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evidence on the effectiveness of the EEAS

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Abstract (Deutsch)

Mit der Gründung des Europäischen Auswärtigen Dienstes (EAD) innerhalb der Europäischen Union (EU) wurde erhofft, dass diese Institution, unter Führung der Höheren Beauftragten (HR), zur Kohärenz des auswärtigen Handelns beiträgt, welches ein großes Politikfeld darstellt, woran sich vielfache EU-Institutionen sowie Staaten beteiligen. Seitdem gibt es Beobachtungen, die auf Mängel dieser neuen Struktur hinweisen. Zeitgleich besitzt die Europäische Kommission nach wie vor Parallelfähigkeiten und -strukturen, welche den EAD und die Kommission auf den Kollisionskurs setzen können. Vor diesem Hintergrund wird in dieser Masterarbeit theorisiert, dass die Kohärenz nicht überall uniform gewährleistet werde, und dass in der Teilmenge dieses Bereichs, wo die Kommission tiefer involviert wäre, weniger Kohärenz erreicht wird. Um diese Haupthypothese auf die Probe zu stellen, wurden vom Autor Datensätze aus vergleichbaren Pressematerialien zweier EU-Institutionen erstellt, woraufhin zur semantischen Quantifizierung der Texte DistilBERT verwendet wurde. Die Kohärenz in Teilbereichen des auswärtigen Handelns wurde mittels Kosinus-Ähnlichkeit der DistilBERT-Embeddings operationalisiert. Weder die Haupthypothese noch die konkurrierende Hypothese konnten empirisch bestätigt werden. Dieses Resultat legt die Möglichkeit nahe, dass die Post-Lissaboner EU-Außenpolitikarchitektur unerwartet effektiv die Kohärenz sicherstellt, oder dass alternative Mechanismen im Spiel sind, die diese Funktion übernehmen. Zudem demonstriert diese Masterarbeit die Durchführbarkeit der quantitativen Studien mittels Inhalte öffentlicher Kommunikation, die der vorhandenen überwiegend qualitativen Literatur im Bereich der EU-Außenpolitik ergänzen können.

Abstract (English)

When the European Union (EU) established the European External Action Service (EEAS) under the High Representative (HR), it was hoped that they will contribute to the coherence of the Union's external action, which is a broad policy area that encompasses competencies of multiple EU institutions and member states. Observers have since argued how the new structure underdelivered to this end. Meanwhile, the European Commission maintains parallel capabilities and influence in this field, which may put the EEAS and the HR at odds. Against such a backdrop, this thesis theorises external action coherence is likely not ensured uniformly in reality, and subsets of this domain where the Commission get more deeply involved should achieve less coherence. To test this hypothesis, original datasets was created from the comparable press material of the two EU institutions, and DistilBERT was used to quantify the texts semantically. The coherence in subsets of the EU's external action was operationalised through the cosine similarity of the embeddings. I found empirical support neither for the main hypothesis nor the competing one. This result may suggest that external action coherence is ensured by the current foreign policy architecture unexpectedly effectively, or that the coherence is guaranteed through alternative mechanisms. This thesis demonstrates the viability of complimenting predominantly qualitative field of EU foreign policy research with quantitative methods leveraging public communication.

List of Abbreviations

BERT	bidirectional encoder representations from transformers
BoW	bag of words
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CGEA	Commissioners' Group on External Action
CGSE	Commissioners' Group on a Stronger Europe in the World
CJEU	Court of Justice of the European Union
DG	Directorate-General
DG DEFIS	Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space
DG ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
DG RELEX	Directorate-General for the External Relations
ECA	European Court of Auditors
EEAS	European External Action Service
EU	European Union
FAC	Foreign Affairs Council
FPI	Foreign Policy Instrument
HR/VP	High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice President of the European Commission
ICC	intra-class correlation coefficient
LDA	latent Dirichlet allocation
LMM	linear mixed-effects model
NLP	natural language processing
TEU	Treaty on European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

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1 Introduction

The European External Action Service (EEAS), established in January 2011 within the European Union (EU) on the basis of the Treaty of Lisbon, is a body separate from such prominent EU institutions as the European Commission and the Council that is put in charge of the Union's external action. It initially attracted a large amount of scholarly interest from the researchers of disciplines such as comparative politics, European integration and international relations. An institution resembling the ministry of foreign affairs of a sovereign state, while drawing inspiration also from other conventional governmental as well as non-governmental bodies (Bátora, 2013), numerous analyses had to be conducted in its early stage to establish the understanding of the new status quo of EU's foreign policy being formed in and around this novel institution, and formulate expectations as to how it was likely to function going forward.

As the wave of performance evaluation vis-à-vis these expectations began to fly in, the EEAS was confronted, at least partially, with a reality-check: One of the elements that left much to be desired was the deficiency of cooperation or coordination of the EEAS and other EU institutions, especially the European Commission (European Parliament, 2013; Wouters et al., 2013). Despite calls for deeper integration of the service to the broader EU foreign policy architecture that predates it, the inter-institutional relation appeared to leave some room for improvement. Such improvement would serve the purpose of the Union's comprehensive external action and the practical embedding of the EEAS chief, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR), into the Commission landscape as one of its own Vice-Presidents (VP).

The EU's primary law calls for coherence of its policies (Gatti, 2016; Tietje, 1997). One of the key objectives of the reform through the Treaty of Lisbon was to enhance the Union's capacity to ensure this coherence, a task which was entrusted to the HR/VP and the EEAS with its 'coherence mandate' (Wouters et al., 2013). The horizontal coherence, which is the coherence of policies amongst the European institutions, is otherwise understood as inter-pillar coherence (Portela & Raube, 2012), as it would encompass policy areas belonging to what were previously known as three pillars of the EU. External action, which includes both the predominantly intergovernmental former second-pillar activities and the community oriented first pillar, necessitates effective coordination by the EEAS with the European Commission. If the inter-institutional relation between these two continues to fall short of the expectation the

twenty-first century reform envisioned, the likelihood of achieving true horizontal coherence in this area would be slim.

This master's thesis opens an inquiry into the extent to which the EEAS contributes to the external action coherence of the Union. It builds on the assumption that the EEAS' coordination role has been ineffective, and that we should therefore be able to observe more dissonance in policy areas where horizontal coherence would have to be actively ensured. Leveraging the novel, author-generated datasets gathered from the press material of the EEAS and the European Commission, it contributes to the literature on the functioning of the EEAS, the foreign policy of the European Union and coherence in the Union's policies in general by providing empirical knowledge based on quantitative data, adding to the concentration of knowledge from previous qualitative research. As a result of the empirical analysis, neither of the two hypotheses could be adopted, a result that qualifies the narrative that dissonance is prevalent between the EEAS and the Commission.

This thesis is presented in the following structure. It first states the core research question of the study. Then, the foundational facts of the EEAS are revisited followed by the literature review. After establishing the current understanding of the functioning of the service and its chief, the core concept of external action coherence is presented in detail. This leads to the formulation of the main hypothesis of the study. Subsequently, the methods of data collection and the original data sets are introduced, as well as the two-step approach to decipher the vast amount of information. Results of the analysis are shown thereafter, whose implications are discussed in a separate section. The thesis culminates in the final reflection provided in the conclusion.

2 Research Question

The research question of this study reads as follows.

‘To what extent does the EEAS contribute to the horizontal coherence of the EU external action?’

The main actors in question are the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) and the one of the institutions at her/his disposal, the EEAS. The notion of external action coherence is understood here as in Gatti’s work (Gatti, 2016): The primary law of the EU, namely the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), calls for coherence in the policy of the EU. The alternative interpretation of the term ‘consistency’ used in the English version of the treaties, that it concerns the non-contradiction of the legal order(s), proved unlikely to be the intention of the request (Gatti, 2016; see also for a similar discussion Tietje, 1997). For coherence in a policy area whose planning and implementation is accomplished by multiple actors inside the Union, coordination becomes necessary. This is the role the EEAS and the HR/VP are entrusted with in the post-Lisbon architecture (Fraschini, 2013). Despite the prescribed mandate and the institutional design to encourage horizontal coordination, the discrepancy between the expectation and effectiveness of the EEAS-Commission coordination in practice has been widely discussed in the extant literature. This master’s thesis aims to provide an empirical look into the effectiveness of this inter-institutional coordination by focusing on the data that reflect the outcome thereof, and measures coherence in the Union’s external action policy based on a large sum of information made publicly available by the EEAS and the European Commission, rather than on anecdotal evidence.

In the next section, fundamental facts regarding the EEAS and its chief, the High Representative of the EU, will be presented.

3 Background

The objective of this section is to establish the hard facts as the basis for following the discussion of the extant literature on the EEAS, the HR, and the post-Lisbon external action/foreign policy landscape of the Union in general. Such information would include the formation of the service, its core tasks and the connection to the HR and other relevant EU institutions.

The EEAS was established formally on the first of January 2011 within the EU. The Article 27 (3) of the TEU, an addition to the EU primary law from the Treaty of Lisbon signed in 2007, sets the legal foundation for the service as follows.

‘In fulfilling his mandate, the High Representative shall be assisted by a European External Action Service. This service shall work in cooperation with the diplomatic services of the Member States and shall comprise officials from relevant departments of the General Secretariat of the Council and of the Commission as well as staff seconded from national diplomatic services of the Member States. The organisation and functioning of the European External Action Service shall be established by a decision of the Council. The Council shall act on a proposal from the High Representative after consulting the European Parliament and after obtaining the consent of the Commission.’

Functionally, the service is directly tied to the mandates of the HR/VP, who is put in charge of heading the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC; as per Article 27 (1) TEU) and handling the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP; as per Article 18 (2) and Article 27 (2) TEU) of the Union, as well as the Commission Vice President portfolio to coordinate the CFSP with other aspects of the external action¹ to ensure consistency (Article 18 (3) TEU). The cited text above further defines the initial state of the institution with its remarks to the future Council Decision and the organisational composition.

The anticipated Council Decision came to existence as the ‘Council Decision of 26 July 2010 establishing the organisation and functioning of the European External Action Service’. I will refer to this document as ‘the Council Decision of 2010’ henceforth. Notably, it clearly defined the service as a ‘functionally autonomous body’ of the EU, while reiterating the EEAS’ supporting role to the HR in all her/his functions as to the FAC, the CFSP and the Vice-Presidency of the Commission, while the service ‘shall assist’ the other two major European institutions with foreign policy capacity, the General Secretariat of the Council and the

¹ Such as, but not limited to, extraterritorial trade.

Commission, and cooperate with the member states in addition to these two (Council of the European Union, 2010).

As seen above, the Article 27 (3) of the TEU defines the composition of the EEAS personnel, which should namely originate from the General Secretariat of the Council, the Commission, and national diplomatic services of the EU member states. This hardly meant that multiple organisational cultures gained equal footings in the internal affairs of the EEAS from the initial phase onwards, however. According to an early descriptive analysis by Bátora, approximately ninety percent of the staff in the EEAS headquarters (i.e. excluding the EU delegations) had their professional background in the Commission, posing minimal hindrance to the dominance of Commission administrative routines and gaining itself internal reputation as a ‘DG RELEX Plus’² as a reference to the now abolished main foreign policy arm of the Commission (Báтора, 2013).

There is a notable distinction between the main body of the EEAS and the delegations under its umbrella. The EEAS, similar to the ministry of foreign affairs of sovereign states, consist of the central administration in Brussels and the Union Delegations to third countries and international organisations (Article 1, the Council Decision of 2010). The Union delegations received an upgrade in terms of its status in the Treaty of Lisbon, which now officially represent the EU in general. As the delegations are considered part of the service, the heads of delegations formally answer to the HR/VP. Yet, the delegation personnel comprises of both the EEAS and the Commission staff members as per Article 5 of the Council Decision of 2010, and their budgetary control is held by the Commission Foreign Policy Instrument (FPI) (Báтора, 2013). As of 2014, approximately two-thirds working at one of the delegations were from the Commission (Lehne, 2014), while the European Court of Auditors (ECA) in 2024 cites figures from the 2023 budget which would indicate slight reduction of the share of Commission staffers to around 55 percent (European Court of Auditors, 2024, p. 11). These conditions suggest the functioning of Union’s delegations comes closer to the Commission’s sphere of influence than the EEAS central administration does, despite officially being part of a ‘functionally autonomous’ service.

Relating to the aforementioned role of the High Representative for the Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR) as a Vice President of the European Commission (VP), she/he is said to

² Prior to the EEAS, DG RELEX existed within the Commission tasked with foreign policy and operating the EU delegations overseas.

be serving the ‘double-hatted’ role (Koenig, 2015; Kostanyan, 2016; Portela & Raube, 2012). The total sum of the roles, depending on whether to count the FAC presidency and the EEAS chief portfolio separately, can increase to as high as four (Portela & Raube, 2012). This institutional design is a crucial aspect for both the HR and the EEAS in terms of coherence, as these hats represent the ‘cross-pillar’ nature overarching the policy areas corresponding to the former first and second pillars of the Union, which allows CFSP-related initiatives in HR’s positions across the fields (Portela & Raube, 2012), ideally contributing to the EU’s external action coherence (Koenig, 2015).

