

THE EXPORT OF SOCIAL AND DEMOCRATIC HABITUS AS A TACIT GUARANTEE IN THE PURSUIT OF OPEN STRATEGIC AUTONOMY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION: THE CASE OF THE GLOBAL GATEWAY IN AFRICA

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Received 28 February 2025; revised 25 April 2025; accepted 28 April 2025

Abstract. In an increasingly fragmented and multipolar international system, the European Union (EU) seeks to maintain its geopolitical relevance by advancing inclusive cooperation models that reinforce its foundational political and social values. These values – anchored in the European Social Pillar (ESP), regulatory frameworks, and democratic governance – serve as both an internal safeguard and an external strategy for reinforcing the EU’s role as a normative power. However, contemporary global challenges, including geopolitical rivalries, energy dependencies, and technological disruptions, necessitate a more structured approach to securing strategic autonomy while maintaining multilateral engagement. This paper explores the concept of open strategic autonomy as a guiding principle of EU foreign policy, analyzing how initiatives such as the Global Gateway Strategy function as geopolitical instruments for regulatory influence and economic engagement. A key focus is on the EU’s engagement with Africa, where the Global Gateway serves as a counterbalance to alternative cooperation models, such as China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The paper proposes a conceptual model for understanding the interplay between internal governance, strategic autonomy, and global influence. This model offers a structured approach to aligning EU regulatory power, economic partnerships, and geopolitical stability in a way that ensures both internal resilience and external projection of European values.

Keywords: strategic autonomy, Global Gateway, European Social Pillar, EU foreign policy, regulatory influence, global governance.

JEL Classification: O19, O29, O55, P18, P27.

1. Introduction

Research context and rationale. The European Union (EU) operates in an international system increasingly defined by fragmentation, geopolitical competition, and regulatory divergence. Traditional multilateral institutions face growing constraints, while economic dependencies on external actors create vulnerabilities in energy security, technology supply chains, and critical infrastructure (Somogyi & Nagy, 2022; Mindár, 2024; Mischczak et al., 2024).

In response, the EU has reoriented its foreign policy strategy, prioritizing open strategic autonomy – a framework designed to balance economic and political independence with cooperative international engagement.

This approach obtains a crucial importance in the context of shift of US policy from previous one (Vrbovský et al., 2024).

A key manifestation of this shift is the Global Gateway Strategy, a policy initiative aimed at strengthening the EU’s external partnerships through sustainable investment, regulatory convergence, and institutional capacity-building. Unlike traditional donor-recipient aid models, the Global Gateway seeks to establish equitable economic partnerships, positioning the EU as a normative leader in global governance.

This paper critically examines the strategic rationale behind the Global Gateway Strategy, particularly in its engagement with Africa. By anchoring cooperation

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within a values-based regulatory framework, the EU aims to counter emerging global asymmetries while maintaining its distinct geopolitical identity.

Research objective and structure. The objective of this paper is twofold:

- To analyze the role of open strategic autonomy in EU foreign policy, particularly its application in the Global Gateway Strategy.
- To propose a conceptual model that integrates internal governance, strategic autonomy, and global influence, providing a structured framework for EU external engagement.

By bridging theoretical discussions with policy applications, this article contributes to the ongoing discourse on EU strategic autonomy while offering a structured analytical tool for evaluating its global engagements.

2. The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR): a cornerstone of European social protection

The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) represents a significant evolution in the European Union's (EU) approach to social governance, marking a shift towards integrating economic development with social cohesion and regulatory harmonization. Recent scholarly analyses have explored the EPSR's multifaceted role in shaping EU social policy.

According to Dumitrescu and Iacob (2021), the EPSR serves as a comprehensive framework addressing key areas such as equal opportunities, fair working conditions, and social protection and inclusion. This structure aims to mitigate socio-economic disparities and enhance institutional resilience against economic volatility. The EPSR's emphasis on integrating labor mobility policies with broader social inclusion frameworks reflects its commitment to aligning economic growth with social justice.

