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Global Governance by the EU

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Abstract

The EU conducts global governance in multifaceted ways. In this paper, we address how the EU engages with various global governance actors and how it navigates these relational webs. We draw particular attention to the EU's competences, its structuring powers and how it navigates its institutional environment to answer these questions. First, we highlight that the EU's issue scope and membership has increased over time, triggering an increased interest in global governance issues and actors. As a result, partnerships have been increasingly established with other countries and organizations. Second, we discuss the competences that the EU has across the different issue areas and show that its competences vary across them, showing that the EU does not always act as one. These two sections set the stage for examining not only the formal powers that the EU has in speaking and acting on behalf of its membership but also its structural powers that can shape global governance arrangements through issue linkages and regulations. Third, a focus on the EU's institutional landscape enables us to draw attention to its strategies employed to navigate global governance arrangements. We show how the EU makes use of densely institutionalized governance spaces and exploits overlaps in membership and mandate with other organizations to pursue its preferences. Overall, this analytical lens helps decenter the EU and question EU-narratives about its liberal aspirations and vision for global governance.

Keywords

EU; Global Governance; Liberal Order; Competences; Structural Power; Institutional Environment

Introduction

The European Union (EU) is situated in a web of international, transgovernmental, transnational, national, private and private-public actors and their relationships that make up what many call global governance. On matters of international trade, the EU can - or needs to – negotiate with or within the World Trade Organization (WTO), the United States, China, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Boeing, Amazon or the World Economic Forum (WEF), for example. In security matters, the United Nations (UN), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Türkiye, the Munich Security Conference, the African Union (AU) or the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), just to mention a few, might be relevant interlocutors. In this governance web, EU documents reveal that the EU understands itself as ‘global partner’ (EEAS 2016) and a ‘global strategic player’ (EEAS 2022a) aspiring to ‘promote an international system based on stronger multilateral cooperation and good global governance’ (TEU, Art. 21.2.h).

How does the EU engage with global governance actors and how does it navigate these relational webs? We argue that the EU can directly engage with global governance actors and shape governance relationships by *acting* in the name of, or alongside, its member states and achieve concrete policy goals. When navigating this global governance web, the EU demonstrates that it is a general-purpose organization, covering a broad (and changing) array of policy domains and issue areas (Lenz et al. 2015). It is also an organization with different degrees of authority and responsibilities across policy domains (Hooghe et al. 2019). But the EU also can rely on its *structuring power* to influence global governance. Its engagement with global governance actors, consequently, is not homogenous across policy domains and the discussion of its actorness is often misleading. We argue that this makes it difficult to speak of the EU as “the actor”, singular. Instead, the way the EU conducts global governance is complex and heterogenous.

To support this argument, we disentangle the various competence and responsibilities that the EU has across policy domains and issue areas as well as the relationships in which the EU engages. This helps us tease out the nature and functioning of the EU in global governance arrangements. We first highlight that as the EU’s issue scope and membership has increased over time, it has triggered an increased interest in global governance issues – consequently finding itself more and more (inter) acting alongside other global governance actors. As a result, partnerships have steadily expanded with other countries and organizations as enabled in the treaties (TEU, Art. 21.1). In a second section, we discuss the competences that the EU has across the different issue areas and show that these competences vary across issue areas; formally speaking they are either exclusive, shared or parallel with member states but the EU has also shaped its competences and responsibilities informally. These two sections set the stage for examining not only the formal powers that the EU has in speaking and acting on behalf of its membership but also its structural powers that enable it to shape global governance arrangements. Even in issue areas where the EU has no or few competences, as for example in public health or human rights, it can serve as a forum where member states can (a) discuss issues of concern, (b) share the burden of coming up with a policy, and (c) link it to other issues where it has more competences. In a third section, we examine how the EU can navigate this complex web. Before we turn to the conclusion, we discuss the EU’s role in fostering a rules-based liberal agenda; an agenda that EU policies are not always aligned (Siddi and Kustova 2021).

