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Charting a Course: The European Union's Evolving Role in Global Affairs

Trazando un rumbo: el papel evolutivo de la Unión Europea en los asuntos globales

ABSTRACT

This article examines the European Union's rise in international politics. It examines how the EU uses proportionality, subsidiarity, and attribution to maximize its global influence through its organizational architecture and power distribution. Complex interdependence and soft power theories are used to understand the EU's global governance impact. The EU plays

Keywords:

European Union (EU), Global Governance, International Politics, Power Dynamics, Soft Power, Complex Interdependence, International Norms, Global Impact, Political Realignment

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a major role in setting international norms and policies, showing its ability to influence global dynamics despite internal differences that might prevent its consolidation as a superpower.

RESUMEN

Este artículo examina el ascenso de la Unión Europea (UE) en la política internacional. Analiza cómo la UE utiliza la proporcionalidad, la subsidiariedad y la atribución para maximizar su influencia global a través de su arquitectura organizacional y distribución de poder. Se utilizan teorías de interdependencia compleja y poder blando para comprender el impacto de la UE en la gobernanza global. La UE desempeña un papel principal en el establecimiento de normas y políticas internacionales, demostrando su capacidad para influir en las dinámicas globales, a pesar de las diferencias internas que podrían impedir su consolidación como superpotencia.

Palabras clave:

Unión Europea (UE), gobernanza global, política internacional, dinámicas de poder, poder blando, interdependencia compleja, normas internacionales, impacto global, reordenamiento político

As the European Union (EU) continues to evolve, its role in global politics remains a subject of scrutiny and analysis. Understanding how the EU reflects its power necessitates an examination of its unique structure, competencies, and interactions within the international arena. While the EU may not exert control over all aspects of its Member States' affairs, its influence is palpable across various domains, prompting questions about its trajectory as a global powerhouse. Is it a resurgence of EU dominance, a *status quo* maintained, or a decline in its potency as a global force? To grasp the nuances of the EU's power dynamics, we must explore its relationships, competencies, and competitive landscape in the realm of international politics.

1. Unpacking the European Union: Understanding Its Structure and Global Influence

Evaluating the EU's potential as a significant global competitor requires a quick overview of the EU's nature and internal organisation. The

establishment of the EU is associated with the concepts of peace and integration amongst its members. These ideas have been present throughout the growth of the EU, starting from the Schuman Declaration, and continuing through the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (1957), the Treaty of the EU (1992), and the Lisbon Treaty (2007) (European Union, 2024).

The structural qualities of the EU prevent it from being categorised strictly as a political alliance, international organisation, or just an economic or military coalition of many nations. Hence, for the scope of this article, the EU is defined as an international union whose Member States delegate powers to pursue shared goals, based on its fundamental rules (Treaty of Lisbon, 2007). In this understanding, the EU treaty concurs with Díez-Picazo when he states that "the European Union has not been conceived as a structure entrusted with certain fixed objectives once and for all, but rather it is an endeavour always open to new common tasks" (2008, p. 4). This approach acknowledges the lack of uniformity inside the Union, noting that the euro is the official currency in only twenty of the twenty-seven EU nations and that the Schengen region includes twenty-five EU countries and four non-EU countries.

The EU's powers are determined by the concept of attribution, which means the Union operates within the competences assigned to it, and any unallocated competences belong to the Member States. The Union's exercise of powers is guided by the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. The Union can act in areas not under its exclusive competence only if Member States cannot achieve the action's objectives effectively at central, regional, or local levels, but can do so more effectively at the Union level due to the action's size or impact. In this sense, the Union's actions must be limited to what is necessary to achieve the Treaties' objectives (Treaty of Lisbon, 2007).

Because of the many sectors in which it has authority, the EU's institutional architecture is wide and complicated. This is due to the co-participation of various European institutions such as the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council of the European Union, and the European Commission, along with other bodies with specific roles like advising, ensuring EU rule compliance, or offering foreign affairs support. Additionally, there are around thirty decentralised agencies or executive agencies set up by the European Commission, amongst other mechanisms.

