SECURITIZATION OF HUMAN SUFFERINGS IN GAZA BY THE EUROPEAN UNION: IS THERE ANY?

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Abstract

The European Union, which is a pluralistic security community based on liberal democratic values, gives priority to human security while conducting its external actions. Accordingly, the Union's way of securitization is in line with its normative security character by applying sanctions or restrictive measures. In addition, the EU's security understanding has been shaped by both material factors influenced by the international system conditions and normative factors which its foundation is based and its identity is formed. This study aims to examine how the EU has addressed the humanitarian suffering in Gaza in the context of its two-pronged security approach, including normative and strategic aspects. Doing this, the study makes a comparison between Gaza and Ukraine by looking at how the EU addressed two different conflict zones.

In normative sense, security community concept is used, and in strategic sense, regional security complex theory is used in the study to explain the securitization behavior of the EU towards the Gaza by comparing it with that towards the Ukraine. The study concludes that the EU has not securitized humanitarian suffering in Gaza the same with it did in Ukraine and, contradicted with its pluralistic security community character and normative actorness. It is also concluded that national prerogatives of the member states prevailed over common interests and common values of the EU in the Gaza case.

Keywords: European Union, Gaza; Ukraine; securitization; pluralistic security community; regional security complex

Introduction

The European Union is a pioneering defender of democratic values including human rights, and the biggest donor of humanitarian and development assistance. The normative and civil quality of the Union results from that it was founded on democratic values and a vision for permanent peace, together with that it thrived under the conditions of international system, which helped it to become a *sui generis* entity. For the EU, as itself succeeded a peace zone in European continent through economic integration among the societies who shared common liberal democratic values, human well-being is one of its top priorities. Therefore, it can be said that human security in narrow scale and societal security in wider scale are enshrined, compared to state security, in the EU's security understanding. Since the EU itself is a supra-national entity, its operating logic goes beyond nation-state and is more oriented towards human/societal welfare.

Within the scope of multi-level threats and the EU's comprehensive security perception, security of the EU citizens is closely connected with security of people outside

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the Union's borders. Based on primacy of democratic values in security understanding of the EU, its external actions would be conducted in the guidance of democratic values as highlighted in the Lisbon Treaty[1]. As a structure focused on human and societal security, human suffering in Gaza has been very concern of the EU. Therefore, it is expected the Union to act in consistent with the values which its identity is founded on and to take appropriate security measures as it did in the case of Ukraine whose security is intertwined with European security. Whereas, in terms of securitization, this expectation is valid theoretically, things are different practically.

While a fragile ceasefire has been reached between Israel and Hamas, it remains questionable whether the EU and member states were addressing the humanitarian suffering in Gaza in a manner consistent with its human rights orientation. In other words, whether the EU had the integrity to respond swiftly and decisively to Israel genocide in the region. Although the EU organs such as European Parliament and European Commission approached the humanitarian situation in Gaza in line with the value perspective and initiated to apply sanctions on Israeli government, there is a deep division in the member states' policies on this matter. The fact that strategic interests of the Union came to the fore is another issue while addressing Gaza. Additionally, the EU paused on efforts to apply sanctions after the ceasefire was declared between Hamas and Israel. In this respect, this study aims to answer the following questions: to what extent has the EU been able to address the human suffering in Gaza from its human security perspective and to take appropriate measures? Regarding securitization of Gaza, is there more inclination towards the EU common values resulting from its supra-national identity or the member states' foreign policies resulting from nation-state sovereignty?

Taken its normative foundation into consideration, the EU securitizes issues in the reference of democratic values. Different from being a military actor attributed to the sovereign states, the Union's way of securitization manifests itself as applying sanctions which is compatible with its identity, instead of using military means. The EU demonstrated this stance by imposing heavy economic, financial and other numerous sanctions against Russia. In light of how the EU securitized Ukraine war, this article is focusing how the Union securitized humanitarian suffering in Gaza or it has securitized that matter enough. In analyzing the EU's securitization behavior of Gaza, the article has used regional security complex theory and security community concept. While, the EU's securitization of an issue, on the one hand, based on its strategic interests, explained by the regional security complex theory in this study, on the other hand it depends on the EU, as a normative power, securitizing on the basis of its own values, in other words its security community nature. In summary, this study examines the extent to which the EU has securitized Gaza, through the regional security complex theory and security community concept, both of which correspond to its intertwined strategic and normative security perspective.

