



**Call for Papers "The European Green Deal: moving to action  
Opportunities and challenges for the European citizens"**

**How can the European Union act as a normative power in the green transition?**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

For the European Union, tackling the challenging global context is one of the greatest priorities for its future, and the green transition could create the greatest impact, both at the economic level, as well as politically. Described by various authors as a soft power, lacking therefore the capabilities of a hard power actor, the EU has been acting as a normative power, a concept describing an international actor who can promote its values and regulations in relations to its third parties. The EU does not lack incentives for convincing outside states and partners to adopt EU values and norms. For aspiring or candidates to membership, the Enlargement Policy is in many ways a real instrument of Europeanisation. For partners outside of Europe, trade deals and the economic importance of the EU create the opportunity for the EU to assert its position on topics it considers strategic. The aim of this project is to investigate and evaluate the instruments available to EU institutions in order to promote and protect its standards and values, both in its relations with countries from the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership, as well as in connection with other global partners, especially in the policy areas related to the green economic transition, in the context of the European Green Deal. The emphasis put on the green economic transformation is explained by its extensive transformative characteristic, as well as its long-term consequences.

### **Social Media summary**

The European Union normative power long-term ambitions are connected to its ability to promote climate regulations on the global stage.

### **Keywords**

#green normative power #climate regulations #EU values and norms

### **Short bio**

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## Table of Contents

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. THE CONCEPT OF NORMATIVE POWER EUROPEAN UNION</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. EU'S NORMATIVE POWER INSTRUMENTS</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4. EU AS GREEN NORMATIVE POWER</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>5. CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>6. RECCOMENDATIONS</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>7. REFERENCES</b>	<b>15</b>

## Table of Figures

<i>Figure 1. Main topic of EU communication related to Belarus, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine (in 2016).....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Figure 2. Trade levels between the European Union and China (2010-2020).....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Figure 3. EU's trade agreements in 2021 .....</i>	<i>13</i>



## 1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated transformative trends, proving the importance of multilateralism and a liberal world order based on rules and common values, especially for democracies. For the European Union, tackling the challenging global context is one of the greatest priorities for its future, and the green transition could create the greatest impact, both at the economic level, as well as politically. Described by various authors as a soft power, lacking therefore the capabilities of a hard power international actor, the EU has been acting as a normative power, a concept describing an actor who can promote its values and regulations in relations to its partners. The EU does not lack incentives for convincing outside states and partners to adopt EU values and norms. For aspiring or candidates to membership, the Enlargement Policy is in many ways a real instrument of Europeanisation. For partners outside of Europe, trade deals and the economic importance of the EU create the opportunity for the EU to assert its position on topics it considers strategic.

The aim of this project is to investigate and evaluate the instruments available to EU institutions in order to promote and protect its standards and values, both in its relations with countries from the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership, as well as in connection with other global partners, especially in the policy areas related to the green economic transition, in the context of the European Green Deal. The emphasis put on the green economic transformation is explained by its extensive transformative characteristic, as well as its long-term consequences. The research paper will not be limited to only an evaluative perspective, its aim being to propose concrete policy measures to enhance the EU normative power instruments and capabilities.

The methodological apparatus will build on the concept of normative power, as proposed by Ian Manners. The main components of normative powers, as described by Manners (ideational, principles, actions), will be investigated. The ideational framework will be analysed by using political speeches as EU officials, as well as official documents of EU institutions on European values. The principles will be described using the same framework. The most important part of the analysis will be related to actions, by critically assessing how to improve the EU green diplomacy and other foreign policy instruments. The research project will investigate what kind of incentives and instruments the EU has in order to promote its ideas, values, and principles in its relations with outside partners. For this goal, we will use documents and policy materials related to both the Enlargement Policy and the Neighbourhood Policy, as well as EU positions in trade and economic negotiations, related to the green transition.