In sum, the EEAS was born as a ‘functionally autonomous’ body resembling precedents set by the ministry of foreign affairs of sovereign states. At its foundation, it was carefully constructed to serve multiple actors, especially the HR, the Council of the EU, and the Commission. It was bound to the tasks and competency of the HR, whose portfolio received an overhaul to contribute to the coherence of the Union’s external action by design in the Treaty of Lisbon. In the next section, the accounts by scholars will be revisited, who have previously scrutinised the EEAS, to gain understanding on the practical functioning vis-à-vis the institutional design and expectations.

4 Literature

The aim of this section is to revisit the extant literature on the subject of this thesis and to identify the research gap that it positions itself in. It mainly involves the body of qualitative research on the nature and practical functioning of the EEAS and the HR/VP. In the course of this literature review, particular emphasis is placed on underdevelopment of the EEAS-Commission coordination. Consequently, a certain degree of doubt is cast as to whether their practical functioning satisfies the expectation post-Lisbon external action architecture originally set relating to external action coherence.

In order to grasp the standing of the EEAS in the institutional landscape of EU foreign policy, it is beneficial to retrace the early accounts on the newly established EEAS, its organisation, and mandate. Bátora's interviews-based analysis (2013) conducted after the initial establishment and the transition stage summarises the organisational settings and the functioning well. He characterised the service as an 'interstitial organisation' which is located in-between existing organisations of the EU, national ministries, and others, institutions that would otherwise be used as references when founding a foreign service. There, no tradition of the pre-existing prevailed. The institution's working borrowed elements from ministries of foreign affairs, defence, and even private organisations. While the large chunk of the staff at the time moved in from the Commission's Directorate-General for the External Relations (DG RELEX), many were not equipped with a conventional diplomatic experience, and others were from the Council. The EEAS also strived to be embedded in both the Commission's and the Council's functioning, and borrowed public communication infrastructure from both. Bátora (2013) hinted at the possibility that the status as an interstitial institution may prove advantageous for the EEAS, and that it may become a pioneer of the new standard of foreign policy delivery.

A contemporary external expert study delivered to the Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union, which is part of the European Parliament, provided a similar yet more detailed description, emphasising the *sui generis* nature of the institution within the EU (Wouters et al., 2013). Among others, it points out the unclear hierarchy within the EEAS (p. 21), the complexity and ambiguity surrounding the mandate of the service (p. 18; p.51), the existence of parallel structures in the Commission and the member states (p. 46), and the lack of clarity as to who or which institution has a final say in the Union's external policy (p. 49). As the Council Decision of 2010 defines the main role of this institution as supporting the

mandate of the HR/VP within the area of the CFSP, the output of the EEAS including its public communication efforts should be contingent on the competency of the HR/VP, which is *inter alia* to ensure the consistency of the Union's external policy. Yet, this role should not obstruct the competency of the Council and the Commission ('*without prejudice to the normal tasks*'), and it 'shall assist the President of the European Council, the President of the Commission, and the Commission' in external action (Council of the European Union, 2010). Furthermore, the heads of the Union delegations overseas answer to the HR/VP notwithstanding the inclusion of the Commission civil servants for internal policies with external dimensions in the delegation personnel (Wouters et al., 2013, p. 63). All these to say, the EEAS and HR are put in charge of Union's external action, while avoiding incursion into competency of pre-existing institutions, unless their assist is desired by them. As such, legal documents mentioned here do not provide a clear-cut disambiguation in terms of where the borders are drawn between areas of coexisting competencies, and how EU activities at the interfaces are to be handled in practice. As far as the formal settings of the external action architecture are concerned, the area of competency given to the HR and the EEAS are wide-reaching, whilst being interwoven within the crowded institutional landscape preceding the Treaty of Lisbon.

The lack of clarity in the service's mandate has been discussed in the literature as a potential obstacle to the service's development to a fully functional one (Furness, 2013; Wouters et al., 2013), and alternatively as something potentially beneficial (Bátora, 2013). It is here that the 'working arrangements' between the Commission and the EEAS dating back to January 2012 (European Commission Secretariat-General, 2012) offer a peek into their efforts to draw more precise boundaries between the Commission and the EEAS in a less abstract and more practical sense. This agreement, with the intention of 'set[ting] out the basic principles and practical implementation method' (European Commission Secretariat-General, 2012, p. 2), disambiguates the flow of functioning and competency against the background of the institutional overlaps between the two. It is divided into sections relating to the EU delegations, the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), financial assistance and cooperation, cooperation on crises outside the EU, media and communication, and briefings. This document is characterised by the Commission's desire to prevent the EEAS from establishing itself as a central and autonomous actor in the EU foreign policy making. As Furness puts it, 'the Commission has pushed back' to the EEAS' effort to gain autonomy (Furness, 2013, p. 116) with this act of demarcation. The budgetary oversight of the service, which fell within the competency of the Commission's Service for Foreign

Policy Instrument (FPI) (Bátora, 2013, p. 604), was reaffirmed to be reserved for the Commission (Furness, 2013). Furthermore, the strategic communications unit of the EEAS, which is responsible for public engagement by the HR/VP, was explicitly put under the terms of the Commission's Spokespersons' Service '[i]n so far as the HR/VP is acting in his/her capacity as Vice-President of the Commission' (European Commission Secretariat-General, 2012; p. 33), and the Commission is to be informed about the EEAS press material in the CFSP domain 'in a timely manner'. Considering the fundamental ambiguity surrounding the division of labour between the two institutions, this agreement is significant in that the EEAS is put under concrete obligation to fall in line with the Commission, keeping the prospect of functional autonomy for the service low.

Further relating to the EEAS' relative place among the EU institutions involved in foreign policy, extant research shows that the post-Lisbon external action architecture may not function as envisioned in the treaties. This first and foremost concerns the horizontal coordination between the EEAS and the Commission. The under-utilisation of the Commission VP role of the HR/VP has been identified as a constraining factor of the inter-institutional cooperation (Wouters et al., 2013). Her/His initiative in the group of foreign policy related (RELEX) Commissioners, originally implemented to encourage the HR/VP to lead the coordination of the Union's external action (Carta, 2013; European Parliament, 2013), was left virtually abandoned (Koenig, 2015; Kostanyan, 2016). The symptom was apparent from the very early stage: Convening of RELEX Commissioners, also referred to as the Commissioners' Group on External Relation or later External Action (CGEA), has not materialised as a regular occurrence in the tenure of Catherine Ashton, the first to oversee the EEAS (Koenig, 2015; Kostanyan, 2016).

Notably, the underperformance vis-à-vis original aspiration of the new foreign policy architecture partially bears the Commission's imprint. Some Commission officials saw the EEAS as a vessel for repatriating foreign policy competences previously won over by the Commission to the member states, and were thus sceptical of the service's empowerment (Lehne, 2014). The then President of the Commission, José Manuel Barroso, did not particularly empower Ashton in the coordination role, either (Koenig, 2015; Lehne, 2014). He apparently preferred bilateral coordination with his the RELEX Commissioners (Blockmans & Russack, 2015). The following Commissions as well as HRs did make efforts to improve their cooperation by experimenting with new formats, yet the RELEX Commissioners enjoyed heightened autonomy while coordination was absent (Lehne, 2014). The second chief of the

EEAS, Federica Mogherini, subsequently attempted to revitalise the Commissioners' group to improve the Commission-EEAS coordination (Helwig, 2015; Kostanyan, 2016; Rüger & Helwig, 2014). A comparable configuration called The Commissioners' Group on a Stronger Europe in the World (CGSE) under Josep Borrell proved effectively inactive, however, letting the co-chaired high-level Group for External Coordination (EXCO), on which the private offices of the HR/VP and the Commissioners took part (European Court of Auditors, 2024). Although the resulting coordination between the EEAS and the Commission was assessed positively by the ECA, the bottom line remains that the coordination vacuum was filled by the Commission initiative. An HR-led coordination of the foreign policy with the Commission has not been realised, and warranting the EEAS-Commission coherence through the exercise of the 'second hat' role by the HR/VP as originally envisioned has proven ineffective.

While far from being an established view in academia, there have even been concerns expressed by member state officials, of the so-called overreach by the Commission in Union's external action areas that arguably fall in the responsibility of the HR and the EEAS. This strand of texts can be found usually in the journalistic coverage catering to the audience in the 'Brussels bubble'. Most recently, the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France Jean-Noël Barrot in his public remark urged the Commission to adhere to the subsidiarity principle, and expressed his country's support of the EEAS in the same context (Cohen & Ionta, 2026; Vinocur, 2026). On the one hand, this is a rare example in the publicly knowledge regarding the insider acknowledgement of the Commission's overreach in this area where the person expressing this position is not obscured. On the other hand, this particular remark, coming from a political representative of the French Republic, and in a time where the country has been expressing discontent with the positions and actions taken recently by the high-level leadership including by the Commission President von der Leyen, may not exactly be an objective assessment of the inner workings of the EU level foreign policy architecture. In fact, critical voices against some actor of this architecture may have the tendency to take the form of a caution towards veering off the basic principles of the Union in the policy area regardless of the target, possibly with the aim of steering the concrete policy rather than of ensuring the adherence to competencies and principles. In the midst of the crisis in Palestine and Israel, then HR/VP Josep Borrell repeatedly made public remarks stating the Commission President von der Leyen should respect the shared position of the Council and the European Council, criticising simultaneously her alleged pro-Israel stance (EU Reporter, 2024; European External Action Service, 2023; Soler i Lecha, 2024). However, his stances on this issue, in return,

prompted similar reactions from some including member states, reminding himself to adhere to the shared position of the European Council (Barigazzi & Moens, 2023). All of this to say, the Union's external action is a domain of EU policy in which the primacy of member states is stressed heavily, yet the European institutions and actors such as the Commission, the EEAS and their respective chiefs occasionally find themselves in contention with each other. Such dynamics suggest that there can be varying degrees of influence to the communicated policy output depending on the time, the subdomains, and milliard of other factors, rather than there being a somewhat fixed equilibrium among the horizontal peers.

Despite the richness of literature in terms of general assessment of the EEAS' functioning, not many have set their focus specifically on the horizontal coordination for external action coherence. It is worthy of mentioning how large a proportion of contribution institutionally contracted reports have made to the literature. Besides the reports by the EU institutions themselves (European Court of Auditors, 2024; European Parliament, 2013), works affiliated with them (Wouters et al., 2013), national foreign services (e.g. Bátorá, 2013) and think tanks (e.g. Blockmans & Russack, 2015; Koenig, 2015; Lehne, 2014) make up a substantial part of research discussed above. This attests to the immense interest for understanding the EEAS among practitioners of the field and their home organisations on the one hand, limited amount of published academic pieces focused on details of the service's functioning, on the other. Most of the research in this field takes place with qualitative methods depending heavily on interviews, which has, besides all its benefits, possibly limited validity of findings due in part to small samples and subjectivity of interviewees. The research for this thesis attempts to contribute to the literature by focusing on the crucial aspect of external action coherence and horizontal coordination, while opting for a quantitative methodology to overcome the limitations of studies based on anecdotal evidence.

While the literature that draws on a systematic collection of a large-N dataset on the communication of the EEAS is lacking, there is a previous attempt. The aim of the research team from the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (de: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik; SWP) was to create a dataset on the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), and they therefore compiled not only the EEAS press releases³ but also the Council sources (Ålander et al., 2020). They encountered a certain level of secrecy that is generally associated with foreign services, and this, along with lack of sufficient and

³ The authors of this work call all entries on the 'Press Material' page of the EEAS press releases. This should not be confused with the subcategory of the press material with the same name.

systematic transparency measures, resulted in difficulty accessing the information that would help evaluate the policy. Still, they were able to collect a significant amount of the press material from the EEAS by web scraping and subsequently categorise the type of the entries manually to identify some annual trends between 2014 and mid 2020. This speaks for the viability of leveraging the EEAS press material as a data source.

The establishment of the EEAS gave the Union a chance to develop a fully functional foreign service at the European level, and allowed the formulation of high expectations regarding, among others, its coordination role. The institutional design was explicitly set to encourage the inter-institutional interaction for coherent external action. Even so, the horizontal coordination by the EEAS with the Commission has not been flawless, leaving the Commission some autonomy in this domain. If the EEAS and the HR are unable to fulfil the coordination role, the coherence of policy in this area may not be sustained at a high level. The thesis contributes to the literature by providing a novel quantitative account on the functioning of the EEAS by focusing on the coherence. The next section will further elaborate on the two key concepts, coherence and coordination.