Based on two theoretical approaches mentioned above, the article will first explain how the EU addresses a security related issue. Secondly, the arguments theoretically discussed will be tested in the Gaza issue practically in the context of the EU's security understanding. In this vein, it will be understood to what extent the EU complies with its commitments and ideals in reality. The external security policy of the Union, a *sui generis* entity built on the logic of human and societal welfare, is expected to be compatible with its normative identity without exception. The study, therefore, aims to provide a deeper view of

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[1] Treaty of Lisbon, 2007, https://publications.europa.eu/resource/cellar/688a7a98-3110-4ffe-a6b3-8972d8445325.0007.01/DOC_19 , (03.10.2025).

the EU's changeable foreign security policy which depends on circumstances. How the Union has securitized two different conflict zones which are Ukraine and Gaza will shed light on its external security policy in the context of human security. As a starting point which lays foundation for subsequent arguments, the normative aspect of the EU has to be put forward.

The Normative Character of the EU and its Relationship with Human Security

The way the European Union tackles security problems is to be accorded with its normative identity, founded on democratic values and human security. In other words, the Union's normative power and human security approach are embedded in the normative part of its security understanding. That is why, it needs to make conceptual explanation on basic notions such as "human security" and "normative power".

While human security is defined broadly by the United Nations in terms of preventing and building resilience for protracted crises, violent conflicts, natural disasters, persistent poverty, epidemics and economic downturns[1], the EU has defined the concept more narrowly in Barcelona Report in 2004 as referring to freedom for individuals from basic insecurities caused by gross human rights violations[2]. Here, the EU approached the human security concept by referring the key threats (terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, failing states, and organised crime) which were described in the European Security Strategy in 2003[3], in accordance with the global security environment. In Madrid Report in 2007, it is seen that the Union has a broader view on the human security with the framework of not only suffering from wars, but also from natural and human-made disasters.[4] Today also the EU takes human security concept in the context of humanitarian aid perspective[5] which is driven by primacy of human rights and humanitarian principles.[6] In summary, human security approach of the EU is displayed itself as humanitarian aid operations in over 110 countries and many areas of action.[7] Gaza is one of those in which the most vulnerable people in need is helped by the EU.

In parallel with its human security approach, the European Union is also renowned with its normative character. Ian Manners, who introduced "normative power Europe", examined the EU's international role in normative terms, alongside traditional conceptions of its military and civilian role. Manners pointed to civil society quality of the EU by strengthening normative role, instead of that its military and civilian role bend towards strengthening international society. In his article published in 2002, he argued Europe as a normative power in terms of the notions of 'power over opinion' or 'ideological power' by moving beyond the debate over state-like features through an understanding of the EU's international identity. Normative difference of the Union comes from its historical context,

[1] United Nations, *What is Human Security*, https://www.un.org/humansecurity/what-is-human-security/ (25.11.2025)

[2] European Parliament, *A Human Security Doctrine for Europe*, 2004, p. 5, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/human_security_report_/human_security_report_en.pdf (10.10.2025)

[3] Council of the European Union, *European Security Strategy: a secure Europe in a better world*, Publications Office, 2003, pp.29-32, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2860/1402 (25.11.2025)

[4] Human Security Study Group, *A European Way of Security*, 2007, p.8, https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/40207/1/A_European_Way_of_Security%28author%29.pdf (15.11.2025)

[5] European Union External Action Service, *Human Security*, 2024, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eu-indo-pacific-human-security_en (25.11.2025)

[6] European Commission, *Humanitarian Aid*, https://commission.europa.eu/topics/humanitarian-aid_en (25.11.2025)

[7] *Idem*

hybrid polity and political-legal constitution. In this respect, normative power of the EU can be examined on how the EU norms are diffused in world politics. Manners used human rights example in his article to examine the diffusion of norms in the EU's external relations.[1]

Europe as "civilian power" is introduced by François Duchene who emphasized European Community as an exemplar of a new stage in political civilization by a large cooperative form. Briefly, Duchene pointed out that the EC, based on its long on economic power and relatively short on armed force, should demonstrate the influence to exert essentially civilian forms of power.[2] Europe's civilian character was highlighted in terms of which the European Community had risen as a global economic power starting from 1960s.