The European Union is facing many challenges, but as any crisis situation, challenges can provide opportunities. Climate change is one of the key elements for the future of the global world order, as well as for the future of the entire humankind. For the European Union, it represents a key transformative phenomenon, which can make or break the entire project of European integration. Consequently, it is of the highest importance of the EU's future to come with solutions than can keep its global importance. A more active normative power European Union does represent one of the available options.



## 2. The concept of normative power European Union

The concept of normative power has been defined by Ian Manners as the “ability to define what pass for ‘normal’ in world politics” (Manners, 2002, 236), being one of the more recent conceptualizations of power in international relations. As Manners points out extensively, the unique institutional arrangement of the European Union creates difficulties when trying to assess whether to define it by employing classic concepts. The post-Westphalian characteristics of the EU integration process (King, 1999, 313) created difficulties for scholarly analysis, Manners’s concept, building on the works of authors such as Carr or Galtung, trying to overcome these theoretical difficulties by focusing on the EU’s potential to act as a regulatory model for other international actors.

The scholarly debate on the concept of normative power is still very much active. Authors such as Daniel Hardwick (2011) argue that the normative power concept was rather idealistically applied by Manners for the EU. While it has been almost universally present in the last years public and political debates, the idea of an eventual demise of Europe as a great power, in an international system transitioning to tensions and hard power competition, was contradicted by the recent book of Anu Bradford. By focusing on the Brussels effect (Bradford, 2020), the author concludes that actually the European Union is still a very influential world actor, especially by its ability to diffuse and promote norms and regulations. The EU does not impose its regulations on other actors, but, on the contrary, the high level of attractivity of its institutional, legal, and economic model is what makes third parties copy the EU norms and ideas.

Manners argues that the EU norms are linked to six main factors. Contagion defines the situations in which other international actors copy the EU’s system of values and norms, not necessarily as a result of EU intentional actions. Informational diffusion is linked to the strategic communications of various EU institutions that can promote issues of relevance on the world stage. Procedural diffusion, on the other hand, is related to institutionalized norms in the relationships between the EU and other international partners, including the cases of pre-enlargement negotiations. Transference is defined by Manners as a type of normative diffusion that takes place when the EU is in a trading relation with another third party, while overt diffusion implies the physical presence of the EU in third states, including the various delegations and representations. The last of the six factors, cultural filters, defines the expansions of EU values, such as democracy or freedom of speech, to other international actors (Manners, 2002, 245).

These innovative perspectives define a more nuanced understanding of power as a concept in international relations. While hard power is very much focused on the real, tangible, capacities of an international actor, with the soft power focused on the less tangible aspects such as culture, normative power implies that the relations between international actors are significantly more entangled, and the power within the international stage can be significantly more related to one’s ability to promote its norms, institutions, regulations etc. as standard. The European Union lacks hard power capabilities, while having some important soft power ones. But, as the above-mentioned authors pointed out convincingly, the real power of the EU on the global stage comes from its ability to promote and diffuse EU norms and regulations to third parties, that become, as a consequence, more EU-like.



### 3. EU's normative power instruments

There are several different instruments available to the EU's normative power. In this section, we will focus on three of them: the Enlargement Policy, the Neighbourhood Policy, and the trade agreements with third parties.

The Enlargement Policy is considered by many authors as the most important foreign policy instrument available to the EU, but it can be rightly argued that it is very much a normative power capability as well. After the end of the Cold War, the objective of becoming an EU Member State meant that former communist countries from Central and Eastern Europe had to adopt values and practices, such as democracy or free market economy, as expressed in the Copenhagen criteria. While strategies and paths vary to a certain degree from country to country, it is certain that the perspective of EU accession makes a government (and society) more willing to become more EU-like. The Enlargement Policy is in this sense very much relevant today, especially in relation to the Western Balkans (Yigit, 2010). While the EU accession of Western Balkans is still a very complicated topic (Sebe, 2021), governments from the region are expected to adopt the EU axiological framework before accession.

