

## What kind of foreign policy actor can the EU be defined as in respect to their sanctions regime against Belarus?

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### **Abstract**

*The aim of this paper is to assess the character of the European Union as a foreign policy actor through examining its restrictive and proactive measures vis-à-vis Belarus, a country often branded as 'Europe's last dictatorship'. For this purpose, documents of the European Parliament are examined throughout a ten-year period, allowing for a coherent policy assessment of European Union decision-making. By depicting the Parliament's impetus behind each decision to impose or lift sanctions and behind introducing other foreign policy tools, this analysis will gain some insight on the principles guiding the European Union as a foreign policy actor. The comprehensive approach further allows us to draw conclusions on the coherence and structure of the European Union's foreign policy towards Belarus, as well as on the type of actor the European Union can be defined as in light of their policies.*

### **Keywords**

Belarus; EU; foreign policy; sanctions; restrictive measures; normative power

## Introduction

How do you approach the “last dictatorship in Europe”? This phrase labelling Belarus like no other has many implications for the citizens of Belarus, but also for the European Union (EU) and its strategy towards the country. It inevitably resonates disapproval and a certain sense of ‘otherness’, which requires a specific policy on behalf of the EU that also determines the character of the European Union itself. While the EU could ignore internal politics of Belarus, namely the civilian dictatorship and the violation of human rights, the mere focus on such internal affairs through the ‘last dictatorship in Europe’ label, negates this solution. Rather, the emphasis on internal political developments of Belarus drives the foreign policy of the EU towards the country. The aim of this paper is to assess the character of the EU as a foreign policy actor through examining its restrictive and proactive measures vis-à-vis Belarus and to conclude whether this approach, and therefore the character of the EU, is one of coherency.

Thus, this paper discusses theoretical underpinnings of the EU as a foreign policy actor, by including different perceptions and theories on ‘actorness’ of the EU. Further, it takes a look at sanctions as a foreign policy tool, how and when they work and sets a frame in which to analyse the EU’s policy towards Belarus.

The methodology consists of a qualitative, as well as a quantitative content analysis, in order to maximise accuracy when assigning certain attributes to the drivers of this policy. Thus, six European Parliament (EP) documents are coded into five variables, as well as checked textually for the main arguments of when the EU decided to impose or lift certain sanctions regimes.

These arguments are checked for the years of 2006, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2015 and 2016, as they represent the years of significant shifts in the EU’s approach towards Belarus. We are thus firstly drawing upon the developments in Belarus in the respective year, then assess which sanctions have been imposed or lifted and then go on to discuss the different variables that drove the decision for the imposition or lift of sanctions. In case of imposing or widening the sanctions regime, the author will also discuss the aim of these measures via Giumelli’s classification of the use of sanctions (Giumelli 2013: 21), in order to check the policy for coherence and strategy.

This will be done in the last sequence via a policy evaluation of the EU towards Belarus of the years 2006-2016, in which not only the coherence and strategy of the policy are evaluated but also possible shortcomings of the research design are discussed, which might affect the conclusions on EU ‘actorness’ and policy coherence.

## 1. Theoretical underpinnings

### 1.1 *The EU as a foreign policy actor*

The EU has been a much debated actor since its creation. There is little agreement among the scientific community which study the EU about what role conception best fits its complexity, or even whether the EU can be called an actor in the international arena (Biscop and Coelmont 2013). However, most scholars seem to agree that the EU is an institution '*sui generis*' (Mann 2009), meaning there is virtually no other power to compare the EU to, and hence it is a unique form of actor. There are naturally many theories to claim they capture the true nature of EU actorness. More traditional theories focus on the economic power of Europe and argue that the EU is an actor primarily in and through trade (Meunier and Nicolaïdis 2006), meaning their ability to influence world affairs can be traced back solely to the vast economic leverage the EU has. As such, many scholars argue that the EU pursues its economic interest as a means in itself (Meunier and Nicolaïdis 2006), oftentimes at the expense of its self-prescribed values. However, those scholars that have focused solely on the objectives of the EU in influencing international affairs, rather than their means to do so, have come to a different conclusion. Two theories have become particularly prominent in that respect, explicitly the EU as a civilian power and as a normative power. The concept of the '*Civilian power Europe*', first put forward by François Duchêne in 1972, although being kept very vague and open for interpretation, stresses the ideational influence of the EU in respect to its governance and objectives, such as human rights or public goods, fostered by international interdependence (Orbie 2006: 126). As the militarisation of EU foreign policy progressed, however, this concept has been under scrutiny (Bull 1982) for an apparent contradiction between the use of military power and the essence of being a civilian power, only to later be revised by Ian Manners, who depicts the EU as a '*normative power*', arguing that most of the EU's actions are clearly aimed at fostering good governance and human rights, based on a case study of abolishing the death penalty (Manners 2002). The dichotomy of economic versus values-based theories of the EU as a foreign policy actor therefore lies within the analysis of the EU's foreign policy objectives. Thus, the analysis of EU objectives vis-à-vis Belarus can help foster a better understanding of the nature of the EU as a foreign policy actor.

### 1.2 *Sanctions as a EU foreign policy tool*

While the EU has a variety of foreign policy tools at hand, one of the most commonly used instruments is that of sanctions, or 'restrictive measures', usually linking economic power and foreign policy. The European Commission has described 'sanctions [as] an instrument of a diplomatic or economic nature which seek[s] to bring about a change in activities or policies such as violations of international law or human rights, or policies that do not respect the rule of law or

democratic principles' (European Commission 3 2017). Most of these sanctions or restrictive measures are targeted sanctions, meaning they are designed to harm only individuals or entities responsible for undesirable policies or actions (European Commission 3 2017) and are oftentimes combined with other foreign policy tools aimed at encouraging dialogue and cooperation, thus resulting in a 'dual-track diplomacy'. The official key objectives of the EU in imposing such restrictive measures are 'safeguarding EU's values, fundamental interests and security, preserving peace, consolidating and supporting democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the principles of international law' (European Council 2017). Among the targeted restrictive measures, four categories can be distinguished: arms embargoes, travel bans, economic measures and financial measures (Giumelli 2013: 22).