5 Theoretical Background

At the core of this inquiry is the concept of external action coherence, and this thesis builds heavily on the conceptualisation by Mauro Gatti (Gatti, 2016). The book discusses the role the EEAS could play in promoting coherence in detail, and it was preceded by a similar yet brief discussion by Tietje (Gatti, 2016; Tietje, 1997). Both agree that despite the usage of the word ‘consistency’ can be seen in the English versions thereof, the primary law of the Union⁴ in fact requests coherence in its policy, rather than merely indicating the necessity for legal non-contradiction. This is supported in his argument by several points: One such point is obtained by first assuming that consistency here could indeed mean the latter. It, at first glance, seems plausible, if one were to recall the issues that can arise due to plurality of the Union’s legislative procedures, layered co-existence of national and European legal orders, and the misalignment between the international and EU-internal legal orders. However, Gatti continues, such issues relating to the systemic consistency is clearly determined to be addressed by the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU): And in practice, too, it routinely does. Systemic consistency thus is not a major issue in the Union’s external action, and even if it were, to conclude that Article 21 (3) TEU entrusts the HR and other executive actors with ensuring legal consistency would be implausible (Gatti, 2016, pp. 13–30). Another fundamental fact is that versions of the treaties in various other languages opted instead of ‘consistency’ for an equivalent of ‘coherence’, making strict adherence to interpretation unique to the word consistency unreasonable (Gatti, 2016, p. 27). As such, one should instead adopt the alternative interpretation, that the ‘consistency’ here relates to promoting ‘synergies’ in the ‘functional overlapping’ of policies by multiple actors, which is to say, the primary law calls for ensuring coherence.

Aside from the careful exclusion of the legal-orders-centred interpretation, Gatti maintains that his definition of external action coherence further differs from the previous scholarly descriptions. He distinguishes vertical and horizontal coherence under the umbrella notion of external action coherence (Gatti, 2016, p. 37). The former mainly concerns the coherence between the member state governments and Brussels, and applies first and foremost, but not limited, to the CFSP (Gatti, 2016, p. 34). The latter is to be ensured at the EU level (Gatti, 2016, p. 33), such as between the various Commission-institutions (e.g. the DGs, FPI), the Council Secretariat, and EEAS. Other related concepts, such as ‘policy coherence for development’,

⁴ Specifically, Article 21 (3) TEU and Article 7 TFEU.

‘internal-external coherence’, ‘intra- and inter-institutional coherence’, and temporal coherence, are argued either to be subsets of either horizontal or vertical coherence, or to not necessitate separation from other cases as an autonomous factor contributing to the external action coherence (Gatti, 2016, pp. 35–36).

As the external action encompasses areas of the EU’s ‘Community’ as well as ‘intergovernmental’ policy, the notion necessarily stands in tension with the principle of delimitation of competency, which the primary law ensures through the principle of conferral (Gatti, 2016, p. 39). In this regard, Gatti points out that the EU institutions including the CJEU have been open for ‘flexible’ interpretation (Gatti, 2016, p. 58). In other words, it is largely a matter of balance as to how much the relevant actors coordinate across institutional boundaries while respecting separation of competencies. The establishment of the EEAS is to be understood in this context, where an effective *coordinator* was needed to ensure the coherence of the external action of the entirety of the Union (Gatti, 2016).

The conceptualisation of *coordination* and *coordinator* by Gatti, however, requires explanation, as their meaning seem to differ from the usage in some other works. In the literature on the Union’s external action as well as the Union’s own words, coordination is a means to contribute to coherence, and the word coordination here is often used either interchangeably with cooperation, or without clear distinction (Gatti, 2016, p. 68). Gatti’s own view, however, is that coordination is situated in between the two extremes of centralised and decentralised methods of ensuring coherence (Gatti, 2016, p. 69). Centralisation is an established way for sovereign states to ensure policy coherence (Gatti, 2016, pp. 59–60), whereby most of decision making authority is reserved for the very core of its central government. This is impossible due to multiple reasons: The EU is not granted enough authority in the Treaties (i.e. no vertical centralisation), nor is there a single entity in the EU that enjoys overwhelming influence over the external action (i.e. no horizontal centralisation) (Gatti, 2016, pp. 62–63). In contrast, coherence would be ensured in a decentralised manner when multiple authorities work together supporting each other’s action i.e. through cooperation (Gatti, 2016, pp. 63–64). It faces a significant challenge in effective judicial enforcement, as the CJEU does not preside over the substances relating to the Union’s CFSP, and where there is inaction from the side of the EU, the CJEU is hardly able to hold the member states to account (Gatti, 2016, p. 65). Coordination, therefore, is seen by Gatti as the third option between these. This means an ideal coordinator in this sense would not itself be involved (much) in political decision making and would be (semi-)autonomous, setting the coordination of multiple authority without self-interest as its

main goal. For this reason, his work foresees the EEAS as a possible effective coordinator, but not its chief, HR/VP.

This is where I depart from Gatti's path. The first part of his text, as seen above, has been a meticulous examination of the notion external action coherence, possible toolsets to this end, and what traits an ideal coordinator in particular should logically possess. However, he proceeds to discuss what would be the main theme of the work from here on; the viability of the EEAS as the closest-to-ideal coordinator the Union could realistically obtain, and therefore a normative and prospective one. He does not have to, and indeed does not, provide satisfactory reasoning for why the EEAS *is* separable from the HR/VP *as is* in its current state. It is only briefly mentioned how the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU acts somewhat distant to the rotating presidency of the Council, which in his argument should attest for the non-zero possibility of the EEAS prospectively distancing itself from the HR/VP in a similar manner to make itself more credible as a coordinator (Gatti, 2016, p. 97). In contrast to Gatti, 2016, the examination in this thesis as an empirical study requires an accurate portrayal of the functioning of the EU external action architecture, and therefore EEAS and the HR/VP, in the past and present tenses. Because the EEAS is fundamentally defined as a service to assist its formal and practical chief, HR/VP, in Article 27 (3) TEU, it should be assumed by default that the two acts in concert with each other as much as any DGs of the Commission or Ministries of sovereign states would with their respective heads. This assumption could be overturned, naturally, should there be sufficient discussions and evidence that the distancing is indeed a phenomenon that followed after the publication of Gatti's 2016 work. Since this is not the case thus far, it would be appropriate to keep observing the EEAS and the HR/VP as directly connected actors rather than the opposite, even if it puts the EEAS further from being an ideal coordinator in Gatti's conceptualisation. This thesis does not theorise on or test how much these two adhere closely to the Gatti's concept of ideal coordinator: Rather, I aim to uncover the observable trends in the output of these two, relative to the Commission in the area of external action, and the status of the EEAS and the HR/VP must be assumed either as one or separate entities vis-à-vis the Commission. In this empirical study on the EEAS-Commission relations, I shall continue with the plausible assumption that the service's headquarters and its chief generally function as one, given the lack of evidence otherwise.

The practical consideration for executing this study further adds to this. Gatti's ideal model of external action coordination foresees the autonomous and neutral coordinator in between the coordinated i.e. three actors in total. As seen in the previous section, the interest of this thesis

lies in explaining the variation of coherence between the Commission and the EEAS, or the Commission and the HR/VP. However, the public communication of the EEAS and the HR/VP are not clearly separated from each other. Rather, the opposite is true: All their press material is hosted on the identical EEAS website, details of which will be presented in the next section. This fact not only attests to the operational oneness of the EEAS and the HR/VP, but simultaneously means I have two, rather than three separate data sources to work with. As such, in addition to the cause for the better adherence to the empirical knowledge, methodological optimisation from the perspective of practicality, too, leads to the conclusion that the examination for this thesis should be conducted with a laxer definition of coordination that encompasses what Gatti would classify as cooperation.

As established in the previous section, the so-called ‘coherence mandate’ of the service has not seen its full realisation. It is first and foremost unfulfilled due to the under-utilisation of the ‘second hat’ (Wouters et al., 2013, p. 32), which has persisted from the earliest of years. The incremental measures for clarification and improvement since then often followed the Commission’s initiative. These hint at the likelihood that the lack of coordination between the EEAS and the Commission would be measurable as incoherence in the external action communication. Where both have competency, capacity and interest to act autonomously, they would perhaps do so, and this without successful execution of coordination by the HR/VP and the EEAS means external action coherence should be pushed down.

Meanwhile, a smaller part of the literature on the EEAS provides an alternative perspective. One may apply the principal–agent model to the EEAS and its institutional neighbours. This theory emerged from the rational institutionalism (Pollack, 1997), and assumes that multiple competent institutions in a particular field have incentives collectively delegate exercising part of the competency to an agent. The agent, however, might pursue its own interests leveraging the informational asymmetry between it and the actors whose original tasks it carries out, which would lead to agency losses (Delreux & Adriaensen, 2019; Dür & Elsig, 2011, p. 329; Pollack, 1997, p. 108). The principals can employ ex-ante and ex-post control mechanisms to limit these. The former kind relies on preventive measures such as monitoring, while the latter entails credible sanctions and even terminating mandates (Dür & Elsig, 2011), risking cancelling the very benefits of delegation (Delreux & Adriaensen, 2019). This model has earned wide-spread recognition among scholars of the European integration and the EU. Examples of principal–agent analyses on the EU includes observing the EU/EC or the Commission, its central supranational institution, as an agent of the sovereign states (Niemann & Huigens, 2011;

Pollack, 1997), as well as discussing a subcomponent of the EU as an agent of both sovereign (member) states and European institutions (Larsén, 2007). Yet, Conceptualisation of the EEAS as an agent either of the EU member states, the Council, or the Commission has not been adopted by many. The aforementioned study by Furness is an instance in which the EEAS's relationship to other institutions are analysed from the principal–agent perspective, where prospect of the EEAS achieving its full potential by thematising possible cultivation of autonomy by the service within the principal–agent framework (Furness, 2013). If we were to understand the Commission as one of the principals of the EEAS, other notable principals being the member states partially through the Council of the EU, the Commission should be capable of exercise some degrees of control over its agent. High levels of control could be achieved when the informational asymmetry is reduced i.e. the principals are more closely involved with and thus themselves possess expertise in the policy areas, which is often the case with the Commission due to its own activity and parallel institutions in these areas (see Wouters et al., 2013). In other areas, the EEAS should enjoy relatively extensive autonomy due to reduced scrutiny and control, and one might therefore expect some decrease in coherence when the issues discussed by the EEAS are not in a policy area where the Commission also is highly active.

In sum, there are two plausible expectations, which are at odds with one another. The large lump of literature this study bases itself upon leads me to believe the coordination in EU's external action, which is a defining task of the EEAS, is lacking, and incoherence resulting from the congested EU foreign policy structure has the tendency to not be dealt with. This in effect would mean reduced coherence in such policy areas. Alternatively, the conceptualization of the relations between the Commission and the EEAS as a principal and the agent suggests the idea of 'the more directly the Commission is involved, the better the control and thus higher the coherence'. I formulate these expectations as testable hypotheses in the section that follows.

6 Hypotheses

For the EU's external action, the HR/VP is mainly in charge, supported by the EEAS. Besides the apparent intergovernmental character of the broad policy area, however, coordination becomes necessary between the EU institutions. Among the EU institutions whose formal competency as well as real capacities are in this domain are the EEAS, the Commission and the Council. For the European Commission, whose long-established administrative capacity and the practical autonomy it enjoys in 'Community' matters make it distinctly influential unlike the more inter-governmental Council and its secretariat, involvement in external action is standard practice. The theory of external action coherence suggests coordination is instrumental in achieving it. Without sufficient horizontal coordination for ensuring constant agreement in areas where multiple institutions may act with some autonomy, for this reason, external action policy areas where the Commission more actively engage should see lower level of coherence. The scholarship on the practical functioning of the EEAS suggests, even though it is tasked with such a role, that its effectiveness in coordinating specifically with the Commission should at least be considered with doubt. Therefore, the main hypothesis of this thesis reads:

H1 The degree of coherence is lower in policy areas with clear Commission competency.

Such policy areas would have to be defined conservatively for the purpose of testing this hypothesis: In other words, the coding criteria should pick up only those that clearly fall into the category. Such instances would include, for example, restrictive measures i.e. sanctions (Immenkamp, 2024; Portela & Raube, 2012, p. 10), civilian crisis management (Portela & Raube, 2012, p. 12), cooperation with third countries and regional actors with dual character (Gatti, 2016, p. 50).

However, a converse expectation can be formed, if I were to follow the logic of the principal-agent theory. Furness' discussion opens the possibility to conceptualise the EEAS as an agent of multiple principals, one of which could be the Commission (Furness, 2013). The core idea here is that the principals should employ ex-ante and ex-post mechanisms to control the agent against possible deviation from their interest. The Commission would likely be in a position to prevent, detect and correct the EEAS' possible deviation when former is more closely involved and hence knowledgeable in particular policy areas. This coincidentally reflects also the

hypothetical situation discussed by Gatti, where an institution lacks external, operational autonomy rendering the EEAS ‘de facto [...] the organ of the entity that controls it’ (Gatti, 2016, p. 76), which should make the EEAS itself unsuitable as a coordinator in his sense. In such cases, the exercised control should result in the EEAS falling in line with the Commission where it would not have otherwise, resulting in increased coherence. This can be expressed as a competing hypothesis to H1:

H2 The degree of coherence is higher in policy areas with clear Commission competency.