The Neighbourhood Policy, on the other hand, received less attention from this normative perspective. However, it is important to point out that the EU does promote its values, norms, and regulations, even if its success can be debated and it is different from region to region, and country to country. The most relevant aspect in this sense is the EU promotion of democratic and liberal values, through various policies (Neumann, 2019).

On the world stage, the European Union does have the potentiality to become a significant normative power. The importance of its economy for other international actors, including superpowers such as China or the United States of America, as well as smaller international actors, gives the EU relevant advantages in free trade agreements negotiations. As Wunderlich (2016) argued, the EU tries to defend and preserve its values, standards, and practices in negotiations with China, including in relations to climate negotiations.

On the other hand, Poletti and Sicurelli (2018) argue that the normative power EU has two objectives in its foreign trade strategy. First of all, to grow European economic prosperity, by putting the European internal market at the core of the international trade system. Second of all, to use trade relations as an instrument of regulatory diffusion, in relations to both developed (or very developed) and underdeveloped countries.

In this sense, association agreements or strategic partnerships are important to the EU normative power status, as they can act as channels for normative diffusion from the EU to third parties. Moreover, the EU provides aims for developments that come with specific rules related to respecting democratic values (Fusiek, 2020, 11).

Apart from these three instruments, with high relevance especially for the issue of climate change, Fusiek (2020, 10) points out how the European Union, as several of its Members States, are in a unique position. They can act as very important diffusers of cultural values and norms, regardless of the level of engagement with other actors. This is very important, meaning that the EU have a normative advantage, in comparison with other international actors, that need to invest more in this regard.



## 4. EU as green normative power

The ambitious European Green Deal presented the European Union as a very active green normative power, ready to act in order to create a sustainable economic environment: „The environmental ambition of the Green Deal will not be achieved by Europe acting alone. The drivers of climate change and biodiversity loss are global and are not limited by national borders. The EU can use its influence, expertise and financial resources to mobilise its neighbours and partners to join it on a sustainable path. The EU will continue to lead international efforts and wants to build alliances with the likeminded. It also recognises the need to maintain its security of supply and competitiveness even when others are unwilling to act” (European Commission, 2019, 2).

The European Union does already act as a green normative power. 30% of the EU’s Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument support climate objectives, while one third of the world public investment in combating climate change comes from the EU and its Member States (EC, *Delivering the European Green Deal...*). The European Green Deal does have an overt normative perspective. As stated by the official website of the European Commission: „The European Green Deal has already set a positive example and led major international partners to set their own target dates for climate neutrality.” (EC, *Delivering the European Green Deal...*). The Fit for 55 Package has, among other, the same objective of active as an incentive for the development of the EU green normative power: „The Fit for 55 Package cements the EU’s global leadership by action and by example in the fight against climate change. However, EU action alone is not enough and cannot deliver the global emission reduction the world needs. The EU remains fully committed to the multilateral global order and calls upon partners around the world to work together.” (European Commission, 2021b, 2). The Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) represent the practical instrument of this abstract objective (European Commission, 2021b, 12).

The following section will analyse if these three normative power instruments of the European Union can act in the environmental and climate areas. First of all, we shall look at any climate-related initiative, the relations between the EU and the Western Balkans, as well as other neighbouring regions. Second of all, this section will assess the EU’s global position, especially in relation with China.

The 2004 and 2007 enlargements prove how the EU's enlargement policy can play a significant role in changing the norms related to environment protection in candidate countries. EU institutions offered expertise to experts and NGOs in those countries, this assistance being very important in the process of regulatory transfer (Carmin *et al.*, 2004). This experience represented an important lesson, applied nowadays in the relations with the Western Balkans. While the countries of the Western Balkans are in different stages in their European integration, in order to help these governments in adopting and enforcing the EU *acquis*, the European Commission launched in late 2020 a series of guidelines for the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (European Commission, 2020). Closely linked to the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, this document proves the increasing interests of the EU institutions to work with the Western Balkans countries in order to prepare their national economies for the green transition. The Agenda proposes five main pillars of action:

1. Climate action, including decarbonization, energy, and mobility



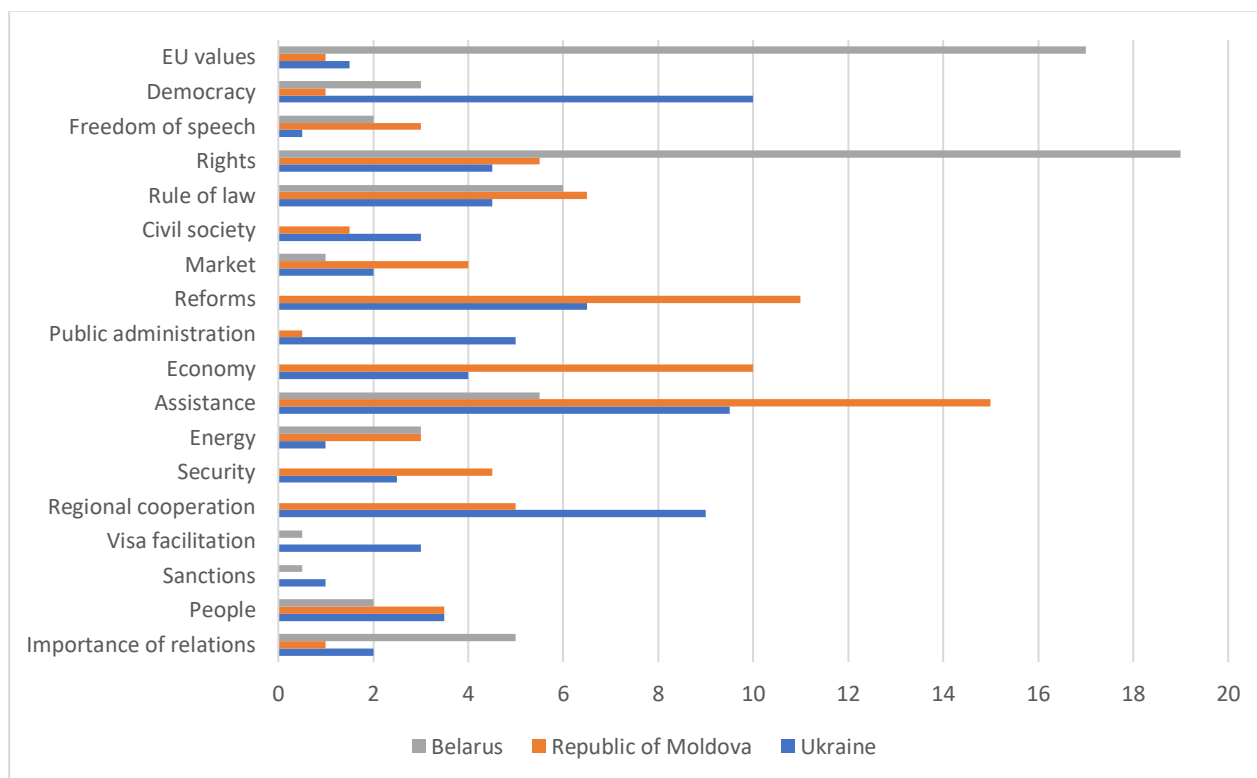


2. Circular economy, in particular related to waste, recycling, sustainable production and efficient use of resources
3. Biodiversity, to protect and restore the natural wealth
4. Combating pollution of air, water, and soil
5. Sustainable food system and rural areas (European Commission, 2020)

Regarding the Neighbourhood Policy, climate change is one of the included areas of interest, but, in comparison with other instruments available to the EU, its relevance seems to be slightly less significant. In the Southern Neighbourhood, in 2018 the EU had launched three projects: ClimaSouth, aiming to adapt policies in the region in order to combat the consequences of climate change; CES-MED, giving assistance to local authorities; and SUDEP South, in order to support the usage of energy sources (European Commission, 2018).

