



THE EUROPEAN UNION INCONSISTENCY IN ITS EXTERNAL HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY IN THE CASE OF THE 2022 QATAR WORLD CUP

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Supervisor:

Virginie Van Ingelgom

Reader:

Antoine Bailleux

Dissertation submitted by:

Francesca Carra

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1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Research question.....	3
1.2 State of the art	4
1.2.1 Theoretical framework	10
1.2.2 Hypotheses.....	15
1.3 Methodology	17
1.4 First conclusions	19
2. The EU’S inconsistent conduct in its external human rights policy: the case of Qatar.....	20
2.1 Between the EU intensions and practical action: inconsistencies.....	20
2.2 The case of Qatar: the controversies of the 2022 World Cup	22
2.3 Human and workers’ rights violations.....	23
3. EU ideas	24
3.1 The image the European Union paints of itself	24
3.2 The EU instruments for an ethical foreign policy	28
3.3 European normative power at the global level: the European Union and the “Responsibility to protect”	31
4. EU institutions.....	35
4.1 The EU institutional setup	35
4.2 The complexity of the foreign policy of the European Union	38
4.3 The soft powers of the European Union: why they are at times limited and Challenging	44
5. EU economic interests	48
5.1 Economic necessity	48
5.2 Qatar multi-dimensional engagement with the EU.....	51
5.3 The European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council.....	55
Conclusion	60
Bibliography.....	63

1. Introduction

In December 2010, following a confidential voting process, Qatar was designated as the host nation for the 2022 World Cup, marking a historic moment as the first Middle Eastern country to host such a prestigious global sporting event. This decision offered Qatar a significant platform to assert its presence on the world stage and distinguish itself from other nations in the region. Traditionally, major sports events serve as a means for host countries to «showcase the values, culture and imagery of a host nation, and through that, ideally, attract investors, tourists and attention»¹. However, since Qatar's selection as the host nation, the spotlight has been cast on the issue of work migrant rights, shifting attention from the projected celebration of sports and cultural exchange. This has led to increased global monitoring and raised concerns about the treatment of migrant workers in the country, putting the latter under the international lens of scrutiny. Long before the World Cup, precisely, «the tragic circumstances under which migrant workers in Qatar were building the infrastructure needed to host the event and other related infrastructure came to light, as did other salient human rights problems such as the country's hostility towards LGBTQI+ people and corruption around the bidding process»². Hence, it can be stated that the question of workers' rights violation in relation to the Qatar World Cup has been an issue of significant concern and controversy since the allocation of the sporting event to the country. Qatar has, in fact, been plagued by reports of poor working conditions, human rights violations and exploitation of migrant workers. The latter have been subjected to harsh working conditions, including unsafe working environments, restricted movement, low pay, long hours, and inadequate living conditions. As previously mentioned, at the international level the state has been put under the lens of scrutiny and therefore pressure has been brought to bear to address the failure to respect these rights. However, despite the above call to action, the European Union, well known for its role as guardian of human rights, has not demonstrated a strong stance to deal with the situation. Rather, the EU has been found to have an inconsistent attitude with regard to infringements of human rights in general by the World Cup host state.

In this context, a concrete action by the EU was expected since the Union presents itself as the guarantor, protector and promoter of human rights.

It has in fact built a positive self-image by portraying itself as a champion of the promotion of human rights, peace, democracy and of all the values defined as European that have characterized countless speeches by the Union's spokesmen such as, for example, that of former Commission President

¹ Næss, H. E. (2023). A figurational approach to soft power and sport events. The case of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*, 5, 1142878

² Heerdt, D., & Roorda, L. (2023). Lessons Learned in Qatar: The Role of the Netherlands and Its Businesses in Addressing Human Rights Abuses in Mega-Sporting Events. *Netherlands International Law Review*, 1-46.

Barroso, whose words were: «by showing the successful functioning of a peaceful Union, based on democracy and respect for human rights, Europe is leading by example»³. This exemplary and human rights-promoting role that the Union ascribes to itself finds its legal foundation in the Treaty of the European Union (TEU), particularly in Article 3⁴ which does not only attribute a legal binding character to the Union's commitment to protecting these rights, but also to its role as a human rights promoter in relation to the wider world. Therefore, on paper, the European Union appears as a champion of human rights, and consequently of their protection and guarantee, as well as an exemplary model in matters of values and, accordingly stands up to the role of advocate of said rights and values at the global level. Nonetheless, between the positive image that the EU has outlined and attributed to itself and the reality of the facts, its actions, some inconsistencies can be found.

The case of the controversies generated by the mega sporting event held in Qatar, at which numerous violations were revealed with regard to respect for human rights in the context of the World Cup, can be considered a clear example of the divergences between what the European Union professes and what it enacts.

However, since the sport event held in Qatar is a fairly recent one, the extent of the European Union's inconsistency in this regard remains, for the time being, as limited, or at least as unclear, as the development and information about it. Notwithstanding, it is however possible to identify factors supporting the thesis that the EU, in the context of the foregoing sporting event, favored an inoperative approach to one of intervention. Indeed, aligned with the portrait designed by itself as champion of human rights and democracy on a global scale, the European Union had a prime occasion to advocate for workers' rights in Qatar where the World Cup highlighted the condition of migrant laborers. Nevertheless, despite Qatar's well-documented human rights breaches, a cohesive stance from the EU remained absent. Examination of EU involvement reveals, in fact, minimal action beyond statements from the European Parliament, which adopted resolutions tackling human rights violations against workers⁵. Indeed, while the European Parliament has consistently condemned these abuses, other EU institutions, such as the European Commission (EC), have failed to take decisive action. The EC's response has been vague, favoring political dialogue over concrete measures to address human rights issues. For instance, while in a joint communication from the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, which addressed

³ Barroso, J. M. D. (2009, May 12). Leading by example: The EU and global governance. Conference on global governance, Brussels. <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/09/239>. Accessed 24 Sept 2011.

⁴ European Union. (2007). Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union. Official Journal of the European Union C326, 26.10.2012, p. 13–390.

⁵ Preussen, W. (2022). European Parliament calls out FIFA, Qatar amid World Cup human rights row, <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-lawmakers-adopt-resolution-on-human-rights-in-qatar-and-call-for-compensation-of-workers-families-as-world-cup-2022-kicks-in/>

strategic partnerships with the Gulf states, emphasis was placed on a partnership for people, specific stances on labor and human rights abuses were lacking⁶.

Moreover, although a human rights dialogue is in place with Qatar⁷, no meaningful statement or action has been released regarding reported workers' rights violations concerning the World Cup. Despite ongoing allegations of modern slavery practices, the EU chose to strengthen its partnership with Qatar through the signing of a Cooperation Arrangement in 2018⁸. Although the EU encourages Gulf countries to comply with international human rights commitments, its response to Qatar's violations lacks a significant stance. Indeed, notwithstanding the serious nature of the situation, the EU has avoided imposing sanctions or exerting effective pressure on Qatar. This EU approach underscores the incongruity of the Union's human rights stance and raises questions about the effectiveness of its partnership with Qatar, and more generally with the Gulf countries.

1.1 Research question

As discussed above, the 2022 World Cup in Qatar has sparked numerous controversies surrounding human and labor rights violations both prior to and during the event, particularly concerning the treatment of migrant workers tasked with building the necessary infrastructure. Human rights have long been a defining element of the European Union's identity becoming, with democratic values, foundational in the European political landscape since the late 1980s. The EU has, in fact, progressively integrated these principles into its external affairs, making them central objectives in its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), as evidenced by frequent references from the Commission, the European Council, and the European Parliament. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, in the case of the mega-sporting event in Qatar, the EU avoided addressing with a strong stance the serious issue of the violation of human rights. The inconsistencies evidenced by the EU response on this matter, namely the incongruities between what is "preached" by the EU and how the latter performed, prompt the question why, in the case of the Qatar World Cup, did the EU demonstrate a discrepancy between ideas and interests?

⁶ European Union: European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Joint communication to the European Parliament and the Council*, 18 May 2022, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/Joint%20Communication%20to%20the%20European%20Parliament%20and%20the%20Council%20-%20A%20Strategic%20Partnership%20with%20the%20Gulf.pdf>

⁷ EEAS Press Team, (2023). Qatar: 5th Human Rights Dialogue with EU held in Doha, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/qatar-5th-human-rights-dialogue-eu-held-doha_en

⁸ EEAS Press Team, (2018), EU and Qatar sign a Cooperation Arrangement, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/40967_en

1.2 State of the art

In this section, two contrasting cases will be discussed, namely those of Turkey and Venezuela, in order to illustrate the variables that have an impact on the European Union's consistency in its external human rights policy.

Firstly, the question of Turkey will be examined. In this case, it can be pointed out that the EU's actions don't align with its professed values, thus mirroring the inconsistency observed in the Qatar situation. Indeed, despite Turkey's significant human rights issues, the EU's response seems to be perceived as inadequate. This inconsistency could stem from various factors such as economic interests, geopolitical considerations, complexities of the EU-Turkey relations, which may have hindered the EU's ability to assertively address these human rights infringements.

Conversely, the case of Venezuela is an example where the EU's external human rights policy appears more consistent. In contrast to Turkey, the EU's stance on Venezuela seems to be characterized by a clearer and more sustained efforts to uphold human rights standards. This consistency could be attributed to factors such as the severity of human rights violations, or, as this thesis argues, the absence of significant conflicting interests.

By analyzing these contrasting cases, this thesis aims to identify the factors and variables that influence the European Union's external human rights policy. Through this comparative analysis, this thesis seeks to deepen understanding of the complex interplay of factors shaping the Union's approach to promoting and protecting human rights on the global stage.

a. Turkey

As already noted, the controversies surrounding the mega sporting event held in Qatar, which unveiled numerous human rights infringements in the context of the World Cup, highlight the discrepancies within the European Union between its professed values and its actions, between its ideas and its interests. However, the Qatar case is not an isolated "incident". The EU's inconsistency in foreign policy regarding the protection of human rights is evident in other instances, such as its approach to Turkey. The latter serves as a compelling example of the gap between the EU's proclaimed commitment to human rights and its practical prioritization of them. Analyzing the case of Turkey is therefore both relevant and useful in illustrating the Union's inconsistency in its external human rights policy toward third countries.

As previously mentioned, human rights are a remarkably distinctive aspect of the Union's identity. As a matter of fact, since the late 1980s, democratic values and human rights have emerged as a

foundational pillar within the European political landscape⁹. In particular, the European Union has progressively integrated human rights provisions and democratic principles into its external affairs¹⁰. These principles serve as central objectives in the Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), as witnessed by frequent references by the Commission, the European Council and the European Parliament. An example of that is the Luxembourg European Council of 1997 in which it was «declared that promoting and safeguarding human rights and fundamental principles of democracy throughout the world constitute an important and legitimate part of their external relations»¹¹. Consequently, contractual agreements between the EU and third countries have emerged as key instruments for the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms in countries outside the Union. Of particular note, the EU's association policy towards countries seeking Union membership has seen a particularly strict application of human rights conditionality. Indeed, the text of the Accession Partnership with Turkey includes human rights conditions that have to be fulfilled¹², together with the Copenhagen criteria. Accordingly, Turkey's aspiration to join the European Union has subjected it to intense scrutiny by EU authorities. The EU has, in fact, targeted specific areas that require policy reform in Turkey in order to conform its standards with those of the EU in this regard. Among these is the persistent issue of human rights violations, encompassing torture, other forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, as well as arbitrary arrest and detention¹³. However, while Turkey has taken steps toward reforming its legal framework, its human rights practices still fall short of EU standards, with ongoing challenges in upholding fundamental rights. Despite European opposition to Turkey's bid for EU membership in 1989, respect for human rights continued to cover a central role in the relationship between the two entities, at least in principle. Both sides aimed not only to revitalize the EU-Turkey Association, but also to modernize it in line with EU advancements. This commitment prompted discussions regarding the completion of a customs union, contingent upon Turkey's efforts to bring its political and human rights framework in line with EU standards. Therefore, the formation of a customs union hinged upon Turkey's response to the Union's political requirements. So far, this appears to hold potential for both Turkey's advancements and the EU's role as a promoter of human rights in its foreign policy. However, despite «all the difficulties and negative developments», concerning breaches of human rights, «on 6 March

⁹ H. Arikan (2002) A Lost Opportunity? A Critique of the EU's Human Rights Policy Towards Turkey, *Mediterranean Politics*, 7:1, 19-50, DOI: 10.1080/713604550

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹¹ European Council (1997): Presidency Conclusions, Luxembourg, 11–12 Dec., Brussels: General Secretariat of the Council.

¹² European Commission (2000): Proposal for a Council Decision on Principles, Priorities and Conditions contained in the Accession Partnership with the Republic of Turkey, COM (2000), 714, Brussels, 8 Nov. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2000:0714:FIN:EN:PDF>

¹³ H. Arikan (2002), *op. cit.* p. 23.

1995 the EU-Turkish Association Council agreed to the completion of a custom union»¹⁴, thus unequivocally showing the discrepancy between what is preached by the EU and what is then actually implemented. In this case, it is therefore evident that there is a similarity between, on the one hand, the decision made by the EU in the case of the completion of a custom union with Turkey and, on the other hand, the EU's choice to enhance the partnership with Qatar through the signature of a Cooperation Arrangement in 2018, despite the fact that in both cases human rights disputes were present and far from being resolved.

Despite portraying itself as a beacon of light for human rights, in the case of Turkey, the EU has missed a crucial opportunity to advance its human rights agenda, and it certainly failed to do the same in the case of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, particularly with regard to the deplorable treatment of migrant workers. Therefore, what the Turkish question highlights is that in this case, just as in the one concerning the relationship between Qatar and the EU, the latter's interests have prevailed over the ideals it proclaims and of which, in principle, it stands as a guarantor.

Contributing to the inconsistency demonstrated by the EU in the case of Turkey, as in that of Qatar, was then the role played by various institutions, particularly the European Commission and the European Parliament (EP). Indeed, as already mentioned, the EP plays a key role in human rights matters. The latter, in fact, has often contributed to the improvement of European human rights policies, which is why it is considered an entrepreneur of norms in relation to the said issue. As previously noted, in the case of human and labor rights violations in Qatar, the EP was the European institution that consistently condemned said abuses, while other European institutions, such as the Commission, did not demonstrate a firm stance. This divergence between institutions appears to be an element that feeds, or at least fosters, the inconsistency of the EU in its relationship with Qatar, since, as will be argued in Chapter 4, institutional divisions make it more difficult to adopt a strong and coherent stance. Similarly happened in the case of Turkey. Indeed, «If the list of human rights problems noted by the EU suggest that human-rights related matters are a particular priority for the EU, there are nevertheless fundamental differences between positions taken by representatives of the European Commission and positions taken by MEPs, and this dichotomy is fundamental to understanding the incoherent nature of the EU's human rights policy vis-à-vis Turkey»¹⁵. Without going into excessive detail, what appears relevant in the case of Turkey, as similar to the dynamics that characterize the EU's relationship with Qatar, is that while the European Parliament has insisted on the fostering of human rights reforms by the Turkish government¹⁶, stressing several times the

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁵ Gates, A. (2009). Mixed messages and mixed results: the EU's promotion of human rights in Turkey. *European Law Journal*, 15(3), 401-411.

¹⁶ A. Giannakopoulos and K. Maras, Party Perspectives in the European Parliament in Turkey's EU Accession. An Empirical Study of Session Protocols of the European Parliament 1996–2004, Occasional Paper

problems regarding said rights, the Commission has focused in targeting economic and social development, prioritizing it at the expense of respect for human rights¹⁷. Therefore, these inconsistencies «that mark positions taken by the EP and the Commission over Turkey encourage an incoherent EU approach to human rights reforms in Turkey»¹⁸, as the one adopted with regard to the World Cup controversies.

b. Venezuela

Regarding, on the other hand, the case of Venezuela, since 2014 the country has been marked by profound political polarization, institutional deterioration, escalating political repression, and a worsening economic and humanitarian crisis. The death of Hugo Chávez on March 5, 2013, followed by Nicolás Maduro's narrow victory in the presidential election on the 14 of April 2013, with a margin of only 1.6%, fueled a cycle of intensifying political turmoil and violent protests¹⁹. Since early 2014, then, the government's harsh response to public demonstrations has further radicalized segments of the opposition, mobilizing their supporters around the demand for President Maduro's removal from office, known as "la salida" (the exit). Venezuela's situation has steadily worsened, characterized by a violent crackdown on protestors by security forces, imprisonment of opposition figures, a fragmented political opposition, growing authoritarianism, the erosion of representative institutions, acute economic and social hardships, a severe public security crisis, and alarming levels of crime-related violence. Additionally, there has been a significant surge in Venezuelans fleeing their homeland²⁰. Following the escalation of protests in February 2014, security forces have employed severe repression tactics, resulting in widespread human rights violations²¹. Instances of unlawful force, such as shooting and severe beatings of unarmed individuals, have been reported²². Moreover, there have been several arbitrary arrests and violations of due process rights. reports also indicate torture and mistreatment during arrest, detention, and in response to social protests involving

No 4/05 (St Anthony's College Oxford, South East European Studies at Oxford, European Studies Centre, 2005).

¹⁷ European Commission, Commission decision on a Multi-annual Indicative Planning Document (MIPD) 2007–2009 for Turkey, C(2007)1835. Available at: https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/d3023e21-6afe-42ab-9758-efbe7ba21dc7_en?filename=mipd_turkey_2007_2009_en.pdf&prefLang=fr

¹⁸ Gates, A. (2009), *op. cit.* p. 407.

¹⁹ Corrales, J., Hidalgo, M. (2017), 'The Quality of the Venezuelan Democracy under Hugo Chávez (1999–2013), *Partecipazione e conflitto*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 89-118.

²⁰ Engstrom, P. (2018). The situation of rule of law and human rights in Cuba and Venezuela and EU engagement. Directorate-General for external policies, European Parliament.

²¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2017), *Human rights violations and abuses in the context of protests in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela from 1 April to 31 July 2017*, Geneva. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/VE/HCHReportVenezuela_1April-31July2017_EN.pdf

²² Engstrom, P. (2018), *op. cit.* p. 16.

excessive use of force by law enforcement officials²³. «In addition to violent repression of public protests, there has also been extensive persecution and criminalization of the political opposition as well as of human rights defenders»²⁴. After extensive anti-government protests flared up again in April 2017, there was a notable increase in repression by security forces. This repression, characterized by its unprecedented scale and severity, has raised concerns about potential international human rights violations perpetrated by the Venezuelan governments and its security forces²⁵. Although manifested in different actions, the failure to respect, and therefore protect, human rights are a common element in the cases of Venezuela and Qatar. However, what constitutes a distinguishing factor in the events of the two countries is the role played by the EU. In fact, as will now be outline, if in the case of Qatar, the EU opted for “passivity”, in the case of Venezuela it took a rather different path.