The normative nature of the EU, based on a economic and a civil foundation in a broad sense, is revealed in its institutional arrangements. The democratic values including human rights and human dignity on which the Union was founded and key principles are reflected in the preamble and also in the very beginning of the Lisbon Treaty[3]. Embedded with normative character of the Union, human security is also given a special importance in the EU documents. Barcelona Report and Madrid Report[4] matter in this vein. Security strategies of the Union published in 2003, 2016 and 2022 had also highlighted the human security concept distinctively. For instance, EU Global Strategy[5] has connected internal security of the EU with promoting human security in neighboring and surrounding regions. According to the EU's normative security understanding, human and societal security are root causes for a peaceful society and state. Common Foreign and Security Policy of the Union is also conducted in accordance with its normative foundation as functions of conflict prevention, crisis management and international peacekeeping.

Within the scope of the Union's security perception which is internal and external security are not separable, any security issue including humanitarian aspect especially in its surrounding regions have decisive impacts on its security. As seen during the civil war in Syria before, people fleeing the conflict area created refugee crisis which became one of the top matters of the EU's foreign and security policy. This subject also significantly affected political discourse inside the EU in the context of rise of far-right movements in recent years. Within the entangling nature of internal and external security, human security is given a special importance by the EU, in line with its societal and human-based security approach. However, while this study acknowledges that human security lays the foundation in the EU's addressing of external security problems, it is key to understand that strategic priorities may come forward in some situations, and the Union may not always act in line with its normative and human security perspective. Proceeding sections examine how the EU handles external security issues from its two-pronged normative and strategic security understanding in light of its human security approach.

The EU's View of Security through Two Theoretical Approaches

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[1] Ian Manners, *Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?,* JCMS, Vol. 40, No. 2, 2002
[2] François Duchene, *The European Community and the Uncertainties of Interdependence*, 1973, Max Kohnstamm and Wolfgang Hager, "A Nation Writ Large? Foreign Policy Problems before the European Community", Macmillan, London, p. 19
[3] Treaty of Lisbon, 2007, https://publications.europa.eu/resource/cellar/688a7a98-3110-4ffe-a6b3-8972d8445325.0007.01/DOC_19 (03.10.2025)
[4] Madrid Report is on the EU's global security role based on human security principles.
[5] European Union External Action Service, *European Union Global Strategy*, 2016, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf (03.10.2025)

Security perception of the EU is a reflection of both normative and strategic factors. On the one hand, the Union was founded with a vision of building permanent peace among member states which shared common liberal democratic values, on the other hand it thrived in objective realities resulting from structure of international system, within which the European regional security order existed. It is argued that the EU's founding principles and values lie in the need to remain geopolitically united.[1] In other words, the EU's normative and strategic approach are intertwined, and the Union needs to guard its values in handling its strategic interests. It has also to be noted that strategic sovereignty concept composing an important part of the EU's security approach today requires the Union promoting its democratic values while managing its strategic dependencies, as highlighted in the Strategic Compass[2]. In summary, the EU needs to protect and promote its strategic interests only by remaining faithful to democratic values, which is compatible with its security community character. This section of the study examines normative and strategic aspects of the EU's security understanding in order to comprehend how it addresses any security problem.

As the champion of promoting human and societal security, the EU addresses security challenges in any part of the world from this perspective and prioritizes human well-being. In light of the EU being a normative and civilian international actor, the securitization of all kinds of problems also occurs in line with stemming from its security community character. The Union would not apply for using military power to cope with an existential threat, but activating its civilian capabilities at its disposal. Economic and individual sanctions, as well as diplomatic measures and visa restrictions against Russia can be regarded in this vein. Sanctions or restrictive measures are indispensable tool of EU-style securitization. European Council also pointed out that "…sanctions are an essential tool of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, and that they allow the EU to respond to global challenges and developments that go against its objectives and values."[3] The Union's use of sanctions to protect and promote fundamental democratic values, and preserving peace and international security reveals the importance of sanctions in its unique securitization style and proves its normative identity.

