

**THE RESUSCITATION OF THE DEAD RELATIVE:  
GEOPOLITICAL AGENDA IN THE VON DER LEYEN  
COMMISSION'S INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
POLICY IN AFRICA**

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## **Abstract**

This study analyzes how the European Union changed its foreign actorness from a normative to a geopolitical power with the takeover of the von der Leyen Commission and what changes in the global political economy triggered them. I analyze the change from the perspective of the global political economy with a policy focus on international development cooperation in Africa during the Commissions presided by Jean-Claude Juncker (2014-2019) and Ursula von der Leyen (since 2019). In this study, I demonstrate that the previously avoided concept of geopolitics became the guiding principle of international development cooperation policies, discourse, and finance. I argue that the shift started under European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and accelerated with the von der Leyen Commission due to two major changes in the global political economy in the 2010s, namely, migration and the emergence of a multipolar world in which the EU is trying to preserve its competitive advantage.

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In May 2020, I finished my undergraduate thesis during exceptional times amidst the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. I hoped that once the health crisis would be over, we could profoundly examine the impacts of the pandemic on our global order and assess the European Union's place in that. I could not even imagine that we would shift from one crisis to another just in two years. February 24, 2022, was a game-changer in post-World War II European history when the Russian invasion of Ukraine started, causing unimaginable suffering, pain, and sorrow for millions, and triggering political, economic, and social consequences globally. My research was timely even before the war, but in the middle of global crises mutually reinforcing each other, I hope that my research can contribute to understanding those phenomena better.

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*“Europe has to develop an appetite for power.” – Josep Borrell, High Representative/Vice-President of the von der Leyen Commission (2019-2024). Munich Security Conference, 2020*

## **Introduction**

On December 4, 2019, following the first College meeting of the new European Commissioners in the Berlaymont building of the European Commission (EC), Ursula von der Leyen outlined her visions for 2019-2024 as newly elected Commission President. She emphasized a previously avoided word in her speech “geopolitics” two times.<sup>1</sup> Decision-makers at the highest levels of the European Union (EU) had tried to keep a distance from this word in the last few decades and emphasized the normative power, responsibilities, and hence actorness of the Union. As Merje Kuus puts it, “[e]ven asking questions about a geographical concept, Europe in this case, is deemed an odd activity: out-of-date and slightly suspicious, like enquiring about a dead relative who passed away in unclear circumstances. The narrative that pervades the European Quarter suggests that European integration is an anti-geopolitical project.”<sup>2</sup> And yet, this dead relative was resuscitated, and geopolitics has become the governing principle of the EU’s external relations, marking the beginning of a new era and also a new formation of the new EC: “a geopolitical Commission;” at least rhetorically.

Due to this shift towards geopolitical ambitions at the highest level of execution and policy initiation in the Union, the question arises whether the actorness of the Union has truly become geopolitical with the takeover of the von der Leyen Commission (VDL Commission) and if so, what changes in the global political economy (GPE) could trigger them? What does this mean for the concept of Normative Power Europe (NPE), inspired by Ian Manners'

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<sup>1</sup> Ursula von der Leyen, "Opening Remarks by President von der Leyen at the Read-Out of the First College Meeting of the von der Leyen Commission," European Commission, December 4, 2019, accessed Jan 31, 2022, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech\\_19\\_6660](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_19_6660).

<sup>2</sup> Merje Kuus, *Geopolitics and Expertise: Knowledge and Authority in European Diplomacy* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2014), 12.

seminal article from 2002?<sup>3</sup> Has NPE lost its relevance and the EU ceased to achieve its foreign policy objectives through normative power?

Except for a small number of existing works,<sup>4</sup> changes in the actorness of the EU under von der Leyen have not been researched, leaving a significant gap in the academic literature on European Integration and GPE. This research is timely due to the forthcoming midterm office-time of the VDL Commission in June 2022 amidst profound changes in the global political economy resulting in shifts in the global order and power relations, including but not limited to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the ongoing, devastating war in Ukraine since February 24, 2022. In addition, a new multipolar world has emerged in which the EU is one of the poles, although a determinant one, which changes the global power distribution profoundly and hence limits what the EU can and cannot do.<sup>5</sup> These changes make the present (May 2022) a delicate time and a suitable occasion to answer these questions.

As I will show, the literature on NPE still dominates the debate on the EU's actorness. However, documents, official discourse, and financial data all report on something else that makes us ascertain that the EU became geopolitical. To solve this discrepancy, I analyze three main sources of information. After reviewing the literature on NPE and geopolitics in the EU, I analyze policy documents and treaties. Then, based on discourse analysis of EU-elites, and development finance allocation analysis, I will argue, contrary to Manners, who

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<sup>3</sup> Ian Manners, "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, no. 2 (June 2002): 235-258, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00353>.

<sup>4</sup> Kamil Zwolski, "Diversified in Unity: The Agenda for the Geopolitical European Commission," *Global Affairs* 6, no. 4-5 (October 2020): 519-535, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2020.1834427>; Lili Bayer, "Meet von der Leyen's 'geopolitical Commission,'" *Politico.eu*, December 4, 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/meet-ursula-von-der-leyen-geopolitical-commission/>; Nicole Koenig, "The 'geopolitical' European Commission and its Pitfalls," (Policy Brief, Hertie School Jacques Delors Centre, 2019), [https://www.hertie-school.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Policy\\_Brief\\_Nicole\\_geopolitical\\_commission.pdf](https://www.hertie-school.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Policy_Brief_Nicole_geopolitical_commission.pdf); Mark Leonard, "The Makings of a 'geopolitical' European Commission," *European Council of Foreign Relations* (commentary), November 28, 2019, accessed April 11, 2022, [https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_the\\_makings\\_of\\_a\\_geopolitical\\_european\\_commission/](https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_the_makings_of_a_geopolitical_european_commission/).

<sup>5</sup> Karen E. Smith, "Can the European Union be a Pole in a Multipolar World?," *The International Spectator* 48, no. 2 (June 2013): 114-126, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2013.788378>.

argues that the EU is a normative power, that the EU has become a geopolitical power. The shift started under EC President Jean-Claude Juncker and took over with the VDL Commission due to two major changes in the global political economy in the 2010s, namely, migration and the emergence of a multipolar world in which the EU is trying to preserve its competitive advantage.

The research, beyond its important contribution to academic discussions, also has practical relevance. The European Union is constantly at a crossroads and is ambitiously searching for more efficient ways of (foreign-)policymaking that have always been guided by crises. Some authors, like Erik Jones, R. Daniel Kelemen, and Sophie Meunier argue from the intersection of institutionalism and neo-functionalism that European integration is facilitated by crises “through a pattern of *failing forward*.”<sup>6</sup> At a time when the Union is being challenged externally by competitors, in particular China, on the global stage, and internally by member states (MS), such as Hungary, when they block certain common external actions, it is central to understand at the policy level in what directions the EU can and should move. Therefore, by coming to terms with its foreign-policy identity, more tailored policies could be made to avoid similar prolongation to that of the post-Cotonou negotiations.<sup>7</sup> It took years to negotiate the post-Cotonou Agreement, and as of writing in May 2022, the agreement has still not been signed. It is the contention of this research that this and similar issues could be understood more profoundly if we have more explicit answers about the actorness of the Union.

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<sup>6</sup> Erik Jones, R. Daniel Kelemen, and Sophie Meunier, "Failing Forward? Crises and Patterns of European Integration," *Journal of European Public Policy* 28, no. 10 (July 2021): 1519, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2021.1954068>; emphasis in original.

<sup>7</sup> Ákos Baumgartner, "Negotiating the Post-Cotonou Agreement: Why the European Union and the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States could Not Reach an Agreement on Time," *European Policy Review* 4, no. 1 (2021): 85-103, <https://esthinktank.com/european-policy-review/volume-4/volume-4-number-1/>.



The dichotomy of NPE and geopolitical Europe has been thoroughly researched by Sarah L. Beringer, Sylvia Maier, and Markus Thiel.<sup>8</sup> They identify that both aspects of actorness play a central role in EU development policies, depending on the nature and the scope of the issue. They argue that normative power guides the EU in the field of energy, biodiversity conservation, democratization, and LGBTI<sup>9</sup> rights. Whereas geopolitics is pivotal in political and economic questions.<sup>10</sup> However, as they conclude, “norms and geopolitics are necessarily interlinked, from policy formulation to implementation, and will require great dexterity and likely some hard choices and trade-offs on the part of the EU if it wishes to maintain its role as a global leader in the promotion of normatively guided sustainable development.”<sup>11</sup> And thereby one was left without clear answers on whether the EU is normative or geopolitical and the assessed timeframe did not include the von der Leyen-era. This research fills the lacuna and shows that the shift toward becoming geopolitical took place. In doing so, I approach the question from the perspective of GPE by evaluating the international development cooperation (IDC) policies of the EU.

International political economy (IPE), alternatively named global political economy,<sup>12</sup> is the field of study within International Relations in which I analyze this discrepancy. Susan Strange, one of the founders of the discipline argues that international political economy “concerns the social, political and economic arrangements affecting the global systems of

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<sup>8</sup> Sarah L. Beringer, Sylvia Maier, and Markus Thiel, eds., *EU Development Policies: Between Norms and Geopolitics*, International Political Economy Series (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-01307-3>.

<sup>9</sup> The authors use LGBTI. LGBTIQ+ would be more appropriate and inclusive, however.

<sup>10</sup> Beringer, Maier, and Thiel, *EU Development Policies*, 197-198.

<sup>11</sup> Beringer, Maier, and Thiel, *EU Development Policies*, 198.

<sup>12</sup> International political economy (IPE) and global political economy (GPE) refer to the same discipline. According to Theodore H. Cohn, both approaches are “interdisciplinary and [draw] on contributions from political scientists, economists, sociologists, anthropologists, historians, and geographers.” However, what differs is the acknowledgement of the proliferation of non-state actors in the globalized world, even though state actors remained the most important ones. *Global Political Economy: Theory and Practice*, Theodore H. Cohn, 7th ed. (Abingdon: Taylor and Francis, 2016), 4. Therefore, given the nature of the European Union as a post-Westphalian entity, and the various non-state stakeholders which could have potential impact on the outcomes of certain policies, I refer to the approach as GPE.

production, exchange and distribution, and the mix of values reflected therein [which] are the result of human decisions taken in the context of manmade institutions and sets of self-set rules and customs.”<sup>13</sup> To shed light on the nature of European (foreign-)policy identity, only global political economy can provide a sufficiently broad theoretical framework to see the intertwined nature of politics and economics, governed by rules, institutions, but also personal ambitions.

International development cooperation is the correct angle for this research for at least four reasons. First, from an institutional perspective, IDC is among the shared competencies of the European Union, a competency exercised together with MSs, meaning that MSs can carry out their own IDC policies and projects along with EU-level ones.<sup>14</sup> This has practical implications. On the one hand, since MSs (or a group of MSs jointly) can execute their own IDC policies and projects, one can juxtapose EU-level projects with MS-level ones to assess the policy coherence and direction of the EU and that of the MSs. On the other hand, the contribution of MSs to the EU budget financed development projects provides the financial pillars of EU IDC policies. As a consequence of the institutional build-up of the decision-making architecture of the EU, focusing on IDC policies can illustrate the diverging identity and aspiration of the EU from those of the MSs.

Second, development is listed as the number four priority among the general provisions which govern the external relations of the Union.<sup>15</sup> Third, as Strange notes, “in giving aid, governments have mostly had in mind either political bargains, serving their strategic and foreign policy interests, or economic bargains, serving their export industries

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<sup>13</sup> Susan Strange, *States and Markets* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2015), 19.

