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THE ROLE OF NORMS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: A REFLECTION ON THE EXAMPLE OF EU EXTERNAL POLICY

A b s t r a c t

The purpose of the article is to show the specificity and importance of the norms factor in contemporary international relations under the conditions of the evolving international order (especially after 2022) with particular emphasis on the specific sub-system of international relations, which is the system of the European Union (EU) under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). It is assumed that with the crisis of the liberal international order, the importance and specificity of norms as pillars of the EU strategy in international relations as the main instrument shaping the specificity of actions in the international space within the paradigm of the normative actor is changing. Thus, the question arises whether reference to norms (possibly which ones) can continue to be the basis for building foreign policy assumptions of international actors in the conditions of a return to the rhetoric of force and *power politics*? The material for analysis will be the strategic documents of the EU's external policy in the period after 2022–24 in terms of possible actions relating to the response to the changing international reality. The study will be set within the constructivist paradigm.

K e y w o r d s: international norms, social constructivism, Common Foreign and Security Policy, war.

INTRODUCTION

International relations are a rich reality, the analysis of which until the 1980s was dominated by a diad of approaches within the (neo) realist and (neo)liberal paradigms. Within their framework, scholars mainly analyzed the material aspects of politics and international relations, such as economic power, military resources or the impact of geographic location on the foreign policy of states. However, as the events of the declining moment of the Cold War showed, intangible factors such as shared ideas, international norms (both legal and non--legal), identity or discourse are equally important in the processes of explaining and understanding the complex international reality. A kind of constructivist turn in the 1980s towards the inclusion of non-material issues in the research programs of the science of international relations made it possible to take a fresh look at the issue of norms in international reality and treat them as factors as important as material elements in the process of analyzing international politics, but also in the creation of international politics.[1] Today, the issue of international actors' recourse to common norms is an important element in the formation of international reality. This issue can be observed, for example, in relation to the dispute in US––Ukraine relations in the context of the war.[2] The European Union upholds respect for the norms of international law, as well as political norms: territorial integrity or limited trust in talks with the Russian Federation in the context of ending the war. The U.S. administration, meanwhile, while appealing to the rhetoric of profit and the economic deal, as well as pointing to the need for a quick end to the war, appeals to the hard, material aspects of its foreign policy, which are economic interests. In addition, the diplomatic fiasco between Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelenski has resulted in European allies joining the negotiations between Kyiv and Washington, highlighting the differing approaches to the issue and the importance of international norms. Europe, with the leading role of Britain and France, today declares its willingness to work out with Ukraine a plan to stop hostilities and its coordination with the US.

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[1]   Jeffrey Checkel, 'The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory', *World Politics* 50: 2, 1998, pp. 324–48.

[2]   *Fiasco of Zelensky's Visit to US and European Plan to End War*, https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2025-03-03/fiasko-wizyty-zelenskiego-w-usa-i-europejski-plan-zakonczenia-wojny (access: 4 March 2025).

The purpose of this article is to show the importance of the soft elements of international politics, which are normative elements, both in the analysis of international reality and in the practice of international politics using the example of the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy in the context of the war in Ukraine i.e. 2022–24.

With regard to the current international situation marked by war and conflict, and with the emergence of a real military threat to Europe from the east, the question is whether the EU's previous strategy of basing its foreign policy on a soft, i.e. normative, aspect is a tenable strategy in the context of current challenges to European security? Can norms continue to play an important role in the European Union's foreign policy, or are we seeing a retreat from norms and a return to hard foreign policy instruments, or perhaps such a distinction is not necessary, i.e. one can be a normative actor in international policy while possessing military instruments of international influence?

For the purposes of this analysis, it is assumed that the European Union's previous strategy in international relations based on the narrative of a normative actor is being evaluated in the direction of the strategy of an actor possessing *hard politics*. At the same time, it seems that European political elites are now linking the possession of defense autonomy with the ability to strengthen and defend the normative identity of the European Union in the international space. The turning point of the previous perception of norms in European foreign policy is the ongoing Russian–Ukrainian war.

The article will be divided into three parts. The first will refer to the analysis of the importance of the normative factor in the processes of explaining international reality. The diversity of looking at the normative factor from the perspective of the three leading perspectives: neorealism, neoliberalism and constructivism will be shown here. This look will help to understand the analytical value and diversity of ways of looking at norms in space especially in the context of the current international situation. The second part of the article will show the existing view of the importance of norms in the formation of the identity of the European Union in international relations. The third part will address the debate on the importance of the normative factor in European politics on the basis of an analysis of policy documents on the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) against the background of recent international events related to the war in Ukraine.