Entering the global governance stage: EU scope expansion and membership enlargement

The EU has evolved significantly since its first incarnations, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951 with the Treaty of Paris and the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957 with the Treaties of Rome. Jean Monnet and other forward-looking thinkers at the time had conceived of the ECSC as a general-purpose organization from the start, but initial efforts to cooperate and integrate were eventually concentrated on the economic policy domain as initiatives such as the European Defense Community failed (Parsons 2003). It is therefore also in the economic sector that the EEC established trade relations with 18 former colonies in Africa with its first big international agreement, the Yaoundé Convention in 1963. Around the same time, the EEC also acquired an informal foreign policy portfolio with a regional focus on the Middle East that was only formalized in the 1980s.

With the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 and its ratification in 1993, the EU was formally established as a general-purpose organization whose authority and competences reach beyond various economic issue areas. When the EU portfolio was expanded with the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), and Justice and Home Affairs (JHA), the EU became responsible for many policy domains that are also negotiated in a plethora of other international fora. Even though it has kept its name since then, changes in its scope have continued (e.g., energy or environment). This is not to say that the EU has responsibilities in every possible policy domain; public health, for example, has remained mainly a member state competence. Table 1 illustrates some of the EU's major milestones in its scope expansion over time.

Table 1. EU Scope Expansion Over Time

Date	Cornerstone document	Policy Domain
April 1951	Treaty of Paris (ECSC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rationalize coal and steel industry • Monitor production of both
March 1957	Treaties of Rome (EEC and EURATOM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture • Energy • Trade • Transport
October 1972	Statement from the Paris Summit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment
February 1986	Single European Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic and social cohesion • Environmental Protection • Foreign policy • Internal market • Research and development • Social policy
February 1992	The Treaty on European Union ("Maastricht Treaty")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asylum • Consumer protection • Culture • Education and vocational training • Environment • Foreign and security Policy • Industrial policy • Trans-European networks • Youth issues
October 1997	The Treaty of Amsterdam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asylum • Environmental protection • Security and defense policy (Petersberg Tasks)
June 1999	Cologne European Council: Conclusions of the Presidency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundamental rights • Security and defense
October 1999	The Tampere European Council: Presidency Conclusions (Tampere Programme)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asylum and migration • Fight against crime • Justice

February 2001	Treaty of Nice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundamental rights • Judicial cooperation in criminal matters
December 2005	The Global Approach to Migration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External dimension of asylum • External dimension of migration
December 2007	The Treat of Lisbon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asylum system and immigration • Border control • Climate Change • Justice and police
October 2009	The Stockholm Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizenships and fundamental rights • Integrated border management and visa policy • Internal security • Law and justice • Migration
April 2012	The Global Approach to Migration and Mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External dimension of mobility
December 2013	European Council Conclusions on CSDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cyber defense • Defense and security industry • Energy security • Maritime security
March 2015	European Council Conclusions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change • External dimension of energy
November 2018	Council of the EU Conclusions on Security and Defence in context of the EU Global Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defense research and capability development
December 2019	The European Green Deal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change
December 2022	REPowerEU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renewable energy

Source: Own Elaboration. Based on EUR-Lex (2023)

Alongside changes in its policy scope, the EU has also changed its membership composition – which is known as widening in EU parlance. With the different enlargement waves, it has included member states whose interests and preferences in different policy domains, neighborhoods as well as capacities to formulate policies towards these issues vary (significantly) (Sjursen, 1998). Enlargement has not only increased the demand on the EU to act, for example vis-à-vis Russia, but it has also increased the pressure on new, and often smaller, member states to take positions on questions of global governance to which they are largely indifferent or had not assigned foreign policy personnel to formulate positions. EU membership has put pressure on those new member states to either formulate a position or remain silent and accede with the majority wishing to pursue

a certain global governance policy.

Partly because of these developments, the EU has established a growing number of partnerships with third countries and other international organizations. The Lisbon Treaty's provisions reflect EU commitment in this respect. According to TEU, Art. 216, the EU may conclude agreements with third countries and international organizations when such agreements are 'necessary in order to achieve, within the framework of the Union's policies, one of the objectives referred to in the Treaties'. The EU may in particular conclude 'agreements establishing an association involving reciprocal rights and obligations, common action and special procedure' (TFEU, Art. 217). At the same time, as TFEU Art. 220 states, 'the Union shall establish all appropriate forms of cooperation with the organs of the United Nations and its specialised agencies, the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The Union shall also maintain such relations as are appropriate with other international organisations'. 'Appropriate forms of cooperation' leaves room of maneuver for EU actors. Additionally, the different policy domains and issue areas debated are not governed the same way within the EU. Depending on its legal authority and competences, it thereby acts on behalf of or alongside its member states or not at all. This is an issue to which we turn now.