However, some scholars question the EPSR's effectiveness. Rasnača (2020) critiques the Pillar as potentially being a "dangerous distraction," arguing that it may lack legally binding rights, which could undermine its intended impact on EU social policy.

The EPSR's structural framework is organized into three thematic domains:

1. **Equal opportunities and labor market access:** This pillar focuses on workforce integration, gender equity, and inclusive education policies. It prioritizes education and lifelong learning to enhance labor market adaptability, implements gender equality measures, strengthens anti-discrimination frameworks, and promotes active labor market policies. These initiatives align with broader EU strategies for workforce competitiveness, positioning social policies as instruments for economic modernization.
2. **Fair working conditions:** Addressing employment security, labor rights, and wage policies, this pillar ensures that economic liberalization does not erode social protections. It encompasses flex-

ible employment structures, wage standardization mechanisms, worker protections, institutionalizing collective bargaining, work-life balance policies, and occupational health and safety regulations. These provisions serve as regulatory counterbalances to emerging labor market trends, ensuring equitable workforce integration within evolving economic models.

3. **Social protection and inclusion:** This pillar establishes institutional safeguards to mitigate socio-economic disparities, reinforcing state responsibility in welfare provision. It includes child welfare policies, social security provisions, pension system modernization, universal healthcare access, and housing affordability measures. The regulatory depth of this pillar reflects a strategic commitment to economic inclusivity and socio-political stability, reinforcing the EU's broader normative governance model.

The EPSR also functions as a mechanism for policy convergence within the EU. By aligning Member State policies under a cohesive social framework, it serves as a harmonization mechanism, ensuring uniformity in social policy implementation across Member States. This alignment facilitates regulatory standardization in labor laws and social protections, reduces socio-economic disparities between core and peripheral economies, and promotes institutional adaptation to emerging socio-political challenges. By reinforcing policy convergence, the EPSR enhances institutional cohesion, reducing economic fragmentation across EU economies.

Externally, the EPSR extends EU social governance frameworks into global economic partnerships. Through initiatives such as the Global Gateway, the EU exports its regulatory standards to external partners, ensuring that its economic engagements align with social sustainability objectives. This strategy enables the EU to establish normative influence in global social policy frameworks, secure trade agreements conditioned on labor and welfare protections, and reinforce geopolitical leverage through social governance diplomacy. Thus, the EPSR integrates social policy with geopolitical strategy, reinforcing the EU's external influence in regulatory governance.

In summary, the EPSR embodies a structural realignment of EU social governance, embedding social protections within economic policy frameworks. It ensures that economic liberalization is balanced with equitable social distribution, reinforcing internal cohesion and external influence. The institutionalization of social policy as a strategic governance tool enables the EU to mitigate socio-economic risks associated with globalization, strengthen institutional resilience against systemic shocks, and reinforce the EU's global normative leadership in social governance. By integrating economic adaptability with social stability, the EPSR positions the EU as a regulatory authority in global social governance, ensuring that social cohesion remains a central pillar of European integration.

3. The open strategic autonomy of the European Union: a community response to safeguard and export its normative values in a changing international system

3.1. Introduction: the strategic shift in EU security and defense

The European Union (EU) has undergone a paradigm shift in its approach to security and defense, marked by a transition from a predominantly economic and regulatory actor to a geopolitical entity with an increasing focus on strategic autonomy. This transformation is a response to growing geopolitical instability, economic dependencies, and evolving global power dynamics. As multilateral institutions face fragmentation and traditional alliances become less predictable, the EU is actively reshaping its external engagement model to balance cooperation with self-sufficiency.

The concept of open strategic autonomy has emerged as a comprehensive policy framework aimed at reducing dependencies, securing critical supply chains, and strengthening defense mechanisms while maintaining a rules-based international order. This approach extends beyond conventional security and defense considerations to include trade policies, digital sovereignty, technological competitiveness, and sustainable economic partnerships, reinforcing the EU's normative influence on the global stage.

The Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) provided insights into citizen-driven policy preferences, revealing a growing public endorsement of greater EU involvement in security and defense affairs. The integration of public opinion into strategic planning underscores the EU's commitment to democratic legitimacy while addressing external threats through a unified and coherent policy framework.