It is important to highlight that analysing the EU's structure provides indispensable context for understanding its global competitiveness, but that is not enough to determine its role in current world politics.

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2. The Evolution of Power: Shifting Paradigms in International Relations

The notion of power in international politics has had a renaissance in recent decades because of the growing interconnection of the world. Quoting some fundamental notions, the influence of power on foreign policy has regained significance in the international arena, ranging from traditional realism ideas to modern strategies such as complex interdependence and soft power. Theorist of international relations Hans Morgenthau emphasized the significance of power, stating that international politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power (1948).

In contrast, Joseph Nye explained the idea of "soft power," emphasizing a state's capacity to sway others by persuading other international actors and appealing to them. In Nye's words, "soft power is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments" (2004, p. 5). This strategy acknowledges the significance of immaterial elements in foreign policy, such as political principles, cultural appeal, and different ideologies.

Even so, the struggle of nations for supremacy in the world has brought raw power back into the spotlight. In his theory of international politics, Kenneth Waltz contends that the distribution of capabilities determines the strategies pursued by states (1979). Numerous situations, such as territorial conflicts in the Asia-Pacific area or economic tensions amongst major nations, reflect this competition.

By presenting the idea of "complex interdependence", Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye further muddle the concept of power. They contend that military might is no longer the only factor influencing state conduct in an interconnected world. Keohane and Nye assert that complex interdependence refers to a situation in which military force is not used by states to resolve disputes (Keohane & Nye, 2012). Rather, the roles of diplomacy, international organisations, and economic cooperation are equally important.

Alexander Wendt, meanwhile, challenges traditional conceptions of power by arguing that its nature is socially constructed. According to Wendt, "anarchy is what states make of it," (1991, p. 395) suggesting that states' behaviour is shaped by their perceptions and mutual interactions.

Power takes on diverse forms in various global contexts, such as the race for scientific supremacy and economic leadership. Understanding the intricacies of power in foreign policy and its influence on global dynamics is critical as competition amongst nations increases. The resurgence of power politics on a global scale presents substantial problems and prospects for the world order in the 21st century. Military power, economic prosperity, political influence, cultural appeal, and diplomatic experience may all impact. Traditional power conceptions focus on military or economic might, but modern views also recognise the importance of soft power, which uses ideology, culture, and diplomacy to influence others. Therefore, power in modern international relations involves competitiveness, conflict, collaboration, and interdependence, reflecting the intricacy and diversity of global politics in a linked world.

For this article, *power* is understood as an entity's capacity to influence foreign actors to accomplish its global political aims. As such, a contemporary world power or superpower would be characterised by its capacity to project power on a worldwide scale, to establish international norms and institutions, and to lead or influence coalitions of nations in the process of tackling global concerns.

Following our exploration of various theories and understanding power as we have defined it, alongside the EU's structure, we gain a detailed understanding of its position in global power dynamics. This holistic approach illustrates how the EU engages with other actors to pursue its objectives and navigate the complexities of the international arena.

3. Navigating Influence: The European Union's Strategic Position in Global Power Dynamics

The EU is now in a unique position in global politics due to its organisational structure and powers. The EU's status as an international union, whose Member States assign mandates to achieve common objectives, indicates the possibility of substantial worldwide impact, however its position as a global force is still being closely examined.

The EU's competences and institutional structure make it a significant contestant in global affairs. It can efficiently operate in several areas, such as economic, political, and diplomatic, thanks to prerogatives given by Member

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States and principles like subsidiarity and proportionality. The institutional structure, which includes entities such as the European Parliament, the European Council, and the European Commission, demonstrates a thorough approach to governing and creating policies. The EU's focus on soft power, as highlighted by scholars such as Joseph Nye, demonstrates its ability to influence global players through attraction and persuasion (2004).

The EU has obstacles that might hinder its rise to superpower status. Differences amongst Member States and the intricate decision-making processes inside EU institutions may impede its capacity to act decisively on the international platform. The EU's dependence on consensus-building and multilateral diplomacy may thwart its ability to take decisive action during crises or conflicts, especially when contrasted to established superpowers such as the United States or major emerging actors like China.

