO Ally, Systemic Rival Manager	Tech, Finance, FDI, Trade	Transatlantic security Partnership potential alternative to NAO, PESCO	High (except data privacy & trade)	G7, NATO, OECD, WTO
				cooperation, cyber, intelligence		
<b>China</b>	Biennial	Systemic Rival, Global Rules Challenger	Trade, investment, green tech	Security dialogues, crisis coordination	Low (esp. human rights).	UN, BRICS, AIIB, BRI
<b>India</b>	Biennial	Indo-Pacific balancing partner	Tech, pharma, FTA candidate	SDA initiated. Key to a cooperative and greener Asia. Maritime security, cyber, training	Medium (divergent on HR)	QUAD+, G20, SCO
<b>Japan</b>	Annual + SPA	Strategic ally, tech norms leader	Digital, green hydrogen, AI	Security dialogues, crisis coordination	High	G7, Indo-Pacific, UN
<b>Canada</b>	Biennial + CETA	North Atlantic likeminded partner	Trade, raw materials, energy	Americas, arctic and Ai Governance.	Very High	G7, NATO, Arctic Council
<b>South Korea</b>	Biennial	Strategic democracy in East Asia	Semiconductors, tech	Cyber, sanctions on DPRK	High	APEC, Indo-Pacific
<b>Brazil</b>	Sporadic	Regional anchor in Latin America	Trade, tech, migration	Low-Medium	Medium	CELAC, Mercosur, UN
<b>Mexico</b>	Biennial	Democratic partner, bridge to North America	Trade, tech, migration, OC.	Limited defence. Celac partner in the Caribbean.	Medium	OECD, CELAC, North American dialogue
<b>South Africa</b>	Sporadic	African democracy partner, regional pivot	Mining, health, pharma	Mining, health, pharma	Medium	AU, BRICS, UN
<b>Russia (Suspended)</b>	Suspended since 2014	Former strategic partner turned adversary	Energy, raw materials (historically)	Now framed as threat	Negative (Ukraine, human rights)	BRICS, CSTO, UN (veto power)

**Observations on Strategic Partnerships**

Empirical analysis of EU engagement with its ten strategic

partners indicates that the intensity of summity and diplomatic dialogue correlates closely with strategic priority. Partners of higher strategic value—such as the

United States, Japan, and India—exhibit denser bureaucratic and diplomatic infrastructure, reflected in the number of working groups, joint task forces, and specialized liaison offices. This correlation underscores the need for differentiated resource allocation, ensuring that institutional attention matches geopolitical and geoeconomic significance.

A second observation concerns normative convergence, which increasingly distinguishes cooperative partners from systemic rivals. Countries such as Canada and Japan exhibit high alignment with EU norms, particularly in areas such as digital governance, environmental standards, and human rights practices. Conversely, systemic competitors, notably China and Russia, often diverge on these parameters, underscoring the EU's dual challenge of fostering normative alignment while safeguarding strategic autonomy.

Third, the regional multilateral roles of partners significantly shape their strategic value. Brazil's leadership within Mercosur and India's active participation in the SCO and the G20 position these states as gateways to broader regional influence, rather than as purely bilateral actors. This highlights the EU's opportunity to leverage multilateralism in extending the reach of its strategic partnerships.

Finally, the societal load associated with managing these partnerships—including staffing, documentation, procedural overhead, and thematic working groups—is substantial. Effective coordination requires rationalization and thematic clustering, such as aligning Global Gateway projects under a single framework or grouping technological and artificial intelligence partnerships to ensure coherence, efficiency, and policy impact.

### **The Concept of International Society**

The theoretical framework of international society, drawn from the English School of International Relations (Bull, 1977; Wight, 1977; Buzan, 2004), provides a robust lens for understanding the EU's external strategy. International society refers to a system of states that not only coexist in an anarchic global environment but also recognize one another as legitimate actors, share norms and rules governing behavior, and engage in institutionalized practices such as summits, treaties, and international organizations. Within this framework, power is understood not solely in terms of material capabilities but is deeply embedded in legitimacy, normative authority, and institutionalized practice. Order and justice are co-constituted through mutual recognition and evolving norms, while formal and informal institutions—including international law, diplomacy, the balance of power, and mechanisms of great-power management—constitute the backbone of interaction.

### **The EU and its Strategic Partners in International Society**

Within this conception, the EU and its ten strategic partners (the EU10) can be understood as **active members** of international society, participating in shared rule-making, normative dialogues, and multilateral governance. The EU's role is distinctive: it combines normative authority, economic leverage, and regulatory capacity to shape rules and standards, thereby influencing the conduct of states beyond its immediate membership. By embedding the EU10 into structured mechanisms such as joint forums, thematic working groups, and co-authored normative initiatives, the EU positions itself as a **system-builder**, capable of reinforcing legitimacy, predictability, and order across the international system.

Policy recommendations flowing from this perspective emphasize the strategic activation of the EU10 partnerships to advance a rebalanced international society. This includes creating enduring institutional frameworks for dialogue and crisis management, co-developing norms for emerging challenges such as digital governance, AI, and supply chain resilience, and leveraging multilateral gateways to amplify European influence regionally and globally. In doing so, the EU transforms from a normative power or regulatory actor into a norm-setting convenor and engine of global governance, shaping international society in accordance with its values, rules, and strategic interests.

The EU's Strategic Partners policy operationalizes its role within international society by establishing structured, enduring relationships with ten key global actors, as outlined by the European External Action Service (EEAS, 2021). By combining normative alignment, geoeconomic cooperation, and security collaboration, the policy translates the theoretical principles of legitimacy, shared norms, and institutionalized interaction into concrete practice. Mechanisms such as joint forums, thematic clusters, and co-authored norms with the EU10 exemplify how the Union seeks to embed its partners within a rules-based international system, reinforcing mutual recognition and predictable behavior. Furthermore, the policy leverages the regional multilateral roles of partners to expand the EU's influence beyond bilateral engagements, enhancing its capacity to shape regional and global governance. In this way, the EU10 framework embodies the practical application of international society theory, transforming the Union from a normative power into a system-builder and convenor of a cooperative, rule-based global order.

In the 21st century, this society is being fragmented by

systemic rivalry, eroded multilateralism, and contested norms (e.g. on AI, sovereignty, environment). The EU's ambition to reassert and reshape international society must proceed by being both a norm entrepreneur and an institutional convenor.

- *The EU10 and the Architecture of a Reformed International Society*

Groupings	Role in Society	Strategic Importance for EU-Led Order
<b>Like-Minded Democracies (US, Japan, Canada, Korea)</b>	Norm sustainers, technological innovators	Anchor a values-based order and offer tech resilience
<b>Emerging Powers (India, Brazil, South Africa)</b>	Norm shapers, regional leaders	Necessary for pluralistic legitimacy and regional reach
<b>Transactional Partners (Mexico, China)</b>	Rule challengers or swing states	Need engagement to avoid normative fragmentation
<b>Excluded Former Partners (Russia)</b>	System disruptor	Managing confrontation without collapse of diplomacy

*Policy Recommendations: Make the EU10 the Core of a Renewed, EU-Led International Society*

The European Union's engagement with its ten strategic partners can be strengthened through the creation of a permanent Strategic Partners' Forum, a standing structure convening annually with rotating chairs and dedicated thematic working groups. These working groups would focus on pressing global challenges, including digital rights, the green transition, and crisis response, providing a structured mechanism for dialogue, coordination, and joint policy development. Beyond formal meetings, strategic partnerships should be organized thematically to enhance coherence and amplify impact. For example, a "Green Partnerships Cluster" could unite Brazil, India, South Africa, and Canada to advance climate-resilient development and sustainable investment, while a "Digital Democracy Coalition" could integrate the United States, Japan, and South Korea around governance standards for artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and data protection. Institutionalizing these networks through shared diplomatic ecosystems, including joint training programs, think tanks, and youth summits, would foster long-term elite convergence, generate mutual understanding, and enhance collective problem-solving capacities. This approach embeds

the EU's institutional leadership within the broader international society, creating predictable patterns of cooperation, shared norms, and strategic alignment among leading global actors (Bull, 1977; Buzan, 2004).