3.2. The drivers of open strategic autonomy

3.2.1. Shifts in global power structures

The increasing multipolarization of international relations has led to a reevaluation of the EU's position in global governance. Traditional power centers are being challenged by emerging economies, while competition over strategic resources, energy security, and technological dominance has intensified. The EU's reliance on external actors for critical materials, energy, and technological infrastructure has revealed vulnerabilities that necessitate a more autonomous and resilient strategic posture (Pariso et al., 2023).

3.2.2. The evolution of EU defense policy

Historically, the EU's defense capabilities were fragmented due to the sovereignty concerns of Member States and over-reliance on transatlantic security frameworks. However, recent security crises have accelerated the need for greater coherence in defense integration. The concept of

a European defense ecosystem is now being institutionalized through initiatives such as:

The Strategic Compass, which outlines a common strategic vision for security and defense.

The proposal for a 5,000-strong rapid reaction force, aimed at improving EU intervention capabilities in external crises.

Investments in joint defense research, military capabilities, and cybersecurity frameworks to strengthen operational readiness.

The shift toward collective security measures represents a departure from previous reliance on NATO as the primary security provider, positioning the EU as an autonomous actor capable of responding to regional and global threats.

3.2.3. Economic and technological dependencies

The EU's commitment to strategic autonomy extends to economic security, digital sovereignty, and technological innovation. Dependencies on external markets for raw materials, semiconductors, and digital infrastructure have raised concerns regarding economic coercion and technological vulnerability. The EU's response has been to:

- Strengthen critical supply chains, particularly in energy and technology.
- Reduce reliance on foreign telecommunications and AI infrastructure.
- Establish a common regulatory framework for strategic industries.

These measures indicate a broader effort to protect economic resilience while projecting regulatory influence globally, ensuring that European standards remain the benchmark for emerging technologies and digital governance.

3.3. The role of the European public in security and defense policy

3.3.1. Changing public perceptions on EU defense integration

Public opinion on security and defense integration has undergone a significant transformation over the past decade. Data from multiple surveys indicate increasing public support for a stronger EU role in defense, particularly in peripheral states facing geopolitical tensions. The shift is largely driven by concerns over regional instability, energy security, and cyber threats, demonstrating a growing recognition of the limitations of national security policies in addressing transnational challenges.

Although public support varies across Member States, trends indicate a convergence toward favoring a more coordinated EU security framework. Peripheral states, particularly those bordering non-EU actors with expansionist policies, exhibit higher levels of support for enhanced EU defense mechanisms, reflecting security anxieties linked to geopolitical proximity.

3.3.2. Institutionalizing public participation in security policy

The CoFoE revealed a clear public demand for a more participatory role in EU foreign policy and security decisions. This reflects a broader democratic shift, as traditionally, EU foreign policy was perceived as detached from citizen engagement. The increasing public endorsement of security initiatives has led to greater institutional efforts to integrate citizen perspectives into long-term strategic planning.

The inclusion of public sentiment in defense policy-making contributes to:

- Greater legitimacy of EU security initiatives.
- Alignment of policy objectives with citizen expectations.
- Enhanced accountability and transparency in decision-making processes.

This evolution marks a departure from previous top-down policy approaches, reinforcing the role of public opinion as a driving force in EU strategic autonomy.

3.4. The strategic compass: a blueprint for EU autonomy

3.4.1. Strengthening crisis response mechanisms

A fundamental aspect of EU strategic autonomy is the development of rapid response mechanisms. The Strategic Compass, a comprehensive security policy document, lays out concrete objectives for crisis management, resilience-building, and defense integration.

Key priorities include:

- The establishment of a rapid deployment capability to address external crises.
- The development of joint military procurement programs to streamline defense investments.
- Strengthening EU-NATO coordination, ensuring complementarity rather than competition.

The Strategic Compass is designed to institutionalize a long-term security vision, ensuring that the EU remains adaptable to evolving security threats while maintaining a commitment to multilateralism.

