

Master's thesis

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# Normative in the sheets, pragmatic in the streets: The EU's external democracy promotion and Azerbaijan as a case study

Master's thesis in European Studies  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis offers an assessment of the EU's efforts at promoting democracy in Azerbaijan between 2004 and 2021. The focus lies on the democracy-security nexus in the bilateral EU-Azerbaijan relationship, and the frameworks within which Azerbaijan and the EU cooperates, such as the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), and the Eastern Partnership (EaP). The thesis is a qualitative single case study, drawing on mixed methods where the analysis rests upon the critical issue areas of good governance, and energy security. By utilising a combination of process tracing and discourse analysis, this thesis seeks to establish correlation between the EU's norms-oriented discourse and its pragmatic and realism-inspired practice, embedded in the logic of the democracy-security nexus.

## Dedication

I would like to thank my mother, father, sister and brother for providing inspiration and courage when needed. Equally important – and much more prevalent – is the peace with which I have been allowed to focus on my studies. Not least in the wider scope of the whole study period, beginning with the bachelor's programme, and including semesters abroad doing internships or exchanges. I would also like to thank aunts and uncles, my grandmother, and all my friends for their support. It has been very much appreciated. Finally, I would also thank my supervisor for encouraging critical reflection and believing there is a way to finish my thesis, despite my very late awakening.

Time and again one can observe in discussions of politics or life, how the idea of moderation as a virtue is considered as provocative or amusing by the so-called left – and right – wing, often respectively (if such a simplistic division may serve a purpose for a brief moment). This phenomenon seems especially widespread among younger generations. Accordingly, by defending the idea that freedom of choice should include the option: not having to make a choice, one is often assigned the position of "sitting on the fence". I reject the fence. There is no fence, just as there are no "ways". All there is, is an open field upon which winds are blowing, and the ever-present change is the only *constant*. And no- this is not an advocacy for the "status-quo", as I find it equally hopeless and absurd. All I am saying is that everything is miserable, but it doesn't matter. It is tempting to mention Tolstoy's anarcho-pacifism and Gaddafi's third international theory (ironic, considering I just defied the existence of two former ones) as at least attempting to repair the pre-destined tragicomedy that is life. Nevertheless, placing too much weight on these as opposed to others would be a logical fallacy at this point. Besides, labelling oneself or others in attempting to map out possible "solutions" misses the point, and goes directly against the argument just made. Before descending into nihilism, however, and being the happy pessimist that I am, I choose to adopt Camus' perception of Sisyphus' eternal task of pushing a rock uphill – as an enjoyable experience. Similarly, I would like to embrace Kierkegaard's discovery of reality as absurd, whereupon he began to laugh, and since this discovery he never stopped laughing. It may be a laughter through tears, but it is laughter, nonetheless.

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## Abbreviations

AA- Association Agreement

AZTAF- Azerbaijan Rapid Technical Assistance Facility

CDA- Critical Discourse Analysis

DCFTA- Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area

DHR- Democracy and Human Rights

EaP- Eastern Partnership

EC- European Commission

ECHR- European Court of Human Rights

EEA- European Economic Area

EEAS- European External Action Service

ENP- European Neighbourhood Policy

ENPI- European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument

IGB- Interconnector Greece-Bulgaria

PCA- Partnership and Cooperation Agreement

SCP- South Caucasus Pipeline

SGC- Southern Gas Corridor

TANAP- Trans-Anatolian Pipeline

TAP- Trans-Adriatic Pipeline



## Introduction

Exploring the European Union's foreign relations with third countries is a complex endeavour. The very nature of the EU as an international actor attracts attention at every major political crossroad, considering how the ability to speak with one voice (or the lack thereof) in matters of foreign relations is either boasted as their strength, or condemned as their Achilles heel, depending on their relative success from case to case. One of the EU's aims of having a distinct foreign policy directed towards non-members is the objective of potentially influencing neighbouring countries in a manner favourable to the EU. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) can be seen as a framework or vessel of collective foreign policy objective(s). The policy was launched in 2004, later revised and adjusted in 2010/2011 and again in 2015. In the words of the European Parliament: *"Through the ENP, the EU offers its neighbours a privileged relationship, building on a mutual commitment to common values (democracy and human rights, the rule of law, good governance, market economy principles and sustainable development). The ENP includes political coordination and deeper economic integration, increased mobility and people-to-people contacts. The level of ambition of the relationship depends on the extent to which these values are shared. The ENP remains distinct from the process of enlargement, although this does not prejudice how relations between neighbouring countries and the EU may develop in the future"* (European Parliament, 2022).

Azerbaijan joined the ENP from the very beginning at the time of its launch in 2004 as a relatively newly independent country, in the process of nation building. The Eastern Partnership (EaP) was launched in \_\_\_ with the objective of further strengthening the emphasis/development in areas of \_\_\_ in the EU's eastern neighbourhood. The EU's interests in Azerbaijan were seemingly concentrated around the potential energy supply that the latter might could provide for the ever-expanding demand of EU energy consumption. Moreover, in light of recent anxiety regarding EU-dependency on Russian gas – noticeably exposed during periodic gas spats in Ukraine in the 2000's (Abbasov, 2016, p. 21), Azerbaijan rose to the position of potentially being a key strategic partner in the EU's plans for energy diversification.

Around the same time (early 2000's), Azerbaijan emerged as a unique geopolitical actor which – for the EU – is well worth having good relations with. This "uniqueness" can partly be explained through the fact that the officially secular Azeri government (an unmistakable relic from the Soviet era) was (and still largely is) at good terms with regional powers such as Russia, Iran (with whom Azerbaijan share the similarity of having a Shia Muslim majority of population, or Turkey (which generally is considered Azerbaijan's closest ally, culturally, historically, or even militarily- as shown in the war of Nagorno-Karabakh). The prominence of Azerbaijan as a strategic neighbour and security actor has arguably increased after regional turbulence related to the "Arab spring"-revolts, the war in Syria, or the threat related to fundamentalist terror activities. For the EU, the value of having close relations with a stable, (ideally) democratic regime at such a strategically located country in terms of both security, and economic issues, cannot be stressed enough.

## Chapter 2- Framework of analysis/ Research design

### **Research problem**

This thesis aims to trace the evolution of the democracy-security nexus in EU-Azerbaijan relations between 2004 (with the launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy) and 2021 (with the opening of the Southern Gas Corridor) and the extent to which [this evolution] has affected the EU's attempts at promoting democracy in Azerbaijan.

### **Research questions**

1. *How has the EU been attempting democracy promotion vis a vis Azerbaijan?*
2. *Which factors has determined the outcome in EU democracy promotion efforts in Azerbaijan?*

### **Hypothesis**

*The EU is using norms-oriented discourse resulting in pragmatic and realism-inspired practice, embedded in the logic of the democracy-security nexus.*

### 2.1 Methodology

This thesis is a qualitative single case study, drawing on mixed methods. By utilising primary and secondary sources in a document – and discourse – analysis, combined with process tracing, the thesis seeks to establish correlation between the EU's norms-oriented discourse, and its pragmatic and realism-inspired practice, as the claimed by the hypothesis. The theoretical/conceptual framework will outline and review the existing scholarly debate and literature around the democracy-security nexus. For the "democracy"-dimension, I will be utilising literature on normative power Europe, external democracy promotion and external governance. As for the "security"-dimension of the nexus, literature on normative empire Europe and neorealist literature on EU foreign policy will be analysed. After reviewing these concepts and (one) theory, I will specifically choose one concept and one theory which will be used as lenses in the analysis-chapter. In the analysis, I will examine two vital issue areas of the EU's democracy promotion in Azerbaijan. These are: good governance and energy security. To understand the specific case of the thesis, that is Azerbaijan (and the EU-Azerbaijani democracy-security relations between 2004-2021), the analysis chapter will include primary and secondary sources, such as academic articles on EU-Azerbaijan relations, book chapters, official documents and statements from EU institutions and Azerbaijan.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is seemingly replacing the term "Critical Linguistics" (CL) in academia but is nonetheless referring to factors such as text linguistics, philosophy, anthropology, sociopsychology, cognitive science, literary studies, sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, pragmatics, and rhetoric (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 1). Wodak and Meyer describes CDA as a school of thought, exclusively occupied with problem-oriented approaches that accordingly are of an interdisciplinary and eclectic nature. Furthermore, they state that critical discourse analysis "*is characterized by the common interests in demystifying ideologies and power through the systematic and retroductable investigation of semiotic data [which can be] written, spoken or visual. CDA researchers also attempt to make their own positions and interests explicit while retaining their respective scientific methodologies and while remaining self-reflective of their own research process*" (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 3). The authors emphasize how CDA do not claim to be one distinct theory or concept, nor has it tried to appear as one. Scholar papers in CDA often represent

different theoretical strands directed towards various data and methodologies. It should also be noted that there are many grammatical suggestions as to what the terms "ideology", "discourse" and "critical" truly mean. Hence, when criticising CDA, one should specify which author or which research one refers to. This, in turn, is why the authors prefer to address the idea of critical discourse analysis as a "school" or a "programme" to which many scholars can relate (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 5).

To explain in further detail what CDA encompasses, I will now define the notion of "discourse", well guided by Wodak and Meyer. One of the most popular definitions is arguably made by Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak in 1997. They state:

*"CDA sees discourse – language use in speech and writing – as a form of 'social practice'. Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s), which frame it: The discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it. Since discourse is so socially consequential, it gives rise to important issues of power. Discursive practices may have major ideological effects – that is, they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between (for instance) social classes, women and men, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent things and position people"* (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258).

Wodak and Meyer points out that critical discourse analysis – like many other critical theories – seeks the production and communication of crucial knowledge, which can help people in liberating themselves from various patterns of domination by means of self-reflection. In other words, not only does CDA and critical theory seek emancipation, explanations and descriptions, they pursue an agenda of eradicating certain delusions, thus, spreading awareness about actors and agencies, differences in ideology notwithstanding. There is one danger, however, that researchers of CDA must have in mind. Namely the fact that their own research necessarily also is a product of political, social or economic influences, hence, their work does not occupy a position of privilege (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 7).

Together with critical discourse analysis, the other method being used in this thesis, is process tracing. David Collier describes this method as *"the systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analysed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator. Process tracing can contribute decisively both to describing political and social phenomena and to evaluating causal claims"* (Collier, 2011, p. 823). Furthermore, process tracing can be understood as an analytical tool that deduce descriptive and causal assumptions from diagnostic fragments of information, *"often understood as part of a temporal sequence of events or phenomena"* (Collier, 2011, p. 824). Due to the close connection with cases as well as the focus on delicate case knowledge, the method of process tracing is capable of concocting crucial contributions to various objectives of research. These could for instance be the identification of new and original social and political phenomena, and the methodical description of these. Other examples include the assessment of former interpretive hypotheses and examining their new causal claims, the acquired understanding of causal processes, and the *"providing [of] an alternative means – compared with conventional regression analysis and inference*

*based on statistical models – of addressing challenging problems such as reciprocal causation, spuriousness, and selection bias” (Collier, 2011, p. 824).*

Given the observation that process tracing necessitates diagnostic evidence serving as foundation for descriptive and causal inference, one should be aware of what it is that makes evidence “diagnostic” in the first place. Collier claims that prior knowledge is the key in identifying what evidence is diagnostic. He points to four kinds of prior knowledge (within the domain of international relations), inspired by Kenneth Waltz. The first one is called “conceptual frameworks” and includes series of linked concepts that usually are informed about how these concepts can be operationalised. Such frameworks, therefore, point out – and explain why – certain topics deserve analytic consideration. Moreover, these frameworks “often points to the counterfactuals that conceptually establish what it means for a given phenomenon to be absent, that is, the “contrast space” (...) that organizes the analysis (Collier, 2011, p. 824). The second kind of prior knowledge is referred to as “recurring empirical regularities”. According to Collier, these are confirmed patterns in the relationships between two – or additional – phenomena. The third kind of prior knowledge is called “theory-I” by Collier. It largely bases itself on the recurring regularities found in the previous kind of prior knowledge. However, “theory-I” connects these regularities more tightly together, into a set of insights that informs about distinct phenomena or behaviours. The fourth kind of prior knowledge is referred to as “theory-II”. “[This] final type of prior knowledge entails not only interconnected empirical regularities (Theory-I), but also a set of statements that explains them, that is, offering explanations of why these regularities occur (...). Theory-II may also be called an explanatory model (Collier, 2011, p. 824). Collier points out that process tracing – as a device of causal inference – concentrates on developing or changing situations or events over a period of time. However, to be able to understand this development, one should be familiar with how to describe one specific point in time. Consequently, the descriptive part of process tracing starts with making good situational observations in a sequence of specific events, instead of merely describing the sequence – or change – itself (Collier, 2011, p. 824).