### Normative Innovation

The EU's normative influence can be expanded by positioning strategic partners as co-creators of global standards, rather than passive recipients. This entails the codification and joint promotion of norms for emerging challenges such as data governance, artificial intelligence, disinformation, ethical supply chains, and dual-use technologies. A central instrument for this purpose could be the establishment of a Charter of Responsible Geopolitical Conduct, a soft law framework defining principles of strategic restraint, limitations on economic coercion, and cooperative management of global commons, including cyberspace, outer space, and critical maritime routes. By articulating such norms collectively with the EU10, the Union would operationalize its normative power in a collaborative and mutually legitimized manner, thereby reinforcing both the legitimacy and effectiveness of its external policy (Manners, 2002). This strategy also reflects the EU's ambition to consolidate its influence in a global system where rule-making increasingly shapes power dynamics, rather than force alone.

### Geoeconomic Integration

A second pillar of strategic engagement involves coordinated economic and technological initiatives. Joint investment platforms under the EU's Global Gateway program could enable strategic co-financing with the ten partners, targeting infrastructure projects in regions of shared interest, such as Africa's digital and energy networks. Complementarily, the establishment of an EU10 Global Resilience Fund would reduce collective vulnerabilities arising from dependency on authoritarian or concentrated suppliers in critical sectors, including semiconductors, pharmaceuticals, and rare earth materials. By pooling resources, sharing risk, and coordinating policy, such initiatives operationalize the EU's geoeconomic strategy, allowing the Union and its partners to exercise autonomy in global markets, strengthen resilience against coercion, and shape production networks and standards according to shared values.

### Security and Peace Infrastructure

The EU's security and crisis management capabilities can

be reinforced through formal integration of strategic partners in operational initiatives. Observer status for partners in Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions would facilitate joint planning, interoperability, and coordinated deployments. This could support new peacekeeping or mediation efforts in regions of strategic importance, including the Sahel, Caucasus, and Indo-Pacific. In parallel, the creation of an EU10 Early Warning and Strategic Foresight Council would enable anticipatory governance, combining analytical resources to forecast systemic shocks in food security, health, or conflict, and coordinating rapid, effective responses. By embedding partners within these structures, the EU enhances the predictability and resilience of international society, reinforcing the norms, practices, and cooperative mechanisms that undergird global stability.

### Diplomatic Presence and Cultural Prestige

Soft power projection is equally critical. Establishing joint diplomatic academies and cultural institutes, rotating across EU member states and strategic partner countries, would standardize diplomatic training, promote EU languages, and cultivate shared norms of multilateral engagement. Additionally, coordinated support for co-branded multilateral candidacies—for example in the UN Security Council or WTO leadership positions—would demonstrate reformist capacity, amplify influence, and signal cohesion. By aligning institutional capacity, cultural prestige, and normative authority, the EU and its partners can jointly shape the rules and expectations of international society, while simultaneously reinforcing the Union's legitimacy and leadership role in global governance.

### Strategic Goal

The implementation of these measures would reposition the European Union from a normative power alone to a norm-setting convenor, capable of orchestrating collective action across multiple domains. It would transform the EU from a fragmented actor into a system-builder of twenty-first-century international society, embedding its strategic partners in structures that combine operational capacity, normative alignment, and economic resilience. Finally, it would allow the Union to transition from a follower in global governance to a shaper of global legitimacy and order, with the EU10 serving as the core engine of a cooperative, resilient, and rules-based international system.

### The Vagaries of the EU as a Global Power and the Imperative for Strategic Governance Reform

The European Union's status as a global actor continues to be marked by significant institutional and operational fragmentation. Although the EU possesses considerable

economic and normative influence, its capacity to act strategically on the international stage remains inconsistent and reactive. This ambiguity stems from a lack of cohesion between its external instruments, insufficient thematic integration, and an absence of long-term foresight in partnership governance.

Addressing these deficiencies requires a fundamental restructuring of how the EU manages its strategic partnerships. Central to the proposed reform is the establishment of a Strategic Partnership Governance Unit (SPGU) within a restructured European External Action Service (EEAS). The SPGU is envisaged as a cross-cutting mechanism designed to harmonize long-term partnership strategies, enhance thematic consistency, and embed foresight-based tools into EU external action.

This reform proposal coincides with a broader institutional consolidation whereby DG INTPA is fully integrated into the EEAS and reconstituted as the EEAS Development and Partnerships Service (EEAS-DPS). Simultaneously, DG FPI and the European Security and Defence Policy

(ESDP) structures are merged into the EEAS Foreign, External and Financial Instruments Service

(EEAS-FEFIS). The unified EEAS is thus reorganized into three main pillars: Geographic and Political Affairs, Thematic Strategies and Strategic Partnerships (including SPGU), and External Financial and Security Instruments.

Within this reformed architecture, the SPGU assumes a pivotal role in advancing strategic coherence. It is tasked with developing cross-regional partnership strategies aligned with EU thematic priorities such as the Green Deal, digital transformation, migration governance, resilience, and security. These strategies are structured around 10-year cycles, supplemented by three-year operational reviews. The SPGU also plays a key role in fostering thematic integration by ensuring that regional and bilateral instruments reflect shared goals and are supported by common metrics and scenario-based foresight.

In terms of operational coordination, the SPGU enhances both delegation-level planning and summit-level preparation. It supports EU delegations by aligning programming with strategic foresight, while also synthesizing cross-regional input for the EU10 Summit format. Furthermore, it develops toolkits for monitoring, evaluation, and scenario analysis to better anticipate global disruptions and power shifts.

The restructured governance framework also clarifies the division of labour among country desks, regional desks, and the SPGU itself. Country desks continue to manage bilateral partnerships and reflect member state priorities, while regional desks ensure the coherence of thematic objectives within regional blocs. The SPGU supplements

both by providing analytical toolsets, harmonizing long-cycle planning, and driving scenario-based coordination across themes and regions.

This integrated model is designed to enhance the EU's strategic posture across key geopolitical regions. In Africa, the SPGU enables alignment between Green Deal objectives, mobility strategies, and regional security foresight, particularly in fragile areas such as the Sahel. In Asia, it facilitates coherence across Indo-Pacific strategies, focusing on maritime governance, digital infrastructure, and security cooperation. In the Americas, the unit enhances transatlantic coordination on green and digital transitions. With regard to Russia and the Eastern Neighbourhood, it equips EU actors with tools for risk-based engagement under highly sensitive conditions. The proposed reorganization pending the formation of DG Defense proper flanks the strengthening of the governance of Europe's sub-regionals – BSEC, CBSS, Arctic Council, UfM, Barents - under the new policy guidelines looking beyond activities towards a strategy with impact on the ground combined with a merger of the ENP and the Eastern Partnership.

Beyond regional application, the reform also establishes a robust mechanism for performance monitoring and strategic evaluation. The SPGU is expected to produce an annual Strategic Partnership Governance Scorecard to assess progress against defined key performance indicators. This scorecard, reviewed at the EU10 summit level, strengthens institutional accountability and provides a formal channel for continuous policy learning and adjustment.

Lastly, the SPGU is designed to open new spaces for strategic dialogue with external actors. It enables thematic engagement with third-country partners and international organizations such as the African Union and ASEAN, as well as think tanks and civil society networks. This broader consultative approach enhances the EU's legitimacy and positions it more credibly as a rule-making and value-based global actor.

In sum, the proposed governance reform seeks to transform the EU's external action from a dispersed and often reactive system into a strategically governed and foresight-driven structure. By institutionalizing long-cycle planning, integrating external instruments, and reinforcing thematic alignment, the EU stands to significantly enhance its global effectiveness and credibility in an increasingly complex geopolitical environment.

## X. CONCLUSIONS

The EU's interests in Strategic Partnerships primarily revolve around enhancing its geopolitical influence, promoting democratic values, securing economic stability, and fostering cooperation on global challenges such as climate change and security threats. These partnerships serve as a platform for the EU to project its normative agenda, engage with key global

players, and navigate a multipolar world more effectively. To create a more coherent policy that integrates both supranational and member-state levels, the EU could prioritize enhanced coordination among its institutions, such as the European Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS), and individual member states. This could involve regular strategic assessments, aligning foreign and economic policies, and implementing joint operational platforms. Establishing a unified Foreign Economic Policy and leveraging shared strategic objectives are crucial steps toward improving policy coherence. There is a cautious geopolitical slant to the SP with Japan, in so far it reflects concern for peace in the Middle East is a desirable shared goal pending the energy interests of the EU and Japan in the Persian Gulf.