<sup>14</sup> Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union art. 4. §4, October 26, 2012b, O.J. (C 326) 47 [hereinafter TFEU].

<sup>15</sup> Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union art. 21. §2(d), October 26, 2012a, O.J. (326) 13 [hereinafter TEU].

and employment objectives.”<sup>16</sup> As such, aid is never value-free or given without conditions. Even if the aim of aid is to decrease global inequalities between states or regions, it always comes at a price. Consequently, focusing on IDC and development aid can shed light on power relations between actors and the actorness of donors, in the case of this research, of the EU.

Lastly, by having normative power as the point of departure and by following the importance of development policies in the EU’s external action, this policy area is “ideal [...] to examine the effectiveness of European normative power.”<sup>17</sup> Development policies mirror power relations between actors, and by prioritizing certain issue areas in those policies, such as trade, sustainability, security, or human rights, interests and hence identities can be traced back.

Limiting the geographical and time scope of the assessment is central as the thesis fills the void by analyzing the changes happening in EU-Africa relations over the Juncker (2014-2019) and VDL (since 2019) Commissions. The focus on Africa serves at least three goals. First, the EU’s external relations, except for a brief deviation in the 1990s, have always prioritized EU-African relations due to geographical proximity and historical ties.<sup>18</sup> As Olufemi Babarinde argues, “EU-Africa relations constitute one of the EU’s most salient development initiatives.”<sup>19</sup> The imbalanced political-economic power relations between actors and colonial history raise the question of neocolonial aspirations. Second, the relations with the 55 African countries – all of which are members of the African Union (AU) – are

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<sup>16</sup> Strange, *States and Markets*, 239.

<sup>17</sup> Zsuzsa Anna Ferenczy, "Development Cooperation in Africa," in *Europe, China, and the Limits of Normative Power* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019), 141, <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781788975827>.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Holland and Mathew Doidge, *Development Policy of the European Union*, The European Union Series, 1st ed. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 59.; Hazel Smith, "The European Union and the Distant South," in *European Union Foreign Policy: What It is and What It Does* (Pluto Press, 2002), 183-223.

<sup>19</sup> Olufemi Babarinde, "New Directions in EU-Africa Development Initiatives," in *EU Development Policies: Between Norms and Geopolitics*, International Political Economy Series, eds. Sarah L. Beringer, Sylvia Maier, and Markus Thiel (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2019), 111, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-01307-3\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-01307-3_7).

governed under two distinct partnership policy frameworks. External relations, which include IDC policies with the majority of the countries, are governed under the (post-)Cotonou Agreement, whereas North-African countries have signed the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) with the EU, providing different policies and hence different scope and aims for partnership. In addition, as I will show, this division also reflects the differentiated geographical ambitions of the EU in emerging contexts which can be traced back to the identity changes of the EU.

This thesis is structured as follows. Section 1 reviews the literature on Normative Power Europe and geopolitics and their connections to the global political economy. Section 2 presents the methodologies used. In Section 3, I outline the brief history of the relations between the EU and Africa. Section 4 examines the policies of EU-African relations, governed by the (post-)Cotonou Agreement. The section will show that policies still give a normative foundation to EU foreign actorness, although we can see changes both in the language and in the structure of newer policies pointing to the shift towards a more geopolitical EU. Then Section 5 focuses on the discourse of the EU-African relations and demonstrates that there is an increased tendency in discourse to call for and identify the EU as more geopolitical. Section 6 presents the findings from development finance allocations and shows that the EU has been acting geopolitically, even if it claims not to be doing so. In Section 7, I discuss the findings. The last section concludes.

# 1. Normative Power Europe and Geopolitics: A Literature Review

Despite the lack of a clear-cut and immediate response to the question of what the EU is,<sup>20</sup> scholars of European integration have tried to locate the actorness of the EU. The literature on the normative actorness of the EU, as Manners highlights, originates in the work of François Duchêne, who argues that the EU – or its respective predecessors – was a civilian power, juxtaposing the EU with the military powers of the Cold War.<sup>21</sup> Following his argument, Manners claims that the Union's international actorness and identity are normative, which empowers the EU to be NPE.<sup>22</sup> NPE refers to the “ability to shape conceptions of ‘normal’ in international relations.”<sup>23</sup> He identifies five “core norms,” namely peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law, and human rights, rooted in the *acquis communautaire*.

These core norms are accompanied by four “minor norms,” which are social solidarity, anti-discrimination, sustainable development, and good governance. These norms, as Manners argues, are diffused through contagion, informational diffusion, procedural diffusion, transference, overt diffusion, and cultural filter. Thus, he claims, “the international role of the EU is not what it does or what it says.”<sup>24</sup> However, as Manners states, the EU is a changer of norms that can and should act accordingly on the international stage.<sup>25</sup> Wolfgang Wagner developed further the concept of NPE and calls the EU a Liberal Power. He keeps the fundamentals of NPE. However, by identifying the EU as a Liberal Power, Wagner tries to overcome the limits of NPE, namely the constraints and politics in EU external actions and

<sup>20</sup> Pål Røren, "On the Social Status of the European Union," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 58, no. 3 (May 2020): 706-722, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12962>.

<sup>21</sup> Manners, "Normative Power Europe," 238.

<sup>22</sup> Manners, "Normative Power Europe," 235-258.

<sup>23</sup> Manners, "Normative Power Europe," 239.

<sup>24</sup> Manners, "Normative Power Europe," 252.

<sup>25</sup> Manners, "Normative Power Europe," 252.

the missing dialogue between EU studies and foreign policy analysis.<sup>26</sup> However, Wagner does not question the origins of the concept of NPE, nor the “*mission civilisatrice*” connotation that it has.

NPE is contested as it sheds light on the ontological contradictions that the notion has. From a moral economic approach, Mark Langan argues that “Europe’s normative policy frameworks regularly work to rationalise regressive external agendas.”<sup>27</sup> From his point of view, NPE is lip service to achieve strategic commercial and geopolitical interests. Postcolonial and neo-colonial patterns, furthermore, paternalism and paternalistic behavior of the EU through NPE are also often criticized.<sup>28</sup> Ueli Staeger, by examining EU-African relations, claims that NPE is Eurocentric and inherently postcolonial. He notes that NPE is a neo-colonial episteme that prescribes how the EU *should* act and as such it erodes the African agency. He claims that the institutional similarities between the AU and the EU, forced regionalism and a “false claim of universality [of values]” hinder decolonial Pan-Africanism.<sup>29</sup>

Norm diffusion is also criticized through NPE as the literature assumes “a European exceptionalism, while [denying] others the capability to define, launch and consolidate normative frameworks on their own.”<sup>30</sup> Henrik Larsen questions the validity of the postcolonial critique of NPE, mostly due to a number of non-European institutions or legal

<sup>26</sup> Wolfgang Wagner, “Liberal Power Europe,” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 55, no. 6 (November 2017): 1404, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12572>.

<sup>27</sup> Mark Langan, “Normative Power Europe and the Moral Economy of Africa-EU Ties: A Conceptual Reorientation of ‘Normative Power’,” *New Political Economy* 17, no. 3 (May 2012): 244, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2011.562975>.

<sup>28</sup> Langan, “Normative Power Europe and the Moral Economy of Africa-EU Ties,” 243-270.; Ueli Staeger, “Africa-EU Relations and Normative Power Europe: A Decolonial Pan-African Critique,” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 54, no. 4 (July 2016): 981-998, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12350>; Ondřej Horký-Hluchán and Petr Kratochvíl, “‘Nothing is Imposed in this Policy!’: The Construction and Constriction of the European Neighbourhood,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 39, no. 4 (November 2014): 252-270, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24569468>.

<sup>29</sup> Staeger, “Africa-EU Relations and Normative Power Europe,” 981.

<sup>30</sup> Annika Björkdahl and Ole Elgström, “The EPA-Negotiations: A Channel for Norm Export and Import?,” in *Importing EU Norms: Conceptual Framework and Empirical Findings*, eds. Annika Björkdahl et al. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 134, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-13740-7\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-13740-7_9).

charters which demonstrate that the EU is not always attractive as a source of norms. However, from the perspective of actorness, he criticizes that NPE literature hardly captures how other actors perceive the Union. He points out that “the EU may be a normative power in some geographical or functional contexts and not in others.”<sup>31</sup> Larsen’s point is quintessential, namely, the EU cannot act in the same manner in all regions, spatiality plays a role in its capacities and aspirations. Noting this, the literature review now turns to the geopolitical literature and the geopolitical turn in European studies and beyond.

### ***Geopolitics: The Resuscitation of the Dead Relative***

The previously avoided concept of geopolitics has returned, even in the NPE literature. Michelle Pace claims that the EU has created NPE to regulate societies around it and thus secure itself. She states that “the NPEU logic adopted here is that a more peaceful periphery means a more secure Europe.”<sup>32</sup> The return of geopolitics to European discourse, decision- and policymaking, and strategy is a fundamental change from the discourse of the 2000s. Geopolitics was seen, and to some extent is still considered a pariah concept. Something which both academia, except for some loud advocates of realism, and EU policy circles had tried to avoid. Kuus, cited above, perfectly characterized the EU’s attitude in regard to geopolitics, calling it “the dead relative.” She continues by stating that “[a]s a political subject, Europe has prevailed over geopolitical power games among states and their alliances.”<sup>33</sup> And yet, what we can see is not just that the “dead relative” has been resuscitated but in having done so it is taking dominance over geopolitical discourse and

<sup>31</sup> Henrik Larsen, "The EU as a Normative Power and the Research on External Perceptions: The Missing Link," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 52, no. 4 (July 2014): 899, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12109>.

<sup>32</sup> Michelle Pace, "The Construction of EU Normative Power," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 45, no. 5 (December 2007): 1046, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2007.00759.x>. Pace applies the term “Normative Power of the European Union” (NPEU). However, it is the same as NPE from the perspective of this research.

<sup>33</sup> Kuus, *Geopolitics and Expertise*, 13.

decision making. Nevertheless, to understand the changes in the EU's actorness we shall shed light on why this resuscitation has happened and since when this process has been going.

Understanding geopolitics begins with understanding how geopolitics fits into the political framework of the European Union. Spatiality and politics are interwoven. Although European and EU borders might be “fuzzy,”<sup>34</sup> space creates politics just like politics and policies create spaces. They are intertwined and inseparable.<sup>35</sup> The very notion of the European Union is a spatial project as Cristian Nitoiu and Monika Sus note.<sup>36</sup> Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) states, “[a]ny European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union.”<sup>37</sup> Thereby the TEU, guided by space and spatiality, immediately creates a European space for high politics and space for geopolitical development in its external relations.

The origins of geopolitics, as an explanatory framework for politics, date back to the turn of the century, when Halford Mackinder stated that “the great power that controlled the heartland of Eurasia would command ‘the World-Island’ and thus the world itself.”<sup>38</sup> However, as we shall see, geopolitics has broken off from these roots and has now a distinguished place in understanding contemporary foreign actorness. Stefano Guzzini demonstrates how the concept of neoclassical geopolitics returned to Europe. The above-

<sup>34</sup> Jan Zielonka, “The International System in Europe: Westphalian Anarchy or Medieval Chaos?,” *Journal of European Integration* 35, no. 1 (July 2012): 1-18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2011.652626>.

<sup>35</sup> Stefano Guzzini, ed., *The Return of Geopolitics in Europe?: Social Mechanisms and Foreign Policy Identity Crises*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 13, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139225809>; Rebin Fard, “Towards a New Concept of Constructivist Geopolitics: Bridging Classical and Critical Geopolitics,” *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies* 15, no. 1 (March 2021): 26-57, <https://doi.org/10.51870/CEJISS.A150102>.