The question of whether sanctions actually achieve what they intend to has been controversially debated, although most scholars attribute ineffectiveness to sanctions as foreign policy tools, measuring them solely by their ability to change a target's behaviour (Pape 1997). Given this frail narrative of the success of sanctions, one would assume the EU would abandon this policy at once. However, restrictive measures remain one of the most used tools for EU foreign policy objectives. In the Chaillot Papers, Francesco Giumelli attempts to give an explanation for this phenomenon, by focussing on three different purposes of sanctions: coercing, constraining and signalling, with signalling, closely followed by constraining, covering by far the most often-cited purpose (Giumelli 2013: 21). Sanctions' purposes, nature and the EU's explanations for imposing them therefore reveal a great deal about the character of the EU as a foreign policy actor.

## 2. Methodology

The method deployed in this analysis is a content analysis of both quantitative as well as qualitative nature. This allows us to interpret more accurately the decisions taken by the EU vis-à-vis Belarus. The data around which the argument is constructed consists of the resolutions adopted by the EU Parliament concerning the political atmosphere in Belarus. While the procedure for imposing sanctions is one originating within the Council of Ministers, then being drafted by the Commission and the HR/VP and implemented by a vote of the European Council (UK Parliament 2017), using the official documents of the EP is the most reasonable element of examination in many respects: The official documents of the Council of Ministers concerning implementing sanctions are usually one-page decisions that do not make clear the rationale behind the decision-making. The documents of the European Commission are very technical and focus on the specificities of the sanctions, rather than the reasons for implementing them, while the HR/VP or the EEAS only release press reports, rather than official documents. Thus, the official

resolutions of the EP, due to the lengthy discussion of all EU member states and the EP's position as a consultant and initiator of sanctions regimes, are the favourable documents in examining the EU's foreign policy objective towards Belarus.

The content analysis will contain six EP resolutions, out of which three advocate a renewal of sanctions towards Belarus, whereas three advocate the lifting of previously implemented sanctions. The time frame thus starts with the first benchmark of implementation of sanctions (Gaidelytė 2010) in 2006 and end with the decision to lift most sanctions in 2016. The quantitative analysis is operationalized by five variables, namely 'Democracy' (referring to violations of democratic principles by Belarus), 'Human rights' (referring to breaches of human rights by Belarus), 'Relations' (referring to the wish for tightening cooperation), 'Economy' (referring to the wish for economic cooperation) and 'Security' (referring to the need for cooperation in order to enhance security). The resolutions are systematically searched for explanations on the lifting/tightening of sanctions in accordance with those five variables. The amount of references to one of the five variables is then counted, in order to grasp the reasoning behind the decision. A variable is only counted as such, if it represents a solid and concrete reason by the EP in influencing the decision to impose/lift sanctions.

The qualitative analysis focuses on the types of measures that are implemented. As mentioned before, sanctions constitute but one policy instrument for the EU, hence it is vital to account for the 'dual-track diplomacy', including both restrictive and proactive measures, in order to get a better picture of what exactly the EU aims to achieve and how. Additionally, it helps in accounting for some aspects of the variables that would be left out by purely counting their frequency. The content analysis, through the analysis of the agglomeration of the variables, allows us to draw conclusions on the nature of the EU as a foreign policy actor, because the variables depict the dichotomy between the interests-based narrative ('Economy', 'Security') versus the values-based narrative ('Democracy', 'Human rights'), checked by 'Relations' for the kind of cooperation encouraged by the EP.

Additionally, we draw upon Giumelli's classification of sanctions according to their purpose (Giumelli 2013: 21), which allows us to make inferences of the EU as a foreign policy actor, as well as examine the EU's broader strategy towards Belarus and check it for incoherence, incredibility or path dependency, the biggest threats to EU's foreign policy (Leenders 2014: 8).

### **3. EU sanctions regime against Belarus**

#### ***3.1 Background 1991-2006***

Since the official recognition of Belarus' independence by the EU in 1991, EU-Belarusian relations have had a somewhat rocky path. While relations remained largely intact until 1994, the

election of Lukashenko to serve as Belarus' new President set in stone a decade-long alienation between the two entities. The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between the EU and Belarus was signed in 1995, but due to constitutional changes incited by Lukashenko, which resulted in mass protests and ultimately gave Lukashenko the power to engage in the legislative process, finally suspended the PCA's ratification in 1997. The following years saw EU-Belarusian cooperation on a halt, while Russia and Belarus strived for ever-closer integration, resulting in several region-building efforts, incorporated by many regional organisations. Thus, focusing on Belarus' lack of democracy and violent human rights abuses, as well as a lack of rule of law, the EU saw relations deteriorate to the benefit of Eurasian region-building projects. In 2004, after Belarus blocked investigations into the disappearance of four men linked to the opposition and after an election that saw the opposition completely driven out, while allowing Lukashenko to run for President for an unlimited amount of terms, the EU imposed their first set of wider sanctions (BBC 2017). However, these sanctions were restricted to mere travel bans of a number of senior officials responsible for human rights abuses and rigging the election and fit within previous incidents of EU travel restrictions against the Belarusian political elite (European Council 2017).