The leading theoretical paradigm through which the analysis will be undertaken is social constructivism in traditional terms. Within this paradigm, an assumption is made about the vital importance of intangible factors in shaping the identity of a political actor and his strategy of action in the international space.[3]

The main research method will be discourse analysis. It is a method used to study written and spoken language in relation to its social context. It aims to understand how language is used in real-life situations. Instead, it examines the linguistic content (what is being said) and the way language is used in a given text to convey meaning in different social settings. The background for that is the view that there is no meaning residing outside language or that, even if there is meaning outside language, there is no way of studying the meaning 'behind' language. No investigation can therefore take place directly at the level of ideas. We are always, strictly speaking, studying the dynamics of language.[4]

SPECIFICITY OF NORMS IN THE SCIENCE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The issue of norms in the study of international relations was one of the early areas of reflection on the nature of international relations. This issue was developed, among others, within the framework of political liberalism and idealism since the first half of the 20th century. The exponent of the idealistic view of international reality was, for example, American President Woodrow Wilson. The essence of the idealism of the then US president was the belief that peace in the international space can be achieved by appealing to international norms, i.e. law, international institutions, ideas of justice, sovereign equality, international ethics and the realization of the principle of the common good. Idealists of the interwar period postulated the construction of international relations based on moral principles.[5] Idealists believe that the main task of all political institutions is to contribute to the development of universal rights and values, such as justice and the dignity of the human person.

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[3] Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[4] Henrik Larsen, 'Discourse Analysis in the Study of European Foreign Policy', in: Ben Tonra and Thomas Christiansen, eds, *Rethinking European Union Foreign Policy* (Manchester Univ. Press, 2004), pp. 62–81.

[5] Michael Joseph Smith, *Realist Thought from Weber to Kissinger* (Louisiana State University Press, 1986), pp. 56–57.

Also, the discussion around the recognition of norms as material factors in the international space was the axis of the dispute within the so-called first paradigmatic debate in the science of international relations, which took place between representatives of the realist and liberal schools regarding the ontology of international reality. While the school of political realism considered them secondary to material factors (military power, economic interest, *raison d'etat*), representatives of the school of political liberalism attributed to them a superior role in determining the principles of peaceful cooperation between nations. Realists responded that the primary regulator of international relations is the real power of the state and the balance of power on a regional and global scale. Liberals, on the other hand, pointed to the system of law and international organizations that mitigate antagonisms.[6]

With the behavioral revolution in the science of international relations in the 1950s and 1960s, there was a kind of abandonment of reflection and research on international norms. This is because they were difficult to measure and issues were rather relegated to the sidelines of scientific reflection. This trend was reinforced by the emerging interest of political scientists in economic methods at the end of the 1970s with the growing dynamics of globalization processes.[7]

At the same time, within the framework of the emerging non--institutional approach, in the late 1970s more and more research attention was focused on the issue of international regimes. Such a trend was an offshoot of the emergence of such international institutions in state-to-state relations at the time.[8] Since the 1980s, the study of international institutions has focused on: international organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, on transnational corporations, and on the formal and informal norms that developed through cooperation. An important work for neo--institutionalism is the publication by J. March, J. Olsen entitled *The New Institutionalism. Organizational Factors in Political Life.*[9] The authors pointed out that institutions (including norms) as such 'matter'

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[6] Andrzej Galganek, 'International Relations Theory. Security Theory', *Strategic Review* 2, 2013, p. 14.

[7] Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, 'International Norm Dynamics and Political Change', *International Organization* 52: 4, 1998, pp. 887–917 (p. 889), https://doi.org/10.1162/002081898550789.

[8] Stephen D. Krasner, *International Regimes* (Stanford: Cornell University Press, 1983).

[9] James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, 'The New Institutionalism. Organizational Factors in Political Life', *The American Political Science Review* 78: 3, 1984, pp. 734–49, https://doi.org/10.2307/1961840.

and influence the way states behave both externally and internally. The research challenge then remained to identify the mechanisms of this influence, as well as to clarify the scope of influence of international institutions on participants in international relations.