EU-style securitization[4] which manifests itself as imposing sanctions, instead of applying to military force finds its root in that the EU is a pluralistic security community. A product of the post-World War II era, security community literature has studied on

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[1] Thierry Chopin, Auguste Naim, *"European values" under pressure from war in Ukraine*, "Jacques Delors Institute", Policy Paper/No. 289, May 2023, p.11,https://institutdelors.eu/content/uploads/2025/04/PP289_valeurs-europeennes-Ukraine_Chopin_Naim_EN.pdf (22.10.2025)

[2] European Union External Action Service, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*, 2022, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/strategic_compass_en3_web.pdf (25.10.2025)

[3] European Council, 2024, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/why-sanctions/ (05.11.2025)

[4] The EU, as both a civilian and normative actor, has been taking its own style of securitization steps in several areas like migration, organized crime, counterterrorism policy, market competition, health security and aviation. Various studies focus on the securitization of the EU. Helena Carrapico, *Analysing the European Union's responses to organized crime through different securitization lenses*, 2014, https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2014.949248; Jef Huysmans, *The European Union and the Securitization of Migration*, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00263; Christian Kaunert et. al., *The collective securitization of aviation in the European Union through association with terrorism*, 2022, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003291374; Christian Kaunert, Sarah Léonard, *Collective securitization and crisification of EU policy change: two decades of EU counterterrorism policy*, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2021.2002098; Louise Bengtsson, Mark Rhinard, *Securitisation across borders: the case of 'health security' cooperation in the European Union*, 2020, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367853365

elimination of wars through integration. Launching the economic integration in Western Europe inspired some scholars such as Karl W. Deutsch and Richard Van Wagenen in the 1950s. Deutsch used the integration term almost synonymly with the security community and argued that integration was the most important method of eliminating war in disputes between political communities.[1] Security community literature has thrived after the Cold War, especially with several studies of Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett. Adler, particularly, highlighted the EU's pluralistic character and pointed out that a group of democratic sovereign states held dependable expectations of peaceful change because they shared liberal democratic values which facilitated the creation of strong civil societies. Adler also stated that strong civil societies strengthened such practices as promoting human rights.[2] The EU is the most vivid example of a security community[3] as an entity founded on liberal democratic values, including human rights along with democracy and the rule of law. The security community basis of the Union has shaped its unique security understanding, which differs from nation-state security logic and achieves securitization in a way that is consistent with its normative character.

The EU also takes into account its strategic interests in securitizing any issue alongside the normative elements based on its security community foundation. In this respect, power politics and developments in the international system are also important for the Union's foreign security policy. In anarchic international system, the EU has to prioritize its security interests in European region, as itself a symbol of regional integration. It means that the Union primarily is to act in line with the stability of the European security order within which it is located and thrived. The sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of states, the inviolability of borders and the peaceful settlement of disputes, which are the key elements of the European security order, are applied to all states, both within and beyond the EU's borders, as highlighted in the European Union Global Strategy.[4] European security order which makes up a significant part of the international system should be considered in the context of regional security complex theory. First introduced by Barry Buzan from the Copenhagen School[5], this theory argues that "Adjacency is potent for security because many threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones"[6]. Geographical proximity, associated to neorealist considerations, is one of the issues that the EU takes most seriously into consideration when taking action on its external security. The Union is primarily concerned with ensuring the stability of the European security order, which once called European security complex that determined the world policy. The utmost example of this has been the reply of the EU and the member countries to Russia's violations on Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity since 2014. The Union considers its own security integrated with Ukraine's security as in the same security constellation. That is why the EU,

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[1] Karl W. Deutsch et. al., *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1957, p. 6

[2] Emanuel Adler, *Europe's New Security Order: A Pluralistic Security Community*, "The Future of European Security", Beverly Crawford (Ed.), Research Series, No. 84, 1992, pp. 293-294

[3] The EU as a pluralistic security community is supported by the studies of Adler and Costopoulos; Emanuel Adler, *Op.cit.,* pp. 287-326; Efthymios George Costopoulos, *The Concept of Pluralistic Security Community: An Attempt to Apply it to the European Union Case*, M.Phil., University of St. Andrews, 1995, pp. 81-147

[4] European Union Global Strategy, 2016, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf (06.11.2025)

[5] Copenhagen School initially examined the European security region as its founding motive.

[6] Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 45

in Russia case, have decisively taken securitization steps in its own way according to the necessities of European security order.

Having shaped by the normative and strategical aspects mentioned above, the Union makes up its security understanding. In other words, the EU's securitization of any issue occurs in line with its security understanding which is composed of both values and interests. Accordingly, the EU's way of addressing any security issue takes place by applying sanctions as its main tool of securitization. In light of the EU's security approach with normative and strategic dimensions, and its securitization type represented in the form of sanctions, the study examines the securitization of Gaza issue by the Union.