<sup>36</sup> Cristian Nitoiu and Monika Sus, “Introduction: The Rise of Geopolitics in the EU's Approach in its Eastern Neighbourhood,” *Geopolitics* 24, no. 1 (January 2019): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2019.1544396>.

<sup>37</sup> TEU art. 49.

<sup>38</sup> Halford John Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: a Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1919), 186, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t4dn4ng2s>, quoted in G. John Ikenberry, “The Illusion of Geopolitics: The Enduring Power of the Liberal Order,” *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 3 (May/June 2014), 81, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24483408>.



mentioned avoidance of the concept of geopolitics can be comprehended, in Guzzini's words, as not innocent.<sup>39</sup> It has connotations of the German *Geopolitik*, and thus of Social Darwinism.<sup>40</sup> Rebin Fard states "geopolitics was taboo after the Second World War because of its impact on Nazi politics."<sup>41</sup> James Rogers connects the process of globalization and geopolitics. He notes that "internationalism, openness and globalization had become fashionable, while considerations of geography, power and political interest were seen as archaic, even *immoral*."<sup>42</sup> Materialism and scarcity of resources also add a further aspect to realizing why geopolitics have acquired new foundations nowadays.<sup>43</sup> But what is geopolitics exactly? Who is the dead relative?

Here, Guzzini's definition of neoclassical geopolitics gives us guidance to understand what geopolitics is and how it fits into the European and EU context. He defines geopolitics as<sup>44</sup>

a policy-oriented analysis, generally conservative and with nationalist overtones, that gives explanatory primacy, but not exclusivity, to certain physical and human geographic factors [...], and gives precedence to a strategic view, realism with a military and nationalist gaze, for analysing the 'objective necessities' within which states compete for power and rank.

Beyond neoclassical geopolitics, the theory of constructivist geopolitics will be quintessential in discussing whether the EU became a geopolitical actor and, if yes, what factors could lead to this change in its actorness? Constructivist geopolitics sees structure-agent relationality as a process in which the structure influences the actor. However, actors' interactions among themselves have an impact on the structure.<sup>45</sup> In addition, deconstructing view on geopolitics

<sup>39</sup> Guzzini, *The Return of Geopolitics in Europe?*, 40.

<sup>40</sup> Guzzini, *The Return of Geopolitics in Europe?*, 26.

<sup>41</sup> Fard, "Towards a New Concept of Constructivist Geopolitics," 34.

<sup>42</sup> James Rogers, "A New Geography of European Power?" in *The Routledge Handbook of European Security*, eds. Sven Biscop and Richard Whitman (Routledge, 2012), 214, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203098417>; emphasis added.

<sup>43</sup> Guzzini, *The Return of Geopolitics in Europe?*, 43.

<sup>44</sup> Guzzini, *The Return of Geopolitics in Europe?*, 43.

<sup>45</sup> Fard, "Towards a New Concept of Constructivist Geopolitics," 37.

is visible how language and discourse construct spatiality.<sup>46</sup> This perspective will be central in understanding why the geopolitical rhetoric of the von der Leyen Commission geopoliticizes IDC. In my research, I am grounded on a thin-constructivist approach in which I analyze actors whose statements and decisions are geopolitical.

In the global political economy, the practice of geopolitics cannot be grasped without the notion of geoeconomics. When one addresses the question of geopolitics, they shall not bypass the tectonic changes that the global economy and the consequent power relations have witnessed in the last decades. The world has become multipolar with the emergence of rising powers. In light of the ongoing war in Ukraine, contrary to what John Ikenberry states when he claims that “[a]cross a wide range of issues, China and Russia are acting more like established great powers than revisionist ones,”<sup>47</sup> we can state that the Liberal International Order no longer determines global economic and political relations. Geoeconomics, as Victor Ferguson, Anthea Roberts, and Henrique Choer Moraes put it, is the post-Liberal International Order paradigm in economics that “[describes] macro level change in the relationship between economics and security.”<sup>48</sup> In the Geoeconomic Order, actors consider relative gains as more valuable than absolute gains and the security goals of the actor can even tend to “weaponize interdependence” to gain relative gains over asymmetric competitors.<sup>49</sup>

The multipolarization of the global arena and the emergence of the Geopolitical Order have invoked a revived focus on geopolitics in the literature of European Studies. The lack of strategic geopolitical thinking in the West and the in European policymaking has been criticized by Rogers. He notes that “over the past two decades, non-European countries –

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<sup>46</sup> Fard, "Towards a New Concept of Constructivist Geopolitics," 46.

<sup>47</sup> Ikenberry, "The Illusion of Geopolitics," 89.

<sup>48</sup> Victor Ferguson, Anthea Roberts, and Henrique Choer Moraes, "Toward a Geoeconomic Order in International Trade and Investment," *Journal of International Economic Law* 22, no. 4 (December 2019): 657, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jiel/jgz036>.

<sup>49</sup> Ferguson, Roberts, and Choer Moraes, "Toward a Geoeconomic Order," 660.

such as China, Russia, India, South Korea and Brazil – have been busily crafting sophisticated and entwined domestic and foreign geostrategies.”<sup>50</sup> In the volatile geopolitical security environment of and around the EU, development policies were also securitized. Wil Hout points out that the EU has been emphasizing the threat of state fragility since the 2003 European Security Strategy whereby development aid and humanitarian assistance, among others, were put into the vanguard of possible ways of containing root causes of threats leading to state failure.<sup>51</sup>

Partially due to this volatile security environment, partially because of the tectonic changes in the global political economy, the EU has changed its approach toward its neighborhood and its trade policies. Authors like Nitoiu and Sus claim that the EU pursues now a “soft version of geopolitics” akin to its other “hybrid-style” policies.<sup>52</sup> When it comes to the enlargement of the European Union, which is also based on the geopolitical spatiality of the EU’s identity, as I noted above, geopolitics also proves to be influential.<sup>53</sup> Similarly to enlargement, trade can also not be separated from external actions and IDC policies of the EU in the global political economy. Therefore, it is central, as Jan Orbie claims, that the EU’s trade policies have become more assertive and geopolitical – and thereby “muscular” – which although perhaps balances rising powers, in particular China, threatens the concept of trade justice.<sup>54</sup>

The EU, as outlined above, was a non-geopolitical project. Its *raison d'être* was to be the antidote to what *Geopolitik* had caused on the European continent and beyond. However,

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<sup>50</sup> Rogers, "A New Geography of European Power?," 215.

<sup>51</sup> Wil Hout, "Between Development and Security: The European Union, Governance and Fragile States," *Third World Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (February 2010): 145, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590903557462>.

<sup>52</sup> Nitoiu and Sus, "Introduction: The Rise of Geopolitics in the EU's Approach in its Eastern Neighbourhood," 5.

<sup>53</sup> Milenko Petrovic and Nikolaos Tzifakis, "A Geopolitical Turn to EU Enlargement, or another Postponement? an Introduction," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 29, no. 2 (February 2021): 160, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2021.1891028>.

<sup>54</sup> Jan Orbie, "EU Trade Policy Meets Geopolitics: What about Trade Justice?," *European Foreign Affairs Review* (2021): 197-202, <http://www.kluwerlawonline.com/api/Product/CitationPDFURL?file=Journals\EERR\EERR2021015.pdf>.

as the structure has changed, so has the Union had to do. Before I turn to analyzing this discrepancy empirically, the following section describes the methodologies used in this research.

## **2. Research Methodology**

I rely on three sources of information and methodologies: document analysis, discourse analysis, and financial data analysis, in particular, the allocation of official development assistance (ODA). This allows my data to be triangulated. Triangulation enhances credibility, helps avoid potential biases, and supports verifying data acquired from different sources.

Policies give the foundations of the directions of the EU's external action. Therefore, I conduct document analysis of primary sources, treaties, strategies, policies, and communiqués of the European Union. I also apply discourse analysis which is considered an important method in analyzing the EU as it is "associated with policy and institutional analysis and, thus, Europeanization research."<sup>55</sup> Thereby, discourse analysis, in particular interpretive discourse analysis, plays a prominent role in analyzing the shift from the normative identity of the EU to the geopolitical one.

Discourse is fundamental in the global political economy. Strange distinguishes four structures of power in the world economy, namely, security, production, financial, and most importantly in the realm of discourse analysis, the knowledge structure.<sup>56</sup> She argues that the knowledge structure "comprehends what is believed [...]; what is known and perceived as understood; and the channels by which beliefs, ideas and knowledge are communicated."<sup>57</sup> She further demonstrates that the knowledge structure "determines what knowledge is

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<sup>55</sup> Kennet Lynggaard, "Discursive Institutional Analytical Strategies," in *Research Design in European Studies: Establishing Causality in Europeanization*, eds. Theofanis Exadaktylos and Claudio M. Radaelli (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2012), 87, [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137005090\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137005090_5).

<sup>56</sup> Strange, *States and Markets*.

<sup>57</sup> Strange, *States and Markets*, 131.

discovered, how it is stored, and who communicates it by what means to whom and on what terms [...] power and authority are conferred on those occupying key decision-making positions in the knowledge structure.”<sup>58</sup> Focusing on the knowledge structure will allow me to grasp the intersection of discourse and GPE which will be particularly important in analyzing the changing actorness of the EU.

Discourse is a performative social phenomenon, and it constructs the world, reality, and identity of actors.<sup>59</sup> Jennifer Milliken notes that discourse analysis in International Relations can take three different forms, which are “foreign policy, International Relations theory and international diplomacy/organization.”<sup>60</sup> In this research, I shall focus on what she calls policy practices in discourse. Its relevance lies in how policies by policy elites are articulated. She notes that among policy elites, certain structures are articulated as limiting.<sup>61</sup> As we shall see, these limiting structures could restructure the EU policy elites’ discourse which can eventually lead to reshaping the identity of the Union. Discourse in European integration can be also considered as a “space of possibility”<sup>62</sup> as discourse is a strategic choice that first articulates policy ideas that leads to changes in the institutions.<sup>63</sup>

Key figures are in the position to speak on behalf of the EU; they have the authority to exercise power in the EU-knowledge structure whereby they produce a certain narrative. The most important actor in this regard is the President of the EC. Their discourse determines policy changes and sets the direction of European foreign identity. Statements and speeches of the President (currently Ursula von der Leyen) of the EC are available on the website of the EC and can be traced back to December 2019 when she took office. In addition, the

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<sup>58</sup> Strange, *States and Markets*, 134.

<sup>59</sup> Jennifer Milliken, "The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods," *European Journal of International Relations* 5, no. 2 (June 1999): 229, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066199005002003>.

<sup>60</sup> Milliken, "The Study of Discourse in International Relations," 236.

<sup>61</sup> Milliken, "The Study of Discourse in International Relations," 240.

<sup>62</sup> Lynggaard, "Discursive Institutional Analytical Strategies," 88.

<sup>63</sup> Lynggaard, "Discursive Institutional Analytical Strategies," 94.

website of the Publication Office of the European Union archives speeches of previous Commission Presidents (in this research I focus on Jean-Claude Juncker to demonstrate changes in discourse).

Finally, I pull out data from development aid records to verify my findings. Sources for this purpose are EU Aid Explorer, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) databases, and data from the European Investment Bank (EIB). Financial records will shed light on what the EU allocates funding to, which will demonstrate both the geographical and the thematic priorities of the Union. Pulling data from three sources also shows the different instruments and channels, as well as the means that the EU uses in development aid. Consequently, to answer this crucially important question of EU foreign actorness, in the next section, I shall turn to the relations between Africa and the EU.