The question of returning to the analysis of the specificity of norms in the theories of international relations dates back to the 1980s and is associated, on the one hand, with the dynamic development of the theory of international regimes, and, on the other hand, with the growing popularity of constructivism in international relations. The main category that allows us to understand the importance of norms in international relations is related to the basic constructivist concept of identity.[10] With regard to norms, constructivists note that they are collective agreements about an actor's behavior. Thus, they shape the identities and interests of a state and regulate its behavior in the international space. Norms in the constructivist perspective have a causal power that works in two directions: with their help, states construct the structure of the international system, but also this structure shapes the identities and interests of states. A distinction can be made between norms: bureaucratic (how to exercise power), economic, equality, both in economic, political and social life (e.g. prohibition of slave trade, sovereign equality of states, human rights) or moral principles (e.g. the idea of just war or just peace).[11]

The issue of international norms returned to the international relations research agenda through the work of researchers representing the constructivist approach. This specific 'normative turn' in international relations (in the 1980s) was associated with the perception of international relations as a social and political space, where, in addition to the interests of individual states, such categories as the common good, the rule of law, peace, good governance, etc. began to play an increasingly important role in the process of policy--making and scientific explanation. Theoretical reflection again focused on issues related to the morality and ethics of international life, and research began to focus on the analysis of the meanings and interpretation of the norms of international law and political and social norms in the relations between the actors of international politics.[12]

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[10] Gary Goertz and Paul F. Diehl, 'Toward a Theory of International Norms: Some Conceptual and Measurement Issues', *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 36: 4, 1992, pp. 634–64 (pp. 640–42).

[11] Finnemore and Sikkink, *International Norm Dynamics*.

[12] Annika Björkdahl, *From Idea to Norm Promoting Conflict Prevention* (Lund: Lund University, 2002), p. 40; Amy Gurowitz, 'Mobilizing International Norms: Domestic Actors Immigrants and the Japanese State', *World Politics* 51: 3, 1999, pp. 413–445 (p. 417).

The return to reflection focused on norms, values or international ethics was marked, among others, by the works of Michael Walzer[13] and John Rawls.[14] The changes observed in the international reality of the late 1980s and early 1990s, accompanied by processes of evolution in reflection on the nature of international relations, formed a new community of scholars who developed a normative theory of international relations. This community included Charles R. Beitz,[15] Mervyn Frost[16] or Friedrich Kratochwil.[17]

Thus, according to the constructivist assumption, norms shape the identity of actors in international relations. It is important to know their origin, nature and specificity in order to better understand international reality. Here are some important questions to ask: what is the function of norms and beliefs in politics and society? How do they affect the construction of international politics? Where do they come from? What is the role of language in formulating, shaping and disseminating such norms and beliefs?

According to constructivists, international relations consist mainly of ideas and norms, while material factors are of secondary importance (ontological idealism). Norms are defined as collective agreements on the behavior of actors. They shape the identities and interests of actors and regulate their behavior. States use them to build the structure of the international system, but at the same time this structure also shapes the identities and interests of states. Norms in international relations are considered a set of subjective agreements and collective expectations about the proper behavior of a participant in international relations at a certain time. Thus, norms contain an element of collective assessment of behavior in the international space and provide guidance for the future behavior of a given entity. On the one hand, international norms regulate the behavior of an actor, on the other hand, they constitute the identity of the actor in relations with others.[18]

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[13] Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument With Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

[14] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

[15] Charles R. Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971).

[16] Mervyn Frost, *Towards a Normative Theory of International Relations: A Critical Analysis of the Philosophical and Methodological Assumptions in the Discipline with Proposals Towards a Substantive Normative Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[17] Fredrich Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms, and Decisions: On the Condition of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[18] Ibid.

The normative structure of the international system consists of two levels: deep and surface.[19] This first level of norms socializes states, making their behavior conform to the rules of the system. The second level, consisting of international organizations and non-governmental actors, is the space for diffusion of norms—in order to teach states proper—norm-compliant behavior. The sources of these norms in the structure of the international system can be multiple: the global level—a state draws its understanding of its own needs, interests and identity from the international system; the level of societies of nation-states—a state shares norms specific to the society of its own state.[20]

Explaining the reasons for the process of emergence and evolution of norms in international relations is, according to constructivists, the essence of change in international relations as such.[21] Norms have their life cycle, which proceeds in stages. The first leads to the emergence of norms. This process involves political actors who use language to name norms and then legitimize them as meaningful. The second step leads to the phenomenon of socialization of states in relation to norms, which involves pressure on them to act in accordance with norms. The third step is a kind of recognition of norms by states as their own and the end of public discourse around them.[22]