The EU can adopt several strategies to enhance its geopolitical presence and manage conflicts more effectively. These include developing differentiated engagement strategies tailored to the specific geopolitical contexts of partner countries, strengthening crisis response mechanisms and conflict management capabilities within the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), using geoeconomic tools to assert its interests while maintaining a clear stance on values, and conducting regular policy reviews and diplomatic dialogues to adapt to changing circumstances and foster cooperation. Current geopolitical and geoeconomic factors significantly influence the EU's Strategic Partnerships. The re-emergence of great power competition, particularly between the U.S. and China, places pressure on the EU to define its position in global affairs. Additionally, economic coercion, technological decoupling, and shifts in regional power dynamics compel the EU to reassess its relationships with both traditional allies and emerging economies. These dynamics necessitate a more strategic, adaptable approach to partnerships to ensure the EU remains a relevant and influential actor on the world stage.

Our research illustrates that the European Union's Strategic Partnerships are critical to enhancing its geopolitical influence in a rapidly evolving global landscape. We have demonstrated that integrating geoeconomic strategies into the EU's foreign policy framework can significantly bolster its effectiveness in managing international relations.

The implications of these findings are profound. By adopting a coherent and strategic approach to its foreign economic policy, the EU can position itself as a formidable actor on the world stage, capable of navigating the complexities of contemporary geopolitics while promoting its core values of democracy and human rights. To this end,

we recommend that the European Union prioritize the development of a unified Foreign Economic Policy that harmonizes its bilateral agreements. This strategy should involve regular assessments of its Strategic Partnerships and targeted initiatives to enhance cooperation with key partners, particularly in areas of mutual interest, such as trade and investment.

Furthermore, we encourage future research to explore the evolving dynamics of these partnerships, particularly in light of emerging geopolitical challenges and shifts in global power structures. Understanding these changes will be essential for the EU to effectively adapt its strategies and ensure its continued relevance in international affairs. Ultimately, the need for a robust and proactive EU in the global arena has never been more urgent. As we confront shared challenges—from climate change to security threats—strengthening the EU's Strategic Partnerships will be pivotal in fostering a more stable, prosperous, and equitable world for all.

The import of this study lies not merely in the identification of the difficulties that confront the European External Action Service in managing Strategic Partnerships, but in its guidance for prudent reform, aimed at fortifying the governance of the Union itself. In an age of shifting powers and unpredictable currents, the careful comprehension and enhancement of the Union's Strategic Partnerships are no trivial matter; they are essential to the preservation of stability, the fostering of cooperation, and the advancement of the shared principles that unite our peoples across borders. The insights offered herein lay a foundation upon which deliberate discussion and measured action may proceed, securing a more cohesive and resilient European Union capable of meeting the demands of the wider world.

The consequences of these findings reach beyond the halls of academia, for they speak directly to the responsibilities of those who govern and direct policy. By acknowledging and addressing these challenges, the Union may strengthen its diplomatic craft, assert its authority with prudence, and maintain its credibility among nations. This work illuminates the structures and practices of institutional governance within the EU, offering lessons that are both practical and enduring, for those who would navigate the intricate and weighty affairs of modern geopolitics with wisdom, steadiness, and justice.

### Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study carry several theoretical implications for the scholarship on the EU's Strategic Partnerships. First, the reconceptualization of partnerships as compositional and flexible instruments challenges earlier literature that treated them as static, comprehensive

frameworks for normative projection (Smith, 2004). By framing partnerships as adaptive mechanisms within a pluralistic global order, the research underscores the importance of viewing the EU not solely as a normative power but as a geopolitical actor negotiating complex, fluid international structures. This theoretical shift expands the analytical lens from ideal-type multilateral engagement to a pragmatic understanding of interest-based alignment, differentiation, and strategic selectivity.

Second, the empirical emphasis on institutional coordination and capacity-building highlights the need to integrate organizational theory into analyses of EU external action. Existing research often treats strategic partnerships as outcomes of high-level diplomacy or rhetorical ambitions, neglecting the bureaucratic and governance dimensions that shape their effectiveness. By foregrounding the role of the EEAS, inter-institutional processes, and targeted resource allocation, the study suggests that theories of organizational design, strategic management, and governance are essential to understanding the EU's operational capabilities in external relations.

Third, the study's attention to geoeconomic instruments, differentiated engagement, and multilateral collaboration introduces a theoretical bridge between international political economy and strategic partnership literature. Incorporating economic leverage, digital diplomacy, and crisis management mechanisms illustrates how the EU can operationalize its strategic objectives while navigating structural constraints. This underscores a theoretical argument for integrating normative and material considerations in analyses of EU external action, challenging approaches that privilege normative projection alone.

Fourth, the findings emphasize the interplay between domestic politics, public opinion, and civil society engagement in shaping the EU's external strategies. This suggests that the theoretical framework for studying Strategic Partnerships must expand beyond intergovernmental and supranational structures to include societal and subnational influences. In turn, this has implications for constructivist theories of norm diffusion, as it highlights the contingent and context-dependent processes through which EU values are operationalized abroad.

Finally, by situating strategic partnerships within the broader architecture of enlargement, neighbourhood policy, and global governance, the research introduces a systems-oriented theoretical perspective. Rather than

viewing partnerships as isolated instruments, they are reconceptualized as interconnected components of a multi-layered geopolitical strategy. This perspective advances theoretical understanding of how regional integration, bilateral diplomacy, and multilateral engagement can be harmonized within a coherent foreign policy framework, offering a more holistic lens for future research.

While conceptual and theoretical analyses of the EU's Strategic Partnerships are well represented, there is a critical need for empirical research to evaluate their actual effectiveness and impact. Theoretically, this addresses a gap between normative claims about EU influence and the operational realities of strategic engagement, connecting to theories of organizational effectiveness, international cooperation, and policy implementation. Empirical assessments—through mixed-methods approaches combining qualitative case studies, process tracing, and quantitative indicators such as trade flows, joint initiatives, or diplomatic outputs—can reveal patterns of success and failure, illuminate bottlenecks in implementation, and provide insights into the contextual conditions under which partnerships generate tangible outcomes. This aligns with institutionalist theory and policy evaluation frameworks that emphasize the interplay between structure, agency, and outcomes.

Consider the world as it shifts beneath our very eyes: the rise of China, the unpredictable currents of U.S. policy, the turbulence of regional conflicts—all these forces press upon the European Union, demanding clarity, foresight, and decisive understanding. Yet here lies a crucial gap: how do these swiftly changing geopolitical realities influence the Union's Strategic Partnerships? The question is not abstract; it concerns the Union's capacity to act, to adapt, and to secure its place among the powers of the earth. Scholars must examine these dynamics through careful analysis: scenarios that envision alternative futures, models that trace the movement of power, comparisons across regions that reveal patterns of opportunity and peril. Only then can the EU position itself wisely, informed by both theory and the realities of global competition.

But the challenge does not end there. Coordination within the Union's institutions—the European Commission, the EEAS, the member states themselves—is too often opaque, too often assumed rather than scrutinized. Yet the effectiveness of partnerships rests upon this coordination. Theories of governance, multi-level policymaking, and organizational behavior remind us that design, culture, and procedure shape outcomes as much as intent. It is imperative to map processes, trace networks, and hear directly from those who act within these institutions, for only by understanding the interplay of actors, norms, and bureaucracies can reforms be forged that

strengthen the Union's strategic reach and operational coherence.

Let this serve as a call: the EU must comprehend, adapt, and act—not tomorrow, not at leisure, but with the urgency that the shifting world demands.

The influence of public opinion and civil society on strategic partnerships is another under-researched area. Constructivist and normative theories of international relations suggest that societal values, norms, and grassroots movements can shape state behavior and policy reception. Empirical strategies, including surveys, participatory observation, and policy ethnography, can reveal how youth engagement, minority communities, and civil society actors contribute to or constrain EU initiatives. Kaja Kallas' civil society engagement in Brasilia exemplifies the potential for local actors to act as levers for deeper democratic and intercultural cooperation, suggesting a bottom-up dimension to strategic influence that merits systematic investigation.