This consensus-driven method promotes collaboration and solidarity amongst EU Member States but also leaves the bloc susceptible to weaknesses, especially during pressing global crises. Hix explains that the EU's thorough and inclusive debating process, although beneficial for developing comprehensive policy solutions, can hinder quick and decisive decisions during worldwide emergencies. The EU's governance model faces a conflict between preserving democratic processes and strengthening its ability to function as a cohesive global entity. This is especially clear in cases where the interests of Member States differ, making it difficult to quickly reach a consensus. An instance illustrating this is the EU's reaction to the migration crisis in 2015. The absence of a comprehensive agreement on the allocation of asylum seekers amongst Member States resulted in a prolonged crisis and damaged tensions within the bloc. This situation emphasised the challenges the EU encounters in promptly and efficiently addressing pressing issues, as pointed out by Collett and Le Coz in their examination of EU policy (2018).

Nevertheless, the EU's distinctive blend of economic, political, and soft power capacities establishes it as a prominent global actor. Although it may not align perfectly with conventional definitions of global superpowers, its impact on global politics is unquestionable. The EU embodies a unique form of influence in today's global environment, marked by its capacity to establish standards, promote collaboration, and exert authority through institutional power, economic might, and soft power attraction. The EU's diverse influence enables it to shape outcomes and strategies that extend far beyond its immediate geographical boundaries, establishing its position as a key player in global affairs, as defined in this article.

4. Global Reach: The European Union's Influence on International Affairs

Having discussed power and the capabilities of the EU, it is crucial to analyse how the EU demonstrates its influence globally, while not overseeing all elements of its Member States' activities.

The EU's authority is clearly demonstrated in several areas, highlighting its weight and significance on the world stage. It influences global norms and agendas by using its expertise in commerce, diplomacy, and regulatory standards, extending its authority internationally. Anu Bradford discusses this when weighting in how the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) has influenced global norms, prompting countries outside the EU to align their data protection laws with those of the EU to facilitate trade and data exchanges (Bradford, 2019). In a comparable way, some scholars feature the EU's aggressive role in the Paris Agreement negotiations as a demonstration of its leadership in global environmental activities under climate diplomacy (Oberthür & Dupont, 2021). The EU's unified tactics and diplomatic involvement have been central in advancing global climate commitments, foregrounding its importance as a significant actor in tackling urgent international challenges.

In a similar way, the EU's influence is evident in its leadership role during crucial international discussions, such as those that resulted in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran. The accord was vital for global nuclear non-proliferation efforts at the time and demonstrated the EU's capacity to coordinate and take the lead in high-stakes multilateral situations. Cornelius Adebahr features the importance of the EU's diplomatic efforts and its capacity to coordinate the interests of its Member States in involving Iran and the wider international community (Adebahr, 2006). The EU plays a crucial role in global governance by initiating, mediating, and advancing complicated international agreements, solidifying its status as a powerful player on the global arena. The EU's leadership in diplomatic discussions, along with its regulatory and environmental efforts, jointly boost its global reputation and influence.

The EU demonstrates its power through economic influence, regulatory expertise, and diplomatic involvement. As the world's biggest single market and commercial union, holds substantial economic influence, swaying worldwide commerce and investment movements. An excellent example

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of this is when the EU strategically imposed retaliatory tariffs on U.S. exports in response to the U.S. imposing tariffs on steel and aluminium. Hoekmam and Bilal's research explains how these tariffs are a component of a broader EU strategy to defend its economic interests and manage the intricacies of international trade law (Hoekmam & Bilal, 2019). This move impacts the industries immediately affected and demonstrates the EU's ability to enforce its trade policy while honouring its obligations to the global trading system.

The EU's diplomatic involvement and soft power programmes enhance its influence on the global arena. It pursues the advancement of peace, stability, and prosperity globally through its different branches, such as the European External Action Service (EEAS) and through a diverse range of development aid projects. An example of this is the EU's significant role in providing development aid to Africa, aiming to foster economic growth, improve infrastructure, and address social challenges. For instance, through initiatives like the European Development Fund (EDF), the EU allocates substantial financial resources to support projects in sectors such as education, healthcare, agriculture, and governance across African countries (Kaya, 2017). By investing in sustainable development and poverty reduction efforts, the EU not only contributes to improving the lives of millions but also strengthens its partnerships and influence in the region.