Incorporating the issue of norms and their change into the analysis of the reality of international relations is a way to overcome the weaknesses of previous theories within the sub-discipline. It was noted at the outset that it was associated with their materialist ontology, which was unable to grapple with the change in relations between states in the context of the Cold War. Constructivists, meanwhile, note that if the focus had been on analyzing the changes taking place at that time in the normative structure of the international system, one would have recognized the coming processes of change and their direction.[23]

Thanks to constructivism, the issues of norms, values, identity and perception of actors in international relations are an important factor to not only better understand and explain the processes and

[19] Jacek Czaputowicz, *Theories of International Relations. Critique and systematization* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2008), p. 314.

[20] Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

[21] Finnemore and Sikkink*, International Norm Dynamics*, pp. 887–918.

[22] Ibid., pp. 895–97.

[23] Wendt, *Social Theory*, p. 13.

phenomena of international relations, but also increasingly determine the actions and decisions taken by actors in the international space. Recently, issues relating to norms and values in international relations have emerged in the public debate. From an analytical point of view, they belong to the intangible (ideational) elements of international relations. The constructivist approach views international relations as a space for constructing interactions between its actors.[24] Norms have causal power in the international system, giving meaning and significance to the material aspects of this reality, such as the power of a state, its might and its foreign policy. They are also an important element in developing the identity of international actors.[25]

THE ROLE OF NORMS IN SHAPING EU STRATEGY AND IDENTITY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Reference to international norms has been the basis of European strategy and identity in international relations since the 1970s. At that time, the international identity of the European Communities was based on the strategy of *domestication* of relations between third countries through the promotion of certain norms in international relations, such as: strengthening the rule of law and democracy. Here it was said to contribute to building fairer international relations, in which, among other things, the principle of independence and equality of states would be safeguarded, and their security better guaranteed.[26] This proposal was to be supported by a political union, through which Europe would offer the world a new model of international relations, based precisely on the primacy of democratic values and commitment to the principles of international morality. This identity in international relations was to constitute a kind of third way in relation to the model of power of the United States or the Soviet Union at the time. The identity of a peculiar *civilian* actor (*civilian power*) of international relations adopted at the time was due to several issues. First, it was the only possible self-definition due to the lack of visible progress in building a political union among the member states of the Communities, especially in the aspect of foreign and security policy. Second, it was the economic factor that, since

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., p. 211.

[26] 'Declaration on European Identity', *Bulletin of the European Communities* 12, 1973, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, pp. 118–122.

the 1950s, had been the strength of the European Communities in its relations with third countries (trade policy, customs union, trade agreements, development aid, etc.). Thirdly, such an identity was the result of the opportunities offered to the European Communities by the international system. This was the result of adopting a definition of its identity in international relations that was neutral with respect to the US and the USSR, focused on issues of values, economics or diplomacy without ambitions to compete militarily with the two aforementioned powers.

The concept of *civilian*, non-military power (*civilian power*) in relation to the European Communities was formulated in the early 1970s. It was presented by the director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, François Duchêne in his 1972 work *Europe in the World Peace*[27]. Duchêne's concept consisted of two parts: descriptive-analytical and normative. The first assumed that the European Communities were a civilian grouping, strong in economic power but relatively weak militarily. The second part assumed that the European Communities should be a force capable of spreading peaceful and democratic standards internationally.[28] The European Communities at the time were to promote such values as political and economic cooperation, peaceful settlement of disputes, promotion of democracy and protection of human rights. This concept was in the context of the international order of the time, based on a network of dependencies (globalization). This order created a rift between the need to pursue individual interests of states and the need and ability of states to work together economically.

Francois Duchêne saw the then European Communities as a non-military power (*civilian power*) that was to become a promoter of the *domestication* of the sphere of international relations. The Communities were to complement American foreign policy efforts in building international order. He was convinced that the European Communities had an important influence on the international system, which was coupled with the nature of the Communities. He was concerned with the ability to spread a model of cooperation between states that guarantees stability and security, more economic and political than military. This characteristic made the Community an

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[27] F. Duchêne, *Europe's Role in World Peace*, in R. Mayne, ed., *Europe Tomorrow: Sixteen Europeans Look Ahead* (Fontana/Collins, 1972), pp. 32–47.