Acting across global governance concerns: EU competences and decision-making

How does the EU participate in global governance? Who in the EU should engage in these relations? With the Lisbon Treaty's entry into force in December 2009, the EU acquired a legal personality (TEU, Arts. 1 and 47). The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European Commission, in particular, may participate in global governance on the EU's behalf in issue areas where the EU has competences (TEU, Art. 17.1; TFEU, Art. 220). The EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) constitutes a relevant exception in this regard. In this policy domain, the President of the European Council represents the EU alongside the High Representative (TEU, Arts. 15.6 and 27.2). EU institutions act in global governance with and through the support of the European External Action Service, especially the Union Delegations (TFEU, Art. 221). One hundred and forty-five such delegations and offices represent the EU at international and regional organizations, as well as in countries around the world. Some important examples include the EU delegations at the AU, the ASEAN, the UN, the OECD and the WTO, as well as those in China, India, Russia, and the US (EEAS 2022b).

Member states often do not sit idly on the margins, however, when the EU speaks on their behalf. Based on the principle of 'sincere cooperation', the EU and the member states are supposed to 'assist each other' to carry out the tasks envisaged in the EU Treaties 'in full mutual respect' (TEU, Art. 4.3). And as per the principle of conferral, the EU is entitled to act (only) in domains for which member states have ceded it the competence to do so (TEU, Art. 5). Member states are *discouraged* from acting *alone* in areas where the Treaties grant an 'exclusive' competence to the EU (TEU, Art. 2.1) or when member states have transferred competence to the EU (Van Vooren and Wessel 2017). This, however, does not mean that they do not act alongside the EU or question its formal authority through greater national control over EU institutions when issues of vital concern are raised (Meunier and Nicolaïdis 1999, 2006) they have now chosen to regain some of their lost trade sovereignty. Neither the European Court of Justice's (ECJ's).

Identifying the division of competences and responsibilities between the EU and its member states is crucial for understanding the way the EU conducts global governance. Doing so not only allows an assessment of the formal and informal powers that the EU has to act in the name of or alongside its member states, but facilitates the disentanglement of the various relationships in which the EU finds itself while carrying out global governance. The EU engages with global governance actors to achieve its policy goals, which according to the treaties, include encouraging the world economy's integration and preserving liberal notions of the international order as suits the EU, fostering the eradication of poverty, consolidating and supporting human rights, ensuring sustainable development, strengthening international security, and assisting third actors' response to and recovery from natural and man-made disasters (TEU, Art. 21.2). The lack of homogeneity in EU formal competences across these policy sectors enables and constrains the EU in achieving its goals and the ways it conducts global governance.

There are three specific categories of competence that the EU enjoys in the policy domains relevant to the task of global governance: exclusive competence; shared competence; and parallel competence (see Table 2). When the EU has an *exclusive competence* in a specific policy sector, it *can replace* its member states in global governance arrangements (TFEU, Art 2.1). In particular, an exclusive EU external competence may derive from explicit treaty provisions (TFEU, Art. 3.1), from an EU legislative act, from the EU need to exercise its internal competence or from the EU necessity to achieve treaty-based objectives (TEU, Art. 3.2). TFEU Art. 3.1.e explicitly includes the common commercial policy among EU exclusive competences (TFEU, Art. 3.1.e). Therefore, the EU can act in the name of its member states to preserve the existing liberal international trade regime or pursue commercial policies deepening the integration of the world's economy. EU member states, in turn, may only carry out activities impinging on EU common commercial policies pursuant to the goal of a more integrated global economy *if* the EU empowers them to do so (TEU, Art. 2.1).