Process tracing holds a special position within observational research design, as it is a “within-case” method, that concentrates on the causal chain that links conditions or factors to outcomes (Schimmelfennig, 2014, p. 101). Other popular methods in single-case study designs, such as the “congruence method”, often suffer from issues of causal interpretation, like equifinality or omitted-variable bias. The comparative method, on the other hand, provides more assurance as to the link between “dependent” and “independent” variables. However, it does not inform the spectator about the causal chain linking these two. Schimmelfennig describes the strength of process tracing in the following manner:

*“By analysing process-level evidence on causal mechanisms, process tracing can claim, in principle, to increase the internal validity of causal inferences dramatically and thereby strengthen our causal interpretations of both single case studies and studies based on covariation” (Schimmelfennig, 2014, p. 101-102). Nevertheless, the method of process tracing naturally has its own pitfalls and potential perils. Schimmelfennig points out four such types, and labels these as: the resource problem; the measure-of-fit problem; the storytelling problem; and the problem of generalisation (Schimmelfennig, 2014, p. 102).*

The resource problem refers to the risk of process tracing ending up in a so-called “infinite regress”, that is, an endless search for an unbroken causal path. Ultimately, the size of the process tracing analyses ends up being much larger (per case) than in an analysis using

the comparative method, where findings can be presented in a much smaller space. The second problem labelled as "measure-of-fit" refers to the lack of formal measures of significance in process tracing. Schimmelfennig notes how statistical analyses and comparative analyses differs from process tracing in that *"Both designs benefit from analysing a data set with clearly delineated and (ideally) independent units of analysis and a defined number of observations (...) The units of process tracing, the individual steps in a causal path or the elements of a causal sequence, are neither independent nor comparable"* (Schimmelfennig, 2014, p. 103). The third problem referred to as "storytelling" concerns itself with Karl Popper's classical critique on empiricism, in that people tend to recognise regularities and patterns. Schimmelfennig builds on this idea by saying people also have dispositions towards manufacturing and communicating coherent stories. Since process tracing is flexible when it comes to choosing causal-process observations as well as creating valid inferences, it can be somewhat easy to choose and align material in a specific way that "persuades" the reader. The fourth and final problem is what Schimmelfennig calls "generalisation". Here, the author points to the fact that process tracing is incapable of producing external validity, even though it can augment internal validity of causal inferences to great lengths. Schimmelfennig admits, however, that process tracing is not determined to generate external validity, and even that other methods encounter the same problem. Nonetheless, as the author states: *"However, in combination with the high costs of process tracing for producing a highly valid explanation of a single event of the past, the uncertainty about generalizability can be discouraging"* (Schimmelfennig, 2014, p. 103-104).

The reason for specifically choosing the case of Azerbaijan and the EU-Azerbaijan relationship against the backdrop of an emerging democracy-security nexus, is the steadily increasing importance of Azerbaijan as a strategic partner of the EU in energy security issues. Correspondingly, the EU pursues a set of normative goals such as democratisation, good governance, and the rule of law in Azerbaijan, as a member of the European Neighbourhood Policy. However, serious concerns about human right violations including suppression of freedom of speech or political opposition could effectively undermine the legitimacy, or at least credibility, of the abovementioned objectives. This tension -between maintaining a fruitful bilateral relationship in terms of (energy)security and promoting democracy in an authoritarian country- is ultimately what will feed the research question.

The specific timeframe of analysis starts in 2004 with the launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy, because one of the objectives of this policy was a "strong focus on good governance, democracy and the rule of law". Incidentally, this year -more or less- coincides with the start of a growing desire in the EU to diversify its energy supply and lessen the dependency on Russian gas. Eventually, this idea would materialise and become the Southern Gas Corridor. The end of my chosen timeframe is the first official commercial gas delivery to the EU via the Southern Gas Corridor in January 2021. The justification of this timeframe goes directly into the thesis's objects of interests, namely: promotion of democracy vis a vis the importance of security (in which energy plays a vital role).

As the title of the paper and thesis statement both suggest: the EU is balancing between projecting an external image of themselves as a normative, value-driven actor with achieving pragmatic and security-influenced goals "on the ground". Hence, I will engage in analytical research on the democracy-security nexus, using document - and discourse - analysis, together with process tracing. By interpreting the mentioned literature on various concepts/theories of the EU's democracy promotion, as well as considering the specific

timeframe of EU-Azerbaijan relations, I will be able to examine my two chosen vital issue areas (good governance and energy security) in the EU's democracy promotion efforts in Azerbaijan. These findings, in turn, will allow me to arrive at the conclusion, thus, enable answering the research questions, as well as verifying and justifying the hypothesis.

### **Limitations & weaknesses**

Considering this thesis concerns itself with the academic debate and literature of the perceived/observed development in EU-Azerbaijani democracy-security relations, I will not elaborate the multitude of variables and parameters of measuring democracy in Azerbaijan (or the EU for that matter) using quantitative measurements. Such an approach could include for example statistics from the OECD, Freedom House, World Bank, etc. The exclusion of a quantitative dimension is of course a major limitation to this thesis. Among the many weaknesses of this thesis, is the somewhat chaotic structure, especially in the chapter covering the analysis, where anachronisms occur on a frequent basis. Another weakness is being captured and held hostage by certain sources, thus yielding to one of the hazards of process tracing, namely indulging in mere storytelling. Furthermore, there is an excessive use of passive voice throughout the whole paper, witnessing about superficial knowledge about theory, concepts and the case.

### 2.2 Concept and theories

As is pointed out by Eske van Gils in her book "Azerbaijan and the European Union": The EU and Azerbaijan has diametrically opposed views on matters concerning democracy and human rights (van Gils, 2021, p. 68). The EU demonstrates a wish to have a so-called transformative effect in several areas, including the promotion of democracy, human rights, good governance, rule of law, but also in conflict mediation, economic reform or trade regulation (van Gils, 2021, p. 78). The government of Azerbaijan, on the other hand, sees all Western – including EU – promotion of democracy and human rights as interference in Azerbaijan's domestic affairs, possibly even threatening their regime (van Gils, 2021, p. 75). The EU's transformative objectives within the policy framework of the ENP have been said to contain deep democracy, good governance, civil society representation, protection of the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, judicial reform and anti-corruption measures. The objectives of the EaP, on the other hand, encompass commitment to international law, fundamental values including democracy, economic harmonisation in relation to the AA and DCFTA, strengthening rule of law, judicial and public administration reform and anti-corruption measures (van Gils, 2021, p. 78).

#### Normative power Europe

Speaking about "transformative effects" with objectives such as democracy promotion among others, leads us to the first conceptual lens of this paper, namely "normative power Europe". The concept of normative power Europe was introduced by Ian Manners in his article "Normative Power Europe: A contradiction in terms?", written in 2002. Manners implies being inspired (or provoked) by the growing notion of "military power Europe" in academia, due to the EU's increased role in defence and security policy (Manners, 2002, p. 235). He describes normative power Europe as an "ideological power" or "power over opinion", as he claims that his concept is: "*an attempt to refocus analysis away from the empirical emphasis on the EU's institutions or policies, and towards including cognitive*

*processes, with both substantive and symbolic components*" (Manners, 2002, p. 239). In other words, he is advocating that the EU possesses the ability to shape what is considered as "normal" in international relations. Manners points out that the introduction of normative power Europe as a notion was partly motivated by wanting to escape questions about whether the EU is an actor in international relations. This question, Manners claims, is somewhat irrelevant as it overlooks the fact that the EU has significant international influence regardless of whether it is perceived as an actor or not (Manners & Diez, 2007, p. 175).

Whereas Manners mentioned being inspired by the notion of "military power Europe" in academia when developing his own concept of normative power Europe, it should also be mentioned that another motivation was the idea (and term) of a "civilian power Europe". This term was developed already in the early 1970's by Francois Duchene, whose argument rested partly on the fact that the European Communities were built on so-called "amilitary values", and partly because the ongoing Cold War seemingly had devalued classical military power (Manners & Diez, 2007, p. 177). When it comes to describing where the normativity itself ("the EU's normative difference"- as Manners calls it) comes from, Manners emphasizes the EU's historical context, political-legal constitution and hybrid polity. These factors – seemingly – repel what Manners refer to as a relativist viewpoint in which the EU promotes its norms in ways akin to historical or contemporary empires/superpowers (Manners, 2002, p. 240). Ian Manners points to numerous defining –albeit not constitutive – milestones in the EU's legal history where its international identity as a promoter of democratic - and human rights - norms, shines through. As for instance in the 1973 Copenhagen declaration on European identity. Otherwise, declarations from the European Council or the Court of Justice clearly nods towards fundamental human rights (Manners, 2002, p. 241).

Manners identifies five central norms based on decades of EU development with treaties, declarations, laws or policies. These are: *peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms*. Additionally, Manners is able to distill yet another four norms which he, however, describes as being a lot more contested. These are: *social solidarity, anti-discrimination, sustainable development and good governance* (Manners, 2002, p. 242-243). Having established these benchmarks of the EU's normative power as its basis, Manners proceed to demonstrate six different ways of diffusing such norms in international relations. The first method is by way of *contagion*, where the spread of norms from the EU to other political actors happens unintentionally. The second method, namely *informational* diffusion, occurs when deliberate strategic communication is visible in new EU policies, declarations, etc. The third way of diffusing norms is described as *procedural*, in which norms are diffused when relationships between the EU and third parties are institutionalised. The fourth method of norms diffusion is referred to as *transference*. Here, the norms are spread correspondingly with the EU's trade, aid, technical assistance or exchange of goods with third parties. Manners points out how both the *transference* and *procedural* ways of diffusing norms are included as part of the "conditionality" appropriated in all EU agreements with third countries. The fifth method of norms diffusion is called *overt* diffusion, and points to the physical presence of the EU –be it Commission delegations, member states' embassies or foreign ministers – in third countries or international organisations. Finally, the sixth method of norms diffusion according to Manners, is the *cultural filter*. Here, the focus lies on the interaction between the development of knowledge and the formation of a political and social identity by the third party who is subject to the diffusion of norms (Manners, 2002, p. 244-245).

## External democracy promotion

The second conceptual lens through which the democracy-security nexus in EU-Azerbaijan relations could be analysed, is that of external democracy promotion. Two of the key scholars discussing this concept are Tanja Börzel and Bidzina Lebanidze. In one of their articles, it is argued that the reason for the hitherto low success of promoting democracy in (ENP) third countries is better explained by inconsistencies in applying positive and negative conditionality, rather than the lack of (EU) membership perspectives offered (Börzel & Lebanidze, 2017, p. 17). "Conditionality" is a crucial term in the concept of external democracy promotion. The authors understand "positive conditionality" and "negative conditionality" as rewarding democratic progress - and sanctioning the lack of democratic progress - respectively. When speaking about the EU's use of democratic conditionality or "neighbourhood conditionality", one should remember that the ENP was meant to offer "everything but institutions" (Prodi, 2002). Hence, the incentives offered by the EU, ideally in exchange for domestic (democratic) reforms, include visa liberalisation, financial aid, or advanced access to the internal market (Börzel & Lebanidze, 2017, p. 18).