[28] Dariusz Milczarek, *Position and Role of the European Union in International Relations* (Warsaw, 2003), p. 185.

innovative actor on the international scene. The thesis of F. Duchêne was based on a mathematical relationship: the more the importance of the economic, diplomatic and cultural factor in international relations increases, the more the importance and weight of military power decreases.[29]

F. Duchêne assumed that the European Communities would never develop into a federal structure, with a common army and government. He fiercely opposed the claim that the Community was a 'superpower in the process of becoming'[30] due to the limited nuclear weapons resources of France and Britain. Moreover, there was no chance to introduce a unified decision-making process on foreign policy. He also argued that the Communities could not transform itself into an unarmed or armed neutral power. A more realistic option is for them to act as a promoter of cooperation between states. In other words, the European Communities were a civilian power because there was a need for this type of community. He pointed out the need for the Communities to promote democratic standards, both externally and internally. Otherwise, they would be doomed to act as a scapegoat for the other powers, which were undeniably stronger than them.[31]

The concept of the European Communities as a non-military power came under criticism from representatives of the realist school of international relations, especially Hedley Bull. This came in the context of the outbreak of the so-called Second Cold War after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. His main theses were contained in his 1982 work *Civilian Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?*

Hedley Bull referred to this concept as *contradiction in terms* (*contradiction in* itself). While he agreed that it can work, but only in times of relative peace and relaxation in international relations. It is completely useless in times of crises, conflicts and wars. In his view, the contradiction was that the European Communities pretend to be a superpower, but do not have the instruments to do so—such as military power. He considered incorrect the thesis that the importance of military power no longer counts in international relations. He pointed to many examples of the use of military power to resolve conflicts. He recalled that Soviet military power was an effective bogeyman for the

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[29] F. Duchêne, *Europe's Role.*

[30] This was the thesis of Johan Galtung presented in his book *The European Community. A Superpower in the Making* (London: Routledge, 1973).

[31] S. Stavidris, *Why the 'Militarizing' of the European Union is Strengthening the Concept of Civilian Power Europe,* "EUI Working Papers" 2001, No. 17, San Domenico 2001, pp. 7–11.

West, while the United States was unable to build up such authority for itself, largely as a result of the divergence of political interests in the anti-Soviet camp. Hedley Bull boldly proclaimed the need to develop a European political strategy that included the possession of conventional and nuclear weapons, which meant nothing less than a proposal to militarize the European Communities. Without military power, the Communities would never be able to become a global actor, and even if they did, they would probably become a lowly and ineffective.[32]

As a proponent of realism, he criticized political idealism. Speaking of the EC as a space of peace, he considered it wishful thinking, and treated war between member states quite realistically. Other critics of the concept charged that the Communities lacked a common strategy for managing crisis situations and coordinating the use of member states' armed forces. They also pointed to the lack of mechanisms for European Political Cooperation, which made it impossible to coordinate the playing of the superpower role.[33]

After the wave of criticism the concept faced at its dawn in the 1980s, the discussion quieted down. It returned after the end of the Cold War, and after the provisions of *the Maastricht Treaty* came into force, the European Union began to search for its new place on the international stage. Faced with the weakness of the civil actor's strategy in the wake of the Balkan conflict in the mid-1990s and the need to rethink the assumptions of its identity in international relations, researchers who propose to base this strategy on European legal, political and market norms came to the rescue. Such figures included Ian Manners, creator of the concept of the European Union as a normative power/power in international relations (*Normative Power Europe* (NPE).[34] I. Manners stated that EU norms not only influence member states, but also affect the external environment through the mechanism of Europeanization and socialization. The power of the European Union in international relations is therefore of an intangible, ideological nature.

The concept of the European Union as a normative power is based on its promotion of those norms and values that underlie its construction and are shared by its member states. These include:

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[32] H. Bull, *Civilian Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?*", Journal of Common Market Studies, 1982 Vol. 21, No. 2: 149–170.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ian Manners, 'Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40: 2, 2002, pp. 235–58.

peace, freedom, democracy, rule of law, protection of human rights. These are supplemented by a catalog of such norms as: social progress, non-discrimination, sustainable development. This concept assumes that the strength of the European Union in international relations is due to the nature of these norms and values and their uniqueness. It is also conditioned by the logic of 'appropriateness.' States from the Union's external environment, want to identify with its norms and values, as they consider them fundamental elements of the international community. Thus, the power of the Union is symbolic—it boils down to achieving external policy goals not by force and threat, but by attracting the external environment by force of attraction. The following table summarizes the normative catalog on which the identity of the European Union in international relations is based, according to I. Manners.