Second, *shared competence*. When the EU and its member states have a *shared competence* in a specific policy sector, the former can carry out activities in that sector alongside the latter in global governance. Significantly, EU shared competences may be either pre-emptive or non-pre-emptive (Van Vooren and Wessel 2017). Member states may carry out their activities in policy sectors where a shared pre-emptive competence applies 'to the extent that the Union has not exercised its competence' (TFEU, Art. 2.2); the EU aspiration to ensure sustainable development in global governance based on EU energy policy is an example (TFEU, Arts. 4 and 194). When the EU competence is shared but not pre-emptive, conversely, the EU exercise of such competence does 'not result in Member States being prevented from exercising theirs' (TFEU, Art. 4.4). Indeed, in these situations EU activities and those of the member states must 'complement and reinforce' each other (TFEU, Arts. 208.1 and 214.1). This working logic applies to EU aspirations to foster the eradication of poverty and to assist disaster responses, respectively, that are rooted in EU development policy and humanitarian aid.

Third, the EU has a *parallel* competence in the CFSP and its integral Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Whenever a common policy proves possible, the EU can act in this policy sector with the active support of its member states (TEU, Art. 24). If a common position has not emerged, however, member states can pursue their policies autonomously (Van Vooren and Wessel 2017). EU competence in CFSP resembles, at first sight, a shared non-pre-emptive competence. According to TEU Art. 2.4, the EU has the competence to 'define and implement a common foreign and security policy, including the progressive framing of a common defence policy'. At the same time, member states shall not only 'inform and consult one another' in this policy sector (TEU, Art. 32), but also maintain a 'spirit of loyalty' (TEU, Art. 25). However, TFEU Art. 4 does not include CFSP among EU shared competences. Furthermore, Declarations 13 and 14 annexed to the Lisbon Treaty state that the CFSP's legal provisions do not affect member states' responsibilities to carry out their foreign policies, as well as their representation in third countries and international organizations – in particular NATO. For these reasons, it has been argued that the EU competence in CFSP is parallel

rather than shared (Cremona 2018; Van Vooren and Wessel 2017). Since EU promotion of human rights and international security in global governance are rooted in the CFSP policy sector, the parallel nature of EU competence determines EU global governance activities in this regard.

Table 2. EU Policy Goals in Global Governance: Sectors, Competences and Decision-Making

EU Policy Goal(s) in Global Governance	EU Policy Sector(s)	Nature of EU Competence(s)	EU Decision-making Logic(s)
Encouraging World Economy's Integration	EU Common Commercial Policy	Exclusive	Qualified Majority Voting
Fostering the Eradication of Poverty	EU Development Policy	Shared Non-Pre-Emptive	Qualified Majority Voting
Consolidating and Supporting Human Rights	Common Foreign and Security Policy	Parallel	Unanimity
Ensuring Sustainable Development	EU Energy Policy	Shared Pre-Emptive	Qualified Majority Voting
Strengthening International Security	Common Foreign and Security Policy / Common Security and Defence Policy	Parallel	Unanimity
Assisting Disaster Responses' Confrontation	EU Humanitarian Aid	Shared Non-Pre-Emptive	Qualified Majority Voting

Source: Own elaboration. Based on Van Vooren and Wessel (2017).

In practice, the EU capacity to act in global governance consistently with its competences has much depended on the decision-making mechanisms in place. In issue areas where unanimity applies, the heterogeneity of EU member-state preferences is more likely to hamper the elaboration of policies, and thus the EU ability to carry out global governance. After all, the EU's competences, expertise, and capacities to speak and act on behalf of its member states across different issue areas exist alongside EU member-state ministries, chancelleries and presidential offices that also define preferences and maintain relationships with other countries and organizations. For instance, some EU member states, such as France, Spain, and the Netherlands, were colonial powers and still maintain bilateral - and often times asymmetric – relationships with their former colonies. And many EU member states look towards their immediate geopolitical neighborhood when defining their strategic preferences. Depending on the formal competences of the EU, member-state preferences are a more or less welcome voice in global governance. Their preferences may be particularly useful for the EU to achieve its goals in areas where it was granted only a shared or parallel competence. Existing studies show how, thanks to their influence and credibility, the EU's Nordic member states have bolstered EU initiatives in international development assistance and relief, environmental protection, sustainable development, and international security (Elgström 2017; Laatikainen 2003). In policy areas where the EU has exclusive competence, on the contrary, member-state voices may call into question its formal authority. Owing to their economic interests and ideological stances, for example, member states essentially reclaimed some of their trade sovereignty in international negotiations over issues of services and intellectual property between the mid-1980s and the early 1990s (Meunier and Nicolaïdis 1999) they have now chosen to regain some of their lost trade sovereignty. Neither the European Court of Justice's (ECJ's).