As these hypotheses are at odds with each other, adoption of one would result in rejection of the other, while it is possible not to reach an adoption of either hypothesis.

The sections immediately after this lay the basis for the empirical analysis by first providing specifications of the data used and methods applied. The analysis and discussion should then reach a conclusion on these hypotheses.

7 Data Collection

Here, the data collection processes for compiling the novel datasets are described in detail. As discussed above, external observers and researchers face considerable difficulty systematically acquiring documentation of the EU's actions especially in the CFSP areas. It is my aim in this section, therefore, to show a replicable method to create useful datasets based on the EU's public communication, which could be adopted and adjusted to be used in the future research. The basis for the core of the empirical analysis part is the novel and original datasets of the EEAS' and the Commission's public communication, acquired by web scraping the official websites of the EEAS⁵ and the Commission's Spokespersons' Service⁶, where the published 'press material' such as press releases, statements, speeches, and factsheets can be found. The scraping is done in the programming language R.

The web scraping of the EEAS press material was conducted mainly with the 'rvest' package (Wickham, 2025). In combination with 'xml2' and 'httr' packages, it enabled me to access, locate and systematically collect openly accessible information on the services' webpages with ease. In order to comply with policy of the websites towards automated access, I used various voluntary rate limits ranging from a few seconds to a few minutes depending on the situation in the repeated parts of the process. The basic procedure in scraping websites with the 'rvest' package was combined with the 'polite' package (Perepolkin, 2023), which refers to the robots.txt when establishing a session to ensure my activity remains in accordance with what the website permits, and eventually to keep the scraping session uninterrupted for as long as possible. The scraping took place roughly in two steps. First, the complete directory of the entries was looked through. There were 731 such pages at the time of scraping, each with ten entries listed. At this stage, information such as the titles, dates, types, and URLs could be extracted. In the next step, the URLs collected in the previous step was used to access the main articles of the press material. This enabled further scraping of the main texts, which were not displayed in the search result pages. It must be noted, however, that the EEAS press material directory contains entries whose main articles are hosted in the servers of different EU and non-EU organisations. These external pieces of press material are not relevant to this inquiry, and would require a different scraping strategy, as each website has its unique policy and I would otherwise risk breaches. Therefore, I decided that it would be appropriate to skip these non-EEAS websites in this second step. As the scraping was a time-consuming process with

⁵ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/press-material_en

⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/home/en>

some susceptibility to interruption, it was executed in multiple batches, the yields of which were subsequently combined into one dataset after the exhaustion of all target entries.

Scraping the Commission press material directory and main articles required some adjustment to the procedures used above for the EEAS, as the Commission uses a single-page application, and the search result pages are rendered within a single webpage. This prevents the previously used method for the scraping of the EEAS directory where each search results page was accessed in a sequence simply by increasing the parameter for the page number by one. This issue could be addressed with the ‘chromote’ package for R (Aden-Buie et al., 2025). This essentially allowed the scraper to click on the ‘next’ button element of the HTML page identified with the CSS selector as a human visitor would do via a web browser. After an additional delay to ensure completion of loading the next page, the scraper proceeded to fetch the data such as the titles, dates, types and URLs of the main articles similarly to the scraping of the EEAS pages. Scraping was set to stop when the ‘next’ button could not be found, marking the end of the directory. In the subsequent step, the main article pages were visited and scraped for the main texts with the help of the ‘polite’ package, which allowed the scraper to modify the session path i.e. the next location in the website without risking losing the host’s permission. I did not encounter the issue of externally hosted articles with the press material in the Commission Press Corner. The process was stable and did not necessitate execution in batches as it was necessary with the EEAS press material.

Subsequent to the acquiring of the two large datasets for the EEAS and the Commission respectively, whose rows represent individual entries, data preprocessing and manipulation were conducted in R. Main modification to the data are as follows. Boilerplates i.e. recurring sets of sentences that are themselves irrelevant to the content of the press material were identified and removed from the text variable. A variable for the total count of words in the texts was added to both datasets. After assigning ID-numbers unique to each observation, smaller versions of datasets were created by filtering observations with the help of multiple criteria. For the EEAS dataset, entries from external institutions, both EU and non-EU, were excluded. Furthermore, entries from the Union delegations, which are part of the EEAS, are also removed. The latter accounted for approximately three-quarter of the sum of entries, and the exclusion ensures that the dataset reflects the intention of the EEAS headquarters rather than the local and duplicated content from the overseas representations, whose staff consists also of Commission personnel. Furthermore, datasets were filtered to only leave observations with types ‘Statement’ (Commission), ‘Statement / Declaration’ (EEAS), or ‘Press release’ to

exclude seldom used categories and ensure comparability of entries. Finally, the temporal scope was limited to the period beginning in December 2019 and ending in mid-September 2025. This is because there was a substantial hike in the pace of press material publication on the EEAS website in late 2019, coinciding with the assumption of office by HR/VP Josep Borrell Fontelles (Ålander et al., 2020). The size of reduced datasets suffices for the purpose of this thesis, while it allows me to avoid possible bias in data through large number of missing entries. As an example from the resulting final dataset, *Table 1* shows the information contained in one row of the EEAS press material dataset, when displayed in a spreadsheet format.

Variable name	Observation
title	Russia: Statement by the Spokesperson on regional elections and their non-applicability to Ukrainian territories
type	Statement/Declaration
date	2025-09-13
url	https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/russia-statement-pokesperson-regional-...
text	On 14 September, Russian authorities hold regional and local elections, including...
word_count	906
(+ IDs, etc.)	

Table 1

After excluding all other types of press material, the EEAS dataset has 3559 full observations with texts, while 6545 observations remain in the Commission dataset. Although both datasets show seasonal fluctuations such as declines in the summer and winter, observations are somewhat evenly distributed (*Figure 1*; *Figure 2*), which speaks for viability of these channels as permanent sources of information on the activity of these EU institutions even when their scopes are limited to two major types of press material, statements and press releases.

EEAS press material since December 2019

Types 'Press Release' & 'Statement/Declaration'

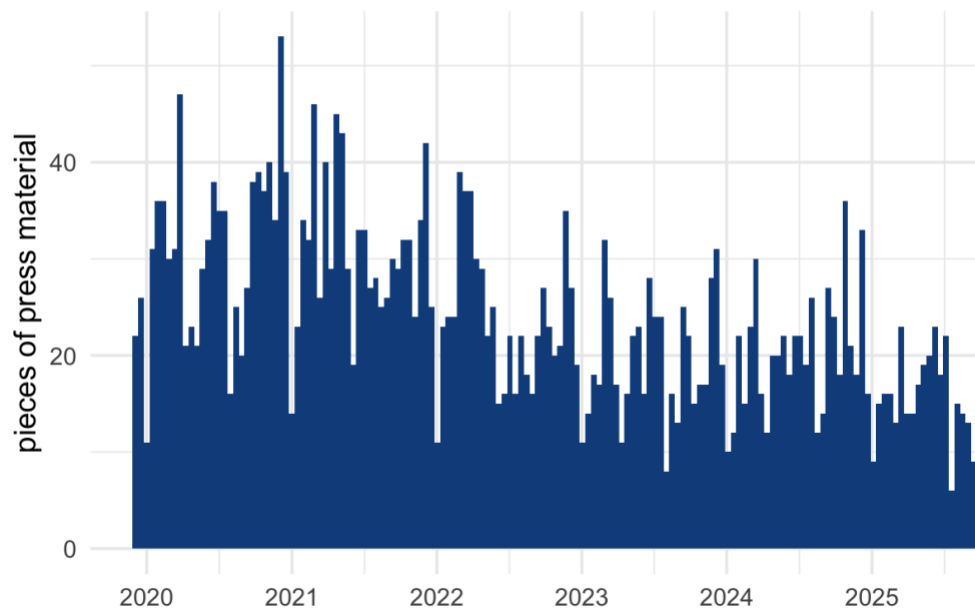


Figure 1

Commission press material since December 2019

Types 'Press Release' & 'Statement'

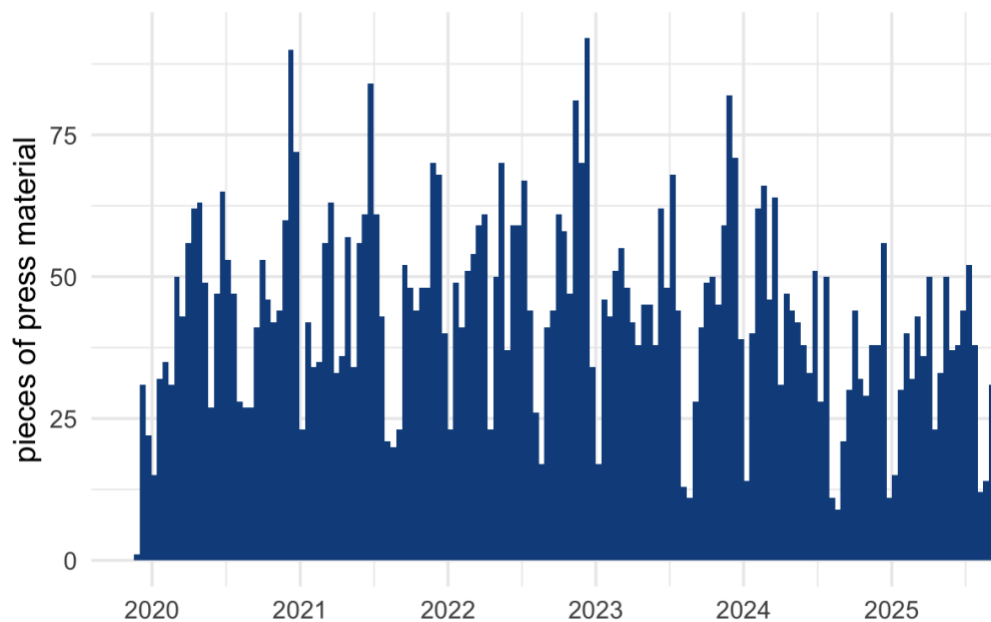


Figure 2

This section was dedicated to the documentation of the processes in through the data sets for this study were created. Beyond providing the sufficient information on the dataset, I aimed to

provide a guide for path future research could take to capitalise on the EU's public communication in policy areas where information is otherwise scarce. The next section details the analytical methods used on these data.

8 Methods of Analysis

In this section, I describe the analytical methodology applied to test the hypothesis using the produced datasets. The empirical analysis is conducted mainly in two parts. Figure 3 depicts the broad course of action to be taken in the procedure.

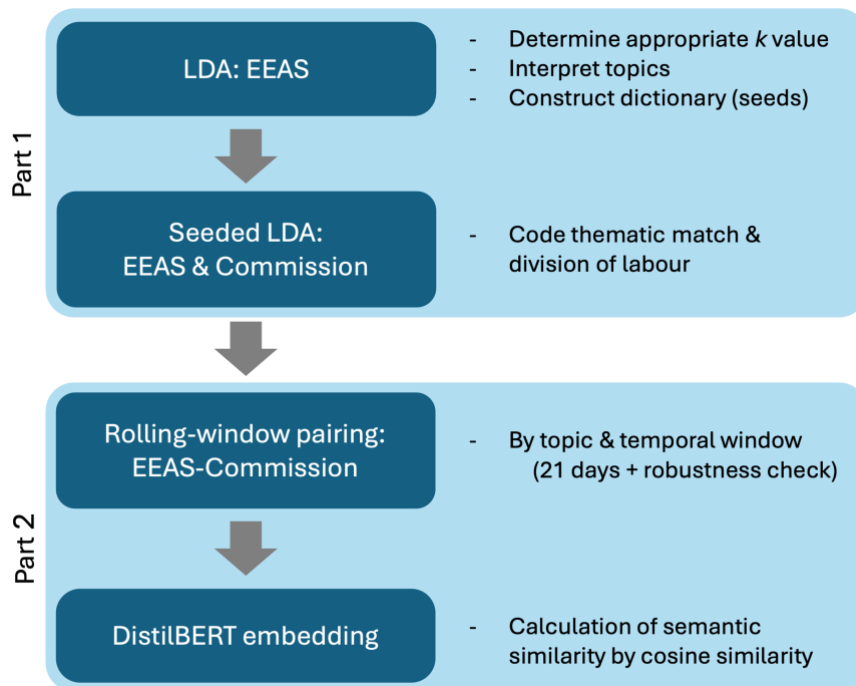


Figure 3

The first step of the analysis serves the purpose of identifying latent topics in the Union’s public communication on external action. Latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) topic modelling (Blei et al., 2003) is a type of unsupervised machine learning that has been widely used in social science. A common application of this is an inductive one where researchers let the algorithm propose topics to which terms from document corpora are matched. The topics are then interpreted and assigned to the target concepts in a process called ex-post mapping (Watanabe & Baturo, 2023). A known problem that topic models constructed with LDA can cause is that they may be less conceptually meaningful when the texts in which the terms appear are short and there are insufficient co-occurrences of terms to identify topics. To address this, scholars have developed ways to feed seed information to the algorithm (Jagarlamudi et al., 2012; Schweinberger, 2025). This way, the resulting topics are likely to match the conceptually expected latent topics better and the model would show more meaningful allocation of terms. The ‘seededlda’ package developed by Watanabe enables plain application of both the unsupervised LDA topic modelling and semi-supervised seeded LDA topic modelling with R (Watanabe & Xuan-Hieu, 2020).