TABLE 1

Catalog of European Union standards

Ground rules	Tasks and objectives	Institutions	Fundamental rights
Freedom	Social solidarity	Guarantee of democracy	Dignity
Democracy	'Non-discrimination'	Rule of law	Freedom
Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms	Sustainability	Human rights	Equality Solidarity Justice
Rule of law		Protection of minorities	Citizenship
Treaty basis: Article 6 of the *Treaty on European Union*	Treaty basis: Article 2 of the *Treaty of Rome and Articles* 6 and 13 *of the Treaty on European Union*	*Copenhagen criteria* 1993	*Charter of Fundamental Rights*

Source: own compilation based on Manners, 'Normative Power Europe', p. 243.

The concept of the Union's identity in international relations proposed by I. Manners starts from the assumption that the previous depictions of the role of the European Union in international relations are flawed. He notes that the Union does not seek to fill any gap in international relations among existing state powers, as it is not state-centric.[35] External actors accept and adhere to European norms as long as they are convinced of their effectiveness and validity and

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[35] Cf. ibid., p. 239.

accept the European Union as such (the mechanism of the so-called logic of appropriateness). The effectiveness of normative authority is therefore the ability of the EU to establish European norms, principles and values in third countries.[36]

The concept of normative power is a continuation of thinking about the identity of the European Union in international relations terms of power, and was developed on the basis of constructivist thinking about international relations under the conditions of the post-Cold War international order. It assumes that legal, political and social norms constitute the strength of the European Union in international relations, while also determining the objectives of its foreign policy.

NORMS IN EU FOREIGN POLICY: THE CONTEXT OF THE RUSSIAN–UKRAINIAN CONFLICT

Since the end of the Cold War, and then with the establishment of the European Union as an international institution on the basis of the provisions of the *Maastricht Treaty*, the guiding ideas that underpinned the European identity strategy in foreign affairs was the conviction to play the role of guardian of the norms of international law (contained in the UN Charter) by means of non-military, mainly civilian or normative foreign policy instruments. It was also a belief in the stabilizing and transformative role of European political and economic norms with regard to external relations within the framework of: European Neighborhood Policy, enlargement, development or humanitarian aid. In addition, the European Union saw itself as an attractive actor in international politics because of the norms and values that underpinned its creation and evolution, which include: democracy, the rule of law or the idea of human dignity, subsidiarity, solidarity.[37]

In the 2016 policy paper on the EU's identity in international relations (developed in response to the first Russian–Ukrainian crisis in the context of 2014's Crimea), there was a reference to norms and values as the guiding principles on which the European strategy for presence in the world was based:

> Our interests and values go hand in hand. It is in our interest to promote our values in the world. At the same time, our core values are rooted in

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[36] Anna Skolimowska, *Perceptions of the European Union's Identity in International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2019), p. 6.

[37] *European Security Strategy. A Secure Europe in a Better World*, European Council, 2003.

our interests. The fundamental interests underlying our external action are peace and security, prosperity, democracy and rules-based world order. This means that Europeans, interacting with partners, must have the necessary capabilities to defend themselves and respect their mutual aid and solidarity obligations enshrined in the Treaties. Internal and external security are increasingly intertwined: our internal security is combined with a parallel interest in the form of preserving peace in our neighborhood and the regions surrounding us. In the case of Europe, both soft power and military power are needed. This strategy is an expression of the European Union's ambition for strategic autonomy. It is necessary to promote the common interests of our citizens, as well as our principles and values. However, we know that such priorities are most easily realized when we do not act alone. They are most easily realized within an international system based on principles and multilateralism.[38]

Due to the change in the international situation due to the then foreign policy of the Russian Federation, the European Union, in the above policy document relating to its identity in international relations, began to move away from the absolute and exclusive primacy of norms in its external policy, at the expense of more realistic categories, such as interest defined in relation to security issues and economics. In addition, the document shows a shift in the language of describing the international situation toward taking into account the risk of a military threat to European security. This confirms the constructivist hypothesis that the change in the nature of international relations is evident in the language of its description, and in the case of the European Union is also reflected in the priorities and place of norms in the construction of its external policy assumptions.