Securitization Approach of the EU in Gaza

The humanitarian tragedy in Gaza occupies the world agenda and provokes great reactions around the world. Israel government's brutal actions in the region were also acknowledged by the UN Independent Commission[1] and in a UN report -in terms of human rights- as a genocide and a collective crime.[2] The EU, founded on democratic values and being a human/societal security-based entity, needs to be examined in terms of securitization style for humanitarian suffering in Gaza. The aim of this study is to analyze the consistency of the EU's securitization approach by comparing Gaza and Ukrainian example.

As mentioned, preceding parts of the study, the EU's way of securitization is different from any nation-state which can apply to use military means. The Union's way of securitization manifests itself as applying to sanctions including arms embargos, travel bans, asset freezes, trade bans, economic and financial restrictions, and diplomatic measures.[3] Sanctions, in the phrases of the EU Council, are an instrument to prevent conflict or respond to emerging or current crises, and essential tool of the EU's CFSP with the aim of promoting peace, democracy, respect for the rule of law, human rights and international law.[4] In this vein, it was expected the EU to comply with its care for human security embedded with democratic values which the Union is founded on, and to act promptly against Israeli government by applying heavy sanctions as it did against Russia during the war in Ukraine.

Firstly, a glance at what the EU did about Gaza issue is as following: Upon the Israel blockade to access of humanitarian aid to Gaza, the EU High Representative presented to the Foreign Affairs Council that this country violated the Euro-Mediterranean Agreement, which establishes respect for human rights and democratic principles as an essential element of that Agreement. The European Commission proposed a partial suspension of the Association Agreement on trade-related matters, applying sanctions against extremist ministers of the Israeli government and violent settlers. European Parliament supported the Commission proposal for sanctions by a common resolution. As a supportive case to this development, it is necessary to stated that the number of EU member states has increased in the same period, which recognized the State of Palestine. Currently, all member states has recognized the State of Palestine except 11 member states, which are Finland, Latvia, Estonya, Lithuania,

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[1] United Nations, *Israel has committed genocide in the Gaza Strip, UN Commission finds*, 16 September 2025, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/israel-has-committed-genocide-gaza-strip-un-commission-finds (11.11.2025)

[2] United Nations, *Report: "Gaza Genocide: a collective crime" by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967*, 20 October 2025, https://www.un.org/unispal/document/special-rapporteur-report-gaza-genocide-a-collective-crime-20oct25/ (24.11.2025)

[3] European Council, 2025, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/topics/sanctions/ (11.11.2025)

[4] European Council, 2024, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/why-sanctions/ (12.11.2025)

Germany, Denmark, Austria, Chezchia, Italy, Greece and Crotia.[1] However, recognition move done by majority of the EU members is said to be "nothing more than symbolic"[2] because the EU, as a bloc, is incapable to act unitedly.

On the other hand, the EU's attempt to take action against Israel and recognition of Palestine by the member states are largely driven by growing mass protests across Europe. In other words, considering to have good relations with Israel as a historical responsibility and, earlier in the war between the parties, taking a stand in favor of Israel, the EU and member states had to shift its position later on mostly due to high public pressures. According to researches, the protests increased nearly three times -from 780 between December and April, to 2066 between April and September 2025- which corresponds to an average of at least 15 protests a day. Comparatively, there were only 51 pro-Israel protests in Europe in the last six months. Furthermore, the EU's shift in Gaza's favor was also affected by many current EU officials and diplomats who criticized the Union's Gaza policy.[3] Behind the EU's position change, there also lies the UN genocide reports and its affiliated organization International Criminal Court decision[4] on issuing arrest warrants, and global protests. It can be argued that the EU felt the need to raise its voice after falling behind the other relevant institutions and huge protests around the world. However, it seemed that there is an EU paralysis on addressing the Gaza. Whereas the EU organs are determined to apply sanctions on Israel, based on the fundamental values which the Union is founded on, member states are divided on going in the same direction. While the countries like Spain and Ireland push for action, some like Germany and Hungary act in accordance with their national prerogatives. The fragmented appearance of the Union is reflected in the obstruction of unanimity in Council decisions. Additionally, after the ceasefire was declared between Hamas and Israel, the EU announced that it paused on efforts to apply for sanctions. Nonetheless, it was stated that it will not take them off the table.