### **3. EU Development Cooperation with Africa**

In this section, I outline the brief history of the relations between the EU and Africa, something central to understanding why and how the current changes in the EU's foreign actorness have taken place. As I noted in the introduction, Africa has long relations with the EU due to the (colonial-)historical relations and domination. At the same time, Europe's close geographical proximity to the African continent has often put Africa at the center of Europe's attention.<sup>64</sup>

African-European relations today are contested over topics of trade and trade imbalance, refugee and migration influxes, and the growing level of investments by rising powers, such as China, Russia, Brazil, or Turkey. EU-African relationship and power relations are often called asymmetrical, neo-colonial, or imbalanced, and are still dominated by the EU. Toni Haastrup, Niall Duggan, and Luis Mah claim that this power imbalance and

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<sup>64</sup> Holland and Doidge, *Development Policy of the European Union*, 18; Smith, "The European Union and the Distant South," 183-223; Babarinde, "New Directions in EU-Africa Development Initiatives," 111.

coloniality of power is the “basis and form of the EU-Africa relationship.”<sup>65</sup> They argue that through NPE, this coloniality of power provides the EU with necessary ontological security that can be traced back throughout the development of EU-Africa treaties.<sup>66</sup> Although this argument is convincing, it explains only partially the interdependent economic and political relations.

EU-Africa post-independence relations date back to the 1960s when African countries signed the Yaoundé Conventions and then the succeeding Lomé Agreements. Through them “the European countries sought to retain the economic links, the access to natural resources and raw materials and other strategic economic interests they had enjoyed under colonialism.”<sup>67</sup> Globalization and the triumph of the Liberal World Order called into being the Cotonou Agreement in 2000 that, as I note until the post-Cotonou Agreement enters into force, continues to govern the relations between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states.<sup>68</sup> To promote economic relations, the EU had initiated Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the EU and ACP countries in the new millennium which also reflect their asymmetrical relationship in which the EU is a norm exporter and the ACP block is a norm importer.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, one might still suspect that the relations between the EU and Africa are governed by the principles of NPE. However, as we shall see, geopolitics has gradually overtaken NPE sentiments in EU-Africa relations. Policies still give a normative foundation to EU foreign actorness, although we can see changes both in the language and in the structure of newer policies pointing to the shift towards a more geopolitical EU. At the same time, there is an increased tendency in discourse to call for and

<sup>65</sup> Toni Hastrup, Niall Duggan, and Luis Mah, “Navigating Ontological (in)Security in EU-Africa Relations,” *Global Affairs* 7, no. 4 (October 2021): 542, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2021.1981144>.

<sup>66</sup> Hastrup, Duggan, and Mah, “Navigating Ontological (in)Security in EU-Africa Relations,” 544-546.

<sup>67</sup> Mary Farrell, “A Triumph of Realism Over Idealism? Cooperation between the European Union and Africa,” *Journal of European Integration* 27, no. 3 (September 2005): 267, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036330500190107>.

<sup>68</sup> Baumgartner, “Negotiating the Post-Cotonou Agreement,” 85-103.

<sup>69</sup> Björkdahl and Elgström, “The EPA-Negotiations: A Channel for Norm Export and Import?,” 133.

identify the EU as more geopolitical. However, independent from this, financial data since 2014 show that the EU has been acting geopolitically, even if it claimed not to be doing so.

#### **4. Policies of the EU-African Relations**

The Cotonou Agreement was the major governing framework of EU-African relations when the Juncker Commission took office in 2014. Policies in the first decade of the new millennium show that the EU had been normative. The Cotonou Agreement has a very strong normative agenda as “the primary objective of the Agreement is to eradicate poverty and to integrate the ACP countries into the world economy.”<sup>70</sup> These economic goals, however, must be achieved through respect for human rights, in particular the right of the individual.<sup>71</sup> The Cotonou Agreement is at the forefront of norm promotion. Article 9 outlines that the cooperation between the parties shall undertake with respect for fundamental freedoms, “including [...] democracy based on the rule of law and transparent and accountable governance.”<sup>72</sup> Although development cooperation is led by the above-cited principle of economic integration,<sup>73</sup> in doing so the parties must mainstream, *inter alia* “human rights, gender issues, democracy, good governance.”<sup>74</sup> If there is a breach of these normative principles, after the necessary consultations, parties can be suspended from the cooperation.<sup>75</sup> Presumably, the Cotonou Agreement and the EPAs are among the gems of NPE, the guiding principles of a former EU foreign actress.

Strong normative provisions are provided in the 2007 Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) as well. The JAES endorses that the two continents are “bound together by history,

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<sup>70</sup> 2000/483/EC: Partnership agreement between the members of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States of the one part, and the European Community and its Member States, of the other part, signed in Cotonou on 23 June 2000 - Protocols - Final Act – Declarations art. 1, December 15, 2000, O.J. (L 317) [hereinafter Cotonou Agreement].

<sup>71</sup> Cotonou Agreement.

<sup>72</sup> Cotonou Agreement art. 9.

<sup>73</sup> Cotonou Agreement art. 19.

<sup>74</sup> Cotonou Agreement art. 20(2).

<sup>75</sup> Cotonou Agreement art. 96.



culture, geography, a common future, as well as by a community of values: the respect for human rights, freedom, equality, solidarity, justice, the rule of law and democracy.”<sup>76</sup> Values and norms constitute the founding principles of the EU-African partnership, according to the JAES. Moreover, the JAES explicitly states that one of the objectives of the partnership is “[t]o strengthen and promote peace, security, democratic governance and human rights, fundamental freedoms, gender equality, sustainable economic development, including industrialisation, and regional and continental integration *in Africa*.”<sup>77</sup> The wording of this objective, namely the promotion of these values and norms “in Africa” corresponds to the asymmetrical power relations between the two continents which are embedded in the normative agenda of the EU and supports Annika Björkdahl’s and Ole Elgström’s point on the EU’s norm importer behavior.

However, as the global political economy changed in the second decade of the new millennium, so have EU-Africa policies changed too. Only seven years after the adoption of the JAES, the Roadmap 2014-2017 document (issued in 2014) demonstrates a different approach and actorness.<sup>78</sup> Although the Roadmap still emphasizes the common norms and values endorsed by the parties in the JAES, Article 2 reports on something radically new. The new cooperation framework as per the Roadmap “should be guided by a results-oriented approach” and, as it continues, it outlines “key priorities [...] where Africa and the EU have mutual *interests*.”<sup>79</sup> Even though the Roadmap prioritizes human rights, democracy, and good governance as joint priorities,<sup>80</sup> the elaboration of this priority area focuses on how to create

<sup>76</sup> The Africa-EU Strategic Partnership: A Joint Africa-EU Strategy art. 1., European Union–African Union, December 9, 2007, 16344/07 [hereinafter JAES].

<sup>77</sup> JAES art. 8(ii); emphasis added.

<sup>78</sup> Fourth Eu-Africa Summit 2-3 April 2014 (Brussels): Roadmap 2014-2017, European Union–African Union, April 3, 2014 [hereinafter Roadmap 2014-2017].

<sup>79</sup> Roadmap 2014-2017 art. 2; emphasis added.

<sup>80</sup> Roadmap 2014-2017 art. 6.

(political) stability and growth through the endorsement of those values.<sup>81</sup> Its economic and business-oriented approach becomes even more visible when the Roadmap calls for “the *governance of natural resources*, including measures to curb their illegal exploitation.”<sup>82</sup> The wording of this document, however, still correlates with the NPE concept and is also the last EU-Africa relations outcome document of the pre-Juncker era.

During the Juncker-era, the EU’s aspiration to become a determinant global actor was amplified with the adoption of the Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign And Security Policy (hereinafter Global Strategy [GS]). The GS calls for a much more strategic Europe in “times of existential crisis, within and beyond the European Union” which are as much challenges as, according to the GS, opportunities.<sup>83</sup> Contrary to previous EU documents and policy papers, the EC’s communication to the European Parliament and the Council from 2017 shows a much more opportunistic EU. Among the strategic objectives, the EU recalls the importance of strategic interests and partnership with Africa and emphasizes that “the EU is collectively Africa’s main foreign investor, its principle [sic!] trading partner, a key security provider, its main source of remittances, and its first partner in development and humanitarian assistance.”<sup>84</sup>

Therefore three objectives must be achieved between the two continents: cooperation in the international arena, in the field of security, and “[s]ustainable and inclusive economic development in Africa, to create the jobs that the continent needs and *to seize the opportunities it offers to Europe*.”<sup>85</sup> In 2012, well before the adoption of this communication, Langan argues from a moral economy perspective that the EU through NPE can achieve

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<sup>81</sup> Roadmap 2014-2017 art. 17.

<sup>82</sup> Roadmap 2014-2017 art. 18; emphasis added.

<sup>83</sup> European External Action Service, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign And Security Policy* (Brussels: European External Action Service, 2016), 7, [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs\\_review\\_web\\_0.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf).

<sup>84</sup> European Commission, *JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL for a Renewed Impetus of the Africa-EU Partnership {SWD(2017) 150 Final} {SWD(2017) 151 Final}*, at 5, JOIN (2017) 17 final (May 4, 2017) [hereinafter *Renewed Impetus*].

<sup>85</sup> *Renewed Impetus*, 5; emphasis added.

“strategic geopolitical or commercial gain through resource to legitimizing moral narratives and norm/laden policy frameworks in its relations with external ‘partners.’”<sup>86</sup> In line with his arguments, the document recalls the importance of values and norms, including human rights, and calls for underpinning democratic processes and the rule of law. However, it does this from an approach that benefits the EU the most.

The interest-based less-NPE EU that the Juncker Commission just touched upon was accelerated by the VDL Commission when they issued the policy paper that further develops EU-Africa relations. The EC Communications “Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Arica” (hereinafter TCSA) shifts away from previous documents both in quantitative and qualitative terms. The TCSA mentions the word “democracy” six times, whereas “investment” appears 31 times. In qualitative terms, we can observe that the tone of the ties between Africa and the EU has changed and now these ties “are broad and deep as a result of history, proximity and shared interests.”<sup>87</sup> The emphasis is now on economic growth and opportunities arising from global challenges and pressures. Values and norms, such as human rights or democracy were indicated in the last lines in the paragraph that lists mutual interests; economic interests and the VDL Commission’s green agenda, which is also an economic growth plan, dominate the priorities.<sup>88</sup>

Geopolitical competition and multipolarity have appeared for the first time in the reasoning. Although China and other emerging economies are only mentioned implicitly – “Africa’s potential attracts increased interest from many players on the world scene” – European and African relations must consequently be stronger in the political, economic, and

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<sup>86</sup> Langan, "Normative Power Europe and the Moral Economy of Africa-EU Ties," 244-245.

<sup>87</sup> European Commission, *JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL: Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa*, at 1, JOIN (2020) 4 final (March 9, 2020) [hereinafter TCSA].

<sup>88</sup> TCSA, 1.

cultural realms.<sup>89</sup> To underpin these aspirations, ten actions guide the future of continental relations, out of which only one (Action #7) focuses directly on norm diffusion whereas the majority of the actions would enhance the EU's economic competitiveness and investment positions. Even IDC finance goes into service to de-risking investments and not to promote norms and values in the first place.<sup>90</sup> With the TCSA, the EU has significantly changed its priorities: investments took the place of values whereas norms have become sidelined.

Following the TCSA, the post-Cotonou Agreement deviates from the tendency of having less-NPE and more geopolitical and geoeconomic focus, at least on a first read. As I argue elsewhere, the post-Cotonou negotiations lasted much longer than expected.<sup>91</sup> The negotiated – and as of writing in May 2022 still not signed – post-Cotonou Agreement puts a much larger emphasis on values, rather than the policy documents released after JAES. The general provisions first recall the shared values (although not what those shared values are). Contrary to previous documents, in particular the TCSA, the post-Cotonou Agreement explicitly states that its objectives include the “[promotion, protection, and fulfillment] of human rights, democratic principles, the rule of law and good governance paying particular attention to gender equality.”<sup>92</sup>

The objective to eradicate poverty was carried over from its predecessor. However, the tone shifted to mobilizing investments and financial resources to boost economies. From the perspective of the NPE concept, it is promising that the first strategic priority of the treaty is centered on norm promotion, including *inter alia* human rights and democratic principles,

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<sup>89</sup> TCSA, 2.