Emerging economies also represent a research gap in both theoretical and practical terms. Comparative political economy and development theories provide a framework for analyzing how diverse political and economic models influence EU engagement strategies. Case-based analysis, policy tracing, and comparative studies of partnerships with emerging economies can shed light on how the EU adapts to heterogeneous governance contexts, balancing normative objectives with pragmatic strategic considerations.

Digital diplomacy intersects with theories of networked governance, transnational communication, and technological mediation of foreign policy. Empirical studies employing social network analysis, digital ethnography, and assessments of e-governance platforms can examine how technology facilitates dialogue, knowledge sharing, and multilateral cooperation, offering both theoretical refinement and practical recommendations for modernizing EU diplomacy.

The absence of a standardized framework for evaluating governance and operational efficiency underscores a gap in both theory and practice. Developing such a framework aligns with governance theory and organizational performance evaluation, providing structured criteria for assessing institutional design, decision-making processes, and partnership outcomes. This approach enhances theoretical understanding while generating actionable insights for policymakers.

Finally, we must turn our attention to the influence of domestic politics upon the Union's conduct abroad, for no institution acts in isolation. Changes in national leadership, the shifting priorities of political factions, or the sway of public opinion possess the power to alter strategic alignment, redirect resources, and reshape commitment to shared initiatives. To understand these effects, we must proceed methodically, employing longitudinal analyses of policy, careful interviews with those who wield authority, and comparative studies across member states. In doing so, we reveal how domestic circumstances mold the Union's coherence and capacity for adaptation, strengthening both our theoretical understanding and the practical measures necessary for effective foreign policy.

It follows, therefore, that addressing these gaps through targeted research is not merely an academic exercise. It is a means of providing the Union with knowledge sufficient to guide its reforms—structural, procedural, and operational—so that its Strategic Partnerships may function with clarity, flexibility, and purpose. By integrating theory with empirical insight, we build a foundation capable of evaluating current practices, anticipating challenges, and designing strategies attuned to the diverse contexts in which the European Union acts. In this way, scholarship and practice unite, each informing the other, and each serving the enduring interest of sound governance and prudent engagement in the world.

Taken together, these findings suggest a theoretical evolution in EU studies: from analyzing partnerships as static or purely normative constructs toward viewing them as flexible, strategically managed instruments embedded in a dynamic global system. This approach bridges gaps in empirical assessment, inter-institutional analysis, and multi-level engagement, and lays the groundwork for future research that integrates organizational, economic, political, and societal dimensions into the study of EU external action.

### Further Research

Reflecting upon the findings of this study, it becomes evident that several fruitful paths for future inquiry present themselves, worthy of careful and deliberate attention. Scholars should examine how the shifting currents of global power—the rising influence of emerging economies, the realignment of international alliances—bear upon the European Union's Strategic Partnerships. Such inquiry is not merely academic; it offers guidance for the Union itself, illuminating the ways in which governance must adapt, lest it lose relevance or fail in its responsibilities to its citizens and partners.

Equally worthy of study is the role of public opinion and civil

society, for the actions of governments and institutions are shaped, rightly, by the sentiments and values of the people. Understanding how grassroots movements and societal norms influence policy will enable the EU to act with greater prudence, responsiveness, and legitimacy in its strategic engagements.

Moreover, comparative investigations of governance frameworks and operational efficiencies in other institutions—such as the African Union or ASEAN—promise to yield instructive lessons. By examining how these bodies organize, deliberate, and implement their strategies, the EU may discover innovative practices, tested elsewhere, that could strengthen its own structures. Such knowledge, pursued with care and reflection, will equip the Union to act not only with authority, but with wisdom and justice, fulfilling its role as a stable and principled actor in the wider world.

With the rise of digital technologies, researching the intersection of technology and diplomacy could reveal new ways to enhance communication and cooperation within strategic partnerships. This research could focus on how digital tools can facilitate dialogue and engagement among diverse stakeholders.

This study underscores the urgent need for further research to navigate the complexities of the EU's Strategic Partnerships effectively. Scholars, policymakers, and practitioners are encouraged to engage collaboratively in this exploration. By dedicating resources and expertise to these areas, we can collectively enhance the efficacy of the EU's engagement on the global stage.

We do not know enough about supply chain issues, conflicts in cyberspace and how they might entangled into and sharpen geoeconomic conflict at the nexus of fragmentation and integration of the world economy. This must be a cause for concern in a quantum age.

We don't know enough about how and why the EU lost its nerve and gave up fighting for the EU's Strategic Partnerships, indications are emotional aspects are involved and the poor state of the neighbourhood amidst stalemate internally in the EU.

### Counter-arguments

Here are some potential counterarguments against strengthening governance on the SP10 and adapting to the contemporary global landscape:

Sovereignty concerns arise with strengthening governance, as it may be perceived as encroaching on the autonomy of EU member states and strategic partners.

Countries could view this as a threat to their sovereignty, leading to resistance against deeper integration or cooperation. The fear of losing control over national policies can dampen enthusiasm for collaborative frameworks, causing friction that undermines the intended benefits of governance improvements.

Overregulation and bureaucracy pose another significant challenge. An increased focus on governance may result in excessive regulation and bureaucratic processes within the EU and its partnerships. Heightened governance structures can complicate decision-making, hinder responsiveness, and slow down the EU's ability to react to crises. This diminishes the EU's overall agility in international relations, making it less competitive compared to more flexible counterparts.

Divergent interests among member states and partners can complicate governance efforts. Political, economic, and social differences among EU member states and SP10 partners may lead to disagreements on priorities, values, and approaches to issues such as human rights or trade policies. Such disagreements disrupt consensus-building and limit the effectiveness of joint initiatives. The more stakeholders involved, the more challenging it becomes to achieve coherent and actionable governance.

Strengthened governance frameworks may inadvertently favor larger member states or more influential partners, risking the marginalization of smaller states. If the governance systems disproportionately benefit certain actors, it could lead to dissatisfaction and feelings of disenfranchisement among smaller or less powerful countries, ultimately diminishing the cohesion and solidarity necessary for effective partnerships.

Challenges of global power dynamics add another layer of complexity. The current geopolitical environment, characterized by great power rivalry and shifting alliances, may complicate efforts to strengthen governance on the SP10. In a multipolar world, the EU's ability to exert influence and authority can be limited, leading to ineffective partnerships that struggle to deliver the desired outcomes. This reinforces the notion that governance may struggle to keep pace with realpolitik.

Consider, then, the question before us: should the Union, entrusted with the welfare of its peoples, extend its power and authority beyond its present bounds? Let us not be swayed by ambition alone, for even the noblest intent can yield harm when prudence is forsaken. To augment the Union's powers may invite suspicion, even resentment, among the very states and peoples it seeks to serve. When nations perceive their freedom or their interests to be encroached upon, will they not resist? Will they not withdraw their cooperation, and thus imperil the very ends the Union pursues?

Mark also the peril of misdirected effort. Should the Union devote itself excessively to consolidating authority, what of the pressing needs of its citizens? What of the sustenance of social programs, the support of economic development, the protection of those who rely upon its care? Neglect in these matters would be no minor misfortune; it would be a betrayal of trust, a diminution of the Union's purpose.

And yet there is a further danger, one that strikes at the heart of justice and of the people's voice. As authority grows, so too may the distance between rulers and ruled. If power becomes concentrated, oversight may weaken, engagement may falter, and the citizen may find his voice unheard in the councils of the Union. Is this the manner in which a free people are to be governed—by a power unmoored from accountability, however well-intentioned? Let prudence, therefore, guide the hand of the Union, lest in seeking strength it sows dissent, neglect, and disconnection among those it exists to serve.

On the other hand, augmenting power and authority can enhance global influence. A stronger EU may better shape global norms and standards, thereby increasing its influence in international fora. This proactive stance positions the EU as a key player in establishing a rules-based international order conducive to its values and interests. Greater cohesion could also result from expanding governance and authority. A unified approach may allow the EU to present a strong front on global issues, ensuring that collective interests are prioritized amidst competing national agendas.

Finally, a more powerful EU with enhanced governance structures can improve capacity for crisis response. Centralized authority enables quicker and more coordinated responses to global challenges, ranging from security threats to economic disruptions.