A research from 2016 on the main topic of EU communications related to Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Belarus, proved that the most important issues were related to EU values, rights, and rule of law (as shown by chart no. 1). As the climate change becomes more relevant for the EU, we can speculate that this topic will become of even higher importance for the Neighbourhood Policy.

Figure 1. Main topic of EU communication related to Belarus, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine (in 2016)



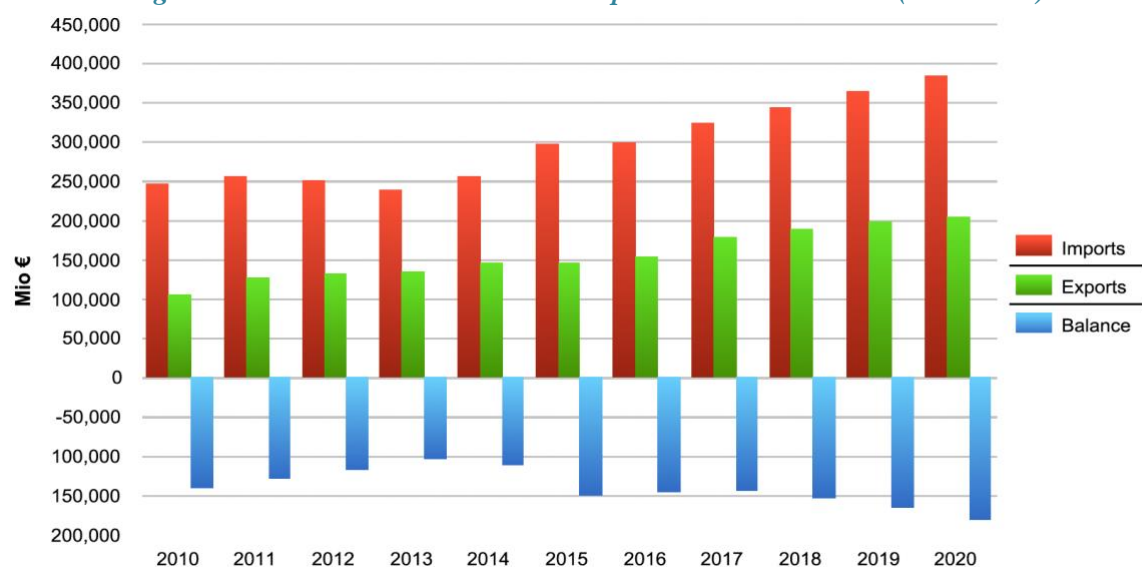
Source: Dimitrova et al., 2016.



On the global stage, the EU is present in different frameworks and has multilateral and bilateral partnerships with various international actors, as well as the Green Diplomacy Network. While all of these are significant for assessing the EU's green normative capabilities, the relation with China is very interesting for this analysis, as there are ideological and institutional differences between the two partners. Our argument is that looking at the EU-China relation, in this case regarding climate action, one could not only uncover EU's normative capabilities, but their limits as well. In this sense, for our paper's recommendation, the discussion on China is very important, as it leads to the various ways in which the EU's normative capabilities could and should be enhanced.

In relation to China, the EU put the environmental problems very high on its negotiation interests. As Shaohua discussed in a paper analysing Ian Manners six factors of normative power and their application on the EU-China relation in regards to climate change (Shouhua, 2015). As the authors point out, there are three ways in which the EU acts as a green normative power in relations to China. First of all, the EU uses informational diffusion quite significantly, the idea that China should act on climate change being very often present in various strategic communication documents. Second of all, the procedural diffusion is very important for the EU-China relations (Ibidem). As a result of long-term cooperation at the high level, the EU and China created in 2005 an EU-China Partnership on Climate Change, confirmed in 2010, and then enhanced in 2015 and 2018. China and EU agreed to work bilaterally on long-term strategies for the development of low greenhouse gas emission capabilities, emissions tradition, energy efficiency, clean energy, low-carbon cities, as well as cooperation with other developing countries (Climate Action). A third instrument used by the EU for achieving its climate protection goals in relation with China is transference, both related to trade and technological transfer. The importance of the European markets for China makes the trade relation significant for regulatory diffusion for the EU (Shouhua, 2015).