As the authors suggest, it is the inconsistent use of conditionality as a tool within external democracy promotion through the ENP that undermines the effect [conditionality] could have had in supporting democracy in third countries. Börzel and Lebanidze claims that to be fully consistent regarding conditionality means that democracy or rule of law should never be degraded as (transformative) objectives/foreign policy goals when colliding with other foreign policy goals of the EU. These "other" goals could be energy security, trade or stability (Börzel & Lebanidze, 2017, p. 18). This observation is key to the research question and hypothesis of this paper, as conditionality in external democracy promotion evidently can tell a lot about the EU's success or failure in promoting democracy in its neighbourhood in general, and possibly also in Azerbaijan.

*"In Armenia and Azerbaijan, in contrast, the EU has never invoked democratic conditionality consistently. Although the European Parliament and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe have criticised the Azerbaijani government for violating basic principles of democracy and the rule of law, the EU has intensified its energy and trade relations with Azerbaijan"* (Börzel & Lebanidze, 2017, p. 20).

By pointing to empirical evidence, Börzel and Lebanidze claim that member states of the European Neighbourhood Policy that have been subject to democratic conditionality in a consistent way, show the highest degree of democratic progress among all ENP members. The authors list Tunisia, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia among those, and acknowledge these as the only non-authoritarian states in both the EU's southern, and eastern neighbourhood (Börzel & Lebanidze, 2017, p. 22).

The very core of this paper, namely the democracy-security nexus in EU-Azerbaijan relations, can partly be explained through what Börzel and Lebanidze refers to as the "democratisation-stability dilemma", a term described by Anette Junemann (2004). The dilemma indicates that since many of the ENP states are authoritarian, democratisation can possibly lead to instability (at least in the short term), which, naturally, is something the EU wants to avoid. Accordingly, the EU might find itself having conflicting objectives in both wanting to support democratic reforms while worrying about stability and peace at



the same time. The authors suggest that the latter objectives -more often than not- seem to prevail, which –in turn- ruins the EU’s consistency in promoting democracy through the ENP. It is worth noting that the ENP’s revisions, particularly the latest one in 2015, have altered the prioritisations in favour of a more stability-oriented line from the EU. In the words of the European Commission, the “democratisation-stability” dilemma has limited the EU’s transformative power in the European Neighbourhood. The most pressing concerns (although it should be noted that the Mediterranean is more associated with some of these concerns than the post-Soviet space) are: terrorism, radicalisation, organised crime, uncontrolled migration and energy security (Börzel & Lebanidze, 2017, p. 23).

Annette Jünemann & Eva-Maria Maggi touches upon an interesting analysis on the downgrading of democracy promotion by the EU. They call it “logics of action” and although their analysis examines the EU’s rationale towards the Mediterranean region, the ideas put forth are interesting to discuss with the external democracy promotion in EU-Azerbaijan relations in mind –as well. The authors claim that by means of the “logics of action” they are able to explain why the EU seemingly nearly abolished the normative dimensions of their regional policies (towards the Mediterranean). They suggest this “abolition” or downgrading of democracy promotion happened partly thanks to “[the] *introduction of co-ownership through the establishment of new institutions and the process of constant de-politicization through a new focus on functionalist cooperation. Co-ownership with authoritarian regimes combined with functionalist cooperation inevitably results in a downgrading of democracy promotion*” (Jünemann & Maggi, 2010, p. 110). When the authors use the term “logics of action” as explanation as to why this downgrading happened, they mean that the shift in EU’s policy was neither uncoordinated nor ad hoc development, but a consequence of changing policy beliefs internally in the EU instead (Jünemann & Maggi, 2010, p. 110-111).

Here we arrive at the centre of what the “logics of action” really contain. Jünemann and Maggi describe it as a framework for understanding why different actors on the international stage behave the way they do. The framework takes into consideration parameters like values, norms, political or economic interests, and it is the constant adjustment to shifting parameters such as these, that ultimately inform potential policy change (Jünemann & Maggi, 2010, p.111). As far as external democracy promotion is concerned, Jünemann and Maggi explicitly describe the EU’s efforts in the following manner: “*Democracy promotion does not belong to the deep core beliefs of the civilian power of Europe, but merely represents a policy core belief. The external promotion of democracy should be understood as a strategy to transfer the deep core beliefs into political practice. External democracy promotion is a strategy to achieve security interests with civilian instruments rather than a normative goal in itself*” (Jünemann & Maggi, 2010, p.117).

Another scholar with great contributions to the literature on external democracy promotion, and democratisation in general, is Peter Burnell. In his article “*Does international democracy promotion work?*” from 2007, Burnell points to the myriad of terms trying to encapsulate what the promotion of democracy really is about. Eventually, he lands on using the term “international democracy promotion”, while lending a definition used by The European Council of Ministers, which states that: “[democracy promotion means] *to encompass the full range of external relations and development cooperation activities which contribute to the development and consolidation of democracy in third countries*” (Burnell, 2007, p. 1).

While much has been said about the aspect of conditionality as a variable in explaining the effects of external democracy promotion, Burnell asks the (possibly undervalued) question as to why one should promote democracy in the first place. One of the widely recognised dimensions seeking to justify democracy promotion, is the view that democracy is a universal value and condition that all people should have the privilege to live under. According to this perspective, the liberal democracies of the world arguably have a form of "moral duty" to defend and propagate the democratic political system. Another dimension as to the *why* in democracy promotion, is the instrumental quality inherent in the (somewhat obscure) multitude of "good things", as Burnell calls it. This instrumental value is regularly referred to and highly regarded by the EU as well as other international actors claiming to promote democracy, such as the United States or United Nations (Burnell, 2007, p. 2). Furthermore, Burnell addresses the questions of what the democracy promotion sets out to achieve, whether it is concerned with the ends, or merely the conditions/preconditions for democracy to emerge. As a general remark to international interventionist attempts at so-called development coordination, Burnell points out: "[...] *setting multiple goals for a single form of intervention can result in none of the goals being achieved to anyone's satisfaction*" (Burnell, 2007, p. 3).

One of the problems with measuring the effectiveness of democracy promotion is that the different tools or methods for promotion usually aims at various - sometimes contrasting - objectives. This, in turn, makes it difficult, if not impossible, to make good comparisons between the various methods, not to mention coming up with satisfying conclusions. To show an example of such a dilemma, Burnell points to the imagined comparison of political conditionality attached to a trade deal, in hope for political rights and civil liberties being permitted from the government in focus, *contra* the "*sponsorship of social learning, socialisation or acculturation into democratic values*" (Burnell, 2007, p. 3). He asks how one can possibly learn which method encourage true attitude change instead of simply changing the external appearance or behaviour. Moreover, which of the methods (if any) can generate a principled pledge to democracy, instead of opting for a deliberately planned compliance, largely motivated by indirect benefits. Finally, Burnell raises the important issue about who is to be considered the most important recipient of/responder to the expected democratic change in attitude, behaviour, or both: the "common people", or perilous portions of the political elite (Burnell, 2007, p. 3).

Considering all the various methods of international democracy promotion as well as ways of measuring these, Burnell suggests that it has indeed been successful, insofar that there are specific cases where some elements of democracy has been relatively successfully achieved. Although this is far from saying there has been an overall impact, exclusively from international (external) democracy promotion. Burnell emphasizes that one cannot dismiss the possibility that unintentional factors (also) from the outside, or internal domestic factors (or a combination of these) could have equal or greater explanatory power. Additionally, Burnell stresses the point that it is difficult to claim international democracy promotion has been working, while – even after many years of its practice - still less than half of the world's population live in what we would call liberal democracies. Moreover, scarcely any people –if any at all- experience the democratically enhanced versions of democracy, including more participatory or egalitarian versions, as compared to the liberal democracy (Burnell, 2007, p. 11-12).

## External governance

The third conceptual lens this paper finds useful when examining the democracy-security nexus in EU-Azerbaijan relations, is called external governance. Sandra Lavenex is one of the most knowledgeable scholars regarding this concept. She defines it as an external dimension of (EU) internal politics, where internal and foreign policy goals often come together (Lavenex, 2004, p. 681). Lavenex also points to established understandings of external governance occurring when the legal or institutional boundary is moved outside the sphere of (EU) member states. The legal boundary is a reference to the regulatory scope within which the so-called "acquis communautaire" or elements of EU legal order are transferred into non-members of the EU. This transfer of legal order or extension of boundary does not, however, demand a corresponding institutional "answer". Thus, external governance differs significantly from other modes of interaction or cooperation, such as conventions or international agreements. Lavenex names some examples in which the EU's external governance is visible, according to her view:

- *"quasi-membership for comprehensive forms of association such as the European Economic Area (EEA) and the bilateral treaties concluded with Switzerland;*
- *accession association for the encompassing framework of enlargement negotiations with (until recently) the new member states of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE countries), Malta and Cyprus, and, although less developed, also with Turkey and the countries of the western Balkans;*
- *neighbourhood association with the Mediterranean and new eastern neighbours;*
- *development co-operation with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries;*
- *transatlantic co-operation with the USA and Canada"* (Lavenex, 2004, p. 683).

Sandra Lavenex makes an interesting remark regarding the nature of external governance and its possibly problematic coexistence with –and/or reliance upon conceptions of the EU as a civilian or normative power in international relations:

*"The requirement to adopt the acquis communautaire and the use of conditionality, however, include a compulsory element which exceeds the voluntarism implicit in the notion of civilian power, or, in Rosencrance's words, the EU's 'magnetic force' (Rosencrance 1998). Especially when applied towards third countries which lack the prospect of membership, the attempt to extend the EU's legal boundary is not only a benevolent projection of acquired civilian virtues but also a more strategic attempt to gain control over policy developments through external governance"* (Lavenex, 2004, p. 684-685).

The author outlines two dimensions that, in her view, are decisive determinants for identifying/exerting external governance. These are: perceptions of interdependence and institutional roles and capacities. As far as the former is concerned, Lavenex notes how the idea of interdependence, together with the notion of threat, is playing a fundamental role in legitimising political order: *"From this perspective, not just benevolent idealism, but also apprehensions concerning the enlarging Union's identity and its vulnerability towards developments in its 'near abroad' are the drivers of recent initiatives. These apprehensions in turn are linked to the Union's self-understanding as a civilian 'security community' and the important responsibilities that EU institutions have acquired in core areas of domestic politics, especially those related to 'soft security' risks. This perspective is reflected in*

*various rhetorical justifications of recent initiatives towards the EU's neighbours and is rooted in a profound redefinition of security concerns in Europe" (Lavenex, 2004, p. 685).*

When it comes to the second dimension of detecting external governance, namely institutional roles and capacities, Lavenex specifies that the "roles" deals with the EU's notion of its own responsibility and behaviour. In this respect "institutional roles" relates to the concept of civilian power. Furthermore, the EU's notion of its role is heavily motivated by former practice regarding routines and rules, so-called path dependency. These former experiences could for instance include enlargement processes. There is also an element of the "logic of appropriateness" to this dimension, as the conscious consideration of the "roles"-conception enables the view of external governance not just as a strategic operation, but also as a mechanism which is influenced by former foreign policies. Thus, also their corresponding appropriate behaviour (Lavenex, 2004, p. 686). As for the "institutional capacities", Lavenex describes it in the following manner:

*"[institutional capacities] refer to the dynamic distribution of competences and resources in the EU's multilevel system and provide the background for the Union's accountability to engage in governance activities. The question whether an underlying soft security issue such as organised crime or energy supply is perceived as one of European order or not, and whether political action is expected from the national government or the European level, can only be understood in the light of the acquis and the evolving powers of EU institutions. Hence, an issue may become a matter of EU external governance if the Union has been granted responsibilities in this area and has the institutional competence to act in external relations" (Lavenex, 2004, p. 686-687).*

Whereas Sandra Lavenex' article: "EU external governance in wider Europe" was published in 2004 and therefore does not debate the nature of external governance through the European Neighbourhood Policy, but rather –as her title reveals- through the "wider Europe"-initiative, the concept is, nonetheless, well described and useful to this paper. Moreover, the author identifies the emergence of external governance in both energy policy and JHA (Justice and Home Affairs) among others (Lavenex, 2004, p. 688), which arguably feeds directly into this thesis' analysis of the democracy-security nexus in EU-Azerbaijan relations between 2004-2021. Regarding the external governance emerging in the EU's energy policies towards non-members, Lavenex points out two possible motivations behind expanding the EU's energy market as well as its accompanying regulations and principles. The first one being a wish to have market access in the countries producing energy, as well as transit countries, while also increasing attractiveness for foreign (private) investments in these countries. The second motivation is a wish to remodel what Lavenex refers to as oligopolistic or quasi-statist energy sectors. This is allegedly an EU attempt to "free" the supply of energy from what the EU considers to be cartels or unstable elites. Lavenex mentions Russia or the southern Mediterranean as examples (Lavenex, 2004, p. 693).

