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BETWEEN NORMS AND INTERESTS: EU-AFRICA STRATEGIC PARTNERHIPS IN
THE SHADOW OF RUSSIA'S FULL-SCALE INVASION OF UKRAINE

Master's thesis

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I confirm that I have prepared the thesis independently. All the views of other authors, as well as data from literary sources and elsewhere, have been cited.

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Table of Contents

BETWEEN NORMS AND INTERESTS: EU-AFRICA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS IN THE SHADOW OF RUSSIA’S FULL-SCALE INVASION OF UKRAINE	1
Introduction.....	6
Research goal and questions	9
Structure of the thesis.....	9
1. EU Normative Power in Africa and the role of institutions.....	11
1.1 Normative Power Europe.....	12
1.2 Historical Institutionalism: Path dependency and growing costs of change	14
1.3 Critical juncture and the gradual change thereafter.....	16
1.4 Discursive Institutionalism: Why the Word changes faster than the deed	17
1.5 Research questions and theoretical expectations.....	19
2. Methodology	21
2.1 Research design.....	21
2.2 Research methods	24
2.3 Data.....	27
3. Analysis: The Shift in EU-Africa Discourse 2020-2025	41
3.1 Pre-war baseline: strategic partnership before 24 February 2022	42
3.2 The 2022 critical juncture: reinterpretation rather than rupture.....	43
3.3 Post-2022: strategic language becomes more explicit	46
3.4 Normative continuity.....	50
3.5 Crisis layering: from COVID-19 to Ukraine	51
3.6 Strategic silences and what is not said.....	52
3.7 Deeds versus rhetoric: EU contributions to Africa after 2022.....	53
Conclusion	56
Bibliography (speeches).....	61
Bibliography.....	64

Introduction

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 has become one of the most significant geopolitical turning points of 21st century. While its immediate consequences have been visible in the field of European security, the war has had wider implications for the European Union's foreign relations. The situation has intensified discussion about strategic autonomy, resilience, geopolitical competition, and the defense of the rules-based international order (Jørgensen, Knudsen and Landorff, 2025; Stockemer, 2024). These developments matter not only for the EU's neighborhood, but also for its relations with actors in the Global South, including African states.

EU-Africa relations have long been framed in the language of partnership, multilateralism, development cooperation, and shared values (Manners, 2002; Schepers and Sicurelli, 2008). At the same time, the relationship between the two continents has in reality never been fully normative. It has also involved strategic interests related to trade, security, migration, investment and influence (Hyde-Price, 2006; Blanco, 2016). In recent years, this duality has become more visible as Africa has gained greater geopolitical relevance in a competitive international environment shaped by the growing activity of China, Russia, the United States and other actors (Haastrup, 2025, Knudsen and Landorff, 2025).

Since 24 February 2022, EU-Africa relations have developed in a more contested and politically sensitive international environment. The war in Ukraine did not concern Africa directly in a military sense, but it changed the wider context in which the EU approached its African partners. The invasion strengthened the EU's emphasis on sovereignty, territorial integrity, international law and the rules-based international order. This mattered for EU-Africa relations because African states did not respond to the war in a uniform way. Some supported Ukraine and condemned Russia clearly, while others abstained in United Nations votes or avoided fully aligning with the EU's position. As a result, Africa became more important not only as a development partner, but also as a diplomatic partner in wider debates about global order, multilateralism and the meaning of sovereignty.

At the same time, the post-2022 period gave new political weight to themes that had already been present in EU-Africa relations before the war. Investment, connectivity, energy security, supply chains and critical raw materials became increasingly important in EU external discourse. Global Gateway had already been launched in 2021, but Russia's invasion made its

geopolitical relevance more visible. In this context, Africa was increasingly presented not only as a recipient of development cooperation, but as a partner in energy diversification, green transition, infrastructure, digital connectivity and strategic supply chains. The Africa-Europe Investment Package, announced in the context of the 2022 AU-EU Summit, illustrates this broader move toward a more investment-oriented and geoeconomic framing of the partnership. The war also made geopolitical competition more visible in EU-Africa relations. Russia's diplomatic and security presence in parts of Africa, China's long-standing investment role, and the growing activity of other external actors have made the African continent a more contested space of international engagement. This does not mean that EU-Africa relations became purely geopolitical after 2022. Rather, it means that the EU increasingly had to explain what kind of partner it wanted to be in an environment where African states have several alternative partners and greater room for manoeuvre. Concepts such as strategic partnership, mutual interests, resilience, credibility and equal partnership therefore became more important in the EU's Africa-related discourse.

These developments make EU-Africa discourse important to study for both empirical and theoretical reasons. Empirically, the period after 24 February 2022 allows us to examine whether a major geopolitical shock changed how the EU talks about Africa and its own role in the partnership. If the EU's language became more strategic, security-oriented or interest-based after the invasion, this may indicate a broader rebalancing in EU external relations. At the same time, if normative language remained central, this would suggest that the EU's self-description as a values-based and partnership-oriented actor continues to shape its external discourse even under geopolitical pressure.

Theoretically, the case speaks to the broader debate about whether the EU is best understood as a normative power, a strategic actor, or a hybrid of both. EU-Africa relations are particularly useful for examining this question because they have historically been framed through development, partnership, multilateralism and shared values, while also involving clear European interests in trade, migration, security, investment, influence and access to strategic resources. Studying the post-2022 period therefore helps assess whether Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine produced a discursive rupture, or whether it mainly intensified and reframed tensions that were already present in EU-Africa relations.

The relevance of this topic also lies in the fact that discourse is not merely rhetorical. The way the EU describes Africa, partnership, values and interests helps legitimise policy choices and shape expectations about the relationship. If Africa is increasingly framed as a strategic partner in a competitive geopolitical environment, this may influence how EU institutions justify investment, security cooperation, development policy and diplomatic engagement. For this reason, analysing EU-Africa discourse after 2022 provides insight into how the EU adapts its external identity and priorities in response to a changing international order.

Research goal and questions

The aim of this thesis is to analyze how the European Union's discourse on its strategic partnership with Africa has changed in the shadow of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. More specifically, the thesis examines whether and in what ways the balance between the language of normative partnership and the language of a more pragmatic or geopolitical partnership has shifted in official EU discourse between 2020 and 2025.

Main research question of the thesis is: How has the European Union's discourse on its strategic partnership with Africa changed after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine?

The thesis is guided by three sub-questions:

1. How was the EU-Africa partnership framed in official EU discourse before 24 February 2022?
2. What changes, if any, can be identified in the framing of Africa and the partnership after the start of the war?
3. To what extent do these changes indicate a shift in the balance between normative and interest-based language?

The thesis focuses on three groups of primary sources: speeches by the President of the European Commission, speeches by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, speeches by the president of the European Council and AU-EU Summit declarations. These texts were selected because they represent high-level articulations of how the EU defines Africa, the partnership and its own role within that relationship (Schmidt, 2008; Yin, 2018)

Structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of five substantive parts. The theoretical framework first discusses norms and interest in EU foreign policy and the concept of Normative Power Europe, it then turns to historical institutionalism and discursive institutionalism in order to explain why crises may generate discourse change faster than institutional transformation. The methodology chapter explains the qualitative case study design, the temporal scope, the selected sources and the logic of discourse analysis. The empirical chapter compares pre-war and post-2022 discourse and

ends with a comparative analysis across source types. The final chapters discuss the findings and draw conclusions.

1. EU Normative Power in Africa and the role of institutions

The purpose of this chapter is to give an overview of the theoretical framework of the thesis. The chapter proceeds as follows. First, it outlines the debate on norms and interests in EU foreign policy, focusing on how these logics are constructed and interact. Second, it introduces the concept of Normative Power Europe and its main critique. Third, it discusses historical institutionalism, with particular attention to path dependency and the constraints on rapid policy change. Fourth, it examines the concept of critical junctures and their role in shaping political trajectories. Finally, it presents discursive institutionalism, which helps explain how and why changes in political languages may precede institutional transformation. A core question in EU foreign Policy theory is if the EU should be analyzed as a Normative actor or interest based one, which adapts strategically according to the day-day challenges (Manners, 2002; Hyde-Price, 2006). In recent years this has become more relevant (Jørgensen, Knudsen and Landorff, 2025). Russia's aggression, the competition of great powers and the rise of anti-liberal ideas are part of the broader context, where the EU's foreign policy must reword its goals (Jørgensen, Knudsen and Landorff, 2025). It is also core question of the current times, if normativity itself, which is more a result of the EU being created normatively, if how much it can act as an interest based actor despite it.

In the context of this thesis, the debate on norms and interests is approached through the concept of strategic partnership. This concept is important because the EU does not describe its relationship with Africa merely as development cooperation, but increasingly as a strategic partnership. The term therefore provides a useful analytical bridge between normative and interest-based foreign policy language. On the one hand, strategic partnership can express normative ideas such as equality, mutual respect, multilateralism and shared values. On the other hand, it can also signal pragmatic interests related to security, trade, investment, migration, connectivity and geopolitical influence. For this reason, the concept of strategic partnership is central for analysing whether EU-Africa discourse after 2022 has moved from a predominantly normative framing towards a more interest-based and geopolitical one.

The literature on the strategic partnership of the EU also supports the position the „strategic partnership is not a neutral and self-evident term (Ferreira-Pereira and Vieira, 2016; Blanco, 2016). Strategic partnership has 3 functions in foreign policy discourse: It acts as a hierarchical label for international partners; it is a normative instrument through which to encourage the

EU's foreign policy understanding; and it is a political-rhetorical instrument (Blanco, 2016; Renard, 2012). In the African context, this is particularly important, as the language of partnership can simultaneously signify both an aspiration for equality and an asymmetric power relationship (Scheipers and Sicurelli, 2008; Haastrup, 2025).

The same can be concluded from the literature discussing the heterogeneity of strategic partnerships. Strategic partnerships can so be different from one another that a coherent model won't work well and for partnerships one needs to account for a lot of variety (Rivera and Garashchuk, 2020). The EU's Africa policy cannot be understood through a universal normative framework, but the analyses has to be more partnership-based as to what language and instruments are used in any given account (Rivera and Garashchuk, 2020; Ferreira-Pereira and Vieira, 2016).

For African countries strategic partnerships are instruments through which to manage international power dynamics and maximize leeway (Engel, 2023). This means that Africa is not passive in it's relations, but also a strategic actor (Engel, 2023; Oloruntoba and Tshimpaka, 2024). In this way the EU-Africa relationship is not only the extension of EU foreign policy's, but meeting ground for two different institutional and political frameworks.

In this work „Norms“ and „Interests“ are addressed as analytical categories, not moral assesments (Tocci, 2008; Casier, 2013). Norms signify universal values and right, interests on the other hand are much more about material, strategic, and security related goals (Manners, 2002; Hyde-Price, 2006). The goal of this theoretical framework is not EU is one or the other, but to research, how the balance of those two logics has shifted because of Russia's war in Ukraine and how it has emanated in the change of discourse and the restructuring of institutions.

1.1 Normative Power Europe

The concept of Normative Power Europe is one of the most influential approaches in the study of the European Union's foreign policy. The idea was developed by Ian Manners, who argued that the EU's international influence should not be understood only through military power, economic strength or traditional geopolitical interests. Instead, the EU exercises influence also through its ability to shape what is considered normal, legitimate and acceptable in international relations (Manners, 2002). In this sense, the EU is not only a material power, but also a normative actor.

For Manners, the EU's distinctiveness comes from its historical development and institutional character. The EU was created after the Second World War as a peace project based on integration, law, cooperation and the limitation of state power. Because of this, its foreign policy identity has been closely connected to principles such as peace, democracy, human rights, the rule of law, social solidarity, sustainable development and good governance (Manners, 2002). These principles are not only policy preferences, but part of how the EU understands itself as an international actor

The framework has also been criticized where for example in the case of EU-Russia strategic partnership one can see that the rhetoric of norms is also used instrumentally. Normative input does not always result in a normative output; the policy of norms can also serve very pragmatic goals, for example constructing identity hierarchies and repositioning spheres of influence (Casier, 2013). Norms and interests do not exclude one another (Casier, 2013; Gieg and Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet, 2025).