*Figure 2. Trade levels between the European Union and China (2010-2020)*



*Source: European Commission. Trade. China*



The impact of China's climate policy is hard to assess. Rhetorically, China considers climate change as one of the main challenges of the present and the future. In the EU-China leaders' statement of 2018 it is stated that both the EU and China will act together on climate action: „The EU and China consider climate action and the clean energy transition an imperative more important than ever. They confirm their commitments under the historic 2015 Paris Agreement and step up their co-operation to enhance its implementation” (EU-China Leaders' Statement on Climate Change and Clean Energy, 2018). But while setting out high goals is encouraging, as Ursula von den Leyen stressed in her 2021 State of the European Union, significantly more action is necessary, from the perspective of the European Union: „The goals that President Xi has set for China are encouraging. But we call for that same leadership on setting out how China will get there. The world would be relieved if they showed they could peak emissions by mid-decade - and move away from coal at home and abroad” (SOTEU 2021).

In this sense, it can be argued that the European Union did and does act as a green normative power in its relations with China. Our perspective agrees with the conclusion of Yan Shaohua (2015), but it must be stressed that there are several limits to EU capabilities to act as a green normative power in relation to China. Pragmatically speaking, there is a difference between the type of international actorness specific to China, on one hand, and the EU, on the other. While China does have significant hard and soft power capabilities, the EU is limited in this regard. Moreover, China's economic rise means that the communist leadership in Beijing is less keen in accepting rules and regulations created elsewhere. China's position on climate change seems to be related more to political and geopolitical calculations, rather than a real concern for the environment. This is linked to China's aim to become a more present actor on the international stage, as climate diplomacy and action can be used as a tool to enhance China's soft and normative power. As a consequence, China will align with the European Union on climate action as long as it will not contradict with its own political and economic interests. This should be taken into account when assessing the EU as a green normative power, especially for further enhancing this status. While China is most certainly important, we argue that the EU should diversify its normative and regulatory diffusion objectives and strategies, by looking at a variety of international actors.

In a sense, this is the strategy that the EU uses in relations to other parts of the world. The 2021 Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, for example, defines climate collaboration as one of the key elements in its relation to countries from the region. Within this strategy, the EU aims to act in several ways. First of all, the EU will conclude Green Alliances with like-minded partners who share the climate neutrality goal by 2050, as well as Green Partnership with other countries. The first Green Alliance was agreed in May 2021, with Japan. Second of all, the EU will engage with the largest emitters and will prioritize the transition away from coal. Third of all, the EU will continue to have high-end dialogue with actors such as ASEAN, Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, South Africa etc. (European Commission, 2021).

Bilateral relations and regional frameworks of cooperation are of the highest importance for the EU's status as a normative power. As Fusiek (2020) these types of dialogues are a good strategy for increasing EU presence on the global stage, as working especially with like-minded partners (with the same values, ideas and, ideals) within frameworks such as the Alliance for Multilateralism is a very effective foreign policy for the EU.

This could be one of the key developments in short-, medium-, and long-term perspectives. EU normative power is significant in relation to all international actors, including the United States



or China, but in changing international order, the EU must become significantly more involved in relations with, even smaller, global actors.

## 5. Conclusions

While the concept of normative power has been criticised by some authors as implying *apriori* that the EU acts a „force for good” (Sjursen, 2005), it is our argument that this concept can have a real relevance for the future of the EU as a global actor. While it was not the aim of our paper to discuss in length the theoretical implications of the normative power concept for the field of international relations, we can stress out several conclusions of this research paper. First of all, the European Union can be correctly described as a normative power, as one of its objectives on global arena is to promote its values, norms, regulations, institutions as the normal ones. This is strongly entangled with EU’s status as a soft power, and it represents the main way in which it can influence global politics.