Indeed, considering the EU’s commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights at the global level, and the critical situation of Venezuela in this regard, from 2014 onward, EU institutions have consistently tackled the country, notably in reaction to the deteriorating human rights and rule of law landscape in the region²⁶. Thus, in response to the escalating political violence in Venezuela, EU institutions have undergone a gradual shift in their approach. Initially, diplomatic statements emphasized the importance of mediation, but over time, the European Union has transitioned to implementing targeted sanctions²⁷. During the 2014 protests, statements from the European Council and former HR/VP Catherine Ashton stressed the necessity of upholding human rights and supporting freedom of expression, particularly for journalists covering the events²⁸. In December of the same year, newly appointed HR/VP Federica Mogherini highlighted the deteriorating economic situation and increasing polarization in Venezuela during a statement to the European Parliament. Throughout this period, the HR/VP consistently emphasized negotiations and inclusive political dialogue as «the only way back to stability and progress in Venezuela»²⁹, expressing the EU’s readiness to support such efforts. Following the disputed election to the Constituent Assembly in July 2017, the HR/VP announced the EU’s readiness to step up responses if democratic principles were further undermined

²³ Amnesty International (2014b), *Venezuela: Briefing to the UN Committee Against Torture, 53rd session*. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AMR53/020/2014/en/>

²⁴ Engstrom, P. (2018), *op. cit.* p. 17.

²⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2018), *Human rights violations in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela: a downward spiral with no end in sight*, Geneva. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/VE/VenezuelaReport2018_EN.pdf

²⁶ European Commission (2013), *Statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton on the elections in Venezuela on 14 April 2013*, Press statement. Available at: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/136829.pdf

²⁷ Engstrom, P. (2018), *op. cit.* p. 32.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

²⁹ See, for example, declarations to the EP in December 2014 and February 2015 by the HR/VP.

and the Venezuelan Constitution disregarded³⁰. Subsequently, after the October 2017 regional elections and reports of voting irregularities, the EU consolidated its position on sanctions³¹. In November 2017, the Foreign Affairs Council unanimously adopted targeted sanctions, including an arms export ban and travel bans and asset freeze measures for certain officials³². These measures were then extended in January 2018 to include senior Venezuelan officials due to the violation of democratic principles, rule of law, or human rights³³. Beyond sanctions, the EU maintains a diverse cooperation portfolio with Venezuela: it provides support for local civil society organizations working in democracy and human rights through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights³⁴. Activities include capacity-building for NGOs and human rights defenders, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, youth professional training, and supporting democratic institutions. Moreover, the EU holds an annual consultation with Venezuelan human rights defenders in Caracas³⁵.

The divide between the EU's intervention in Venezuela and the apparent absence of engagement in the case of Qatar do provide a reasonably solid basis for the emerging doubts about the EU's consistency between what it proclaims, its ideas, and what it enacts, its interests.

A first conclusion can be drawn from this analysis, namely, that when the EU is confronted with human rights violations, an essential part of its nature, occurring in third states in which the EU does not identify an economic interest, it is far more likely to intervene with the means at its disposal in order to cease said infringements, thus playing its role as a beacon of light for human rights. On the contrary, in its dealings with third countries with which economic and strategic interests are present, as in the case of Qatar and the previously illustrated case of Turkey, the protection of human rights takes a back seat, that is, the values and ideals that the EU claims to defend are overshadowed by economic necessities, which in turn are one of the causes for greater heterogeneity that leads to further divisions, and thus complexities, in the implementation of the EU's external human rights policy.

³⁰ European External Action Service (EEAS) (2017a), *Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the joint press conference with Sven Mikser, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, following the informal meeting of EU Foreign Ministers (Gymnich)*. Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/31830/remarks-high-representativevice-president-federica-mogherini-joint-press-conference-sven_en

³¹ Engstrom, P. (2018), *op. cit.* p. 35.

³² Council Decision (CFSP) 2017/2074 of 13 November 2017 concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Venezuela, available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2017.295.01.0060.01.ENG&toc=OJ:L:2017:295:TOC

³³ Council Implementing Regulation (EU) 2018/88 of 22 January 2018 implementing Regulation (EU) 2017/2063 concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Venezuela, available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg_impl/2018/88/oj

³⁴ Engstrom, P. (2018), *op. cit.* p. 36.

³⁵ European External Action Service (EEAS) (2018), *EU annual report on human rights and democracy in the world 2017 - Country Updates on Human Rights and Democracy*, Brussels.

1.2.1 Theoretical framework

This thesis aims to explore the apparent inconsistency displayed by the European Union concerning its response to the 2022 Qatar World Cup and the human rights violations associated with it. The core focus lies in analyzing the reasons behind the EU's discrepancy, where its articulated ideals regarding human rights seem to clash with its actual actions or interests in external policy, in particular in the context of Qatar.

As previously explained, the EU has ascribed to itself the role of champion of human rights, a model role in which the EU's normative power plays a crucial part. The EU effectiveness with regard to the latter, in fact, depends on its ability to translate its values into concrete actions and outcomes in the international arena. In this section, therefore, a review of the literature with regard to the EU's normative power is proposed, as the analysis of the latter provides an initial understanding of the lack of alignment between the EU's internal values and external actions, thereby offering a nuanced insight into the challenges and complexities inherent in its external human rights policy.

To the end of understanding this divide, the work of Manners³⁶ appears relevant as he underscores the EU's role as a normative power in the global arena. According to his perspective, the EU's strength lies in its capability to extend its fundamental values beyond its own borders³⁷. Conversely, Nicolaïdis³⁸ and Howse³⁹ present a more critical viewpoint, suggesting that what the EU projects is not its true self but instead an idealistic vision, which they name "EUtopia". They argue that this inconsistency between the EU projected image, and what the EU actually is, undermines its credibility in negotiations with other international actors, thus impacting its power. They attribute the risk of

³⁶ Ian Manners, PhD, Lecturer in European Studies, Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Kent at Canterbury.

³⁷ Manners, I. (2002) 'Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?' *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 2, pp. 235–58.

³⁸ Kalypso Nicolaidis holds the Chair in Global Affairs at the School of Transnational Governance (EUI), where she leads the EUI Democracy Forum among other responsibilities. Currently on leave from the University of Oxford, she previously held professorial positions at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and Ecole Nationale d'Administration, Paris. Nicolaidis has extensive experience collaborating with various EU institutions, including her membership in the European Council's reflection group on the future of Europe chaired by Felipe González (2008-10), and her role as a Council member of ECFR. In addition, she has provided advisory services on European affairs to George Papandreou in the 1990s and early 2000s, as well as to the governments of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, the European Parliament, the European Commission, OECD, and UNCTAD. Her research encompasses both internal and external dimensions of European integration, alongside global affairs. She delves into various areas such as theaters of recognition, democratic theory, transnational legal empathy, and social solidarity. Additionally, she explores topics including global governance, international trade, sustainable integration, post-colonialism, myth and politics, and the impact of new technologies on international relations.

³⁹ Robert Howse holds the Lloyd C. Nelson Professorship of International Law at NYU School of Law. His academic endeavors center on teaching and researching international economic law, with a specific emphasis on trade, investment, and finance, as well as legal and political philosophy. He is one of the co-founders and co-conveners of the New York City Area Working Group on International Economic Law and also contributes to the American Bar Association Working Group on Investment Treaties.

credibility loss to the utopian idealism that the EU demonstrates, which they argue reveals a fundamental lack of self-awareness⁴⁰.

These analyses raise several unresolved issues. Firstly, the concept of reflexivity, related to collective identity within the framework of normative power, requires further elucidation. Additionally, the extent to which the EU's idealistic rhetoric affects its credibility on the international stage remains uncertain. To address these questions and understand the identity that the EU has built around the concept of normative power, which, as previously explained, has enabled it to set itself up as a champion of fundamental rights and values, an analysis of the literature on normative power is necessary, especially in relation to the development of an EU identity. The examination of the EU's role in international relations and its unique characteristics can be traced back to François Duchêne's⁴¹ portrayal of Europe as a "civilian power" in 1972. Duchêne's original concept highlighted Europe's distinct approach to external relations, prioritizing economic and political strategies over military ones. Building upon this foundation, Manners later reevaluated Europe's role as an international actor, shifting from the notion of "civilian power" to "normative power" in order to address perceived limitations. He, in fact, identifies a shift away from a "Westphalian" statehood concept and a rational interest-driven approach towards a focus on influencing opinions and shaping ideologies. In essence, Manners argued that Europe's significance lies in its capacity to redefine what is considered "normal" in international relations. His work initiated an academic discourse on the concept of normative

⁴⁰ Nicolaïdis, K. and Howse, R. (2002) ' "This is my EUtopia...": Narrative as Power. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 4, pp. 767–92.

⁴¹ As a prominent adviser to Jean Monnet, the architect of European unification, François Duchêne played a pivotal role in the establishment of the European Union, notably the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Duchêne, a bilingual British-Swiss national, initially served as a spokesperson for US and British interests within the High Authority of the ECSC from 1952 to 1953. Later, he became Monnet's Chief of Staff at the Action Committee for the United States of Europe from 1958 to 1963.

Within the ECSC, Duchêne served as the English language information officer, operating under Monnet's leadership. He held Monnet in high regard, recognizing him as a visionary leader with a knack for achieving tangible results. Duchêne relocated to Paris with Monnet in 1955 to further the European project, where he simultaneously worked as a correspondent for the *Economist* and an adviser within Monnet's inner circle until 1958.

Monnet's strategy involved building a network of politicians and labor leaders across Europe to garner support for his initiatives. Duchêne played a vital role in executing this strategy. Subsequently, he assumed the position of Director at the International Institute for Strategic Studies from 1969 to 1975 and Director of the Sussex European Research Centre from 1974 to 1982. In these capacities, he contributed significantly to discussions surrounding Europe's trajectory, east-west relations, and various aspects of global affairs. Duchêne maintained close ties with influential figures, including Zbigniew Brzezinski, and remained a key figure in international diplomatic circles.

power, prompting further explorations and clarifications by researchers such as Diez⁴², Youngs⁴³, and the previously mentioned Nicolaïdis and Howse, and subsequent writings by Manners himself⁴⁴. Central to this debate were questions regarding the processes of identity formation within the EU and the moral evaluations of its actions as a “force for good”. Manners’ analysis is significant here because he emphasized the intertwined nature of Europe’s ideological influence and the construction of its identity, suggesting that they are interconnected aspects of the normative power concept, which is relevant here in order to better understand the identity and image the EU has designed of itself. The study proposed by Diaz⁴⁵, then, is also essential in that it provides another useful element to consider in examining the formation of the European identity. He, in fact, elaborated on Manners’ analysis by highlighting the role of “othering” in EU identity formation, in particular in relation to external perceptions, with the US often cast as the primary “other” as will be explained later on. Diez delineated four models of “othering”, ranging from viewing the “other” as an existential threat to recognizing differences without value judgments. According to him, the EU primarily engages in portraying the “other” as violating universal principles that the EU is committed to. However, the EU itself does not always demonstrate consistency and fidelity to the values and principles it proclaims, as this thesis seeks to demonstrate. For this purpose, it is pertinent what Nicolaïdis and Howse⁴⁶ argue, namely that the image the EU presents on the global stage is not a true reflection of its actual identity, but rather an idealized version: an “EUtopia”, as mentioned before. They underline the EU’s lack of reflexivity, noting its tendency to project an aspirational image rather than its authentic self. According to them, reflexivity can be comprehended through two lenses: initially, it may indicate the «consistency between the internal and external planes, a consistency requiring a constant checking of

⁴² Thomas Diez holds the position of Professor of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Tübingen. He obtained his PhD from the University of Mannheim and served as a staff member at the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute COPRI from 1997 to 2000. Beginning in 2000, he held the position of Lecturer at the University of Birmingham, where he progressed to Senior Lecturer in 2003 and then to Professor in 2005. Since April 2009, Diez has been based at the University of Tübingen. He has also lectured at universities in Aarhus, Copenhagen, Munich, and Victoria (British Columbia). In September 2009, he was awarded the Anna Lindh Prize for his significant contributions to the study of EU foreign policy. From 2015 to 2017, he served as president of the European International Studies Association.

⁴³ Richard Youngs is currently a senior fellow in the Democracy, Conflict, and Governance Program at Carnegie Europe, focusing on EU foreign policy and international democracy issues. Alongside his role at Carnegie, Youngs serves as a professor of international relations at the University of Warwick. Prior to joining Carnegie in July 2013, he held the position of director at the European think tank FRIDE. Youngs has also held positions within the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office and served as an EU Marie Curie fellow. From 2012 to 2013, he was a senior fellow at the Transatlantic Academy in Washington, DC.

⁴⁴ Manners, I. (2004) ‘Normative Power Europe Reconsidered’. Paper presented to the CIDEL Workshop, Oslo, 22–23 October 2004.

⁴⁵ Diez, T. (2005) ‘Constructing the Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering “Normative Power Europe.” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 3, pp. 615–36.

⁴⁶ Nicolaïdis, K. and Howse, R. (2002), *op. cit.*

the EU's narratives of projection on to its own internal goals and, we must add, deficits»⁴⁷. Secondly, reflexivity could also entail avoiding tendencies towards «utopian normativity»⁴⁸ in EU endeavors. This failure to engage in self-reflection prevents the EU's ability to represent itself internationally in an accurate, precise, way. This sentiment is also being invoked by Diez, who calls for greater reflexivity in both academic discourses and political representations of the EU as a normative power⁴⁹. This call for reflexivity is then supported by Manners, which argues that it is only through self-awareness in its external policies that the EU can effectively maintain both normative influence and power. Therefore, he emphasizes the need for alignment between the EU's internal values and its external actions. In other words, coordination between ideas and interests is required.

For the purpose of understanding and examining this inconsistency as accurately as possible, this thesis adopts a theoretical framework known as the three "I": ideas, institutions, and interests⁵⁰. The latter will thus be applied to the foreign policy of the European Union in the case of the aforementioned mega-sport event to investigate the intricate interaction of elements influencing said policy.

First, it is necessary to briefly present what is being referred to when discussing the three "I".

The discourse surrounding the three "I" s stands as a central concept within the social sciences, particularly in fields such as international political economy and political science. These three elements serve as explanatory tools for understanding the motivations driving political actor's behaviors.

1. Ideas

In this discourse, ideas pertain to the values, principles, and norms that guide the EU's external policies, especially concerning human rights. The EU has a strong rhetoric advocating for human rights globally, often promoting democracy, rule of law, and respect for fundamental freedoms.

Therefore, ideas represent beliefs, perceptions, and mental frameworks that inform actors' perspectives and define their interests. Ideas encompass deep-seated convictions about morality, worldview, pragmatic perceptions, and ideologies. They possess the capacity to shape individuals' thoughts and behaviors, influencing political action by guiding the interpretation of facts, framing problem definitions, and proposing potential solutions.

Ideas exert significant influence over policy developments and decisions. They encompass both factual understandings (such as research findings) and normative viewpoints (like values), or a

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 771.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 789.

⁴⁹ Diez, T. (2005), *op. cit.* p. 613.

⁵⁰ Palier, B., & Surel, Y. (2005). Les «trois I» et l'analyse de l'État en action. *Revue française de science politique*, 55(2005/1), 7-32.

combination of both⁵¹. These ideas shape not only how various societal actors conceptualize issues but also their assessments of the effectiveness, feasibility, and acceptability of different policy alternatives. Ideas, therefore, serve as lenses through which actors interpret realities and envision preferred outcomes, profoundly influencing the trajectory of policy debates and decisions⁵².

More specifically, in this thesis the ideas relate to the image the European Union has painted of itself and the role it has consequently ascribed to itself, namely that of champion of human rights: a model role in which the EU's normative power plays a crucial part. The EU effectiveness with regard to the latter, in fact, depends on its ability to translate its values into concrete actions and outcomes in the international arena.

However, despite the ideals professed by the European Union, its response to human rights abuses in Qatar, notably in the context of the World Cup, might not align with its stated principles. This dissonance between rhetoric and action prompts an exploration into how and why such a gap exists.

2. Institutions

The second “I” denotes institutions, which encompass the established rules governing societal interactions. These rules act as human constraints, shaping the dynamics of human behavior.

Institutions include both formal and informal frameworks, among them rules, norms, precedents, and organizational dynamics that shape political conduct⁵³. They represent the structures of governance, policy networks, and historical policy trajectories within a society⁵⁴.

They exert influence over political actors by delineating permissible behavior and structuring the incentives faced by participants. In the case of the EU, the latter operates within a complex institutional framework which includes various bodies and mechanisms for policymaking and implementation. Understanding how these institutions function, interact, and influence decision-making processes is crucial in analyzing the EU's response to the Qatar situation. Here, the “I” of institutions refers to the intricate institutional setup that characterizes the Union, which has an impact on the EU's external human rights policy.

3. Interests

⁵¹ Pomey, M.-P., Morgan, S., Church, J., Forest, P. G., Lavis, J. N., McIntoch, T., ... Dobson, S. (2010). Do provincial drug benefit initiatives create an effective policy lab? The evidence from Canada. *Journal of Public Health Politics, Policy, and Law*, 35(5), 705-742.

⁵² Gauvin, F. P. (2014). Understanding policy developments and choices through the “3-i” framework: interests, ideas and institutions.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

In this discourse, the third “I” refers to interests, which are frequently regarded as the primary impetus behind political actions. Whether at the individual, group, or national level, political actors are assumed to pursue actions that serve to maximize their own interests. The latter manifest in various forms, such as the pursuit of power, wealth, or security. Identifying and analyzing these interests form a fundamental aspect of policy analysis. In the case of the European Union, interests refer to the strategic, economic, and political pursuits that drive the EU’s behavior on the global stage. While the EU espouses human rights as a fundamental value and as its distinguishing feature, its actions are also influenced by considerations such as trade relations, geopolitical alliances, security concerns, and economic necessities. In the case of Qatar, the Union’s economic ties, in particular in areas like energy and trade, seem to intersect with its human rights concerns, leading to a balancing act or compromise between competing interests. In other words, the interests referred to in this thesis are those of the EU vis-à-vis Qatar, and more generally, the Gulf states, mainly from the energy point of view. These have therefore a strong incidence on the decisions that the Union makes, as they create a complex dynamic in which, precisely, ideas and interests are competing.