In conclusion, while strengthening governance on the SP10 and augmenting the EU's power presents opportunities for enhanced influence and coordination, it also invites significant challenges relating to sovereignty, bureaucracy, and diverse interests. Balancing these competing considerations will be essential for the EU to navigate its role in a complex global landscape.

### Policy recommendations

Hear me, citizens and guardians of Europe: these recommendations are not idle words, nor are they the musings of the faint-hearted. They are a call to action, a summons to fortify the Union's Strategic Partnerships, so that it may traverse the stormy seas of international affairs with steadfastness, wisdom, and strength. The world is restless, full of shifting powers and unseen dangers;

without clarity of purpose and unity of action, our influence shall wane, and our authority falter.

These measures—crafted to enhance governance, to invigorate diplomatic engagement, to sharpen economic strategy, to deepen multilateral collaboration, and to uphold accountability—are the instruments by which the Union may remain credible, respected, and effective among allies and rivals alike. Each is grounded in reason, each justified by principle, for they serve not private ambition, nor fleeting advantage, but the enduring welfare of the Union and the stability of the world it touches.

Understand this: the recommendations do not act in isolation. Together, they form a shield and a compass, guiding the Union to act with prudence, to build trust among partners, and to advance cooperation in pursuit of shared interests. To neglect them is to risk weakness where there must be strength, disunity where there must be coherence, and doubt where there must be resolve. Let us then embrace these measures, not as mere policy, but as the embodiment of Europe's responsibility, foresight, and honor in the governance of its destiny.

### **Strengthening Governance Frameworks**

Establishing clear governance structures that delineate roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes within the EU and its Strategic Partnerships is essential for ensuring clarity, efficiency, and accountability. By enhancing coordination among EU institutions, member states, and external partners, the Union can reduce duplication, prevent miscommunication, and foster more coherent and unified approaches. Well-defined governance frameworks provide a foundation for consistent policy implementation, strengthen the EU's credibility with external partners, and enable more effective responses to emerging global challenges. This clarity and coordination are critical for sustaining long-term strategic partnerships and maximizing the impact of EU initiatives abroad.

### **Enhancing Diplomatic Engagement**

Investing in diplomatic initiatives to strengthen relationships with both member states and strategic partners is crucial for fostering trust, coordination, and mutual understanding. Establishing regular consultations, dialogue platforms, and collaborative forums ensures that diverse interests are acknowledged and reconciled, reducing the risk of misalignment and conflict. This proactive engagement enhances the EU's ability to anticipate challenges, build consensus, and create durable partnerships grounded in transparency and shared objectives. By prioritizing diplomacy, the EU can reinforce its credibility, facilitate coherent policy implementation, and advance its strategic

goals more effectively on the international stage.

### **Promoting a Unified Foreign Economic Policy**

Developing a coherent Foreign Economic Policy that harmonizes bilateral agreements and trade initiatives is essential for ensuring that the EU's economic diplomacy supports its broader political objectives. By aligning trade and investment strategies with overarching policy goals, the EU can maximize its influence in global markets and strengthen its position as a leading actor in international economic governance. A coordinated approach reduces fragmentation, enhances policy predictability for partners, and ensures that economic tools are leveraged strategically to advance both commercial and geopolitical interests. This integration of economic and political objectives reinforces the EU's credibility, resilience, and capacity to shape global trade and investment norms in line with European values.

### **Empowering Smaller Member States**

Ensuring that governance frameworks are inclusive and empower smaller member states to contribute to decision-making processes is crucial for promoting equity, cohesion, and legitimacy within the EU. By creating a level playing field, the Union can mitigate power imbalances, encourage diverse perspectives, and enhance collective ownership of strategic initiatives. This inclusivity strengthens institutional credibility, fosters constructive dialogue among member states, and improves the quality of policy outcomes. From a theoretical standpoint, this aligns with principles of multi-level governance and deliberative democracy, which emphasize the importance of participation, representation, and equitable influence in complex institutional settings. By empowering smaller member states, the EU not only enhances internal cohesion but also projects a more credible and unified position externally in its strategic partnerships.

### **Fostering Public Engagement and Accountability**

Implementing mechanisms to enhance transparency and accountability in decision-making processes is essential for building trust, legitimacy, and effectiveness in the EU's Strategic Partnerships. Regular reporting on governance performance, public consultations, and opportunities for civil society engagement ensure that policy formulation and implementation are open to scrutiny and responsive to diverse stakeholders. Such mechanisms allow for the early identification of inefficiencies, promote informed participation, and foster public confidence in EU external action. From a theoretical perspective, this aligns with governance and accountability frameworks that emphasize the role of openness, deliberation, and participatory oversight in improving institutional

performance and strategic outcomes. By institutionalizing transparency and accountability, the EU can strengthen the credibility of its partnerships, enhance policy coherence, and support adaptive, evidence-based decision-making.

### **Adopting Flexible Policy Approaches**

Emphasizing adaptability in partnerships is crucial for ensuring that the EU's strategies remain relevant and effective across diverse geopolitical and developmental contexts. By developing flexible approaches, the Union can tailor its engagement to the unique circumstances and priorities of each partner, responding proactively to shifting regional dynamics, emerging challenges, and evolving opportunities. Such adaptability enhances the EU's credibility, allows for more targeted and impactful initiatives, and ensures that strategic partnerships remain resilient, mutually beneficial, and capable of delivering long-term results in an increasingly complex international environment.

### **Investing in Capacity Building**

Allocate resources within the European External Action Service (EEAS) and affiliated member state chancelleries as a matter of priority to the ten Strategic Partners, and double the number of Eurocrats in those countries. Deploy Europol attachés and EU Military attachés in all ten partnership countries. Make sure they understand the art of global governance such as multi-stakeholder engagement, rule of law, cooperative mechanisms, institutions and organizations, accountability and transparency, equitable representation, sustainability and resilience, adaptability, norm development and socialisation and conflict resolution mechanisms. These elements collectively contribute to the framework of global governance, facilitating cooperation and coordination among countries and other international stakeholders to address complex global issues.

### **Leveraging Geoeconomic Tools**

Utilizing geoeconomic instruments, such as trade agreements and investment screening mechanisms, is essential for aligning the EU's external engagement with its internal resilience and long-term strategic interests. This proactive approach allows the EU to safeguard its economic and political priorities while exerting influence over global economic governance. By strategically leveraging trade, investment, and financial tools, the EU can create incentives for partner countries, mitigate external vulnerabilities, and promote standards that reflect European values. This ensures that the EU's external economic policy is coherent, forward-looking, and capable of shaping international markets and regulatory frameworks in ways that reinforce both regional stability and global competitiveness.

### **Encouraging Multilateral Collaboration**

Promoting collaboration among various international organizations and regional partners, including the African Union, ASEAN, and EU-CELAC, is vital for enhancing the EU's strategic influence and global governance capacity. Such engagement enables the EU to share best practices, learn from alternative governance frameworks, and leverage collective expertise to address complex transnational challenges. By fostering multilateral cooperation, the EU can strengthen its credibility, enhance policy coherence across regions, and assert a more effective presence in international fora, ensuring that its Strategic Partnerships are mutually beneficial and responsive to evolving global dynamics.

### **Conducting Regular Policy Reviews**

Implementing systematic evaluations of the effectiveness of Strategic Partnerships and governance initiatives is essential to ensure that the EU's engagement remains relevant and impactful. Regular reviews allow for the assessment of progress, identification of emerging challenges, and timely adjustments to strategies in response to shifting global dynamics. This evaluative process promotes evidence-based decision-making, strengthens accountability, and ensures that resources and diplomatic efforts are optimally allocated. By continuously monitoring outcomes, the EU can refine its approaches, reinforce coherent policies across institutions and member states, and sustain the long-term effectiveness and credibility of its Strategic Partnerships.

### **Collective Summits**

The rationale for conducting regular bi-annual summits in Brussels to gather Strategic Partners is to provide a structured forum for assessing progress, reinforcing coordination, and ensuring alignment with broader EU strategic objectives, including the EU's approach to United Nations Security Council reform. These summits allow partners to collectively review achievements, identify challenges, and recalibrate joint initiatives, fostering coherence, mutual accountability, and a shared vision for global governance. By institutionalizing such high-level exchanges, the EU can strengthen its diplomatic influence, enhance policy coherence, and demonstrate leadership in promoting multilateral solutions to complex international issues.