### **3.2 2006**

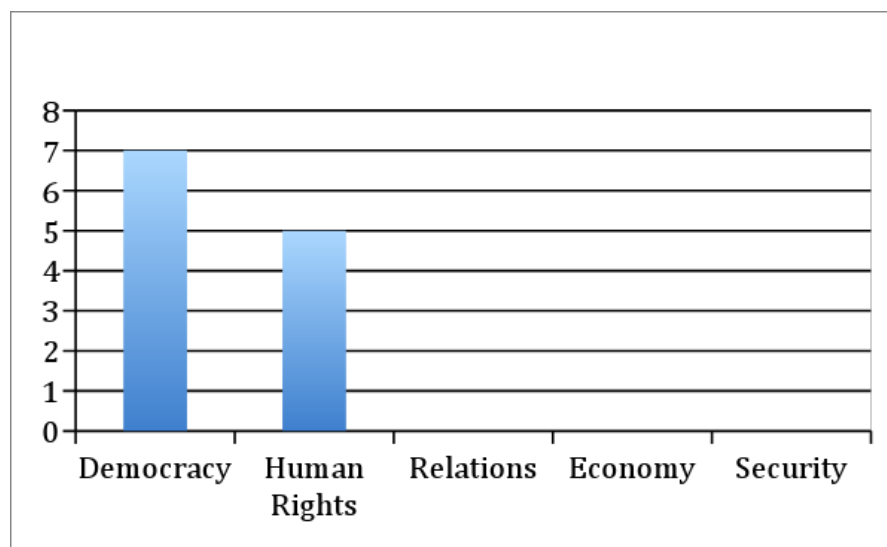
As elections drew closer in 2006, the Belarusian government ordered the arrest of dozens of opposition demonstrators and continuously harassed journalists, student organisations and campaign activists (BBC 2017). Thus, the election result proclaimed Lukashenko as the renewed President, again sparking mass demonstrations in Minsk, which were once more met with a violent response on behalf of the government.

The EU responded by finally implementing restrictive measures not limited to travel bans. Also implemented were financial measures (European Commission 2017), meaning the 'freezing of funds of certain individuals, entities or restrictions on[...] financial transactions, export credits or investments' (Giumelli 2013: 22). These financial measures included freezing the assets of Lukashenko, his close advisers and other Belarusian authorities (European Parliament 2006).

The justification for implementing said sanctions on behalf of the EP is strictly focused on the abuse of human rights and the lack of democratic governance by the Belarusian authorities (European Parliament 2006). In their resolution they speak of Belarus' abuse of human rights in five different paragraphs (*Table 1*), drawing upon the crackdowns before and after the election perpetrated against different groups and on different occasions. The lack of democracy is accounted for in seven different paragraphs (*Table 1*), referring to Lukashenko's dubious referenda, the lack of independent press reports and the lack in standards of the election among others. The EP also expressed their sympathy towards the Belarusian population to defend democratic

principles by going out to protest. Thus, they also urged the Commission to increase financial support to NGOs and citizens initiatives, support news feeds, facilitate the visa process and to fund additional exchange programs. They further note that Russian engagement in Belarus is of concern, since it undermines the effectiveness of EU policies and restrictive measures through lending decisive support. Interesting here is the complete lack of reference to ‘Relations’, ‘Economy’ and ‘Security’, which leads to assume that EU foreign policy here was guided mostly by moral concerns, thus perfectly fitting the *normative power* description.

Table 1. Arguments 2006



Source: Author

Now we can apply the EU strategy to Giumelli’s classification of the use of sanctions (Giumelli 2013: 21). This approach cannot be described as coercing, as it does not incite a behavioural change on Belarus’ part. It can neither be described as constraining, as the aim is not to undermine the capabilities of the Belarusian government to achieve their policy objectives (Giumelli 2013: 18), since they can still be carried out after a freezing of funds. Thus, the EU sanctions policy objective is ‘signalling’, meaning a target is to be influenced in different ways than merely through material damage. This accounts for the mix of the use of sanctions on the one hand and the use of proactive measures, such as the visa facilitation and financing NGOs.

### 3.3 2009

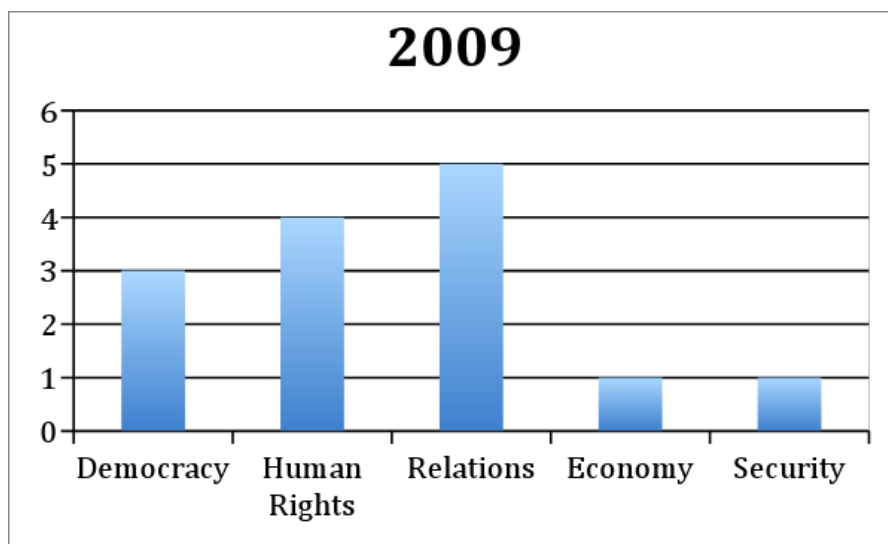
The years from 2006 to 2009 saw human rights abuses decline, with a number of individuals released from prison. The parliamentary election still fell short of international standards according to European observers, but nonetheless improved since 2006 (BBC 2017). The EU welcomed this behaviour as “positive steps taken by Belarus” (European Parliament 2009) and in turn decreased the restrictive measures in place. Thus, the EU decided to lift the travel ban



of most Belarusian officials, including Lukashenko, for six months, except for those involved in the disappearance of the four men in 1999. However, financial measures remained largely intact.