Another scholar with extensive knowledge about –and interest in- external governance is Frank Schimmelfennig. Together with Sandra Lavenex they have co-written the article "EU rules beyond EU borders: theorizing external governance in European politics". Here, the authors touch upon topical questions that are central to this thesis. First of all, they examine the modes and effects of external governance in different settings and compare these to one another. Secondly, they raise the very important questions:

*"Why do modes of governance differ across policies and third countries? Under which conditions are they effective?" (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 792).*

Three variables are put forth as an indication to where the authors are heading with these questions, these are: power, institutions and domestic structure. It is pointed out that the concept of external governance usually is most applicably understood in institutionalist terms. According to the institutionalist view, modes and effects of external governance are formed internally in the EU, by their own rules and modes of governance, before being projected externally. In the competing argument of the power-based view, we find that modes and effects of EU external governance are credited the EU's resources contra those of third countries, as well as other potential (rivalling) influences such as the US or Russia. The variable of the third countries own domestic structures refers to the possibility that these (domestic structures) might alter the modes of EU external governance, as well as their efficiency, themselves (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 792).

Within the modes of external governance, Lavenex and Schimmelfennig identifies three different institutional forms, these are called hierarchy, networks, and markets. The authors claim that these modes can explain both the macro-level of the EU's relations with third countries within structures such as the ENP or the EEA, and the meso-level of individual EU policy fields by tracing sectoral patterns of external governance (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 796-797). The hierarchical mode of governance refers to legislation and the vertical (arguably asymmetric) connection between the rulers and the ruled. The authors note how third countries technically and officially maintain their sovereignty vis a vis the EU. In practice, however, there are occasions where the EU external governance resemble a system of hierarchy as it undermines crucial branches of the third countries' autonomy over their own legislation. Here, the EEA is pointed out as the most distinct example. Conditionality is also mentioned as a tool of (top down) policy transfer that has embedded within itself the hierarchical mode (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 797).

The form of networks differs sharply from that of hierarchy in that it defines all parties as equal in terms of institutions. This means that (in theory) no actor can demand from another actor the answering to certain measures without the latter's approval. As opposed to the hierarchical system in which the focus lies on the formulation of binding laws, networks tend to emphasize procedural forms of interaction instead of producing conclusive answers through "quick fix"-policies. Another term often associated with networks, is "negotiation". Again, the point is about not reaching agreement or ending quarrels by means of jurisdiction, but to reach it thanks to arguing and/or bargaining (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 797-798). When it comes to identifying networking as a mode of external governance through -for instance- the ENP, the authors highlight horizontal coordination, joint elaborations and evaluations of ENP Action Plans, and last but not least: *"the attempt to establish stable communication between sectoral experts in the framework of the ENP subcommittees and the possibility of such sectoral experts participating in EU agencies and programmes"* (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 798).

The third mode of external governance in institutionalist terms, is the market. According to the market approach, the outcome of an attempt at external governance is decided by competition between actors who -theoretically- act autonomously. Lavenex and Schimmelfennig recognise that "markets" are not usually considered to be a form of governance in political science due to its inevitable lack of ruling system. However, as they point out: *"...competition is sometimes included in the newer governance approaches as an institutionalized form of political market interaction. In the EU, the typical form of*

*institutionalized market governance is the principle of mutual recognition, at least in its application in the Single Market” (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 799).*

According to this market mechanism, it is the mutual recognition that supposedly launches an authoritative dynamic where the most ambitious service or product succeed, because of the customers' demands. In doing so, (non-EU) actors might voluntarily accept – or at least close in on- EU legislation due to the production and service standards inherent in the latter. This is referred to as regulatory adaptation. Such adaptation, may, however, occur even without the mutual recognition or other institutionalised setups of rule transfer. In such an event, it happens indirectly thanks to the competitive pressure exerted by the EU. The third countries or non-EU companies simply chooses to comply with EU rules because the opportunity costs of missing out on being part of – for example- the EU's internal market, are too high (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 799).

### Normative empire Europe

As this paper starts discussing the concept of normative empire Europe, we are venturing across the “neutral middle” in an imagined spectre that symbolises the democracy-security nexus. This imagined scenario is, however, a stark simplification as the concepts discussed are not equivalents of debates on, say, constructivism versus realism. One of the scholars with competency around the normative empire Europe-concept, is Raffaella Del Sarto. In her paper: *“Normative power Europe: The European Union, its borderlands, and the 'Arab spring”*, she addresses the normative qualities of the EU, as described by Ian Manners, as well as realist or rational views of EU external relations, ultimately claiming that the alleged normative-instrumental dispute can be bridged by considering the EU as an empire of sorts (Del Sarto, 2016, p. 215-216). Del Sarto points out how empires historically have operated towards their immediate neighbourhoods by seeking economic benefits from these external relations, exporting imperial systems of organisation, encouraging and nurturing chosen elites in neighbouring states/regions, etc. Furthermore, quite often empires have seemingly felt the inspiration – or even obligation- to undertake what Del Sarto refers to as “civilising missions”. These endeavours have arguably been justified/enabled by the upholding of a normative notion of oneself, by the empires. As for the concept of normative empire Europe, Del Sarto justifies/defines it accordingly: *“... by conceptualizing the EU as an empire, we may conceive of the EU's exporting of rules and practices to neighbouring states as the modus operandi of empires in pursuit of their own interests; this modus operandi also serves the construction of a 'normative' identity”* (Del Sarto, 2016, p. 216). In other words, Del Sarto seeks to settle the somewhat dogmatic discussions concerning contradictions between the EU's normative discourse on one hand, and its interest-oriented (arguably realist or pragmatic) policies, on the other.

In contrast to the idealistic norms described in Ian Manners's concept of normative power Europe, Del Sarto's concept claim that the rules and practices being exported by the EU - although still normative in nature- are different. According to the concept of normative empire Europe, the norms, rules and practices being transferred from the EU to third countries mostly encompass efficient economic governance, regulatory convergence or practices concerning border control –with a goal of limiting unwanted migrants (Del Sarto, 2016, p 220). As to the question of why the EU exerts rule and norm transfer towards its neighbourhood, or the rationale behind such kind of behaviour, Del Sarto implies there are two answers stipulated by the concept of normative empire Europe. The first answer points at the modus operandi in which the EU operates, where regulatory convergence and the transfer of rules and practices is seen as the most cost-efficient way of promoting the EU's

very own security –and economic- interests. Especially since the EU (supposedly) lack the methods of coercion (Del Sarto, 2016, p. 221). The other answer claims that the EU acts the way it does because of what it is. Here Del Sarto hasten to disengage from what she admits look similar to the functionalist explanation of European integration, instead stressing her point that what the EU is, is an empire (of sorts). Hence, an empire acts the way empires do. Among the reasons for conceptualising the EU as an empire, are the following “peculiar characteristics”, as Rafaella Del Sarto calls them: “*These [characteristics] include the EU’s vast territory comprising different and unequal constitutive elements; its variable geometry with overlapping but not necessarily congruent functional borders (such as those delineating the eurozone, the Schengen area, the monetary union and the internal market); its ‘fuzzy’ external borders; and its constant territorial expansion to include new members*” (Del Sarto, 2016, p. 222).

Jan Zielonka is another scholar with contributions on the concept of normative empire Europe to his name. In one of his articles, he describes the ways in which he considers the EU to be an empire that –albeit being a modern type- share certain similarities with earlier (historical) examples. Unlike the British or Russian empires of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, the EU do not have a large (unified) military, or even a distinct definition of a possible authoritative centrum. Nonetheless, the EU is undoubtedly an extensive territorial entity capable of influencing or even manipulating the agenda of international relations. Moreover, it is capable of determining what passes as legitimate or “normal” in world politics, above all in its neighbouring regions and countries. Hence, by controlling its neighbours by various means of “informal domination”, the EU acts like all empires before it has acted (Zielonka, 2013, p. 36). Similar to Rafaella Del Sarto, Zielonka touches upon the notion of “civilising missions” frequently embarked upon by empires. He notes that empires historically have a notorious reputation for meddling in their immediate neighbourhoods, or “the empire’s own peripheries”, as they would see it. As Zielonka observes: “*Civilising missions are not merely rhetorical exercises: they try to convince the peripheries that imperial policies are good for them, not merely for the imperial centre. They make the peripheries comply rather than rebel. They create normative bonds between the peripheries and the metropolis*” (Zielonka, 2013, p. 37).

At this point, perhaps a brief remark about the origins of the term “civilising missions” is needed. It was commonly used as a way of legitimising the interference of European states in other parts of the world, especially in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The worst possible connotations that come to mind when hearing the term, are those of colonialism, slavery, racism and similar. There were, however, some less controversial aspects behind the term as well. Such as its usage in advocating policies that were meant to encourage good government, political order, economic development, or entrepreneurial ethics (Zielonka, 2013, p. 38). Nevertheless, despite encouragement from enlightened thinkers such as Kant, Tocqueville, Mill, Smith, or Locke, “civilising missions” can easily be attributed to typical imperial behaviour grounded in the idea that the “civilised west” has a moral responsibility or obligation to civilise and reform the “uncivilised others”. This ought to happen accordingly with the plans and image of the west, and it is done with the universalist claim of serving humanity as a whole (Zielonka, 2013, p. 38-39).

Zielonka claims that there are numerous imperial features about the EU, perhaps most striking is the resemblance between the rhetoric of philosophers of the enlightenment, and that of EU officials today. Such discourse was most certainly used in legitimising (for themselves as well as others) the enlargement of the EU in central and eastern Europe.

Not only in terms of geographical expansion, but also the dividing of sovereignty, and the transfer of resources and laws. Finally, Zielonka points out that the concept of normative empire Europe raises the question about the potentially problematic legitimacy of the contemporary EU project, especially in the neighbouring regions. After all, the success of a civilising mission can only be established upon the proven achievement of legitimacy in both the imperial metropolis and its peripheries. Zielonka notes how EU officials often reproduce certain patronising ideas about their own role towards their neighbourhood. Such as the "holy duty" of Nicolas de Condorcet: "[where] *those people, which to civilize themselves, wait only to receive the means from us, to find brothers among Europeans and to become their friends and disciples*" (Zielonka, 2013, p. 49-50).