5. The European Union in Flux: Traversing Revival, Stasis, and Decline on the Global Stage

Evaluating the EU's impact in various scenarios is fundamental to ascertain whether it is experiencing a resurgence, maintaining its existing supremacy, or diminishing as a global force. Currently, our analysis must prioritize two pivotal geopolitical contexts that are shaping the influence of the EU: Ukraine and Gaza. These areas are of immediate concern due to their profound implications on international stability. Additionally, to provide a comprehensive review and exercising a degree of editorial latitude, this article will also encompass an examination of the EU's influence and relations with Latin America.

5.1 *The European Union's Strategic Significance in the Ukraine Crisis*

Ukraine is a central focus of geopolitical tensions. The EU's response to the crisis is a noteworthy example of its foreign policy implementation and impact on the global arena. The EU's comprehensive reaction includes diplomatic efforts, economic sanctions, governance support, and the use of soft power, each representing the union's strategic aims and skills.

The EU's diplomatic endeavours in Ukraine showcase its dedication to stabilising the area and upholding a strong position against breaches of international law. The EU has played a significant role in pursuing a settlement to the situation in Ukraine by acting as both a mediator and a key diplomatic player, highlighting the union's efforts in promoting dialogue and peace (Härtel, 2023). This engagement is essential as it highlights the EU's willingness to uphold sovereignty and territorial integrity in its nearby region.

The EU has employed economic sanctions as a tool to demonstrate its stance against the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Targeting key Russian sectors is part of a broader strategy to exert economic pressure and display the EU's disapproval of the breach of global norms (Mamonov et al., 2022). Accordingly, the EU has promised substantial financial assistance through the EU4Ukraine Facility, to promote Ukraine's resilience and recovery, ensuring the country's operations while imposing sanctions. Cardwell and Moret underline that the sanctions showcase the EU's intentional utilisation of its economic influence to accomplish political goals, significantly impacting Russia's economic landscape (2023). The EU's varied strategy to tackling the problem in Ukraine involves a combination of punitive sanctions and constructive financial help.

In addition to urgent actions, the EU has played a crucial role in promoting governance and change in Ukraine. The EU aspires to provide a more stable and democratic governance structure by providing cash and expertise. This method is crucial for the lasting progress of Ukraine, bringing it into closer conformity with European norms and procedures. Additionally, this support benefits Ukraine in addressing its current requirements and is in line with the EU's overarching goal of advancing democratic principles and ensuring stable government in nearby areas, especially since Ukraine was granted candidate status in June 2022 to join the EU in the future (Shatz et al., 2023).

When it comes to soft power, the EU has been instrumental in shaping the narrative and public image of Ukraine through its active involvement. Through the implementation of cultural exchanges, educational

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programmes, and media efforts with the purpose of promoting European ideas and principles, the EU has been able to develop social links and improve its reputation as a supporter of peace and stability. By carefully employing soft power in Ukraine, the EU can strengthen support for its policies and stances, both locally and internationally, so increasing its influence on the future trajectory of the area (Raik et al., 2023).

Ukraine receives non-lethal military aid and cybersecurity support from the EU to maintain peace without military conflict. Diplomacy is prioritised over military action, emphasising the balance between humanitarian and military help. Even while Ukraine receives significant EU economic and diplomatic aid, many say it needs additional military aid to confront Russian aggression. This viewpoint emphasizes the necessity of reevaluating the EU's support policy by considering extending beyond non-lethal aid to provide more extensive military assistance to enhance the efficacy of its support in the current battle. Obviously, soft power does not always deliver the results wanted, and it might not be enough to dissuade a power such as Russia, in this case (Tuomioja, 2009).