These policy recommendations are designed to fortify the European Union's governance of its Strategic Partnerships, equipping it to navigate the intricate and often turbulent currents of contemporary international relations with prudence, coherence, and strategic foresight. By fostering transparency, accountability, and inclusivity, the EU can not only safeguard its interests but also exemplify

principled leadership, promoting stability, cooperation, and a rules-based international order. In doing so, these measures reaffirm the Union's commitment to upholding democratic values, advancing equitable engagement among partners, and exercising influence responsibly in service of the common good.

### **Strengthening the EU's Unified WTO Trade and Investment Profile**

A coherent and authoritative EU trade and investment profile within the WTO framework is essential for reinforcing the Union's legal, institutional, and strategic standing. Under the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the European Commission exercises exclusive competence over the Common Commercial Policy, encompassing trade in goods and services, foreign direct investment (FDI), and trade agreements. Accordingly, the EU—rather than its Member States—is the recognized WTO member for matters falling under this competence. It is therefore imperative that a single, unified EU profile is published and maintained, ensuring legal clarity and avoiding the confusion that might arise from parallel national publications.

In order to increase the profile's utility and legitimacy, its content must be substantially enriched. While the current version provides a useful overview, it lacks the granularity needed to support effective monitoring, negotiation, and analysis. Deeper integration of FDI and balance of payments data would significantly enhance the profile's analytical value. This should include a breakdown of FDI flows by partner country and economic sector, a detailed presentation of relevant BoP statistics—particularly those related to trade in services and investment income—as well as comprehensive information on the EU's FDI screening mechanisms and strategic autonomy policies.

An expanded EU profile should also systematically include major policy instruments and trade measures. This encompasses trends in tariffs and non-tariff measures at the EU level, records of trade remedies such as anti-dumping cases, and regulatory frameworks governing digital trade and sustainability initiatives, including the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) and the Deforestation Regulation. These instruments reflect the evolving priorities of EU trade policy and are central to current debates at the WTO.

To provide context and ensure policy coherence, the trade profile should be explicitly linked to the EU's broader strategic agenda. References to the Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) chapter, the Digital Trade Strategy, the Global Gateway investment framework, and preferential engagement with least developed countries (LDCs) through schemes such as GSP+ would situate trade and investment data within a wider policy narrative. In doing so, the EU would contribute to a clearer understanding of how its trade strategy intersects with

development, digitalization, and climate policy. While enhancing the granularity of the profile, care must be taken not to revert to fragmentation by Member State. Instead of publishing separate national profiles, the Commission and WTO Secretariat should prioritize data disaggregation along functional and regional lines. For example, including regional clusters within the EU—such as Central and Eastern Europe, the Nordics, or the Mediterranean—alongside sector-specific insights on areas like pharmaceuticals, automotive manufacturing, agri-food, and digital services, would preserve internal diversity without undermining the EU's unified external representation. Similarly, identifying major trading partners and assessing the EU's exposure to geostrategic risks—such as those posed by dependencies on China, the United States, or Russia—would enhance the geopolitical relevance of the profile.

The broader implications for WTO reform are significant. A strengthened EU trade profile would reinforce transparency by providing detailed, centralized data from the world's largest trading bloc. It would also support institutional coherence, reflecting the actual legal and political reality that the EU acts as a single voice within the WTO. For developing countries, an enhanced profile would improve access to critical information on EU trade measures, thus supporting greater inclusivity. Moreover, by improving the quality and precision of information available, the profile would facilitate more accurate WTO dispute settlement procedures, trade policy reviews, and early warning mechanisms.

Publishing national profiles at the WTO level would run counter to these objectives. Doing so would create confusion among stakeholders about who speaks for Europe in trade matters, potentially undermining the EU's efforts to maintain a unified external voice under the banner of open strategic autonomy. It would also raise the risk of inconsistent statistics and conflicting narratives, which could be exploited in negotiation or litigation settings.

Ultimately, the EU should commit to strengthening, not splitting, its WTO trade and investment profile. By enhancing its depth, scope, and analytical clarity—without sacrificing its institutional unity—the EU can better represent its interests, uphold its legal obligations, and support a more transparent and effective multilateral trading system.

The EU supports comprehensive WTO reform as a central pillar of its broader trade and foreign policy agenda, viewing it as essential to maintaining an effective, credible, and rules-based multilateral trading system. In the EU's perspective, reform is not only necessary to address systemic challenges such as rising protectionism and

unfair trade practices, but also to modernize the WTO's institutional structures and legal frameworks in line with 21st-century realities. A key priority is the restoration of a fully functioning dispute settlement system, including a reformed and depoliticized Appellate Body that can deliver timely and legally sound rulings. Without this mechanism, the WTO loses much of its authority and legitimacy.

The EU also seeks to update WTO rules to better reflect the digitalization of trade and the growing importance of services, as well as to impose stronger disciplines on industrial subsidies and state-owned enterprises, particularly where such distortions threaten fair competition. Transparency and effective monitoring are equally critical: all members should be held accountable for trade-related notifications and obligations. In this spirit, the EU promotes the use of plurilateral negotiations, such as the Joint Statement Initiatives, as a pragmatic way to move forward on key issues when consensus among all members is not feasible.

At the same time, the EU wants to see sustainability, climate action, and labor rights better integrated into the WTO framework. It argues for a more nuanced approach to Special and Differential Treatment, based not on self-designated development status but on concrete economic indicators. The EU also emphasizes the need for stronger cooperation between the WTO and other international bodies, such as the ILO and UNFCCC, in order to address interconnected global challenges.

Beyond structural reform, the EU believes the WTO Secretariat should be empowered with greater analytical capacity and technical support functions, improving both oversight and assistance to developing members. The pandemic and subsequent geopolitical tensions have exposed the need for clearer rules on export restrictions and for bolstering supply chain resilience, areas the EU sees as ripe for collective action under WTO guidance. Overall, the EU envisions a reformed WTO that supports open trade while enabling green transition, digital innovation, and inclusive development.

However, while a strengthened WTO profile would lend the EU greater weight in defending and shaping global trade norms, it would not absolve the Union from the strategic necessity of alliance-building. Effective leadership in a contested multilateral system requires not only strong institutions but also strong coalitions. The EU cannot assume that its normative positions will gain traction automatically; it must invest in diplomacy and strategic alignment.

To be effective and efficient in alliance-making, the EU should adopt a flexible, layered strategy. First, it must reinforce transatlantic coordination with like-minded partners such as the United States, Canada, Japan, and Australia to shape core WTO reforms. This alignment is essential for pushing forward

rules on subsidies, dispute settlement, and digital trade. Second, the EU must deepen engagement with emerging economies, particularly within the SP10, through differentiated dialogue that acknowledges their development concerns while seeking shared objectives. Engagement with India, Brazil, South Africa, and Indonesia will be crucial to achieving inclusive reform and avoiding North-South polarization.

Third, the EU should lead coalitions of middle powers on thematic issues—such as climate-trade linkages, gender and trade, or digital governance—where convergence exists. These issue-based coalitions can act as reform incubators, building consensus gradually. Lastly, the EU must strengthen its presence in informal forums and regional groupings that feed into WTO dynamics, using its economic and regulatory influence to foster support for rules-based multilateralism.

In sum, while WTO reform is essential to bolster the EU's global standing, this institutional focus must be matched by an agile, inclusive, and proactive alliance strategy. Only through such a dual approach can the EU shape a fairer, more resilient, and more strategic multilateral trade order.

The EU's Strategic Partnerships (SP), especially the SP10 framework, play a crucial role in both advancing WTO reform and shaping the EU's alliance strategy within the multilateral trade system. These partnerships serve as key diplomatic and economic platforms through which the EU can coordinate positions, build trust, and pursue shared interests with some of the world's most influential and emerging economies.

Within the WTO reform agenda, the SP10 countries—such as the United States, Canada, Japan, India, Brazil, South Africa, Mexico, China, South Korea, and Russia—represent a mix of advanced and emerging economies that are central actors in global trade governance. By leveraging these strategic partnerships, the EU can engage in more targeted, bilateral and plurilateral dialogues that help build consensus around critical reform areas such as dispute settlement, subsidy rules, digital trade, and sustainability. The SP10 thus provide both a sounding board and a coalition-building opportunity, allowing the EU to test reform proposals, negotiate compromises, and mobilize support from influential players with diverse perspectives.