3.4.2. Expanding EU security cooperation beyond Europe

The scope of EU security and defense engagement is no longer confined to internal stability. The EU is increasingly involved in external security partnerships, particularly in regions such as Africa and the Indo-Pacific (Hegedűs, 2022; Szabó, 2023; Wajdi et al., 2023; Bamigboye, 2023).

The deployment of EU training missions, counter-terrorism operations, and cybersecurity programs underscores a strategic ambition to extend European security influence beyond its borders (Grega & Nečas, 2022; Ivančík & Nečas, 2023; Ivančík & Andrassy, 2023).

By promoting security sector reforms and governance capacity-building, the EU aims to:

- Enhance stability in partner regions.

- Counter security threats at their source, reducing spillover effects into Europe.
- Establish a geopolitical presence that aligns with broader strategic autonomy goals.

3.5. Conclusion: The future of EU strategic autonomy

The EU's pursuit of open strategic autonomy is a multifaceted endeavor that extends beyond security and defense to economic resilience, technological sovereignty, and regulatory influence. The growing public endorsement of security integration, coupled with institutional efforts to enhance EU defense capabilities, signals a long-term commitment to reducing external dependencies while maintaining cooperative global engagement.

As geopolitical uncertainties persist, the EU's ability to navigate security challenges will depend on the successful implementation of strategic autonomy measures, balancing collective defense with independent decision-making. The Strategic Compass provides a structured framework for this transition, ensuring that Europe remains a global security actor without compromising its commitment to multilateralism and democratic governance.

4. The global gateway strategy in Africa: the European Union's strategic commitment to normative expansion

4.1. Introduction: the Global Gateway as a pillar of EU strategic autonomy

The Global Gateway Strategy represents a fundamental shift in the European Union's (EU) external action, aligning economic cooperation, regulatory influence, and geopolitical strategy within a single framework. Positioned as a response to an increasingly multipolar and fragmented global system, the strategy serves as both a developmental initiative and a geopolitical instrument, reinforcing the EU's role as a global regulatory power.

Unlike traditional donor-recipient models, the Global Gateway is designed to foster equal partnerships, with an emphasis on sustainable investment, governance reforms, and institutional capacity-building. This approach reflects a broader EU ambition: to export its values beyond its borders while simultaneously securing economic and political stability.

Here it has to be noted, that development of Africa has already moving towards direction of implementing governance reforms and institutional capacity building. The first steps in the long way, are related to disclosing of current issues, such as governance crisis (Tsheola et al., 2023), unethical behavior of police (Hauravi & Chilunjika, 2023), and corruption (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2024). Auditor General plays an important role in South Africa's development by providing recommendations on institutional level (Thusi & Matyana, 2024; Kgobe & Selepe, 2024). Exporting EU values would accelerate development of African institution qualify, what is precondition

for transitioning towards economic and political stability of Africa's and EU partnership.

Africa emerges as the primary regional focus of the strategy, reflecting both historical interdependencies and emerging geostrategic imperatives. As external actors such as China and Russia expand their economic and security engagements on the continent, the EU seeks to consolidate its influence through socioeconomic partnerships that emphasize sustainability, governance, and democratic stability.

4.2. The Global Gateway within the EU's external action architecture

4.2.1. Institutional framework and financial architecture

The Global Gateway Strategy is embedded within the EU's broader Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021–2027, which allocates substantial resources to external cooperation, with a total of €98.4 billion directed towards neighbourhood policies and global development. Within this, the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI–Global Europe) consolidates and modernizes the EU's external action financing mechanisms.

The NDICI operates through a multi-pillar structure, integrating:

- A geographic pillar focused on regional cooperation and integration, with Africa receiving the largest share of development funds.
- A thematic pillar targeting global governance challenges, such as climate change, human rights, and digital transformation.
- A rapid response pillar designed for crisis management, conflict prevention, and resilience-building.
- A flexibility reserve to address unforeseen geopolitical disruptions, such as migratory pressures or economic shocks.