EU-Africa relations have long supported the EU's identity related security, as they have reinforced Europe's identity as a „good „responsible“ and „partnership-oriented“ actor (Haastrup et al. 2021). However, it is contented that the growing agency of African actors and the increasing present of new external actor, such as China, have begun to challenge this self-confidence (Haastrup, Duggan and Mah, 2021). This means that for example the terms „partnership of equals is not merely a declaratory ideal, but also a site of tension which Europe's self-image is put to the test (Haastrup, Duggan and Mah, 2021; Haastrup, 2025). The main issue is not only which norms the EU claims to promote, but also how these norms serve the EU's own identity needs.

The latest literature references that after 2022 the term „normative power“ is not used in the same way as it was in the beginning of the 2000s (Skolimowska, 2025). After Russia's invasion of Ukraine normative power must deal with larger geopolitical competition, security pressures, and pragmatism. Normative power must work in a world where strategic autonomy, security interests and geopolitical rivalry are much more visible than in the model proposed by Manners. (Skolimowska, 2025; Lefebvre, 2021).

Based on the explanations above we can conclude that when Normative logic dominates more often terms like „partnership“, „equality“, „human rights“, „democracy“, „multilateralism“ and „the rule of law“ (Manners, 2002; Scheipers and Sicurelli, 2008). If a more interest-based logic gains hold than terms like „strategic interests“, „resilience“, „supply chains“, „energy,

connectivity”, “investments”, “competition”, and “strategic autonomy” should become more frequent (Hyde-Price, 2006; Gieg and Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet, 2025). The given thesis does once again not presume that one will be replaced by the other, it’s more a question of their relational shift after 24.02.2022 (Skolimowska, 2025; Murray, 2026).

1.2 Historical Institutionalism: Path dependency and growing costs of change

Historical Institutionalism is concerned with how institutions shape political behavior over time and why political change is often gradual rather than abrupt (Pierson, 2000; Mahoney and Thelen, 2010, Hall & Taylor 1996). Its central claim is that political actors do not make decisions on a blank slate. Instead, earlier choices create institutional paths that structure later possibilities, distribute power unevenly, and make some courses of action easier than others (Pierson, 2005). For this reason, even major crises do not automatically produce major transformation. Political actors often respond by adapting existing arrangements rather than replacing them entirely.

A key concept in historical institutionalism is path dependency. Once a particular institutional direction has been chosen, it tends to become self-reinforcing over time. Policies, routines, expectations, and investments accumulate around established agreements, making deviation increasingly costly (Pierson, 2000). Institutions therefore can develop a kind of inertia. Change remains possible, but it is often constrained, uneven and incremental rather than revolutionary (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010).

The approach is useful for analyzing EU external relations because long-standing policy frameworks rarely disappear quickly even under strong geopolitical pressure in the case of EU-Africa relations, development cooperation frameworks, summit formats, and partnership language have emerged over a long period and are not easily restructured overnights. Historical institutionalism helps explain why post-2022 change may appear more clearly in emphasis and prioritization than in a complete institutional breaks (Neuman, 2021; Dumitrescu, 2024).

Historical institutionalism explains why the EUs foreign policy does not change even after a strong shock (at least in the beginning of it) (Pierson, 2000; Neuman, 2021). The core of this approach is that institutions shape political behavior: former decisions construct „paths“ which are expensive and difficult to change - this is called path dependency (Pierson, 2000; Mahoney

and Thelen, 2010. Politics is characterized by increasing return, the importance of timing and path dependence (Pierson, 2000). The longer a particular institutional arrangement persists, the more it generates interest, expectations, routines and investments around it, which make switching to alternatives increasingly costly (Pierson, 2004).

Historical institutionalism explains how the EU evolved from an economic integration project into a political entity with a global foreign policy agenda (Neumann, 2021). The development of EU foreign policy has been shaped by the early success of economic integration, the logic of institutionalism, the informal norm of European political cooperation, as well as a long-standing rhetorical commitment to certain regions, particularly Eastern Europe (Neumann, 2021).

This argument shows that EU foreign policy does not emerge from nothing in the aftermath of crises, but it instead has been „long in the making“ (Neumann, 2021; Pierson, 2004). It also demonstrates that foreign policy priorities can persist and expand because institutions generate continuity even amid change (Neumann, 2021; Mahoney and Thelen, 2010).

Even in the event of a strong geopolitical shock there is significant continuity in EU foreign policy: the shock itself is absorbed through reframing not through complete replacement (Dumitrescu, 2024). If the core policy logic towards Ukraine has endured then it is even more believable that in the case of Africa the change will emanate through in the change of tempo, iteration and reframing (Dumitrescu, 2024; Ikani, 2019).

Historical institutionalism also explains why the frameworks for development cooperation are especially inert (Pierson, 2000; Mahoney and Thelen, 2010). Multiannual budgetary frameworks, program logic and partnership mechanisms for long periods of time need a lot of time, political will, alignment and often even judicial support to be changed or even undone (Pierson, 2000; Mahoney and Thelen, 2010).

In conclusion the EU-Africa policy has emerged over a long time and is not subject to easy post-crisis shift (Pierson, 2004; Neuman, 2021). Secondly the current frames have created a path dependence, which have limited fast and radical changes (Pierson, 2000; Mahoney and Thelen, 2010). Thirdly the post-crisis shift is probably more gradual, and hybrid than a total paradigm shift (Ikani, 2019; Dumitrescu, 2024). The hypothesis of this thesis is that policy change tends to become visible first in discourse and strategic prioritization, rather than through immediate institutional transformation (Schmidt, 2008; Pierson, 2004). In this manner the

policy changes towards Africa will be probably visible in rhetoric and prioritization rather than institutional shifts.

1.3 Critical juncture and the gradual change thereafter

Critical juncture is a period where normal structural limitations weaken and the choices that have been made so far have a larger long-term effect. In these case the new political path becomes more „open“, but it does not mean that the path is predetermined (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007). In the analyses of a critical juncture it is important to see which alternatives were possible and why either one of them was chosen (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007).

In the case of the war it is a systemic shock, which has security, institutional, normative and geopolitical consequences (Stockemer, 2024). The framework helps not only understand why such events are not „merely crises“, but they are moments where policy field can start to move in any given direction (Stockemer, 2024). Then again it is not the juncture itself that changes the policy, but the change in content depends on institutions, decision makers and on paths already taken (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007; Stockemer, 2024).

This can also be observed in the recent case studies of the European Union. Antoaneta Dimitrova, Sinem Gürkan and Joachim Koop ask whether the 2022 war created conditions for and entirely new path in EU enlargement, as well as in security policy (Dimitrova, Gürkan, and Koops, 2025). Their „stairway of change“ framework shows that, although a series of unprecedented decisions followed 2022, the change was neither complete nor symmetrical across all policy fields (Dimitrova, Gürkan and Koops, 2025). In some areas, significant progress can be observed, while in other, existing constraints such as unanimity requirements or pre-existing institutional logics still persisted (Dimitrova, Gürkan and Koops, 2025).

The framework proposed by Ikan also enhances this with an important thought: the post-crisis change can be symbolic or constructively ambivalent (Ikani, 2021). This means that a political reaction might be expressed through rhetoric, declarations and wording, but at the same actual instruments and goals change less or left to be deliberately ambiguous to enable compromise among member states (Ikani, 2021). This is one of the core presumptions of this thesis: the EUs Africa policy's post 2022 change might be in part real, symbolic and be deliberately ambiguous (Ikani, 2021).

Jørgensen, Knudsen ja Landorff (2025) confirm the same logic in EU foreign policy paradigms. They emphasize that in a changing world paradigm might not be replaced by one-another but quite often pressures and reframing can be observed between them in a changing world. The critical juncture opens a space where normative frameworks are combined with new geopolitical realities and strategic emphasis without losing the old paradigm as a whole (Jørgensen, Knudsen and Landorff, 2025; Skolimowska, 2025). In the context of EU-Africa relations: after 2022 the EU might not have abandoned its language of partnership and values, but it could place it into a new much more clearer geopolitical framework (Saltnes and Infante, 2025; Murray, 2026).

The thesis will see the war in Ukraine not as a critical juncture because it would automatically change the nature of EU-Africa relation, but because it opened up a bigger probability of change (Stockemer, 2024). In identifying the critical juncture itself it is also important to why the change happens gradually, why some fields change more than others and why the rhetorical change can be much more extensive than the institutional one (Dimitrova, Gürkan and Koops, 2025).

1.4 Discursive Institutionalism: Why the Word changes faster than the deed

For this thesis, discursive institutionalism is particularly important because the empirical materials consist of speeches and declarations. If the Ukraine war has affected EU-Africa relations, the most immediate trace of that change may appear in the way the EU describes Africa, partnership, security, resilience, or strategic interests. Discursive change does not in itself prove institutional transformation, but it can reveal changing priorities.

Discursive institutionalism adds an important dimension to institutional analysis by focusing on the role of ideas, language and communicative practices in political change (Schmidt, 2008). Whereas historical institutionalism is particularly strong in explaining continuity and structural constraint, discursive institutionalism draws attention to how political actors define problems, justify priorities, and make new courses of action appear legitimate. In this perspective, discourse is not merely a reflection of policy, it is part of the policy process itself.

A central insight of discursive institutionalism is that change may become visible in language before it becomes visible in institutions. Political actors often respond to crises first by reframing issues, changing emphasis, and adapting narratives. In this way, discourse can serve as an early indicator of broader political adjustment (Schmidt, 2008). This is especially relevant in moments of geopolitical disruption, when institutional arrangements may remain relatively stable in the short term, while official rhetoric changes more quickly.

Discursive intuitionism explains why institutions often begin talking in a „new language“ before they can act on new grounds (Schmidt, 2008; Alves, 2024). Discourse and ideas are not a byproduct of policy, but a central part of it (Schmidt, 2008). Institutions work not only through rules and procedure, but also through how they define problems and set priorities (Schmidt, 2008). From this viewpoint the analysis of speeches, declarations and documents is justified to research how institutions have adapted (Schmidt, 2008; Ikani, 2021).

There are two types of institutional discourses that are relevant: Firstly coordinative discourse, which happens between lawmakers and communicative discourse, which is applied to the public and partners (Schmidt, 2008; Alves, 2024). If the Commission, the EEAS or high representative start describing Africa in more strategically autonomous, resilience, investment or supply change language, then it does not mean that all programs have been undone because of it (Skolimowska, 2025). This also means that the institution tries to rethink its approach and politically legitimize it (Schmidt, 2008; Ikani, 2021). The change in discourse can be therefore the first measurable sign of a broader shift (Dumitrescu, 2024).

The AU and EU use converging and diverging strategic narratives and their partnership is not only shaped by policies, but how either party describes the international system publicly and their own role within it (Murray, 2026). Both sides tend to present themselves as supporters of a multilateral, rules based world order, but at the same time, they emphasize their strategic interest and priorities differently (Murray, 2026). In this sense partnership is not only the practice of cooperation, but also a process where meaning is mutually constructed (Schmidt, 2008; Murray, 2026).

Discursive institutionalism helps to combine the normative power debate with the historical institutionalism theory (Schmidt, 2008; Neuman, 2021). The literature on Normative power tells us which narratives the EU could use (Manners, 2002). Historical institutionalism tells us why institutions change slowly (Pierson, 2000). Discursive institutionalism tells us, why language can change before the institutions do (Schmidt, 2008). With the combination of the three we have the main theoretical argument of this thesis: After the war in Ukraine, the most likely observable change in EU Africa policy is a discursive shift in the balance between normative partnership language and pragmatic geopolitical language, while institutional and budgetary changes are expected to occur more slowly and in a more selective manner.

1.5 Research questions and theoretical expectations

Together, the theoretical approaches discussed above provide a framework for analyzing continuity and change in EU discourse on Africa after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The normative power debate helps identify the kinds of value-based and identity-related language the EU has traditionally used in external relations, including partnership, equality, multilateralism democracy and human rights (Manners, 2002; Scheipers and Sicurelli, 2008). Historical institutionalism explain why long-standing policy works are likely to change slowly, even under crisis conditions (Pierson, 2000; Mahoney and Thelen, 2010). Discursive institutionalism complements this by showing why rhetoric and political framing may shift more quickly institutions (Schmidt, 2008).