Kalypso Nicolaïdis' idea of the concept of normative empire Europe, is that the EU resembles a mild form of empire, that "*by invitation [is] seeking to exercise non-coercive forms of influence, but is an empire nonetheless*" (Nicolaïdis, 2014, p. 240). He claims that empires can conceal the differences between those on the inside, and the outside "Others", while accepting differences within the empire. Alternatively, if assuming that for an empire to exist, there must be an "Other", as in idea of foreigners beyond the empire's borders, be it neighbours, enemies or rivals, Nicolaïdis states that in such case the "Other" should only be Europe's (the EU countries') past, with its mutual self-destruction of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, or colonialism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This view is referred to as a non-statist vision of Europe (or the EU). Nicolaïdis states that only the non-statist –as opposed to the statist– vision of EU can enable the argument that the EU should not be shaped against an "Other", like for example Islam and the Islamic world, or the United States (Nicolaïdis, 2014, p. 240-242). According to the statist vision of the EU as an empire, there is a causal link between homogeneity and power, thus, every enlargement of the union – expanding the variety of political, social, economic, etc, cultures and practices – is potentially a weakening of the empire as a global actor. This weakening comes to the fore in a lessened sense of common purpose and increasing hardship regarding the ability to speak with one voice in international matters.

Conversely, the non-statist vision of the EU as an empire, questions every link in this causal chain: "*Whether diversity and destiny are really antinomic in a world where the tyranny of small differences tends to be the greatest source of all conflict; whether a single voice is necessarily the most effective mode of influence in a multi-centred world; and whether indeed, scale and size are not in the end a greater source of influence – making Europe an alliance of states or new kind of empire "by invitation" more relevant to a world in transition*" (Nicolaïdis, 2014, p. 243). Accompanying this non-statist vision of the normative empire Europe, is the idea that the diversity of the union favours the pooling of (international) networks, languages, skills, special ties, etc. This mixture, in turn, is more admissible to actors all around the world. In the end, however, it might not be up to the EU citizens themselves to formally judge the nature of the normative empire Europe's power. As Nicolaïdis argues, just as important is the view in which the rest of the world perceives the EU. In this sense, he suggests that the EU's actual power could be of lesser importance than the normativity surrounding the polity:

*"Hence, we need to ask about the credibility, legitimacy, and desirability associated with different visions of European borders from the outside-in and critically assess claims to EUniversalism.[...] The rest of the world is the co-shaper of Europe's imagined geography. After all, the Union is an imagined community for them, too"* (Nicolaïdis, 2014, p. 243-244).



## Neorealist theory of international relations

The last approach with which the democracy-security nexus in EU-Azerbaijan relations between 2004-2021 will be analysed, is that of (neo)realist theory of international relations. One of the scholars with significant knowledge of – or interest in – this theory, is Adrian Hyde-Price. In his article: “A ‘tragic actor’? A realist perspective on ‘ethical power Europe’”, Hyde-Price addresses the scholarly debate on “civilian power Europe”, “normative power Europe”, and “ethical power Europe”, as he explains the latter notion’s emergence through structural realism (neorealism) (Hyde-Price, 2008, p. 29). The author points out how the political elites in EU member states increasingly uses rhetoric meant to demonstrate the “ethical character” of the EU’s foreign and security policies. This tendency seemingly escalated with the end of the Cold War and its corresponding bipolarity in the international system. The European self-image as an ethical actor in international politics has been affirmed on several occasions. Lisbeth Aggestam provides one example from the late 1990’s, where the EU articulated their intention of being “a force for good” with its foreign and security policies (Hyde-Price, 2008, p. 30).

As mentioned above, Hyde-Price attempts in explaining the emergence of the EU as an ethical power through structural realism, also called neorealism. This theory assumes states as being the most important actors in the international system, and the point of departure is every state’s fight for its own survival in the anarchic structure that is international politics. Despite the primacy of sovereignty in security issues, states are not completely opposed the idea of working towards normative or ideological goals, be it motivated by religion, protecting the rights of oppressed groups, etc. Nevertheless, states usually act rationally when it comes to chasing these goals, they do not seek them at the expense of their first-order security concerns. There are, however, instances in which cooperation (relinquishing sovereignty) between states is considered necessary because the first-order security concerns of one state might need a benevolent international environment in order to endure. Hyde-Price notes:

*“Consequently, they will seek to use their material power capabilities not only to exert direct influence or control over other actors, but also to shape their external milieu”* (Hyde-Price, 2008, p. 30-31).

Examples of such conditions where states might find themselves having common problems of a regional or even global character, are terrorism, failed states, pollution, regional conflicts, or proliferation. However, the author points out the difficulty with which states cooperate considering the lack of any central authority, partly because of the problem with so-called “free-riders”, and partly because states are uncertain as to their relative power capabilities (gains or losses) in the eventuality of international cooperation. Hyde-Price claims that the realist theory of international relations reveals three primary purposes for which the EU assist its member states. First –and possibly most important – of these, is that the EU works as an instrument where the shared economic interests of all member states presumably are being taken care of in a globalised economy, where factors like subsidies or international standards can prove difficult to manoeuvre. The second purpose of the EU is – again – that it acts as an instrument which helps the member states in the concerted “adjustment” of their neighbourhood. The last purpose, according to Hyde-Price, is that the EU serves as a vehicle for chasing the member states’ collective second-order normative goals. The abolition of the death penalty, concern for human rights, promoting democracy, protecting the environment, or fighting poverty, can all serve as examples of

such normative goals. This third purpose of the EU is what Hyde-Price claim enables the theoretical understanding of the EU as an ethical power (Hyde-Price, 2008, p. 31-32).

Hyde-Price points out an important contradiction – supposedly ingrained – in the EU’s identity versus its role as an international actor. This dissonance refers to the EU serving as an instrument for pursuing shared “European” interests, such as political and strategic security, economic prosperity or territorial integrity –on the one side. These very interests are precisely what has elevated the EU into its current position as a global economic actor, as well as instrument for cooperative alteration of the neighbourhood. On the other side, however, the EU consider itself acting as the institutional “depot” for the member states’ common second-order normative concerns, thus assuming the role of an ethical power. Hence, the EU can claim they are representing universal values and cosmopolitan norms, serving as a “force for good in world politics. The obvious subsequent question asks how anyone can successfully seek self-interests in a pluralist international system, while at the same time assuming – if not demanding – other actors to “look up to them” as servants of the “universal good”? (Hyde-Price, 2008, p. 32). Moreover, regarding the “values of universal applicability” and cosmopolitanism, Hyde-Price points out an innate logical fallacy as he draws upon Edward Hallett Carr’s thoughts on the creation of universal values: *“Theories of social morality are always the product of a dominant group which identifies itself with the community as a whole, and which possesses facilities denied to subordinate groups or individuals for imposing its view of life on the community”*(...) *“The doctrine of the harmony of interests thus serves as an ingenious device evoked, in perfect sincerity, by privileged groups in order to justify and maintain their dominant position”* (Carr, 2001, p. 74-75).

The neorealist theory of international relations does not reject the notion that liberal ideas – like democracy promotion, human rights, etc – are able to shape policies, what the theory disputes is the belief that such ideas still dictate policy outcomes, even when confronted with incompatible concerns of great national importance (often security related). Therefore, realists claim that EU foreign policy seeking to promote democracy or human rights, usually is possible only when the security – or economic – interests of the EU are not threatened (Hyde-Price, 2008, p. 39).

## Chapter 3- Analysis

In this chapter, I will finally examine the nature of EU external democracy promotion in Azerbaijan between 2004-2021, and the tension around the democracy-security nexus. In the preceding chapters I have delineated a variety of conceptual and theoretical approaches to understanding the EU’s attempts at promoting democracy in its neighbourhood. As stated in the chapter on methodology, I will now narrow down my scope and use the concept of normative power Europe, and the neorealist theory of international relations as lenses through which two vital issue areas of the EU’s democracy promotion in Azerbaijan, will be investigated. These are: good governance and energy security.

In this analysis, I will utilise a number of academic articles, book chapters, official EU declarations, etc, in order to fully analyse the case, that is Azerbaijan. Drawing on a mixed methods analytical approach, eclectically utilising discourse analysis combined with process tracing, I will be able to answer the research questions, namely:

1. *How has the EU been attempting democracy promotion vis a vis Azerbaijan?*
2. *Which factors has determined the outcome in EU democracy promotion efforts in Azerbaijan?*

Finally, the analysis should enable the verification and justification of this paper's hypothesis which states: *The EU is using norms-oriented discourse resulting in pragmatic and realism-inspired practice, embedded in the logic of the democracy-security nexus.*

Initially, I will briefly justify the choice of normative power Europe, and the neorealist theory in IR, as a concept and theory respectively, that will be used in examining the issue areas of good governance and energy security, which, in turn, will inform my research questions and hypothesis. The primary reason for choosing the abovementioned concept/theory is because these are the two that differ the most in the literature on the EU's external democracy promotion. Hence, by setting up two very distinct "camps", or schools of thought, from which one can "attack" the chosen issues/phenomena, I hope to achieve a fruitful analysis, possibly discovering correlation between the EU's norms-oriented discourse and its pragmatic and realism-inspired practice, as stated in the hypothesis.

## **Historical background**

As the research problem states, what I aim to do in this thesis/analysis is to trace the evolution of the democracy-security nexus in the relations between the EU and Azerbaijan from 2004 to 2021. Therefore, it is natural to provide the historical background for the chosen timeline, including chosen instrumental milestones and political frameworks such as the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership, or the energy-security related project of the Southern Gas Corridor. The announced beginning of my chosen timeframe of analysis is directly bound to the beginning of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which Azerbaijan joined from its very inception. However, the first bilateral agreement between the EU and Azerbaijan was the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) signed in 1996 and entering into force in 1999 (mfa.gov.az, 2022). Lcinia Simão defines the PCA's as "*comprehensive agreements focusing on democratic reforms and transition to market economy, as well as the development of multi-sectorial cooperation between the EU and the post-Soviet countries*" (Simão, 2017, p. 313).

To clarify some of the terminology related to the "modes of cooperation" within the frameworks of the ENP and the EaP, it is worth noting that the Action Plan (AP) currently in force under the ENP, is on a bilateral EU-Azerbaijan level. Both the ENP and the EaP encompass relations that are multilateral and bilateral in nature. Within the bilateral dimension of the EaP, there are plans to negotiate and establish so-called Association Agreements (AA's) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area's (DCFTA's) between the EU on one side, and (ideally) each of the respective partner states, on the other. These agreements would in such case replace the PCA's that are present today (van Gils, 2021, p. 58-59). Contrary to the case of the EU-Azerbaijan Action Plan under the ENP, the negotiation of AA's involves the use of conditionality. For the negotiating of Association Agreements to start, certain conditions need to be fulfilled, *ex ante*, meaning in beforehand. A communication document from the European Commission of 2008 clearly states: "*A sufficient level of progress in terms of democracy, the rule of law and human rights, and in particular evidence that the electoral legislative framework and practice are*

*in compliance with international standards, (...) will be a precondition for starting negotiations and for deepening relations thereafter” (European Commission, 2008, p. 4).*

Nevertheless, in 2010 the EU and Azerbaijan started the negotiations for a specific Association Agreement (European Council, 2022), despite earlier criticism of the DHR development in Azerbaijan, whose regime is regarded as undemocratic by international standards (van Gils, 2021, p. 68). It should be noted, however, that the conduct of these negotiations has not been efficient, nor yet concluded. When it comes to the establishment of the DCFTA’s with each of the EaP’s members under their respective AA’s, the Commission made it clear that this could only happen once the specific country had entered the World Trade Organisation (WTO) (European Commission, 2008, p. 5). As Azerbaijan still stands on the outside of the WTO, they have not started DCFTA negotiations (van Gils, 2021, p. 59). There are good reasons to believe the Azerbaijani government is quite content with being outside the WTO. As Richard Youngs observes, the regime of Aliyev sees liberalisation of the market as redundant – considering the vast energy resources of the country. Consequently, when Azerbaijan negotiated their Action Plan with the EU within the ENP, they only made non-specific or even symbolic commitments to joining the WTO (Youngs, 2007, p. 10).