Second of all, the so-called „Brussels effect” makes the European Union still one of the most important global actors, even if it does not have the hard power capabilities of other actors, such as China or the United States of America. Third of all, given the increasing importance of the green transition and high level of system economic and social risks related to climate changes, the European Union is acting as a green normative power. Its main instruments are especially the various international trade agreements, with both like-minded partners, as well as others international actors, the Enlargement Policy, especially in relation to the Western Balkans, as the Neighbourhood Policy.

Climate change and the green transition represents of the key challenges for both the entire world, as well as for the European Union. In this sense, it is vital for the future of the European integration process that the EU has an active role in this domain. In the recommendations sections we shall provide several broad ideas that could improve EU’s green normative power status in international politics.

## 6. Recommendations

As Fusiek (2020) argued, ability of the EU to act on the global arena is linked to both internal, as well as external, capabilities. Internally, „the EU should focus on its internal capabilities and “domestic” conditions to help the diffusion of its normative power. The well-functioning of its normative instruments is not only dependent on the audience, but also the transmitter. So, by improving its capacities and modus operandi, the EU could significantly improve the force of its normative influence, while supporting its pledge to relaunch multilateralism” (Fusiek, 2020, 15).

Given the arguments developed previously, we can make several policy recommendations that, from our point of view, will contribute to maintaining the EU’s green normative position within the global international system. These recommendations will look at the Enlargement Policy, Neighbouring Policy, as well as the EU’s global position, especially regarding trade negotiations.



### 1. Green regulatory frameworks should become a key element of a reformed Enlargement Policy

The Enlargement Policy, especially and not only in relation to the Western Balkans, is one key historical policy instrument of the European Union to promote its values, institutions, and regulatory frameworks. However, recent evolutions put under significant stress the future of the Western Balkans European integration process. In this sense, the Enlargement Policy requires reforms. Clear standards, frameworks of negotiations, and integration calendar should be put in place, as this is a vital element for the EU's future presence in the region. While environmental regulations are currently part of the Enlargement Policy, we argue that their importance should become even more significant, as they will become even more important for the specificity of the EU economies and societies.

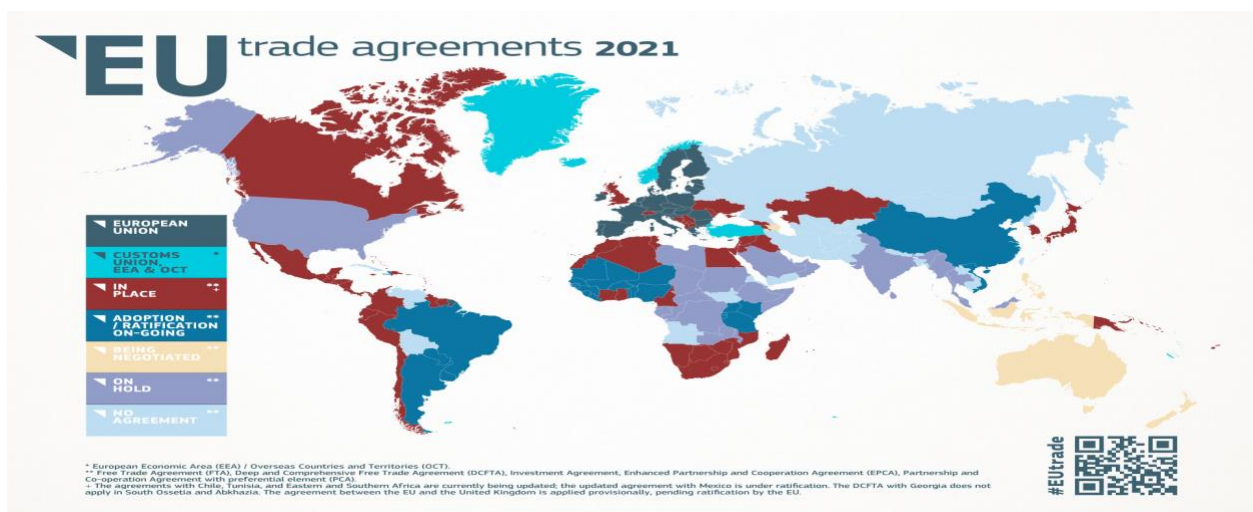
### 2. Green regulatory frameworks should become a key element of a reformed Neighbouring Policy