The justification of the EP for this approach is more varied than the one for implementing the sanctions. While they still focus on on-going human rights abuses in four paragraphs (*Table 2*), as well as on democratic deficits in three paragraphs (*Table 2*), the focus for lifting the travel bans is set on ameliorating relations, with five paragraphs dedicated to this aim (*Table 2*). Noted here is the emphasis of the EP on the improved conduct of Belarusian authorities towards the civil society, thus encouraging over and over again tightening relations in areas of energy, environment, customs, transport, food safety and cross-border cooperation. The hope for closer cooperation also caused the EP to debate ‘Economy’ and ‘Security’, in a paragraph each (*Table 2*). The EP therefore encourages the European Investment Bank (EIB) to invest in Belarus’ energy transit infrastructure while simultaneously stressing the importance of participating in the privatisation process (European Parliament 2009). The focus on ‘Security’ merely concerned the plans of a new nuclear power plant in Belarus, for which the EU offered to help out financially in order to keep up international energy security standards. The readiness of the EU to switch positions and deepen cooperation with Belarus is worrying in the context of the on-going human rights abuses and lack of democracy. However, only some travel bans have been lifted, while the financial restrictive measures remain in place and further help to civil society has been stressed. Thus, this approach would still fit to theorise the EU as a *normative power*, albeit it being quick to adapt to minor changes in political repression in Belarus.

*Table 2. Arguments 2009*



*Source: Author*



### 3.4 2011

In the run-up to the election in 2010, Lukashenko's regime once again resorted to grave violations of human rights. After the vote, which was called rigged by the opposition and Western observers, more than six hundred people were arrested after protests were broken up by force (BBC 2017). Unsurprisingly, Lukashenko was declared the winner of the election and thus entered his fourth term in office in January 2011.

The EU swiftly responded by significantly widening their sanctions regime. While travel bans remained largely suspended, financial measures expanded to include a freeze of micro-financial aid via the IMF as well as the EIB and EBRD, the ENP and other national assistance (European Parliament 2011). Further, the EU also introduced economic measures for the first time, by banning exports of equipment for internal repression as well as banning the provision of certain services (European Commission 2017). The EU's restrictive measures in 2011 consequently included three different types.

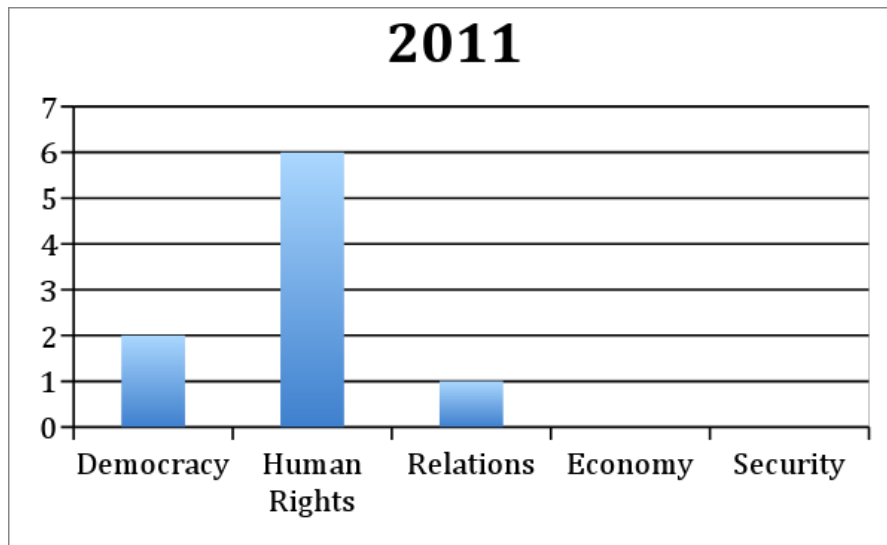
The justification by the EP for the renewal of sanctions focuses once more mainly on the abuse of human rights, with six paragraphs (*Table 3*) dedicated to the repression and arrest of different groups and individuals on different occasions, as well as the lack of a fair trial and broader fear campaigns (European Parliament 2011). Violations in the 'Democracy' sector are accounted for in two paragraphs (*Table 3*), deprecating the serious irregularities on voting day as well as the lack of any international standards in procedures. In order to maximise EU policy efficiency towards Belarus, the EP encourages ameliorating relations to both Russia and Ukraine, which it sees as threatening the effectiveness of EU policies. In accordance with the previous approach, the EP continues to advocate support for the Belarusian civil society, although in a somewhat more restricted sense, such as financing education opportunities abroad (European Parliament 2011).

Thus, the policy here seems to be guided by moral principles once more. While in 2009, the EU showed a willingness to cooperate and to ease up their restrictive measures, they increased all sanctions by a significant margin, signifying that crackdowns on human rights and democratic principles still score highest in EU priorities. Hence, once more the attribution of the EU to the concept of *normative power* is justified.

Applying the EU strategy to Giumelli's classification of the use of sanctions (Giumelli 2013: 21), we once again would have to discard 'coercion', as the restrictive measures are not sufficient in changing Belarus' behaviour. However, the nature of the sanctions, which now include economic measures such as banning the export of equipment for internal repression, has changed. Thus, the aim has altered to include constraining the Belarusian authorities from certain policies.