The theoretical framework developed in this chapter provides the basis for answering the central research question of the thesis: How has the European Union's discourse on its strategic partnership with Africa changed after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine? More specifically, the thesis asks three sub-questions. First, how was the EU-Africa partnership framed in official EU discourse before 24 February 2022? Second, what changes, if any, can be identified in the framing of Africa and the partnership after the start of the war? Third, to what extent do these changes indicate a shift in the balance between normative and interest-based language?

Based on the theoretical framework, the thesis develops three expectations.

First, the war in Ukraine is expected to function as a critical juncture in the sense that it has increased pressure for reinterpretation and reprioritization in the EU policy discourse Capoccia, and Kelemen, 2007; Stockemer, 2024). However, this does not mean that the EU abandoned its earlier normative language altogether. Rather, the expectation is that themes such as partnership, multilateralism, and shared values remain present, but are increasingly embedded within a more strategic vocabulary.

Second, historical institutionalism leads to the expectation that institutional continuity will remain strong. Long-standing cooperation frameworks, summit structures and partnership mechanisms are unlikely rapidly replaced. Therefore, if change occurs, it is expected to appear more clearly in rhetoric, framing and prioritization than in a complete institutional breaks (Pierson, 2004, Neuman, 2021).

Third, discursive institutionalism suggests that the most immediate and observable post-2022 shift should appear in language itself. The EU is expected to speak more frequently of resilience, strategic interests, geopolitical competition, connectivity, investment and security, while continuing to preserve elements of its earlier normative self-description (Hyde-Price, 2006; Skolimowska, 2025). The key expectation is therefore not a replacement of norms by interests, but a rebalancing between the two.

Taken together, these expectations lead to the broader argument of the thesis: in the aftermath of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the most visible change in EU-Africa relation is likely to be a discursive shift toward a more strategic and geopolitical framing, while institutional change remains more slower, more selective, and constrained by prior path dependencies.

2. Methodology

The aim of this chapter is to explain the methodological choices that guide the empirical analysis of the thesis. It sets out the research design, the selected methods, the data sources, the timeframe and the logic of analysis used to examine change in EU-Africa discourse between 2020 and 2025. More specifically, the chapter explains why the thesis uses a qualitative case study design and text-based discourse analysis, how the selected speeches and declarations were chosen, and how normative, interest-based and hybrid language are identified in the empirical material. The chapter also clarifies the unit of analysis and the interpretative procedure used to distinguish between dominant and secondary discursive patterns. Finally, it discusses the role of descriptive quantitative indicators, which are used not as a separate explanatory method, but as contextual evidence for comparing rhetorical change with material developments in EU external action.

2.1 Research design

This thesis uses a primarily qualitative research design, combining qualitative discourse analysis with a limited descriptive quantitative component. The qualitative part analyses EU speeches and summit declarations in order to identify changes in the framing of EU-Africa relations. The quantitative component is used to contextualise the discourse analysis by comparing selected financial and policy indicators before and after 2022. The quantitative material is as descriptive evidence for assessing whether rhetorical change is matched by observable changes in EU external action.

The core question of this thesis is to show how the EU speaks about Africa before, during and after the beginning of the Russia full scale invasion and if one can see a shift in the partnership discourse between the normative and more pragmatic and geopolitical language. Specifically the speeches by the president of the Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and what is emphasized in the declarations of the EU-AU Summits.

This work will use a qualitative research method encompassing case study and a text based discourse analyses. This approach helps to research not only what is talked about it within the speeches, but in which rhetorical constructs the messages are conveyed and how those messages create an understanding of the EUs role in Africa.

The qualitative method enables to analyze texts in a continual way, by preserving textual nuance and the distinct political feature in a given period (Laherand, 2010). Qualitative research as such is directed towards understand meanings and interpretations and enables to create a holistic and detailed view from it (Õunapuu, 2014). In the context of this research the official language of the EU is researched and how the partnership with Africa is interpreted in any given period in time.

A combination of qualitative methods which combines case-study and discourse analysis will be used. The case being EUs strategic partnership with Africa. It will be addressed as a case where three periods can be observed: before the juncture, the juncture itself and after the period after the juncture. The case study method is justified because the question in principle is a „how“ and „why“ type: how did EUs Africa self description change after 24.02.2022 and why it happened firstly on rhetorical and not on a institutional level (Yin, 2018; Gerring, 2017).

The analysis does not assume that norms and interests are always clearly separable in practice - EU discourse often combines the two. For example, the “rules-based international order” is a normative concept because it refers to law, rules and multilateral cooperation. At the same time, it is also interest-based because the EU has a strategic interest in preserving an international order where rules constrain the use of force. Similarly, the concept of “equal partnership” expresses a normative commitment to mutual respect, but it can also serve a strategic purpose if the EU uses it to strengthen its credibility as a partner in Africa.

In order to make the discourse analysis more transparent, the analysis followed a step-by-step interpretative coding logic. Each relevant text was first read in full in order to identify the broader context and communicative purpose of the speech or declaration. In the second reading, passages referring to Africa, EU-Africa relations, partnership, international order, security, investment, development, resilience or geopolitical competition were marked as relevant analytical units. An analytical unit could be a sentence, a short paragraph or a closely connected formulation, depending on where the relevant meaning was expressed.

Each analytical unit was then assessed according to whether it primarily expressed normative language, interest-based language or a combination of both. Normative language was identified when the text referred to values, principles or identity-related commitments, such as democracy, human rights, equality, solidarity, multilateralism, international law, the rule of law or partnership among equals. Interest-based language was identified when the text referred to strategic, material, geopolitical or security-related objectives, such as resilience, security, investment, connectivity, supply chains, competition, strategic autonomy, migration or influence. When both logics appeared in the same analytical unit, the passage was coded as hybrid rather than forced into only one category.

For example, in Josep Borrell's 2020 Africa Week speech, the sentence that "Africans and Europeans have a massive shared interest in protecting the rules-based international order" was treated as a hybrid formulation. The reference to the "rules-based international order" belongs to the EU's normative vocabulary, because it refers to rules, law, multilateral cooperation and opposition to power politics. However, the phrase "shared interest" gives the same idea a strategic meaning: the rules-based order is not defended only because it is normatively desirable, but also because both Europe and Africa benefit from an international system in which stronger actors cannot simply impose their will on weaker ones. The sentence was therefore not coded as purely normative or purely interest-based, but as an example of overlap between the two categories.

The same logic was applied to less clear cases. If a concept could plausibly be interpreted in both ways, the surrounding context was used to determine its dominant function. For instance, "partnership" was not automatically treated as normative. If partnership was linked to equality, mutual respect, solidarity or shared values, it was interpreted as primarily normative. If it was linked to investment, geopolitical competition, security, connectivity or strategic presence, it was interpreted as more interest-based or hybrid. Similarly, "security" was not automatically treated as interest-based in every case, because it could refer to human security, food security or peacebuilding as well as to geopolitical or military concerns. In such cases, the analysis focused on how the term functioned within the specific passage.

This procedure also helped to avoid treating norms and interests as mutually exclusive categories. Since the thesis assumes that EU discourse often combines normative self-description with strategic objectives, the purpose of the analysis was not to count every word mechanically or to classify each passage into a rigid binary. Rather, the aim was to identify which logic was dominant, how the two logics were combined, and whether the balance

between them changed after 24.02.2022. This made it possible to analyse not only explicit references to values or interests, but also broader shifts in framing, emphasis and tone

2.2 Research methods

Given the aim of this Master's thesis and the selected methodological approach, the data analysis relies on a qualitative text-based discourse analysis. The purpose of the analysis is to compare how the President of the European Commission, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and AU-EU summit declarations speak about Africa, and how this language evolves over time.

During the analysis, the selected speeches and declarations are read repeatedly and examined through three main guiding questions. First, how Africa and the partnership with Africa are framed. Second, which values, objectives, and priorities are emphasized in the texts. Third, whether and how the balance between these emphases changes before the war and after the outbreak of the war.

The primary unit of analysis in this thesis is not the whole speech or declaration as a single undifferentiated text, but a thematically coherent passage within a text. In most cases, the analytical unit is one sentence or a short group of closely connected sentences in which the EU's relationship with Africa, the meaning of partnership, or the EU's role in the international order is explicitly discussed. A single sentence is treated as an analytical unit when it contains a complete political claim, for example a statement about shared values, strategic interests, investment, security or multilateralism. However, when the meaning of a sentence depends on the surrounding formulation, the analytical unit is expanded to include the relevant neighbouring sentence or paragraph.

This flexible definition of the analytical unit is necessary because the thesis uses discourse analysis rather than formal content analysis. The aim is not to count isolated words or code every sentence mechanically, but to interpret how concepts are used in context. For example, the term "partnership" cannot be classified in the same way in every text. In one passage, it may refer mainly to equality, solidarity and mutual respect. In another, it may be connected to

investment, security, geopolitical competition or strategic presence. The analytical unit is therefore defined by meaning rather than by a fixed grammatical length.

The full speech or declaration is still relevant as a contextual unit. Each text is first read as a whole in order to identify its overall communicative purpose, tone and dominant framing. After this, specific passages are selected for closer analysis. This means that the analysis moves between two levels: the whole text provides the broader discursive context, while individual sentences or short passages provide the concrete evidence for identifying normative, interest-based or hybrid formulations.

The thesis does not develop a formal coding scheme in the sense of qualitative content analysis. Instead, it uses analytical categories derived from the theoretical framework. These categories are normative language, interest-based language and hybrid language. Normative language refers to passages that emphasise values, principles and identity-related commitments, such as democracy, human rights, equality, solidarity, multilateralism, international law, the rule of law and partnership among equals. Interest-based language refers to passages that emphasise strategic, material, geopolitical or security-related objectives, such as resilience, security, investment, connectivity, supply chains, competition, strategic autonomy, migration and influence. Hybrid language refers to passages where these two logics appear together in the same analytical unit.

In practical terms, the analysis proceeded by identifying recurring discursive themes rather than by producing a numerical coding table. These themes were then grouped into broader discursive patterns. Normative discourse includes themes such as equal partnership, shared values, multilateralism, sustainable development, human rights and international law. Interest-based discourse includes themes such as security, resilience, investment, connectivity, strategic autonomy, geopolitical competition and economic influence. Hybrid discourse includes formulations where the EU presents values and interests as mutually reinforcing, for example when the rules-based international order is defended both as a normative principle and as a shared strategic interest.

The distinction between primary and secondary discourses was made on the basis of emphasis, repetition and argumentative function. A discourse was treated as primary when it structured the main argument of a speech or declaration, appeared repeatedly, and was used to justify the EU's overall approach to Africa. A discourse was treated as secondary when it appeared only briefly, supported another argument, or was limited to a specific policy area. For example, if a

speech repeatedly framed Africa as a partner in defending multilateralism, equality and shared values, the dominant discourse was interpreted as normative. If the same speech also referred to investment or security only in a limited section, those elements were treated as secondary interest-based themes. Conversely, if a text repeatedly connected Africa to resilience, connectivity, critical raw materials, security and geopolitical competition, while still using the language of partnership and values, the dominant discourse was interpreted as hybrid or increasingly interest-based.

This approach makes it possible to analyse change without forcing the material into a rigid binary. The purpose is not to determine whether a text is entirely normative or entirely interest-based. Rather, the analysis asks which discourse is dominant, which themes appear as supporting elements, and whether the relationship between them changes over time. This is especially important for EU-Africa discourse, where normative and strategic language often appear together. The method therefore allows the thesis to trace a possible post-2022 rebalancing: not the disappearance of normative language, but the increasing embedding of normative partnership language within a more strategic and geopolitical frame.

The discourse analysis pays particular attention to whether the texts are dominated by normative or interest-based language. Normative language is understood here as references to democracy, human rights, multilateralism, the rule of law, solidarity, and partnership among equals. In contrast, interest-based language refers to security, geopolitics, investments, strategic interests, connectivity, resilience, and competition. The aim of the analysis is not to demonstrate that one type of language fully replaces the other, but rather to examine whether the balance between the two shifts.

This thesis proceeds from the assumption that post-war change may not manifest as a sharp rupture. Therefore, the texts are compared not only based on what is explicitly stated, but also on the broader framing and tone that emerges from them. For example, it is important to assess whether partnership is framed primarily in terms of value-based cooperation or increasingly in the context of strategic needs, investments, and global competition. It is also relevant to examine whether normative language persists while new geopolitical emphases emerge alongside it.