EU's incapability in providing a consensus in the Council is directly related with intra-EU politics. That some member countries keep close relations with Israel hinders any progress in the EU Council in favor of people in Gaza. Behind the logic of supporting Israel, trade relations and historical concerns from their Holocaust experience matter for Germany and Austria. First of all, these countries attach great importance to their responsibility in the Holocaust. Being the second largest arms supplier to Israel, Germany, and entering into strategic, extremely close relationship with Israel, Austria are indispensable trading partners of this country. There is also Hungary's vetos in the Council, which no way possible to reach a consensus among the member states.[5] That Hungary has both a far-right government and close trade relations with Israel, together with the members such as Germany and France

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[1] Les Décodeurs/Le Monde, *Map: The countries that recognize a Palestinian state*, 23 September 2025, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/les-decodeurs/article/2025/09/23/map-the-countries-that-recognize-a-palestinian-state_6745654_8.html (24.11.2025)

[2] David MacRedmond, *EU sanctions for Israel? A 'non-starter' for now says one expert*, 2 June 2024, https://www.thejournal.ie/eu-sanctions-israel-veto-6393239-Jun2024/ (25.11.2025)

[3] AP& The Times of Israel, *Israel's long-standing ties with Europe crumble as outrage over Gaza war swells*, 1 October 2025, https://www.timesofisrael.com/israels-long-standing-ties-with-europe-crumble-as-outrage-over-gaza-war-swells/ (24.11.2025)

[4] The Conversation, *Why the EU's stance on Israel is starting to change*, 25 November 2024, https://theconversation.com/why-the-eus-stance-on-israel-is-starting-to-change-241763 (24.11.2025)

[5] David MacRedmond / The Journal, *EU sanctions for Israel? A 'non-starter' for now says one expert*, 2 June 2024, https://www.thejournal.ie/eu-sanctions-israel-veto-6393239-Jun2024/ (25.11.2025)

having defence procurement from Israel, show gravity of member states' weight in the EU's decision-making process.[1]

EU's inertia in the Gaza crisis has to be explained with some contextual challenges as argued by Açıkmeşe and Özel. Multipolar competition and internal contestation are important in this respect.[2] In multipolar competition vein, as a main financier of the Israeli security sector and almost the only actor with significant leverage over Israel, the USA is very effective whose Middle East policy can not be overlooked by the EU. On the other hand, Russia's role in the region after the war in Ukraine diminished and attention of the Western countries largely shifted to the Eastern Europe. War in Ukraine also pushed the EU to explore alternative suppliers of energy, and Israel with its offshore gas reserves, in tandem with Egypt, increased its leverage for the Union. Regarding internal contestation, there is a highly division among the member states and EU instutions as well. It is stated that EU member states fall into roughly three camps: the first group including Ireland, Belgium and Luxemburg is pro-Palestinian which emphasizes international law and human rights; the second group including Denmark, France and Spain[3] stresses balance and good relations with both Israel and Palestine; and third group including Germany, Austria, Hungary and Czechia supports Israel. There are also discrepancies between the EU Commission and the European Parliament, with the Commission displaying a balanced stance by calling on both sides to agree both on the 1967 borders and the terms of peace, and the European Parliament favoring Palestinian rights.[4] As a result of not reaching to unanimity in the Council, the EU has failed to securitize the humanitarian suffering in Gaza as expected from a security community which founded on liberal democratic values, whereas it securitized the events in Ukraine successfully by imposing sanctions decisively. Regarding the Russia's war of agression against Ukraine, human rights violations in Russia and hybrid threats from Russia, the EU has already adopted 19th package of sanctions. Regarding the Israel, humanitarian suffering following its military intervention against Gaza and violations of human rights committed by Israel in this region, the EU has not implemented any sanctions so far.