The European Neighbourhood Policy was launched already in 2003 and developed through 2004. Its main objective was to prevent new “hard”, separating lines amid a freshly enlarged EU and its “new neighbours”, and to strengthen the security, prosperity and stability for all parts involved. Furthermore, the ENP bases itself on respect for human rights, the rule of law and democracy (European Commission, 2022). Perhaps contrarily to other countries joining the ENP, Azerbaijan –or at least its government- was not interested in taking the extra step, thus, becoming an EU member. There are numerous aspects to consider in order to understand this fact. It can partly be explained by the country’s rather solid economic position (thanks to its abundant natural resources, primarily in oil and gas). Another aspect is the country’s foreign policy of balancing (related to its unique geopolitical/cultural/historical position referred to in the introduction). Finally, the EU’s insistence on certain European values might have been too much of a “turn off” for the Azerbaijani government (van Gils, 2021, p. 54). What is implied here, and what will become a recurring theme throughout the analysis is a sense of an Azerbaijani assertiveness or –almost- stoicism that ultimately will contribute to our understanding of the EU’s attempts, and its relative success or failure to promote democracy in Azerbaijan in the specified time frame.

One of the indisputable reasons for this growing assertiveness of Azerbaijan throughout the 2000’s, is the role of the incumbent political regime. The sitting president Ilham Aliyev was elected into his position in 2003, succeeding his father, Heydar Aliyev who held the power since 1993. Ilham Aliyev was later re-elected in 2008, 2013, and 2018 (president.az, 2022). This consolidation of the Aliyev regime becomes even more pronounced in light of a constitutional referendum from 2016, which extends the president’s term to seven years (van Gils, 2021, p. 54). The “authoritarian elephant” in the “democratic room” is of course obvious to point out here. Correspondingly with the consolidation of political power from the mid-2000s, came worsened conditions for democracy and human rights internally in Azerbaijan. To name a few examples, there were forced closures of several independent media agencies, an increase in political prisoners, and worsened oppression of the political opposition. In Azerbaijan’s external relations, however, the same period was marked by extensive self-promotion, through investments in public relations, enabled by the country’s

rapid economic growth (a self-reinforcing mechanism). As Eske van Gils notices, the accomplished international recognition as an economic actor of relevance coincided with increasing antipathy between the EU and Azerbaijan over the latter's worrying development in meeting (or failing to do so) international DHR standards. Azerbaijan, or the Aliyev regime, arguably grew ever more confident and conscious of its economic- thus slowly also political- significance during this period (van Gils, 2021, p. 54).

Eske van Gils refers to the term "cherry picking" when describing the somewhat unusual development (at least from the EU's experience) of the balance of power in the bilateral relations between the EU and Azerbaijan. Despite the EU's pronounced disregard of so-called cherry picking –meaning selectively choosing domains of cooperation- the Azerbaijani government has been quite successful in raising economic and technical matters to the table of cooperation, while turning down matters of human rights, democracy or good governance. Hence, the famous asymmetry of power –so often considered favouring the EU- might have moved towards a balanced centrum, if not slightly towards the Azerbaijani side. As van Gils sums up:

*"In recent years then, Azerbaijan's standpoint regarding relations with the EU seems to have become a very pragmatic one. While the country adheres to economic co-operation with the EU, it is increasingly rejecting the EU's political reform agenda – and it becomes more and more assertive in doing so"* (van Gils, 2021, p. 55).

As the title of this thesis – *Normative in the sheets, pragmatic in the streets* – might reveal, albeit in a slightly ambiguous way, the issues of transformative aims, policy co-ownership and partnership equality, are of great interest and value to this thesis. Eske van Gils addresses both the ENP and the EaP in this context. Whereas the former let Azerbaijan in from 2004, the latter was created in 2009 as a regional complement (including Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus) with the goal of intensifying political and economic relations with the EU. Tom Casier claims that the essence of the ENP –for the EU- is the transfer of rules, which ultimately happens through the Action Plans, bilaterally negotiated between the EU and the respective "neighbourhood" country. According to the European Commission, these Action Plans are the product of joint ownership and mutual political agreement (European Commission, 2006, p. 3). However, as Casier notes, the Action Plans are mostly the reflection of preferences internally agreed upon, in the EU. Moreover, he claims that 80 per cent of the agreed action points in the AP's are merely meeting the EU's motives (Casier, 2011, p. 39).

Eske van Gils points here to the paradox that the EU's transformative aims (through policies) are not discussed with the supposedly equal partner, they are in fact domestic EU policies applied externally. On the other hand, should the EU's partner have any policy to promote to this partnership, it would potentially have to be discussed and agreed upon (van Gils, 2021, p. 56). This asymmetry – I argue – undermines the credibility, perhaps even legitimacy, of the EU's declaratory, normative statements. Such asymmetry alludes to the (very recognisable) behaviour of empires. In this regard, Azerbaijan actually stands out as an example where this asymmetry in bargaining power does *not* unfold, but rather shrinks, as mentioned earlier. This is because they have managed to agree upon (equal) cooperation with the EU in certain policy areas, especially those concerning Azerbaijan's domestic affairs. In other words, the "cherry picking" so frowned upon by the EU (van Gils, 2021, p. 55), is exactly what enables a country like Azerbaijan to rapidly progress in terms of economy and state building, which – in the Azerbaijani government's view – is pragmatic and just, whereas the EU deem it negatively, but mostly in words, (apparently) not so

much in actions (considering the continued – or rather growing – interest in Azerbaijani energy supplies). One could argue that the EU's resemblance of an empire is clearly at display here. Through the ENP, and EaP, they offer a framework for policy partnership and cooperation, well aware that when their own policies are being implemented externally, this usually happens in a top-down approach, meeting little to no friction. Whereas when Azerbaijan succeeds in promoting policy domains that positively affects Azerbaijan's domestic affairs (most likely in terms of economy), the EU cooperates, but is nonetheless quick to condemn their partner's behaviour as "cherry picking".

One might argue – as does Eske van Gils – that there are mechanisms within the ENP to ensure a certain degree of inclusivity and co-ownership of the policymaking. Two examples here are the so-called institution of political dialogue, in which the partner states are offered the possibility of contributing to the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU. This offer allegedly stands because the EU recognise that there is an element of security interdependence between the EU and the partner states. The second example is based on a statement from an EU official, claiming that Azerbaijan indeed has some authority in creating and shaping the AP's. Two out of four priority areas in the Action Plan between Azerbaijan and the EU were requested by the Azerbaijani government, and the other two by the EU. Not surprisingly, Azerbaijan promoted cooperation in the areas of regional development and education, both of which can strengthen their domestic economy. While the EU, on the other hand, requested reforms of the judicial system and promotion of democracy and human rights (van Gils, 2021, p. 56). Nevertheless, it appears as if though the premises for the frameworks of the ENP and the EaP, have chiefly worked (or were meant to work) for the betterment of one party to this partnership, namely the EU and its interests. Such an observation can be backed up for example by considering the origins of the ENP, as it was a consequence of the 2004 enlargement of the EU, where – due to the new "frontiers", there was fear of illegal migration or cross-border crime. In this respect, the ENP is commonly associated with the European Security Strategy of 2003, where improved relations with EU neighbours first and foremost serve to safeguard security and stability in Europe (van Gils, 2021, p. 57).

Considering the concept of the EU as a normative power, Ian Manners addresses the EU's normative basis and its foundations in universally acknowledged conventions on human rights: "*Although we may be sceptical about the application and indivisibility of such core norms [as consolidation of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms] ... we cannot overlook the extent to which the EU is normatively different to other polities with its commitment to individual rights and principles in accordance with the ECHR and the UN*" (Manners, 2002, p. 241).

What Ian Manners displays here is a surprisingly underwhelming reasoning. The logic is reminiscent of a child's, who is self-evaluating his/her actions against those of other children, where the self-proclaimed least "evil" can always point fingers at others and brag about not being the worst in the group. After all, the fact that the EU is *different* from other international actors in making oral or written proclamations about commitment to DHR on several occasions, says absolutely nothing about neither the strategy of other actors (or their moral orientation) nor the actual results this "difference" of the EU is making, on the ground, in third countries. It seems merely as an attempt at attaining alibi. For whose sake? -one might wonder.

As hinted towards earlier, the EU has seemingly had modest – if any – transformative effects regarding DHR promotion in Azerbaijan through the ENP and EaP. Delcour and

Duhot notes: "... no or limited progress has been made in those areas where the EU's and Azerbaijan's interests and values diverge. This applies to the rule of law, good governance and human rights..." (Delcour & Duhot, 2011, p. 41). The natural assumption here would be to check whether the EU has been too harsh in applying conditionality, meaning withholding political and (particularly) economic cooperation, while awaiting increased Azerbaijani commitment to political and economic reforms. However, no such scenario has occurred as conditionality has never been applied towards Azerbaijan (even the ex ante conditionality accompanying the AA negotiations were seemingly neglected considering the negotiations formally started in 2010). Again, we are discussing the aforementioned balance of power and asymmetrical relationships between the EU and its partners through the frameworks of the ENP and EaP. Eske van Gils points out that the incentives for reforms in the EU's neighbourhood, simply do not attract, nor scare Azerbaijan to comply with all of the EU's reform-wishes. Not even the theoretically strongest incentive – namely an EU membership offer (which is not part of the ENP anyway) – would work on Azerbaijan, simply because the country – or at least its government – neither want, nor need it. In result, the lack of powerful leverage – so often ascribed the EU in its foreign relations – lends itself to the picture of an increasingly symmetrical relationship between Azerbaijan and the EU. This observation arguably tells us something about the (growing) bargaining power of Azerbaijan. Especially, and, all the more so when considering the relative success with which Azerbaijan and the EU cooperates, within domains of energy and trade (van Gils, 2021, p. 181), (Simão, 2012, p. 198).

At this point we are cautiously approaching the role of security, with energy playing a key role, in the democracy-security nexus in EU-Azerbaijan relations. The bargaining power (of both parties) addressed earlier is central here. Eske van Gils quotes Alec Rasizade's words from 2003 when saying that "[The Azeri government] *is fully aware of the obvious truism in international politics: the greater the oil reserves – the more tolerant Western governments are in overlooking a poor human rights record of a petroleum-based regime*" (Rasizade, 2003, p. 363) (van Gils, 2021, p. 18). This statement certainly welcomes the idea of Azerbaijan's bargaining power growing accordingly with its relevance as an exporter of natural resources, thus, strategic partner and provider of energy security, for the EU. Currently, the EU's cooperation with Azerbaijan in the field of energy takes place in a Memorandum of Understanding on Energy Cooperation (MoU). In this MoU, the EU and Azerbaijan can negotiate a fully developed agreement (Van Vooren, 2011, p. 203). Despite the fact that Azerbaijan has significant crude oil reserves, with both onshore and offshore production (in the Caspian Sea), as well as large natural gas reserves, with the Shah Deniz (I and II) field outside Baku being one of the largest in the world (International Energy Agency, 2020), one should not overestimate their position as energy supplier vis a vis the EU. Azerbaijan puts in considerable effort in promoting itself abroad as a reliable energy supplier. From their perspective, the threats of energy security relate to not being able to export their oil – and gas – products, thus securing their (by far) largest source of revenue. This fear differs starkly from that of the EU, where energy security largely is about being able to cover one's consumer needs. Consequently, the Azerbaijani government has been cautiously aware of the fact "*that the EU may well one day be in the position where it can play out Moscow and Baku against one another. Azerbaijan feels it may even be used as a 'bargaining chip' against Russia*" (van Gils, 2021, p. 14). In light of recent events, with EU signalling a gradual "phase-out" regarding imports of Russian energy due to the latter's war in Ukraine, this reality might undergo certain changes. In theory, the bargaining power of Azerbaijan could increase accordingly with the EU's increased energy demands. However, there are limits to how much more gas Azerbaijan

will be able to deliver to the European markets considering a recent decline in production (Wesolowsky, 2022).