The analysis also takes into account the different functions of the texts. Speeches by the President of the European Commission are typically more political and vision-driven, and may signal emerging priorities. Speeches by the High Representative may be more closely linked to foreign policy assessments and descriptions of the security environment. Summit declarations are more formal and consensus-based, and therefore reflect a collectively agreed institutional position. Examining these three types of texts together allows for an assessment of whether changes occur uniformly across levels or are more pronounced in certain types of texts.

A key strength of qualitative discourse analysis lies in its ability to capture nuances that more formalized approaches might overlook. For example, the same concept may serve different functions across texts. The term “partnership” may refer to shared values in one speech, while in another it may be linked to investments and strategic presence. Similarly, the concept of “security” may be narrowly military in one context, while in another it may relate to food security, energy security, or institutional resilience. Such shifts in meaning are best captured through close reading of texts.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that qualitative discourse analysis is interpretative, and its results depend in part on the researcher’s reading. It is therefore important that the analysis remains systematic and transparent. In this thesis, this is ensured through clearly defined research questions, a narrowly delimited sample, and the comparison of texts using consistent analytical categories. This approach helps to reduce arbitrariness and makes the conclusions more robust.

In sum, the chosen method of data analysis enables the thesis to answer its main research question: whether the European Union’s discourse on partnership with Africa has changed following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and if so, in what way. Since the study focuses on comparing formulations, emphases, and narratives, qualitative text-based discourse analysis is the most appropriate method for achieving this objective.

2.3 Data

This section compares the pre-war baseline period of 2020-2021 with the post-invasion period of 2022-2025. It focuses on quantifiable indicators rather than speeches: European Commission development assistance, OECD official development assistance data, Global Gateway investment mobilisation, European Peace Facility security support, EIB Global investment, the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, and EU-Africa trade and investment figures. The purpose is not to measure every possible EU financial flow to Africa, but to assess whether the most

important available datasets show a clear post-2022 shift in EU contributions to the African continent.

The available data do not show a simple or dramatic post-2022 financial rupture in favour of Africa. Africa remained a major recipient of EU external action, and in some areas, especially Global Gateway and investment mobilisation, Africa became very prominent in the EU's strategic presentation of its external engagement. However, many of the relevant instruments either predated the war or were embedded in multiannual frameworks that had already been decided before February 2022. This means that the most visible post-2022 change was not a sudden increase in all forms of EU funding to Africa, but a strategic reframing and consolidation of existing instruments around investment, connectivity, resilience and geoeconomic partnership. This finding fits the theoretical expectation of the thesis: discourse can change faster than institutions, while budgetary and policy instruments are constrained by path dependency and programming cycles.

The first and most direct dataset is European Commission development assistance to Africa. This is important because development cooperation has historically been one of the most important material dimensions of EU-Africa relations. If post-2022 rhetoric about Africa as a strategic partner had been matched by a major material shift, one might expect a clear rise in development commitments or disbursements to Africa after 2022. However, the available data suggest continuity rather than rupture. In 2024, European Commission development assistance commitments to Africa amounted to EUR 6.041 billion, while disbursements amounted to EUR 5.220 billion (European Commission and High Representative, 2025).

These 2024 figures are substantial, but they do not by themselves prove a post-war increase. In the pre-war baseline, Commission commitments to Africa were uneven: 2020 was relatively low, while 2021 was much higher. Based on the Commission's annual external action reporting, commitments to Africa were around EUR 1.920 billion in 2020 and around EUR 6.321 billion in 2021, producing a two-year average of around EUR 4.121 billion. Disbursements were around EUR 6.477 billion in 2020 and around EUR 4.997 billion in 2021, producing a two-year average of around EUR 5.737 billion (European Commission, 2021; European Commission, 2022). This means that the 2024 commitment level of EUR 6.041 billion was high, but broadly comparable to the 2021 pre-war level. The 2024 disbursement level of EUR 5.220 billion was below the 2020 figure and close to the 2020-2021 average. Therefore, the Commission

development assistance data do not support the claim that the EU dramatically increased traditional development assistance to Africa after 2022.

This is an important finding for the thesis. The EU's rhetoric after 2022 increasingly presented Africa as a strategic partner in a more competitive international environment. However, the direct development assistance figures suggest that Africa remained materially important rather than becoming newly prioritised in an unprecedented way. The level of aid was significant, but not clearly transformed. This supports the argument that the post-2022 change is stronger at the level of framing than at the level of traditional development finance. The development assistance data therefore fit a historical-institutionalist explanation: the basic external financing structure did not suddenly change after February 2022 because the relevant instruments and programming cycles were already in place.

This point becomes even clearer when Africa is compared with Europe after the invasion. The most visible post-2022 shift in EU external action was not toward Africa, but toward Europe, especially Ukraine. In 2024, European Commission development assistance commitments to Europe amounted to EUR 9.346 billion, while disbursements to Europe amounted to EUR 7.677 billion (European Commission and High Representative, 2025). This was considerably higher than Africa's EUR 6.041 billion in commitments and EUR 5.220 billion in disbursements for the same year (European Commission and High Representative, 2025). In other words, Africa remained a major recipient, but Europe became the larger destination in the post-invasion context.

The OECD data confirm this relative shift. In 2022, EU institutions allocated USD 14.2 billion to ODA-eligible countries in Europe, of which 74.9% went to Ukraine. In the same year, they allocated USD 6.5 billion to Africa. Europe therefore accounted for 46.6% of EU institutions' gross bilateral ODA, while Africa accounted for 21.4% (OECD, 2024). In 2023, the difference became even stronger: EU institutions allocated USD 24.4 billion to ODA-eligible countries in Europe, of which 84.4% went to Ukraine, while USD 6.3 billion went to Africa. Europe accounted for 60.8% of gross bilateral ODA, while Africa accounted for 15.8% (OECD, 2025).

Africa remained important in absolute terms, but its relative position in EU institutions' bilateral ODA decreased after the invasion because Ukraine and Europe absorbed the most visible post-2022 increase. In 2022, Africa received USD 6.5 billion from EU institutions; in 2023, it received USD 6.3 billion. These figures show continuity, not collapse. However, Europe's increase from USD 14.2 billion in 2022 to USD 24.4 billion in 2023 shows where the largest

post-war financial shift occurred (OECD, 2024; OECD, 2025). The result is therefore not that Africa disappeared from EU external action, but that Ukraine became the dominant new financial priority.

This matters for interpreting EU rhetoric. After 2022, EU leaders increasingly spoke about the need to engage Africa as a strategic partner, including in relation to geopolitical competition, multilateralism, investment and resilience. Yet the largest measurable shift in EU institutions' bilateral ODA was directed toward Europe, above all Ukraine. This does not make the Africa rhetoric meaningless, but it does suggest that the material reorientation caused by the war was first and foremost European. Africa remained significant, but it did not become the main beneficiary of the post-2022 expansion in EU external action.

The second major dataset is Global Gateway. Global Gateway was launched in 2021 as the EU's strategy to support smart, clean and secure links in digital, energy and transport sectors, as well as health, education and research systems. It aims to mobilise up to EUR 300 billion globally by 2027 (European Commission, 2026). The Africa-Europe Investment Package is presented as one of the first major milestones of Global Gateway, with approximately EUR 150 billion in investments dedicated to strengthening partnerships with Africa (European Commission, 2026).

The Africa-Europe Investment Package is therefore central for comparing 2020-2021 with 2022-2025. In the pre-war period, Global Gateway did not exist for most of the period. It was launched only in December 2021. In the post-invasion period, however, it became one of the main ways through which the EU presented its engagement with Africa. The Commission's Africa-Europe Investment Package page states that the EUR 150 billion package is implemented through Team Europe initiatives, involving the EU, Member States and European financial institutions, and that financing includes bilateral aid, grants and loans (European Commission, 2026).

This demonstrates a genuine difference between the two periods. In 2020-2021, EU-Africa financial engagement was still framed primarily through development cooperation, the European Development Fund legacy, the beginning of NDICI-Global Europe, EIB financing and migration-related instruments such as the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. In 2022-2025, Global Gateway became the main umbrella under which the EU organised and communicated its investment-oriented Africa policy. This means that even where the money was not entirely new, the political and strategic framing changed significantly. Africa was no

longer presented only as a recipient of development cooperation, but as a partner in connectivity, green transition, digital transformation, transport corridors, health manufacturing and strategic investment.

However, the EUR 150 billion figure needs careful interpretation. It should not be treated as equivalent to direct EU budget spending. It refers to investment mobilisation, including EU funds, Member State contributions, loans, guarantees, development finance institutions and private-sector leverage. This distinction is important because Global Gateway is partly a financing strategy and partly a political brand. Its purpose is not only to spend EU budget money, but to mobilise and coordinate broader investment. Therefore, Global Gateway shows a clear post-2022 strategic investment agenda, but it does not prove that the EU simply added EUR 150 billion in new aid to Africa.

The 2025 annual external action report provides more concrete evidence of Global Gateway implementation. It states that EUR 179 billion had been mobilised globally between 2021 and 2023, out of the planned EUR 300 billion by 2027. Of this, EUR 50 billion was supported by the EU, while EUR 129 billion was mobilised by Member States, the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (European Commission and High Representative, 2025). It also states that more than 250 Global Gateway flagship projects had been deployed globally and that 45% of these projects were located in Sub-Saharan Africa (European Commission and High Representative, 2025). This is one of the strongest quantitative indicators that Africa became central to the EU's strategic investment offer after 2022.

The Council's EU-Africa trade and investment factsheet gives a similar picture. It states that Africa is at the heart of Global Gateway and that 138 of 264 Global Gateway flagship projects are located in Africa (Council of the European Union, 2025). A large share of the flagship project portfolio is Africa-focused. Therefore, unlike traditional development assistance, where the data show continuity, Global Gateway shows a clearer post-2022 difference: the EU increasingly organised its Africa engagement around an investment and connectivity logic.

The comparison between the two periods is therefore mixed. In 2020-2021, Global Gateway was not yet an operational framework for Africa, except at the very end of 2021. In 2022-2025, it became the dominant frame for EU-Africa investment cooperation. This is a real difference. However, because Global Gateway was launched before the full-scale invasion, it cannot be described as a direct product of the war. The better interpretation is that Global Gateway was a

pre-war instrument whose geopolitical importance intensified after the war. The invasion did not create the instrument, but it changed the political context in which the instrument was used. In the post-2022 environment, Global Gateway became a way for the EU to demonstrate that it could offer concrete alternatives to other global actors, especially in infrastructure, digital connectivity, energy and critical supply chains.

The third dataset concerns peace and security, especially the European Peace Facility. This instrument is relevant because the discourse analysis showed that the EU increasingly linked Africa with peace, security, stability and resilience after 2022. The question is whether this language was matched by measurable security support. In April 2022, the Council adopted a EUR 600 million assistance measure under the European Peace Facility to support the African Union for the period 2022-2024. The Council explicitly described this as a continuation of the EU's long-standing support to African-led peace support operations (Council of the European Union, 2022).

The EUR 600 million measure shows that EU security support to Africa continued after the invasion. It also shows that the EU's Africa-related security engagement was not only rhetorical. The European Peace Facility provided a concrete financial instrument through which the EU could support African-led peace operations. However, the wording of the Council decision is analytically important: it described the measure as continuing a well-established pattern of long-term support. This means that the measure is not best interpreted as a completely new post-2022 turn toward Africa. Rather, it is evidence of continuity within a security relationship that predated the war.

The broader European Peace Facility dataset also shows that the largest post-2022 expansion of the instrument was driven by Ukraine. The European Peace Facility was created in 2021 with an original ceiling of around EUR 5 billion in 2018 prices for 2021-2027. After Russia's full-scale invasion, the Council increased the European Peace Facility financial ceiling to nearly EUR 7.98 billion in March 2023, and later agreed an additional top-up of EUR 3.5 billion (Council of the European Union, 2023). This means that although Africa received a substantial EUR 600 million African Union support package, the major post-2022 increase in European Peace Facility resources was driven mainly by the war in Ukraine.