By employing the three “I” framework, this thesis aims to unpack the complexities underlying the EU’s response to the Qatar World Cup and elucidate the factors contributing to the perceived discrepancy between its professed ideals and its actual behavior in the realm of human rights diplomacy. Through this analysis, this thesis seeks to provide insights into the nuanced interplay of ideas, institutions, and interests shaping the EU’s external human rights policies.

1.2.2 Hypotheses

This thesis identifies two likely explanations for the inconsistency showed by the EU in the case of the 2022 Qatar World Cup human rights violations: the first one concerns the complexity of the EU’s foreign policy, while the second one regards the economic necessities of the European Union.

The first hypothesis assumes that although the European Union has often been described, and has also portrayed itself, as a normative power, meaning that it seeks to promote its values and norms in its external relations, frequently the complexity of its foreign policy has raised challenges to the consistent upholding of these norms and principles in practice, particularly in the area of external human rights policy. This suggests that while the EU may assert its commitment to promoting human rights on the global stage, the practical implementation of this commitment is hindered by various factors within its foreign policy dynamics.

As will be discussed in more detail later, one of the key reasons for inconsistency in the EU's external human rights policy as a normative power is the intricate institutional setup of the Union itself. Indeed, the EU operates through a complex system of institutions, among them the European Commission, the Council of the European Union, the European Parliament, the European Council, and the European External Action Service (EEAS). Moreover, the EU is constituted of Member States with different priorities and national interests in foreign affairs. Although all Member States officially endorse the EU's commitment to human rights, in practice they may prioritize other concerns such as security considerations or economic interests. Furthermore, the EU foreign policy is influenced by its relationships with other international actors, including major powers such as China, Russia, and the United States. To summarize, although the EU presents itself as a normative power that promotes human rights in its external relations, the complexity of its foreign policy raises considerable barriers to achieving consistency in this regard.

The second hypothesis rests on the assumption that the economic relationship between the European Union and Qatar represents a relevant factor influencing the EU's consistency in its external human rights policy. Indeed, the state of Qatar is a major player in the global energy market and holds substantial investments in various sectors across Europe. As a result, the economic ties between the EU and Qatar create a complex dynamic where economic interests often interfere with human rights considerations. The economic interests of the EU, and thus its Member States too, may create pressure to maintain a stable and cooperative relation with Qatar, sometimes at the expense of guaranteeing the protection of human rights. In other words, the EU may face pressure to prioritize economic interests and maintain stable relations with Qatar, even in cases where there are evident concerns regarding human rights violations or abuses. Therefore, this hypothesis implies that the economic leverage exerted by Qatar, particularly in sectors like energy, finance, and infrastructure development, may afford it a degree of influence over the EU's decision-making process. In such circumstances, the EU may find itself constrained in its ability to take robust action against Qatar for human rights infringements, fearing potential repercussions on economic cooperation and stability, in particular, as it will later be explained, in the context of the energy crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In conclusion, this second hypothesis underlines the intricate balance that the EU must navigate between its economic interests and its commitment to upholding human rights values, underscoring the challenges inherent in maintaining consistency in foreign policy decisions when faced with competing priorities.

1.3 Methodology

This section outlines the methodology employed in examining the inconsistency of the European Union in its external human rights policy, with a specific focus on the case of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. The primary objective is to investigate the EU's stance on human rights issues associated with this global sporting event, with the aim of identifying instances where the EU's actions or statements regarding human rights in Qatar appear inconsistent. To achieve this, the methodology adopted for this examination is process tracing, a qualitative research technique that analyzes the intermediary factors between cause and outcome⁵⁵.

This method «can contribute decisively both to describing political and social phenomena and to evaluating causal claims»⁵⁶, thus allowing for a detailed analysis of the sequence of events and decisions that have led to the observed outcomes, making it particularly suitable for the objectives of this research.

Process tracing is a method frequently employed in social science research to understand causal mechanisms by following the sequential stages of a process⁵⁷. It involves the formulation of hypotheses that predict the outcomes of specific actions and subsequently examines evidence to test these hypotheses.

In essence, process tracing «is defined as the systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analyzed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator»⁵⁸. In the context of this research, process tracing will be used to analyze the European Union's approach to its external human rights policy concerning Qatar, particularly in relation to the 2022 World Cup. By tracing the EU's decisions, statements, and actions regarding human rights in Qatar, this research aims to uncover the underlying factors that have led to apparent inconsistencies in the EU's stance.

The first step in this research involves identifying instances where the European Union's approach to human rights in Qatar exhibits signs of inconsistency. This step requires the collection and analysis of a diverse range of documents, including official EU statements, reports from EU institutions, resolutions from the European Parliament⁵⁹, and media coverage of EU activities related to the Qatar

⁵⁵ Beach, D. (2017). Process-tracing methods in social science. Oxford research encyclopedia of politics, 1, 1-29.

⁵⁶ Collier, D. (2011). Understanding process tracing. *PS: political science & politics*, 44(4), 823-830.

⁵⁷ Waldner, D. (2012). Process tracing and causal mechanisms. *The Oxford handbook of philosophy of social science*, 65-84.

⁵⁸ Collier, D. (2011). *op. cit.* p. 1.

⁵⁹ European Parliament, (2022), Resolution on the situation of human rights in the context of the FIFA World Cup in Qatar, European Parliament, <https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/printficheglobal.pdf?id=741870&l=en>

World Cup, such as those of *The Guardian* or *Human Rights Watch*. Through a comprehensive examination of these documents, this thesis will identify situations where part of EU bodies has criticized Qatar's human rights record, while other have simultaneously engaged in activities that may undermine the EU commitment to human rights principles. Such instances could include EU's failure to take decisive action against human rights abuses in Qatar despite publicly condemning these violations, thereby revealing a potential discrepancy between rhetoric and action.

Once the inconsistencies in the EU's actions have been identified, the next step is to analyze the intermediary factors that may have contributed to these discrepancies. This analysis involves formulating hypotheses that predict the outcomes of certain actions and systematically examining evidence to test these hypotheses.

The first hypothesis concerns the impact of the EU's fragmented foreign policy structure on its ability to formulate a cohesive approach towards Qatar. This will be tested by examining the roles of key EU institutions and actors, such as the European Commission, the European Parliament, and individual member states, in shaping the EU's approach to human rights concerns related to the Qatar World Cup.

The second hypothesis considers factors such as economic interests, geopolitical considerations, and Qatar's influence on the EU. Given Qatar's status as a major energy supplier to Europe and its strategic importance in regional geopolitics, these factors may have influenced the EU's reluctance to take strong action on human rights issues. This hypothesis will be tested by analyzing the economic ties between the EU and Qatar and the dynamics at play between the two.

In conclusion, this thesis seeks to uncover the reasons behind the European Union's inconsistency in its external human rights policy concerning the 2022 World Cup through the analysis of relevant documents using the process tracing method. By identifying instances where the EU's actions or statements regarding human rights in Qatar appear inconsistent and analyzing the intermediary factors that may have contributed to these discrepancies, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the challenges facing the EU in balancing human rights principles with other interests in its external relations. The findings of this research could contribute to a better understanding of the complexities and compromises inherent in the EU's foreign policy particularly in contexts where human rights considerations intersect with economic and geopolitical concerns.

1.4 First conclusions

The allocation of the 2022 World Cup to Qatar had undeniably elevated the nation's global profile, providing a platform for showcasing its culture and capabilities on an unprecedented scale. However, the spotlight in Qatar has shifted from celebratory anticipation to intense scrutiny over human rights violations, particularly concerning the treatment of migrant workers involved in the construction of World Cup infrastructures.

Despite its professed commitment to championing human rights and promoting democratic values, the European Union's response to the Qatar World Cup controversy had been marked by discrepancies and a lack of decisive action. This raises questions about the EU's alignment between its stated ideals and its actual conduct in external policy. While the European Parliament has issued resolutions condemning human rights abuses, other EU institutions, notably the European Commission (EC), have failed to translate these condemnations into concrete measures. The EC's response has been characterized by vagueness and a preference for political dialogue over substantive action, raising doubts about the EU's commitment to upholding human rights in practice.

Furthermore, the EU's reluctance to impose sanctions or exert significant pressure on Qatar underscores the complexities inherent in its foreign policy, in particular concerning economic interests. Qatar's status as a major player in the global energy market and its substantial investments across Europe, create a dynamic where economic considerations often overshadow human rights concerns.

In exploring the EU's response to the Qatar World Cup, this thesis aims to analyze the underlying reasons for the apparent inconsistency between the EU's ideals and its actions or interests in external policy. Adopting the theoretical framework of ideas, institutions, and interests, this research will investigate the intricate interactions shaping the EU's foreign policy decisions in this context.

This thesis will start with a chapter focusing on the inconsistent conduct of the EU in its external human rights policy in the case of the World Cup in Qatar. In the following one, instead, the image the EU has constructed of itself, thus its role as a normative power, will be explored. The next chapter will then look at the complexity of the EU's foreign policy. While the final chapter will address the economic interests that bind the European Union and Qatar. In the final section, the conclusions that emerge from this research will be outlined.

2. The EU's inconsistent conduct in its external human rights policy: the case of Qatar

The debate surrounding the role of human rights objectives in EU external relations often centers on the issue of inconsistency. Nevertheless, in order to analyze and understand the inconsistency that has characterized the European Union's conduct in the Qatar case, specifically with regard to the controversies generated by the 2022 World Cup, it is first necessary to clarify what is meant for inconsistent. In the case of the EU approach to the human rights infringements that occurred in the context of the abovementioned sport event, «inconsistency can be presented as a result of a struggle between values and interests; a gap between rhetoric and action»⁶⁰. Inconsistency in the Union's foreign policy therefore has a very significant impact on the image of the European Union, as this weakens the credibility and effectiveness of the EU's involvement in third countries and its efforts to promote human rights⁶¹, as the following section will show.

2.1 Between the EU intentions and practical action: inconsistencies

On paper, the European Union appears as a champion of human rights, and consequently of their protection and guarantee, as well as an exemplary model in matters of values and, accordingly stands up to the role of advocate of said rights and values at the global level. However, between the positive image that the EU has outlined and attributed to itself and the reality of the facts, its actions, there are some inconsistencies. Indeed, several criticisms have been made of the EU by non-EU states, NGOs, and academics⁶². With regard to the external human rights dimension of the EU's foreign policy, the positive portrayal of the Union as the guarantor and protector of human rights is criticized⁶³ on the grounds that, in a variety of occasions, the EU has refrained from intervening, sometimes ignoring serious human rights violations in some third countries⁶⁴. Even merely withdrawing from action in

⁶⁰ Körtvélyesi, Z. (2016). Inconsistency and Criticism: Mapping Inconsistency Arguments Regarding Human Rights Promotion in EU External Relations. *European Yearbook on Human Rights*, 2016, 223-242.

⁶¹ This principle holds not only within academic literature but also within EU institutions. A resolution by the European Parliament emphasized that the EU's action regarding third countries has to be consistent for it to be credible and hence effective, and that discrepancies and inconsistencies make its action less effective and sometimes cause its views on human rights not to be heard; recalls that, in spite of the many problems encountered, consistency is still a priority for external policy and that it has to be at the heart of the mandate of all those involved in such policy". European Parliament, Resolution on the Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World 2013 and the European Union's policy on the matter, 2014/2216 (INI) (12 March 2015), para. 27.

⁶² Balfour, R. (2013). Human rights and democracy in EU foreign policy: The cases of Ukraine and Egypt. Routledge.
Bosse, G. (2007). Values in the EU's Neighbourhood Policy: Political Rhetoric or Reflection of a Coherent Policy? *European Political Economy Review*, 7 (2), 38-62.

⁶³ Lerch, M., & Schweltnus, G. (2006). Normative by nature? The role of coherence in justifying the EU's external human rights policy. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 13 (2), 304-321.

⁶⁴ Burchill, R. (2011). Assessing the EU's Position on Human Rights: Is it a Desirable One? *The EU as a 'Global Player' in Human Rights?* (pp. 17-31). Routledge.

the event of non-compliance with these rights appears to diverge with the reputation the Union has built for itself, thus already underscoring an inconsistency. With regard to the aforementioned incongruencies, then, Professor Stijn Smismans⁶⁵ makes an even stronger criticism of the EU's delineated human rights profile, stating that the latter is constituted by «institutional myth-makers»⁶⁶. As a proof of this he stresses how, in the outset of the institutional project, there was no provision for and, indeed, no mention of human rights. He argues, in fact, that the fundamental rights narrative that the EU has developed contains factual mistakes like all myths, but that, nevertheless, it is «believed and acted upon by both institutional myth-makers and civil society actors»⁶⁷. Although the tension between the internal and external dimensions of the human rights framework present in EU foreign policy is not the subject of discussion in this thesis, it turns out to be a useful concrete example of what Smisman is referring to. The distinction between these two dimensions is qualified as “double standards”. The latter term stands for the divergent treatment that the Union operates with regard to human rights protection and respect between member and non-member states. In this case, it is helpful in emphasizing the lack of respect for human rights that occurs within the territory of the Union and which the EU neglects being, thus, more indulgent toward its own member states than it is toward non-EU countries. The ignoring of these violations, then, harks back to what Smisman argues when he states that, despite evident errors, the fundamental rights narrative is carried on, closing, or at least squinting, its eyes to these errors (in the World Cup case, human rights infringements). This indulgence of the EU, however, is not limited to the internal dimension of human rights but can rather be found in the external policy of the aforementioned rights as well. Indeed, critiques have been levelled at the EU with regard to the selectivity it employs when the urge to intervene in crises in the name of human rights arises. In particular, Borja Guiarro-Usobiaga, outlines the objections raised by a group of scholars to the behavior of the Union in dealing with such cases, by stating that: «when confronted with human rights abuses in third countries, the EU exercises Realpolitik by punishing only those states to which it can exert leverage, while it remains indulgent towards those where the EU's strategic interests are at stake»⁶⁸. Therefore, a general tendency can be found on the part of the EU not to be objective and congruent in its foreign human rights policy when its own economic interests are at jeopardy. Indeed, the human rights clauses that the EU includes in Trade Agreements with third countries appear to be of minor significance when weighed against the possibility to of concluding an economic partnership. On the contrary, economic pursuits often translate into obstacles

⁶⁵ Professor of European Law and founder and Director of the Cardiff Centre for European Law and Governance.

⁶⁶ Smismans, S. (2010). The European Union's fundamental rights myth. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 48(1), 45-66.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁶⁸ Guiarro-Usobiaga Borja, 'Normative or Negative? Human Rights and the Use of Negative Measures in the EU's External Action' [2013] 1 White Rose Politics Review 86.

for external human rights policy. Strategic assessments and considerations, thus, trump the work of protecting, guaranteeing, and promoting said fundamental rights that the EU espouses. However, as will be explained in the following chapters, economic and, in general, strategic questions are only one of several reasons that undermine the commitment that the Union aims to bring to the protection and fostering of human rights in third countries. Indistinctly from the reasons that lead the Union to act differently in third states, the EU's conduct undermines the legitimacy of its own external human rights policy. To ensure that this does not occur, therefore, «Any policy aimed at promoting and protecting certain values and principles in all third countries, to be credible and principled, must be coherent and consistent, with little regard to the strategic or economic importance of a third state or the historical considerations that continue to exist in relations with some third states»⁶⁹. Nevertheless, the EU's commitment to its external human rights policy appears to continue to be in competition with other EU interests and incongruent with the ideals of which the EU aims not only to be the protector and promoter, but also an example, as the recent case of the Qatar World Cup proves.

2.2 The case of Qatar: the controversies of the 2022 World Cup

In December 2010, following a secret ballot, it is announced that Qatar is the state that will host the World Cup in 2022. This event was «the first global sporting event ever to be hosted in Middle East»⁷⁰, thus giving Qatar the opportunity to present itself as a legitimate player on the international stage and to show itself distinct from other Arab states. Indeed, quite often, «sports events showcase the values, culture and imagery of a host nation, and through that, ideally, attract investors, tourists and attention»⁷¹. Nevertheless, the 2022 World Cup has drawn attention to Qatar for the wrong reasons, or at least for motives far different from those desired. Ever since Qatar was selected to host the sporting event, in fact, it has been the issue of labor migrant rights that has put the country under the international lens of scrutiny. Long before the World Cup, precisely, «the tragic circumstances under which migrant workers in Qatar were building the infrastructure needed to host the event and other related infrastructure came to light, as did other salient human rights problems such as the country's hostility towards LGBTQI+ people and corruption around the bidding process»⁷². Therefore, the mega-sporting event that could have allowed Qatar to realize its aspirations, has instead put the country in the situation of handling human rights scrutiny in order to safeguard its image globally. The consequences of the takeover of the World Cup have thus been negative for Qatar.

⁶⁹ Khaliq, U. (2008). *Ethical dimensions of the foreign policy of the European Union: a legal appraisal*. Cambridge University Press.

⁷⁰ Bidders for the 2022 FIFA World Cup: Qatar, <http://www.fifa.com/worldcup/qatar2022/bidders/qatar.html>

⁷¹ Næss, H. E. (2023)., *op. cit.* p. 1.

⁷² Heerdt, D., & Roorda, L. (2023)., *op. cit.* p. 20.

Although such a sporting event could potentially allow the state to create a new positive self-image defeating stereotypes about the Middle East region in general, this has not been the case. It is, after all, essential to underline that «simply having the ambition to be seen as attractive through the use of global sport does not automatically lead to one becoming so in the minds of others. In fact, for states that endeavour to improve their image through global sport and its subsequent mass-media exposure, there is always the need to consider the potential for “soft disempowerment”, referring to “those occasions in which you may upset, offend or alienate others, leading to a loss of attractiveness or influence” »⁷³, as was indeed the case with Qatar.

In order to analyze the inconsistent conduct of the EU in the case of the World Cup held in Qatar, it is first necessary to investigate the circumstances of said state with regard to the human and labor rights violations that occurred before and during the sporting event in question. By scrutinizing these circumstances, the gravity of the situation and the urgency for action will be underlined. Analyzing the conditions prevailing in Qatar before and during the World Cup demonstrates the severity of the human rights violations and the clear disregard for labor standards. This corroborates the argument that the EU had a compelling basis to adopt a resolute stance against such violations. The investigation seeks to provide evidence of the conditions that warranted decisive action from the EU. By illustrating the extent of the human and labor rights violations in Qatar, the analysis aims to underscore the imperative for the EU to uphold its values and principles, ensuring that its engagement aligns with its commitment to promoting and protecting human rights globally.