In this study, the benefit of unsupervised LDA topic modelling is combined with that of the semi-supervised seeded sequential LDA. I first construct an unsupervised LDA topic model based on the document corpus of texts from the EEAS press material. The parameter for presumed number of topics, k , is altered until optimal value is found. Although no universally agreed-upon method for determining the best k exists, *perplexity* is widely recognised as a measure that reflects the goodness of fit of such a model, whereby a smaller value indicate a better fit. It does not necessarily reflect the interpretability of the topics, though, which still relies on well-informed human judgement. I calculate perplexity for all unsupervised LDA iterations starting with $k = 10$ and increasing it by 5. The models with lowest k values are then viewed by the author to check interpretability. If the topics are easily interpretable by viewing a few top terms, the interpretations and select terms can be used as a basis for a dictionary used in the next sub-step, the seeded LDA topic modelling.

The purpose of the two new topic models is to allocate one topic to each of the entries included in the EEAS and the Commission press material datasets. The seeded models can also be permitted to define the topic of a document as ‘other’ when none in the seed dictionary matches. The dictionary is a list of terms nested around topics. Many of topics are adopted from the unsupervised LDA and its interpretation, while terms are carefully selected to only include those that are conceptually relevant and consistent. The dictionary, in its form when fed to the algorithm, does not contain human interpretation of the topics, and the model only uses the groups of terms as a reference. The use of the dictionary and the seeds bring about a few benefits over the unsupervised counterpart. Because the dictionary adopts the human-interpreted versions of deductively identified latent topics, the classification can be expected to match both the data (i.e. which terms seem to co-occur and thus likely belong to certain topics) and the concepts (i.e. which topics *make sense* as subsets of EU external action) well. It also allows for ensuring the some of the topics will correspond to the conceptualised areas of the Commission’s competency, and that these are made readily identifiable. Doing so before training the secondary models lowers the likelihood of such policy areas being bundled with other unintended areas, and prevents possible endogeneity that may be caused by viewing Commission terms allocated to the topics prior to coding a ‘Commission competency’ variable. Commission competency or not, seeding also helps me avoid false matches caused by specific terms, such as ‘bank’ from the context of the ‘West Bank’ of the Jordan River, and ‘south’ from

the ‘South China Sea’ issues, that could undermine thematic homogeneity within the topics⁷. Furthermore, the application of one identical dictionary on both the EEAS and Commission corpora ensures allocation through the identical criteria, which is important for assuming comparability between the documents. The increased computational load by fitting the models on lengthy texts, instead of short titles, is merely minor inconvenience, while this drastically improves the quality of resulting topic allocation owing to the higher number of words in text corpora. The dictionary used in this process reflects the learning from the previous unsupervised LDA topic model of the EEAS texts. Therefore, its details can first be discussed in the empirical analysis section.

Above, each of the entries in the two datasets have been given an identified latent topic. This puts me one step closer to conducting an inter-institutional comparison of the communicated content originating from the EEAS and the Commission. Before this can take place, the quality of matches must be evaluated. When scrutinising the top terms assigned to topic in the seeded LDA model for the Commission dataset, thematic mismatches are expected to be observed for some of the topics: For some topics, Commission’s top terms may deviate tremendously from the original interpretation of the topic. Such situations can be caused either because the documents were assigned to a topic that do not guarantee the thematic comparability, or because there is no abundance of Commission documents in that topic. For example, both institutions may have published press material containing terms ‘meetings’, ‘minister’, ‘prime’, and ‘foreign’. This topic would not allow for thematic comparisons, as the terms used for identification do not guarantee specific shared issues discussed. Despite there being no practical use for entries with this type of topics in this thesis, they are intentionally kept in the dictionary, given they were identified in the LDA topic model of the EEAS dataset, as such incomparable entries must still be isolated from usable topics. On the contrary, when topics could not be thematically matched due to the Commission’s lack of reference to the subject, it would have a different implication. Namely, those are the cases of horizontal external action coherence through division of labour. A hypothetical example of this would be a situation where *topic i* is clearly interpreted to be a military-related item, and the top terms for the Commission dataset entirely lacks military elements. A such case leads to the conclusion that thematic matches cannot be found in the Commission press material likely due to the Commission not recognising itself as a competent actor of the policy area. As such, the

⁷ In these examples, a topic mainly on Palestine-Israel relations may get mixed with entries on financial market, or a topic on the security in Southeast Asia may experience an unlikely match with issues on South Africa.

horizontal conflict of messaging would already be out of question for this topic, before the semantic comparison of the two institutions' communication. Depending on the manual evaluation, *thematic match* as well as *division of labour* are coded respectively as binary (0/1) variables, whereby the latter can only take a non-zero value when the former takes zero.

The analysis can now move past the first part, with the thematic match of topics between the press material of the two institutions ascertained. The second part involves quantifying and evaluating the fluctuation of horizontal external action coherence in the shared topics among the EEAS and the Commission. Having ruled out coherence manifested in division of labour, horizontal coherence can only be present in the rest of the external action communication when the texts semantically align.

The operationalisation of this takes place through the modern method of quantifying semantic similarity, where I use a pre-trained transformer model to obtain the embeddings for texts, and measuring the cosine similarity of two paired instances. Contextualised embeddings are produced with 'DistilBERT' (Sanh et al., 2020), a small transformer model possessing a similar property to a larger conventional model BERT. The use of transformer models and BERT in particular has been the state of the art for natural language processing (NLP) in social sciences (see Kertcher & Zwilling, 2025; Timoneda & Vera, 2025). They offer an improvement over conventional NLP methods, such as simple vectorisation through term frequency-inverse document frequency (tf-idf), on understanding context and thus nuances of texts relevant to political science (Timoneda & Vera, 2025). Prior to feeding the documents to DistilBERT, I apply minimal preprocessing to the texts which includes exclusion of non-English languages and removal of boilerplates. Other methods, such as stop words removal and lowercasing of words including upper-case letters, were avoided, as these provide valuable information to bidirectional transformer models such as DistilBERT used here. Then, with the help of the 'text' package for R (Kjell et al., 2023), the contextualised text embeddings are obtained by mean-aggregating the token embeddings from DistilBERT's second-to-last hidden layer. I then produce EEAS-Commission pairs of observations for similarity calculation, while ensuring comparability; thematic comparability by matching within the same topics and excluding incomparable topics discussed earlier in this section, and temporal comparability by matching entries whose publication dates are within twenty-one days of each other. The calculation of semantic similarity scores between transformer-produced embeddings are enabled by the 'text' package as well, where I opt for cosine similarity. Cosine similarity is a widely adopted measure of similarity for this type of embeddings, and is suitable for the purpose of this

research, as it measures the angle rather than the distance of the compared, therefore reflecting semantic characteristics of the documents over magnitude such as verbosity and length of the texts, compared to, say, Euclidean distance. It is bound between -1 (meaning ‘completely dissimilar’) and 1 (‘identical’), yet documents that share the same language, theme and writing style as in my datasets are expected to return values near the upper bound in general.

Finally, the results obtained are presented in two ways: The semantic similarity scores are aggregated per topics into descriptive statistics. This should visualise the strong-enough trends, if present, in variance of the semantic similarity, hence allowing for preliminary evaluation of the hypothesis. For inferential statistics, a linear mixed model (LMM) is fitted, which appropriately considers the hierarchical structure of the data, and varied distributions of similarity scores between the topics. A result consistent with the hypothesis H1 would be, that the semantic similarity scores are lower when the subject topic is one that involves substantial Commission competency.

Throughout the processes that rely on pseudo-randomisation with R and additional packages, I set the seed to ‘100’ for reproducible results.

This section described in detail how the empirical analysis takes place. This proceeds in two parts: The first part is concerned with preparing the documents for comparison. This means searching for latent topics in the external action in the EEAS’s communication, ensuring conceptual fit through a dictionary, identifying topics which the Commission would find itself responsible for, and then fitting seeded LDA topic models on the EEAS and Commission datasets to label each entry with a topic. The second part builds on the previous step by conducting a pairwise semantic comparison and quantifying horizontal coherence as high cosine similarity of contextualised text embeddings between the two institutions. The results of these processes are presented. in the next section.

9 Empirical Analysis

This section presents the results of the empirical analysis. It is divided into two parts corresponding to the temporal order of analysis as described in the previous section. The first of the two as its objective, to identify latent topics in the data sets. Part 2 will close in on the hypotheses of this thesis by producing similarity statistics between texts that are determined comparable with the help of the previous part. A direct observation on the empirical findings is made in the section, while the function of discussing the implications in detail and in total is reserved for the next section.

9.1 Latent topics

Identifying latent topics in the content of the EEAS' and the Commission's external action communication enables me to do a few things. One is to know which entry i.e. data point in the original datasets likely belongs to which topic. Another is to know which terms likely make up the identified topics. These can be achieved through LDA topic modelling / seeded LDA topic modelling. By referring to the terms and entries whose document was assigned to a topic, I can interpret the topic as a specific area within external action, and thus code whether it is an example of a policy area where the standard Commission competency is concerned. Matching observations from the EEAS and the Commission datasets by the identified topics allows for producing data points for the pair-wise comparison of Part 2.

When creating the unsupervised LDA topic model with the EEAS press material entries, the value of the parameter k , i.e. the number of topics, must be determined before initiating the process. Although scholars have yet to find a definitive method to determine the better suited values let alone the best one for the corpus, one proposed way of doing so is by assessing the fit of the model with various k values. The measure here is called *perplexity*. For a selection of k values from ten to fifty, the perplexity scores of unsupervised topic models are shown in *Table 3*. Figures beyond the second decimal place have been rounded. This indicates the best fit is when k equals forty-five. Human comprehension of the topics, however, remains decisive when determining k . With this model, most of the identified topics could be interpreted with ease. An excerpt from the list of latent topics and their top terms from this model is provided as *Appendix I* at the end of this thesis. A larger table with all forty-five topics will be made available as a separate spreadsheet.

Value of k	Perplexity
10	1663.8
15	1521.7
20	1454.8
25	1397.9
30	1359.6
35	1336.2
40	1322.6
45	1306.9
50	1314.7

Table 2

From these, a seed dictionary was compiled. To minimise negative effects of arbitrariness and endogeneity, the coding of the Commission-competency dummy variable was done when compiling the seed dictionary. The codebook is available as *Appendix 2*. The dictionary largely adopts the latent topics identified in the unsupervised process, while changes were made to separation of topics in order to ensure conceptual fit of the categorisation. Some terms were deliberately excluded from the topics, either to correct the apparent misidentification by the topic model, or to prevent possible misidentification in the subsequent seeded LDA. The full dictionary plus human interpretation of topics can be seen in the appendix of this thesis (*Appendix 3*). It is a nested list of terms, each cluster representing a topic with interpretation deriving from the learning of unsupervised LDA model on the EEAS texts. In total, there are 45 topics.

The binary variable for the Commission competency is coded on the basis of the interpretation of topics as well as a pre-determined codebook, and defines such policy areas minimally and positively. In short, restrictive measures i.e. EU sanctions are classified as such for their profound economic dimensions and the roles the Commission is known to play in (Immenkamp, 2024; Portela & Raube, 2012), whereas few other policy areas with concrete Commission portfolios are also identified as Commission competency. *Table 3* lists examples of expected policy areas that qualify according to the codebook. The corresponding topics included in the dictionary are shown in *Appendix 3.2*. *Appendix 3.1* includes topics that are coded ‘0’ for the Commission competency variable, meaning they do not fall within the positive definition of the external action policy areas with significant Commission competency, while *Appendix 3.3* is a collection of topics that persisted in multiple LDA models that would not ensure

comparability of the texts. Although they must be left unutilised in this research, keeping them as topics in the dictionary and thus in the seeded LDA models is meaningful to isolate documents from contaminating the topics I am interested in.