The Southern Gas Corridor was briefly mentioned earlier in this thesis, in the context of drawing a final date for my timeline of interest. This project is considered as part of a larger EU strategy on energy diversification. The SGC allows the EU to import natural gas from the vast reserves in the Caspian Basin, but in its future aims, also the Middle East (Abbasov, 2016, p. 21, 25, 78). The SGC consists of the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) stretching through Azerbaijan and Georgia, the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) running through Turkey, and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) crossing Greece and Albania before moving under the Adriatic Sea and finally reaching Italy. (Southern Gas Corridor, 2022). The Interconnector Greece-Bulgaria (IGB), linking with the TAP in Greece, is often included in the political discourse concerning the SGC (European Commission, 2020).

Faig Abbasov points out an interesting remark that is relevant to the issue of the EU's external governance in Azerbaijan: ". . . unlike other EU pipeline corridors (i.e. Norwegian, Russian, Algerian/Libyan), the SGC will allow the EU to tap into several production basins simultaneously. Thus, the necessity of ensuring free-market governance, and reducing transit risks for gas supply along the SGC make it all the more relevant for the EU to foster EU acquis-based regulation of this alternative energy corridor" (Abbasov, 2016, p. 26-27). Here I would like to remind about Lavenex' observation concerning a possible dissonance between the EU's externally projected normative self-image, and its attempts at extending the EU's legal boundaries to non-EU members. Lavenex notes how the requirement to adopt the EU's *acquis communautaire* and its corresponding use of conditionality implies an element of coercion which oversteps the boundaries of voluntarism. This voluntarism, in turn, should be an innate part of being a "force for good", not to mention –part of the many so-called partnerships in which the EU seeks cooperation with Azerbaijan. The contradictory behaviour of the EU here – I argue – reveals that the EU's discourse surrounding their external normative objectives – including the promotion of good governance, thus, democracy – in Azerbaijan, resembles prescriptivism. In this regard, it could be useful to look at a sobering statement from the American Anthropological Association, submitted to the UN Commission on Human Rights in 1947, in which they criticise "the West" for enforcing its own particular values on the rest of the world, claiming universal applicability:

*"Standards and values are relative to the culture from which they derive so that any attempt to formulate postulates that grow out of the beliefs or moral codes of one culture must to that extent detract from the applicability of any Declaration of Human Rights to mankind as a whole"* (The Executive Board, AAA, 1947, p. 542).

Since the EU, however, has not applied conditionality towards Azerbaijan, meaning they are inconsistent due to a differentiated approach (based on the energy-interests of the EU), we are witnessing an actor whose success at disguising its own hypocrisy, might be of historical dimensions. As Richard Youngs points out: *"One of the EU's particularly senior producer-state interlocutors observes that the EU is no less egotistically geopolitical than any other international actor, but seeks to dress its geopolitics in the finer cloaks of rules-based discourse"* (Youngs, 2007, p. 8). Hence, we might reiterate the hypothesis of this paper, namely: The EU is using norms-oriented discourse resulting in pragmatic and realism-oriented practice, embedded in the logic of the democracy-security nexus.



## Good governance

The objective of good governance was mentioned (however, not for the first time) in the 2004 European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper, and again in a 2006 regulation from the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). In the latter document, there is a hint towards the idea of differentiation with which the EU operates, towards its neighbourhood countries. This trait has been suggested accelerated with the latest review of the ENP in 2015 (Aarstad & Bremberg, 2017, p. 81). As written in a note from the European External Action Service (EEAS): *"in article 7 [the ENPI] underlines the need to take into account the level of ambition of the European Union's partnership with a given partner, progress towards implementing agreed objectives, including on governance and on reform, in determining the level of allocation for each country programme"* (EEAS, p. 1). In the same note from the EEAS, it is pointed out what indicators are being used by the EU when measuring the progress towards good governance in the partner country with whom the EU share an Action Plan. These indicators *"covers inputs, process and outputs, that is to say the existence of relevant legislation or equivalent, the institutional mechanisms put in place for its implementation, and the effectiveness and accessibility for citizens of these mechanisms"* (EEAS, p. 6).

According to a study conducted by the policy department of the Directorate-General for external policies in the European Parliament, the EU is familiar with the term "good governance" having one broad and one narrow definition. The narrow definition of good governance relates to the need for an efficient state (apparatus). According to this view, good governance is closely connected to how well the administration performs and how the regulatory framework of the state looks like. *"Principles such as efficiency and effectiveness, predictability, transparency, accountability, the level of corruption or sound financial management constitute important elements of this understanding"* (Hackenesch, 2016, p. 12). Correspondingly with this definition of the term, the EU's methods of supporting good governance includes fighting corruption, advocating transparency in decision-making processes, reinforcing public financial management, reforming administrations and civil services, or finally, helping to build governmental institutional capacity to enhance their functioning. On the other hand, the broader definition of good governance entails a more normative dimension with more focus on democracy and human rights. In this perception, the "good governance" is "good" thanks to its foundations being cemented in democratic structures. Accordingly, the EU's promotion of good governance aligned with this view, includes *"promoting competitive democratic politics, including the strengthening of electoral regimes, political and civil rights, the separation of powers, horizontal and vertical accountability"* (Hackenesch, 2016, p. 12). Seeing as the fight against corruption is one of the core elements in the EU's good governance agenda, it is worth noting that through the Action Plans with all three respective neighbourhood states in the Southern Caucasus, the EU asks among others the Azerbaijani government *"to accede to, ratify, and implement international conventions that are related to the fight against corruption, including the UN convention on Corruption, the Council of Europe Criminal and Civil Law Conventions, and the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions"* (Börzel & Pamuk, 2012, p. 83).

Together with the 2015 revision of the ENP, came signals about downgrading the EU's ambitions in "transforming" their neighbourhood countries, partly because most of these – seemingly – were not interested in becoming more integrated with the EU (Furness,

2017, p. 208). However, good governance seemed to remain an important declaratory objective, on the EU's part. As Furness notices: "*References to democracy, good governance, and human rights remained prominent in the November 2015 Communication, with specific focus on programmes supporting the judiciary, accountable public administration and civil society – all areas where the EU has extensive expertise*" (Furness, 2017, p. 208).

As is clear from the EU's 2015 revision of the ENP, one of the dimensions to the object of good governance is the EU's assistance to the civil society in Azerbaijan. Such assistance is commonly acknowledged as attempts to spark grassroot democratic culture and movement in the receiving country. Very often, the topic of civil society assistance is debated within the concept of "Europeanisation". There are two main approaches to how Europeanisation operates outside the EU, these are known as "top-down" and "bottom-up" approaches. Whereas the former approach places weight on the EU's influence on the policymaking and institution building in the receiving country, the latter emphasize domestic variables, reactions, and initiatives vis a vis European integration, claiming Europeanisation to stem from the national level. As Huseyn Aliyev argues, in the case of South Caucasian states, Europeanisation usually takes shape in the "top-down" form (Aliyev, 2016, p. 45).

Perhaps one of the most peculiar ways in which values and interests collide in EU-Azerbaijani relations, is the way the EU's attempts at promoting good governance, sometimes are creatively "exploited" by the Azerbaijani government. The example I am referring to is a remark (concerning all the Southern Caucasus states) about how "*incumbent regimes have instrumentalised the EU for their political survival strategies, selectively implementing anti-corruption policies to gain and consolidate political power*" (Börzel & Pamuk, 2012, p. 80). In this sense - Börzel & Pamuk argues - one might make the claim that the EU's attempts at promoting good governance can result in the stabilisation instead of transformation of the incumbent regimes, due to the strengthening of state-capacities through the EU's differentiated approach (Börzel & Pamuk, 2012, p. 80).

In order to analyse good governance promoted by the EU in Azerbaijan between 2004 and 2021 through the conceptual lenses of normative power Europe, I will have to operationalise the concept. This will be done by applying Ian Manners six methods of norms diffusion to the issue area, that is, good governance. As stated in the chapter on normative power Europe, these six methods are: diffusion by contagion, informational diffusion, procedural diffusion, diffusion by transference, overt diffusion and diffusion through a cultural filter. At this point, it is worth noting that "good governance" is also mentioned in Manners' article from 2002, where he refers to it as the fourth "minor" norm within the EU's constitution and practices (Manners, 2002, p. 242-243). For the sake of clarity and efficiency, I will quickly discard those methods of norms diffusion rendered as anachronistic or irrelevant to the issue at hand and jump to the one(s) I deem most accurate in describing the respective phenomena.

The diffusion by contagion refers to the unintentional spread of norms by the EU to other international actors. The EU's attempts at promoting good governance in Azerbaijan are anything but unintentional, considering the strong presence of references to for instance anti-corruption reforms (EEAS, 2004, p. 5), civil society support (EEAS, 2004, p. 4, 40), (EC, 2014), or advocating reforms in public finance "*to improve efficiency, accountability,*

*transparency and predictability*" (EEAS, 2004, p. 7). The outcomes of these intentional normative goals, however, have been painted as a rather pessimistic picture (Delcour & Duhot, 2011, p. 41). In fact, this latter remark, could arguably eliminate any possibility of Manners' six methods of norms diffusion being realised, considering how (relatively) unsuccessful the promotion of good governance in Azerbaijan, has been. Informational diffusion seems to have the right premises for explaining the potential transfer of good governance-norms from the EU to Azerbaijan. After all, this method refers to strategic communications, policy proposals, declarations and other initiatives from the EU (Manners, 2002, p. 244). The method of procedural diffusion is interesting when considering good governance, because this method relates to institutionalisation of a relationship and the mechanisms at work in the EU's agreements with non-members or its enlargement processes. The intentions of the ENP included the provision of "*a framework for deepening economic, as well as non-economic, relations with neighbouring countries that are not EU accession candidates*" (Hoekman, 2017, p. 372). In this respect one could argue that since good governance is a statutory part of the Action Plan and PCA under which the EU and Azerbaijan cooperates, the method of procedural diffusion has strong explanatory power regarding the EU's promotion of good governance in Azerbaijan. The problem, however, is – again – that the actual levels of good governance achieved in Azerbaijan are highly contested, for instance with respect to the challenge of corruption, where no significant positive effects have been discovered (Börzel & Pamuk, 2012, p. 89).

The transference-method of diffusion refers to the spread of EU-norms to third countries through trade, aid or technical assistance. Furthermore, Manners claim transference can be a result of so-called "carrot and stickism" where compliance is rewarded, and non-conformism is sanctioned. As discussed earlier in this analysis, such behaviour from the EU's side has largely been met by Azerbaijani assertiveness, much thanks to the latter's solid economic position due to its natural resources, thus, bargaining power. Like I mentioned in the chapter on normative power Europe, both the procedural and transference method of diffusing norms are included as part of the conditionality with which the EU theoretically operates in agreements with third countries. However, considering that the EU-Azerbaijani negotiations regarding an Association Agreement formally started in 2010, without conditionality being applied as far as the lack of democratic progress is concerned, it is hard to say that transference carries much explanatory power in the EU's promotion of good governance in Azerbaijan. Then again, one could argue that because the AA negotiations have not made significant progress, the element of "carrot and stickism" is working its magic. The question of why the EU permitted negotiations to start despite their ex ante conditions not being met by Azerbaijan, nevertheless, suggests inconsistency from the EU's side.

The method of overt diffusion, referring to the physical presence of EU – or EU member state – personnel in Azerbaijan, do not seem to accomplish much good governance in Azerbaijan. This method would include actions such as publishing statements – on behalf of the EU or member states – criticising authoritarian actions of the incumbent regime, funding independent NGO's or even attending – and condemning – court hearings of arrested journalists or members of the political opposition. Part of the explanation to why overt diffusion seems rather futile in promoting good governance, could be the fact that the respective EU member states, and even institutions, are not unitary in their actions, sometimes even obstructing one another (van Gils, 2021, p. 81). Finally, we have the cultural filter which Manners claim "*is based on the interplay between the construction of knowledge and the creation of social and political identity by the subjects of norm diffusion*."