A substantial majority of Europeans (around 74%) approve of the EU's position on Ukraine (Camut, 2023), which includes its financial, military, and humanitarian aid initiatives, along with sanctions imposed on Russia. The level of support differs across various EU Member States and might affect future European elections as public worries about the economic consequences of the conflict increase. The EU's internal dynamics and the differing public opinions amongst its Member States may significantly influence future foreign policy choices and the political environment within the union.

Consequently, the EU's involvement in Ukraine highlights the drawbacks of primarily using diplomatic, economic, and soft power strategies in a scenario dominated by armed combat. This comprehensive approach, advantageous for promoting peace and bringing Ukraine in line with Western principles, may prove inadequate in dealing with increasing military aggression from Russia, stressing the EU's difficulties as a global player in managing intricate international emergencies. The EU's ability to react to problems and preserve influence will be crucial as the situation in Ukraine develops, affecting the larger European security picture and the EU's position within it.

5.2 *European Union's Role in the Gaza Conflict: A Dual Commitment to Humanitarian Aid and Diplomatic Challenges*

In its stance on the ongoing conflict in Gaza, the EU places a significant emphasis on humanitarian considerations and the necessity of a cease-fire to successfully resolve the humanitarian tragedy (Starcevic, 2023). Josep Borrell, the Chief of the EU's Foreign Policy, has frequently emphasised the importance of humanitarian interventions and opposed the shipment of arms to Israel considering the increasing violence (Al Jazeera, 2024). Furthermore, Borrell has expressed his support for the demands for a ceasefire, highlighting the vital necessity to make it possible for humanitarian aid to be provided to the people of Gaza, who are suffering immensely because of the conflict (Al Jazeera, 2023).

Experts have enriched the discussion by emphasising many fundamental issues and the complex geopolitics of the war. Researchers from the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) and Brookings state that the high unemployment rate in Gaza makes many young men vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups like Hamas, which is a recurring problem in the region (Eilam, 2023). This socioeconomic aspect worsens the cycle of violence and is connected to broader regional instability. Academics argue that a cease-fire is likely to be brief and might lead to other conflicts if the underlying issues such as the Israeli occupation and Gaza blockade are not resolved (Dews, 2014).

Discussions on this topic focus on international law and the responsibilities of countries during conflicts. Debates in international forums are contentious due to allegations of Israel's disproportionate actions and debates about the accuracy of Israeli and Palestinian accounts. Meanwhile, Borrell and other officials state that the EU's objective is to foster peace, protect human rights, and navigate complex issues by finding a balance (The Times of Israel, 2024).

The EU's significant role in the Gaza crisis illustrates its commitment to diplomatic and humanitarian principles, while also accent the limitations of soft power in complex geopolitical situations. The EU's influence is constrained by several factors, notwithstanding its strong backing of international law, humanitarian aid, and peace efforts. Its reliance on non-coercive and diplomatic methods renders it useless in dealing with or influencing parties engaged in military conflicts, when immediate and forceful responses are often more effective. Likewise, the EU's institutional structure limits its ability to act independently, necessitating extensive international cooperation to address crises such as the one in Gaza.

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6. EU's Reinvigorated Strategy in Latin America: Balancing Between Tradition and Transformation

The geopolitical landscape in Latin America for the EU is intricate and increasingly influenced by other nations such as the US and China. Recently, it may be perceived that the EU is focusing on enhancing its political and strategic partnerships with the region in response to China's increasing influence and larger geopolitical changes.

The EU has long maintained strong ties with Latin America, where it is a significant commercial and economic partner, based on shared historical and cultural heritage. However, because of China's bold infrastructure and investment projects, which have significantly increased its influence, the dynamics have shifted. The EU has recognised as a result that it has to get more active in Latin America, with a strategy that entails focusing on matters such as climate change, sustainable development, and enhancing business relations, particularly via the ongoing EU-Mercosur trade agreement (Lau, 2023).

The EU has new prospects due to political developments in Latin America, such as the election of leaders with whom it shares stronger ideological views. For example, Europe has welcomed Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's election in Brazil, hoping to build trade and environmental cooperation that would lessen the EU's reliance on other countries like China and Russia for vital resources for the green transition (Moens & Mathiesen, 2022).