In the next section, therefore, the conditions of workers in the state of Qatar and the related respect for human rights will be analyzed. An explanation of the country’s labor system and its subsequent changes will also be provided, in order to better understand the conditions of workers on which the European Union has shown a lack of coherence and consistency.

2.3 Human and workers’ rights violations

In order to get a more complete informative picture of the violation of workers’ rights in the context of the World Cup, it is necessary to make a premise, namely: the majority of Qatar’s working population is composed of expatriates. In general, the «countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have one of the highest shares of foreign-born labor force in the world and in terms of destination choice are ranked third globally for international migrants after the European Union and

⁷³ Brannagan, P. M., & Rookwood, J. (2016). Sports mega-events, soft power and soft disempowerment: international supporters’ perspectives on Qatar’s acquisition of the 2022 FIFA World Cup finals. *International journal of sport policy and politics*, 8(2), 173-188.

North America»⁷⁴. It is sufficient to reflect on the fact that, in 2012, 94% of Qatar's working population was composed by emigrants⁷⁵. The premise about the high number of migrants among the workers who participated in the construction of the projects for the stadiums and, in general, for the infrastructure needed for the World Cup sporting event, is relevant when taking into account that it is usually easier for labor rights violations and abuses of their human rights to occur in cases where the people in question are migrants. These violations, in fact, already begin with the migration life cycle, in which «labor migrants are exposed to abuses that make possible the conditions of forced labor, human trafficking, and indefinite detention»⁷⁶. Fueling the abuse suffered by migrants has been the *Kafala* system. The latter «regulates the lives of tens of millions of migrant laborers in the Middle East»⁷⁷ through a sponsorship system that results in the employer exercising great control over his employees. By reason of this control system, «sponsors are granted legal power to control migrant workers; for example, a worker cannot change his job, quite his job, or leave the country without the employer's permission. Further, an employer has the authority to cancel the residence visa of a worker who quit his or her job without permission»⁷⁸.

However, the law that made all labor migrants subject to this restrictive system⁷⁹ was superseded in 2015 by Law No. 21⁸⁰, which not only eliminates the *Kafala* system but provides increased protection of migrants' rights as workers. Among the reforms operated we can identify «a minimum wage for all workers, electronic wage transfer systems and the creation of a government authority to issue residency permits and work visas, as well as oversee work contracts»⁸¹. Nonetheless, the legal change was not enough for a shift in workers' conditions and respect for their human rights to occur. As showed by an analysis by *The Guardian* in February 2021, in fact, «more than 6,500 migrant workers from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka had died in Qatar since the award of the tournament»⁸².

⁷⁴ Seshan, G. (2012). Migrants in Qatar: A socio-economic profile. *Journal of Arabian Studies*, 2(2), 157-171.

⁷⁵ Doha News Team, 'Report: Qatar growing increasingly dependent on expat labor', in Doha News, 11 January 2012, <https://dohanews.co/report-qatar-growing-increasingly-dependent-on-expat/>

⁷⁶ Ganji, S. K. (2016). Leveraging the World Cup: Mega sporting events, human rights risk, and worker welfare reform in Qatar. *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, 4(4), 221-259.

⁷⁷ Robinson, K. (2022) What Is the Kafala System? *Council on Foreign Relations*, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-kafala-system>

⁷⁸ ter Haar, B. (2018). FIFA, Qatar, Kafala: can the world cup create a better world of work?: by Beryl ter Haar, assistant professor on European and International Labour Law, Leiden University, The Netherlands. *International Labor Rights Case Law*, 4(1), 128-132.

⁷⁹ Qatar Law No. 4 of 2009 Regulating the Entry, Exit, Residence and Sponsorship of Expatriates, adopted 26 February 2009, entered into force 29 April 2009

⁸⁰ Qatar Law No. 21 of 2015 Regulating the Entry, Exit and Residence of Expatriates, adopted 27 October 2015, entered into force 13 December 2016

⁸¹ Griffin, T. R. (2021). National identity, social legacy and Qatar 2022: the cultural ramifications of FIFA's first Arab World Cup. In *Moments, Metaphors, Memories* (pp. 104-117). Routledge.

⁸² Dart, T., (2022). How many migrant workers have died in Qatar? What we know about the human cost of the 2022 World Cup, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2022/nov/27/qatar-deaths-how-many-migrant-workers-died-world-cup-number-toll>

3. EU ideas

3.1 The image the European Union paints of itself

The European Union presents itself as the guarantor, protector, and promoter of human rights. It has in fact built a positive self-image by portraying itself as a champion of the promotion of human rights, peace, democracy and of all the values defined as European that have characterized countless speeches by the Union's spokesmen such as, for example, that of former Commission President Barroso, whose words were: «by showing the successful functioning of a peaceful Union, based on democracy and respect for human rights, Europe is leading by example»⁸³. Nevertheless, as a promoter of external human rights, in the case of the violations and abuses committed by the state of Qatar in the context of the World Cup, the EU appears to have opted more for inaction than action. In accordance with the image and role that the Union presents for itself, namely that of «beacon of hope for the world when it comes to human rights and democracy»⁸⁴, the aforementioned issue concerning the respect for human rights, and in particular those of workers, presented itself as a unique opportunity for the EU to «push its labour rights agenda in the Gulf state, with the tournament throwing the country's dismal record on migrant workers firmly into the spotlight»⁸⁵. Indeed, as stated by the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in a joint communication to the European Parliament and the Council, «the EU has a lot to offer to the Gulf partners» as, among many other roles, «an important mediator and promoter of multilateralism, democracy and social transformation including human rights and gender equality»⁸⁶. However, what has been articulated does not seem to coincide with the line of action taken by the EU with regard to this particular matter, revealing therefore a discrepancy between the EU's professed values and its response to the human rights challenges posed by events like the Qatar World Cup. Contributing to the rise of critical questions about the Union's commitment to its own image as a global champion of human rights and democracy is the fact that, the EU's role as a guarantor of said rights is not limited to statements made by EU spokespersons but has a proper legal basis. Indeed, this exemplary and human rights-promoting role that the Union ascribes to itself finds its legal foundation in the Treaty of the European Union (TEU), particularly in Article 3(1) which states that

⁸³ Barroso, J. M. D., *op. cit.*

⁸⁴ Tullemans, F. Unwilling or Unable?: Explaining Double Standards between the Internal and External EU Human Rights Policy, Ghent University.

⁸⁵ Fautre, W., (2019). EU must hold Qatar to account for World Cup deaths. In *EU observer*, <https://euobserver.com/opinion/144899>

⁸⁶ European Union: European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Joint communication to the European Parliament and the Council*, 18 May 2022, *op. cit.*

«The Union's aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its people» and in Article 3(5) which declares that «In its relations with the wider world, the Union shall uphold and promote its values and interests and contribute to the protection of its citizens. It shall contribute to peace, security, the sustainable development of the Earth, solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights, particularly the rights of the child, as well as to the strict observance and the development of international law, including respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter»⁸⁷. Article 3 of the TEU, therefore, does not only attribute a legal binding character to the Union's commitment to protecting these rights, but also to its role as a human rights promoter in relation to the wider world. The human rights framework thus finds two dimensions: one internal to the Union and one external. A tension between these two is present and has been the subject of study by several scholars. However, the aim of this thesis is not to discuss the double standards that have emerged from this division, but rather is to focus on the tension highlighting the discrepancies between ideas and interests that results from the differential treatment of third states with regard to respect for human rights when an economic partnership is at stake. In order to analyze said tension, it is necessary to explain what is being referred to when talking about the external human rights dimension of the European Union. First of all, it is important to specify that the issue concerning the protection and guarantee of human rights in territories outside the Union originates even before the internal regime of such rights. Indeed, it is already with the European Political Cooperation (EPC) of the European Community that the external human rights arrangement begins, albeit remaining limited to dialogue and diplomacy. However, the historical context of the end of the Cold War enabled the EU to broaden its horizons by cultivating relations with parts of the states that previously belonged to the former Soviet bloc. This allowed an integration of human rights and of the use of the instrument of conditionality in relations between the Union and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The element of conditionality and human rights related matters, then, are intrinsically linked, that is: with the inclusion of human rights as integral to the Union's agreements with third states, the use of the tool of conditionality that applies to EU agreements also touches on the question of respect for human rights. In other words: «These human rights clauses allows either party to take 'appropriate measures' (including the suspension of the agreement), in case of a human rights violation»⁸⁸.

To fulfill a key role in this area is the European Parliament. Although the latter has limited powers in the sphere of EU foreign policy, it has often contributed to the advancement of EU human rights policy. Indeed, it is considered as an entrepreneur of norms in relation to the protection and

⁸⁷ Art. 3 TEU.

⁸⁸ Tullemaans, F., *op. cit.*, p. 7.

enforcement of human rights⁸⁹. An example of the European Parliament's commitment to ensuring progress on human rights is the initiative, proposed by the latter, that led to the creation of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) in 2006⁹⁰. The purpose of this instrument is to distribute funds to civil society organizations in third countries, so that improvements in democracy, human rights and the rule of law are achieved. In particular, then, this instrument stipulates that the consent of the third state in question is not required to receive financial aid, which thus allows human rights matters to be addressed from the bottom-up⁹¹.

An externalization of human rights is thus evidently enacted. In fact, Javier Solana, the former High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy himself, has repeatedly reiterated the importance of the Union's role in the progression of human rights, stressing that the EU has to assume its responsibility to contributing to the common overall good, since the EU is meant to serve a global role⁹². It is therefore clear that, from the previously mentioned legal basis and the subsequential actions and declarations made by various EU actors, the image the EU paints of itself is undoubtedly that of a defender of human rights, to which is added an important role as a promulgator of said rights. Also reinforcing the Union's role in this matter is the fact that the Union has woven human rights as values into its identity, making them one and the same and, consequently, elevating the Union's role to that of an exemplary actor to be followed.

Having elevated its image as a guarantor of human rights to a high level of relevance, a strong and definite action, or rather positioning, on the part of the EU would have been consistent with the role it has assigned to itself, in the context of the human rights issues surrounding the Qatar World Cup. However, as already mentioned, the European Union has not demonstrated to uphold its own principles with regard to the scrutiny and criticisms that Qatar has faced concerning its human rights records, generating debates about the consistency of its principles, and thus undermining its credibility as a defender and guarantor of said rights on the global stage. The external dimension of the EU's human rights, and all the progress the EU has made throughout history, seems to have been ignored by the EU itself in the case of the World Cup controversies. The image the EU has shown on the occasion of the infringements that occurred in the aforementioned sporting event, therefore,

⁸⁹ Smith, K. E. (2013). *European Union foreign policy in a changing world*. John Wiley & Sons.

⁹⁰ Dobрева, A., (2015). *European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights*, European Parliamentary Research Service, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2015/568332/EPRS_BRI\(2015\)568332_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2015/568332/EPRS_BRI(2015)568332_EN.pdf)

⁹¹ Churrua Muguruza, C., Gómez Isa, F., García San José, D., Fernández Sánchez, P. A., Márquez Carrasco, C., Muñoz Nogal, E., Nagore Casas, M. & Timmer, A. (2014). *Mapping legal and policy instruments of the EU for human rights and democracy support*. FRAME. Deliverable No. D12.1.

⁹² Javier Solana – 'Shaping an effective EU Foreign Policy' Foundation Konrad Adenauer. (2006). In *EU security and defence: Core documents 2005* (pp. 17–22). European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep06972.5>

appears to be rather far from the one it is used to present worldwide. In conclusion, in the case of Qatar, the EU has displayed another “side” of itself, distancing it from its own role.

3.2 The EU instruments for an ethical foreign policy

In its self-proclaimed role as a global advocate for human rights and democracy, the European Union often portrays itself as a beacon of hope and a promoter of international standards⁹³. However, when faced with the harsh reality of human rights violations, such as those that occurred in Qatar during preparations for the World Cup, the EU’s response has often been characterized more by passivity than proactive engagement. While the European Union hasn’t explicitly stated that its foreign policy is driven by ethics, it consistently emphasized the significance of prioritizing human rights in its interactions with third countries. Indeed, the EU has «established a set of instruments of its own in order to protect human rights. Furthermore, the Union refers to the other European legal arrangements such as the “European Convention of Human Rights” (ECHR) when developing and implementing its human rights regime»⁹⁴. However, as has already been mentioned, the EU does not always live up to the approach it claims to have when it comes to promoting and safeguarding human rights, precisely as occurred in the case of the violations that took place in Qatar. In the current context, in which the role of the EU on the international stage is still growing, there is an even more urgent necessity for a consistent approach to the treatment of human rights issues in the EU’s external policy⁹⁵. This section thus proposes to provide an overview of the possibilities, in terms of legal basis and tools, that the EU has in order to pursue a human rights policy in third countries that is consistent with its proclaimed values.

The instruments the Union has at its disposal for ensuring respect for human rights outside its borders are diverse. In fact, as already stated, the EU claims a legal basis for the promotion of said rights (i.e., Article 2 and 3 of the TEU, which give human rights not only the status of values of the Union, but also of objectives). The EU’s legal system then goes further, with Article 21⁹⁶ of the same Treaty, which established the general principles guiding the application of human rights in the EU’s external relations. Additionally, Article 6 of the TEU⁹⁷ references the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights as guiding frameworks for the EU’s practices, including its

⁹³ Tulleman, F., *op. cit.*, p. 4

⁹⁴ Yazgan, H. (2017). European Union’s human rights policy: an analysis from external relations perspective. *Adam Academy Journal of Social Sciences*, 7(1), 51-67.

⁹⁵ Alston, Philip & Weiler J.H.H. (1998), “An ‘Ever Closer Union’ in Need of a Human Rights Policy”, *EJIL*, 9:658-723.

⁹⁶ Art. 21 TEU.

⁹⁷ Art. 6. TEU.

external affairs⁹⁸. Going beyond the legal system that the Treaties provide, it can be observed that the EU fosters the recognition of human rights through a multifaceted approach. This includes incentivizing compliance through both positive and negative conditionality, and the engaging in diplomatic discourses.

The first form used by the EU to promote respect for human rights, namely positive conditionality, refers to a situation where a state or international organization connects potential benefits, such as aid, to another state, contingent upon that state meeting specified criteria concerning the safeguarding of human rights and the promotion of democratic values⁹⁹. In particular, positive conditionality offers benefits to a state upon meeting specific conditions, while negative conditionality entails the reduction, suspension, or cessation of those benefits if the state fails to adhere to the conditions. One of the EU's most relevant moves towards the implementation of conditionality can be identified in the integration of the Human Rights Clause¹⁰⁰ into its cooperation and association agreements. Initially introduced by the Council in May 1992, this clause became a standard feature in agreements with other European states, allowing for the potential suspension of said agreements in cases of human rights and democratic principles infringement. Despite initial hesitance, it wasn't until May 1995 that the Council extended this clause to agreements with third countries¹⁰¹. This provision empowers the EU to amend or suspend agreements with non-European states found in violation of human rights and democratic principles. However, there is a notable inclination towards constructive engagement, as emphasized by the clause's focus on maintaining operational agreements whenever feasible. Furthermore, a consultation process precedes any decisive action, underlining the EU's commitment to diplomatic resolution. The EU's tendency to favor a constructive engagement over more restrictive measures may, however, prove to be a convenient way for the EU not to intervene directly and concretely with regard to human rights infringements. Often, in fact, «economic competition and conflicting national interests continue to restrict Europe's common foreign policy in human rights issues to declarations of concern rather than action»¹⁰². In the case of the Cooperation Agreement¹⁰³ in whose framework the EU-Qatar collaboration takes place, a human rights clause is not present at all. Certainly, it is important to bear in mind that, since the agreement between the EU

⁹⁸ Yazgan, H. (2017)., *op. cit.* p. 53.

⁹⁹ Smith, K. E. (2001). 11 The EU, human rights and relations with third countries: 'foreign policy' with an ethical dimension? *Ethics and foreign policy*, 185.

¹⁰⁰ Zamfir, I., (2019), Human rights in EU trade agreements. The human rights clause and its application, European Parliamentary Research Service, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/637975/EPRS_BRI\(2019\)637975_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/637975/EPRS_BRI(2019)637975_EN.pdf)

¹⁰¹ Smith, K. E. (2001)., *op. cit.*, p. 189.

¹⁰² King, Toby (1999), "Human Rights in European Foreign Policy: Success or Failure for Post-Modern Diplomacy", *EJIL*, 10/2: 313-337.

¹⁰³ Cooperation Agreement, 1989, Official Journal of the European Communities, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:21989A0225%2801%29:EN:HTML#d1e32-12-1>

and the Gulf Cooperation Council (to which, it is worth recalling, the state of Qatar is a member) was concluded in 1988, thus prior to the introduction of such provision, the Agreement is not accompanied by such essential clause. Nevertheless, the fact that to this day the clause is not present in the agreement means that the latter has not, in the decades since its signature, been amended in favor of the inclusion of such a clause. This omission undoubtedly fuels criticisms of the EU for lack of will in addressing human rights related controversies.

The tools at the EU's disposal in order to protect and safeguard respect for these fundamental rights, however, are not limited to conditionality and, more specifically, to the inclusion of such a clause. As already mentioned, in fact, the Union also avails itself of diplomatic instruments. Certainly, the EU firmly positioned human rights as a cornerstone of its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). This commitment was further reinforced through subsequent documents such as the "European Security Strategy of 2003, which underlined the prominence of human rights within the EU's external relations"¹⁰⁴. Indeed, annually, the EU, via the CFSP, issues a multitude of statements regarding the human rights landscape in third countries and it forwards diplomatic notes expressing concerns regarding specific cases. Even «diplomatic sanction (suspending high-level contacts and withdrawing ambassadors) and arms embargoes have been imposed on third countries over their human rights records»¹⁰⁵. Nevertheless, in the case of human rights violations occurred in Qatar, the EU did not opt for a suspension of contact with the country, but rather, in 2022, opened an EU Delegation in Doha, considered the result of the intensified bilateral engagement between the two parties¹⁰⁶, despite the fact, it is essential to remember, that controversies related to the World Cup that the state hosted had emerged from the moment of the awarding of the sporting event to Qatar in 2010.