At the same time, depending on how the EU can make itself heard, member states' interactions with other countries and organizations may be more or less beneficial for its global governance activities. While the EU has only an enhanced observer status at the UN, all EU countries are voting members of the UN. Therefore, their presence at the UN can enhance the EU ability to negotiate and achieve its preferred result. Nonetheless, when member-state preferences are highly heterogeneous, their participation in institutionalized international settings where the EU is absent may also lead to a bypassing of the agreed EU position (e.g. Libya Contact Group) (Sus 2023).

Nevertheless, even when policy gridlock has occurred and inflexibility dominated the EU system, member states have maintained 'cooperative reflexes' (Reykers et al. 2023: 729). To overcome and circumvent political gridlock, EU member states and institutions can resort to informal modes of cooperation which replace, complement and/or support corresponding EU policies (Amadio Viceré and Sus 2023; see also Kleine 2013). Informal groupings of EU member states, in particular, have frequently steered EU activities in institutionalized international settings without receiving a formal mandate from EU institutions and/or other member states (Amadio Viceré 2023). Next to these more direct ways of attempting to influence global governance, as discussed below, the EU has also often relied on its structural power to influence the governance of global policy issues and influence actors beyond its border, to which we turn in the next section.

Structuring global governance beyond its competences

The EU's formal competences and its partnerships do not cover all the ways in which the EU can engage with and impact global governance arrangements. In other words, the EU does not necessarily need representatives that speak in its name to act beyond its borders. Instead, the EU has structural powers that contribute to shaping global governance. One manifestation of its structural power is the inclusion of non-economic issue linkages in economic agreements, in particular Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs). These are a powerful tools to regulate not only bilateral trade relations with other countries or IOs but also to suggest, advance – and even impose – EU normative standards and foreign policy objectives (Cremona, 1998). The EU – and here both the Council of the EU and the European Commission are in the driver's seat – is known to use its clout in global trade to achieve policy goals in human rights guarantees, environmental protection, labor standards, and security provisions (Ariel and Haftel, 2021; Hafner-Burton, 2005). The EU's use of its trade power and the wish of others to have access to the European single market has been coined power through trade by Meunier and Nicolaïdis (2006). As such, the EU can not only impact global trade flows but also issue areas that are debated and negotiated in other organizations or agreements such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The EU's structural power does not only manifest itself through issue linkages but also through its regulatory power. For example, the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) shows how the regulatory power of the EU can constrain actors and project its regulatory preferences beyond its borders. The EU exerts a regulatory influence at the global level in areas such as the digital economy, food and consumer safety, and environmental protection (Garcaia Bercero and Nicolaïdis 2021). Not only across issue areas worldwide but also by targeting its immediate neighborhood has the EU expanded the scope of EU rules beyond its borders, which has been coined as its external governance (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2009). Neighboring countries, in an effort to converge with the EU framework, have adopted EU regulatory standards in soft security issues, such as justice and home affairs, environmental regulations, and energy policy (Abrardi et al. 2016; Lavenex 2004; Russo and Stambøl 2022).

The decades old debate about whether the EU has normative power and if so, how it manifests itself, is another testament to its potential structural power. Arguably, for example, the EU's internal climate change policies boosted the credibility of its leadership efforts in international climate negotiations beginning with the 1997 Kyoto Protocol followed by the 2015 Paris Agreement (Skjærseth 2017). Some actors perceive the EU's power of attraction as worthwhile emulating, if only rhetorically.