Since this part of the sanctions nevertheless remains relatively small, the major aim remains signalling, where the EU tries to influence Belarus through different means.

Table 3. Arguments 2011



Source: Author

### 3.5 2012

While Belarus was struggling with its Russian partner over gas prices, anger was also voiced about the EU sanctions of 2011, leading Lukashenko to threaten retaliation. Belarus continued its repression among the citizenry, arresting and imprisoning political opponents and activists. A new law got put into place, which severely restricts access to foreign Internet sources and requires owner of Internet cafés to report anyone visiting foreign websites (BBC 2017).

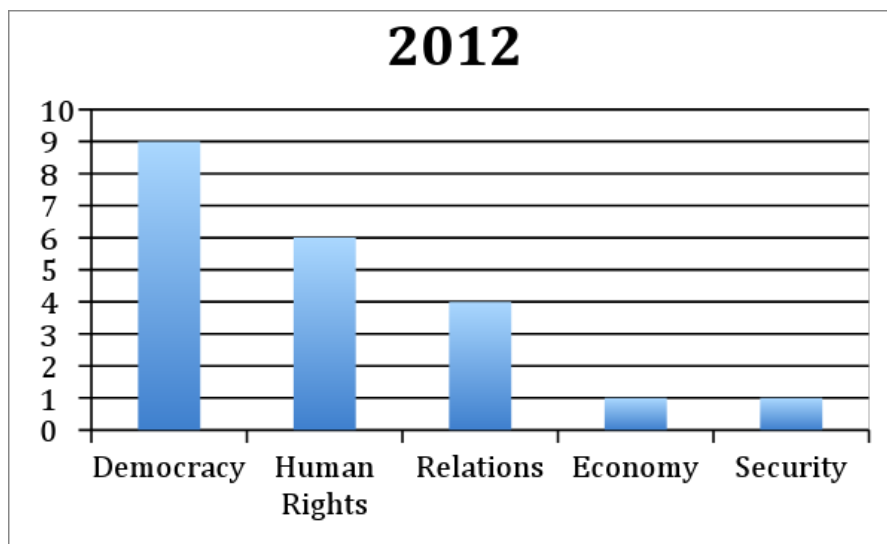
In response to the developments in Belarus, the Commission reinforced those sanctions already in place against Belarusian officials, such as travel bans and financial measures against certain individuals as well as continuing the afore-mentioned economic measures. Additionally this time however, the EU also instigated an embargo on arms and related material, now taking advantage of all four types of sanctions possible (European Commission 2017).

In their justification, the EP once more places its main concern on democratic deficits, with nine paragraphs devoted to it (Table 4), and human rights abuses, with six paragraphs devoted to it (Table 4). These concerns mainly centre on the lack of rule of law, as well as different aspects surrounding the election in combination with the continued use of the death penalty (European Parliament 2012). A wish for more cooperation with Belarus is also expressed four times (Table 4), in which the EP stresses the need to leave the possibility of dialogue open for the Belarusian society, thus focussing less on the regime than the population. However, the EP also remarks that it is ready to decrease any measures once Belarus complies with certain steps, such as releasing

prisoners, promoted by the EU (European Parliament 2012). There is one remark each on both ‘Economy’ and ‘Security’, with the note on ‘security’ mainly focussing on the planned construction of the nuclear power plant. For ‘Economy’, the EP calls ‘on the Council and the Commission to consider measures to improve the business climate, trade [and] investment’ (European Parliament 2012). This approach is in line with advocating the proactive measures, which show a significant increase in actions compared to the previous years. Specifically, the financial support of Belarusian opposition organisations is promoted, encompassing a long-term program. Support for media organisations in Belarus, in the wake of the crackdown on media freedoms, also show a significant increase (European Parliament 2012).

As relations between the EU and Belarus reach its worst point, the EU paradoxically seems to want to increase its ties to Belarus more than in previous years. However, as the rights abuses of Belarusian authorities are also unprecedented, it seems as though the EU had to make a decision between pushing Belarus even further towards Russia, which could ultimately lead to completely isolating Belarus and the Belarusian society, and trying to counter the developments even stronger than before. The latter seems to be the case, and thus, parallel to their condemning human rights abuses and a lack of democratic institutions, this approach appears to be in line with the *normative power* principle.

Table 4. Arguments 2012



Source: Author

According to Giumelli’s classification of the use of sanctions (Giumelli 2013: 21), ‘coercion’ can once again not be regarded as a main objective, as the sanctions are not broad enough to have a devastating impact. Thus, since the restrictive measures now include all four types of sanctions, the EU approach remains a mix of constraining, via the arms embargo and ban

on equipment for internal repression, and signalling, via strongly supporting the civil society of Belarus.