These elements form a holistic investment ecosystem, integrating public financing, private sector mobilization, and risk-mitigation strategies. A key mechanism in this approach is the European Sustainable Development Fund (EFSD+), which leverages blended finance models to attract non-state capital into high-impact infrastructure and governance projects.

4.2.2. The strategic shift: from aid to equal partnerships

The EU's engagement in Africa under the Global Gateway represents a departure from conventional development assistance paradigms, which historically positioned Brussels as a donor and Africa as a recipient. Instead, the strategy promotes horizontal cooperation, ensuring co-ownership and mutual investment incentives. This aligns with contemporary global trends, where recipient states increasingly seek greater agency in shaping their developmental trajectories (Rezk et al., 2023; Todorov et al., 2024; Zemlickienė et al., 2024).

By integrating infrastructure development, digital transformation, and governance capacity-building, the Global Gateway fosters structural economic integration between Europe and Africa (Blašková et al., 2024; Chilunjika, 2024).

This model contrasts sharply with other international actors that prioritize extractive economic arrangements or politically conditioned investments.

4.3. The Global Gateway as the EU's geopolitical instrument

4.3.1. Aligning economic influence with political objectives

The Global Gateway's €300 billion investment plan aligns with broader EU strategies to assert its regulatory influence on global economic governance. By embedding high environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards into its infrastructure and financial commitments, the EU seeks to:

- Counter alternative investment models that prioritize economic return over sustainable development.
- Reinforce the EU's normative power, ensuring that investments reflect European legal and ethical frameworks.
- Strengthen African institutions, reducing reliance on governance structures that are vulnerable to external coercion and economic dependency.

The strategy operates under six foundational principles, which define the EU's engagement model:

1. Democratic governance and regulatory compliance: Ensuring that all investments align with international legal standards.
2. Transparency and institutional accountability: Establishing clear financial and operational mechanisms to mitigate corruption risks.
3. Equal partnerships: Moving away from hierarchical aid structures towards mutually beneficial investment models.
4. Environmental sustainability: Embedding climate resilience and green transition policies in all funding instruments.
5. Security-centered development: Addressing economic and security risks simultaneously.
6. Private sector mobilization: Catalyzing capital flows from European and African financial institutions.

This structured approach enhances the EU's ability to secure strategic access to emerging markets, while also serving as a counterbalance to alternative global investment frameworks.

4.4. Africa as the focal point of the Global Gateway Strategy

4.4.1. Sectoral investment priorities

Africa is the largest beneficiary of the Global Gateway's initial €1.5 billion investment package, structured around five core areas:

1. Green transition and climate resilience:
 - Expansion of renewable energy infrastructure, targeting 300 GW of additional capacity by 2030 (e.g., Redouani et al., 2024)
 - Strengthening agri-food systems to ensure climate adaptation and food security.
 - Enhancing climate risk mitigation strategies to prevent economic disruptions.
2. Digital transformation and connectivity:
 - Development of secure digital infrastructure, including submarine fiber-optic cables and cloud computing networks.
 - Strengthening cybersecurity protocols to ensure data sovereignty.
3. Sustainable trade and industrial development:
 - Integrating African and European transport networks to facilitate intra-continental and intercontinental trade.
 - Promoting regional economic cooperation to enhance value-added production chains.
 - Developing sustainable mineral resource value chains, ensuring that African economies retain greater control over their natural wealth.
4. Healthcare systems and pharmaceutical sovereignty:
 - Establishing local vaccine manufacturing hubs to reduce reliance on external suppliers.
 - Enhancing pharmaceutical supply chain diversification and resilience.
5. Education and workforce development:
 - Supporting education modernization, with a focus on STEM and digital literacy (e.g., Msosa et al., 2022; Chilunjika & Uwizeyimana, 2024).
 - Encouraging academic and research collaboration between EU and African institutions.
 - Expanding student and workforce mobility programs to facilitate knowledge exchange.

These priority sectors align with Africa's long-term developmental objectives, ensuring that investments contribute to sustainable economic diversification and institutional modernization.