The EU should, first of all, increase its presence in all neighbouring regions. This presence must focus significantly more in helping developing countries in their green transitions. As a consequence, these countries will become closely aligned with the EU and better connected economically to EU economies.

### 3. The EU should promote green regulatory frameworks in all its trade negotiations, especially with partners that not necessarily share its institutions and values

The European Union has many trade arrangements, with countries from all around the globe. As Map no. 1 shows, these frameworks allows the EU to be very of the centres of global trade, a position in which it can influence how other partners tackle climate challenges. Consequently, the EU should use more this special status in order to promote green regulations and frameworks.

Figure 3. EU's trade agreements in 2021



Source: Council of the European Union, 2021.





While the European Union is focusing on climate regulations in all negotiations, economic or otherwise, with like-minded partners, such as the United States, or in various multilateral international frameworks, we argue that the EU should focus even more on its negotiations, especially trade related, with partners not necessarily like-minded. China is, in this sense, maybe the most relevant example. This focus on non-like-minded partners is linked to the definition of normative power. If the EU is to remain one of the most important international actors in setting norms and regulations, it is more important to engage with those international actors that have different values, institutions, and norms, as it will be harder for EU regulatory diffusion in these cases. Trade agreements remain of the most important instrument of the EU in this sense, as the third parties have a high interest economically in trading with EU economies. As a consequence, the EU should use this advantage significantly more and put climate regulations at the top of its negotiation agenda in all trade agreements.

**4. The EU should focus more on multilateral and regional frameworks of cooperation, including related to trade, and include as a key element in negotiations green regulatory frameworks**

However, as this paper has argued, there are significant limits to the EU's ability to act bilaterally. Pragmatically speaking, the European Union has limited capabilities, in comparison with other international actors. In order to employ the EU's capabilities better, our recommendation is that the EU should focus more on multilateral, regional or otherwise, free trade agreements. This will enhance the EU ability to negotiate, as it is dealing with smaller third partners. Within these trade agreements, climate regulation should become one of the key elements. It is our opinion that this strategy could better enhance the EU's green normative power.

**5. The EU should enhance the scope and objectives of the Green Diplomacy Network**

EU climate diplomacy is one of the key-elements for achieving the Fit for 55 Package objectives on the global stage. Officially, these objectives have been described as it follows: „In order to enhance cooperation with our international partners and facilitate the global transition to a net zero economy, the full range of the EU’s external policy instruments will be harnessed to align with these higher goals. As part of its climate diplomacy in bilateral partnerships and multilateral organizations, the EU will ensure that it consults, explains, assists and where possible accommodates partners, while keeping the main objectives as laid down in the Paris Agreement in focus. This also includes support to climate finance to help vulnerable countries adapt to climate change and invest in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The EU and its Member States have consistently been the world’s largest contributor of public climate finance to low- and middle-income countries, and this will continue, with particular attention to the needs of the least developed countries.” (European Commission, 2021b, 13).

The Green Diplomacy Network should be enhanced in relation to all the above-mentioned recommendations. The Network, and the EU’s green diplomacy generally speaking, should become one of the main areas of activity and concern of the European External Action Service. The EEAS must become more active in promoting EU regulations and values, and in relation to our argument, should become the institutional framework that puts into practice all the above-mentioned recommendations.



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