<sup>90</sup> TCSA, 7.

<sup>91</sup> Baumgartner, "Negotiating the Post-Cotonou Agreement," 85-103.

<sup>92</sup> Partnership Agreement between the [European Union/European Union and its Member States], of the One Part, and Members of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States, of the Other Part: Negotiated Agreement Text Initialled by the EU and OACPS Chief Negotiators on 15th April 2021 part I, art. 1(3/a), April 15, 2021 [hereinafter post-Cotonou Agreement].

which constitute the essential elements of the agreement.<sup>93</sup> Akin to the Cotonou Agreement, should a party breach the essential elements of the Agreement appropriate measures can be taken, in some cases without consultation, including the suspension of the party from the Agreement.<sup>94</sup> Prioritizing norms over interests would indicate that the EU has returned to normativity. However, the structure of the new Agreement reports the opposite as norm promotion also favors interests.

Contrary to one overarching framework, the new Agreement has four distinguished parts: General Provisions outline the conditions which apply to all parties to the Agreement. This is followed by three Regional Protocols, one for each group: Africa Regional Protocol, Caribbean Regional Protocol, and Pacific Regional Protocol. The Africa Protocol sets out the key areas of cooperation among whom “[i]nclusive sustainable economic growth and development” is prioritized as the number one area.<sup>95</sup> Norm diffusion, in other words, the promotion of human rights, fundamental freedoms, or democracy, is the fifth priority only.<sup>96</sup> What is visible is that on the one hand, the EU now differentiates between regions at the highest level of partnership agreements through regional protocols. On the other hand, the regionalization shows that external actions of the EU on the global stage gained greater presence than ever. Maurizio Carbone notes “within the EU institutions there were divisions, as some units of the European External Action Service (EEAS) seemed more eager to fully regionalize EU-ACP relations, whereas the Directorate General (DG) for Trade pushed for a framework agreement with all ACP.”<sup>97</sup> Consequently, what we can observe is a much more strategic and conscious EEAS whose priorities and vision outlined in the GS have gained

<sup>93</sup> post-Cotonou Agreement part II, art. 9.

<sup>94</sup> post-Cotonou Agreement part VI, art. 101(7-8).

<sup>95</sup> post-Cotonou Agreement African Regional Protocol, part II, art. 7.

<sup>96</sup> post-Cotonou Agreement African Regional Protocol, part II, art. 64-72.

<sup>97</sup> Maurizio Carbone, "The Rationales Behind the EU-OACPS Agreement: Process, Outcome, Contestations," *European Foreign Affairs Review* 26, no. 2 (May 2021a): 247, <https://kluwerlawonline.com/journalarticle/European+Foreign+Affairs+Review/26.2/EEER2021018>.

primacy in decision-making, showing the shift towards a more geopolitical and also geoeconomic EU.

The same vision resonates in the outcome document of the 6<sup>th</sup> EU – AU Summit. Geopolitical approaches guide the document from the very beginning as it states that the “renewed Partnership [of the EU and AU] will be founded on *geography*, acknowledgment of history, human ties, respect for sovereignty, mutual respect and accountability, shared values, equality between partners and reciprocal commitments.”<sup>98</sup> The two Unions agreed that they would protect human rights and would stand up for democratic principles. From the perspective of the global political economy, the EU’s “Team Europe” relief package with a value of EUR 425 million aims at accelerating vaccine equity with Africa. However, the most important financial package is the proposed Africa-Europe Investment Package with a value of no less than EUR 150 billion to support economic development. Six out of the seven goals of the investment package prioritize geopolitical or geoeconomic aspirations, including, transport, digitalization, or energy transition. Only the goal aiming at facilitating human development could fit into the realm of NPE.<sup>99</sup> This investment package, also known as the Global Gateway Investment Package, aims at countering China’s Belt and Road Initiative. It uses the synergies among EU institutions, MSs, and EU financial institutions by aligning their investment and development objectives under the Team Europe framework “to support concrete and transformational projects.”<sup>100</sup>

The Global Gateway does not shy away from explicitly mentioning raw material extraction to “enable African countries to extract and add value locally to their raw materials

<sup>98</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> European Union - African Union Summit: A Joint Vision for 2030 at 1, European Union–African Union, February 18, 2022 [hereinafter Joint Vision for 2030]; emphasis added.

<sup>99</sup> Joint Vision for 2030, 3-4.

<sup>100</sup> European Commission, “EU-Africa: Global Gateway Investment Package,” (factsheet, FS/22/871, European Commission, 2022a), [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/attachment/871256/GG\\_factsheet-Africa\\_Investment%20Package.pdf.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/attachment/871256/GG_factsheet-Africa_Investment%20Package.pdf.pdf).

resources and integrate into sustainable global value chains.”<sup>101</sup> Following Langan, this further reproduces geopolitical and neocolonial patterns in the concept of “the new scramble for Eurafrica.”<sup>102</sup> Akin to the TCSA, the Summit’s outcome document states that it would use ODA and other market-based financial instruments and institutions, most prominently the EIB and the African Development Bank (AfDB) to accelerate African entrepreneurship and hence economies through public-private partnerships.<sup>103</sup> Even though norms and values are endorsed in the outcome document,<sup>104</sup> the geoeconomic and geopolitical strategic priorities of the EU dominate the partnership.

All of this shows that EU policies have long provided the EU with a strong normative basis in its relations with Africa. However, NPE declined when the relations were governed at the level of less foundational agreements, and consequently geopolitics and geoeconomics have found more presence in EU foreign policymaking (see Table 1). Cognizant of this, the paper now turns to the discourse of EU-elites to trace how the aforementioned changes have been taking place at the discursive level.

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<sup>101</sup> European Commission, “EU-Africa: Global Gateway Investment Package.”

<sup>102</sup> Mark Langan, “A New Scramble for EurAfrica?,” *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 16, no. 2 (June 2020): 218-233, <https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v16i2.1074>.

<sup>103</sup> Joint Vision for 2030, 4.

<sup>104</sup> Joint Vision for 2030, 5.

**Table 1: Policies of EU-African relations since 2000, own design**

<b>Policy</b>	<b>Approach</b>	<b>Emphasis</b>	<b>Commission</b>
<b>Cotonou Agreement (2000-2020), still in force</b>	Normative	Human rights	<i>Before Juncker</i>
<b>Joint Africa-EU Strategy (2007)</b>	Normative	Values and norms	<i>Before Juncker</i>
<b>Roadmap 2014-2017 (2014)</b>	Normative in foundations Geopolitical/Geoeconomic in objectives	Results and interests	<i>Before Juncker</i>
<b>Global Strategy (2016)</b>	Geopolitical	Opportunities, interests	Juncker
<b>Renewed Impetus of the Africa-EU Partnership</b>	Geopolitical	Strategic interests and partnership, Economic interests	Juncker
<b>Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Arica, TCSA (2020)</b>	Geopolitical	Economic growth and opportunities	von der Leyen
<b>post-Cotonou Agreement (2021), not in force</b>	Normative in foundations Geopolitical/Geoeconomic in structure	Economic growth and opportunities	von der Leyen
<b>6<sup>th</sup> European Union - African Union Summit: A Joint Vision for 2030</b>	Geopolitical	Economic growth	von der Leyen
<b>Global Gateway Investment Package (2022)</b>	Geopolitical/Geoeconomic	Economic growth	von der Leyen

## 5. The Discourse of EU-African Relations

As I argued before, discourse analysis does have a legitimate place in analyzing the global political economy. Strange claims one of the four structures of power in the world is centered on the knowledge structure,<sup>105</sup> which manifests in discourse. The discourse of EU-elites tells us a lot about how the EU sees itself in the global arena, and most importantly, by juxtaposing it with treaties and financial data, we can shed light on why this geopolitical shift has been taking place. Under the “Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament (EP) and the EC,” the President of the EC is required to address the EP every September and in this speech the EC President “[takes] stock of the current year and [looks]

<sup>105</sup> Strange, *States and Markets*.



ahead to priorities for the following years.”<sup>106</sup> Hence, the State of the Union (SOTEU) speeches show us how changes in the priorities of EU institutions occur. Therefore, I review them to look for the shift towards geopolitical ambitions at the highest level of execution and policy initiation within the Union. Consequently, as I stated, the question arises whether the actorness of the Union has truly become geopolitical with the takeover of the VDL Commission, and if so, what changes in the GPE could trigger them. What does this mean for the concept of NPE? Does this shift prove that NPE has lost its relevance and the EU ceased to achieve its foreign policy objectives through normative power?

Jean-Claude Juncker delivered his first SOTEU speech in 2015, which was centered on internal and external crises which the Union had to face. A recurring point of the speech was the refugee/migration crisis, calling it “the first priority [that] must be [addressed].”<sup>107</sup> Emphasizing that the EU is the number one donor to help the refugee crisis, Juncker called for a “stronger Europe” in its foreign policy. EUR 1.8 billion was mobilized from the EU budget to ameliorate crises in Africa in the Sahel and Lake Chad regions, Horn of Africa, and North of Africa to “create lasting stability, for instance by creating employment opportunities in local communities, and thereby address the root causes of destabilisation, forced displacement and illegal migration.”<sup>108</sup> This indicates that the EU sees problems arising in its geopolitical radius *prima facie* in economic terms that can be solved with geoeconomic development policies and not through normative power.

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<sup>106</sup> Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the European Commission ANNEX IV, art. 5, November 20, 2010, O.J. (L 304) 47.

<sup>107</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Jean-Claude Juncker, *State of the Union 2015* (Publications Office, 2015), 6, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2775/83144>.

<sup>108</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Jean-Claude Juncker, *State of the Union 2015*, 11.

The following year, Juncker continued delivering securitized rhetoric in the SOTEU by stating that the EU was “in an existential crisis.”<sup>109</sup> He continued that the EU was expected to act united on the global stage and in doing so “we [i.e., the EU] need our words to be followed by joint *action*. Otherwise, they will be just that: *words*. And with words alone, you cannot shape international affairs.”<sup>110</sup> This is a shocking deviation from the norm promotion rhetoric that previously characterized the EU and thus sets the scene for a more assertive EU foreign actorness in line with new policies, in particular the GS. Although values got a prominent part in the 2016 SOTEU, they are embedded in internal EU actions.<sup>111</sup>

However, and most importantly, when it comes to development, investments are the primary concern. Following the same geoeconomic logic of the 2015 SOTEU, Juncker announced an investment plan for Africa in the value of EUR 44 billion which could reach EUR 88 billion with MSs’ contributions. According to the plan, EU public money would back up “private and public investments to create *real* jobs.”<sup>112</sup> EU development aid together with the investment plan was planned to ameliorate the reasons for migration. Following the business-oriented approach, values are not even mentioned.

Two further rhetorical game changers are present in the 2016 SOTEU that set the scene for the altered EU actorness. Juncker states “even though Europe is proud to be a soft power of global importance, we must not be naive. Soft power is not enough in our increasingly dangerous neighbourhood.”<sup>113</sup> Here, the EU leaves behind soft power and NPE approaches for the first time and advocates something more strategic and more region-

<sup>109</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Jean-Claude Juncker, *State of the Union 2016* (Publications Office, 2016), 6, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2775/968989>.