This gives another nuanced result. Compared with 2020-2021, the 2022-2025 period shows continued and visible EU security support to Africa under the European Peace Facility. The EUR 600 million African Union package is substantial. However, if the question is whether the

post-war expansion of EU security spending primarily benefited Africa, the answer is no. The main security-financial rupture after 2022 was Ukraine-related. Africa remained a significant security partner, but it did not become the main destination of the EU's new security spending. This supports the wider argument that post-2022 EU-Africa policy changed more in framing and strategic emphasis than in a dramatic reallocation of resources toward Africa.

The fourth dataset is EIB Global and investment finance. This is important because the post-2022 rhetoric increasingly presented Africa through investment, private-sector mobilisation, infrastructure, green transition and connectivity. EIB data help test whether this investment turn is visible materially. In the pre-war period, the EIB already had a major role in Africa. In 2020, the European Investment Bank provided EUR 5 billion for new private and public investment across Africa, which it described as the largest annual EIB engagement in 55 years of operations on the continent (European Investment Bank, 2021).

This 2020 figure is especially important because it prevents an overly simple interpretation of the post-2022 investment turn. If 2020 already saw EUR 5 billion in EIB engagement across Africa, then investment-oriented EU action in Africa did not begin after the Ukraine war. The 2020 financing supported green energy, clean water, private-sector growth, COVID-19 resilience, climate action and investment in fragile states (European Investment Bank, 2021). The EIB also stated that this financing backed more than EUR 12 billion of new investment in agriculture, off-grid renewable energy, rural electrification, affordable housing, communications, climate resilience, healthcare and private-sector access to finance (European Investment Bank, 2021).

In the post-invasion period, EIB Global continued to invest heavily in Africa, but the annual level does not clearly exceed the 2020 peak. In 2025, EIB Global invested EUR 3.1 billion in Africa, representing roughly one third of its global activity that year. The main sectors included small and medium-sized enterprises, venture capital funds, sustainable energy, transport infrastructure, water and health. The EIB also stated that 46% of its Africa activity in 2025 was dedicated to climate action and environmental sustainability (European Investment Bank, 2026).

The comparison is therefore revealing. In 2020-2021, EIB Africa engagement was already very high, partly because of COVID-19 response and green investment. In 2022-2025, EIB investment remained significant, but the available 2025 figure of EUR 3.1 billion is lower than the 2020 record of EUR 5 billion. This means that EIB data do not show a simple post-2022

increase in investment volume. What changes is the broader political frame. In the post-2022 period, EIB Global activity in Africa is increasingly linked to Global Gateway, strategic investment, climate action, infrastructure, resilience and private-sector mobilisation. Therefore, EIB data support the argument of strategic reframing rather than material rupture.

This is important for the thesis because it shows that “deeds” and “rhetoric” do not move in a simple linear way. The EU did not start investing in Africa only after it began speaking more geopolitically. On the contrary, large-scale European investment finance in Africa existed before the war. What changed after 2022 was the political meaning of such investment. Infrastructure, green energy, digital connectivity and private-sector financing became more clearly embedded in a geopolitical narrative about European influence, economic security and resilient partnerships. Therefore, the post-2022 difference is not necessarily higher EIB volume, but stronger integration of EIB activity into the EU’s geoeconomic foreign policy.

The fifth dataset is the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. This instrument is useful because it shows that EU-Africa relations had a strong interest-based component long before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa was created in 2015 to address root causes of instability, forced displacement and irregular migration. Its resources amounted to EUR 5.0 billion, including EUR 4.4 billion from the European Development Fund and other EU financial instruments, while Member States and other donors contributed around EUR 623 million (European Commission, 2025).

The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa comparison is very clear. In 2020-2021, the instrument was still part of the EU’s Africa-related policy landscape and reflected a strong migration-stability nexus. In 2022-2025, however, it was winding down rather than expanding. The Commission’s EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa page notes that since 1 January 2022, the fund has not financed any new programmes, while ongoing programmes continue implementation until 31 December 2025 (European Commission, 2025). This means that one of the EU’s major interest-based instruments toward Africa was not strengthened after the Ukraine invasion. Instead, it was already closed to new programming at the start of the post-invasion period.

This is analytically important for two reasons. First, it shows that interest-based EU engagement with Africa did not begin in 2022. Migration management, instability, displacement and border-related concerns were already deeply embedded in EU-Africa financial instruments before the war. Second, it shows that not all strategic instruments expanded after 2022. The EU

Emergency Trust Fund for Africa was a major instrument, but it was institutionally tied to an earlier period and was being phased out. This supports the historical-institutionalist argument that instruments follow their own programming cycles and do not automatically expand or contract in line with new rhetoric.

The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa also complicates the normative dimension of EU-Africa relations. It was often framed in terms of addressing root causes and supporting stability, but it also served clear European interests related to irregular migration and border management. This reinforces the thesis's broader finding that EU-Africa relations were already hybrid before 2022. The post-2022 period did not introduce interests into an otherwise normative relationship. Instead, it intensified and rearticulated strategic language that had already been present in material instruments.

The sixth dataset concerns trade and foreign direct investment. These figures do not measure EU foreign policy contributions in the narrow sense, but they show the broader material structure of EU-Africa relations. This matters because the EU's post-2022 rhetoric increasingly framed Africa as a strategic economic partner, not merely a development recipient. In 2024, EU-Africa trade in goods was worth almost EUR 355 billion. EU imports from Africa amounted to EUR 189.5 billion, while EU exports to Africa amounted to EUR 165.2 billion (Council of the European Union, 2025).

The same Council source states that EU-Africa services trade was worth more than EUR 110 billion in 2024, with EUR 55.4 billion in EU exports to Africa and slightly more than EUR 55 billion in EU imports from Africa (Council of the European Union, 2025). It also states that European investors hold the largest foreign direct investment stock in Africa. In 2024, EU company investments in Africa were worth more than EUR 250 billion, while African investments in the EU were worth more than EUR 74.6 billion (Council of the European Union, 2025).

These figures are useful for the thesis because they show that EU-Africa relations are materially much larger than aid. Development assistance is only one part of the relationship. Trade, foreign direct investment, infrastructure, lending and investment mobilisation are also central. However, these figures do not by themselves prove a post-2022 change because a proper comparison would require extracting equivalent annual 2020 and 2021 trade and foreign direct investment values from Eurostat or UNCTAD. Therefore, the trade and foreign direct

investment data should be used mainly to show the structural economic importance of Africa, not as direct evidence of a post-war shift.

Even with that limitation, the 2024 trade and foreign direct investment figures help interpret the EU's strategic rhetoric. When the EU speaks about Africa through investment, connectivity, critical raw materials and supply chains, it is doing so in the context of a relationship that already includes hundreds of billions of euros in trade and investment stock. The asymmetry is also important: EU foreign direct investment stock in Africa is more than three times larger than African foreign direct investment stock in the EU. This supports the argument that the partnership is materially unequal, even when it is rhetorically framed as a partnership of equals. Therefore, the “deeds versus rhetoric” question is not only about how much money the EU provides, but also about the structure of economic power within the relationship.

Taken together, the datasets show a consistent pattern. In traditional development assistance, there is no clear post-2022 rupture in favour of Africa. Commission development assistance to Africa remained significant in 2024, but it was not dramatically higher than the 2020-2021 baseline. OECD data show that Africa remained a major recipient of EU institutions' official development assistance, but Europe and Ukraine became much more prominent after the invasion. In Global Gateway, there is a clearer post-2022 strategic shift: Africa became central to the EU's investment mobilisation narrative, with the EUR 150 billion Africa-Europe Investment Package and a large share of flagship projects located on the continent. In security, the EUR 600 million European Peace Facility support measure for the African Union shows continued material engagement, but the main European Peace Facility expansion was Ukraine-driven. In EIB finance, Africa remained important, but the 2025 figure does not exceed the 2020 record. In migration and stability, the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa shows that interest-based instruments predated 2022 and were winding down rather than expanding. In trade and foreign direct investment, the 2024 figures show structural economic importance, but not enough by themselves to prove post-war change.

The strongest conclusion is therefore that the EU's material contributions to Africa between 2022 and 2025 show continuity, selective consolidation and strategic reframing rather than a wholesale transformation. Africa remained a major recipient of EU development assistance, investment projects, security support and EIB financing. However, the largest post-2022 reallocation in EU external action was toward Europe and Ukraine, not Africa. This is visible both in OECD official development assistance data and in Commission external action figures.

Therefore, if the EU's rhetoric toward Africa became more strategic after the invasion, the material evidence only partly follows that rhetorical shift.

This does not mean that EU rhetoric was empty. Global Gateway provides the strongest evidence that rhetoric and deeds moved in the same direction. The EUR 150 billion Africa-Europe Investment Package, the 45% share of flagship projects in Sub-Saharan Africa, and the 138 of 264 Global Gateway flagships located in Africa show that Africa occupies a central position in the EU's strategic investment agenda (European Commission, 2026; European Commission and High Representative, 2025; Council of the European Union, 2025). Yet even here, the difference is not straightforward, because Global Gateway was launched before the invasion and relies heavily on mobilisation rather than direct EU expenditure. Therefore, Global Gateway is best understood as a hybrid instrument: it is both a material investment framework and a discursive tool for presenting the EU as a strategic, values-based partner.

The comparison also strengthens the thesis's theoretical argument. Historical institutionalism helps explain why the EU's material instruments did not change as quickly as its rhetoric. NDICI-Global Europe was already part of the 2021-2027 financial framework. Global Gateway was launched in 2021. The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa was created in 2015 and stopped financing new programmes from January 2022. EIB engagement in Africa was already high before the war. European Peace Facility support to African peace operations continued a long-standing policy pattern. These examples show that EU-Africa material engagement is path-dependent and shaped by earlier institutional choices.

Discursive institutionalism helps explain the other side of the pattern. Even when instruments remained relatively stable, their meaning changed. After 2022, development cooperation, investment, infrastructure and security support were increasingly described through the language of resilience, strategic partnership, connectivity, economic security and geopolitical competition. The same types of projects that might earlier have been framed mainly as development or cooperation were now increasingly framed as part of a strategic European offer. This is why the post-2022 period can be described as a period of strategic consolidation rather than institutional rupture.

2.4 Time frame

The thesis covers the period from 2020 to 2025. This timeframe is selected in order to capture variation in EU discourse on Africa before and after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The period 2020-2021 serves as the pre-war baseline, while the period from 2022 to 2025 allows the thesis to examine how EU discourse developed during and after the geopolitical shock caused by the war.

The war is treated as a critical juncture, but not as a single moment that automatically transformed EU-Africa relations. Instead, the thesis approaches the post-2022 period as a process in which discursive change may have unfolded gradually. This makes it possible to distinguish between immediate rhetorical reactions to the invasion and more sustained changes in how the European Union frames its partnership with Africa.

This timeframe is also useful because it captures both continuity and change. It allows the thesis to assess whether pre-existing themes, such as partnership, multilateralism and development cooperation, remained dominant after 2022, or whether they became increasingly combined with more strategic language related to security, resilience, investment, connectivity and geopolitical competition. Thus, the 2020-2025 timeframe provides a suitable basis for comparing the pre-war discourse with the post-war evolution of EU-Africa strategic partnership language.

Sample

The analysis focuses on speeches by the President of the European Commission, speeches by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, speech by the president of the European Council and joint declarations from EU-AU summits. This choice is methodologically justified, as these texts represent the EU's official and high-level political discourse and therefore provide a suitable basis for analyzing how the EU frames Africa institutionally.

The scope of the sample is 2020-2025. This follows the central analytical logic of the thesis: comparing the period before the war, the critical juncture, and the period after. The pre-period covers 2020-2021 and serves as a baseline for EU discourse on Africa before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The critical juncture is defined as 24 February 2022 and the following year, which can be understood as the immediate crisis response phase. The post-period covers

2023-2025 and allows for assessing whether the initial reaction developed into a more stable and consolidated discursive shift.

Speeches by the President of the European Commission are included because the Commission President plays a key role in shaping the EU's broader political self-description. These speeches often signal how the EU seeks to position itself globally. This is particularly relevant in the context of Ursula von der Leyen, whose Commission has frequently been described as a "geopolitical Commission". This makes her speeches especially useful for examining whether the EU's Africa-related discourse has shifted from a predominantly normative framing towards a more geopolitical one.

Speeches by the High Representative are included for a similar reason. This position is responsible for representing and articulating the EU's foreign and security policy and therefore reflects the Union's external priorities in a particularly direct way. In these speeches, themes such as international order, security, multilateralism, partnership, and strategic autonomy are often made explicit. As such, they provide a useful comparison point to the Commission President's more overarching political framing.