Although the EU and the EU governments have political, economic and diplomatic means to exert real pressure on Israel, they have not used this leverage. Inaction of the EU and the member states have been characterized as "hypocricy".[5] The EU had announced a deal with Israel in order to improve the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, and in a EU report corroborated UN allegations that Israel was guilty of "indiscriminate attacks… starvation…torture…(and) apartheid". However, condemnation of Israel's brutal actions by the Union doesn't find a response in practice. That the EU's Gaza aid deal with Israel was originally called an 'agreement' to expand humanitarian access, later it was rebranded as an 'understanding' between the parties. Whereas 'agreement' is related to a binding document and leads to more transpency, 'understanding' leaves room for ambiguity. Besides the EU is insufficient on putting pressure at the bloc level on the Israeli government politically, it can

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[1] Sinem Akgül-Açıkmeşe, Soli Özel (2024) *EU Policy towards the Israel Palestine Conflict: The Limitations of Mitigation Strategies*, "The International Spectator", 59:1, 59-78, DOI: 10.1080/03932729.2024.2309664, pp. 65-66

[2] Açıkmeşe and Özel also highlighted regional fragmentation challenge to the EU's foreign security policy towards the Israel-Palestinian conflict in general. In this vein, a lack of regional governance mechanism, the existence of Hamas or right-wing Netanyahu government limited the EU's influence the in the Middle East Peace Process (Sinem Akgül-Açıkmeşe, Soli Özel, *ibidem*, pp. 64-65)

[3] Today Spain is a stark supporter of Palestine and Palestinians.

[4] Sinem Akgül-Açıkmeşe, Soli Özel, *ibidem*., pp. 62-66

[5] Medecins Sans Frontieres, *EU governments' hypocrisy fuelling suffering in Gaza*, June 2025, https://www.msf.org/eu-hypocrisy-fuelling-suffering-gaza (27.11.2025)

not be said that it has been as effective as expected in humanitarian aid either. It was reported that the EU didn't have any presence on the ground in terms of the aid-entering in Gaza and making it rely on Egyptian and Jordanian authorities and UN bodies for monitoring.[1]

This study argues that a two-pronged approach explains why the EU didn't address Ukraine and Gaza issues in the same level. This approach has also been shaping the security understanding of the EU, as mentioned in preceding sections. In other words, security understanding of the Union is composed of two factors, namely normative and strategical factors. With reference to this argument, the EU acted in Ukraine case according to both its interests and values because Ukraine's security is linked with European security, and in normative terms, Ukraine is regarded to belong to European family.[2] The study elucidates the strategical aspect of the EU's security understanding with regional security complex theory and the normative aspect with security community concept.

As a matter of fact, that the EU takes the stability of the European security order into account and its regional security, it explains the strategical element of the EU security understanding. In this respect, the Union concerns Ukraine's security with its own security embedded. Ukraine is regarded as a part of the European security order which is built upon the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of states, the inviolability of borders and the peaceful settlement of disputes. Contrastly, the security of Gaza is not taken in the same strategical vein with that of Ukraine because Gaza doesn't exist within the European security order. As the regional security complex theory argued, adjacent units have more security interactions than those located in different regions, shortly geographical proximity matters for security dynamics. However, the EU and Gaza belong to separate regional security complexes, unlike the EU and Ukraine.

In normative sense, Ukraine is considered to belong to European family by the EU, as often declared officially. President of the EU Commission, von der Leyen, has stated that "Ukraine is on the front line of the defence of everything we Europeans cherish: our liberty, our democracy, our freedom of thought and of speech"[3]. The EU Delegation to the United States also has expressed "Ukraine is already a member of the European family…"[4]. The main indicator of the Union's normative approach to Ukraine is agreement of the member states to start negotiations with Ukraine for the EU membership. According to the surveys conducted throughout the European citizens, by standing against Russia, the Union has been defending European values[5] that form its identity and pluralistic security community character. The solidarity between the EU and Ukraine is built on normative security elements under which the European values underlie. By contrast, the EU and Gaza have nothing to do with sharing the same values in the Union's perspective. Gaza is not considered the same way with Ukraine normatively, but only in humanitarian security aspect, meaning that the EU's

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[1] Elena Sanchez Nicolas / euobserver, *EU document shows flimsy nature of Israel aid deal*, July 2025, https://euobserver.com/eu-and-the-world/arc78d91d3 (27.11.2025)

[2] European Commission, *Statement by President von der Leyen*, 8 April 2022, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/statement-president-von-der-leyen-ukrainian-president-zelenskyy-occasion-presidents-visit-kyiv-2022-04-08_en (13.10.2025)

[3] European Commission, *Standing with Ukraine to defend freedom and democracy*,, https://ec.europa.eu/stories/slava-ukraini/ (13.11.2025)