Also in 2019, the Council adopted the *Conclusions*, in which we find reference to the EU's belief in the regulatory power of legal and non--legal norms within the United Nations (UN) system to ensure peace, security, human rights, prosperity and sustainable development:

Through international law, agreements, rules, large and small countries have a level playing field. An effective, relevant and resilient multilateral system must be able to face the new global realities, remain faithful to the provisions and principles of the *UN Charter,* and promote peaceful resolution of disputes between states. The need to promote multilateral solutions, one of the key principles of EU action at the international level under *the Treaty on European Union*, is more urgent than ever. As stated in the Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy, multilateralism, of which the UN is a central

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[38] *Common Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe: A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*, European External Action Service*,* Publications Office, 2016, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2871/565395 (access: 12 September 2024).

pillar, is the cornerstone of the EU's external policy. It is in our interest to have a multilateral system that is based on principles and rights, protects global common goods, promotes common public goods and benefits citizens in Europe and around the world. Cooperation through effective multilateralism remains the best way to pursue both national and collective interests [...] The EU will continue to promote international action to protect and respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, human dignity, democracy, the rule of law, social progress, solidarity and equality, including gender equality and the rights of persons belonging to minorities.[39]

The EU wants to promote global peace and security, and defend fundamental rights, universal values and international law, which are the foundation of cooperative relations between states and nations. It will continue to take a leading role in responding to the climate and biodiversity crises that threaten the existence of humanity, and this aspect will also guide our approach to the multilateral system. The EU intends to foster cooperative solutions with a view to 'rebuilding better' in order to more effectively implement global reconstruction, fight inequality, promote sustainable development and public health, environmental and digital transformation, including the transition to clean energy, defend human rights and the rule of law. These efforts are accompanied by a more interest-based approach.[40]

The change in the specifics of the international order in the wake of Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2022 marked a turning point in the way the EU's identity in international relations was self--defined and translated into a discussion of the relevance of the existing assumptions and foundations of the EU's presence in the world based precisely on norms and values, mainly of a liberal nature.

The European Union's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was unprecedented, showing unity among member states, especially in the first four months after the invasion.[41] The EU agreed to far-reaching economic and financial sanctions, against the Russian Federation, and provided military support to Ukraine through

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[39] *Council Conclusions—EU Action to Strengthen Principled Multilateralism*, Brussels, 17 June 2019, (OR. en) 10341/19.

[40] EUROPEAN COMMISSION, HIGH REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNION FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND SECURITY POLICY COMMITTEE, Brussels, 17.2.2021, JOIN(2021) 3 final *JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL on enhancing the EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism*, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021JC0003.

[41] Marita Gorgiladze, 'Challenges of the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union after Russia–-Ukraine War', *Vilnius University Press Scholarly Journals* 130, 2024, pp. 44–54, https://doi.org/10.15388/Teise.2024.130.4.

the European Peace Facility.[42] In a further step, the EU implemented the *Temporary Protection Directive*, granting Ukrainian citizens and permanent residents the temporary right to live and work in the EU. In addition, Ukraine and Moldova were offered candidate status. The EU's swift response was unexpected in many respects, given the previously divergent interests of member states *vis-à-vis* Russia and in security and defense, differences on the migration issue, or a general reluctance to expand the European Union.

The expression of this change was found in the *Strategic Compass for Security*, adopted back in March 2022.[43] The document reads that for the past 70 years the EU has played an important role in stabilizing the situation on the continent, promoting European interests and values and contributing to peace and security in the world, setting standards and leading the way when it comes to investing in effective multilateral solutions. The Russian aggression against Ukraine was considered a game-changer in European history:

> In the face of Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine, which blatantly violates international law and the principles of the *UN Charter* and threatens security and stability in Europe and the world, the EU is more united than ever. We are showing unprecedented determination to uphold the principles of the *UN Charter* and restore peace in Europe with our partners. A stronger EU with greater security and defense capabilities will contribute positively to global and transatlantic security and complement the work of NATO, which remains the basis for the collective defense of its members [...] Solidarity among member states is reflected in Article 42(*7*) of *the Treaty on European Union*. More broadly, the European Union reaffirms its intention to increase its support for the global rules-based order of which the United Nations is a central element. In an era of increasing strategic rivalries, complex security threats and direct attack on the European security order the security of our citizens and our Union are at risk. The crisis of multilateralism is leading to relations between states being increasingly transactional in nature. The spectrum of threats has become more diverse and unpredictable. After three decades of strong economic interdependence, which was supposed to reduce tensions, the most significant change in international relations is a return to a policy of force and even armed aggression.[44]

The Russian–Ukrainian war is having an impact on the way European security issues are talked about, and is seen by European

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[42] Alina Carrozzini, *The Direct Effect of CFSP Norms in light of Common Position 2008/944/CFSP defining common rules governing the control of export of military technology and equipment*, 2024.