While the Commission President often articulates the EU's broader policy agenda and the High Representative speaks from the perspective of foreign and security policy, the President of the European Council reflects the priorities agreed among member-state leaders. This makes these speeches particularly useful for identifying how EU-Africa relations are framed at the intergovernmental level. In the context of this thesis, they help assess whether the language of strategic partnership, geopolitical competition, multilateralism, security and mutual interest appears not only in Commission or EEAS discourse, but also in the discourse of the EU's highest political leadership.

The third component of the sample consists of EU-AU summit joint declarations. These are methodologically important because, unlike individual speeches, they represent formally agreed positions between the two sides. While speeches reflect more communicative and political framing, declarations capture institutional compromise and the official structure of the partnership. Including both allows for assessing whether rhetorical shifts are also reflected at a more institutional level.

The sample is constructed based on clear criteria. First, all texts must be officially published and publicly accessible. Second, they must be directly related to the EU, Africa, or EU-Africa

relations. Third, they must fall within the 2020-2025 timeframe. Fourth, they must be texts in which the EU explicitly defines its role, priorities, or understanding of the partnership.

The aim is not to cover all EU external action texts, but to focus on those that are most informative for the research question. This is consistent with qualitative research and case study logic, where the goal is to understand processes and meanings in depth rather than to produce statistically generalizable findings (Yin, 2018; Gerring, 2017).

Finally, limiting the sample to these three types of texts is a deliberate choice. It keeps the analysis focused and manageable, while ensuring that the material carries clear institutional weight. The final sample consists of 19 primary texts published between 2020 and 2025. These include six speeches or remarks by the High Representative/Vice-President, seven speeches or statements by the President of the European Commission, four speeches or remarks by the President of the European Council, and two AU-EU summit declarations.

3. Analysis: The Shift in EU-Africa Discourse 2020-2025

This chapter analyses the main discursive themes through which the European Union framed its strategic partnership with Africa between 2020 and 2025. Rather than presenting the empirical material speech by speech, the chapter is structured around the recurring discursive elements that appear across the selected speeches and declarations. This structure makes it possible to compare how the same themes are used before and after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and to assess whether the balance between normative and interest-based language changed over time.

The analysis identifies five main discursive elements. The first is normative partnership, which includes references to equality, solidarity, shared values, sustainable development, multilateralism, international law and the rules-based international order. The second is hybrid rules-based order discourse, where normative principles are presented simultaneously as strategic interests. The third is strategic investment and connectivity discourse, especially visible in references to Global Gateway, infrastructure, investment, digital transformation, energy, supply chains and critical raw materials. The fourth is security and resilience discourse, which links Africa to peace, stability, crisis response, geopolitical competition and European strategic interests. The fifth is the discourse of strategic silence and ambiguity, where certain tensions in the partnership, such as asymmetry, African agency or the limits of EU material action, remain only indirectly addressed.

These themes do not appear in isolation from one another. EU-Africa discourse often combines normative and strategic language within the same passage. For this reason, the chapter does not seek to classify each speech as either normative or interest-based. Instead, it examines which themes dominate, how they are combined, and whether their relative importance changes after 24 February 2022. This approach also allows for comparison across different types of texts. Speeches by EU leaders often reveal more explicit political framing, while AU-EU summit declarations tend to be more formal, negotiated and policy-oriented.

The chapter argues that the most important post-2022 change is not the disappearance of normative language, but its increasing embedding within a more strategic and geopolitical frame. Before the invasion, EU discourse already described Africa as a strategic partner and already connected multilateralism with shared interests. After 2022, however, this hybrid logic

became more explicit and more central. The language of partnership, equality and shared values remained present, but it was increasingly linked to resilience, investment, security, connectivity, supply chains and geopolitical competition.

3.1 Pre-war baseline: strategic partnership before 24 February 2022

In Josep Borrell's Africa Week speech of 14 October 2020 he argued that multilateralism was already in crisis and that the alternative to multilateralism was the "rule of the stronger" (Borrell, 2020).

/.../ „multilateralism is in crisis. We see a growing trend of countries playing power politics. Because the alternative to multilateralism is just the rule of the stronger. Power politics, "I am the strongest and I impose my rules". Africans and Europeans have a massive shared interest in protecting the rules-based international order.“ (Borrell, 2020)

This is a clear example of hybrid discourse. The defence of multilateralism belongs to the EU's normative vocabulary, because it reflects the Union's self-understanding as a supporter of international law, institutions and cooperation. However, Borrell does not present multilateralism only as a value, but also as a shared interest. A rules-based order also reflects European values because it protects both Europe and Africa from a world in which stronger actors impose their will on weaker ones.

The same hybrid logic appears in Borrell's discussion of the rules-based international order. He argues that the expression may not be politically attractive, but it remains necessary in order to avoid a drift into "might makes right" politics (Borrell, 2020). It shows that the concern with coercive power politics was already present before 2022.

Borrell's 2020 speech also directly describes the EU-Africa relationship as strategic. He argues that EU-Africa relations are one of the cases where the word "strategic" is justified, while also stressing that the older language of having "a strategy for Africa" should be replaced by the language of a common strategy between Africans and Europeans (Borrell, 2020). This formulation is analytically important because it combines two different logics. On the one hand, the relationship is described as strategic, which points to Europe's interests and to Africa's

geopolitical relevance. On the other hand, the shift from “for Africa” to “with Africa” reflects a normative attempt to frame the relationship as more equal and mutually defined.

/.../ the relationship between the EU and Africa – one of the rare cases where the word ‘strategic’, that we use a lot, is justified. The future of our partnership matters and it is something that we can really shape together through common choices. The time is over when we said ‘We have a strategy for Africa’, now we say ‘we share a common strategy, the African and the Europeans, all together’. Borrell

This pre-war discourse therefore already moves beyond a simple donor-recipient model. Africa is presented as a partner whose role matters for Europe’s future and for the international order.

Borrell’s 2021 remarks at the AU-EU Ministerial Meeting in Kigali further reinforce the argument that pre-war EU discourse already combined normative and interest-based reasoning. He presented the relationship as one in which Africa and Europe faced both shared challenges and shared opportunities, and called for the partnership to take an “unprecedented qualitative leap” (Borrell, 2021). At the same time, he underlined the sharp demographic and economic asymmetries across the Mediterranean and described this imbalance as “unsustainable”. This is significant because it moves beyond a purely normative vocabulary of solidarity or equality. While Borrell’s references to common ambition, partnership, and frank dialogue reflect a normative commitment to cooperation between partners, the emphasis on unsustainable imbalance introduces a strategic rationale: Europe has an interest in engaging Africa more seriously because the structural gap between the two continents has consequences for European stability, prosperity, and security.

The pre-war baseline therefore shows three important patterns. First, the rules-based order and multilateralism were already central to EU-Africa discourse before 2022. Second, Africa was already described as a strategic partner. Third, normative concepts such as equal partnership were already connected to European interests.

3.2 The 2022 critical juncture: reinterpretation rather than rupture

The year 2022 changed the context in which EU-Africa relations were discussed. Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine made the defence of the rules-based international order more urgent

and more concrete. However, the empirical material does not suggest a complete discursive rupture. Instead, 2022 appears as a moment of reinterpretation. Existing concepts such as partnership, multilateralism, rules-based order, security and investment remained central, but their meaning became more explicitly geopolitical.

The 6th EU-AU Summit in February 2022 took place only days before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The summit declaration, A Joint Vision for 2030, framed the AU-EU relationship as a renewed partnership built around solidarity, security, peace, sustainable development and prosperity (African Union and European Union, 2022). The declaration also stated that the partnership aimed to promote common priorities, shared values, international law and common public goods. It emphasises partnership, solidarity, shared values, human rights, gender equality, rule of law, climate protection and sustainable development (African Union and European Union, 2022).

At the same time, the document also contains clear interest-based and strategic elements. The partnership is not only about values, but also about security, peace, prosperity, economic development and investment. The summit announced an Africa-Europe Investment Package of 150 billion euros, intended to support diversified, inclusive, sustainable and resilient economies (African Union and European Union, 2022). This shows that the formal AU-EU discourse already linked normative partnership language with material and strategic instruments. Investment, infrastructure and resilience were not external to the partnership; they were central to how the partnership was defined. Across the six-page document, this balance (or imbalance) is also visible structurally: normative language is concentrated mainly in the opening section, while the remainder of the declaration is dominated by more concrete priorities related to investment, security, economic transformation, infrastructure, health, climate, mobility and resilience.

/.../ It aims to be the driving force in promoting our common priorities, shared values, international law, and preserving together our interests and common public goods. This includes inter alia: the security and prosperity of our citizens, the protection of human rights for all, gender equality and women's empowerment in all spheres of life, respect for democratic principles, good governance and the rule of law, actions to preserve the climate, environment and biodiversity, sustainable and inclusive economic growth, the fight against inequalities, support for children's rights, and the inclusion of women, young people and the most disadvantaged.“ ...

As the declaration was adopted before the full-scale invasion, it cannot be treated as a direct response to the war. However, it provides an important baseline for the critical juncture. It shows that even immediately before the invasion, the AU-EU partnership was already framed in hybrid terms: solidarity and shared values on one side, investment, security and resilience on the other.

However, this observation must be treated with some caution, as the format of the document differs from the speeches analysed in this chapter. Unlike a speech, the AU-EU Summit declaration is not primarily a rhetorical or persuasive text, but functions more like a political roadmap or workplan that sets out concrete areas of cooperation and specific initiatives. For this reason, it is structurally more likely to contain detailed references to investment, infrastructure, security, mobility, health, and resilience. Its comparatively interest-based character should therefore not be interpreted only as a discursive shift away from normative language, but also as a consequence of the document's practical purpose. In other words, the declaration has limited space for broad normative reflection because its main function is to operationalise the partnership through concrete commitments. Additionally it was written by African countries themselves, which show a reflection of their own rhetoric and interests as well.

Von der Leyen's 2022 State of the Union address is useful for understanding how the critical juncture affected the EU's broader external discourse. In that speech, she argued that Europe's future depended on its ability to engage beyond its core democratic partners (von der Leyen, 2022).

"...our future also depends on our ability to engage beyond the core of our democratic partners."

It already reflects a more pragmatic understanding of partnership. The EU continues to speak in the language of shared global challenges, but it also acknowledges that Europe cannot limit its engagement to a narrow group of like-minded democracies.

It suggests that after the invasion, partnership with Africa became part of a broader need to build coalitions in a more contested international environment. The EU still frames cooperation through normative concepts such as climate action and digitalisation, but the logic is increasingly strategic.

This supports the theoretical expectation derived from discursive institutionalism. The first visible changes after a crisis are often changes in language, emphasis and framing. Institutions

and formal partnership structures may remain relatively stable, but the meaning attached to existing concepts can shift. The 2022 critical juncture therefore appears primarily as a discursive turning point: it made existing strategic themes more urgent and more central, without eliminating the normative vocabulary of EU-Africa relations.

3.3 Post-2022: strategic language becomes more explicit

The post-2022 period allows the analysis to distinguish between immediate crisis response and more durable discursive change. If strategic language appeared only in 2022, it could be interpreted as a temporary reaction to the war. However, if similar themes remain visible in 2023, 2024 and 2025, then it becomes more plausible to speak of a broader rebalancing in EU-Africa discourse.

In Kaja Kallas's press remarks after the EU-AU Ministerial Meeting in Brussels of May 2025 she described the AU-EU partnership as one that had delivered concrete results over 25 years and argued that the presence of more than 70 delegations, including more than 50 ministers, demonstrated a shared commitment to deepen the partnership (Kallas, 2025a).

The speech quickly connects partnership to security and strategic capacity. Kallas stated that the EU actively supports peace and security on the African continent, referring to more than EUR 1 billion in European Peace Facility support and noting that more than half of EU Common Security and Defence Policy missions operate in Africa (Kallas, 2025a). This marks a clear interest-based dimension of the partnership. Africa is not only discussed in terms of development, values or cooperation, but also as a central space for EU security engagement.