[4] Delegation of the European Union to the United States of America, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/united-states-america/eu-assistance-ukraine-us-dollars_en?s=253 (19.11.2025)

[5] Jacques Delors Institute, *"European values" under pressure from war in Ukraine*, Policy Paper/No. 289, May 2023, p. 8, https://institutdelors.eu/content/uploads/2025/04/PP289_valeurs-europeennes-Ukraine_Chopin_Naim_EN.pdf (13.10.2025)

role in Gaza conflict is to provide humanitarian aid, which is its defining characteristic. While the Union has approached the tragedy in Gaza as a humanitarian aid provider in great amounts[1], it has not regarded the Gaza within its value perspective, unlike Ukraine. The EU itself as a pluralistic security community bond with Ukraine with regard to sharing common democratic values. As Adler and Barnett mentioned, a distinctive feature of the (tightly) coupled security community is that "they have a "mutual aid" society in which they construct collective system arrangements"[2]. In the case of Ukraine, the EU has mobilized its financial and military sources in line with its nature of security community acting as a "mutual aid society". However, this is not applicable in the Gaza case for the EU.

Conclusions

This article has handled the EU's securitization approach to human suffering in Gaza by comparing it with its securization of Ukraine, based on two-pronged approach of the EU's security understanding. In Ukraine case, the EU quickly succeeded to be united and didn't hesitate to implement important sanctions on Russia. The security of Ukraine is directly related with the European security order in the context of regional security phenomenon. Entangled with the strategic concerns, there are also normative concerns of which the EU prioritized as its founding logic. Uniting against the Russia attacks to Ukraine is highly affected by the fact that this country is standing up for the values enshrined by the EU. The values, such as democracy, solidarity and human rights, guide institutional responses of the Union to approach Ukraine's membership in the lens of a moral and ethical obligation, rather than a pragmatic decision based solely on political or economic interests, as Gozkaman pointed out.[3]

While taking its securitization steps in accordance with two-pronged strategic and normative approach mentioned for Ukraine case above, the EU has not acted the same in Gaza issue. Regarding values and interests' combination in the EU's security understanding, both in the level of the EU and member states, interests or strategic concerns have come to the fore. In this context, the questions asked earlier can be answered as following.

1) To what extent has the EU been able to address the human suffering in Gaza from its human security perspective and to take appropriate measures?

The EU has not responded properly and swiftly by applying decisive sanctions on Israel which committed crimes. Having both normative senses, with the reference of its security community nature and strategic sense, with the reference of the regional security complex theory in the study, which together make up the its action towards securitization, the EU has not securitized Gaza as expected. In terms of securitization of Gaza, the EU's reaction was no more than denouncing, unlike it applied a number of sanctions on Russia since 2014. The EU's role in Gaza conflict is to provide humanitarian aid, which is its defining characteristic. In other words, the Union has not securitized humanitarian suffering in Gaza by taking appropriate measures or applied sanctions on Israel, but taken action for humanitarian aid and assistance. The reason why the EU has not securitized humanitarian situation in Gaza the way it has done in Ukraine lies in that it prioritizes its strategic interests as demonstrated in Russia-Ukraine war which directly affects European security order.

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[1] European Commission, https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/news/eu-provides-additional-eu50-million-emergency-humanitarian-aid-palestine-2025-09-24_en (13.11.2025)

[2] Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett (Ed.), *Security Communities*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 30

[3] Armağan Gözkaman, *When values meet enlargement: framing Ukraine's future in the European Union through the lens of the logic of appropriateness*, 2025, "Global Discourse", Vol. XX, No. XX, pp. 1–15, https://doi.org/10.1332/20437897Y2025D000000066 (14.11.2025)

2) Regarding securitization of Gaza, is there more inclination towards the EU common values resulting from its supra-national identity or the member states' foreign policies resulting from nation-state sovereignty?

The situation in Gaza is not directly connected with the common security interests of member states which in this case prevail over common EU interests and values. It shows that member states play more significant role in securitizing any issue than the EU's supranational bodies. The EU is presenting a picture in which member states are divided among themselves, with countries like Spain and Ireland push for action, while those like Germany and Hungary act in accordance with their national prerogatives. The EU's capacity to act collectively has not functioned in Gaza, as expected from a security community, which is founded on common democratic values. National interests of the member states have more influence on how the EU addressed Gaza issue than common values and interests.

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