4.4.2. The role of sustainable financing and private sector engagement

A distinguishing feature of the Global Gateway is its emphasis on blended financing models, incorporating:

- Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) to reduce financial risks.
- Green bond issuance, prioritizing sustainable institutional investors.
- Cooperation with international financial institutions, including the IMF's Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust Fund.

This approach ensures that Africa's economic transition remains financially viable, minimizing long-term debt burdens while promoting capital market development.

The Global Gateway Strategy represents a foundational shift in how the EU engages with Africa, prioritizing mutual economic benefits, governance standards, and long-term sustainability over traditional aid mechanisms. By embedding its investments within a regulatory framework that promotes transparency, inclusivity, and climate resilience, the EU seeks to consolidate its global leadership in sustainable development while safeguarding its own strategic autonomy.

As geopolitical competition in Africa intensifies, the EU's ability to sustain the credibility and attractiveness of the Global Gateway will determine its long-term influence as a global regulatory power. If successfully implemented, this model may serve as the blueprint for EU engagement with other emerging regions, reinforcing its status as a leader in values-driven economic diplomacy.

5. Proposed model for European strategic autonomy and global influence

5.1. Foundations of the model

Building upon the analysis presented in the previous sections, this chapter introduces a conceptual framework that integrates European values, strategic autonomy, and global influence into a unified model. The proposed model captures the interdependencies between internal governance, economic resilience, and geopolitical outreach, ensuring that the European Union (EU) remains a cohesive and globally relevant actor in an increasingly competitive international landscape.

Table 1. Strategic goals of the European Union

Pillar	Key components	Strategic objectives
Internal consolidation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening the European Social Pillar (ESP) • Enhancing policy cohesion • Securing economic resilience • Ensuring regulatory robustness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote social stability and economic inclusivity • Streamline decision-making • Protect democratic institutions and the rule of law
Strategic autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy independence • Digital transformation • Security and defense framework • Balancing economic openness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce critical dependencies • Strengthen European sovereignty in key industries • Improve EU crisis response capacity
Global influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening economic partnerships • Regulatory leadership • Expanding geopolitical engagement • Leveraging public-private financing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish global norms in governance • Promote EU values and regulatory influence • Counter alternative geopolitical models

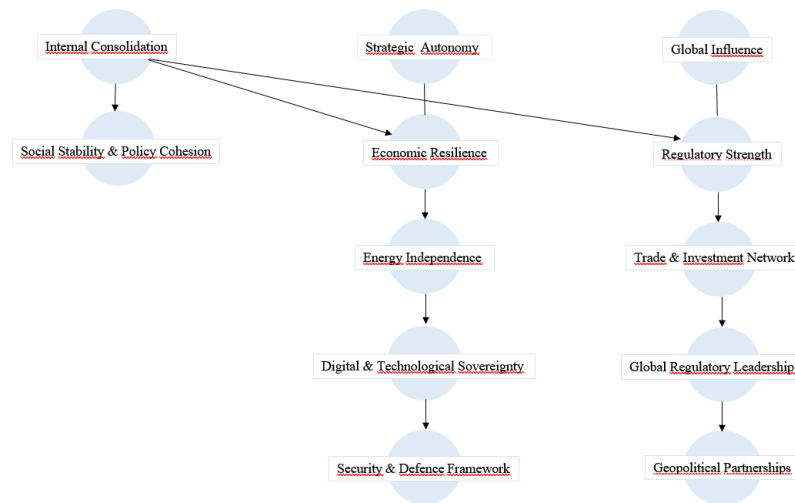


Figure 1. Conceptual model for European strategic autonomy and global influence

The European Union's ability to project its influence globally relies on three interdependent pillars: internal consolidation, strategic autonomy, and global influence. These three elements create a feedback mechanism, where strong internal governance enhances strategic autonomy, which in turn reinforces the EU's ability to export values and secure influence abroad. Table 1 provides an overview of this framework.

5.2. Strategic implementation

For the model to be effective, the EU must implement cohesive and adaptable policy mechanisms that integrate these three pillars into a synchronized foreign policy strategy. Figure 1 illustrates the interaction between the three key pillars and their strategic implementation mechanisms.