The security language in Kallas's remarks is not separate from normative language. Support for peace operations, stability and predictable UN funding can be interpreted as part of a normative commitment to international peace and multilateralism. Yet these issues are also strategic. Stability in Africa matters for Europe's security environment, migration pressures, geopolitical influence and credibility as a global actor. The EU's peace and security engagement in Africa therefore again appears as hybrid: normatively justified, but strategically relevant.

Kallas's 2025 remarks also place investment at the centre of the partnership. She stated that nearly EUR 150 billion had been committed under the EU's Global Gateway strategy to

enhance infrastructure, digital connectivity and green transitions across Africa (Kallas, 2025a). This confirms that Global Gateway had become one of the central instruments through which the EU presented its Africa policy after 2022. The emphasis on infrastructure, digital connectivity and green transition shows that the partnership is increasingly framed through material and structural transformation.

Kallas's remarks also emphasise multilateral representation. She described the EU as a champion of Africa's presence in multilateral fora and referred to EU support for the African Union's membership in the G20 (Kallas, 2025a). This is a strongly normative claim because it concerns inclusion, representation and reform of global governance. However, it also has strategic implications. The EU and AU together represent a significant share of votes in the United Nations, and Kallas explicitly links this to shared global responsibility and reform (Kallas, 2025a). This means that African representation is not only a matter of fairness, but also a matter of building coalitions in multilateral institutions.

The same speech also points to new strategic priority areas, including critical raw materials, artificial intelligence, regional integration and mobility (Kallas, 2025a). Critical raw materials are connected to industrial strategy, green transition and supply chain security. Artificial intelligence is connected to technological competition and digital sovereignty. Regional integration is linked to markets and political stability. Mobility connects development, labour, migration and security.

The post-2022 consolidation is even more explicit in Kallas's Global Gateway Forum speech in October 2025. In that speech, she described the world as volatile, complex and unpredictable, marked by economic uncertainty, trade weaponisation, disruption and geopolitical rivalry (Kallas, 2025b) a geopolitical diagnosis. Global Gateway is presented as a response to this environment.

Kallas's Global Gateway speech is particularly significant because it makes the interest-based nature of the EU's offer more explicit than earlier discourse. She describes Global Gateway as an ambitious investment strategy and refers to projects such as digital connectivity, transport corridors and the first transcontinental rail link in Africa (Kallas, 2025b). She also links connectivity to access to critical raw materials and to support for local populations (Kallas, 2025b).

The speech also explicitly states that Global Gateway is not only an offer, but a choice of partners, values, principles and world vision (Kallas, 2025b). The EU's investment offer is framed as a value-based geopolitical choice. It is not only about financing infrastructure. It is about choosing a model of global order, partnership and development.

The same speech links Global Gateway projects to open transport corridors, supply chains, shock-resistant markets, energy security, access to critical materials, conflict prevention and mobility infrastructure (Kallas, 2025b). These are all strongly interest-based concepts. They relate to resilience, security, economic competitiveness and geopolitical positioning. The fact that they appear in a speech about global partnership shows that the EU's external discourse has moved toward a more openly geoeconomic vocabulary.

However, Kallas also describes every cable, school and renewable energy plant as a statement of who the EU is and what vision of the world it represents (Kallas, 2025b). This shows that even the most strategic parts of the discourse remain connected to identity and values. The EU does not present infrastructure only as infrastructure. It presents it as an expression of Europe's world vision. This supports the central argument of the thesis: post-2022 EU discourse does not replace norms with interests; it fuses them more explicitly.

The 2025 declaration reaffirms the Joint Vision for 2030 adopted at the 6th EU-AU Summit and welcomes progress on its implementation (African Union and European Union, 2025). The post-2022 partnership does not abandon the 2022 framework. Instead, it explicitly builds on it. This supports the historical institutionalist expectation that formal partnership structures remain stable and path-dependent.

The declaration also refers to strong institutional, trade, investment and people-to-people ties between the two continents (African Union and European Union, 2025). This again shows hybrid discourse. Institutional and people-to-people ties reflect the normative and cooperative dimension of the relationship. Trade and investment reflect its material and interest-based dimension. The declaration does not separate these categories. It presents them as mutually reinforcing elements of the same partnership.

The 2025 declaration also states that the partnership has shown resilience in the face of geopolitical challenges (African Union and European Union, 2025). This is a particularly important phrase for the thesis. Resilience is one of the central terms of post-2022 EU strategic language. Its appearance in a formal AU-EU summit declaration suggests that the geopolitical

context has entered the institutional language of the partnership. The partnership is no longer described only as a long-term development or diplomatic framework; it is also described as something that must withstand geopolitical shocks.

The declaration's discussion of the Global Gateway Africa-Europe Investment Package further confirms the centrality of investment discourse. It welcomes progress in areas of mutual interest and refers to the need to mobilise public and private funds, stimulate investment and improve the investment and business climate across the continents (African Union and European Union, 2025). This language is clearly more economic and strategic than traditional development discourse.

However, the declaration also frames these investments through inclusive and sustainable development (African Union and European Union, 2025). This means that even in the formal declaration, strategic investment language is combined with normative development language. The partnership is not framed as pure competition or raw interest. It is framed as mutual interest embedded in sustainable development.

The summit declaration shows that similar language has entered the formal framework of the AU-EU partnership. This does not mean that the partnership has undergone complete institutional transformation. But it does suggest that the strategic vocabulary is no longer confined to individual speeches. It has become part of the agreed language of the partnership.

A comparison across source types shows that discursive change is visible in different ways. Speeches by the HR/VP tend to make strategic and geopolitical themes most explicit. Borrell's 2020 speech foregrounded multilateralism, power politics and the rules-based order (Borrell, 2020). Kallas's 2025 remarks foregrounded peace and security, the European Peace Facility, CSDP missions, Global Gateway investment, critical raw materials, artificial intelligence and multilateral reform (Kallas, 2025a). Her Global Gateway Forum speech made the geoeconomic logic even more explicit by referring to trade weaponisation, geopolitical rivalry, supply chains, energy security and critical materials (Kallas, 2025b).

Speeches by the Commission President provide broader agenda-setting language. Von der Leyen's 2022 State of the Union address is particularly important because it links the need to engage beyond the EU's democratic core with Global Gateway and shared global challenges (von der Leyen, 2022). This shows how the EU's global strategy after the invasion combined values, interests and pragmatic partnership-building. The Commission President's discourse is

less narrowly security-focused than the HR/VP's, but it is strongly connected to the EU's global positioning.

AU-EU declarations are more cautious and institutional. The 2022 Joint Vision emphasised solidarity, security, peace, sustainable development, prosperity, shared values, international law and common public goods (African Union and European Union, 2022). The 2025 declaration reaffirmed the Joint Vision while describing the partnership as strategic, politically significant and resilient in the face of geopolitical challenges (African Union and European Union, 2025). These declarations show continuity, but also gradual incorporation of strategic language into formal partnership discourse.

The comparison supports the theoretical argument of the thesis. Discursive change appears first and most strongly in speeches, especially those by the HR/VP. Formal declarations show more continuity, but by 2025 they also include stronger strategic language. This pattern is consistent with the expectation that language changes faster than institutions, but that repeated discursive shifts can gradually become reflected in institutional texts.

The comparison also helps address the question of leadership change. Because the HR/VP changed from Borrell to Kallas, it would be risky to attribute all discursive change simply to the war. Some differences may reflect personal rhetorical style. However, the broader pattern is not limited to one speaker. Strategic language appears in Borrell's pre-war speeches, von der Leyen's 2022 address, Kallas's 2025 remarks, and the 2025 AU-EU Summit declaration. This makes it more plausible that the shift reflects a broader change in EU discourse rather than only a change in individual leadership.

3.4 Normative continuity

Despite the stronger strategic vocabulary after 2022, normative language remains central throughout the period. The EU continues to describe its relationship with Africa through partnership, equality, solidarity, multilateralism, international law and shared values. This continuity matters because it shows that the EU did not abandon its normative self-description after the war.

The 2025 declaration also preserves this continuity by reaffirming the Joint Vision for 2030 and linking the partnership to the AU's Agenda 2063, the EU's strategic priorities and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (African Union and European Union, 2025). This shows

that even in a more geopolitical period, the formal AU-EU partnership remains anchored in development, sustainability and multilateral commitments.

Kallas's 2025 remarks also preserve normative language. She describes the EU as a champion of Africa's presence in multilateral fora and refers to support for the AU's G20 membership (Kallas, 2025a). This is a normative claim about representation and inclusion in global governance. Similarly, the reaffirmation of the UN Charter in the EU-AU communiqué reflects the continued importance of international law and multilateralism (Kallas, 2025a).

However, the meaning of this vocabulary changed. Normative concepts became more closely connected to strategic concerns. The rules-based order became linked to the problem of aggression and power politics. Partnership became linked to geopolitical competition and the need for reliable allies. Investment became linked to supply chains, critical materials and resilience. Therefore, the key finding is not the disappearance of norms, but their strategic embedding.

3.5 Crisis layering: from COVID-19 to Ukraine

The empirical material also shows that the EU's Africa discourse is shaped by crisis layering. The period 2020-2025 was not defined only by the Ukraine war. It began with COVID-19, continued through economic disruption, climate pressures and geopolitical rivalry, and then moved into the full-scale war and its global consequences. This matters because the Ukraine war did not enter an otherwise stable discourse. It was added to an already crisis-oriented vocabulary.

Borrell's 2020 Africa Week speech was delivered in the context of COVID-19. The pandemic shaped the speech's focus on inequality, economic disruption and global interdependence (Borrell, 2020). Yet even in this pandemic context, Borrell moved quickly from health and inequality to multilateralism, power politics and the rules-based order. This suggests that COVID-19 already functioned as a crisis through which the EU interpreted global interdependence and strategic vulnerability.

This is important because it shows that the EU's strategic rethinking did not begin with Ukraine. The pandemic had already revealed weaknesses in global supply chains, health systems, economic resilience and multilateral cooperation. In EU-Africa discourse, this created space for a vocabulary of resilience and shared vulnerability.

Von der Leyen's 2022 State of the Union speech connects this pandemic legacy to the post-Ukraine context through the example of vaccine manufacturing in Rwanda and Senegal (von der Leyen, 2022). Vaccine manufacturing is a pandemic-era issue, but in the 2022 speech it becomes part of Global Gateway and global partnership. It represents a move from emergency response to structural investment.

The Ukraine war then adds another layer. It does not replace the pandemic frame; it combines with it. After 2022, resilience no longer refers only to health systems or economic recovery. It also refers to energy security, food security, supply chains, geopolitical dependencies and the defence of international law. The EU's Africa discourse therefore becomes shaped by overlapping crises. Each crisis reinforces the argument that Europe and Africa are interdependent and that partnership must be more strategic.

The post-2022 shift is not only about Ukraine. It is about how Ukraine accelerated and intensified a broader movement already visible after COVID-19: the EU's external partnerships became increasingly framed through resilience, strategic autonomy, supply chains and global order. Africa is central to this shift because it is connected to health, demography, energy, raw materials, climate, migration, security and multilateral voting power.

3.6 Strategic silences and what is not said

A further way to deepen the empirical analysis is to examine strategic silences. Official discourse is shaped not only by what is said, but also by what is avoided, softened or left ambiguous. In EU-Africa discourse, this is especially important because the partnership is sensitive. The EU wants to speak about values, security and strategic interests, but it must avoid appearing paternalistic, coercive or overly transactional.

One noticeable silence concerns asymmetry. The speeches repeatedly speak of equality, common strategy and partnership, but they rarely dwell on the structural asymmetries between the EU and African partners. These asymmetries include differences in financial power, institutional capacity, market access, historical responsibility and agenda-setting power. The language of partnership helps manage this problem by presenting the relationship as mutually defined. However, the very need to emphasise equality suggests that equality cannot be assumed.

Another silence concerns competition with other external actors. EU discourse often implies geopolitical competition, especially through references to Global Gateway, connectivity,

supply chains and strategic partnerships, but it does not always explicitly name competitors in the Africa context. The EU wants to present its offer as positive and partnership-based rather than openly confrontational. Global Gateway is therefore framed as a values-based investment offer, not simply as a response to China's Belt and Road Initiative or Russia's influence.

A third silence concerns African disagreement with EU positions. Borrell's 2023 reflections on non-alignment and international law show that this issue is present, but EU discourse often frames disagreement through the language of persuasion rather than conflict (Borrell, 2023). The EU emphasises shared principles and common interests rather than directly accusing African partners of insufficient alignment.