Policy area	Concrete competency of the European Commission
Ukraine-Russia relations	Restrictive measures
Palestine-Israel relations	Restrictive measures
Oppression of opposition figures in Russia	Restrictive measures
Oppression of opposition figures in Belarus	Restrictive measures
Military coup in Myanmar	Restrictive measures
Other CFSP sanctions	Restrictive measures
Civilian crisis management	DG ECHO
Humanitarian aid	DG ECHO
Human rights	DG INTPA
Sustainable development	DG INTPA, DG TRADE
Justice and rule of law	DG INTPA
Pandemic, global health and WHO	DG SANTE
Enlargement	DG NEAR, DG ENEST

Table 3

Next, I fit the seeded LDA topic models to the document corpora of both institutions, the EEAS and the Commission. Because the number of topics is optimised through the aforementioned deductive analytical process on the EEAS dataset, it is expected that the seeded LDA model for this dataset shows a good fit. The model for the Commission dataset, in contrast, is expected to display a certain degree of mismatch: As discussed in the previous section, this should reflect some inactivity of the Commission in certain areas where it may not have seen itself competent, and the seeded LDA algorithm falsely matches some Commission documents to such topics. Alternatively, they are found not containing any of the topics and identified to have ‘other’ topics. There were twenty-one cases of ‘other’ out of 3408 documents in total in the EEAS model, whereas the Commission model had 159 out of 6505. Although no reliable measure, this aligns with the theorised expectation that *not* all external action policy areas the EEAS communicates in is covered also by the Commission. The thematic mismatch was coded according to the codebook (see *Appendix 2* for the criteria). *Figure 4* is an Euler diagram depicting the thematic (non-)overlaps between the press material of the two institutions. A large portion of the dictionary-topics without clear Commission competency found little to no thematic match, meaning these were likely not often discussed by the Commission. This is contrasted by the large number of dictionary-topics coded to be in Commission’s realm of activity that found thematically matched instances in the Commission dataset. Besides these

tendencies, a number of topics with and without clear Commission competency could be found in both corpora, shown at the middle of the diagram. These topics enable me to calculate the semantic similarity scores of documents from the EEAS and the Commission, which are the data points for the mixed effects model the next part of this section presents.

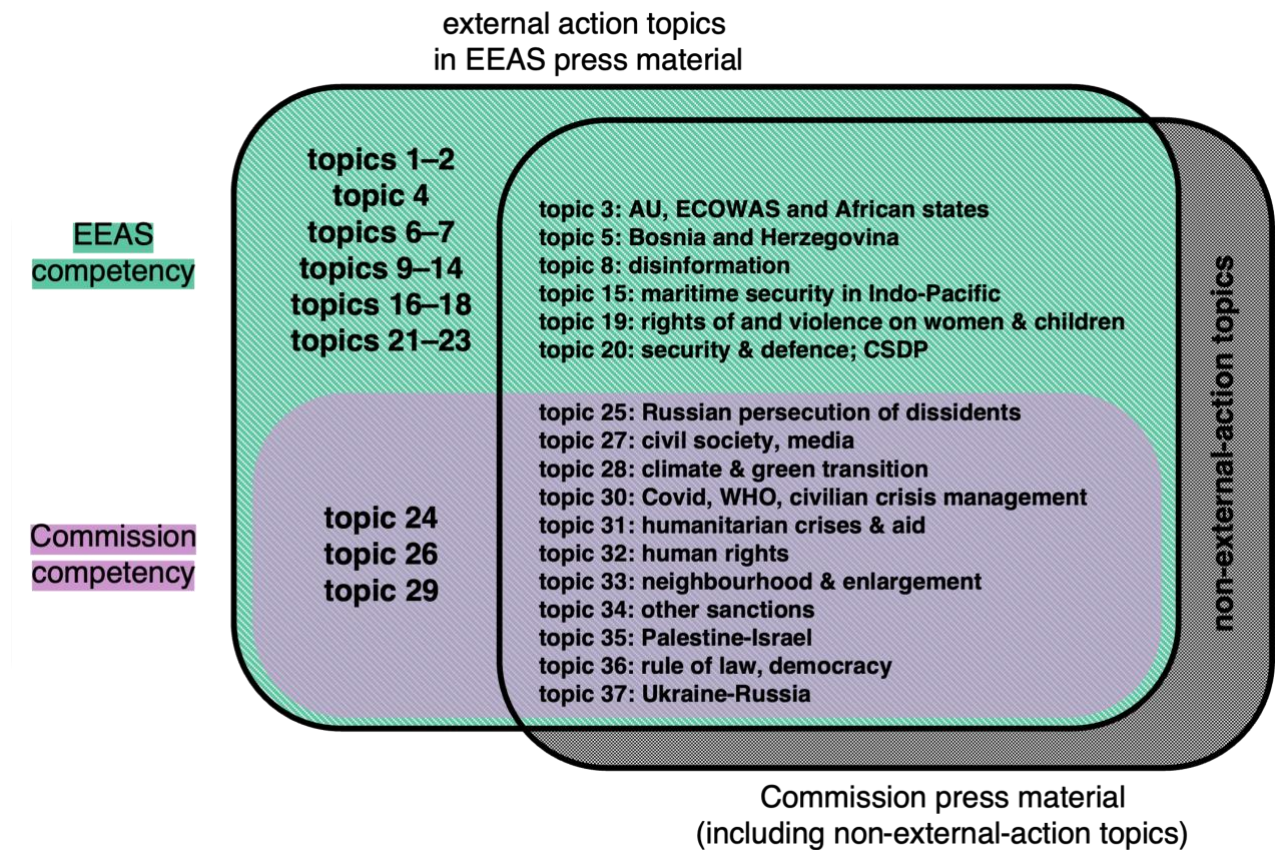


Figure 4

9.2 Semantic similarity

Here, I share the statistics regarding the semantic similarity scores at an aggregate level. The scores are cosine similarity scores of the contextualised text embeddings from the second-to-last hidden layer of DistilBERT. The closer the values are to one, the more similar the pair of documents is. The creation of these pairs followed two criteria to ensure comparability of the content; by shared topics, and by temporal proximity. Topics are the ones that were assigned to each entry of the datasets in the previous part. The temporal proximity is relevant because actors and institutions may alter their positions on one topic over time. This was implemented with a ‘rolling window’ of twenty-one days, but statistical results with a slimmer and wider rolling window are also included in *Appendix 4*.

Figure 5 shows central values of the cosine similarity per topic, sorted by the median values from the top to the bottom. Medians are shown in dark blue rectangles on the horizontal scales, while the red rectangles represent mean values. Each topic-axis is accompanied by a density plot, showing the distribution of similarity scores at the higher end. The plot is coloured in magenta if it belongs to a Commission competency topic, otherwise in green. The number of pairs i.e. available data points for a topic is shown next to its label. In total, there were 3966 data points with this twenty-one-day rolling window pairing. The x-axis is limited to the range between 0.965 and 1, with seventeen datapoints lower than this being dropped visually.

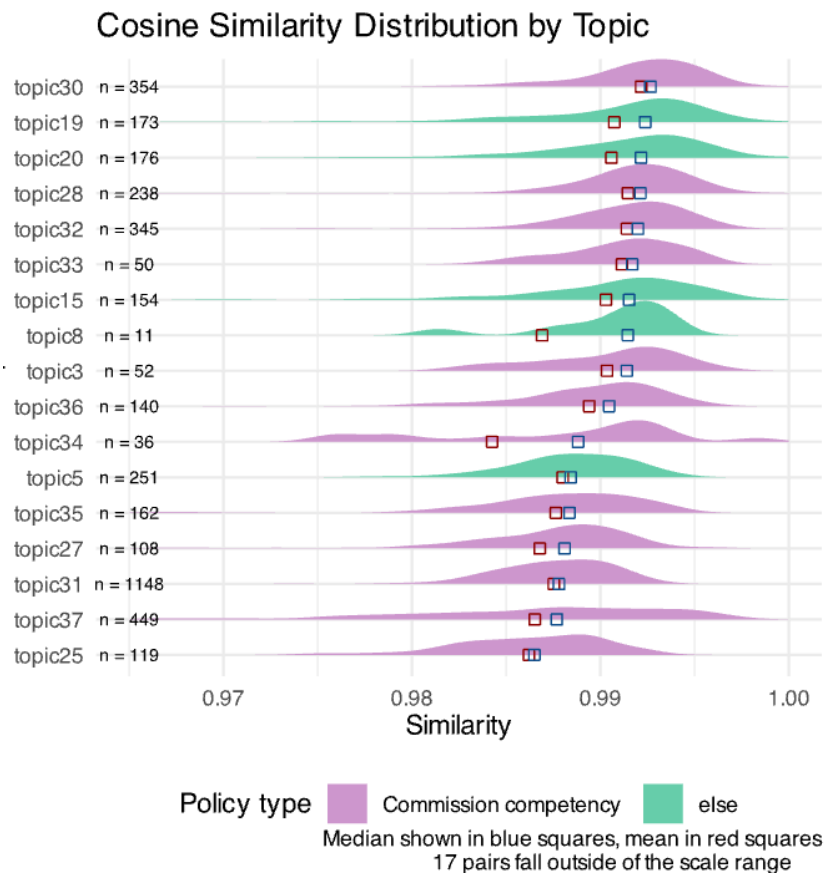


Figure 5

From these descriptive statistics, a few features stand out. Firstly, the similarity scores overall are high. A fraction of the pairs, namely 17 out of 3966 (approx. 0.4%), fell below the depicted range of this chart. This is hardly surprising, however, as documents that were not in the English language were excluded in two steps: With data-cleaning using ‘cld2’ package (Ooms & Sites, 2025), and with a dictionary topic for observed foreign language traits in the unsupervised LDA model of the EEAS data. Moreover, all documents are by EU institutions in a similar press release or statement format, and are compared only within a narrow topic. Related to this, due to the heavy tendency towards high values while the measurement has its upper bound at one,

it is expected that the distribution of cosine similarity values would show persistent left-skewness. Although mean values are indeed lower than the median values in all topics, indicating a longer tail in the lower side of the distribution, the difference seems minor in many topics, and the many density plots resemble a normal distribution. Exceptions are topic 8 and 34, which show noticeable mean-median differences and multiple peaks, as well as topic37, which has a distinctly flat curve without much skewness. The former two topics, however, has two of the lowest numbers of data point, potentially explaining the abnormality. Thirdly, it appears that there may indeed be variance in similarity depending on the topics, while the variance of similarity within individual topics are also present. It is, from this presentation alone, not clear whether the topic-level variance can be explained by the presence and absence of the Commission's competency.

It is visible in *Figure 5* that the data points for the semantic similarity are nested around the topics, and the observations on hand are in fact clusters. This means that it is not appropriate to fit an ordinary least square (OLS) model to the data for inferential statistics, as its assumption of independent error is violated. I thus opt for a linear mixed-effects model, which accounts for this hierarchical i.e. multilevel data structure, to estimate the effect of the Commission-competency variable on similarity. This allows the intercept to vary per cluster (topic)⁸. The independent variable is the similarity bound between minus one and one, where higher values indicate higher similarity and thus horizontal coherence between the EEAS and the Commission. The main independent variable is the binary Commission competency variable, which is coded one if the topic falls in one of the pre-determined areas of competency for the Commission, and otherwise zero. The hypothesis *H1* expects the communicated content on external action to be less coherent between the two institutions where the Commission has competency and may assert itself, reflecting the lack of EEAS-led coordination suggested in the literature. This expectation translates to similarity being lower when the main independent variable is one. The results would be the opposite of this, should the competing hypothesis *H2* be true, as the Commission's activity in certain areas would crystallise as increased control over the EEAS. The model includes four factors that are reasonably believed to influence the similarity score. One is yet another dummy variable for whether the types of two documents match. As previously mentioned in the data section, the two datasets include press material selectively of kinds 'Statement' (Commission), 'Statement / Declaration' (EEAS), or 'Press release' to exclude drastically differing content and ensure comparability. However, because

⁸ The model does adopt varied slopes, as the main independent variable remains constant within a cluster.

documents for ‘Press release’ and ‘Statement’ entries can still be matched, it can be argued that this distinction could cause content to differ. This binary variable exists to isolate the effect of those different types. The second is the difference in the length of the two documents. Although the contextualised embeddings compared with the cosine method are largely immune to document length and verbosity, a large difference in the lengths may co-vary with the similarity score. An especially short document may not provide detailed enough positions on a topic driving the similarity down. Alternatively, there may be some consistently appearing formats or patterns of writing in some cases, constituting a pattern of sub-types within a type. Some of such patterns could push the document length in certain direction i.e. notably long or short. In both these cases, then, a variable reflecting the extreme differences allows to isolate the effect. With the word count variables being sets of count data, where the values can only be natural numbers and the highly right-skewed distribution of observations resembling the Poisson distribution, I opt for the use of square root-treated values instead of raw difference values for this matter. The third covariate is whether the EEAS entry includes the phrase ‘on behalf of the EU’. Statements of the HR on behalf of the EU must attain positive approval by all member states, and can be initiated by a member state (Ålander et al., 2020, p. 16). This is to say, consensus-based coordination efforts among the member states took place at this time on this issue. Although my model does not aim to account for the full picture of external action coherence, which would necessitate inclusion of factors related to member states the Council and others, this ‘on behalf of the EU’ variable flags and isolates evident cases of member states related coordination.