Moreover, these partnerships help bridge the gap between the EU's normative ambitions and the pragmatic interests of its global counterparts. Since the SP10 countries differ significantly in their economic models, political priorities, and levels of development, the EU's engagement with them under the SP framework allows for differentiated approaches tailored to each partner's context. This

flexibility is vital for advancing WTO reforms in a complex, multipolar environment where a one-size-fits-all strategy is unlikely to succeed.

In terms of alliance-making, the SP10 form a foundational network for the EU's layered coalition-building strategy. The EU can strengthen transatlantic coordination by deepening ties with partners like the United States and Canada while simultaneously expanding outreach to emerging powers within the SP10. These partnerships enable the EU to lead thematic coalitions on specific WTO issues, drawing on the comparative strengths and interests of its strategic partners. For example, cooperation with Japan and South Korea can advance digital trade rules, while partnerships with Brazil, India, and South Africa can foster inclusive development frameworks and environmental sustainability commitments.

Ultimately, the SP framework is not just about bilateral relations but about creating a cohesive and practical architecture through which the EU can amplify its voice and influence in global politics in accordance with the mandate handed down by the Treaties, something the EEAS has neglected to fully exploit. By institutionalizing dialogue and cooperation with these key partners, the EU can overcome some of the internal and external fragmentation that has historically limited its international leadership. The SP10 thus constitute both a strategic resource and a necessary platform for the EU to navigate the challenges of WTO reform and to secure a stronger, more united position in global trade governance.

## RENOVI

This has to be compared to the legally bound exclusive and shared competencies of the EU

Commission and the fact that the UVL Commission has as its flagship issue The European Green Deal. Why does the EU Commission call itself a geopolitical commission? Is Ursula playing Paris appealing to France's vain thirst for power? Or is she maneuvering to produce a policy space to move Europe forward? If the policy context is the latter, why has nothing happened with an impact on the ground regarding a stronger Europe and an economy that works for all? Or is the cause – to coin Wittgenstein – instead a result of confusion through everyday language leading to the bewitchment of our understanding through language? If you ask these questions, they are easy to answer. To make peace using geopolitical concepts is impossible; by impossible, I mean currently beyond the EU's military capabilities. I recommend the following. First, I want the European Union to adopt a more strategic and practical approach to geo-economics as it is the most outstanding economy in the world. Second, an integrated geo-economic approach desires more: it is like a fire, which kindles European capitalism with its own goals and values but

is still to be defined and enacted. Third, it follows that the EU must keep geo-economics and geopolitics separate and address conflicts of a geopolitical nature much more effectively in regions other than Europe, such as the Middle East and Asia. Fourth, the EU Commission should prioritize the development of relationships with the leaders and administrative systems of the EU's ten strategic partners, far from all impressed by the EU's diplomatic performance. Fifth, the European Union must connect the development of the quality of relationships among leaders with better management of its Strategic Partnership.

On this basis, the EU could launch a multilateral policy review of its Strategic Partnerships. The progress reports on the EU's Strategic Partnerships hatched during Lady Ashton's tenureship could form the departure point for a comparative study of the EU's Strategic Partnerships and the resumption of the EU-SP summits in terms of a multilateral policy review. By multilateral, I am thinking of, in general, CELAC and ASEM and, in particular, about an EU-11 bi-annual meeting at the appropriate level. This should provide the conditions for an EU-led international society, a second-best option implemented with delay to the new type of great power politics expounded by China, and so much more should the EU Strategy to reform the UNSC fail ( Jianhang & Breslin, 2016). The Middle East should be allowed to establish a Middle Eastern international society (Ilcus, 2015).

## International Society

Comparing the EU-led international society with the international society depicted in Westbrook and Cohens' *Amarna Diplomacy The Beginnings of International Relations* highlights fundamental differences in how diplomacy and international order are constructed and maintained. The EU-led international society is characterized by formal institutions, codified rules, and multilateral diplomacy rooted in principles such as sovereignty, rule of law, human rights, and collective decision-making. It relies heavily on written treaties, legal agreements, and bureaucratic processes that aim to regulate state behavior within a predictable, rules-based framework. Diplomacy here is professionalized and institutionalized, emphasizing transparency, consensus-building, and long-term cooperation.

In contrast, the international society reflected in the Amarna correspondence represents an early, regionally embedded form of diplomacy centered around personal relationships, symbolic exchanges, and flexible, informal agreements. As Westbrook and Coghens describe, this ancient Middle Eastern diplomacy operated through a ladder of diplomatic practices ranging from gift-giving and correspondence between rulers to negotiated alliances

and verbal promises, rather than binding written treaties enforced by institutions. Status, honor, and mutual recognition played a critical role, and the legitimacy of agreements depended largely on ongoing relationships and power dynamics rather than codified law.

Where the EU's international society is anchored in universal norms and institutional continuity, the Amarna international society is rooted in context-specific customs, shifting alliances, and pragmatic negotiations tailored to the fluid balance of power among city-states and kingdoms. The former aims for stability through rules and legal mechanisms; the latter maintains order through ritual, reciprocity, and personal diplomacy.

This comparison shows that while the EU-led international society reflects the evolution toward a global, rule-based order, the Amarna diplomacy illustrates how early international societies functioned through **flexible, interpersonal methods** suited to their historical and cultural contexts. Understanding this difference is crucial for appreciating how diplomatic practices and concepts of international order vary across time and regions.

Approaching the EU-led international society and the Middle Eastern-style international society (like the one reflected in Amarna diplomacy) gently means recognizing and respecting their distinct diplomatic cultures and practices rather than trying to impose one model onto the other. It requires dialogue built on mutual understanding, patience, and flexibility.

To bridge these societies, the EU and Middle Eastern partners could start by acknowledging the value of informal, symbolic, and relationship-based diplomacy common in the Middle East, while also gradually introducing more formalized mechanisms that reflect the EU's emphasis on rules and institutions. This means not rushing toward strict legalistic frameworks but instead fostering trust through repeated interactions, culturally sensitive diplomacy, and pragmatic cooperation on shared interests like trade, security, and development. Over time, such engagement can build a hybrid model blending stability and flexibility—combining institutional strength with personal diplomacy.

The D-8 is essentially an intermediary, pragmatic tool designed to sideline Cairo's political Islam ambitions and contain the region's instability. It's less about creating a fully integrated, powerful regional bloc and more about "shaking the ground" and putting contentious political Islam **issues on ice** for the time being. The idea is to manage economic cooperation and regional ties in a way that keeps these sensitive political forces at bay, preventing them from dominating the agenda.

Until Egypt stabilizes its domestic politics and Libya achieves unification and peace, D-8 serves as a temporary platform—a

holding pattern rather than a game-changer—to maintain some regional connectivity without rocking the boat too much. It's about managing tensions and delaying deep political reckoning, not about immediately transforming the Middle Eastern international order.

So, is D-8 *the real thing* in terms of being a true regional international society or counterbalance? It is a meaningful step but still evolving. Its success depends on whether it can build stronger institutional coherence, political will, and effective mechanisms for cooperation that respect the region's diplomatic realities while gradually adopting elements of formalized governance.

In short, gentle engagement between different international societies requires patience, respect for different diplomatic traditions, and building pragmatic, interest-based cooperation. Regional organizations like the D-8 can play a role but are not yet fully matured as comprehensive alternatives to EU-style international societies.

In short, D-8 is a stopgap mechanism: useful for keeping the status quo, but far from a fully-fledged alternative to established regional or global international societies. Or in the words of Helmut Kohl: Bypasses are sometimes throughpasses.

## PERSPECTIVE

The EU's Strategic Partnerships are more than formal alliances—they are levers, fulcrums, and compasses guiding the Union through turbulent geopolitical waters. This matters for security and economics and diplomacy and culture. Can dialogue alone carry the weight of influence, or must these partnerships become engines of tangible, coordinated action? Without operational follow-through, alignment is a shadow, not a force.

Fragmentation and divergent interests within the EU are not merely obstacles—they are mirrors reflecting the paradox of collective action: the stronger the internal diversity, the greater the potential for adaptive strength. How can the Union reconcile national sovereignty with shared responsibility, and yet remain credible externally? The question is not rhetorical alone; it is central to the EU's strategic identity.