A fourth silence concerns the potential tension between European interests in critical raw materials and African interests in value addition, industrialisation and sovereignty over resources. Kallas's 2025 remarks acknowledge the importance of technology transfer and ensuring that prosperity and jobs remain in Africa, even while noting Europe's need for critical raw materials for its industry (Kallas, 2025a). This is a revealing moment because it makes visible a potential conflict of interest that the discourse tries to resolve through partnership language. The EU needs African resources, but it must frame this need in a way that does not reproduce extractive patterns. The language of local value, jobs and technology transfer therefore becomes essential to the legitimacy of the strategic agenda.

3.7 Deeds versus rhetoric: EU contributions to Africa after 2022

This section therefore asks whether the EU's "deeds" changed alongside its rhetoric. This directly follows the theoretical expectation of the thesis: rhetoric may change faster than institutions, while financial instruments remain constrained by earlier programming cycles and path dependency.

The empirical evidence suggests a mixed picture. There is clear evidence of stronger strategic and investment-oriented presentation of EU engagement with Africa after 2022, especially through Global Gateway, the European Peace Facility, EIB Global and Team Europe initiatives. However, the available data do not show a clean rupture in EU contributions to Africa after the invasion. Instead, they point toward continuity combined with strategic reframing. Africa remained a major destination for EU external action, but many of the relevant instruments were already in place before the war. Therefore, the post-2022 change is better understood as a shift in emphasis, prioritisation and political meaning rather than as a complete transformation of EU-Africa financial relations.

This chapter showed that the EU's official discourse on Africa became more explicitly strategic after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The language of partnership, equality, multilateralism and sustainable development remained present, but it was increasingly combined with references to resilience, security, investment, connectivity, critical raw materials, supply chains, geopolitical competition and strategic interests. This raises an important follow-up question: did the EU's material contributions to Africa change in the same way as its rhetoric? In other words, did the EU's "deeds" follow its strategic language, or did the main change occur at the level of discourse?

The comparison between 2020-2021 and 2022-2025 therefore adds an important qualification to the discourse analysis. The discourse analysis alone might suggest a strong post-2022 strategic turn in EU-Africa relations. The quantitative data show that this turn was real but uneven. It was strongest in the way the EU packaged and prioritised investment through Global Gateway. It was weaker in traditional development assistance, where the figures show continuity rather than major increase. It was mixed in security, where Africa continued to receive support but Ukraine drove the main expansion. It was limited in migration, where the main Africa-specific trust fund was already winding down. It was structurally significant in trade and foreign direct investment, but not yet clearly measurable as a post-2022 change without further annual data extraction.

A careful thesis conclusion could therefore be formulated as follows. Between 2020-2021 and 2022-2025, the EU's material contributions to Africa did not undergo a complete transformation. Africa remained central to EU external action, but the main post-2022 financial shock was directed toward Ukraine and Europe. The clearest Africa-related change was the rise of Global Gateway as a strategic investment framework. This gave the EU a way to connect existing development, investment and infrastructure instruments to a new geopolitical narrative. However, because many of the instruments predated the war, the evidence points to strategic reframing and selective consolidation rather than a new Africa-specific financial rupture.

This finding supports the broader argument of the thesis. The EU did not abandon normative language toward Africa after 2022, nor did it suddenly replace development cooperation with pure geopolitical interest. Instead, the EU increasingly embedded its normative language within strategic instruments and strategic claims. Partnership, sustainability and mutual benefit remained central, but they were increasingly connected to investment, resilience, security, supply chains and connectivity. The quantitative evidence confirms that EU deeds and rhetoric

moved partly in the same direction, but not at the same speed. Rhetoric changed faster and more clearly; material instruments changed more slowly and selectively.

The final interpretation is therefore one of partial alignment. The EU's post-2022 rhetoric toward Africa was not merely symbolic, because Africa remained a major recipient of EU external assistance and became highly visible in Global Gateway. At the same time, the rhetoric was stronger than the material shift. The data do not show a dramatic increase in traditional aid to Africa after 2022, and they show that Ukraine became the main new recipient of EU external action. This makes the Africa case a good example of the thesis's central theoretical expectation: after a geopolitical shock, the EU first changes how it speaks about partnerships, while institutional and budgetary change follows more slowly, unevenly and within the limits of existing policy paths.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine how the European Union's discourse on its strategic partnership with Africa changed after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The central research question asked how the EU's discourse on its strategic partnership with Africa changed after the beginning of the war. More specifically, the thesis examined whether EU-Africa discourse shifted from a predominantly normative language of partnership, values and multilateralism toward a more interest-based and geopolitical vocabulary, or whether the relationship between norms and interests became more complex.

The main finding of the thesis is that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine did not produce a complete rupture in EU-Africa discourse. The post-2022 period should not be understood as a simple replacement of normative language by interest-based language. Instead, the evidence points toward a process of hybridisation. Normative concepts such as partnership, equality, solidarity, multilateralism, international law and the rules-based order remained central throughout the period. However, after 2022 these concepts became increasingly embedded within a more strategic vocabulary of security, resilience, investment, connectivity, critical raw materials, supply chains, migration, technological competition and geopolitical influence. In other words, the EU did not stop speaking as a normative actor, but its normative language became more visibly connected to strategic and material concerns.

This conclusion supports the theoretical expectation developed in the thesis. The war in Ukraine can be understood as a critical juncture, but not in the sense that it automatically transformed EU-Africa relations or replaced one foreign policy paradigm with another. Rather, it intensified existing pressures and changed the geopolitical context in which the EU interpreted its partnerships. Historical institutionalism helps explain why long-standing partnership structures, summit formats, development cooperation frameworks and institutional routines did not change abruptly. Discursive institutionalism helps explain why the most visible change appeared first in language, framing and prioritisation. The EU's discourse adapted more quickly than its institutions. This is why the post-2022 shift is best understood as a discursive rebalancing rather than a complete institutional transformation.

The empirical analysis across different source types confirms this finding. Speeches by the High Representative and Vice-President reveal the strategic and security dimension most clearly. Borrell's pre-war remarks already linked EU-Africa relations to multilateralism and power

politics, while Kallas's post-2022 remarks placed greater emphasis on peace and security, European Peace Facility support, CSDP missions, critical raw materials, artificial intelligence and Global Gateway. Speeches by the President of the European Commission provided a broader agenda-setting frame, especially by linking Global Gateway and external partnerships to Europe's need to engage beyond its core democratic partners. Speeches by the President of the European Council reinforced the same pattern from an intergovernmental perspective, particularly in the way Michel and Costa connected African prosperity, European security, investment, multilateral reform and strategic partnership. Speeches by the President of the European Parliament added a more parliamentary and democratic dimension, emphasising equality, partnership and mutual prosperity while also acknowledging security, investment, raw materials and migration. Finally, AU-EU summit declarations showed the more institutional side of the same trend. They were more cautious than speeches, but by 2025 they also reflected stronger language of resilience, investment, mutual interest and geopolitical partnership.

This comparison across source types is important because it shows that the observed shift cannot be reduced to the rhetorical style of one individual speaker. It appears across several EU institutional voices. At the same time, the source types differ in their intensity. The HR/VP and European Council President speeches make strategic and security themes more explicit. The Commission President speeches frame the shift more broadly through global positioning and investment. The European Parliament President speeches preserve a stronger emphasis on equality and democratic legitimacy. AU-EU declarations show more continuity, partly because they are negotiated documents and partly because they reflect both European and African priorities. This confirms the theoretical expectation that discursive change appears unevenly across institutional arenas.

The thesis also showed that AU-EU declarations must be interpreted carefully. They are not the same type of source as political speeches. Speeches are rhetorical and agenda-setting, while summit declarations function more like political roadmaps or workplans. They are expected to list concrete priorities, instruments and commitments. This means that their more interest-based character does not automatically prove a discursive turn away from values. It partly reflects the practical purpose of the document type. Nevertheless, the declarations remain important because they show which formulations become formally institutionalised. The 2022 Joint Vision and the 2025 AU-EU declaration both demonstrate that investment, security, resilience, health, mobility, infrastructure and green transition are central to the institutional definition of the partnership.

The supplementary comparison of material instruments also supports a cautious “deeds versus rhetoric” perspective. The available data do not allow for a simple conclusion that EU material engagement with Africa uniformly increased after 2022. Different instruments follow different logics. EU-Africa trade shows a clear annual series and indicates that the economic relationship remained substantial, with a notable rise around 2022 followed by some decline. The African Peace Facility and European Peace Facility show that peace and security support has long been part of the EU-Africa relationship, but the post-2022 discourse gives such support a more explicit geopolitical meaning. Global Gateway is especially important, not because it provides a simple annual spending figure, but because it functions as the EU’s main strategic investment narrative. It allows the EU to present infrastructure, connectivity and critical materials as both development-oriented and strategically necessary. This suggests that the shift in discourse is not entirely detached from instruments, but the relationship between rhetoric and material change remains uneven and selective.

Theoretically, the thesis contributes to the debate on Normative Power Europe by showing that normativity and interest should not be treated as mutually exclusive categories. The EU’s discourse toward Africa after 2022 does not demonstrate the disappearance of normative power. Instead, it demonstrates the strategic embedding of normative power. The EU continues to justify its external role through values, partnership, sustainability and multilateralism, but these values are increasingly linked to resilience, security, competitiveness and geopolitical positioning. This finding supports critiques of a simplistic normative-versus-realist dichotomy. EU foreign policy discourse is not purely altruistic, but neither is it purely interest-driven. Its distinctive feature is often the presentation of interests through normative language.

The thesis also confirms the usefulness of combining historical institutionalism and discursive institutionalism. Historical institutionalism explains why EU-Africa relations did not undergo a sudden institutional break after 2022. Long-standing cooperation frameworks, budgetary cycles, summit structures and development instruments created continuity. Discursive institutionalism explains why the language around these frameworks changed more visibly. The EU did not need to invent a completely new Africa policy in order to reframe the meaning of the existing partnership. Instead, existing concepts such as partnership, multilateralism, investment and security were rearticulated in a more geopolitical context.

The limitations of the thesis should also be acknowledged. First, the analysis focuses primarily on official EU discourse. It therefore examines how the EU presents and legitimises its

partnership with Africa, rather than how African actors interpret or respond to this discourse. Although AU-EU declarations partly reflect African agency, the thesis remains mainly focused on the EU side. Future research could examine African Union speeches, national African government statements, or African media and policy responses in order to assess whether the EU's self-description is accepted, contested or reinterpreted by African partners.

Second, the thesis focuses on discourse and only uses material instruments as supplementary context. It does not provide a full policy evaluation of EU development cooperation, trade, security assistance or investment flows. A more extensive "deeds versus rhetoric" study would require systematic financial data across multiple instruments, including ODA, EIB financing, Global Gateway implementation, EPF support, trade and migration-related funding. Such a study could assess more directly whether the EU's increasingly strategic rhetoric is matched by measurable changes in financial commitments and implementation.

Third, the period under analysis is relatively short. The post-2022 period is still unfolding. Some of the most important institutional consequences of the war may become visible only later, especially after the full implementation of Global Gateway projects, changes in EU budget priorities, or further reforms of external action instruments. Therefore, this thesis should be read as an analysis of early and medium-term discursive change rather than a final assessment of the long-term transformation of EU-Africa relations.

Despite these limitations, the thesis provides a clear answer to the research question. EU discourse on Africa has changed after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, but not through a simple abandonment of normative language. The main change is that strategic, security-related and geoeconomic language has become more explicit and more central. Africa is increasingly framed as a partner whose role matters for Europe's security, prosperity, resilience and global influence. At the same time, the EU continues to present this partnership through the language of equality, mutual respect, multilateralism, sustainable development and shared values.

The final conclusion is therefore that the EU's post-2022 Africa discourse is best described as normatively framed strategic partnership. The EU still speaks the language of Normative Power Europe, but it does so in a more geopolitical world and with a clearer awareness of its own interests. The war in Ukraine did not create this transformation from nothing. It accelerated, sharpened and legitimised tendencies that were already present before 2022. The result is a

more openly hybrid discourse: one in which values and interests are not separate alternatives, but mutually embedded elements of how the EU defines its partnership with Africa.

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