Despite the progress that has been made, the EU still faces several challenges. Its influence has been lessened in comparison to China's economic initiatives due to the bloc's erratic commitment. As authors who are closely familiar with the EU's ties with Latin America, namely with Peru, it is possible to observe that the EU's involvement has been insufficiently strong for a while. Although there are indications of renewed engagement, such as the 2023 CELAC Summit with the EU (following an eight-year break) and the next one scheduled for 2025, these occasions draw attention to a more general problem of infrequent attention. The EU frequently underlines its own goals, such as the green transition and digital transformation, over those that are more urgent for Latin American nations, giving the impression that other global issues have taken precedence.

The combat against drug trafficking, improving security, battling organised crime, and growing their economies while addressing serious inequality

concerns continue to be the region's key priorities. These goals frequently do not line up perfectly with those of the EU, which causes a mismatch in cooperation efforts and gives the impression that European priorities are being imposed over the needs of Latin America. This discrepancy emphasises how, to promote a more equitable and fruitful collaboration, the EU must adjust its policies to better reflect the needs and circumstances of the nations of Latin America.

Many argue that the current state of the EU reflects more of a continuance of the existing situation rather than a significant revival or decline. The EU remains a major player in global affairs, but its influence is being limited by internal conflicts, external threats, and evolving geopolitical dynamics. On one part, internally, there were conflicts about the procedure of admitting new members while the approval of the new migration and asylum accord faced criticism, especially from nations located on the outer border. Also, EU members have differing views on the adequacy of their response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. On the other hand, externally, high-level meetings with the United States and China in 2023 did not result in concrete economic measures. The EU's future as a global power will be defined by its ability to address these issues while upholding its values and interests.

Another point of view says that the EU is witnessing a comeback of dominance, which is being driven by its coherent response to urgent global concerns as well as its capacity to mobilise resources and political will amongst Member States. Some examples of the reinvigorated sense of purpose and ambition that the EU possesses on the international arena reflects in its leadership in climate action, digital innovation, and global health.

The European Green Deal and its Fit for 55 packages are presented as one of the EU's most ambitious measures, aiming to achieve an ecological transition with the goal of reaching climate neutrality by 2050 (Consejo de la Unión Europea, 2024). In the area of digital innovation, the EU's efforts began early in 2010 with the first digital agenda for Europe and are currently guided by the 2030 agenda and the Digital Compass for 2030, covering a wide range of topics such as data law, regulations for artificial intelligence, digital markets and services, e-education, amongst others (Polluveer et al., 2023). In terms of health, the EU has a global health strategy to improve global health security by 2030, seeking to strengthen its leadership and reaffirm its responsibility in facing major global challenges and health inequalities (European Commission. Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety., 2022). As we have already mentioned, another example of how its dominance is also reflected is in its current role as a major supporter of Ukraine in its war against Russia, while also reinvigorating its legitimacy by supporting a country that is defending its territorial integrity.

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On the other hand, there are analysts who believe that the EU's power as a global force is diminishing. They attribute this situation to a few issues, including internal fragmentation, institutional inertia, and foreign scepticism. In a world that is becoming increasingly complicated and competitive, the EU has been having difficulty addressing challenges such as migration, security, and economic inequality, which has led to questions being raised about its capacity to preserve its cohesiveness and relevance.

The practical scenarios introduced above lead us to the preliminary conclusion the EU's current worldwide role is characterised by continuity rather than a significant collapse or a sudden resurgence, although encountering new difficulties and adaptations. This multi-faceted viewpoint acknowledges that the EU has faced challenges from both within and without, but its institutional resilience and dedication to joint efforts are still strong. The EU's strategic actions in addressing global problems, especially in climate action and digital transformation, demonstrate its ability to sustain or even increase its impact on the international platform. The bloc must maintain internal harmony and adjust to the evolving geopolitical environment to preserve its position. The Union future as a major global player will depend on its capacity to balance internal cohesion with aggressive foreign involvement, marking this time as a crucial phase of strategic adjustment.