[43] *Strategic Compass for Security and Defense—for a European Union That Protects Its Citizens, Its Values and Interests and Contributes to International Peace and Security*, General Secretariat of the Council, Brussels, 21 March 2022 (OR. en) 7371/22.

[44] Ibid.

institutions as a manifestation of the crisis of the previous multilateral system, in which legal and non-legal norms were paramount.[45] Under these conditions, referring to the ideas contained in the *UN Charter* and basing the strategy on a normative actor is not enough to ensure the security of the European Union member states. The document specifies that being a normative actor requires adaptation to current challenges and involves increasing defense capabilities within the European Union.

Also in its *Conclusions* of 17 October 2024, the European Council reiterated its strong condemnation of Russia's aggression war against Ukraine, in clear violation of the *UN Charter*, and reaffirmed its continued support for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. The European Council expressed its readiness to further limit Russia's ability to wage war, including by imposing further sanctions and taking measures to counter their circumvention, including through third countries.[46]

An expression of a significant change in terms of thinking about the place of norms in the European identity in international relations was *the Council Conclusions* of 27 May 2024.[47] The document indicates that the phenomenon of war leads to a change in the balance of power in the world, which poses a real threat to the security of the EU and its citizens. In addition, the course of the US towards Europe is changing, which was reflected in the strong pressure on Ukraine by American leaders and the desire to normalize relations with the Russian Federation. It is pointed out that an entity that also threatens the existing rules-based international order is the People's Republic of China.[48] In the face of these challenges, the EU refers to the need to act to protect and safeguard the existing political norms of independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of states while acting to provide the necessary political, financial, economic, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support to those in need. In order to protect European values and interests, it was decided to strengthen European security

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[45] Pernille Rieker and Marianne Riddervold, 'Not so Unique after All? Urgency and Norms in EU Foreign and Security Policy', *Journal of European Integration* 44: 4, 2022, pp. 459–473, https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2021.1977293.

[46] *COUNCIL DECISION (CFSP) 2024/3182 of December 16, 2024 amending Decision 2014/145/CFSP concerning restrictive measures in view of actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine*, OJ. EU, 2024/3182, 16.12.2024.

[47] *Council Conclusions on EU Security and Defense*, https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9225-2024-INIT/pl/pdf (30 June 2024).

[48] Ibid.

it was decided to increase the EU's strategic autonomy (including increased defense preparedness) and its ability to work with partners (especially the UN and NATO) to protect.[49] The content of the cited document indicates that political and legal norms are still an important point of reference for programming the strategic objectives of the EU's external policy. However, due to the change in the specifics of the international order, it is not possible to act as a credible international actor without a defense component through which these norms and values can be secured and implemented.

CONCLUSION

The article addresses the importance of soft elements of international policy, such as norms, both in the analysis of international reality and in the practice of international policy using the example of the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy in the context of the war in Ukraine i.e. 2022–25.

With regard to the current international situation marked by war and conflict, as well as the emergence of a real military threat to Europe from the east, it has been shown that the EU's foreign policy strategy to date, which appeals to ideological factors, is not a tenable strategy and one that is expected in the context of European security. While norms are still an important point of reference in the European Union's foreign policy, they are not the only aspect of this policy. To secure them, the need to expand hard (military) instruments of international influence is indicated.

For these reasons, the European Union's strategy in international relations based on the narrative of a normative actor is being evaluated in the direction of the strategy of an actor possessing *hard politics*. At the same time, it seems that European political elites are now linking the possession of defense autonomy to the ability to strengthen and defend the normative identity of the European Union in the international space. The turning point of the previous perception of norms in European foreign policy is the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war.

The change described in the text has not yet translated into the development of an academic response in terms of the theoretical framing of the role of the European Union in the new international conditions. However, it seems that in view of the theoretical

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[49] Ibid., para. 7.

instruments it possesses in the form of the normative actor paradigm, such a proposition is tenable, i.e. the European Union will not be able to promote, defend or give credence to its normative role in the international space without credible instruments of its security policy.

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