<sup>110</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Jean-Claude Juncker, *State of the Union 2016*, 7; emphasis added.

<sup>111</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Jean-Claude Juncker, *State of the Union 2016*, 10.

<sup>112</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Jean-Claude Juncker, *State of the Union 2016*, 25; emphasis added.

<sup>113</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Jean-Claude Juncker, *State of the Union 2016*, 18.

focused. Second, up until the Juncker Commission, the EC was seen as rather technocratic. However, Juncker called for a “political Commission” that takes responsibility.<sup>114</sup> Thereby, he paved the way for von der Leyen’s geopolitical Commission and prepared the rhetorical circumstances to depart to a geopolitical EU.

This was further strengthened with the 2017 SOTEU, as Juncker states “Europe must always defend its strategic interests.”<sup>115</sup> The 2017 SOTEU has a striking rhetorical point beyond the already stated call for a stronger Europe on the global stage. Juncker labels Africa as a “noble and young continent, the cradle of humanity.”<sup>116</sup> However, he does so in the context of a lack of funding and migration. The EC President calls for solidarity with Africa and for mobilizing more funds to create jobs locally. He continues “we know the dangers of lack of funding,”<sup>117</sup> whereby he refers to the lack of World Food Program funds in 2015 that contributed to the increased migration, which he now calls *only* migration, crisis. And to avoid the “same fate”<sup>118</sup> more funds should be allocated to avoid what happened in 2015. In one single paragraph, Juncker praises Africa then he constructs the demonized, threatening geopolitical “other” from whom Europe must be saved through investments. NPE disappeared from external rhetoric.

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<sup>114</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Jean-Claude Juncker, *State of the Union 2016*, 20.

<sup>115</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Jean-Claude Juncker, *State of the Union 2017* (Publications Office, 2017), 9, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2775/31701>.

<sup>116</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Jean-Claude Juncker, *State of the Union 2017*, 11.

<sup>117</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Jean-Claude Juncker, *State of the Union 2017*, 11.

<sup>118</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Jean-Claude Juncker, *State of the Union 2017*, 11.

A recurring term used by Juncker is *naïvety*. In SOTEUs 2017 and 2018, Juncker warns the EU that they should not be naïve.<sup>119</sup> For the first time, geopolitics is mentioned in Juncker's 2018 SOTEU:<sup>120</sup>

[t]he geopolitical situation makes this Europe's hour: the time for European sovereignty has come. It is time Europe took its destiny into its own hands. It is time Europe developed what I coined "*Weltpolitikfähigkeit*" – the capacity to play a role, as a Union, in shaping global affairs. Europe has to become a more sovereign actor in international relations.

As per the discourse, naïvety originating in the NPE framework had not allowed the EU to unleash its global potential, and therefore, in the era of intensifying geopolitical tensions, the EU now shall act geopolitically.

Given that migration in Juncker's rhetoric is intertwined with the geopolitical challenges throughout his SOTEUs, it is stunning to mark that Juncker, after having spoken about migration, turns to Africa immediately. Juncker states that the development aid donor-recipient relationship between the EU and Africa shall come to an end and they should be substituted with investments and partnerships. The aim of this partnership called the "Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs," is to bring private investment to Africa and create 10 million jobs, partially building on the investment package announced in 2016.<sup>121</sup> And whereas values appear in internal actions, external (development) policies are now solely driven by economic and security interests; one cannot find NPE in the discourse of foreign policies.

Ursula von der Leyen took office in December 2019, in which year no SOTEU was delivered. The 2020 SOTEU, now delivered by von der Leyen, was written in a completely

<sup>119</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Jean-Claude Juncker, *State of the Union 2017*, 9.; European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Jean-Claude Juncker, *State of the Union 2018* (Publications Office, 2018), 7, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2775/243922>.

<sup>120</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Jean-Claude Juncker, *State of the Union 2018*, 9; emphasis in original.

<sup>121</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Jean-Claude Juncker, *State of the Union 2018*, 12.

new geopolitical and geoeconomic reality: the COVID-19 pandemic paralyzed the world and made decision-makers question the global order and consequently the EU's place in it. Von der Leyen sees values both within and outside the Union as fragile. Following the Churchillian logic of "never letting a good crisis go to waste," von der Leyen utilized her program which has driven the TCSA as well: the European Green Deal (EGD), the economic growth plan of the new EC, was put in the center around which the narrative of "strength" enters the discussion. She states "[the EGD] is about making systemic modernisation across our economy, society and industry. It is about building a *stronger* world to live in."<sup>122</sup>

Aiming at diversifying and greening the EU's energy portfolio, von der Leyen calls for extracting more green hydrogen.<sup>123</sup> This holds particular importance due to the war in Ukraine as EU MSs are trying to sign new deals with North African countries to replace Russian gas and oil.<sup>124</sup> The EU's and EU MSs' renewed attention toward African energy sources even before the war has been labeled as "energy or green colonialism" in which costs are externalized following an "imperial and racialised logic."<sup>125</sup> Although von der Leyen later claims "[w]e want to create links and not dependencies!,"<sup>126</sup> such initiatives, beyond reconstructing historical colonial patterns could also finance corrupt elites capable of violating human rights and so NPE would lose its relevance.

A more assertive EU foreign actorness, beginning with the GS and the 2016 SOTEU, is now even advocated by EU-elites. Since Juncker, the concept of "partnerships" has

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<sup>122</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Ursula von der Leyen, *State of the Union 2020* (Publications Office, 2020), 11, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2775/27587>; emphasis added.

<sup>123</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Ursula von der Leyen, *State of the Union 2020*, 12.; see also European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Ursula von der Leyen, *State of the Union 2021* (Publications Office, 2021), 15, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2775/20168>.

<sup>124</sup> Karl Mathiesen, Zack Colman, and Zia Weise, "Climate's 'messy Moment' as Countries Hunt for Oil and Gas to Replace Russian Imports," *Politico.eu*, April 12, 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/climates-messy-moment-europe-hunt-oil-gas-replace-russia-import/>.

<sup>125</sup> Hamza Hamouchene, "Green Hydrogen: The New Scramble for North Africa," *Al Jazeera*, November 20, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/11/20/green-hydrogen-the-new-scramble-for-north-africa>.

<sup>126</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Ursula von der Leyen, *State of the Union 2021*, 15.

dominated the discourse of development policies, von der Leyen takes a step further when she states “[a]s well as responding more assertively to global events, Europe must deepen and refine its partnerships with its friends and allies. And this starts with revitalising our most enduring of partnerships.”<sup>127</sup> According to the EC President, the most enduring partnership is with Africa and the AU, which was also the destination of her first official visit in office. By justifying the choice, von der Leyen states “Africa will be a key partner in building the world we want to live in – whether on climate, digital or trade.”<sup>128</sup> The focus of the partnership does not mention any connection to normativity. Climate, digitalization, and trade are put into service of geopolitical and geoeconomic decisions.

What migration was to Juncker to justify changes in the foreign actorness of the EU, green transition in the multipolarizing world serves the same goals for von der Leyen. In the 2021 SOTEU, von der Leyen opens Pandora’s box toward becoming geopolitical by stating “climate and economic leadership is central to Europe’s global and security objectives. It also reflects a wider shift in world affairs at a time of transition towards a new international order. We are entering a new era of hyper-competitiveness.”<sup>129</sup> She securitizes green leadership, presenting it as a policy objective on which the EU’s existence depends. This can further give rhetorical justification for geopolitical and geoeconomic foreign policies in which human rights and norms are absent as during an existential crisis normativity is not prioritized. On the road to becoming more geopolitical, von der Leyen calls first for stability in the immediate neighborhood of the EU. She states “[b]ecause of that geography, Europe knows better than anyone that if you don’t deal in time with the crisis abroad, the crisis comes to

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<sup>127</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Ursula von der Leyen, *State of the Union 2020*, 17.

<sup>128</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Ursula von der Leyen, *State of the Union 2020*, 18.

<sup>129</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Ursula von der Leyen, *State of the Union 2021*, 11.

you.”<sup>130</sup> And as I argued before, the EU is trying to solve those crises in the neighborhood purely by geoeconomic means in the absence of NPE.

Multipolar competitiveness in the geoeconomic world order resonates in the 2021 SOTEU. As I pointed out above, the new initiative called Global Gateway, announced in the 2021 SOTEU, aims at countering China’s Belt and Road Initiative as “[w]e [i.e., the EU] are good at financing roads. But it does not make sense for Europe to build a perfect road between a Chinese-owned copper mine and a Chinese-owned harbour.”<sup>131</sup> However, this purely geopolitical reasoning does include some normative elements as good governance, transparency, and human rights are guiding principles of this investment package, at least, rhetorically.

Some interim conclusions can be made. Crisis communications have accompanied the SOTEUs which securitized actors and phenomena happening in the global political economy. Juncker echoed migration as the reason why the EU needs to bring development investment to Africa. The publication of the GS in 2016 set the scene for a more assertive language and foreign policy actorness and the longing for a more determinant EU on the global stage that is capable of acting. NPE in crisis management IDC-rhetoric was absent. Development aid and investments were aimed at promoting the EU’s interests abroad and security at home. Von der Leyen has been putting the tone on the climate crisis and the new multipolar world order. She has continued using the language that Juncker had started, with a higher level of assertiveness and geopolitical focus, however. Except for the 2021 SOTEU, normative power had not only been characterized as incapable of giving adequate answers for new geopolitical problems but was not incorporated into the language of foreign and development policies when objectives were set. Minding this, I shall now turn to the last part of the empirics in

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<sup>130</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Ursula von der Leyen, *State of the Union 2021*, 12.

<sup>131</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, and Ursula von der Leyen, *State of the Union 2021*, 15.

which the financial instruments of the two Commissions are analyzed to juxtapose with policies and discourse.

## **6. EU Development Finance in Africa**

As I argued above, development finance is never value-free or given without conditions and it serves donors' interests in the first place. This is visible from the data pulled out from the EU Aid Explorer database.<sup>132</sup> It demonstrates that in the given period Africa, and particularly sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), has been the top destination of EU development funds, having received EUR 47.54 billion (see Table 2). Not counting Europe, Africa has received more funds than Asia, the Americas, Oceania, and unallocated destinations together in the value of EUR 46.62 billion (see Table 3). The EC was the major donor (EUR 40.69 billion). However, the EIB also contributed to the allocations with EUR 6.85 billion (see Table 4). Aid gradually increased from 2014 until 2019 after which it dropped significantly (see Table 5). This can be explained by the significant drop of people arriving from Africa to Europe (see Table 6),<sup>133</sup> which dominated SOTEUs discourses as well. Table 7 demonstrates that in the given period, normative purposes were not prioritized, except for "Legal and judicial development."

It is striking that for "Democratic participation and civil society" purposes the EU has given only EUR 745.82 million, composing a fraction only of that spent on "General budget support-related aid" purposes. Thereby it takes 15<sup>th</sup> place in sectorial allocations in descending order of allocated euros. At the same time, trade linkages were further facilitated by building roads and connections: EUR 3.26 billion were spent only on building roads, which does not diffuse norms and values but serves economic purposes. As for civil society, something that is fundamental in European democratic participation, we would expect that,

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<sup>132</sup> "EU Aid Explorer: Recipients Data," European Commission, accessed April 30, 2022, [https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients\\_en](https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients_en).

<sup>133</sup> "Migratory Map," Frontex, accessed April 30, 2022, <https://frontex.europa.eu/we-know/migratory-map/>.



following the NPE-logic, the EU supports local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs). However, as Table 8 demonstrates, the primary channels of allocations were central and recipient governments. In addition, donor country-based NGOs received more than three times more funds from EU institutions than recipient country-based NGOs. Even the EIB received more development aid than local NGOs.