Navigating global governance arrangements

While the EU can act directly or indirectly to influence global governance arrangements and actors, it has different strategies available to navigate their interactions. As the preceding discussion has shown, the EU sometimes speaks on behalf of all member states and at other times acts next to them. And at times, it uses issue linkages and regulatory power to achieve its policy goals. When making use of its powers, the EU and its member states need to consider its various overlaps in membership and mandate with other organizations such as the UN, the WTO, or the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) (Hofmann 2011). Some overlaps are formalized in agreements, giving the EU observer status (e.g., UN, OECD), formal membership (e.g., the UN Food and Agricultural Organization and WTO) or making it a formal party to an international agreement such as the UNFCCC. Even in instances where the EU does not overlap with organizations – most often because these organizations operate in another region - the EU has partnership agreements that provide opportunities to exchange information with a variety of actors across the globe, collaborate on joint projects or support their activities both financially and with expertise (e.g. AU) (Hofmann et al., forthcoming).

To navigate different inter-institutional arrangements, the EU and its member states have various strategies available to them. An IO research program often dubbed “regime complexity” (Alter and Raustiala 2018; Raustiala and Victor 2004) has examined strategies such as competitive regime creation, regime shifting, forum shopping, brokering, and hostage taking (Hofmann 2019; Morse and Keohane 2014) to show how actors can pursue their preferences in global governance spaces with more than one organization. While these strategies have been developed for states, there is *a priori* no reason why regional organizations like the EU (or non-state actors) cannot pursue them as well, as long as they have access to them. For example, the EU has either co-founded or is member of a host of informal international organizations (Roger 2022). Based on the pursuit of these strategies, the EU and/or its member states can influence the constellation of organizations pertinent to a particular global governance challenge, collective policy outcomes but also its own positing in this densely institutionalized web of actors. This has been shown, for example, in issues related to climate change. Kreienkramp et al. (2022) have shown how the EU engages in forums in the hope of anticipated feedback loops: ‘European institutions have seized on the problem of climate change to reinforce their own legitimacy, advance the development of a joint foreign policy, and accelerate supranational identity building’ (Kreienkamp et al. 2022: 736).

These strategies, however, are also available to the EU’s member states. In instances where EU member states cannot agree on a policy position within the EU or the negotiation process takes too long for certain member states, they can make use of densely institutionalized governance spaces to pursue their preferences in other fora (Hofmann 2019). Hence, we need to examine EU competences, in conjunction with its structural power and institutional landscape, to understand where, when, how, and why the EU influences global governance.

The EU’s vision for global governance and the liberal international order

When navigating global governance, the EU presents itself as a liberal actor, often pushing others more or less directly to also pursue a liberal agenda (Wagner 2017). A look at the Lisbon Treaty confirms the EU’s formal commitment to principles and practices of the liberal international order. Fundamental liberal values should underpin EU activities. In its external relations, the EU aims to promote equality, individual freedoms, democracy, the rule of law, and the respect for human rights (TEU, Arts. 2 and 3). At the same time, the EU supports economic liberalism in global governance (Ikenberry 2018). It is explicitly committed to the ‘integration of all countries into the world economy’ (TEU, Art. 21.2). According to its treaties, it aspires to contribute to the ‘harmonious development of world trade, the progressive abolition of restrictions on international trade and on foreign direct investment, and the lowering of customs and other barriers’ (TFEU, Art. 206). From an organizational perspective, the EU promotes multilateralism as a procedural principle of the global order (TEU, Art. 21.1) (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann 2020). In the aftermath of the Lisbon Treaty’s entry into force, the 2016 EU Global Strategy reiterated those liberal aspirations and committed the EU to a global order based on international law, which ensures human rights, sustainable development and lasting access to the global commons’ (EEAS 2016: 10) and the existence of a ‘multilateral rule-based order’ (EEAS 2016: 39).