Taking the case of Qatar as an example, then it is not surprising that the EU is charged with failing to implement the rhetoric it proclaims and on which it has based its image.

Indeed, despite the rather broad legal basis the EU prides itself on and the mechanisms at its disposal, it is often criticized on several issues: «some claim that the EU's interest in human rights protection is often about promoting its own influence and strategic advantage internationally or that it is motivated by other political considerations», while «others accuse the EU of failing to show the real leadership in efforts to address human rights violations internationally»¹⁰⁷ and of being perceived as lacking the political will to tackle numerous urgent human rights challenges¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰⁴ Council of the European Union (2009), "EU Guidelines, Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law", Retrieved from: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/30855/qc8308123enc.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ Smith, K. E. (2001), *op. cit.*, p. 191.

¹⁰⁶ European External Action Service, 2021, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁷ De Búrca, G. (2011). The road not taken: the European Union as a global human rights actor. *American Journal of international law*, 105(4), 649-693.

¹⁰⁸ Amnesty International, The EU and Human Rights: Making the impact on people count (2009), <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/IOR61/004/2009/en>

Nonetheless, these are not the only objections made to the role EU attributes to the promotion of human rights in its external policies. Rather, that has been criticized is the lack of a human rights policy that is consistent and comprehensive both internally and externally. Specifically focusing on the latter dimension, this thesis argues that the deficiencies of the Union's performance on external human rights policy became quite evident in the case of the violations of said rights before and during the World Cup in Qatar. Indeed, the latter event has brought into sharp focus the condition of migrant workers, highlighting systemic issues of exploitation and human rights violations. This situation presented a unique opportunity for the EU to assert its labor rights agenda and uphold its image as a defender of human dignity. Despite rhetoric emphasizing its role as a mediator and advocate for democracy, the EU's actions in addressing these abuses have fallen short of its stated ideals. There is, therefore, «an urgent need for a human rights policy which is coherent, balanced, substantive and professional»¹⁰⁹, and not just a “façade”.

3.3 European normative power at the global level: the European Union and the “Responsibility to protect”

Based on a principle determined and agreed upon in 2005 by the members of the United Nations (UN), the European Parliament, in 2013, introduced an initiative with the purpose of consolidating and implementing the Union's support for the international “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P)¹¹⁰, which is derived from the aforementioned principle, aimed at preventing and responding to atrocities. By proposing an EU involvement in this project, the goal is, inevitably and necessarily, also to develop a consensus at the European level.

As will be explained later, the European Union's foreign policy is complex and marked by various facets, and as a result tensions often arise in the Union's internal decision-making processes.

Indeed, despite the fact that, in 2018, the EU High Representative clearly asserted that the above principle is already embedded into the Union's policies, «the slow pace with which the EU has engaged with R2P, in spite of the support of key individual members, is indicative of political tensions, uncertainties and bureaucratic path dependency in the organization».¹¹¹

The challenges that the EU has faced, such as Brexit and the migration crisis, have undoubtedly contributed to fuel the questioning and re-evaluation of the role of the Union at the global level,

¹⁰⁹ Smith, K. E. (2001)., *op. cit.*, p. 193.

¹¹⁰ Responsibility to Protect, United Nations, Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/about-responsibility-to-protect.shtml>

¹¹¹ Newman, E., & Stefan, C. G. (2020). Normative power Europe? The EU's embrace of the responsibility to protect in a transitional international order. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 58(2), 472-490.

particularly with reference to its normative role, resulting from the use of its soft power to conduct its foreign policy.

Because the promotion of the principle advocated by R2P requires normative actors who can attract others to a concept and a model indicative of certain values and standards, the legitimacy and credibility of the European Union are paramount and therefore cannot be compromised.

The Union must therefore demonstrate not only that it has embraced the principle proposed by the United Nations, but it must also be an example, that is, reflect in its actions said norm.

Consequently, «if the EU is to make R2P a key policy platform for its global role, this will need to be underpinned by Europe's normative reach and credibility in a broader sense» and, for this purpose, «a certain level of consistency in terms of practice in the human rights field, as well as technical competency as a foreign policy actor»¹¹² are needed.

It is not, therefore, sufficient that the protection and respect for human rights are considered, along with so many other values, to be foundational pillars of the EU and its identity. Concrete evidence is needed of the portrait of normative power that the Union has drawn of itself over the years. However, it is often the very concept of normative power, «and the subsequent endorsement of the theory by EU officials» that appears to be «nothing more than a facade to hide the EU's real, not so normative intentions»¹¹³. A clear example of this inconsistency is reflected in the European Union's approach to the human rights violations associated with Qatar's preparations for the 2022 World Cup. Despite the EU's Parliament's commitment to the Responsibility to Protect initiative, the Union's response to the abuses in Qatar has been notably lacking. The R2P framework emphasizes the international community's duty to intervene when a state fails to protect its populations from serious harm¹¹⁴. Yet, in the face of widespread reports of migrant workers exploitation in Qatar, the EU's actions have been minimal and largely symbolic. Indeed, in the case of the controversies concerning the human rights violations by the state of Qatar in the preparation of the mega sporting event that was the World Cup, the European Union appears to have proven that its normative power, and the actions that should follow, are a façade. In particular, as will be explored later in this thesis, in this case it seems that the EU has prioritized its own interests, neglecting the implementation of a policy aimed at respecting the fundamental rights and the values it proclaims. Unquestionably, there is a close connection between the values upheld by the EU, its role in the international arena, and the principle from which R2P was born, but the political commitment resulting from this norm requires far more.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹¹³ Tullemaans, F. *op. cit.* p. 12.

¹¹⁴ Gierycz, D. (2010). From humanitarian intervention (HI) to responsibility to protect (R2P). *Criminal Justice Ethics*, 29(2), 110-128.

What is demanded, in fact, is for «states to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, and to prevent such crimes, including their incitement. It also obliges the international community to assist states to meet their responsibility to protect and establishes that the international community, through the UN, has the responsibility to help to protect populations from these atrocities where national authorities are manifestly failing to do so».¹¹⁵

Despite the fact that during the R2P approval process at the United Nations level, the European states played an important role, simplifying the path to consensus, it seems that R2P was not then effectively embodied into the EU's foreign policy framework, or at least that of its member states.

In fact, «most of the endorsements of R2P between 2005 and 2013 were quite cursory or insubstantial»,¹¹⁶ seeing the reactions of the Union often slow and therefore delayed. Added to this is the difficult coordination that often occurs at the European level, which certainly does not help. These elements together make it difficult to say that on the EU side an R2P realization has actually occurred. However, this does not mean that the Union has completely lost its normative power, or that it has not advanced in this regard at all: «if one scrutinized the EU as a normative power at the UN, the EU Delegation has been a key supporter of the R2P in UN circles, “fighting for it politically and financially” ». Moreover, «the EU Delegation has regularly listed R2P as a priority and uses the explicit “Responsibility to Protect” terminology in press releases and statements».¹¹⁷

These actions of the Union certainly have a degree of relevance from a normative point of view, which is necessary to enjoy a certain legitimacy and credibility. The latter characteristics, which a normative actor needs, are certainly not encouraged by the internal tensions within the Union.

In particular, the lack of consensus among member states on how to implement R2P points back to one of the areas of tension that will be analyzed in the next chapter, namely that between civilian and military power. In other words, the divisions that continue to characterize the relationship between states within the EU, mainly concerns «the role of military force in preventing or stopping egregious human rights violations, and European states have arguably never reached a consensus on this».¹¹⁸

This, added to the fact that the process of internalizing the R2P into the Union's foreign policy system has proven to be slow going, only brings to light, once again, the internal divergences for which the heterogeneity of the Union's organization often provides fertile ground.

Further complicating the question is the fact that «the EU's response to the» previously mentioned «refugee crisis has arguably provided a negative test of its normative credibility, by raising serious

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹¹⁶ *Ibidem.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

questions about the EU's capacity to overcome internal differences on humanitarian challenges relevant to R2P, and its capacity to "live by example" ». ¹¹⁹

Even at the global level, then, the complexity of the Union's structure and its foreign policy, and the tensions that arise among its states, seem to compromise, or at least risk compromising, its role as a normative actor in the eyes of the rest of the world, thus undermining its legitimacy and credibility. With the Responsibility to Protect initiative, therefore, the EU has taken a further step forward, at least on paper, in terms of the protection and safeguard of human rights. In fact, as previously explained, R2P calls for greater political commitment. However, the fact that in the case of the 2022 World Cup the EU was either unable, due to the complexity of the dynamics affecting its foreign policy, or unwilling, on account of economic interests that were given precedence over human rights, to act on normative grounds in favor of the protection of workers' human rights, raises concerns and threats for the «legitimacy of the EU's human rights policy» ¹²⁰. This discrepancy between the EU's proclaimed values and its actual behavior reveals a troubling gap. The EU prides itself on its role as a global normative power, advocating for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Nevertheless, the lack of substantial action regarding the human rights violations in Qatar undermines this self-image. The Union's failure to leverage its influence to push for meaningful reforms in Qatar suggests that its commitment to R2P and similar principles may be more about rhetoric than reality.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹²⁰ Tullemans, F., *op. cit.* p. 14.

4. EU institutions

4.1 The EU institutional setup

As already briefly explained, the European Union's institutional setup is intricate, involving multiple bodies with different roles and competences in foreign policy decision-making. «Single in name, dual in policymaking method, multiple in nature – this is the Union's institutional framework in a nutshell»¹²¹. This complexity can lead to divisions or disagreements among EU institutions, impacting the consistency and effectiveness of the EU's foreign policy. Such an intricate institutional setup contributes to divisions at the European level, among different bodies, sometimes resulting in inconsistent attitudes and lack of firm and explicit stances, as seen in the case of the human rights violations during the World Cup in Qatar. When examining the European Union's role and interventions regarding this issue, it is primarily the European Parliament's statements that stand out¹²². Indeed, as previously mentioned, the EP, despite its limited powers in the framework of EU foreign policy, has often occupied an outstanding role in the progression of human rights, showing commitment and dedication to ensuring that human rights are respected and for the purpose of their advancement. Since 2008, thus prior to the awarding of the World Cup to Qatar, the EP «has adopted four resolutions addressing the situation of migrant workers in Qatar; it has called on Qatar to end the 'deplorable situation' of migrant workers and prevent preparations for the 2022 World Cup from being 'overshadowed by allegations of forced labour'»¹²³. Additionally, as reported by *CBS News*, the European Parliament has formally expressed its position on possible human rights violations by condemning Qatar following the World Cup, thus reiterating its stance on the matter¹²⁴. The European Parliament, then, further adopted a supplementary resolution with regard to the human rights situation in Qatar, stating that even the process of assigning the World Cup to the state back in 2010 was not preceded by a proper and responsible risk assessment, in addition to not being transparent¹²⁵. However, the credibility of the European Parliament was severely tested in December 2022 due to the scandal regarding the bribery of some member of its members, commonly referred to as Qatargate. The case concerns the controversy generated by allegations that the Qatar government channeled cash

¹²¹ Keukeleire, S., Delreux, T., *The Foreign Policy of the European Union*, 2014. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-02576-0>

¹²² Worden, M., (2022), European Parliament Testimony: "The High Human Cost of the World Cup".

¹²³ Immenkamp, B., (2021). The 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar: Turning the spotlight on workers' rights.

¹²⁴ Czachor, E. M., (2022). EU condemns Qatar over alleged human rights abuses ahead of World Cup, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/eu-condemns-qatar-alleged-human-rights-abuses-2022-world-cup/>

¹²⁵ Press release, (2022). World Cup in Qatar: FIFA should help compensate families of dead migrant workers, Ref.: 20221121IPR56305, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20221121IPR56305/world-cup-in-qatar-fifa-should-help-compensate-families-of-dead-migrant-workers>

to influence the decision of the European Parliament itself. Qatargate thus refers to the political scandal of corruption and money laundering. Although the European Union immediately condemned the actions of the parliamentarians involved in the case, it is evident that this scandal did not benefit the image of the European Union. While this thesis does not aim to analyze the reactions of civil society and European institutions to this scandal, it is relevant to mention it as an additional argument demonstrating the inconsistency of the EU in its relations with Qatar and, in particular, the necessity to reassess EU-Gulf relations.

In conclusion, several elements create and fuel divergences and sometimes schisms at the institutional level within the EU, contributing to its inconsistent foreign policy actions.

First of all, the EU's foreign policymaking involves numerous actors, including the European Commission, the European Council, the European Parliament, the European External Action Service (EEAS), and the individual member states. Each of these actors may have different perspectives, priorities, and interests. These distinct points of view usually lead to potential clashes or divergences in foreign policy objectives and, thus, actions.

Secondly, the competing mandates of the institutions in the European sphere contribute to the already present divide that results from the complicated plurality of players. Indeed, although each institution has its own mandate and area of responsibility, these are overlapping or competing, thus creating tensions and disagreements over the allocation of resources, priorities, decision-making authority and, more in general, over the direction of the Union's foreign policy.

Thirdly, and as will be elaborated later, the EU foreign policy operates within a hybrid system that combines elements of intergovernmentalism and supranationalism. While intergovernmental bodies such as the European Council and the Council of the EU represent member states governments, supranational institutions like the European Commission and the European Parliament represent EU-wide interests. Balancing these dynamics is, of course, challenging and may result in controversies and disunity over the distribution of competencies. Since member states retain significant influence over EU foreign policy decisions, they often prioritize their national interests over EU-wide objectives, thus risking the already delicate balance between the two levels.

Another factor that has to be taken into account is the role of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The latter has a central position in coordinating EU foreign policy. However, his effectiveness may be limited by conflicting interests among EU institutions, as well as by the necessity to navigate between member states' preferences and, again, priorities at the European level. This has, of course, an impact that cannot be considered positive for the purpose of reaching consensus and consistency in foreign policy decisions.

Considering these difficulties, the question of the decision-making procedures can only be interpreted as a further factor against the simplification of the EU's institutional setup. The latter is indeed complex not just because it involves both the member states and the institutions of the Union, but also because of the different procedures, due to the hybrid nature of the Union, that characterize the decision making of the EU as a whole. Achieving a shared decision, or even just reaching a compromise, is therefore complex and can often lead to delays, deadlock or even to an arrangement that doesn't satisfy all the parties involved, thus creating even more tensions.

The latest element to consider is the general lack of clarity in the institutional roles. The division of responsibilities and competences among the institutions is not always clear-cut, but it is rather blurred, leading to ambiguity and, as previously mentioned overlaps in their roles. Obviously, this vagueness fuels the misunderstandings and the institutional rivalries, and thus hinders the effectiveness of the coordination and cooperation in EU foreign policy, making, once again, more likely an inconsistent attitude of the Union with regard to what it proclaims and what it then enacts.

Indeed, the «EU's complex system of competences, institutions, decision-making procedures, policymaking processes and funding mechanisms cannot but lead to significant problems with regard to consistency»¹²⁶. It is therefore rather difficult for the EU to deliver a coherent statement. Undoubtedly, a «lack of consistency in EU external policies is detrimental to the EU's capacity to present a coherent message in international politics and mostly undermines its credibility as an international actor as well as its ability to achieve specific foreign policy goals»¹²⁷. In the case of the human rights violations during the Qatar World Cup, the EU demonstrated the challenges it faces in conveying an unambiguous message as a foreign policy actor on the global stage. Indeed, while the European Parliament formally condemned Qatar over allegations of human rights violations, which are believed to have caused the deaths of migrant workers during preparations for the infrastructure needed for the World Cup¹²⁸, the European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety Stella Kyriakides¹²⁹, referring to the same human rights violations highlighted and denounced by the EP, stated that «each single one of those deaths is, of course, a tragedy. But Qatar has also made significant progress on labour rights over the past years»¹³⁰, underlining, already, a distancing from the position repeatedly stressed by the EP. The European Commissioner then proceeded to assert that Qatar «was the first country in the Gulf to dismantle the discriminatory kafala system, which kept

¹²⁶ Keukeleire, S., Delreux, T., *op. cit.* p. 139.

¹²⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁸ Czachor, M. E., *op. cit.*

¹²⁹ Stella Kyriakides is a Cypriot psychologist and politician; she represents the Democratic Rally party. From 2019 she is the European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety.

¹³⁰ Situation of human rights in the context of the upcoming FIFA world cup in Qatar: opening statement by Stella Kyriakides, European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, Multimedia Centre, European Parliament, November 2022.

Qatar's large migrant worker population at the mercy of their employers», pointing out that «Qatar has adopted a new law establishing a non-discriminatory minimum wage»¹³¹, ignoring that this reform stems from the international pressure exerted on the State with regard to the violations of said rights. The aforementioned example thus proves the EU's difficulty in sending a coherent message as a foreign policy actor in the international context, a fact that, as mentioned above, resulted in the EU displaying an inconsistent attitude in the case of the Qatar disputes.

Despite being caught up in the political scandal, the European Parliament remains the only European institution to have spoken out on the human and labor rights violations that occurred in Qatar. Indeed, the Parliament condemned the abuses by the Qatari government and backed a remedy fund for the victims. In contrast, other institutions, including the European Commission, have not taken a firm stance on the matter. For instance, when asked about the Commission's position on the World Cup being assigned to Qatar¹³² through the European Parliament's website, the answer given on behalf of the European Commission was vague, merely stating that «EU relations with Qatar are based on the March 2018 Cooperation Arrangement, which fosters enhanced political dialogue, including on human and labour rights»¹³³. This disparity between the European Parliament and the European Commission illustrates how the EU's intricate institutional setup can affect the consistency of its statements on the global stage. The distance between these institutions in this case further complicates the EU's ability to present a unified stance. Therefore, the EU's institutional complexities hinder its ability to consistently address human rights issues, as evidenced by the differing responses of its various bodies.

Having outlined the EU's institutional set-up, the following section will look in more detail at its foreign policy complexities in the attempt to identify its origins.

4.2 The complexity of the foreign policy of the European Union

In order to comprehend the role that the European Union plays in protecting human rights in territories outside the Union, it is first necessary to define and understand the functioning of its foreign policy. The foreign policy of the European Union can be defined as «the area of EU policies directed at the external environment with the objective of influencing that environment and the behavior of other actors within it, in order to pursue interests, values and goals».¹³⁴

¹³¹ *Ibidem*

¹³² Parliamentary question, Football World Cup in Qatar and the Commission's position, E-003199/2022, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2022-003199_EN.html

¹³³ Parliamentary question, Answer given by Ms Gabriel on behalf of the European Commission, E-003199/2022(ASW), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2022-003199-ASW_EN.html

¹³⁴ Keukeleire, S., Delreux, T., *op. cit.* p. 1.