Inclusive engagement is indispensable: governments and civil society and private actors must act in concert. Polysyndeton emphasizes the interdependence of these layers. Cooperation is not optional; it is the sinews that bind global initiatives to effectiveness. Without it, policy becomes a monologue; with it, a symphony.

One-size-fits-all strategies falter in a world of rapid change. The EU must pivot, recalibrate, and tailor its engagement to each geopolitical context. Think of it as sailing: winds shift, tides rise, and the skilled navigator adjusts the sails, not the destination. Can rigid structures survive in such seas, or only flexible, responsive ones?

Principles are only as strong as their enactment. Transparency and accountability are the glue that transforms rhetoric into legitimacy. Elliptical phrasing captures the urgency: Declare, yes—but act; announce, yes—but implement; promise, yes—but deliver. Without these, influence evaporates into words.

Civil society and economic strategy are not peripheral—they are intertwined. Public engagement informs legitimacy; economic leverage shapes outcomes. This matters for resilience and for reputation and for relevance. Analogously, think of governance as an ecosystem: policy, people, and economy interact like roots, soil, and water—neglect one, and the system falters. How can the EU optimize this complex interconnection to remain both credible and effective?

Having said that geoeconomics and geopolitics are two different approaches to understanding international relations. Geoeconomics refers to the use of economic power to achieve strategic international goals. It is concerned with how economic factors shape the behavior of states and other actors in the global system. On the other hand, geopolitics is concerned with how geography and territory shape the behavior of states and other actors in the international system. It emphasizes the importance of physical space, natural resources, and strategic locations. There is debate about whether geoeconomic or geopolitical conflicts characterize the present world. Some scholars argue that we are witnessing a shift from geopolitics to geoeconomics as a primary force in international relations. Others say that geopolitics remains as crucial as ever or conjugate the West's perceived decline in power in geopolitical terms to cloak their home nation's insatiable thirst for power (Chaliand, 2022). The implications for the prospect of peace and war depend on whether a geoeconomic or geopolitical stand has been adopted. Those who emphasize geoeconomics argue that economic interdependence can reduce the likelihood of conflict between states. They believed that conditions are more likely to lead to cooperation when they share economic interests. Those who emphasize geopolitics argue that competition over resources and strategic locations will continue to drive state conflicts. Kissinger, Huntington, Brzezinski, and Boniface were geopoliticians. This geoeconomic school is represented in the works of Parag Khanna, Zhang Xiaotong, Robert Kaplan, Edward Luttwak, and Robert Blackwill. Glenn Diesen, Milan Babic, and Adam Dixon are in the EU.

Examples of geoeconomic conflicts include trade wars, resource conflicts, sanctions, and cybersecurity. Examples of

geopolitical conflict include territorial disputes, civil wars, proxy wars, and nuclear proliferation. Geoeconomic conflicts can lead to trade wars or: economic sanctions, negatively affecting global economic growth. Geopolitical conflicts can lead to military or war with devastating consequences for human life and global stability. The latter are state-centric (Kurecic, 2015).

To navigate these challenges, the EU will adopt a unified framework that emphasizes collaboration and coordinated policy-making among member states. By establishing transparent mechanisms for sharing best practices, fostering dialogue on common goals, and investing in joint sustainability projects, the EU can create a cohesive strategy that not only addresses individual member states' interests but also enhances overall collective impact. The commitment to transparency will also build trust and goodwill among stakeholders, facilitating smoother collaboration. Consequently, the EU will initiate a series of actionable steps, including the development of a comprehensive action plan that outlines specific objectives, timelines, and metrics for success. This plan will be closely aligned with the upcoming European Green Deal initiatives and will empower EU institutions to promote sustainable practices across various sectors. By committing to regular progress assessments and adapting strategies based on real-time data, the EU will demonstrate its dedication to meaningful progress and accountability, thus reinforcing its position as a credible leader in global governance.

This piece has addressed how to advance the union's Strategic Partnerships to restore European independence, security, and leadership in world affairs, a duty bestowed by the TEU upon the EEAS. Accordingly, I proposed four areas of effort to put the EU's SP-ship on a steady keel toward a strategy appropriate for the Union's Strategic Partnerships. On this basis, EUCO, assisted by EEAS, could address the question: What are the Union's interests concerning Strategic Partnerships?

The European Union's interests in Strategic Partnerships are multifaceted, encompassing political, economic, security, and normative dimensions. Politically, these partnerships enable the EU to extend its influence in global decision-making forums and multilateral organizations while promoting core values such as democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. Engagement with strategic partners also allows the EU to contribute to conflict prevention, stability, and the management of regional tensions. Economically, Strategic Partnerships facilitate market access, investment opportunities, and the development of resilient trade links. They provide avenues for collaboration in advanced technologies, innovation, and industrial capacity, strengthening the EU's

competitive position and enhancing its geoeconomic leverage in a multipolar world.

From a security perspective, partnerships support the EU in addressing shared threats, including cyber attacks, terrorism, hybrid warfare, and maritime insecurity. They also foster capability development and interoperability with partner militaries, enabling coordinated responses to crises. Beyond traditional security, Strategic Partnerships advance scientific, educational, and societal objectives, promoting joint research and innovation, knowledge exchange, and people-to-people connections that build long-term trust and networks.

Normatively, these partnerships allow the EU to shape global rules and standards in areas such as climate governance, digital policy, trade, and human rights, while reinforcing multilateralism and collective action. They provide mechanisms for the Union to anticipate emerging challenges and respond effectively, positioning the EU as a credible and adaptive actor in international affairs. In sum, Strategic Partnerships serve as instruments through which the EU projects influence, advances economic and security interests, promotes values, and strengthens global governance, thereby enhancing its resilience and relevance in a complex global environment.

In a world of shifting powers and fragile alliances, the European Union's Strategic Partnerships are not mere alliances—by which I mean simple formal agreements on paper—but deliberate levers through which it transforms principle into practice, dialogue into action, and potential into enduring influence.

The European Union has a unique opportunity to enhance its global leadership by leveraging its Strategic Partnerships to promote sustainable development and economic resilience. By aligning its economic policies with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the EU can position itself as a key player in addressing pressing global challenges while fostering innovation and competitiveness among its member states. However, the EU faces significant obstacles in realizing this potential, including fragmented policy approaches among member states, varying levels of commitment to sustainability initiatives, and external geopolitical pressures that often undermine collective efforts. Additionally, the risk of misalignment between economic and environmental goals complicates the implementation of an integrated strategy. The strategic environment in which the European Union operates is complex, dynamic, and, at times, unforgiving. Economic growth and environmental sustainability do not always walk hand in hand, nor do trade imperatives, industrial competitiveness, and climate commitments align effortlessly. The risk of misalignment between economic and environmental goals is not insignificant; it is real, pressing,

and persistent. Short-term gains may overshadow long-term sustainability, immediate priorities may eclipse enduring obligations, and urgent pressures may suppress careful planning. Implementation is therefore no simple task, no straightforward process, no mere routine exercise—it demands nuanced calibration, flexible governance, and constant attention to coherence across policies and sectors.

Meanwhile, The European Council has already resolved how to engage in the future reform of the UNSC, which would be preceded by an EU Strategy on reform of the UNSC Council, the forging of which I find problematic (Ilcus, 2022). However, I encourage a careful examination of how and why reality could come closer to appearances in daily power practice, which is subtle but not without horizon and humble but not without ambition ( Dodds & Atkinson, 2000; Vedrine, 2022; Kaplan, 2023). That is all I have to say about the European Union's geopolitical destiny and the degree to which political decision-makers deceive themselves.

A coherent, credible, and consistent foreign economic strategy implies aligning the EU's trade, investment, industrial, and monetary policies with its geopolitical objectives, rather than treating them as separate domains. It requires predictable instruments of economic statecraft that support strategic partners, deter coercive behaviour by rivals, and safeguard Europe's technological and industrial base. It also demands institutional coordination, ensuring that external financial tools, development finance, market access policy, and export controls operate under a unified strategic framework. Above all, such a strategy must be long-term in vision, scalable in resources, and backed by political unity, enabling the EU to convert its vast market power into sustained geo-economic influence.

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