It is important to consider the effect that the impending European elections and the admission of new members will have in the future of Europe. As with any election, there exists a potential that either the priorities established by community authorities are strengthened or that the newly elected ones bring about substantial changes. The European Parliament's research tank paper highlights ten significant concerns for the 2024 hearings. The analysed topics include young Europeans and the European elections, fake reality and disinformation during an election year, achieving the twin transition, climate overshoot and adaptation, the future of the EU automotive sector, financing Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction, prosecution of international core crimes and reparations for victims in Russia's war on Ukraine, El Niño's impact on food security, the 2024 US elections, and India's growing influence (Bassot, 2024). The reaction of the new community leaders and new members to these difficulties will decide if the EU can uphold its influence.

7. Evolving Strategies: The European Union's Adaptation to a New Geopolitical Era

The EU is currently at a critical juncture in its history, one in which a profound comprehension of broader geopolitical trends is indispensable for addressing global concerns such as the changes brought about by climate change and the technological transformation. This context gives rise to an essential conversation about political realignment, which is a necessary component for the EU as it works to strike a balance between continuity and change on a global scale. Research conducted by academics such as Fareed Zakaria and John Ikenberry offers valuable insights into the ways in which the EU might effectively respond to new geopolitical issues and strategically retain internal cohesiveness. The way in which they understand political realignment helps to define the strategic options available to the EU to maintain its influence in the face of the dynamic factors that are altering the world system.

It has been suggested by Zakaria that political realignment frequently occurs as a reaction to significant global upheavals, such as economic crises, technological advancements, or rising dangers. It is because of this that entities such as the EU are compelled to rebalance their connections with both traditional allies and new powers to adjust to a world in which influence is becoming more diffuse (2008).

According to Ikenberry's theory, such realignments are an essential component of more extensive institutional shifts that are taking place inside the international system. This entails the EU reassessing its position on sovereignty and national interests while simultaneously increasing its level of integration in some domains. As a result of this realignment, which is affected by both internal dynamics and external influences, the EU faces a difficulty in preserving its cohesion and effectively addressing problems regarding the global economy, environment, and security (Ikenberry, 2011).

When the perspectives of Zakaria and Ikenberry are brought together, it becomes clear that the ongoing political realignment of the EU is not only a strategic necessity but also an opportunity to redefine its role in the global arena. This process requires striking a balance between the many internal preferences of its Member States and the requirements of a complex and interconnected global environment. In doing so, it paves the way for the subsequent chapter in European integration and international diplomacy.

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In its external dimension, political realignment propels the EU into more direct competition with global powers. According to political scientist Barry Buzan, such realignment often accelerates as regions or states adjust their external policies in reaction to the changing distributions of power and capabilities in the international system. Buzan notes that the EU's strategic realignment involves recalibrating its approaches to global governance, trade, and security, pushing it into arenas of heightened competition with the United States, China, and Russia (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). Each of these powers presents distinct challenges and opportunities, requiring the EU to adopt a more nuanced and initiative-taking stance in its foreign policy to safeguard its interests and extend its influence. This dynamic is critical as the EU seeks not just to react to but actively shape the evolving geopolitical landscape.

8. Global Power Play: The EU's Strategy Against Rising Geopolitical Tensions

Competition from large nation-states is a challenge for the EU. These countries use a range of political, economic, and military tools to safeguard their interests and challenge the EU's position as a global power. Political scientist Ian Bremmer offers a modern view, focusing on the idea of "geopolitical risk" in today's foreign policy environment. Bremmer contends that the EU is seeing greater difficulties in upholding its power and protecting its interests globally due to the rising nationalism of countries such as the United States, China, and Russia.

Bremmer recommends that the EU should strengthen its geopolitical strategy by broadening its relationships and bolstering its diplomatic resilience to address these difficulties. This includes not only enhancing established alliances but also interacting with developing economies to expand its impact. The EU may utilise its economic might strategically by employing trade agreements and development funding to form coalitions and counterbalance the impact of its competitors.