Has the EU influenced global governance arrangements and actors in line with such a liberal vision? At times, but not always, the EU has not only supported but also contributed to shaping the liberal international order's model (Ikenberry 2011). It has done so through its formal competences and structural power, while adopting various strategies mentioned in the previous section to navigate global governance arrangements. In the early post-Cold War years, when the liberal international order seemed to have affirmed itself globally under US hegemony, the EU capacity to be a liberal power was put into doubt (Rynning 2003). Yet, over time, the EU and its member states have been key US partners in shaping the liberal international order and imposing it on others (Chen 2016). The EU has adopted a liberal narrative in its approach to regional and global peacebuilding in its approach to international climate and energy (McGowan 2008; Musch and De Ville 2019) and sometimes did so in opposition to its member states (Goldthau and Sitter 2020). Furthermore, it has pursued the promotion and protection of global human rights in the UN Human Rights' Council (Tuominen 2022). At times, the EU has even acted as the liberal champion in global governance. During the US invasion of Iraq and its breach of international norms, for instance, the EU presented itself as the main guarantor of the international liberal order (Tocci 2021). A similar situation arose when, during Donald Trump's Presidency, the US essentially gave up its liberal leadership. EU – failed – attempts to save the Iran Nuclear Agreement provide a relevant example.

However, the EU also pushes or moderates its liberal ambitions, especially so during periods of emergencies, geo-political reorientations, great power competition, and intra-EU reactionary movements (Siddi and Kustova 2021). For example, Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine caused a dramatic U-turn in the EU approach towards Moscow, and put into question the role of trade in advancing political relations. Not only authoritarian governments and their supporters, but also Western populist politicians and their voters, have been challenging the EU's liberal vision for its external relations (Adler-Nissen and Zarakol 2021). While the EU speaks the language of a liberal vision in its approach to its immediate surroundings and has fostered the alignment of third countries at its Eastern and Southern borders with its values and interests through the European Neighborhood Policy over the last decades, the EU did not necessarily only focus on democracy promotion in the Western Balkans (Richter and Wunsch 2020) and as a result, it has only partially managed to be an agent of democracy promotion in its neighborhood (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2011). The EU's (mis)management of the migration and refugee emergencies through the securitization of this sector and the deputization of third – often controversial - actors to police EU borders at a distance is perhaps the most relevant failure of the EU liberal aspirations.

Conclusion

The EU's engagement in global governance is multifaceted and complex. The EU has expanded in both scope and membership over time. This expansion has contributed to the EU's increasing presence on the global stage. In this context, a comprehensive assessment of how the EU influences global governance necessitates examination of three interrelated and equally relevant factors: EU formal and informal competences; its structural power; and its institutional environment. The chapter showed that EU engagement in global governance occurs alongside EU member-state preferences and interactions with other actors. Formally, it is the division of competences between the EU and its member states across policy domains that determines how the EU acts across global governance concerns. This division determines whether the EU can act on behalf of its member states, in concert with them or next to them in global governance arrangements. Yet when EU decision-making logics hindered the EU capacity to carry out global governance activities, EU member states and institutions have resorted to informal modes of cooperation.

We also showed that, beyond direct engagement, the EU can influence global governance through its structural and structuring power. Through issue linkages, the EU has imposed its normative standards on third actors' activities in fields of human rights, environment, labor, and security. At the same time, the EU exerts considerable influence owing to its regulatory power: third actors wanting to interact with the EU must accept EU regulations to such an extent that the EU exerts control or influence over the internal governance of countries outside it. While EU formal, informal and structural powers provide important insights into how the EU – directly and indirectly - influences global governance, analyzing the EU institutional landscape allows an unpacking of the strategies employed to navigate global governance arrangements. Indeed, the EU makes use of densely institutionalized governance spaces and exploits various overlaps in membership and mandate with other organizations to pursue its preferences.

Has the EU managed to shape global governance in line with its liberal aspiration and vision? Is it even the guardian or champion of such of liberal global governance-making? By looking at global governance by the EU, we enable an analytical lens that helps decenter the EU and question such EU-narratives. At times, the EU has employed its powers and strategies to pursue (and impose) its liberal vision for global governance. Its global governance activities have been shaping and supporting the international liberal order alongside the US. At other times, the EU carries out global governance in complex ways and not always consistent with the articulated liberal vision. The EU has also set aside its own liberal objectives, partially informed by geopolitical crises, great power rivalries, and internal disagreement. Albeit it is difficult to speak of the EU as a single actor at all times and in all circumstances, it has shown that it can be a global partner to some and, when it wants to, also be a global strategic player.

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