<i>Predictors</i>	<i>Estimates</i>	Similarity	
		<i>CI</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	0.98969	0.98768 – 0.99171	<0.001
Commission Competency	-0.00067	-0.00300 – 0.00165	0.570
Verbosity Difference	-0.00002	-0.00002 – -0.00001	<0.001
Type Match	0.00111	0.00079 – 0.00143	<0.001
On Behalf of the EU	0.00153	0.00062 – 0.00245	0.001
Random Effects			
σ^2	0.00002		
$\tau_{00 \text{ topic}}$	0.00000		
ICC	0.16596		
N_{topic}	17		
Observations	3966		
Marginal R^2 / Conditional R^2	0.023 / 0.185		

Table 4

Table 4 lists the information on the fitted linear mixed-effects model. There are 3966 observations i.e. pairs of documents, yet the data is nested around 17 topics, which are the dictionary topics coded thematically matched between the two datasets. The intra-class correlation coefficient (ICC) is a ratio of variance attributed to the between-topics differences, which is the random effect in this model (Nakagawa & Schielzeth, 2010). It is returned here as 0.17, meaning approximately 17 percent of the variation in the dependent variable is attributed to the topic-level, justifying the mixed-effect modelling. The base value of similarity, appearing in Table 4 as ‘intercept’, lies stably at around 0.99, bolstering the impression of high horizontal coherence in the press material in general. The regression term for the Commission competency variable, which is the main interest of this inquiry, is not statistically significant ($p = 0.57$). The magnitude of this effect is small with 0.00068. Although the centre of the confidence interval lies in the negative realm, neither *H1* nor *H2* can be confirmed. All three covariates turned out statistically significant. Verbosity difference, which is square root-transformed absolute difference of word counts within a given pair, has a negative effect on similarity, meaning the larger the discrepancy of documents in terms of verbosity, the lower the similarity score is calculated to be. Conversely, sharing an equivalent press material type has a positive effect on the same score. When the EEAS publishes press material marked as ‘on behalf of the EU’, the similarity scores between the EEAS and the Commission are higher. The directions of the effects of covariates are unsurprising. There is a large difference between the marginal and

conditional R^2 values, respectively 0.02 and 0.19. As the former estimates the explained variation in the dependent variable only with the fixed effects, whereas the latter includes the random effects, it is safe to conclude that these covariates are significant yet small.

In sum, the following can be said about the results. The measure of horizontal coherence between the EEAS and the European Commission here, cosine similarity of contextualised text embeddings for their press material, displays high degrees of stability near the upper bound. Even still, the values do vary. The constructed linear mixed-effects model is not successful in precisely determining the contributing factors to this variation. The hypotheses expected that the existence of pronounced Commission competency would be the determinant, either because the EEAS would not have been able to exercise its coordinating role horizontally (negative effect) or because the Commission actively intervene in such areas to ensure the EEAS' adherence to the Commission's preferred course of action. The term not sustaining statistical significance as well as the small magnitude of the negative effect clearly speaks against adopting either hypothesis. Nevertheless, the underlying assumption that the measurement of horizontal coherence would vary per topics i.e. subsets of external action policy area seems to find support in the model: The ICC of 0.17 hints at the existence of an undiscovered topic-level factor, if not multiple, that is associated with a sizable amount of variation in cosine similarity. Finally, the control terms show the dependent variable is indeed susceptible to the reasonable relational changes in the pairs of documents, which attests to the appropriateness of the measure for the purpose of this comparison.

10 Discussion

In this section, I discuss the interpretation of the empirical findings shown in the previous section in relation to the theoretical reasoning for the hypotheses. The purpose is to clarify what the results suggest and what they do not. It also reflects on the shortcomings of this work and suggests possible avenues for further research on this subject.

The goal of this thesis is manifested in the research question: ‘How much does the EEAS contribute to the horizontal coherence of the EU external action?’ It concerns the coherence of individual policies in the broad policy area congested with multiple EU and national institutions, their competencies, and capacities. External action coherence is a theme worthy of research due, in part, to its centrality in the EU foreign policy architecture especially since the reform in the Treaty of Lisbon, and the vagueness surrounding the concept. It is supposedly an important, high objective the EU institutions and member states strive for, yet it also is unclear in its definition and hard to quantify as to how much of it exists. By grounding itself on the discussions by Gatti, this thesis gained a clear basis for what to look for. Opting for the quantitative analysis of thousands of press material entries from the EEAS and the European Commission, it managed to depart from the anecdotal evidence that constitutes most of the previous works in the literature.

Neither of the hypotheses, main hypotheses *H1* and the competing *H2*, were adopted as a result of the statistical analysis. *H1* was conceived from the previous assessment by scholars and EU institutions that the coordinating role of the EEAS and the HR/VP for coherent external action left much to be desired, considering the original expectation. The lack of coordination would, as the reasoning went, result in horizontal incoherence mostly in subsets of the external action policy area populated by multiple actors. This was to be challenged by a different strand of reasoning through *H2*, which assumed the EEAS as an agent partially of the Commission, the latter being able to exercise more effective control over the former in areas it has its own resources in. The negative result from the empirical analysis suggests neither effect has prevailed. Therefore, there are at least two possible ways to interpret this. One is that these hypothesised tendencies simply do not exist. This would mean it is irrelevant whether the Commission has competency for policy making in specific subsets of external action as to whether the horizontal coherence is ensured. This could mean, for example, that the EEAS and HR are indeed fulfilling the coherence mandate despite the shortcomings mentioned in the literature. The other is that the effects cancel each other out, as both hypotheses depends on an

identical variable for measurement. This could mean that the potential for dissimilarity of individual policies due to parallel competencies is counteracted by the heightened control from the Commission's side, possibly through the EXCO or informal mechanisms. With the data and methods available for this thesis, it is unable to assess which of the scenarios, or any of them, represents the actual dynamics of the two institutions leading to the negative result better than the other.

Aside from the hypotheses, it is notable that horizontal coherence does appear to be contingent in part on which topic the documents belong to, but not on the Commission competency. The ICC of 0.17 implies the existence of latent factors at the topic level that were not accounted for by the covariates in the model. Although it rests beyond the scope of this thesis, this signifies a ground for future research. Possible topic-level factors include the longevity of the topics (long-standing topics may have a clear EU *line to take*), or the presence of strong initiative from the member states and the Council (vertical factors bolstering horizontal coherence). In any case, these expectations must be theorised individually, and some will be accompanied by great difficulty in operationalisation. Still, in the quest for the determinants of horizontal external action coherence, this thesis' finding of topic-contingency provides some guidance.

Methodologically, too, this study brings about an advancement to the field of EU foreign policy research. In a policy area that typically lacks transparency and thus systematically acquirable information (see Ålander et al., 2020), the press material from involved institutions serves as a valuable basis for research at a more aggregate and comprehensive level. By applying the LDA and seeded LDA topic modelling to the document corpora, I was able to identify prevalent latent topics and match comparable documents. This proved particularly useful in a case such as this thesis when the allocation process cannot rely on already available standardised categories that are fine-grained enough for the planned inquiry⁹, the categories are unknown and have to be discovered from the data, and manual coding by multiple knowledgeable coders is unattainable. Combining this with the transformer-enabled NLP, which is hardly the latest frontier in social sciences today, it could be demonstrated in this thesis that there is an alternative to qualitative analysis based on interviews and few key documents, which remains prevalent in this field. Even though the effectiveness of such research designs should not be understated and they will presumably remain the staple of the discipline, their findings from

⁹ On the contrary, an analysis of political parties' manifestos, for example, could instead make use of readily available categorisation of content that are shared across different instances across the spectrum (e.g. welfare, defence, economy) to a certain extent.

often anecdotally characterized evidence would best be complemented with an aggregate and comprehensive approach whenever possible. This approach to EU foreign policy with NLP-techniques and information published in large quantities could find a wider application.

Notwithstanding the achievements discussed above, this research leaves some room for improvement and further consideration. One such limitation is the use of DistilBERT over other, more conventional and computationally intensive models. This decision was made considering the availability of computational power for me. Although the DistilBERT offers comparable performance to a larger BERT model (Sanh et al., 2020), and distilled models have been shown to perform on sentence embedding tasks for similarity calculation very well, this research can likely be better executed with a more computationally demanding model, as the accuracy of semantic similarity quantification through cosine similarity calculation depends on the quality of embeddings (Pavlyshenko & Stasiuk, 2025). Researchers should, whenever possible, opt for using a more standard model unlike in my case.

This thesis focused on one inter-institutional factor in external action, presence of the Commission's competency, because it set out to discuss the effectiveness of the EEAS' coordination role for ensuring horizontal coherence. Consequently, the model would not have come close to explaining the mechanisms of external action coherence fully, even if the independent variable corresponding to the hypotheses were to be statistically significant. For that full picture of external action coherence, one would have to drastically expand the range of consideration to third institutions (such as the member states and the Council) as well as to a wider range of inherent features in topics and the used material. Such an attempt would have to wait for advancement in theories, availability of relevant information and means of operationalisation. As the horizontal coherence between the EEAS and the Commission improves when the former publishes statements 'on behalf of the EU', successful consensus building at the member states level seems to have a positive relationship with the coherence among two EU institutions.

I used press material as the data source for the policy output of the Commission and the EEAS. As it stands, this is the only viable way to collect a large amount of constantly flowing, mutually comparable information from these institutions on external action / foreign policy. As a communication medium, press material such as press releases likely do not exactly mirror the actual policy output, and rather entail some systematic distortion. In terms of European institutions, many of (dis-)agreements that unfold between the institutions will not reach the

surface, as they have incentives and, in fact, mandates to present themselves as collectively functioning parts of the Union to the outside world. This is to say, the similarity scores would be higher overall than they should be, and this research likely overestimates EU's external action coherence. The degree to which this is the case is uncertain, yet it should be noted as a limitation of the research on institutional inner workings through public information.

11 Conclusion

This master's thesis set out to critically assess the contribution of the EEAS makes to ensure horizontal coherence in the EU's external action empirically. The EEAS and its chief, the High Representative, are expected to play a unique role of a coordinator in the Union's foreign policy landscape since the Treaty of Lisbon. Scholars have since assessed the role to be sidelined and less effective in practice. This thesis borrows its impetus from this background. External action coherence definition is based on the discussion by Gatti, where the coherence or consistency requested in the Treaties are understood to be established within concrete foreign policies of the Union. Methodologically, a break from the predominantly qualitative literature was needed, should I aim to measure the signs of hypothesised ineffectiveness of the EEAS-coordination on the EU's policy output. I therefore turned to the large-scale analysis of the press material from the EEAS and the European Commission, which constitutes some of the most transparent and consistent data source on timely foreign policy matters of the Union at the European level. The textual data were quantified as DistilBERT embeddings to draw the semantic similarity scores between the institutions, which is the operationalisation of the horizontal coherence of external action. It was hypothesised that I should find less similarity in policy areas with larger degrees of the Commission's possible involvement in policy making. This is because, according to the literature, the EEAS' coordination for horizontal coherence should be generally lacking, and it should be failing to ensure coherence effectively in fields where it does not play the predominant role, leaving traces of decreased coherence in the form of smaller similarity scores in these areas. A competing hypothesis essentially expected the opposite, claiming the Commission as a principal of the agent EEAS manages to exercise more control over the latter, resulting in higher coherence in the Commission-heavy policy areas. The hypotheses were tested with the linear mixed-effects model (LMM) that also included a few covariates.

The results of my quantitative analysis do not support neither of the hypotheses. The similarity scores in general are quite high between the two institutions. Although the scores do vary per policy area, which is the prerequisite of the hypothesised bivariate relationship, whether the topics fall in the policy areas with considerable Commission competency is not significantly related to the values the similarity score takes. This may suggest the EEAS' coordination is functioning well to ensure coherence regardless of the policy areas, or could indeed be the sign of coherence ensured by non-EEAS factors. With the per-topic random effect still explaining a portion of the model's variation and the covariates being statistically significant, the statistical

model still seems to hide within itself the latent factors responsible for the horizontal (in-)coherence of the EU's external action. With different theoretical angles and valid operationalisation of these into implementable variables, a further development of this model has the potential to uncover such mechanisms.

Tool Declaration

This manuscript was written without the use of generative AI.