5.2.1. Institutional coherence

The EU must strengthen internal consensus mechanisms to enhance decision-making efficiency, particularly in foreign and security policy. This includes streamlining policy coordination among Member States and ensuring alignment between economic, security, and regulatory frameworks.

5.2.2. Financial sustainability

Optimizing financial instruments is crucial for ensuring that investments in global infrastructure projects are competitive, sustainable, and risk-mitigated. This requires mobilizing resources through blended financing models, strategic partnerships with multilateral institutions, and innovative funding mechanisms such as green bonds.

5.2.3. Geopolitical alignment

Strategic autonomy must align with broader multilateral frameworks, ensuring that the EU remains engaged with global partners while securing its own economic and security interests. This includes reinforcing transatlantic

alliances where beneficial, while simultaneously deepening strategic partnerships with emerging economies and regional blocs.

5.2.4. Regulatory expansion

The EU must proactively shape global standards, reinforcing its role as a regulatory superpower in digital governance, climate policy, and fair trade. By embedding European regulatory norms in international agreements, the EU can establish a long-term normative advantage over competing global actors.

5.3. The Global Gateway as a case study for the model

The Global Gateway Strategy serves as an initial test of this proposed model, demonstrating how value-based partnerships can enhance both economic and political influence beyond Europe's borders. By prioritizing investments in infrastructure, digital transformation, energy security, and governance reforms, the Global Gateway aligns EU external action with the principles outlined in the three-pillar model.

5.4. Conclusion

The proposed model offers a structured approach to integrating internal governance with global influence, ensuring that European values are safeguarded and projected effectively in a rapidly evolving world order. By reinforcing internal consolidation, strategic autonomy, and external engagement, the EU can position itself as a global leader in sustainable development, regulatory governance, and geopolitical stability.

The effectiveness of this model will depend on consistent policy adaptation, institutional resilience, and strategic investment in key global regions. The Global Gateway Strategy serves as an initial demonstration of how structured, value-driven engagement can enhance both economic and political influence beyond Europe's borders. As the EU navigates emerging geopolitical challenges, this model provides a comprehensive framework

for maintaining economic independence, securing geopolitical relevance, and reinforcing Europe's role as a global normative power.

6. Conclusions

The European Union (EU) stands as a distinct geopolitical actor, characterized by its commitment to regulatory governance, multilateralism, and strategic autonomy. In a fragmented global system, where competing governance models are reshaping international dynamics, the EU seeks to reinforce its internal cohesion while extending its influence abroad. This dual approach forms the foundation of its open strategic autonomy paradigm, ensuring economic resilience, technological sovereignty, and sustained global engagement.

The European Social Pillar (ESP) remains central to this strategy, serving as the structural safeguard of the EU's social model. By securing internal stability and economic inclusivity, the EU enhances its ability to export its values and governance principles. The Global Gateway Strategy exemplifies this approach, acting as a mechanism for economic cooperation and regulatory convergence in key regions, particularly Africa.

Building on the analysis presented, this article introduces a three-pillar model integrating internal consolidation, strategic autonomy, and global influence. This framework provides a structured approach to aligning internal governance with external engagement, reinforcing the EU's role as a leader in sustainable development and regulatory diplomacy.

The EU's long-term global relevance will depend on its ability to strengthen institutional coherence, optimize financial mechanisms, and adapt to shifting geopolitical realities. The successful implementation of strategic autonomy, as outlined in the proposed model, will determine the extent to which the EU can maintain its economic independence, expand its geopolitical influence, and shape international governance in the coming decades.

Funding

The research leading to these results has received funding from the project titled "Cluster for innovative energy" in the frame of the program "HORIZON-MSCA-2022-SE-01" [1011298205].

Authors contribution

The authors declare their participation in the writing of the article: G. Čyras, review and generalization of the publication – V. M. Janušauskienė.

Disclosure statement

The authors do not have any financial, professional, or personal interests from other parties that could influence the insights provided in the article.

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