By juxtaposing EU Aid explorer data with the latest OECD development profile of EU Institutions, the same conclusions could be drawn, although less detailed data is available.<sup>134</sup> Africa was the number one destination of EU development aid in 2019, composing 42% of EU ODA in the value of USD 7.4 billion via bilateral channels, and Africa was the main destination of EU ODA through multilateral channels as well.<sup>135</sup> The non-prioritization of NGOs and CSOs was also a systemic approach of the EU and happened not just in Africa. In 2019, the EU allocated USD 2 billion of ODA to CSOs globally.<sup>136</sup>

The EIB publishes yearly reports on its activities in the ACP countries.<sup>137</sup> The objectives of EIB projects are to develop the private sector and strategic infrastructure, such as ports or electricity links, always in line with the goals of the EC.<sup>138</sup> During the examined period, EIB reports have mirrored what the EC set as goals. In 2015, managing migration, climate resilience, private sector development, and building key infrastructure dominated the objectives. However, geopolitical reasoning appeared earlier in the EIB's report than in the EC's language when they state "[t]here are also persistent country-specific risks associated with macroeconomic instability, political uncertainty and heightened geopolitical risks in

<sup>134</sup> OECD data is available in USD. The official exchange rate used by the OECD of EUR per US dollar was 0.8933 in 2019.

<sup>135</sup> OECD, "European Union Institutions," in *Development Co-operation Profiles* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1787/c0ad1f0d-en>.

<sup>136</sup> OECD, "European Union Institutions."

<sup>137</sup> EIB Reports are available until 2020.

<sup>138</sup> European Investment Bank, *Report on Results of EIB Operations Outside the EU, 2014* (European Investment Bank, 2015), <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2867/2687>.

some parts of the [SSA] region.”<sup>139</sup> The second scramble and colonial patterns are undeniable when the EIB writes<sup>140</sup>

[t]he EIB is in a good position to help European companies that are interested in investing in the African market [...]. The regions are primed for progress, being rich in natural resources and renewables, and with favourable demographics. Africa is particularly hungry for investment, and the EIB is raising awareness of this around the European Union.

NPE language is missing from the 2016 and 2017 Reports as well, meanwhile, the EIB’s priorities remained the same. The tone of the reports was adjusted to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) introduced in 2015, however.<sup>141</sup> Whereas the 2018 Report set the tone for highlighting “partnerships,”<sup>142</sup> in alignment with the changing tone of EU discourse, the real subordination of EIB investments to EC geopolitical priorities was made clear in 2019. The EIB claims that they play a role in mitigating migration to Europe by “[contributing] further to the EU Agenda on Migration [... and focusing] on the long-term investment needs of countries of origin, transit and destination of migrants and forcibly displaced people.”<sup>143</sup> Finally, the 2020 Report’s overview on EIB allocations further proves the previous findings: the closer a region is to and consequently the higher impact geopolitical events have on the EU, the more funding is allocated to those regions. Not counting “Regional Africa” allocations, Central, East, and Southern Africa and the Indian

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<sup>139</sup> European Investment Bank, *Annual Report 2015 on EIB Activity in Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific, and the Overseas Territories* (European Investment Bank, 2016), 9, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2867/9644>.

<sup>140</sup> European Investment Bank, *Annual Report 2015 on EIB Activity in Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific, and the Overseas Territories*, 42.

<sup>141</sup> European Investment Bank, *2016 Annual Report on EIB Activity in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, and the Overseas Countries and Territories* (European Investment Bank, 2017), <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2867/27779>; European Investment Bank, *Annual Report 2017 on EIB Activity in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, and the Overseas Countries and Territories* (European Investment Bank, 2018), <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2867/364336>.

<sup>142</sup> European Investment Bank, *Africa, Caribbean, Pacific and the Overseas Countries and Territories: Annual Report 2018* (European Investment Bank, 2019), <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2867/232736>.

<sup>143</sup> European Investment Bank, *Africa, Caribbean, Pacific and the Overseas Countries and Territories: 2019* (European Investment Bank, 2020), 29, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2867/41169>.

Ocean got less funding than West Africa and Sahel with a total value of EUR 912 million (see Table 9).<sup>144</sup>

All these findings show that the EU abandoned NPE and became geopolitical and geoeconomic, especially when it comes to development finance. The numbers clearly show that regional investments via the chosen channels for the designated purposes favor EU security and geoeconomic interests. These allocations are backed up by policies and justified by discourse. However, why did the EU end up being geopolitical? What are the changes in the GPE that could trigger this shift in its actorness?

## 7. Discussion

The EU ceased to be NPE and became geopolitical in its development policies; the “dead relative” has been resuscitated. The road to developing a new foreign policy actorness started with the Juncker Commission, without explicitly calling the new identity geopolitical. The VDL Commission took a step further and declared geopolitics as the new governing principle that would lead EU external relations. Starting in 2014, less than a decade was needed to loudly advocate for the contrary of the *raison d'être* of the EU, which was, as I argued above, “to be the antidote to what *Geopolitik* had caused on the European continent and beyond.” The shift took place but why was NPE left to oblivion? Policies, discourse, and development finance data point in the same direction. By careful examination, two phenomena can explain the change in the EU’s foreign actorness: migration and multipolarization of the global (economic) order. If we trace the development of the three pillars of the paper, all vectors report on these two issues.

Juncker’s discourse was dominated by the refugee/migration crisis for years. However, his tone changed by the end of his term, and left out the word “refugee” in

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<sup>144</sup> European Investment Bank, *Africa, Caribbean, Pacific and the Overseas Countries and Territories: 2020* (European Investment Bank, 2021), 15, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2867/20500>.

presenting the EU's external relations and used solely "migration". He securitized the phenomenon that could be "mitigated" by economic policies and investments which should solve conflicts and create employment locally. He presented the neighborhood, in particular Africa, as a source of imminent threat, a dangerous place to the EU where change only via soft power is not possible. Only investments could "save" the EU from the threatening geopolitical other. All announced financial packages of the Juncker-era were streamlined to bring first development aid, and second, investments. This correlates with the strategic priorities of the EIB in the examined period. The EIB aimed at bringing investments to Africa to manage migration and to develop key infrastructure whereby local economies could be boosted which would result in a decreased level of migration. The EIB even claimed a complementing role to the EU with resources to mitigate migration.

Policy documents issued before the increased level of migration to the EU in the 2010s were NPE-driven. The Cotonou Agreement and the JAES prioritized norms in the first place. However, by entering the 2010s, the focus of the policy documents became twofold. First, to serve the EU's economic interests, something that will be central in the second part of the discussion, and second, to create political stability locally through investments. The GS, however, set the scene for a more geopolitical policymaking, and the objectives, echoed by Juncker and supported by the EIB, were incorporated into policies, namely, to create jobs locally which would decrease the number of people departing to Europe.

The rise of new powers, in particular China, in the global political economy, their increased presence in Africa, the multipolarization of the global order, and the consequent challenges, as well as opportunities, are the second reason why the EU has become geopolitical. It has widely been argued that emerging powers question the EU's position in

the global order.<sup>145</sup> Some claim that “[the emerging powers] present serious challenges for Europe in particular, in view of their defiance of the international order (in which Europe occupies privileged positions) and their different approaches towards multilateralism.”<sup>146</sup> The EU has recently characterized these processes as “[t]he present international reality is based on the combination of dynamics with an increasing number of actors seeking to expand their political space and challenge the security order.”<sup>147</sup> China’s role was evaluated as it “tends to limit access to its market and seeks to promote globally its own standards.”<sup>148</sup>

Following the theory of constructivist geopolitics, the EU has experienced a change in the structure through the emergence of new powers, and this structure-change influenced the EU. Consequently, it had to adapt to the new geo-spatial-economic-power reality. However, by doing so, it also contributes to creating a more geopolitical global politics by making geopolitical and geoeconomic policies. At the same time, rivaling actors, in particular China and the EU, who conflict over economic gains from (IDC) presence in Africa, impact the structure which reinforces the further geopoliticization of IDC policies and EU-African relations reflexively. As global competition has intensified between the EU and China, so

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<sup>145</sup> Julian Pänke, "The Empire Strikes Back: 1989, 2011 and Europe's Neighbourhood Policy," in *Global Power Europe - Vol. 2: Policies, Actions and Influence of the EU's External Relations*, eds. Astrid Boening, Jan-Frederik Kremer, and Aukje van Loon, Global Power Shift (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2013), 111-129, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-32416-1\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-32416-1_7); Niall Duggan, "BRICS and the Evolution of a New Agenda within Global Governance," in *The European Union and the BRICS: Complex Relations in the Era of Global Governance*, ed. Marek Rewizorski (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 11-25, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-19099-0\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-19099-0_2); Elisabeth Johansson-Nogués, Martijn C. Vlaskamp, and Esther Barbé, "EU Foreign Policy and Norm Contestation in an Eroding Western and Intra-EU Liberal Order," in *European Union Contested: Foreign Policy in a New Global Context*, eds. Elisabeth Johansson-Nogués, Martijn C. Vlaskamp, and Esther Barbé, Norm Research in International Relations (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 1-15, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-33238-9\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-33238-9_1); Maurizio Carbone, "There is Life Beyond the European Union: Revisiting the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States," *Third World Quarterly* 42, no. 10 (September 2021b): 2451-2468, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2021.1951608>.

<sup>146</sup> Stephan Keukeleire and Bas Hooijmaaijers, "The BRICS and Other Emerging Power Alliances and Multilateral Organizations in the Asia-Pacific and the Global South: Challenges for the European Union and its View on Multilateralism," *JMCS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 52, no. 3 (May 2014): 583, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12102>.

<sup>147</sup> European External Action Service, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence* (Brussels: European External Action Service, 2022), 17, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/strategic\\_compass\\_en3\\_web.pdf](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/strategic_compass_en3_web.pdf).

<sup>148</sup> European External Action Service, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*, 18.

changed the discourse toward being more assertive and policies toward being geopolitical and geoeconomic.

A major implication of this study is to understand the new geopolitical actorness of the EU and to make more tailored foreign and development policies in times when the EU is at a crossroads and being driven by crises. As I argued above, EU IDC policies still give some normative foundation to EU foreign actorness, with changes both in the language and in the structure of newer policies showing a geopolitical EU. The discourse of EU-elite undeniably presents the EU geopolitical. Financial data since 2014 demonstrates that the EU has been acting geopolitically, even if it claimed not to be doing so. I showed that for “Democratic participation and civil society” purposes the EU has spent a fraction (EUR 745.82 million) to that spent on “General budget support-related aid” purposes, whereas the EU has allocated EUR 3.26 billion on trade linkages and infrastructure creation. It is also striking that the primary channels of allocations of EU aid were central and recipient governments. The departure to a geopolitical actorness is also visible from the fact that donor country-based NGOs received more than three times more funds from EU institutions than recipient country-based NGOs. Lastly, I pointed out that even the EIB received more development aid than local NGOs. NPE no longer determines EU foreign actorness.

## **Conclusion**

In this research, I showed how the EU changed its foreign actorness from NPE to geopolitical. I demonstrated that the previously avoided concept of geopolitics became the guiding principle of development policies, discourse, and finance. The shift started under EC President Jean-Claude Juncker and accelerated with the VDL Commission due to two major changes in the global political economy in the 2010s, namely, migration and the emergence of a multipolar world in which the EU is trying to preserve its competitive advantage. I applied the theory of NPE and its critique and the literature on geopolitics and geoeconomics.

Guzzini's neoclassical geopolitics helped to understand geopolitics, whereas constructivist geopolitics proved useful in theorizing and explaining the change in the EU's actorness. I analyzed the change from the perspective of GPE with a policy focus on IDC in Africa during the Juncker and VDL Commissions.