In this sense, Bremmer's thesis highlights the importance of adaptive methods in a world where geopolitical changes can quickly change power dynamics (Bremmer, 2012). The EU must adopt a proactive approach in its foreign policy endeavours to meet the needs of the current reality. To

illustrate this, we will introduce five key ideas that outline how the EU can effectively adopt a resourceful approach in its foreign policy.

Firstly, the EU should prioritise strengthening its diplomatic endeavours in key geopolitical areas such as Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa to implement this policy effectively. This involves increasing diplomatic presence and participating in regional forums and international discussions to assert its influence and promote conflict resolution. An illustration of this is the EU's involvement in the Joint Communication on a Partnership with the Gulf, which aims to enhance relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (European Commission, 2022). This programme aims to strengthen political, economic, and cultural connections between the EU and the Gulf area. In this forum, the EU utilises direct discussions, joint initiatives, and regional forums to assist dispute resolution, improve mutual understanding, and reinforce its influence in an area crucial for global energy markets and geopolitical stability.

Furthermore, it is imperative that the EU expands its economic clout. It is essential to use economic leverage to forge alliances and influence non-EU countries' agendas through trade agreements, investment packages, and development assistance. The European External Investment Plan (EIP), which promotes investment in non-EU regions, especially in Africa and the EU Neighbourhood, provides a concrete illustration of this. The primary goal of the EIP is to get a significant amount of funds from both public and private sources to support development initiatives that encourage sustainable growth (Bilal & Große-Puppenthal, 2018). The investments seek to enhance economic growth in the areas and create lasting coalitions to advance EU geopolitical interests and diminish the influence of competitors such as China and Russia. This way, the EU leverages its economic power to sway governments and gain support from individuals in strategically crucial geopolitical regions via fostering such commercial connections. Supporting sustainable development initiatives in developing nations can assist the EU in establishing enduring alliances and reducing the impact of competitors such as the ones mentioned above.

Moreover, the EU may enhance its worldwide influence by implementing frameworks aligned with its principles and enforcing stringent international standards in cybersecurity, privacy, and digital trade, using its technical and inventive progress. As it was mentioned earlier, the adoption of the GDPR serves as a practical example of this concept. This legislation impacts global markets by requiring international companies that process EU citizens' data to comply with its regulations and by enforcing stringent privacy and data protection measures within the EU (Bradford, 2019). This approach influences global standards in cybersecurity and data protection, enhancing the EU's reputation as a leader in digital commerce and privacy.

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Similarly, the EU must create a comprehensive security plan that encompasses traditional military capabilities as well as defences against cyber and hybrid warfare. An example of strategic alignment is the EU's cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to enhance collective security measures through the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats. The institute in Helsinki was established to enhance EU defences against hybrid threats, such as cyberwarfare (European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, n.d.). The EU may demonstrate its dedication to a comprehensive security strategy by collaborating with NATO and other alliances to address historical and current concerns, therefore enhancing its defensive capabilities against other superpowers.

Finally, increasing financial assistance for projects that promote cultural exchange and public diplomacy might augment the EU's soft power. This concept is illustrated by Erasmus+, an EU-funded educational and cultural exchange programme. Scholarships for students, educators, and administrators to study, train, and experience in different European countries promote European cultural values and intellectual achievements worldwide. Stimulating European culture, values, and intellectual achievements globally through exhibitions, cultural events, and scholarships could enhance the EU's reputation and attract backing from other nations (European Commission, 2021). This showcases how the EU employs and could enhance cultural diplomacy to strengthen its global influence.

As a result of these key ideas, the bloc can boost its ability to manoeuvre through the intricate global environment outlined by Bremmer employing a combination of hard and soft power tactics to uphold and broaden its influence amid changing geopolitical dynamics. Implementing a proactive and versatile foreign policy will protect the EU's interests and establish it as a strong leader amongst global transformations. In conclusion, the potential of the EU to exercise influence on the global arena, in conjunction with the challenges offered by its competitors, highlights the complexity of current global politics. The EU must manage internal tensions, external obstacles, and a shifting geopolitical landscape to uphold its influence in current world affairs.

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