*Examples of the cultural filter at work include the diffusion of democratic norms in China, human rights diffusion in Turkey, or environmental norms in Britain" (Manners, 2002, p. 245). If judging by the merits of the examples presented here, I don't see much potential for the cultural filter being successful in promoting good governance in Azerbaijan.*

At this point we arrive at the neorealist theory of international relations and its assessment of the EU's promotion of good governance in Azerbaijan. As written in the chapter on neorealist international theory, Adrian Hyde-Price claims that promoting democracy – which is a part of good governance – falls under the category of the EU's third primary purpose for which the EU assists its member states. Namely the "vehicle" for the EU's pursuit of its collective second-order normative goals. According to Hyde-Price, this third primary purpose justifies the notion of an "ethical power Europe". The fact that democracy promotion is considered a product of the EU's ethical agenda, and thus comes third in line of priority, behind areas – apparently more important – such as economic interests, and regional milieu shaping (Hyde-Price, 2008, p. 31), tells us how diametrically opposed the neorealist theory is to the concept of normative power Europe. Following this line of thought, we are once again forced to consider what Hyde-Price refers to as "*a fundamental contradiction at the heart of the EU's identity and role as an international actor*" (Hyde-Price, 2008, p. 32). As already noted in the chapter on neorealist theory, this is a contradiction between pursuing one's own security, economic, and political goals, on the one hand. On the other, however, one recognizes oneself as the embodiment of EU member states' collective second-order normative concerns, and as a "force for good", advocating values in the belief that they are universally legitimate. Hyde-Price claims such conduct is impossible, except if one were to acknowledge what he refers to as liberal-idealist claims of universal, cosmopolitan values exceeding the values of individual political communities. As an example of such type of behaviour being exposed, he points to the somewhat ironic fact that "*many Europeans have seen through the Bush administration's claims that what is good for America is also good for the world, but fail to question EU claims that what is good for 'Europe' is good for the world*" (Hyde-Price, 2008, p. 32).

As Hyde-Price argues, the ENP is one of the largest policy instruments through which the EU seeks to promote its liberal norms and values which, in turn, could help creating a so-called "ring of friends" around the physical borders of the EU. According to the realist international theory, however, the ENP was pre-destined to fail to deliver in its declaratory normative objectives – thus, also in spreading good governance – due to "*its over-ambitious and contradictory goals, its unrealistic operating assumptions and its failure to recognise the continued importance of geopolitics and security competition in an anarchic international system*" (Hyde-Price, 2017, p. 64). One of the contradictions, which hypothetically could be observed in Azerbaijan is that the promotion of liberal values, including good governance, can act as a seed to regional destabilisation following political reforms, potentially toppling an authoritarian regime. At the same time, it is in the EU's own interest to maintain good relations with the incumbent regime in Azerbaijan considering the latter's abilities to tackle security-related issues (thus, also benefitting the EU) such as migration, organised crime, terrorism or regional conflicts. This observation by Hyde-Price is made based on the ENP as a whole (Hyde-Price, 2017, p. 65), however, it seems very accurate also for the case of Azerbaijan alone, although some of the abovementioned security issues may be more relevant for the Southern Neighbourhood.

Although the following example falls outside the scope of my chosen timeline of EU-Azerbaijani relations, I will include it as it could be interesting for future consideration.

Possibly the latest of additions to the list of agreements, cooperation's or forums in which the EU has attempted promoting good governance in Azerbaijan, is the Administrative Agreement for the Azerbaijan Rapid Technical Assistance Facility (AZTAF). This is a three-year program, signed on the sixteenth of February 2022, in which the EU – together with the World Bank – will help the Azerbaijani government further in building capacity in the state institutions, thus enhancing public sector governance, economic development, energy efficiency or market opportunities. The budget of this program is set to EUR 5.25 million, the EU is funding it in its entirety, and the World Bank is responsible for managing these funds (World Bank, 2022). In the neorealist view, such a program can be explained as serving the collective EU-member states' third primary purpose, that is, their shared second-order normative concerns. According to the neorealist theory, this behaviour, however, is only made possible in the absence of conflicting interests of the primary – or secondary – purpose of the EU member states. At the onset, the AZTAF seems a genuine attempt to contribute and encourage the Azerbaijani government to make progress in the area of good governance. However, as exemplified earlier in the analysis, it remains to be seen whether these incentives are implemented "faithfully" according to the EU's and the World Bank's wishes, or whether the assertive Azerbaijani government instrumentalises these external incentives in ways akin to former examples.

## **Energy security**

Energy, and energy security is arguably one of the most central domains in the bilateral EU-Azerbaijan relationship. As mentioned earlier, the export of oil and gas represents Azerbaijan's main source of revenue. In fact, in the year 2020 as much as approximately 87% of the country's exports came from oil – and natural gas – revenues (State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan, 2021). For the EU, energy similarly represents an important issue area, albeit in a different way, as the demands from the collective group of EU member states continue to increase. There are estimates that suggest the EU's dependency on import of natural gas will rise from approximately 61% in 2016 to 86% in 2035 (Abbasov, 2016, p. 75). Examining energy security as an issue area in EU-Azerbaijan relations through the conceptual lenses of normative power Europe, is an interesting endeavour. Here I will omit four of Ian Manners' methods of norms diffusion, and concentrate on procedural diffusion, and diffusion through transference –together, as they are both describing the intentional promotion of norms, as well as being integral in the EU's use of conditionality. Whereas Manners – as a proponent of social constructivism (Skolimowska, 2015, p. 112) - focuses mostly on values concerning democracy and human rights in his concept of normative power Europe, energy is often discussed within frameworks of geopolitics or market liberalism (Stoddard, 2013, p. 442). Nevertheless, energy security or international energy relations are generally hard to theorise in an explicit way due to its association with multiple social sciences such as International Relations, Economics, International Development, Geography, or Public Policy. As Edward Stoddard notes: "... *what is needed in the study of international energy relations is an approach to theorisation that merges political and economic factors rather than hierarchically privileging the analysis of one over the other*" (Stoddard, 2013, p. 438).

When considering Manners' method of procedural norms diffusion, one can argue that the EU seeks to extend its normative character into the area of energy (security) by attempting to export EU norms such as liberalisation, through existing instruments and frameworks of cooperation between themselves and Azerbaijan. Bernd Weber notes: "*The rationale*

*behind the EU's approach is that reliable energy supply and affordability of energy are best guaranteed by functioning, interconnected gas and electricity markets, grounded in liberal EU market norms"* (Weber, 2017, p. 381). In the case of the Southern Gas Corridor, however, Faig Abbasov argues that the absence of EU incentives (in the shape of an EU-membership), or more precisely, the lack of such aspirations from Azerbaijan, determines the negative outcome of the EU's attempts at liberalising and depoliticising the energy market in Azerbaijan (as well as the other SGC countries). Abbasov points out that the domestic costs of relinquishing national control over supply – and transit – of natural gas, simply are too high, thus, unattractive. As a consequence, the SGC remains influenced by the political and economic interests of the Aliyev regime, meaning the supply of natural gas to the EU is not defined by dynamics of the free market –as is synonym with the EU's idea of energy security (Abbasov, 2016, p. 29).

Hence, the procedural diffusion, and diffusion by transference has limited – if any – explanatory power as far as energy security (as an issue area in EU-Azerbaijan relations) being guided by normative power Europe - is concerned.

In the neorealist theory of international relations, energy resources are commonly regarded as "*elements of the power maximization of states*" (Česnakas, 2010, p. 35). In a European Commission document from 2011, discussing energy security and international cooperation, it is stressed how bilateral agreements between single EU members and third supplier or transit countries have led to a fragmented internal energy market. The Commission urges to extend its regulatory framework externally, to secure network access, and hopefully establish competition provisions. In order to create this wider regulatory area beyond EU borders, the Commission claims what is needed is "*a regular information exchange on intergovernmental agreements concluded and planned by Member States*" (European Commission, 2011). According to such discourse, one can clearly recognise the EU's attempts at promoting its own energy security norms externally, including elements such as depoliticization, transparency or market liberalisation.

In the case of Azerbaijan, energy relations with the EU are defined by the bilateral partnership of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 2006. This agreement reflects a high level of convergence when it comes to adopting EU norms. Bernd Weber notes: "*Indeed, the EU has managed to include precise EU provisions on unbundling, market pricing and TPA in the bilateral memorandum, since Azerbaijan was exposed to strong geopolitical pressure*" (Weber, 2017, p. 387). The geopolitical pressure referred to here, reveals that rules and norms convergence happened not because of normative "attraction", but from strategic geopolitical and economic considerations made by the Azerbaijani regime. The context was Russia's external pressure on Azerbaijan due to the former's reluctance towards seeing Azerbaijan increase their role as a major energy exporter. Azerbaijan's answer to Russia increasing gas prices (among its other tools of applied leverage), was to increase energy interdependence with the EU, as exemplified by the SGC. However, Azerbaijani decision-makers were not enthusiastic about the appropriateness of the unilaterally pre-defined norms of the EU, which would lead to high costs and loss of national sovereignty over the energy sector. Accordingly, when Azerbaijan succeeded in counterbalancing Russia's *realpolitik* by cooperating more closely with Turkey, including linking up with the TANAP, the compliance with EU norms in the energy sector, fell drastically. Consequently, a new MoU between Azerbaijan and the EU was signed in 2011. As Weber points out: "[this MoU] delinked the cooperation on the Southern Gas Corridor from stalling convergence in the energy sector, reflecting more co-development with Azerbaijani decision-makers" (Weber, 2017, p. 388). As is clear from

these developments, the incentives to comply with the EU's normative values, including market liberalisation in the energy sector, can be explained through the neorealist notion of energy being a key component in international actors' sense of security, thus, fight for survival in the anarchic structure of international relations.

## Conclusion

As this thesis is coming to an end, I will finally be able to address the research questions:

*How has the EU been attempting democracy promotion vis a vis Azerbaijan?*

*Which factors has determined the outcome in EU democracy promotion efforts in Azerbaijan?*

In order to arrive at these research questions and hypothesis, however, I stress the necessity of familiarising myself and the reader with existing scholarly literature on the concepts and one of the theories, through which one can study the phenomenon, that is the EU's promotion of democracy in Azerbaijan. To answer the first research question, I claim that the EU has attempted to promote democracy in Azerbaijan first and foremost by requesting reforms of the judicial system and promotion of democracy and human rights through the bilateral EU-Azerbaijan Action Plan, within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. To answer the second research question, I argue that the factors determining the outcome of the EU's democracy promotion efforts in Azerbaijan, are geoeconomics and geopolitics. In this sense, I am largely adopting the critical lenses of neorealism, considering the emphasis put on threats to Azerbaijan's energy security (exemplified by an Azerbaijani shift towards energy interdependency with the EU, in the light of Russian external pressure).

The hypothesis of this paper states:

*The EU is using norms-oriented discourse resulting in pragmatic and realism-inspired practice, embedded in the logic of the democracy-security nexus.*

I claim that this hypothesis is justified when considering the contradictory nature – and behaviour – of the EU. This can be exemplified for example in their inconsistent use of conditionality, which – as is evident from my analysis – seemingly need not be applied in the case of Azerbaijan. This contradictory nature is exactly what the title of this thesis refers to, namely: “normative in the sheets, pragmatic in the streets”, where normative discourse is frequently applied throughout sheets of EU legislation, resolutions or other statements, whereas the politics “on the ground” (“in the streets”) are often the result of pragmatic, security-oriented prioritisations.

To follow up on such findings, I will include the following statement, despite it not being an official EU declaration, but from a study that, nonetheless, is conducted by the Policy Department of the Directorate-General for external policies in the European Parliament, on request from the European Parliament's Committee on Development. For the sake of clarification, it is worth noting that the role of the policy department is defined accordingly: “Policy departments are research units that provide specialised advice to committees, inter-parliamentary delegations and other parliamentary bodies” (Hackenesch, 2016, p. 12).

The statement:

*“Support for governance reforms is therefore not only a question of the EU's values and whether the EU is a normative power; it is the EU's own economic, security and political interest”.*



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