The analysis has shown that the EU became geopolitical. On the one hand, this can primarily be explained by migration to Europe. The concept was securitized. Following the geoeconomic logic, development policies and finance were streamlined to mitigate the effects of migration on the EU, mainly by bringing development aid and investment to Africa to boost local economies and create jobs. Thereby, geoeconomic policies were put into service to create security at home and promote the EU's interest abroad.

On the other hand, the multipolarization of the global economic order gave further impetus to change. I argued that following the theory of constructivist geopolitics, changes in the structure of the GPE, namely the emergence of a new power (China), made the EU adapt to the new geo-spatial-economic-power reality by becoming geopolitical. I pointed out that, at the same time, China and the EU, as rival actors, impact the structure which reinforces the further geopoliticization of IDC policies and EU-African relations reflexively. I concluded that EU IDC policies still give some normative foundation to EU foreign actorness, with changes both in the language and in the structure of newer policies showing a geopolitical EU. The discourse of EU-elite undeniably presents the EU as geopolitical. Financial data since 2014 demonstrates that the EU has been acting geopolitically; NPE no longer determines EU foreign actorness. The "dead relative" has been resuscitated and is alive.

The VDL Commission's mid-term in office, the ongoing health, climate, and humanitarian crises, and war on the borders of the Union amidst the profound changes in the GPE with the era of an emerging multipolar geoeconomic order make this contribution timely and highly important. This paper has also envisioned being practical and relevant. As I

argued, the EU is constantly at crossroads whilst its (foreign-)policymaking is guided by crises. By understanding the new geopolitical actorness of the EU, more tailored foreign and development policies could be made. Future research could analyze the discrepancy by focusing on other regions, in particular the Eastern Partnership, incorporating intra-European politics, or focusing on other policy areas.

Whether geopolitical foreign policy actorness would benefit the EU is yet to be known. One lesson must be learned, however. In the geopolitical and geoeconomic rivalry, founding norms, values, and the principles of the EU – and hence its core identity – must never be sacrificed for the sake of economic gains or securitized phenomena. The war in Ukraine shows where compromises or sidelining of values could lead. The absence of normative guidance in foreign policy and solely focusing on geopolitical and geoeconomic interests could eventually lead to financing autocracies whereby the next senseless wars would be ready to break out. And then, resuscitating norms would be too late.



## Appendices

**Table 2: Disbursement of EU Development Aid, Continental allocation, EU Institutions only, 2014-2022**

<b>Recipient Continent</b>	<b>Disbursement, (in billion EUR)</b>
<b>Africa</b>	47.54
<b>Europe</b>	31.24
<b>Asia</b>	25.24
<b>Unallocated</b>	13.03
<b>America</b>	7.54
<b>Oceania</b>	0.81

Source: "EU Aid Explorer: Recipients Data," European Commission, accessed April 30, 2022, [https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients\\_en](https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients_en).

**Table 3: Disbursement of EU Development Aid, Regional, EU Institutions only, 2014-2022**

<b>Recipient Region</b>	<b>Disbursement (in billion EUR)</b>
<b>Africa (South of Sahara)</b>	33.55
<b>Europe</b>	31.24
<b>Unallocated</b>	13.03
<b>Asia (South &amp; Central Asia)</b>	11.39
<b>Asia (Middle East Asia)</b>	10.64
<b>Africa (North of Sahara)</b>	9.62
<b>Africa</b>	4.36
<b>America (South America)</b>	3.58
<b>America (North &amp; Central America)</b>	3.46
<b>Asia (Far East Asia)</b>	2.81

Source: "EU Aid Explorer: Recipients Data," European Commission, accessed April 30, 2022, [https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients\\_en](https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients_en).

**Table 4: Disbursement of EU Development Aid in Africa by Institutions, 2014-2022**

<b>Donor</b>	<b>Disbursement, (in billion EUR)</b>
<b>European Commission</b>	40.69
<b>European Investment Bank</b>	6.85

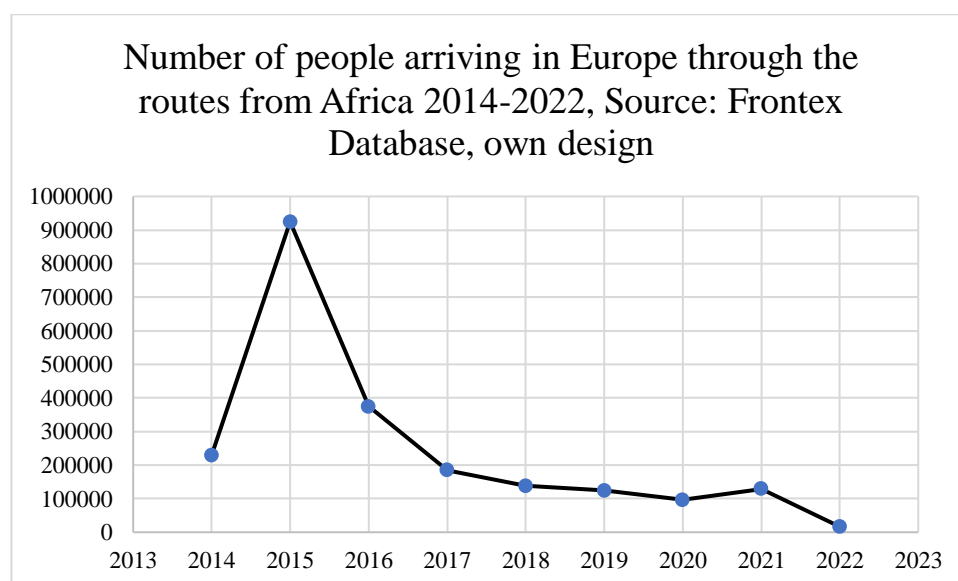
Source: "EU Aid Explorer: Recipients Data," European Commission, accessed April 30, 2022, [https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients\\_en](https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients_en).

**Table 5: Disbursement of EU Development Aid in Africa, Yearly allocations, EU Institutions only, 2014-2022**

Year	Disbursement
2014	5.47
2015	5.06
2016	6.11
2017	6
2018	6.17
2019	6.65
2020	6.37
2021	4.75
2022	0.95

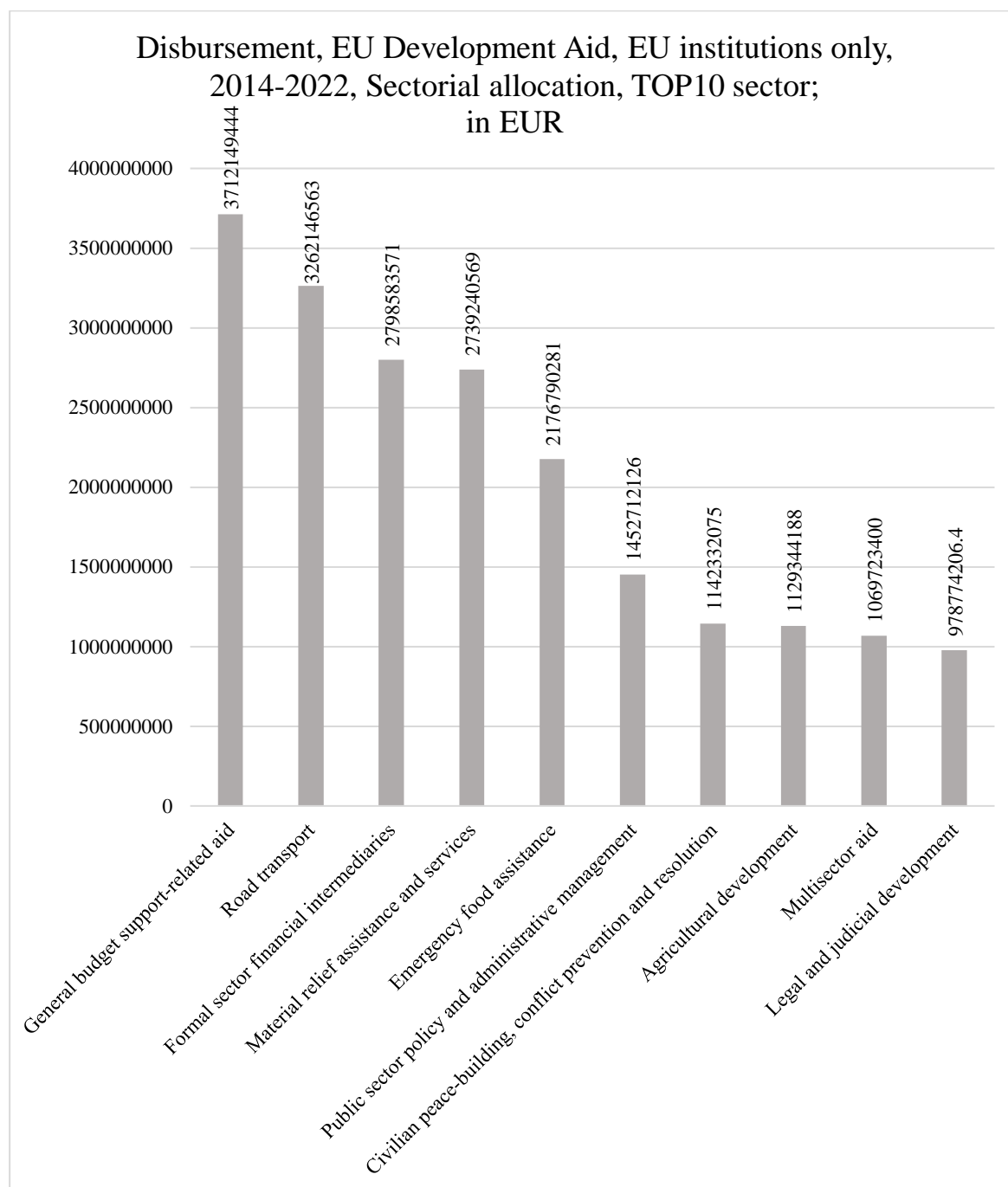
Source: "EU Aid Explorer: Recipients Data," European Commission, accessed April 30, 2022, [https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients\\_en](https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients_en).

**Table 6: Number of people arriving in Europe through the routes from Africa 2014-2022**



Source: "Migratory Map," Frontex, accessed April 30, 2022, <https://frontex.europa.eu/we-know/migratory-map/>.

**Table 7: Disbursement, EU Development Aid, EU Institutions only, 2014-2022, Sectorial allocation, TOP10 sector**



Source: "EU Aid Explorer: Recipients Data," European Commission, accessed April 30, 2022,  
[https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients\\_en](https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients_en).

**Table 8: Disbursement by channels, EU Development Aid, EU Institutions only, 2014-2022**

Channel	Disbursement in billion EUR
Central Government	10.87
Recipient Government	5.84
Other public entities in donor country	3.76
Donor country-based NGO	3.36
Third Country Government (Delegated co-operation)	3.33
Other public entities in recipient country	2.76
World Food Programme	1.48
European Investment Bank (Trust fund via EIB like FEMIP, NIF, Interest subsidies...)	1.42
United Nations Children's Fund	1.25
Developing country-based NGO	1.02

Source: "EU Aid Explorer: Recipients Data," European Commission, accessed April 30, 2022, [https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients\\_en](https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients_en).

**Table 9: EIB Regional Breakdown, own design**

Region	Number of Project	Total value (in million EUR)
West Africa and Sahel	16	912
Central Africa	5	136
East Africa	6	292
Southern Africa and Indian Ocean	8	288
Regional Africa	4	465

Source: European Investment Bank, *Africa, Caribbean, Pacific and the Overseas Countries and Territories: 2020* (European Investment Bank, 2021), 15, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2867/20500>.

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