### **3.6 2015**

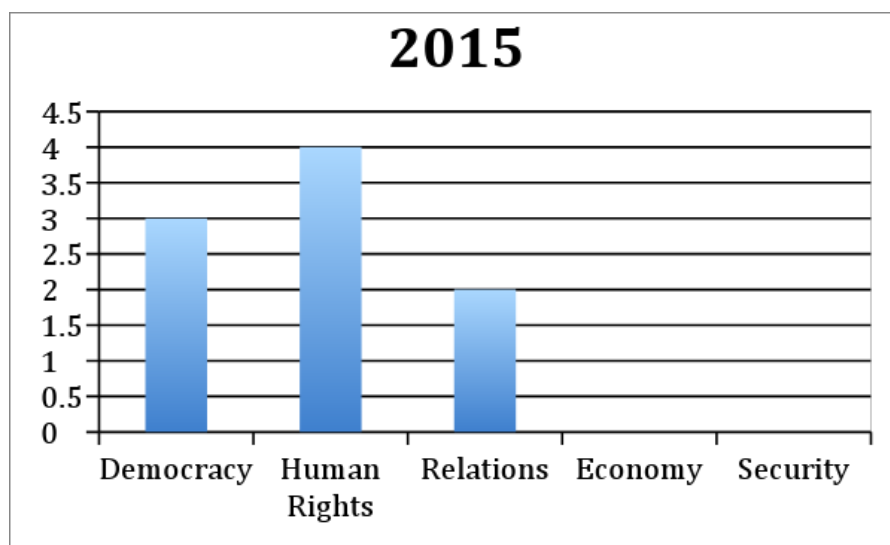
The crisis in Ukraine has plunged the region into uncertainty as well as created a standoff between the EU and Russia. After NATO boosted its troops in the Baltic, Belarus asked Russia to deploy military equipment onto the Belarusian territory (BBC 2017). Simultaneously though, Belarus also spent efforts on maintaining stability and peace in the region, offering to host peace negotiations ultimately leading to the Minsk II agreement, freezing the conflict in the Donbas. Belarus furthermore resumed cooperation with the EU, participating more actively in numerous programs, including resuming the EU-Belarus Human Rights Dialogue (European Council 2016).

Responding to these developments, the EU decided to temporarily suspend a significant number of one hundred and seventy travel bans and asset freezes against certain individuals and entities. Thus, the restrictive measures now only include a travel ban and an asset freeze against the four individuals involved with the unresolved disappearances, as well as the remaining financial as well as economic measures (European Commission 2, 2017).

In their justification on lifting sanctions against Belarus, the EP emphasises this specific constructive role Belarus played in the on-going conflict in Ukraine and stresses the fear among the Belarusian civil society of a similar destabilisation (European Parliament 2016). It is striking, that the variables ‘Democracy’ and ‘Human rights’ still score highest (*Table 5*), constantly criticising Belarusian authorities’ conduct vis-à-vis political opposition and activists. In the face of the Ukrainian crisis and the need to establish closer ‘Relations’ (*Table 5*), there seems a dichotomy developing. Judging from the still unresolved human rights abuses and lack of democracy that have triggered previous sanctions regimes, the swift lifting of asset freezes and travel bans for a grave number of individuals seems like a rash decision, not well fitting into the previous approach. One must therefore assume that the extraordinary circumstances of the Ukrainian crisis have led the EU to quickly adapt their sanctions regime to crisis mode – containing the crisis in Ukraine under all circumstances.

The case of whether this approach fits into the *normative power Europe* theorem is somewhat more difficult to assess, as human rights violations and democratic deficits, albeit scoring highest, do not seem to guide EU’s policy here. However, it is questionable whether the EU could have responded differently in face of the Ukrainian crisis, as the goal was ultimately not to destabilise the region any further. Thus, the notion *normative power* is still applicable, albeit it is being adapted to crisis-mode.

Table 5. Arguments 2015



Source: Author

### 3.7 2016

Throughout the year 2015, Lukashenko released a number of political prisoners, widely observed as an attempt to convince the EU to decrease their trade barriers (BBC 2017). During the election, which took place in October 2015, the Belarusian regime mostly restrained from cracking down on political opposition and activists, although this is also due to a big part of the opposition having emigrated North and the election not allowing for any opposition candidates to stand for office (BBC 2017).

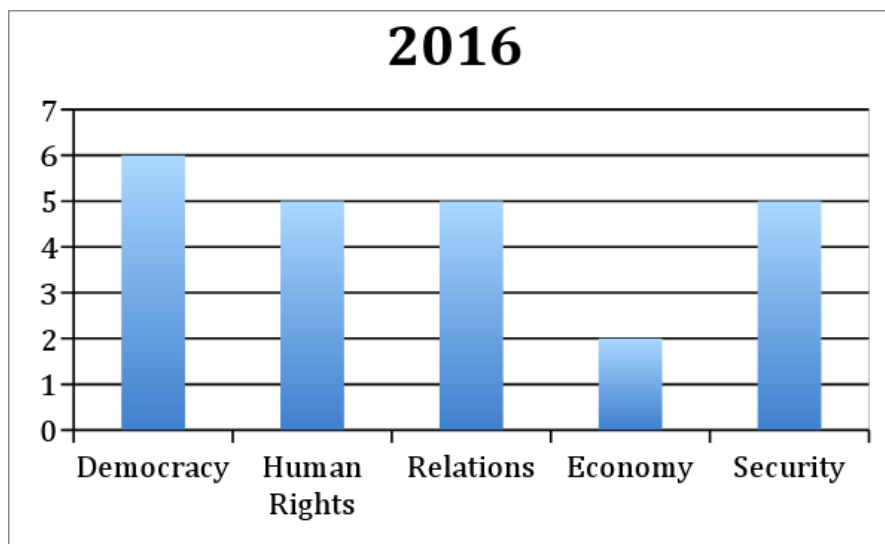
The EU's approval of these 'non-violent' developments is embodied in its new approach, which lifts most restrictive measures against Belarusian officials. However, the arms embargo rests in place, effectively making embargoes the only sanction currently upheld against Belarus (European Council 1 2016).

As the EU sees progress in Belarus' behaviour, the importance of issues deviates from previous priorities (European Parliament 2016). Economic and security issues rise in importance, the need for good relations is generally emphasised and promoted and 'Democracy' and 'Human rights' are for the first time also used in positive terms, with the EU acknowledging Belarus' attempts to ameliorate the situation (European Parliament 2016). 'Economy', which was mentioned in two paragraphs (*Table 6*), addresses the possibilities for EIB and EBRD financing of trade- and assistance-related fields for Belarus, as well as criticises the heavy financial burdens for supporting NGOs in Belarus. 'Security', which scores extraordinarily high with five paragraphs (*Table 6*), focuses mostly on the Ukrainian crisis and fear of Russian aggression as well as instability in the region, stressing once more the positive role Belarus has played during the Ukrainian

conflict. Simultaneously, Belarus' participation in 'Zapad' joint military manoeuvres with Russia has evoked concern for security on behalf of the EU. In face of these issues, the EU has doubled its bilateral assistance to Belarus via the ENP.