However, for the purpose of explaining the rationale behind European actions and interventions in third countries, it is essential to be aware of the internal mechanisms of the Union itself. Thus, simply defining foreign policy is not sufficient. The European Union is characterized by values that are considered common among the various member states. Nonetheless, the political, social and economic interests of the latter mean that at the same time it is possible to identify a strong heterogeneity within the Union.

Several constituent elements of the EU foreign policy that influence the decisions made at the European level and the resulting outcomes. For instance, the EU's approach to external human rights policy, including its response to human rights violations in the context of the Qatar World Cup, illustrates the complexity and inherent inconsistencies of its foreign policy.

To demonstrate the complexity of EU foreign policy, it is useful to describe three key traits that characterize it, namely that it is multifaceted, multi-method, and multilevel.

With regard to the first feature, namely multifaceted, the reference is to the fact that EU's foreign policy is composed of four different but related facets, that is to say: CFSP, CSDP, external action and external dimension of internal policies.

This thesis has neither the pretension nor the aim of explaining in detail each of these dimensions of EU foreign policy, but rather of analyzing said dimensions in order to allow for a greater understanding of the complexity that characterizes the aforementioned policy of the Union, for which it is therefore important to keep in mind its composition. In fact, although these four facets deal with different aspects, they are intertwined with each other in the process of policymaking, being the division between them not clearly defined, but rather blurred. It is therefore clear that this multifaceted trait of EU foreign policy does not simplify the decision-making process of the Union itself.

Added to this is the «importance of the national foreign policies of the member states» which «reveals that coordination of and cooperation between national foreign policies is an equally important component of EU foreign policy».¹³⁵

From the multifaceted nature of the Union's foreign policy, it follows, almost automatically, a multiple, indeed in this case double, method: the four aforementioned dimensions are structured according to two policymaking approaches: the Community one, which concerns the external action and the external dimension of internal policies, and the intergovernmental one, which relates to the CFSP and the CDSP.

The fact that the latter facets of EU foreign policy are organized by the above method denotes and highlights the control and the consequent importance of the role of member states who are represented in the two institutions of the European Council and the Council of the EU.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

On the contrary, the Community method stand for the balance operated at the European level between other institutions, namely between the Commission, the European Parliament, the Court of Justice and the Council of the EU.

Another prime factor to be taken into account is the multilevel characteristic of the EU foreign policy. Indeed, the various national foreign policies are not replaced by European one; rather there is an interaction between these two: «On the one hand, EU policies are often mirrored in national policies. On the other hand, national actors participate in EU foreign policymaking».¹³⁶

These two dimensions, the European and the national, are then joined by the international dimension. Indeed, the European Union and its member states participate in various international organizations, acting, jointly or individually, even at the global level. This third dimension, and in particular the fact that member states can also act singularly in the international sphere, is evidence of the complexity and nuances that characterize EU foreign policy.

Furthermore, the fact that the latter is not a substitute for national ones leads us toward an analysis of the elements that shape the behavior of member states with regard to foreign policy decisions, namely: power and resources, interests and identity.

With regard to the first feature, it is crucial to consider that the heterogeneity of the European space is also, if not primarily, presented in terms of capacity and power of member states. Indeed, the varying degree of the latter profoundly conditions the attitude of states in the policymaking process that takes place at the European level, where the disparity that arises between smaller and larger states often complicates, and sometimes even prevents, the choice of a common line to follow in European involvement in third states.

Secondly, national foreign policy interests define the position of States in the context of the European Union and, consequently, the relationships between them. Therefore, interests, depending on whether they are common, absent, converging but with a limited number of possibilities (thus making states competing), or incompatible as well as different, profoundly condition the attitudes of member states in policymaking and stances at the European level.

As the objective of this thesis is to analyze the EU's engagement in human rights advocacy in third countries when an economic partnership with them is at risk or necessary, a useful element to the above study is that of divergent and mutually incompatible interests. In the case of Qatar, for example, while the EU as a supranational entity has not taken a clear and unambiguous position on the issue of human rights violations that occurred in the country in question (with the exception of the condemnations coming only from the EP), some of its member states, including Belgium, have

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

demonstrated a stronger stance. Indeed, the Flemish and Walloon Regional Governments announced their intention to boycott the World Cup¹³⁷, unlike other member states and EU institutions.

The third element, namely the national identity of a member state, proves in turn to profoundly affect the role played by states in EU foreign policy.

Since identity is linked to the worldview and the role states play in it, conflicting visions about the course of action the EU should or should not take often arise within the European sphere, creating obstacles to forming a common position. Therefore, again, «the relative importance of values such as human rights and democracy compared to the pursuit of economic profit and geostrategic gain»¹³⁸ accurately demonstrates the tension and complexity characterizing European decision-making processes. This is particularly evident in determining the type of influence and interventions to be exercised in countries outside the Union.

The case of human rights violations in the Qatar World Cup underscores the complexity and often inconsistent nature of the EU's foreign policy. The multifaced objectives, multi-method approach, and multilevel governance all contribute to a foreign policy that must navigate competing priorities and external pressures. Consequently, while the EU advocates for human rights, practical considerations often lead to a more pragmatic and less consistent implementation of this principles in its external relations.

The determination and definition of the foreign policy of the EU, however, cannot be entirely attributed to the differences that may arise among member states. The diversity that characterizes the European Union is certainly complicates achieving a common policy, but it is not solely responsible for the lack of cohesion and consistency sometimes present at the European level. Also affecting the policymaking and decision-making that take place in Brussels are tension that do not stem directly from the States, but in which have marked, and still do, the history of the European Union since its inception. The reference here is to a particular area of tension: that between European integration and Atlantic solidarity, to which is connected another area of tension, namely that involving civilian power and military power.

As for the former, this impacted profoundly the Union even before the latter developed its own foreign policy.

In the post-World War II context, in fact, the United States (US) quickly assumed the role of guarantor of European security, thus creating a relationship of military dependence on them.

¹³⁷ Moller-Nielsen, T., Belgium to send smaller delegation to Qatar World Cup in human rights protest, 2022, The Brussels Times, <https://www.brusselstimes.com/311664/belgium-to-send-smaller-delegation-to-qatar-world-cup-to-protest-rights-abuses>

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

The military security offered by the United States did indeed provide stability in Europe after the second world conflict, but it also contributed to the formation of a European foreign policy, and more generally to a European integration, that was in the shadow of the Atlantic solidarity.

This military dependence on the US thus conditioned firstly the national foreign policies and later the European one. As a result, European foreign policies actions are taken with consideration not only of their implications for the EU but also, if not especially, the potential effect they may have on relations with the US. The European Union's relatively subdued stance on human rights violations during the Qatar World Cup can be understood in this context, particularly in regions of critical strategic importance to the United States. The Persian Gulf, a key source of oil and a region with vital strategic waterways like the Strait of Hormuz, is crucial for global energy supplies and US military strategy¹³⁹. Given the strategic importance of the Persian Gulf to the US, the EU often aligns its foreign policy with US interests in this region due to its limited military capabilities, economic interests, and the need to maintain a strong transatlantic alliance. Consequently, the EU's response to human rights abuses in Qatar reflects broader strategic considerations, including economic and energy interests, diplomatic and strategic relations, and the influence of US policy. This alignment ensures the EU maintains its security and economic interests, even if it results in a more subdued response to human rights abuses.

The guarantee of military support and defense offered by the United States has therefore profoundly shaped the European defense project. The early failure of the European Defense Community in the 1950s led to the establishment of the European Community (EC) as a civilian actor.

This designation of the EC has fueled ongoing debates about whether the EU should evolve into a military power, potentially reducing its reliance on the United States and focusing more on European military integration. In other words, to take up the first area of tension previously mentioned: should the EU focus more on European integration from a military point of view, taking some distance from the Atlantic solidarity in this regard? By civilian power, in this case, we refer to the chance of the European Union to be and thus represent a power despite the absence of military equipment.

Indeed, the EU «is usually described as a civilian – or soft – power: an economic giant but a military dwarf»¹⁴⁰. This lack of a military dimension to the EU, stemming from the dominance exercised by the United States, NATO in particular, in this area, allowed the then EC and its member states to shape the European status and role in such a way that it was perceived positively in the international context. Indeed, this civilian focus allowed the EU to present itself positively on the global stage, emphasizing peaceful conflict resolution and the promotion of human rights and democracy.

¹³⁹ Asisian, N. (2018). The Qatar Crisis, its Regional Implications, and the US National Interest. *Journal Article*, 1-20.

¹⁴⁰ Goldthau, A., Sitter, N., (2015) Soft power with a hard edge: EU policy tools and energy security, *Review of International Political Economy*, 22:5, 941-965, DOI: 10.1080/09692290.2015.1008547

This characteristic, and ability, of the EU to co-opt rather than coerce is defined as “soft power”. The latter is in contrast to “hard power”, with respect to which the EU has no policy tools. The Union, indeed, «does not have sizeable armed forces under joint command, a substantial federal budget or direct control of firms. Its ability to use “hard power”, by means of coercion and payment, is limited»¹⁴¹.

The Union’s shortcomings in this area have caused a lack of trust on the part of member states towards the EU for security reasons, which in part explains their preference to act in the context of international organizations for issues like these. However, as previously mentioned, it has allowed the Union to define itself in the global context under a positive light. The EU, in fact, «seeks to be viewed as supporting economic, social, and political development of member states and defending universal values».¹⁴² By abandoning the idea of becoming a power from a military standpoint, then, the European Union had the opportunity to adopt a new narrative for itself through the use of civilian power, or soft power, or even normative power. Over the years, the EU «prided itself as a global norm-setter, a champion of human rights, and promoter of democracy as well as the largest provider of official development assistance (ODA). More than this, the EU was seen as the model of regional integration and the most successful international organization. For its contribution to peace and stability in Europe, it was rightly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize»¹⁴³. Nevertheless, as previously examined, the attention the EU claims to have for human rights was not reflected in the case of said rights during the World Cup in Qatar. As explained, the EU has had the opportunity to evolve as a soft power Union, which has consequently allowed it to build a certain picture of itself. However, between the image the EU has painted of itself over the years, and what it then actually implements, there is a gap. The complexity of EU foreign policy, influenced by a need to align with US strategic interests, economic considerations, and its self-defined role as a “soft power”, contributes to this inconsistency. While the EU prides itself on its normative power and commitment to universal values, the practicalities of maintaining regional stability and strategic alliances often leads to a more subdued stance on issues like human rights. Indeed, «promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law is for many member states not a high priority as an external foreign policy objective, but it is primarily an (internal) identity objective, where the goal is to shape a distinct international identity for the EU as a value-driven normative power»¹⁴⁴. This divergence between the EU’s projected image and its

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 942.

¹⁴² Carragher, A. (2022). Soft Power Analysis. In *Hard Cash and Soft Power: When Chinese Firms Win EU Contracts* (pp. 19–20). Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep44936.9>

¹⁴³ Kugiel, P. (2017). End of European soft power? Implications for EU foreign policy. *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs*, 26(1), 59-72.

¹⁴⁴ Keukeleire, S., Delreux, T., *op. cit.* p 151.

actual policies underscores the multifaceted nature of its foreign policy, shaped by both internal and external pressures, and reflects the ongoing tension between its ideals and pragmatic necessities. In conclusion, there are several factors that influence and shape the EU foreign policy, making it complex to understand and implement.

4.3 The soft powers of the European Union: why they are at times limited and challenging

As previously explained, in the difficult historical moment after World War II, the then European Community gradually began to take shape and establish itself in the international context by qualifying as a civilian actor or, more precisely, as a normative power. This conception of the Union stems from its chosen focus on fundamental rights, which has since expanded to encompass a wide range of norms and values. Its normative power has thus resulted in the export of these norms to other parts of the world, that is: it has made them the center of its relations with countries outside the Union. Nonetheless, despite the Union's apparently exemplary work in exporting these norms, which are fundamental to it and its member states, its normative power has been criticized.

Indeed, «the annual reports on EU action in the field of human rights and democracy», to mention a couple, as well as attesting to a large number of initiatives in which the EU is involved, «they also reveal the growing challenges the EU faces and the considerable variation in the EU's approach, actions and successes across countries, across different dimensions of human rights and rule of law policy, and across democracy promotion policies».¹⁴⁵

The soft powers of the Union, the use made of them, and the outcomes obtained as a consequence, are therefore not as flawless as one might wish.

Analyzing the EU's performance from the perspective of the capability-expectation gap, it is indeed possible to find that the Union is not that strong an actor as expected in the foreign policy arena, but rather it can be observed «a discrepancy between the expectations the EU engenders, and its limited ability to pursue the actual policies needed for fulfilling its envisaged roles in world politics».¹⁴⁶ The case of the workers' rights violations in Qatar provides a clear example of this. Despite the controversies and calls for actions by human rights organizations, such as Human Rights Watch¹⁴⁷, the European Union missed the exceptional chance to advance its advocacy for labor rights within

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p 147.

¹⁴⁶ Nielsen, K.L. (2013). 'EU Soft Power and the Capability-Expectations Gap', *Journal of Contemporary European Research*. 9 (5), pp. 723-739.

¹⁴⁷ World Report 2023: Qatar, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/qatar>

the nation. However, as already explained, this did not occur, and this failure reinforced the capability-expectation gap argument.

As previously introduced, one of the factors that contributes to the weakening of the EU as an actor in the international context is the lack of a foreign policy that is effectively common and coherent. The scarce and fragile presence of a European identity undermines the Union while highlighting the importance of national characters and their interests. Moreover, the constitutional powers enjoyed by the member states and their limited autonomy of action in Brussels contribute to the difficulties the Union has in establishing itself as a “strong power” in the global context. In other words, «the weak capacity for consistent action and the difficulties incorporating all its different policies across institutions has been a major barrier for the EU».¹⁴⁸

An early example of how the Union failed to meet expectations can be identified in the 1990s during the conflicts in the Western Balkans, where the EU and «its member states’ limited capacity for actual intervention in conflicts, underscoring the need for a more active and capable foreign policy»¹⁴⁹. This lack of capacity led to a loss of credibility for the EEU, which then relied on its soft powers, such as peacekeeping, support operations and stabilization vis-à-vis the countries concerned and, in particular, availed itself of the promise of an eventual EU membership to compensate for its shortcomings.

Undoubtedly, the norms and values upheld by the EU make it attractive in the eyes of third countries, as it has been from the very beginning. Indeed, «the reordering of relations between nations based on the rule of law, and the elaborate balancing of interests between larger and smaller members, makes the EU attractive in the eyes of outsiders» as does «the prosperity that has sprung from that recasting of relations and some of the concrete achievements of the European integration, such as the Single Market and the Schengen zone».¹⁵⁰ However, the attraction, legitimacy and credibility that the Union has been able to create for itself has been impacted by several phenomena.

In particular, the 2016 refugee crisis significantly undermined the strengths that characterized the Union. The European response to this crisis jeopardized the Union’s image and contributed to internal divisions among member states. The reception of a large number of migrants created tensions over how to best manage the crisis, with Greece and Italy bearing a disproportionate burden due to a largely

¹⁴⁸ Nielsen, K.L. (2013)., *op. cit.*, p. 726.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 725.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 729.

theoretical relocation project.¹⁵¹ Indeed, «the contribution of funding for special trust funds, border guards, and experts to support Greece and Italy leave room for improvement»¹⁵².

The opposition of the Visegrad countries¹⁵³ further highlighted the lack of a common political line on the issue, leading to a loss of solidarity within the Union and the renationalization of migration policies.

Obviously, the complications that arose within the Union also had consequences from an external point of view. Externally, the EU's struggle to remain true to its principles during the migration crisis compromised its international image. The focus on containing migration flows to its borders, rather than placing an emphasis on safeguarding the human rights of migrants themselves, demonstrated the EU's prioritization of internal security over its founding principles of freedom and justice¹⁵⁴. The fact that «a comprehensive approach towards the “human dimension” in relations with neighbouring countries, aimed at promoting fundamental structural changes, has been abandoned in favour of a much narrower focus on internal security and migration issues»¹⁵⁵, means that, although «this approach is veiled in the humanitarian language of “saving lives of migrants”, its goals clearly are self-serving for the EU stemming irregular migration»¹⁵⁶.

Internal pressures within the Union, those of the member states, have thus led the EU to conduct a foreign policy focused on securing its borders and its citizens. In this way, the Union's priorities have become evident to the rest of the world. In other words, «as the walls of “fortress Europe” rise higher, the EU leaves its founding principles of human dignity, solidarity, freedom, democracy, equality and human rights at the door»¹⁵⁷.

The externalization of migration policy operated by the EU, through the use of its soft powers, to convert host countries into migration buffers with the aim of limiting migration flows towards its borders, has resulted in a loss of its credibility as a normative power.

Summarizing, it is possible to state that «the reaction to the refugee crisis proves even the EU is selective in applying its high normative standards when its core interests are in play» and this only fuels the questioning of its role «in the protection of human rights and democratic principles worldwide»¹⁵⁸.

¹⁵¹ European Commission, Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, The European Council and the Council. Tenth report on relocation and resettlement, COM (2017) 202 final, Brussels, 2 March 2017. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52017DC0202>

¹⁵² Kugiel, P. (2017)., *op. cit.*, p. 61.

¹⁵³ Tullemaans, F. *op. cit.* p. 16.

¹⁵⁴ Keukeleire, S., Delreux, T., *op. cit.*, p 265.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

¹⁵⁶ Kugiel, P. (2017)., *op. cit.*, p. 62.

¹⁵⁷ C. d'Oultremont, A. Martin, "The Migration Crisis: A Stress Test for European Values," European Policy Brief no. 38, Egmont Institute, September 2015, www.egmontinstitute.be.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

The case of the Qatar World Cup further illustrates the EU's inconsistency in its external human rights policy. Indeed, despite calls to hold Qatar accountable for its treatment of migrant workers, the EU failed to take a strong stance, mirroring its response to the migration crisis, in which «it seems the EU is falling victim to its own soft power»¹⁵⁹. This appears to demonstrate that the priority of the EU stems from the tensions within it, clearly putting its founding principles in the background, as seen in the case of the Qatar World Cup. Just as the EU prioritized border security over the human rights of migrants during the refugee crisis, it similarly neglected its normative commitments in the case of Qatar, opting not to advance labor rights in the face of significant abuses. This inconsistency underscores the discrepancy between the EU's professed values and its actions, revealing a tendency to prioritize internal interests over its normative commitments. As reported by the EUobserver in an opinion published on the website, «it is now time for the EU to step in where footballing authorities have failed and hold Qatar to account for its shameful treatment of migrant labourers»¹⁶⁰. This ongoing failure to act consistently with its norms weakens the EEU's legitimacy and complicates its role as a promoter of human rights and democratic principles worldwide.

¹⁵⁹ Kugiel, P. (2017)., *op. cit.*, p. 64.

¹⁶⁰ Fautre, W., (2019)., *op. cit.*

5. EU economic interests

5.1 Economic necessity

As previously explained, the EU has long been a proponent of human rights on the global stage, championing values such as democracy, rule of law, and fundamental rights. Nevertheless, the consistency of its external human rights policy is often challenged by geopolitical realities and economic interests. This inconsistency has become particularly evident in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which has accentuated the EU's complex balancing act between upholding human rights and addressing pressing economic and security concerns.

a. The Russian aggression to Ukraine and its energetic consequences for the EU

Indeed, the energy crisis resulting from the aforementioned invasion has triggered a transition at the European level: «the EU has undertaken a number of steps to develop energy infrastructure. These included diversifying import routes, developing energy networks and improving cross-border interconnections»¹⁶¹. It is therefore possible to state that the Russian aggression marked a significant turning point in international relations and brought about a fundamental reassessment of European energy security. Indeed, it underscored the dangers associated with the EU's heavy reliance on Russian gas and oil, highlighting the potential risks of supporting an aggressive regime and the geopolitical manipulation of energy supplies as a tool of coercion. Prior to the invasion, the European Union's dependence on energy had been steadily increasing, with the bloc importing 57.5% of its energy in 2020. Moreover, the share of Russian gas in EU gas imports had risen to 41% by the third quarter of 2021, further exposing the vulnerabilities of Europe's energy landscape¹⁶². Already prior to the invasion, therefore, when the risk of conflict between Europe and Russia was mounting, the gas supply that Europe imported from Russian pipeline was about 52%¹⁶³. Even then, because of the aforementioned threat, European states began «preparing by diversifying their energy supply to replace Russian imports and implementing energy efficiency programs». In fact, due to gas shortages

¹⁶¹ Widuto, A., (2023). EU energy infrastructure: Boosting energy security. European Parliamentary Research Service, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/753956/EPRS_BRI\(2023\)753956_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/753956/EPRS_BRI(2023)753956_EN.pdf)

¹⁶² European Parliament, Russia's War on Ukraine: Implications for EU Energy Supply, European Parliament, 2022. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu>.

¹⁶³ BP Statistical Review, (2019) BP Statistical Review of World Energy, <https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/business-sites/en/global/corporate/pdfs/energy-economics/statistical-review/bp-stats-review-2019-full-report.pdf>

in European countries because of the conflict, an increase in «energy poverty levels»¹⁶⁴ happened, leading to an economic crisis. However, aspirations to uphold or expedite the energy transition following the Ukraine conflict were met with skepticism, given their focus on long-term goals and thus deemed insufficient to enhance national energy security. Additionally, energy-exporting nations encountered challenges in meeting the demand to replace Russian energy supplies for EU countries due to insufficient capacity. Concurrently, the economic fallout from the Ukraine crisis was extensive, spanning from economic downturns and spikes in food prices to transportation bottlenecks and fiscal strains. While Europe aimed to embrace adaptable policies, diminishing dependence on and enhancing energy security within the continent represented a venture spanning medium to long-term horizons. The EU's reliance on Russian gas supplies, however, is hardly a recent issue. In fact, in 2013, the European Union procured 162.7 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas from Russia, with 85 bcm passing through Ukraine. This transit volume accounted for 15% of the EU's overall gas demand¹⁶⁵. Thus, the conflict in Ukraine has just once more emphasized the Union's significant reliance on Russian gas and its susceptibility to disruptions in supply. This is a clear and relevant example of the use that Russia makes of «market power to interfere in European foreign policy». Indeed, «previous disputes with the Ukraine and Belarus, mainly because of large unpaid gas bills to Russia, led to supply interruptions for several EU countries in 2006 & 2009»¹⁶⁶. As a result, the measures put in place by the Union have not been all that effective and, in fact, the EU's aim of energy diversification did not materialize, since Russia became locked in the European energy markets, and energy developments in other regions were not adequately considered. Ultimately, the gas supply dependence of Europe worsened in the last decades¹⁶⁷. The conflict sparked by Russia's military action has thus placed the European Union in a difficult position with regard to the energy question and «has increased the relevance of energy diplomacy within Europe's energy foreign policy»¹⁶⁸.

b. The role of Qatar: a new energy supplier?

The Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the EU energy crisis resulting from it, has led to the search for a reinforced diplomatic, and therefore partnership relationship with the Gulf countries, which include

¹⁶⁴ Al-Breiki, M.; Bicer, Y. Potential Solutions for the Short to Medium-Term Natural Gas Shortage Issues of Europe: What Can Qatar Do? *Energies* 2022, 15, 8306. <https://doi.org/10.3390/en15218306>

¹⁶⁵ Gazprom – 2014. Statistics available at: www.gazprom.ru

¹⁶⁶ Ruble, I. (2015). EU Energy Security Through Supply Diversification: Do Natural Gas Reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean Present A Viable Option?. IAAEE Energy Forum, International Association for Energy Economics.

¹⁶⁷ Al-Saidi, M. (2023). White knight or partner of choice? The Ukraine war and the role of the Middle East in the energy security of Europe. *Energy Strategy Reviews*, 49, 101116.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Qatar, as evidenced by the fact that in May 2022 the EU issued a joint statement called «A strategic partnership with the Gulf»¹⁶⁹ encompassing collaborative endeavors concerning security and the transition towards sustainability. An open stance towards energy collaboration with the Middle East involves engaging in energy trade with active participation from the private sector. This perspective is clearly visible in Europe's ambitious and substantial REPowerEU¹⁷⁰ plan, also announced in May 2022, aimed at reducing dependence on Russia through diversification of energy supplies, with an estimated investment of approximately 210 billion euros¹⁷¹. In the long run, Qatar stands out as potentially the most advantageous nation to meet a portion of Europe's liquefied natural gas (LNG) requirements. The significance of a partnership between Qatar and Europe concerning LNG can be underscored through some key point: first, the economic advantages associated with Qatari LNG; second, the positive track record of LNG production in Qatar in recent decades; lastly, the promising market conditions and contractual agreements anticipated in the future. The analysis of these focal points, considered in the context of need and the energy crisis caused by the conflict initiated by Russia, allows emphasizing the importance that a partnership relationship with the state of Qatar and, more generally, with the Gulf countries, has for the European Union. Starting therefore from the first point, Qatar possesses substantial gas reserves, primarily located within the world's largest field, the South Pars/North Dome field, which spans 51 trillion cubic meters and is shared between Qatar and Iran. The advantage of being able to extract from a single site and the unique characteristic of this gas field as a natural gas condensate field, capable of yielding both raw natural gas and natural gas liquids, contribute to a cost-effective production process for Qatar. Moreover, Qatar enjoys geopolitical stability and has established positive trade relations with the EU. Given its central position in the LNG markets, significant soft power, and role as a mediator, Qatar holds the potential to become a valuable partner for Europe from an economic point of view¹⁷². In the medium to long term, Qatar's production capacity and stability could provide it with a competitive advantage over other locations currently under consideration for untapped potential in LNG, such as countries in the West African region¹⁷³. Regarding the second point, embracing liberal energy trade entails collaborating with energy companies to secure advantageous contracts and investments for Europe. Since the late 1990s, Qatar has cultivated robust LNG export capabilities and forged partnerships with International Oil Companies (IOCs). By the early 2000s, Qatar's LNG capacity had significantly expanded,

¹⁶⁹ EEAS Press Team, (2022). Joint Communication on a "Strategic Partnership with the Gulf",

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/joint-communication-%E2%80%9Cstrategic-partnership-gulf%E2%80%9D_en

¹⁷⁰ European Commission, (2022). REPowerEU: A plan to rapidly reduce dependence on Russian fossil fuels and fast forward the green transition, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_3131

¹⁷¹ J. Ainger, EU Targets Clean Power, LNG in Plan to Cut Russia Dependence, Bloomberg, 2022.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-18/eu-targets-clean-power-lng-in-plan-to-slash-russia-dependence>

¹⁷² E. Woertz, Qatar and Europe's neglect of the Gulf region, *notes internationales*, 46, 2012, pp. 1–6.

¹⁷³ J. Ainger, *op. cit.*

positioning it as a key player in the LNG markets and a viable potential supplier for Europe¹⁷⁴. In fact, «since it launched its gas strategy in the 1990s Qatar has considered Europe to be an important energy market»¹⁷⁵. In 2011, Qatar achieved a liquefaction capacity of approximately 77 million metric tons per annum (MTPA), making it the world's second-largest producer after Australia¹⁷⁶. Subsequently, Qatar paused further LNG capacity expansion until 2017, when it unveiled plans for a substantial increase to up 126 MTPA by 2027¹⁷⁷. Lastly, with the forthcoming LNG expansion and the expiration of certain long-term contracts in the near future, Europe has the opportunity to secure additional LNG contracts from Qatar. Despite persistent challenges associated with destination clauses in its long-term LNG contract, Qatar Petroleum (now Qatar Energy) has remained the EU's primary supplier of seaborne LNG, thus highlighting once again the necessity that bind the European Union to Qatar.

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict has thus had a considerable burden, from an economic point of view, on the European Union. Indeed, the latter found itself in a complicated situation with regard to energy supply. The Russian aggression has, therefore, contributed to a rapprochement of the EU with Qatar as a matter of economic necessity. Its needs then seem to have translated into a failure to give due weight to the violations that occurred before and during the World Cup in the country. In other words, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has heightened the inconsistencies in the EU's external human rights policy and has underlined the challenging reality of aligning moral values with practical necessities in a complex international landscape in which economic dependencies, energy needs, and strategic interests frequently lead to compromises and selective application of human rights principles.

To sum up, we can state that the economic relationship between the European Union and Qatar represents a relevant factor influencing the EU, as the economic ties between the two create a complex dynamic in which the EU's interests often interfere with human rights considerations.

5.2 Qatar multi-dimensional engagement with the EU

Since the signing of a Cooperation Agreement between the EU and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1988, Qatar has deepened its relations and collaboration with the European Union across a wide range of areas. However, even though Qatar has, as explained in chapter two, disestablished the

¹⁷⁴ J. Haselip, N. Al-shafai, S. Morse, EU energy security, sustainability and globalisation: what role for Qatari LNG amid calls for greater energy diversification? *Int. J. Global Energy Issues* 33 (2010) 38–55, <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJGEI.2010.033014>

¹⁷⁵ Roberts, D. B. (2016). The four eras of Qatar's foreign policy. *Comillas Journal of International Relations*, 5, 1-17.

¹⁷⁶ Al-Saidi, M. (2023)., *op. cit.*, p. 10.

¹⁷⁷ A. Meza, M. Koç, M.S. Al-Sada, Perspectives and strategies for LNG expansion in Qatar: a SWOT analysis, *Resour. Pol.* 76 (2022), 102633, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resourpol.2022.102633>

Kafala system, after it was strongly criticized by various human rights organizations, serious difficulties remain within the country. And although the EU proposes to cooperate with the Gulf states on social reforms that also touch on the issue of human rights, as stated in the previously mentioned communication regarding a strategic partnership with the Gulf ¹⁷⁸, it has not exposed itself against Qatar when several violations and abuses of workers' rights have been brought to light. There is no sign of EU sanctioning Qatar, rather: while controversies have plagued Qatar since the sport event was awarded, the EU has reaffirmed its partnership with Qatar by signing the already mentioned Cooperation Arrangement in 2018 ¹⁷⁹. Even, a story reported by *The Guardian*¹⁸⁰ «suggests that Qatari construction firms, in furtherance of the need to erect stadia, hotels, and even entire cities for the World Cup, are utilizing labor consistent with the International Labour Organization's ("ILO") definition of modern slavery»¹⁸¹. Nevertheless, the EU's choice was to strengthen the political dialogue and cooperation with the State of Qatar through the signing of the above-mentioned Cooperation Arrangement.

Indeed, Qatar's multi-dimensional engagement with the European Union encompasses various aspects, including economic, political, energy and cultural dimensions. In order to demonstrate the relationship of interdependence, which is certainly unbalanced on the part of the Union because of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the energy crisis it has caused, a brief analysis of the aforementioned aspects of engagement is relevant, starting in particular with the economic and energy aspects, which are undoubtedly the most significant.

Economically, it is possible to state that Qatar and the EU maintain robust economic ties, with bilateral trade and investment playing a crucial role. Qatar is a significant investor in Europe, particularly in sectors such as real estate, finance, and infrastructure¹⁸². Conversely, European companies also invest in Qatar, thus contributing to economic development and cooperation between the two entities. Indeed, the leadership of Qatar recognizes the interconnection between regime security, domestic stability, and economic development, leading to the identification of certain European countries as crucial partners for Qatar¹⁸³. Already during the financial crisis of 2008-2009 in Europe, Qatar emerged as a significant investor in the EU, offering financial assistance and aiding prominent banks in Europe to navigate the adverse effects of the crisis, thereby ensuring their

¹⁷⁸ European Union, (2022), *op. cit.*, p. 13.

¹⁷⁹ EEAS Press Team, (2018), *op. cit.*

¹⁸⁰ Pattison, P. (2013). Revealed: Qatar's world cup 'slaves'. *The Guardian*, 25, 2013.

¹⁸¹ Engle, M. B. (2014). A CN Tower over Qatar: An analysis of the use of slave labor in preparation for the 2022 FIFA Men's World Cup and how the European Court of Human Rights can stop it. *Hofstra Lab. & Emp. LJ*, 32, 177.

¹⁸² Balog, R. (2021). The Foreign Policy Orientations of Qatar and the Role of the European Union, Master's thesis, Qatar University.

¹⁸³ *Ibidem*.

survival¹⁸⁴. Meanwhile, several European nations have become notable importers of Qatari goods, with imports totaling 5.62 billion euros. Among them, countries such as France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy have also evolved into security partners for Qatar¹⁸⁵. It's therefore possible to affirm that Qatar has strengthened its strategic ties with numerous European countries. For instance, Italy has emerged as one of Qatar's most important trading partners. The bilateral trade between Qatar and Italy exceeds one billion euros, with a focus on promoting joint investment projects, particularly in construction and infrastructure, aligned with the preparations for the FIFA World Cup that Qatar held in 2022¹⁸⁶. This relationship holds particular significance due to the economic challenges Qatar faced at the outset of the 2017 blockade. The latter resulted in Qatar's reliance on trade relations, including the construction sector, with neighboring countries, particularly for sourcing raw materials¹⁸⁷. Most of these materials for Qatar's large-scale construction were traditionally sourced from the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia¹⁸⁸. Despite attempts by the blockade countries to impede Qatar's progress, this situation has created an opportunity for deeper economic ties with European countries. Additionally, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani¹⁸⁹ has embarked on visits to numerous European states and signed bilateral agreements across various fields, aimed at enhancing cooperation between Qatar and the EU. This cooperation has experienced significant strengthening over the past decades, as evidenced by the fact that in October 2023 «Qatar has agreed to supply Shell in the Netherlands with gas for 27 years, the second such deal with a European buyer in a week, as the Gulf state competes with the United States to help Europe replace lost Russian supplies»¹⁹⁰. As it is evident, therefore, the economic and energy partnerships are intrinsically linked. The other arrangement with a European buyer referred to in the above article is in fact the one with France: «Shell's agreement is identical to a TotalEnergies deal [...] with QatarEnergy to supply France»¹⁹¹. Qatar is, in fact, a major supplier of LNG to the EU, contributing to its energy security and diversification efforts. The EU relies on Qatar's stable and abundant LNG exports to meet its energy needs, fostering a strategic energy partnership between the two parties. Moreover, as already mentioned, Qatar invests in energy infrastructure projects in Europe, further enhancing bilateral cooperation in the energy sector.

¹⁸⁴ Bianco, C. (2020). *A Gulf apart: How Europe can gain influence with the Gulf Cooperation Council*. ECFR. https://ecfr.eu/publication/a_gulf_apart_how_europe_can_gain_influence_with_gulf_cooperation_council/

¹⁸⁵ Miller, R., & Al-Mansouri, K. (2016). 'Qatar's Foreign Policy Engagement with the European Union: Evolving Priorities of a Small State in the Contemporary Era.' *Comillas Journal of International Relations*, 5. <https://doi.org/10.14422/cir.i05.y2016.004>

¹⁸⁶ Balog, R., *op. cit.*, p. 32.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸⁸ Szalai, M. (2018). The Crisis of the GCC and the Role of the European Union. *MENARA Future Notes*, 14, 8.

¹⁸⁹ Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani is the Emir of Qatar, and he is reigning since 2013.

¹⁹⁰ Saba, Y., Qatar supplies gas to Europe, vying with US to replace Russia supply, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/qatarenergy-shell-agree-27-year-lng-supply-2023-10-18/>

¹⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

Politically, the engagement between Qatar and the EU helps foster understanding, cooperation, and diplomacy on regional and global issues of mutual interest. In particular, «the EU-Qatar Policy Dialogue was established to enable intellectual exchange and foster deeper discussion on pertinent issues such as the rivalry between the United States (US) and China and its implications for the European Union (EU) and the GCC, the crisis in Ukraine and Afghanistan»¹⁹². Indeed, the world has encountered numerous crises in recent years, ranging from the aforementioned conflicts and rivalry to uprisings in Iran, energy shortages, irregular migration, and climate change. Given Europe's central role in global strategic discussions and Qatar's extensive relations with key European players, coupled with its track record as a mediator in international crises, there is a pressing need for a more proactive dialogue between Europe and Qatar¹⁹³. Indeed, as reported by the European External Action Service (EEAS), the latter «and the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs signed a Cooperation Arrangement in March 2018. This Cooperation Arrangement serves as the basis for enhanced political dialogue and strengthened cooperation on sectoral areas of mutual interest, notably private sector development and research innovation»¹⁹⁴. The signing of the EU-Qatar Cooperation Arrangement a few years ago gave new impetus to the bilateral relationship between the two parties «in order to strengthen their relationship especially in terms of mutual political and economic interests»¹⁹⁵. Moreover, in recent times, this engagement has experienced a notable escalation, culminating in the establishment of an EU Delegation in Doha in 2022. The significance that the EU places on the Gulf Region as a whole, and on Qatar specifically, is evident in the EU's Joint Communication regarding a Strategic Partnership with the Gulf, which was endorsed in May 2022. Thus, it is possible to argue that the political dialogue between Qatar and the European Union is present and deep-rooted.

Culturally, Qatar and the EU promote cultural and educational exchanges to enhance mutual understanding and cooperation. Educational partnerships and exchange programs facilitate academic collaboration and knowledge sharing between institutions in Qatar and Europe, contributing thus to cultural diversity. An example of this cooperation is the European Union National Institute for Culture (EUNIC) that is Europe's network of national cultural institutes. «The EUNIC cluster in Qatar is the first of its kind to be established in the GCC region. It gathers EU Member States represented in Qatar and Switzerland with the aim to promote cultural and linguistic diversity, to develop exchanges between European and Qatari artistic exchanges. The EUNIC cluster in Qatar contributes to enhancing the cultural relationships between EU Member States and Qatar and to promoting the cultural diversity of Europe»¹⁹⁶.

¹⁹² Bülent, A., (2022) EU-Qatar Policy Dialogue, Center for International Policy Research, CIPR, Policy Brief No. 3.

¹⁹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹⁴ European External Action Service, *The European Union and the State of Qatar*, Bruxelles, 2021.

¹⁹⁵ Balog, R., *op. cit.*, p. iv.

¹⁹⁶ Ambasciata d'Italia Doha, *EUNIC Qatar offers crash courses in Doha in 11 European Languages*, 2019.

Overall, it's possible to state that Qatar's multi-dimensional engagement with the EU underscores the importance of bilateral cooperation and partnership across various sectors. By fostering economic, political, energy, and cultural ties, Qatar and the EU contribute to mutual prosperity, stability, and cooperation in the region. Nevertheless, this engagement also highlights a significant inconsistency in the EU's stance on human rights. Despite its strong rhetoric on upholding human rights standards globally, the EU's response to the documented violation in Qatar during the World Cup was remarkably restrained. This discrepancy suggests that, in practice, economic and strategic considerations often take precedence over human rights advocacy, revealing a pragmatic approach that compromises the EU's commitment to its core proclaimed values.

5.3 The European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council

As previously mentioned, in the 1980s, the European Community (EC) established a partnership with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). This collaboration culminated in the inaugural minister-led joint meeting in 1985, aimed at advancing mutual economic and political objectives, with a particular emphasis on energy and security initiative¹⁹⁷. In 1988, the European Union consolidated its ties with the GCC through the signing of the Cooperation Agreement. This landmark agreement was elaborated in order to enhance strategic trade partnership and bolster economic and political collaboration across various sectors¹⁹⁸. In the meantime, negotiations surged to foster interregional trade connections, facilitating investment prospects in the Gulf region, while safeguarding market accessibility for European goods¹⁹⁹. In the 1990s, discussions started between the EU and the GCC to establish a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), aimed at enhancing economic ties and trade collaborations. However, progress was delayed in 2008 due to various challenges and impediments²⁰⁰. Concurrently, economic collaboration between the EU and the Gulf region began to take shape in 1994 through the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. This initiative sought to support bilateral trade relations and forward mutual interests in economic, security, and politics²⁰¹. The overarching goal was to facilitate political discourse, promote cultural understanding, and facilitate knowledge exchange²⁰². In the decade since, the Gulf region experienced substantial economic and political transformations, significantly impacting its societies. As mentioned in the last part of the previous section, cooperation between

¹⁹⁷ Kostadinova, V. (2013). *What Is the Status of the EU-GCC Relationship*. 23.

¹⁹⁸ European Commission. (2020). *Gulf region—Trade—European Commission*. <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/regions/gulf-region/>

¹⁹⁹ Kostadinova, V. (2013), *op. cit.* p. 3.

²⁰⁰ European Commission. (2020), *op. cit.*

²⁰¹ Fürtig, H. (2004). GCC-EU Political Cooperation: Myth or Reality? *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 31(1), 25–39. JSTOR.

²⁰² *Ibidem*.

Qatar, which is, of course, a member of the GCC, and the European Union, is also about the cultural and educational dimension. Indeed, the EU actively organized various international forums and diplomatic initiatives to address practical matters while fostering improved relations, with the overarching goal of promoting enduring cooperation. A crucial moment occurred in 1995 during the EU-GCC Granada meeting in Spain, marking a notable shift in the political dynamics²⁰³. The cooperation efforts centered on enhancing collaboration in education, business, and media realms. One of the primary initiatives was the expansion of European Studies courses in the Middle East and Gulf Studies programs in Europe, with the aim of promoting deeper cultural understanding beyond mere political discourse²⁰⁴.

However, despite these advancements in cooperation, the Cooperation Arrangement between the European Union and the Gulf states notably lacks explicit references to human rights, including workers' rights. This omission appeared somehow addressed by the launch of a Human Rights Dialogue²⁰⁵ in the same year the Arrangement was signed. Although this dialogue aimed to tackle sensitive human rights issues, which started a full 4 years before the beginning of the sporting event in Qatar, it did not result in firm statements or significant actions by European institutions (excluding those of the Parliament) regarding abuses of workers' rights or broader human rights concerns.

Furthermore, in the already mentioned joint communication from the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to the European Parliament and the Council, regarding a strategic partnership with the Gulf, a section is devoted entirely to a partnership for people²⁰⁶. In this section of the aforementioned communication, it is stated that "while human rights, democratization and rule of law related challenges remain, the EU can cooperate with the GCC in accompanying such reform efforts, building on bilateral human rights dialogues with GCC countries" and, moreover, it is declared that «the EU strongly encourages GCC countries to live up to their international commitments on human rights»²⁰⁷. However, the EU's encouragement of the Gulf countries and its good intentions are not enough, or at least were not sufficient in the case of the World Cup, whose initial controversies have not very slowly translated into accusation of reported abuses and violations of workers' rights, which are obviously intrinsically linked to human rights. It can therefore be stated that while the leadership of the Gulf region has consistently emphasized the importance of maintaining robust cooperation and partnership with European countries, this

²⁰³ Kostadinova, V. (2013), *op. cit.* p. 6.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁰⁵ The Diplomatic Service of the European Union, (2022). Qatar: Establishment Agreement signed for opening of the EU Delegation in Doha, European Union External Action, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/qatar-establishment-agreement-signed-opening-eu-delegation-doha_en

²⁰⁶ European Union, (2022), *op. cit.*, p. 13

²⁰⁷ *Ibidem.*

sentiment was then mirrored by the European Union. However, the latter, by focusing on enhancing political and economic relations, seems to overshadow its commitment to human rights.

The EU formalized its cooperation with the GCC in 1998²⁰⁸ and its leaders have since underscored their commitment to strengthening relations with the GCC across various sectors²⁰⁹. An example of this undertaking is the fact the «on 18 May 2022, the Commission and the High Representative adopted a Joint Communication on a strategic partnership with the Gulf, proposing a comprehensive and stronger partnership between the EU and the GCC and its Member States»²¹⁰. Moreover, as reported by the European External Action Service, «In June 2022, the High Representative/Vice President of the European Commission has appointed for the first time ever an EU Special Representative for the Gulf (Luigi Di Maio) to further develop a stronger, comprehensive and more strategic EY partnership with the countries in the Gulf region»²¹¹.

Additionally, in 2017, the European Union launched the EU-GCC Dialogue project, which focuses on economic diversification. The primary objective of this initiative is to encourage investment cooperation beyond traditional hydrocarbon sectors²¹². By aligning with the national visions of all GCC members, including ongoing efforts toward economic diversification, this platform serves as the foundation for strengthening EU-GCC relations. Annual meetings, held alternately in Brussels or Riyadh, facilitate discussion on central topics within the framework of the EU-GCC Joint Cooperation Committee²¹³. Through these engagements, both parties aim to foster a deeper and more mutually beneficial partnership. As evidence of the multi-dimensional cooperation between the two entities, it suffices to consider the fact that in 2020, the European Union emerges as the Gulf Cooperation Council member countries' second-largest trading partner, accounting for 12.3% of trade volume, following China at 15.8%. notably, the EU holds the position of the primary import partner for the GCC. The total trade volume between the EU and the GCC in 2020 reached 97.1 billion euros, with a notable emphasis on imported fuel and mining products, alongside exports including machinery, agricultural products, transport equipment, and raw materials²¹⁴. Nevertheless, the prospect of establishing a comprehensive economic cooperation framework between the EU and the Gulf on a multilateral scale has yet to be fully realized. Normative disparities across vital sectors,

²⁰⁸ Fürtig, H. (2004), *op. cit.*

²⁰⁹ Al-Ubaydli, O. (2020). A Detailed Anatomy of EU-GCC Trade Relations: Past, Present, and Future. *Bussola Institute, Research Paper, 10*. <https://www.bussolainstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/A-Detailed-Anatomy-of-EU-GCC-Trade-Relations-Past-Present-and-Future.pdf>

²¹⁰ European External Action Service, *Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the EU. Dialogue and Cooperation has been intensifying over the years and is based on mutual interest to foster relation in all political domains.*, Bruxelles, 2021.

²¹¹ *Ibidem.*

²¹² European Commission. (2020), *op. cit.*

²¹³ *Ibidem.*

²¹⁴ Sons, S. (2021). The three E's: Enhancing a multidimensional model for economic cooperation between the Gulf states and the European Union, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Policy Report No. 34.

from trade regulations to human rights, coupled with bureaucratic complexities within the EU administration and deficits in expertise, have frequently hindered efforts to forge closer economic ties with Gulf countries²¹⁵. Despite the formalization of relations between the EU and the GCC in 1988, the realization of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), proposed in the same year, remains improbable²¹⁶. However, despite this, as already mentioned, the European Union is actively involved in enhancing political and economic relations with the Gulf through various initiatives. Examples include the launch of the Enhanced EU-GCC political dialogue, cooperation, and outreach project in 2021²¹⁷, as well as the initiation of the EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic diversification in 2018²¹⁸. «Both projects aim to establish closer institutional ties in different sectors with specific Gulf states by promoting EU instruments and tools, organizing network events, creating business contacts and improving people-to-people contacts»²¹⁹. Indeed, the Gulf regions stands out as a significant hub for technological advancement and digital industries, powered by a flourishing technology-savvy young professional cadre. This emerging generation, characterized by their education and enthusiasm, has the ambitions to catalyze the evolution of their societies into dynamic, post-oil economies²²⁰. Such aspirations have become emblematic of a broader trend across Gulf societies, prompted by evolving realities and challenges. This transformative wave is introducing fundamental changes to the socio-economic landscape of the Gulf states, requiring a reevaluation of existing social contracts. Central to this shift is the imperative economic diversification, which remains a cornerstone strategy across the region. Therefore, collaboration between the EU and the GGC holds the potential not only to generate returns on investment and unlock expanded business prospects, but also to cultivate a mutually beneficial environment. By facilitating knowledge exchange, nurturing collaborative endeavors in research and development, and fostering the formation of a new partnership, such cooperation can engender a win-win scenario²²¹. Additionally, it offers an avenue for the establishment of personal and institutional networks, fostering mutual trust and underpinning sustained collaboration. The fact that economic interests are intricately intertwined with concerns surrounding ecological sustainability, youth empowerment, and socio-economic development, means that greater cooperation between the two entities in these areas «could contribute to a comprehensive nexus between business interests and social transformation which could result in more social cohesion, regional integration and

²¹⁵ Colombo, S. (Ed.). (2014). *Bridging the Gulf: EU-GCC Relations at a Crossroads* (Vol. 14). Edizioni Nuova Cultura.

²¹⁶ Sons, S., *op. cit.* p. 1.

²¹⁷ European External Action Service, *Enhanced EU-GCC Political Dialogue, Cooperation and Outreach*, Bruxelles, 2021.

²¹⁸ EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification, CEPS project, <https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-projects/eu-gcc-dialogue-on-economic-diversification/>

²¹⁹ Sons, S., *op. cit.* p. 1.

²²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²²¹ *Ibid.* p. 3.

stability»²²². It is clear, therefore, that the relationship that binds the Gulf countries, including precisely Qatar, and the European Union, provides the latter with an obvious benefit in favor, exactly, of the latter's interests.

However, in the EU's close engagement with the Gulf countries, the issue of promoting, protecting and ensuring respect for human rights seems not to be such a prominent one. While the Union has built its image as that of a champion of the safeguard of such rights, in fact, in the case of its relations with the said countries it appears to have "forgotten" the values on which it is based and which it often stresses in its public discourses. The infringements that occurred in Qatar are proof that the protection of fundamental rights is not, or at least doesn't seem to be, the priority for the EU, certainly not in the case of the dialogue and cooperation with the GCC. The case of the sporting event in question, therefore, can be interpreted as an erosion of the already vacillating credibility of the Union's normative power and evidence of the lack of consistency between its ideas and interests.

²²² *Ibid.* p. 2.

Conclusion

This thesis has aimed to understand why, in the case of the World Cup in Qatar, the European Union did not demonstrate a strong and critical stance towards the human rights violations that occurred. Through the application of the theoretical framework of the three I's, ideas, institutions and interests, the research conducted highlighted the inconsistencies in the EU's external human rights policy. In particular, starting with the analysis of the numerous controversies that have characterized the World Cup since its awarding to the state of Qatar in 2010, it has been possible to underscore the tragic working environment of the people involved in the construction of the infrastructures necessary for the holding of said sporting event. Therefore, this illustrated the context referred to when discussing the political action of condemnation of such working conditions expected from the European Union, allowing to emphasize the requirement of intervention by the latter, which, however, did not occur. The following review of the role the EU has, over the years, ascribed to itself as an actor at the international level, namely, the first of the three I's identified in the theoretical framework, ideas, allowed for an initial reflection on the discrepancies between what the EU proclaims, and what it enacts. Indeed, in considering the EU's (in)action, or at any rate the absence of a pronouncement condemning the infringements that occurred in Qatar, the examination of the image the EU has painted of itself should already raise initial concerns about the consistency of its external policy. By employing the method of process-tracing, an attempt was made to identify the reasons of this inconsistency, which, in the case of Qatar, the EU proved. Specifically, this thesis targeted two hypotheses in order to motivate the outcome of the role that the EU played in the case of the mega sporting event discussed here. Concretely, by investigating said issue through the lens of the three I's, the two hypotheses refer first to the I of institutions, and second to the I of interests. By availing itself of this approach, this thesis sought to expose that the role that the complexity that characterizes the EU as an actor on the global stage, and the sometimes divergent economic interests of its bodies, have a severe impact on the way the EU conducts its foreign policy. Regarding the first of the hypotheses outlined, this thesis argues that the intricate framework of the EU's foreign policy landscape has led to a notable disparity between the principles it advocates and the actions it takes, particularly evident in the context of the Qatar World Cup. The multifaceted nature of the EU's competences, institutions, and decision-making processes inevitably engenders significant challenges in maintaining consistency. Consequently, developing a unified and consistent stance becomes an arduous task for the European Union. As has been illustrated, in fact, the complexity inherent in the EU's foreign policy apparatus contributes to inconsistencies and occasional inefficacies precisely in its external human rights agenda.

An example of the divergence of ideas and interests that has affected the position of the European Union in the case of the World Cup in Qatar is, as previously analyzed, the lack of alignment between the statements made by the European Parliament and the European Commission.

The division at the institutional level is then compounded by the one between EU institutions and member states. Indeed, while the Union endeavors to champion human rights, democracy, and the rule of law on the global stage, without always succeeding, for many member states, these objectives are primarily internal identity makers. Therefore, the intricate institutional setup and the complexities of EU foreign policy dynamics can be seen as factors undermining the EU's credibility as a cohesive international actor and as obstacles to its ability to effectively pursue a consistent external human rights policy.

The second hypothesis, which regards the last of the three I's, namely interests, stipulates that the economic interconnection between the European Union and Qatar significantly impacts the EU's consistency in its external human rights policy. As analyzed above, in fact, the role Qatar plays on the global stage turns out to be an important one, particularly in the global energy market.

Indeed, as already explained, Russia's aggression against Ukraine has had a major impact on the energy situation in the EU. The latter has found itself in a rather complicated condition to deal with. In this context, the state of Qatar emerges as a valuable economic partner, not only in terms of energy supply it can provide to the EU, but also by reason of the state's substantial investments in various sectors across Europe. Through the study of the EU's economic necessities, conditioned precisely by the impact that the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has had on the energy market, and of the multi-level engagement that the Union has with the state of Qatar and, more generally, with the Gulf Cooperation Council, this thesis has sought to present the varied economic issues that concern the relationship between the two parties, in order to prove what is at stake for the EU when it comes to economic needs. Indeed, the strategic and economic interests of the EU, and its member states, may create pressure to sustain a stable and collaborative relationship with Qatar, and this could potentially come at the cost of ensuring protection for human rights. In other words, the EU might feel compelled to prioritize economic concerns and uphold stable ties with Qatar, even when faced with evident concerns regarding human rights violations or abuses.

As examined in the state of the art section, the precedence exercised by the economic needs and strategic interest of the EU over the protection of human rights is not an issue limited to the case of the World Cup held in Qatar. Rather, it can be seen that the EU tends to be more predisposed to take a strong and decisive stance against infringements of said rights when that occurs in countries with which a bond of economic needs is not present.

The two hypotheses highlighted in order to motivate the inconsistency of the European Union in the case of the mega sporting event held in Qatar are then linked. Indeed, as previously explained, the complexity of the EU's foreign policy dynamics and its intricate institutional setup, result in divergences in interests emerging in the decision-making and policy implementation processes. Therefore, given the heterogeneity of the Union, including therefore the different member states, it is not surprising that a firm and unambiguous stance is difficult for the EU to adopt. In other words, divisions within the EU result in a lack of cohesion and agreement on the position to be taken, that is on the role to be played in the international context, complicating the already delicate balance that the EU has to manage between strategic interests, which are indeed different and sometimes conflicting among the actors of the Union, and the commitment to upholding human rights.

In conclusion, the EU faces competing priorities both from an internal perspective, among its constituent bodies, and from an external perspective, namely in its external human rights policy, which often conflicts with policies dictated by economic necessity, resulting in an inconsistency between what the European Union proclaims and what it actually enacts, that is an inconsistency between its ideas and its interests. This study underscores the need for the EU to address these internal inconsistencies and balance its economic interests with a consistent and principled approach to human rights in order to enhance its credibility and effectiveness as an international actor.

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