Availability of Replication Data

Data that are central for the empirical analysis in this thesis are submitted along with this manuscript. Access to further relevant data will be provided by author without hindrance. *Appendix 5* lists the supplementary material submitted along with this manuscript.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Excerpt from the table of LDA top terms ($k = 45$)

topic	term_1	term_2	term_3	term_4	term_5	term_6	term_7	term_8	term_9	term_10
1	civilians	violence	must	attacks	law	civilian	people	military	eu	attack
2	eu	energy	sustainable	development	climate	support	green	global	economic	new
3	eu	security	defence	european	military	moldova	member	strategic	missions	support
4	nuclear	security	jcpoa	united	iran	international	implementation	joint	dprk	participants
5	world	united	union	european	peace	global	nations	together	un	international
6	campaign	candidates	political	media	election	polling	elections	eu	voters	electoral
7	humanitarian	people	assistance	support	syria	myanmar	international	un	aid	access
8	rights	human	eu	civil	including	society	freedom	law	persons	dialogue
9	security	european	cyber	terrorism	cooperation	united	union	dialogue	international	cybersecurity
10	operation	asides	eunavfor	sea	maritime	commander	admiral	regional	navigation	freedom
11	including	international	support	call	welcome	efforts	g7	security	global	work
12	eu	election	electoral	mission	elections	eom	process	observers	observation	european
13	union	european	mongolia	colombia	agreement	america	ministers	agenda	regional	latin
14	somalia	police	training	maritime	eucap	somali	mission	support	coast	law
15	sri	lanka	iraq	iraqi	group	coalition	working	government	daesh	lanka's
16	kosovo	dialogue	lebanon	serbia	parties	agreement	lebanese	eu	normalisation	relations
17	ukraine	russia	russian	russia's	war	aggression	international	ukrainian	integrity	sovereignty
18	weapons	chemical	use	european	union	international	measures	navalny	convention	organisation
19	justice	crimes	international	court	victims	criminal	accountability	torture	war	impunity
20	vietnam	cultural	project	design	vietnamese	sustainable	culture	delegation	evsda	eu
21	states	eu	arms	parties	convention	treaty	implementation	member	support	disarmament
22	rights	human	authorities	belarus	civil	society	media	political	freedom	journalists
23	eu	cooperation	meeting	dialogue	importance	agreed	sides	including	also	discussed
24	china	hong	kong	law	chinese	freedoms	cuba	one	basic	national

Appendix 2: Codebook

Interpretation of unsupervised LDA topics

Topics are treated as external action policy areas with Commission competency when it falls into one or more of the following categories.

Variable name: **'com_comp'**; coded '1' if positive, '0' if else.

1. Individual areas characterised by mixed planning and implementation due to restrictive measures (sanctions). Below are the examples; coding should not be limited to these:
 - a. Ukraine-Russia: Concerns sanctions, which leaves room for Commission involvement
 - b. Persecution in Russia and Myanmar (sanctions involved)
 - c. Palestine-Israel (sanctions on Israeli and Palestinian extremists in effect)
2. Part of broad policy areas in which official commission portfolios and DGs exist
 - a. Civilian crisis management (including epidemiological danger)
 - i. HERA and DG ECHO; Commissioner for Preparedness and Crisis Management (https://commission.europa.eu/about/organisation/college-commissioners/hadja-lahbib_en)
 - ii. DG SANTE (https://commission.europa.eu/about/departments-and-executive-agencies/health-and-food-safety_en)
 - b. Humanitarian aid
 - i. DG ECHO
 - c. Advocacy for 'European value'
 - d. Human rights
 - i. DG INTPA
3. WHO and other topic-specific UN bodies, as the Commission President and competent Commission bodies intervene in these arenas

Areas that concern, or are adjacent to, topics such as armament, defence industry and space are coded separately due to changes in the DG DEFIS.

Variable name: **'defis'**; coded '1' if positive, '0' if else.

(https://commission.europa.eu/about/departments-and-executive-agencies/defence-industry-and-space_en)

Coding thematic match (seeded LDA)

Entries from the EEAS and the Commission are deemed *not* thematically matched, and thus their entries are inter-institutionally incomparable, when the following are the case. Else, the topic is considered thematically matched.

Variable name: **'thematic_match'**; coded '1' if matched, '0' if not.

1. The Commission top terms are irrelevant to the interpretation set in the dictionary
2. The EEAS topic is matched due only to shared types of action (e.g. meetings, visits, appointments) or formats (e.g. statements, communiqués, working groups, g7 summits), and not by the substance of external action
3. Documents were matched due to linguistic, syntactic and other superficial features

Appendix 3: Dictionary

Topic	Interpretation	Seeds
1	Arms control, arms trade, disarmament	'arms', 'trade', 'control', 'treaty', 'conference', 'parties', 'implimentation', 'disarmament'
2	ASEAN	'asean', 'vietnam', 'indonesia', 'viet', 'nam', 'thailand'
3	AU, ECOWAS, and African States	'au', 'ecowas', 'nigeria', 'africa', 'kenya', 'angola', 'drc'
4	Belgrade-Pristina	'belgrade-pristina', 'belgrade', 'pristina', 'kosovo', 'albania', 'serbia'
5	Bosnia and Herzegovina	'bosnia', 'herzegovina', 'bih', 'srpska'
6	Central Asia	'central', 'asia', 'eu-central', 'kazakhstan', 'uzbekistan', 'tajikistan', 'kyrgyzstan',
7	Cyber and counter-terrorism	'cyber', 'couter-terrorism'
8	Disinformation	'disinformation', 'disinfo', 'misinformation'
9	DPRK ICBM / nuclear programmes	'dprk', 'missile', 'ballistic', 'korea', 'intercontinental', 'nuclear', 'icbm'
10	Election observation, EOM	'eom', 'election', 'observation', 'mission', 'european_union_election_observation', 'electoral', 'observer', 'report'
11	EU-brokered ceasefires	'ceasefire', 'armenia', 'azerbaijan', 'karabakh', 'nagorno-karabakh', 'sudan', 'libya', 'conflict', 'european', 'eu'
12	Foreign elections	'election', 'electoral', 'legitimacy', 'court', 'transparency'
13	Gulf, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar	'gulf', 'gcc', 'saudi', 'arabia', 'kuwait', 'qatar', 'bahrain', 'emirates'
14	Iran nuclear programme / JCPOA	'iran', 'jcpoa', 'comprehensive', 'plan', 'action', 'nuclear'
15	Maritime security in Indo-Pacific	'south', 'china', 'sea', 'philippines', 'indo-pacific', 'security', 'maritime'
16	Naval missions; EUNAVFOR, Red Sea	'eunavfor', 'atalanta', 'aspides', 'red', 'sea', 'naval', 'navy', 'maritime'
17	Reconciliation efforts (Sri Lanka & Iraq)	'reconciliation', 'working', 'sri', 'lanka', 'iraq', 'colombo', 'baghdad'
18	Restriction of AP mines, chemical warfare	'weapon', 'chemical', 'ban', 'mine', 'biological', 'toxin', 'anti-personnel', 'parties', 'convention'
19	Rights of and violence on women & children	'women', 'girls', 'children', 'elimination', 'violence', 'sexual', 'rights'
20	Security and defence; CSDP	'common', 'security', 'defence', 'defense', 'csdp', 'military'
21	Senior officials meetings on Venezuela	'venezuela', 'senior', 'officials'
22	Somalia police and coastguard coop.	'somalia', 'somaliland', 'police', 'coast', 'guard', 'eucap', 'maritime'
23	Terrorism and other attacks on civilians	'terrorist', 'attack', 'terrorism', 'attacks', 'violence', 'civilians', 'military'

Appendix 3.1 ('com_comp' = 0)

Topic	Interpretation	Seeds
24	Abolition of death penalty	'death', 'penalty', 'abolition', 'punishment'
25	Alexei Navalny; Russian persecution of dissidents	'alexey', 'navalny', 'russia', 'russian', 'poisoning', 'sanction', 'sanctions', 'opposition'
26	Belarus; civil society and opposition	'belarus', 'belarussian', 'opposition', 'civil', 'society', 'opposition', 'lukashenko', 'lukashenka', 'sanction', 'sanctions'
27	Civil society, media	'civil', 'society', 'media', 'journalists', 'journalism', 'opposition', 'ngo'
28	Climate and green transition	'climate', 'green', 'transition', 'sustainable'
29	Coup in Myanmar	'myanmar', 'burma', 'coup', 'sanction', 'sanctions'
30	Covid, WHO, civilian crisis management	'who', 'health', 'organisation', 'covid-19', 'pandemic', 'vaccine', 'civilian', 'crisis'
31	Humanitarian crises, aid	'humanitarian', 'crisis', 'aid', 'civilians', 'hunger'
32	Human rights	'human', 'rights', 'hrc'
33	Neighbourhood, enlargement	'neighbourhood', 'neighborhood', 'enlargement', 'georgia', 'albania', 'bosnia'
34	Other sanctions	'sanctions', 'sanction'
35	Palestine-Israel	'palestine', 'israel', 'gaza', 'hamas', 'settlement', 'palestinian', 'rafah', 'sanction', 'sanctions'
36	Rule of law, democracy	'rule', 'law', 'democracy', 'democratic'
37	Ukraine-Russia	'ukraine', 'russia', 'russian', 'crimea', 'sevastopol', 'aggression', 'sanction', 'sanctions', 'zelensky', 'zelenskyy'

Appendix 3.2 ('com_comp' = 1)

Topic	Interpretation	Seeds
38	Appointment of officials	'appoint', 'delegation', 'head', 'ambassador', 'nominated'
39	Europe day	'europe', 'day', 'europe-day'
40	G7	'g7', 'minister', 'ministers'
41	Meetings and visits	'meeting', 'consultation', 'minister', 'visit', 'visits'
42	Non-english language and other unintelligible elements	'de', 'la', 'du', 'déclaration', 'sur', 'le', 'européenne', 'porte-parole', 'en', 'et', 'les', 'á', 'l'union', 'dans', 'que', 'los', 'las', 'y', 'del', 'una', 'con', 'se', 'es', 'also', 'can', 'today'
43	Statements, press release, communiqués, and memorandums	'statement', 'joint_statement', 'joint', 'press', 'release', 'communiqué', 'memorandum'
44	Trade (non-arms)	'trade', 'partnership', 'wto', 'export', 'import'
45	UNGA	'unga', 'general', 'assembly', 'nations'

Appendix 3.3 (incomparable)

Appendix 4: LMM with alternative rolling windows

<i>Predictors</i>	<i>Estimates</i>	Similarity	
		<i>CI</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	0.98979	0.98754 – 0.99204	<0.001
Commission Competency	-0.00055	-0.00313 – 0.00203	0.675
Verbosity Difference	-0.00002	-0.00003 – -0.00001	<0.001
Type Match	0.00099	0.00059 – 0.00139	<0.001
On Behalf of the EU	0.00236	0.00121 – 0.00351	<0.001
Random Effects			
σ^2	0.00002		
τ_{00} topic	0.00001		
ICC	0.18091		
N_{topic}	17		
Observations	2727		
Marginal R^2 / Conditional R^2	0.024 / 0.201		

Appendix 4.1 (fourteen-days window)

<i>Predictors</i>	<i>Estimates</i>	Similarity	
		<i>CI</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	0.98628	0.98192 – 0.99064	<0.001
Commission Competency	0.00265	-0.00250 – 0.00781	0.313
Verbosity Difference	-0.00002	-0.00002 – -0.00001	<0.001
Type Match	0.00125	0.00096 – 0.00154	<0.001
On Behalf of the EU	0.00128	0.00049 – 0.00207	0.002
Random Effects			
σ^2	0.00003		
τ_{00} topic	0.00002		
ICC	0.49071		
N_{topic}	17		
Observations	5201		
Marginal R^2 / Conditional R^2	0.034 / 0.508		

Appendix 4.2 (twenty-eight-days window)

Appendix 5: List of supplementary material

R script

scrape.R	Web scraping the EEAS press material
dataset_assembly.r	Consolidating the fragmented data frames for the EEAS dataset
scrape_com.r	Web scraping the Commission press material
analysis1.r	Early descriptive statistics, identifying collocations, creating smaller datasets
analysis2.r	Descriptive statistics, LDA, seeded LDA
analysis3.r	Producing DistilBERT embeddings, rolling-window pairing, calculating semantic similarity, inferential statistics

Raw datasets

pmaterial_df.rds	Consolidated raw dataset from the EEAS press material
iv1.rds	Raw dataset from the Commission press material

Final datasets

pmaterial_df_internal_p2019_PrSt.rds	Reduced EEAS dataset with following criteria: Internally hosted main articles, published in or after December 2019, categories ‘Press release’ and ‘Statement / Declaration’
Iv_p2019_PrSt.rds	Reduced Commission dataset with following criteria: Published in or after December 2019, categories ‘Press release’ and ‘Statement’

Spreadsheets

lda_topterms_k45.xlsx	Top 25 LDA terms from the EEAS press material texts when k equals 45
lda_topterms_semisup_coded_text.xlsx	Top 15 seeded LDA terms from the EEAS and the Commission press material texts, frequencies of given topics in each dataset, the thematic_match variable, the div_labour variable, short description of mismatch if applicable