The shift of issues at the heart of EU decision-making reflects their change of priorities in the region. With the Ukrainian conflict still unresolved, the struggle with Russia for influence in the region under these circumstances has become a top priority, emphasised through a much more benevolent policy and economic bait. Although the classic paradigm of a *normative power* cannot be transferred completely, given the current circumstances, one can argue that the EU approach nevertheless seeks to reduce the impact on human rights violations and democratic deficits by stabilising the region and not letting it become a war theatre, which would have far more devastating consequences.

Table 6. Arguments 2016



Source: Author

#### 4. Policy evaluation and conclusion

The most important conclusions of this paper derive from an evaluation of the overall strategy of the EU. Throughout the ten years, the emphasis on human rights concerns and lack of democracy has been a constant in all EP resolutions, scoring the highest out of all variables (Table 7), closely followed by highlighting the wish to ameliorate relations. The restrictive and supportive measures the EU adopted in response have been mostly coherent and systematic, in that there has been an increase in restrictive measures when human rights abuses and undemocratic development were particularly high (See Annex 1) and there has been a constant support for citizens and programmes directed at strengthening the civil society. However, the continued statements on hoping to improve relations are pursued even when human rights and democratic reforms are still

mostly neglected, with only slight improvements in those areas (*See Annex 1*). Despite this quite ready-to-respond approach, the policy still seems coherent and systematic, in that the initiative to use restrictive measures stems from abuses of human rights and violations of political power. The restrictive measures in itself also seem to be applied systematically, as the aim of the sanctions regimes has always been to send a signal to Belarus, or to constrain it from cracking down on its population.

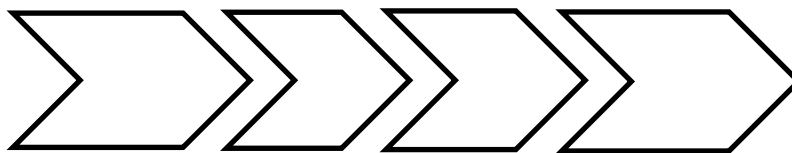
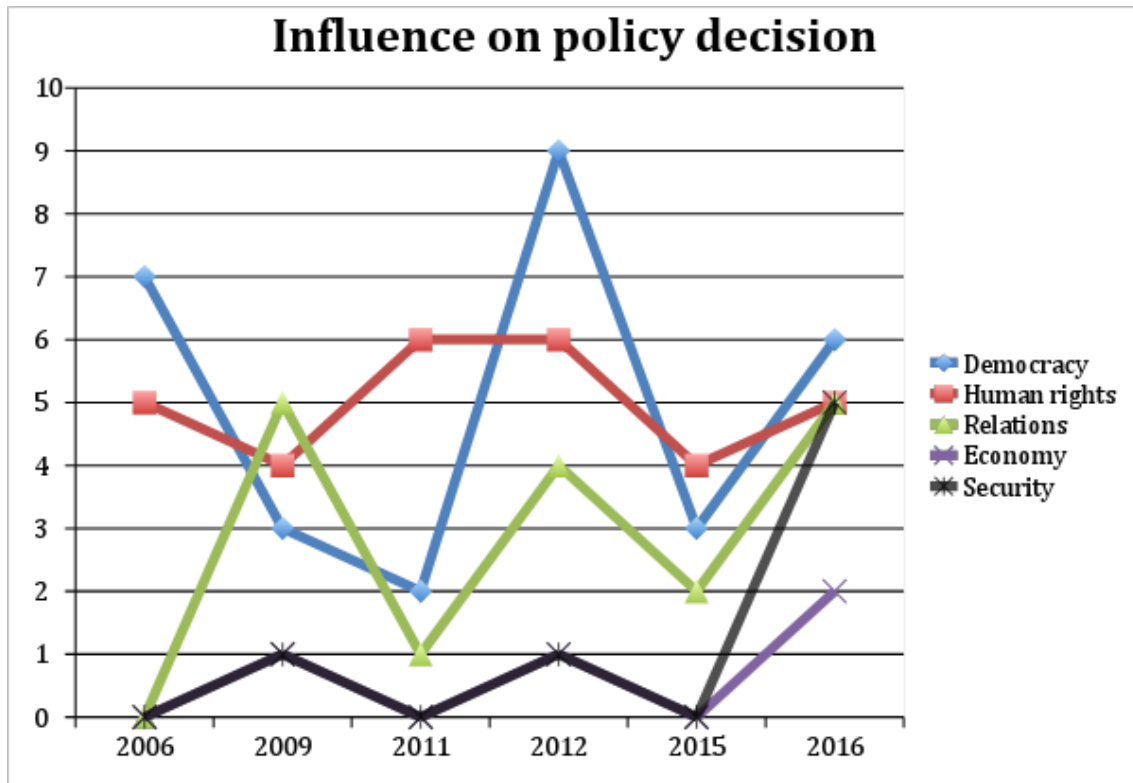
However, from 2014 onward, EU policy shifts quite significantly, as emphasised by the constant references to the Ukrainian crisis and the switch in EU priorities in the region (*Table 7*). Conveniently, this focus shift towards security concerns coincides with a slight amelioration of the human rights situation in Belarus, justifying the EU's readiness to lift restrictive measures due to less internal crackdown. Nevertheless, the policy still seeks to strengthen Belarusian civil society more than at any point before, while continuing to constrain the Belarusian government from crackdowns on human rights via the arms embargo and giving the government an alternative to closer integration with Russia. One should also bear in mind that in 2014, the EU revised its foreign policy vis-à-vis Belarus under the European Neighbourhood Policy, introducing a new financial instrument, the ENI (European Commission 1 2017). Thus, the question arises, whether one should re-evaluate the EU's approach towards Belarus from the time of implementation of the new policy. This can account for some of the major shifts of the EU's approach towards Belarus and will be of particular importance, if the EU fails to make the Belarusian government understand that they have had said policy shift in 2014. Thus, in order not to lose credibility via an incoherent approach, the clear communication of how the abuse of power in the domains of democracy and human rights will trigger restrictive measures will be of immense significance. In case of unclear transmittance of the signal the EU wants to send, it is likely that Belarus will continue to or even worsen human rights and democratic institutions in the future, as it will deem consequences by the EU as not credible.

One of the main shortcomings of this paper is that it focuses solely on EU-Belarusian relations, therefore not taking into account its environment. In order to assess coherence of restrictive measures, taking a broader look might also be useful. The regime in Azerbaijan for example also consists of a civilian dictatorship, in which human rights violations are even more severe than in Belarus (Our World in Data 2017), yet the EU has not to this date imposed sanctions due to these circumstances. Thus, assessing EU policy towards Belarus within this setting might lead to very different conclusions about the EU as a *normative power*, but also about policy coherence. For this paper however, which focuses solely on EU-internal reasons to implement restrictive measures against Belarus solely, we can conclude that it is mostly following a *normative*



power frame, as well as being both coherent and systematic, albeit the shift of priorities in 2014 (Table 7).

Table 7. Influence on policy decision



Source: Author

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## Annex 1. Dataset

Year	RM	Other tools	E: Dem.	E: HR	E: Relations	E: Econ.	E: Security	Notes	Type of sanctions
2006	expand visa ban list, freezing assets of Belarusian authorities, RM against companies linked to regime, freezing assets of L. and close advisors, demand concrete package of smart sanctions	all financial support to citizens initiative, NGOs etc all not linked with government, create visa facilitation regime for benefit of society, support news feeds, fund additional educational exchange programmes	7	5				EU views that the effectiveness of EU policies are undermined by irresponsible attitude of the Moscow authorities, who are lending decisive support to the 'last dictatorship in Europe'	freezing of funds and economic resources of listed persons, entities and bodies
2009	lift travel bans for 6 months, except for those involved in disappearances of 1999 and 2000 and Chair of Central Election Committee	liberalise visa procedures (cost of visas), more support to B. civil society through selective ENP as sign of goodwill	3	4	5	1	1	Relations: dialogue with Belarus on energy, environment, customs, transport, food safety, increase cross-border cooperation; EP with Belarus; Most points very positive 'welcoming' several steps B. took; Econ.: EIB should invest in B. energy transit infrastructure, stress importance of participation in privatisation process; Security: energy security for plans on building new nuclear plant	
2011	extend RM against B officials but suspend application of travel restrictions to EU, calls to consider targeted sanctions and freezing of all microfinancial aid via IMF as well as EIB and EBRD, ENP and national assistance	support efforts of B civil society, independent media and NGO, finance reprintin and distribution of poetry books by Uladzimir Niaklajevu, continue and increase financial aid to EHU in Vilnius and increase number of scholarships for B students, visa facilitation including reduced costs	2	6	1			Poland as good example(imposed own travel restrictions and simplified access to EU), Calls on EU MS not to weaken EU action with bilateral initiatives because it undermines EU credibility and effectiveness of EUPF, condemns Russia in recognising elections and calling repression 'internal affair', encourages dialogue with Russia and Ukraine to maximise EU policy efficiency towards B	ban on exports of equipment for internal repression, ban on provision of certain services
2012	refrain immediately from cooperating with B authorities in field of police training	support initiatives aimed at developing B civil society, creation of consistent and long-term program of support of B. opposition organisations, facilitation of visa procedure, support independent media, NGO, give special attention to protect digital freedoms; measures to improve business climate, trade, investment, energy and transport and cross-border cooperation	9	6	4	1		Relations: ameliorate relations to B civil society; Ec.: Improve business climate, trade, investment; Sec.: nuclear power plant, comply with internat. Norms	embargo on arms and related matériel, ban on exports of equipment for internal repression, ban on provision of certain services, restrictions on admission of listed natural persons, freezing of funds and economic resources of listed persons, entities and bodies, valid until 28.2.2017
2015	amend visa-ban and asset-freeze list, but still entry bans and asset freezes	support efforts of B civil society, independent media and NGOs	3	4	2			as compared to before, report also has many clauses on amelioration in HR and democracy areas in B; Econ.: stress need to enhance cooperation in trade- and assistance related fields that opened possibility for EIB and EBRD financing, condemn heavy financial burden for supporting NGO; Security: Russian aggression against Ukraine and the fear of pol. instability resulting from it have been addressed twice, also B positive role in facilitating agreement; the nuclear power plant has been addressed twice with offers of funding safety guarantees, express concern over B being part of CSTO and taking part in 'Zapad' joint military manoeuvres with Russia	termination of the suspension of freezing of funds and economic resources as regards certain listed persons, entities and bodies <sup>1</sup>
2016	lift most RM against B officials and legal entities in Feb 16 as gesture of good will	strengthen support for civil society, need to support all independent sources of information for B society, should speed up visa liberation process	6	5	5	2	5		

**Annex 2. Abbreviations**

EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EEAS	European External Action Service
EIB	European Investment Bank
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
HR/VP	High Representative/Vice President (of the EEAS)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation