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European Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation
A.Y. 2022/2023

The EU human rights policy in Lebanon, a shift towards realism?

The EU's promotion of democracy and human rights in Lebanon in the normative power Europe debate: comparing the Single Support Framework and the Multiannual Indicative Programme

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Word Count Declaration: 21437

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14-07-2023

Word count: 21437

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Abstract

This thesis aims to shed light on three interrelated questions. Firstly, it explains what the European Union (EU) human right policy in Lebanon entails: the protection and promotion of human rights and democracy with financial and non-financial means. It discovers and discusses three main policy documents: the Single Support Framework for Lebanon, the Multi-annual Indicative Programme and the European Instrument for Human Rights and Development. Secondly, it places these policy documents in EU foreign policy and in the normative power Europe debate, arguing that the EU human right policy in Lebanon displays elements of both normative and realist power Europe. Finally, it raises some concerns about the EU as a donor in the human rights development sector in Lebanon. The distribution is undemocratic and unsustainable, with funds being less accessible for smaller organisations and sustenance of a development money dependent society.

Acknowledgement

This thesis would not have come together without the opportunity to exchange to the ArMA programme at Université Saint Joseph in Beirut, for which I am deeply grateful to Jihad Nammour, Chiara Garbuio and Orla Ní Cheallacháin. A special word of acknowledgement to the mentorship of professor El-Mufti, who helped create this thesis from what started out as a chaotic proposal. Also to all my friends who proofread this piece of work far before it was proofread-worthy, I extend my heartfelt gratitude.

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Abbreviations

CFSP – Common Foreign and Security Policy

CSDP – Common Security and Defence Policy

ECHO - European Commission's Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection

EEAS – European External Action Service, the diplomatic service of the EU

EIB – European Investment Bank

EIDHR – European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights

ENI - European Neighbourhood Instrument

ENP - European Neighbourhood Policy

EU – European Union

EUDEL – European Union Delegation in Lebanon

IcSP - Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace

IMF – International Monetary Fund

HRD – human rights defenders

LRRD – Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development

MIP – Multi-annual Indicative Programme

NDICI - Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument

NIP – Neighbourhood Investment Platform

PRIMA – Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area

SSF – Single Support Framework

UN – United Nations

Introduction

The EU's human rights policy in Lebanon has evolved significantly over the past two decades. The early years of EU engagement were marked by a focus on economic and social development, with a limited focus on human rights. However, the adoption of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2004 marked a significant shift in EU policy towards the Mediterranean region. The policy emphasized the importance of human rights and democratization and set out specific conditions for EU support. The EU's human rights policy in Lebanon has continued to evolve since then, with a greater focus on supporting civil society and promoting political reform. The adoption of the EU-Lebanon Association Agreement in 2016 marked a significant milestone in EU-Lebanon relations, with a specific focus on human rights and democratic governance. This raises the question how this changing human rights policy fits into EU foreign policy in Lebanon.

This thesis takes a deep dive into European Union (EU) foreign policy, specifically human rights promotion and protection in its external policy, and examines how EU policy is executed in Lebanon. I this paper I seek to assess if the EU is best described as a normative power, trying to export their values and norms to Lebanon, or if the EU human rights policies show characteristics of realist foreign policy. Lebanon is a unique case due to the particular characteristics of the Lebanese human rights development sector, political situation and poor governance. The Lebanese development sector is diffuse and opaque, with high historical dependence on civil society. The polarised political landscape and intricate multi-sectarian system make for questionable leadership, and in turn poor or even maleficent governance. These characteristics theoretically create fertile soil for realist foreign policy. To date, no study has

attempted to fit the EU's human rights policy towards Lebanon in a foreign policy frame: normative, realist or something else.

A quick introduction on the state of Lebanon and its relationship with foreign aid: Lebanon has faced a series of crises, including the 2019 protests and the devastating explosion in Beirut in August 2020, which brought international attention to the country's longstanding decay. The explosion occurred amidst an existing economic crisis, leaving over half the population below the poverty line. Lebanon's economic struggles are further compounded by a soaring debt-to-GDP ratio, making it one of the most indebted countries in the world. The countries banking sector and financial governance is severely corrupted as well as completely inapt to deal with the situation.

International response to the explosion was swift, with promises of financial aid tied to strict reforms. However, previous aid packages for Lebanon have faced challenges in terms of oversight and implementation. The efficacy of development aid, in general, has been a subject of debate. While some argue that foreign aid has positive long-term effects on development, others contend that it can perpetuate corruption and hurt the recipient country's economy.

In the case of Lebanon, aid has often postponed necessary reforms, sustaining an unsustainable political and economic system. Foreign aid has been used to stabilise the economy and cover the government's negative balance of payments, allowing for continued borrowing and dependency on aid. Corruption has also thrived, with funds being channelled through state institutions and political networks. Transparency and accountability have been lacking, with inflated costs and substandard project implementation.

The availability of foreign aid has created a negative incentive for the Lebanese government to enact meaningful reforms, as they rely on external support and fail to take full responsibility for governance and service delivery. Development projects implemented by international donors have filled gaps left by the government but may have reduced state accountability and undermined the government's incentives to fulfil its responsibilities.

The entrenched political structure in Lebanon poses a significant obstacle to effective development aid. Superficial concessions have allowed the ruling class to maintain their power, while the country remains in a deadlock, unable to implement necessary reforms. The international community, while well-intentioned, bears some responsibility for sustaining Lebanon's governance gaps and unsustainable institutions through aid provision.

The European Union's human rights development aid in Lebanon has become part of the problem due to various factors. Despite its intentions to promote human rights and social development, the EU's approach often runs into the same problems as the rest of the international community. Firstly, the EU's aid programs often lack proper oversight and implementation. The allocation of funds and monitoring of projects have been insufficient, allowing for mismanagement and potential corruption. This undermines the intended impact of the aid and perpetuates the cycle of ineffective governance. Additionally, the EU's focus on conditionality has proven problematic. While conditionality can be a useful tool to encourage reforms, the EU's demands for strict and unrealistic deadlines for implementation disregard the complexities of Lebanon's political landscape. These unrealistic expectations ignore the numerous political bottlenecks that hinder progress and fail to account for past experiences with aid packages. Moreover, the EU's funding priorities in Lebanon have centred around promoting a resilient

economy. While this is important, the emphasis on economic development often overshadows the pressing needs of the population. The EU's funding has not adequately addressed the growing number of people dependent on food distribution and struggling to meet their basic needs. The EU's focus on human rights and social development goals can appear disconnected from the urgent realities faced by individuals trying to secure their daily sustenance. On the other hand, the EU attempt to separate human rights promotion from humanitarian aid is understandable, as humanitarian aid is not sustainable. However, in the face of current Lebanese hardship, the EU is forced to face the reality of the situation, which is that a large proportion of the Lebanese population is in dire straits. Furthermore, the EU's reliance on working through state institutions in Lebanon has reinforced the existing governance deficiencies. Funds are channelled through government structures that are rife with corruption and political patronage. This perpetuates the systemic issues and fails to encourage genuine reforms or accountability.

Thus, this thesis seeks to address this gap by contributing to the existing literature on the EU’s foreign promotion of human rights, the EU as realist or normative power as well as reflect critically on this EU funding policy. More extensively, this thesis seeks to assess the nature of the EU's human rights policy by examining the relevant policy documents and treaties that serve as its foundation. Additionally, it will analyse the specific application of EU human rights policies in Lebanon, exploring the instruments and frameworks employed in their implementation, such as the European Neighbourhood Instrument, Neighbourhood, the Development and International Cooperation Instrument, and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights. The research will also consider the unique context of Lebanon,

including its political situation with dual power dynamics, challenges faced by Lebanese civil society, and issues related to governance.

Secondly, the study explores whether the EU's human rights policy for Lebanon is shaped by realist perspectives. It will delve into the ongoing normative Europe debate and its relevance to the EU's external policy. The research will evaluate the balance between security objectives and normative considerations within the EU's approach. Moreover, it will examine trends in EU funding for human rights in Lebanon over time, specifically comparing the Single Support Framework and the Multi-annual Indicative Programme to assess the fit of a realist lens.

Lastly, the research will investigate the perceptions of local actors regarding EU human rights funding in Lebanon. It will identify the challenges and issues experienced by these actors and propose potential improvements to enhance the impact and effectiveness of EU-funded initiatives.

By addressing these research questions, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the EU's human rights policy, its implementation in Lebanon, and the evolving nature of its realist dimensions. Furthermore, it seeks to shed light on the perspectives of local actors and offer recommendations for optimising EU-funded human rights endeavours.

Methodology

The study employs a threefold mixed-methods approach to analyse the EU human rights policy in Lebanon, corresponding to the three main chapters in this thesis:

1) Literature review (Bryman, 2016) mapping out the current status of the EU human right policy in Lebanon;

2) Comparative analysis (Bryman, 2016) of EU policy documents concerning human rights policy in Lebanon;
    a. The European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI)
        1. And its subsequent funding framework for Lebanon: the Single Support Framework (SSF)
    b. Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)
        1. And its subsequent funding framework for Lebanon: The Multi-annual Indicative Programme (MIP)
3) Investigation into the local perception through semi-structured qualitative interviews (Bryman, 2016) with civil society actors in Lebanon, among which:
    a. A human rights organisation that receives EU funding;
    b. A human rights organisation that receives indirect EU funding;
    c. A human rights organisation that does not receive EU funding;
    d. The EU delegation in Lebanon;
    e. Other donors in the human rights development sector in Lebanon.

    subsequently thematically analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

The choice for qualitative is motivated by an attempt to gather real insight in the perspectives of the organisations and individuals receiving or working with this funding. Semi-structured because this allows for flexibility and exploration of diverse experiences. Guiding questions for these interviews are:

- How do you appreciate the EU funding for human rights and democracy?
    - Do you see a shift in EU funding over time?
- What specific activities, initiatives or programmes are funded?
    - How do they contribute to human rights?
- Do you feel that EU funding is instrumental in the facilitation of your capacity building efforts?
    - Is it sustainable?
    - Long term effective?
- What prevents local civil society from adequately accessing EU support?
    - Non-financial support
    - Financial support
- What are improvements that could be made to this funding?

These semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with civil society actors in Lebanon who work in the field of human rights or adjacent fields. The sample was selected through purposive convenience sampling (Bryman, 2016), with participants being selected based on their experience and involvement in the human rights development field in Lebanon as well as their availability. The interviews were conducted face-to-face or via video conference and were recorded and annotated for analysis. The interviews have explored the perceptions of civil society actors on the EU's human rights policy in Lebanon, including their perceptions of the EU's instruments and their effectiveness in promoting human rights and supporting civil society. From this data qualitative support for the thesis was found. The interviewees were not

renumerated for their participation. Each interview lasted between thirty and forty-five minutes and was conducted by me.

Interviewee	Organisation	Date (2023)	Medium or location
Zaynab Lasshab Zaynab.lasshab@minbuza.nl	Human Rights officer at the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Lebanon	9th of March 10th of May follow-up	Face-to-face embassy premises, Sin el Fil, Lebanon, clarifications through phone
Michelle Wazan michelle.wazan@skoun.org	Drug Policy and Advocacy Department Manager, Skoun	10th of May	Video call
Roula Abbas roula.abbas@eeas.europa.eu	Human Rights officer, women's rights at EUDEL in Lebanon	30th of April	Face-to-face, EU delegation premises, Beirut, Lebanon
Moufeeda Haidar moufeeda@restlessdevelopment.org	Senior Youth Collective Coordinator at Restless Development	21st of May	Face-to-face, Tota Cafe, Beirut, Lebanon
Interviewee 1 (anonymous)	Triangle, research department	16th of May	Face-to-face, Triangle office, Badaro, Beirut, Lebanon
Interviewee 2 (anonymous)	EUDEL in Lebanon	23rd of May	Face-to-face, Kalei coffee co., Ashrafiyya, Lebanon
Interviewee 3 (anonymous)	Policy and advocacy officer at Oxfam international	20th of May	Face-to-face, Oxfam office, Sodeco, Beirut, Lebanon

Literature review

The literature review involves a systematic analysis of academic literature on (neo)realist theory, EU foreign policy and the EU's human rights policy in Lebanon. The systematic review employed Google Scholar to identify academic literature on the EU's HR policy in Lebanon, neorealist theory, and EU security interests in the Middle East. The review utilizes articles that offer insight into the EU's HR policy in Lebanon, including instruments used, effectiveness, and contributions to EU security interests in the region. Inclusion criteria are all articles published in English to the present day using both founding papers for realist theory, as well as modern

interpretations most recently published. I did not use resources available in Arabic or French, because my knowledge of these languages is not sufficient to analyse policy documents or academic literature.

Policy analysis

To analyse the EU's human rights policy in Lebanon over the past eight years, various official policy documents issued by the EU institutions were consulted:

1) EU Joint Strategy for Lebanon 2017-2020;
    a. The Single Support Framework for Lebanon (SSF)
2) EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024;
    a. European Instrument for Human Rights and Democratization (EIHRD)
3) European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)
    a. The European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI)
    b. Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)
4) EU Statements, Press Releases and other resources on Lebanon and human rights issues.

These policy documents have been substantiated by relevant international human rights instruments and agreements that the EU is party to, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), as well as reports and recommendations by UN human rights bodies such as the Human

Rights Council and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). These documents were analysed twofold to assess them as part of EU foreign policy: on content and through financial analysis.

The data collected from the literature review and the qualitative interviews was analysed using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes identified were analysed in relation to the research questions, with a focus on identifying patterns, similarities, and differences in the data from the interviews. The thematic findings were compared to results from the literature research.

In addition to the above-mentioned employed research methods, I have employed various technologies for editing, structuring and compiling my bibliography: ChatGPT, Google Bard, Zotero, Chegg CitationMachine and StudyMoose plagiarism checker. Also, I have made use of the University of Amsterdam online library, as well as online resources from Università Padova and Université Saint Joseph. Research papers were accessed online through Google Scholar.

The study's methodology was designed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the EU's HR policy in Lebanon and explore the perceptions of civil society actors on the policy's instruments and effectiveness. The mixed-methods approach was utilized to provide a nuanced understanding of the EU's HR policy in Lebanon and its impact on promoting human rights and supporting civil society.

The EU human rights policy in Lebanon

Before diving into the Lebanese situation, I will shortly elaborate on the terminology used in the present literature. The EU human rights policy is a term that is used to broadly indicate any EU policy that aims to enforce, protect or promote the human rights as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of human rights or other international treaties. Additionally, this policy often also aims at the promotion and protection of democracy abroad. In the present research, the 'EU human rights policy' is a term used to cover both these objectives in a foreign policy setting. The European Union frequently cites a commitment to this policy: promoting and protecting democracy and human rights. This section aims to give a historical and conceptual understanding of what this human rights policy entails.

The EU's contemporary position as a global actor has been shaped by various historical, political, and economic factors, including the dynamics of power that have evolved within and beyond its borders. The EU's power, which stems from its vast economic resources and significant geopolitical influence, has been instrumental in driving its external human rights policy (Seeberg, 2009). This policy has been built upon a range of interrelated policy documents that aim to promote respect for human rights globally while ensuring the EU's strategic interests are not compromised. As mentioned on the European Parliament (EP) website (2023), the European Union is "based on a strong commitment to promoting and protecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law worldwide" and "human rights are at the heart of EU relations with other countries and regions".

The EU's human rights policies encompass a broad spectrum of objectives centred around championing the rights of women, children, minorities, and displaced persons. The EU

explicitly opposes harmful practices including capital punishment, torture, human trafficking and discrimination. Emphasizing unity in defending these fundamental principles. The EU actively fosters collaborations with countries, organizations, and associations at all societal levels to protect human rights. The importance bestowed upon upholding human rights standards is consistently highlighted by its inclusion in all trade and cooperation agreements with non-EU nations (European Parliament, 2023).

These policy goals are anchored in the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) which is decided by the Council of the EU (CEU). The basis of this policy can be found in the Treaty of the EU (TEU, 1992), where the signing countries of the newly formed union confirm their attachment to human rights in the preamble to the treaty. The specifics can be found in the following articles of the TEU.

Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU): EU values. According to the EU website (European Parliament, 2023), the EU's founding values are 'human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities';

Article 3 of the TEU: EU objectives. In "*its relations with the wider world"*, the EU contributes to the "*eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights, in particular the rights of the child, as well as to the strict observance and the development of international law, including respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter"* (European Parliament, 2023);

Article 6 of the TEU: the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union only refers to the implementation of Union law, the EU's institutions and bodies. "*Member states*

must also respect the Charter of external relations" and "*countries joining the EU must also comply with the Charter"*. Article 6(2) requires the EU to accede to the European Convention on Human Rights (4.1.2) (European Parliament, 2023);

Article 21 of the TEU: principles inspiring the Union's external action. These principles are *"democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter of 1945 and international law" (*European Parliament, 2023). In Article 21, the EU endorses the principle of the '*indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms'*, committing itself to considering economic and social rights to be as important as civil and political rights (European Parliament, 2023).;

Article 205 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU): general provisions on the Union's external action. *"This article determines that the EU's international actions are to be guided by the principles laid down in Article 21 of the TEU"* (European Parliament, 2023).

Such articles shape EU foreign policy in the Mediterranean region, with the aim of promoting regional stability, security, and human rights. More recently, the European Union has adopted a so-called human rights-based approach in its engagement with Lebanon, with a focus on supporting civil society and promoting human rights reforms.

In short, the European human rights policy refers to a broad range of policy goals that the EU sets for their internal and external policy. These policy goals are enshrined in the founding treaties of the EU and mainly aim at the protection and promotion of human rights and democracy.

The 2020-2024 action plan on human rights and democracy

Before analysing the specific situation in Lebanon, I want to give one more general perspective on the EU human rights policy. The 2020-2024 European Union action plan on human rights and democracy (action plan) is the principal document for the EU human rights policy and its implementation. I will summarise the action plan and reflect on its implications for the type of power the EU is. Later I will continue to compare the specific policy documents for Lebanon with the general EU human rights policy as enshrined in the action plan, to assess if the EU is more realist in its approach to Lebanon versus it is in its general foreign policy.

The action plan on human rights and democracy for the period of 2020-2024 outlines five primary areas of focus, that I will summarize comprehensively. Later, I will use this information to discuss the focus areas in terms of power, and the extent to which it reflects a normative or realist EU foreign policy. The first focus area emphasizes the importance of protecting and empowering individuals by ensuring their civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. It highlights the significance of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights in fostering societal cohesion and trust. The European Union and its member states prioritize promoting gender equality, women's rights, and the empowerment of women and girls in all areas of action. The document outlines various actions to be taken, such as working towards abolishing the death penalty, eradicating torture and inhumane treatment, supporting human rights defenders, protecting civilians in armed conflicts, combating discrimination, advocating for the rights of minorities, and addressing climate change impacts on human rights. Additionally, the document underscores the need to empower women and girls, ensure the participation of children and youth, strengthen civic and political space, reinforce

economic and social rights, support the rule of law, promote accountability and transitional justice, and fight against impunity for human rights violations (European External Action Service, 2020).

The second area talks about the importance of human rights for resilient, inclusive, and democratic societies. It highlights the need for *"transparent and accountable institutions, representative parliaments, and engaged citizens"* (European External Action Service, 2020, p. 4) to create an environment where stakeholder and media can freely voice their thoughts and critiques, holding decision-makers accountable. The plan aims to enhance democratic institutions by supporting the separation of powers and an efficient, impartial justice system. It also seeks to improve the integrity and inclusivity of electoral processes and strengthen election management bodies and public administrations. The plan emphasizes the role of EU election observation and the monitoring of social media for fake news during elections. It calls for support to democratic institutions at the local level and comprehensive assistance to prevent and fight against corruption. The plan also promotes responsive and inclusive governance by working towards women's and youth's equal participation in public and political life, supporting pluralist party systems, and engaging civil society in accountability. It emphasizes the importance of impartial and pluriform media as well as the fight against fake news. Additionally, the plan aims to reinforce a human approach to conflict prevention, including marginalised groups. It emphasises the need for policy coherence between human rights and crisis response policies and actions, protection of civilians, gender equality, and children affected by armed conflict. The plan also addresses the importance of EU human rights due diligence policy and dedicated modules on

international humanitarian law and child protection in training programs (European External Action Service, 2020).

The third area discusses multilateral cooperation by creating a stronger network of partners and engaging with different views on human rights resolutions (European External Action Service, 2020). It also seeks to enhance cooperation with the office of the high commissioner for human rights and support the independence of the office. Strengthening the role of the human rights council, supporting civil society participation, and promoting the implementation of the un secretary-general's call to action for human rights are additional objectives. Regional partnerships are considered important, with a focus on strengthening cooperation with organizations such as the Council of Europe (COE), the organisation for security and cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the African union, the organisation of American states, and others. The plan also supports regional human rights professionals educating and exchanging knowledge. Bilateral cooperation is emphasized to ensure coordination between the EU's bilateral relations and its multilateral actions. This includes dialogue and consultations with partner countries, with a particular focus on monitoring objectives. The plan also emphasizes the implementation of human rights provisions in EU trade policy, the promotion of labour rights, and the use of political and sectoral policy dialogues to promote human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. Civil society and national human rights institutions play a crucial role, and the plan aims to deepen engagement and support for independent civil society organizations and human rights defenders. It emphasizes the importance of structured and regular dialogues between state actors, civil society, and the international community. The plan also highlights the need to support and strengthen long-term partnerships and cooperation with civil society actors.

Engagement with the business sector is another important aspect of the plan. It seeks to promote and support the implementation of the UN's guiding principles on business and human rights, engage with the business sector on responsible business conduct, and develop standards and mechanisms for business and human rights. The plan also focuses on advocating for compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law, supporting mechanisms to promote and protect human rights, and strengthening the international criminal court's fight against impunity (European External Action Service, 2020).

Finally, the action plan commits to application of human rights principles in both online and offline contexts (European External Action Service, 2020). It acknowledges the significant potential of digital technologies to contribute to the protection and promotion of human rights and democracy. These technologies have the capacity to enhance public participation, facilitate access to public services, aid in documenting human rights violations, and support online activism. However, it is also recognized that digital technologies can have negative consequences, such as the proliferation of disinformation and hate speech, the emergence of new forms of violence and privacy infringements, and the reinforcement of discrimination and inequalities (European External Action Service, 2020).

To tackle these challenges, the EU Action Plan proposes several strategies. Firstly, it emphasizes the importance of capacity building and effective monitoring. This involves engaging with governments, multilateral institutions, civil society organizations, and experts to share analysis, best practices, and enforce human rights frameworks within the digital age. It also includes providing support for national authorities to effectively implement international standards in the online space. Moreover, the plan aims to foster discussions on the opportunities

and risks associated with new technologies, facilitate the exchange of best practices in countering disinformation and hate speech, and examine regulatory approaches adopted by third countries (European External Action Service, 2020).

Secondly, the EU Action Plan underscores the significance of promoting human rights and democracy in the use of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence (European External Action Service, 2020). The plan aims to contribute to the development and implementation of frameworks and international standards that safeguard human rights and democracy in the online sphere. This involves engaging in multi-stakeholder processes to promote human rights and democratic values within online frameworks. The protection of the right to privacy and data protection is prioritized, alongside efforts to promote convergence towards high standards. The plan also supports global and regional initiatives that seek to ensure respect for human rights in the development and use of new technologies. Additionally, the EU aims to promote an open, free, and secure internet, guaranteeing accessibility for all individuals, and ensuring transparency and accountability in the use of technology within judicial processes (European External Action Service, 2020).

Finally, the plan suggests a way to address emerging challenges. It aims to tackle emerging challenges by promoting coordinated efforts and stakeholder dialogue. The plan will be implemented through a joint approach by EU institutions and Member States, with a focus on sharing good practices and knowledge. The EU Special Representative for Human Rights will play a crucial role in guiding the implementation process. The European Parliament also has an important role in promoting human rights and democracy. EU delegations, offices, missions, and embassies will lead efforts to protect human rights and support democracy at the country level.

Civil society organizations are recognized as key partners in these efforts. To support implementation, the plan suggests things like public diplomacy and strategic communication: Develop effective social media networks for engagement and content sharing, communicate policies and initiatives in a manner sensitive to public perceptions and local languages, measure the effectiveness of public diplomacy and campaigns, and promote initiatives that highlight positive human rights and democracy stories (European External Action Service, 2020).

In short, the European Union has an extensive action plan to coordinate and execute its human rights policy, both internally and externally. The plan emphasizes the significance of protecting and empowering individuals, promoting democratic societies, enhancing multilateral cooperation, and addressing challenges posed by digital technologies. These themes are relevant throughout this present literature and instrumental for an analytical understanding of the EU human rights policy in Lebanon.

Lebanon

The EU has been active in promoting human rights in Lebanon since the early 1990s, following the end of the civil war. Its efforts have focused on a range of areas, including strengthening civil society, promoting democracy and the rule of law, and combating impunity for human rights violations. The EU's engagement in Lebanon has been through various instruments, including financial assistance, political dialogue, and cooperation on specific programs (Dandashly, 2021). However, critics argue that the EU's human rights policy in Lebanon has been inconsistent and has sometimes been subordinated to security concerns. For instance, some EU member states have provided military aid to the Lebanese armed forces

(LAF), despite concerns about their human rights record. Critics argue that this aid has contributed to the strengthening of security institutions at the expense of human rights (Seeberg, 2009). Because of the limited scope of the present narrative, the focus will remain the EU promotion of civil and political rights, rule of law and the subsequent democratization.

Political situation in Lebanon and 'dual power'

Lebanon stands out as a unique case in the Middle East, characterized by a political system that, despite its flaws and sectarian imbalances, is relatively less autocratic compared to other Arab states. While Lebanon allows for party competition and freedom of political expression, it also contributes to the resistance against democratization processes in the Arab world due to the unequal distribution of seats in the National Assembly and the inefficiencies of the political system (Ruffa, 2011).

Analysing the Lebanese society, it is pertinent to consider Raymond Hinnebusch's (2006) analysis of authoritarian persistence in the Middle East, which highlights the limited democratization in the region due to hostile structural conditions, unresolved national problems, and specific class configurations. Lebanon's enduring yet imperfect political system is considered one of the most democratic among Arab countries, characterized by sectarian fragmentation and a power-sharing arrangement dominated by the bourgeoisie and traditional notables.

The concept of a politically relevant elite (PRE) proposed by Volker Perthes provides insights into the functioning of Lebanon's political system. The Lebanese PRE, including former warlords, religious rebels like Hezbollah, Syria's clients, entrepreneurs such as Rafiq Hariri, and

military personnel, aims to maintain their political power and manoeuvre within the system without fundamentally altering the consociational political framework.

Hezbollah, as a significant actor in Lebanese society, holds a unique position. It is integrated within the political system while simultaneously standing above or outside it. With its well-organized structure, powerful militia, parliamentary representation, and alliances with other parties, Hezbollah has constructed a "dual power" situation in Lebanon (Seeberg, 2009). This situation entails two competing sources of authority and legitimacy vying for political hegemony. Hezbollah's dominance sets it apart from other Islamic movements in the Arab world and grants it influence and power vis-à-vis the Lebanese state.

Hezbollah's influence stems not only from its political activities but also from its religious dimension. Drawing on a Khomeini-inspired version of Shi'ism, Hezbollah enjoys religiously grounded legitimacy, particularly among its supporters in poor areas of Lebanese cities. This duality of being a political actor within the system and a religious symbol beyond it grants Hezbollah a superior status compared to other actors in Lebanon. Its self-proclaimed role as "the resistance" against Israel, backed by a strong military organization, enables Hezbollah to act independently and challenge the dominant military power in the Middle East (Seeberg, 2009).

The EU faces challenges in dealing with political Islam and Hezbollah as a significant organization. Additionally, the EU struggles to clarify its position regarding regional political challenges, given the role of Iran and Syria in supporting Hezbollah. The EU's democracy promotion efforts in Lebanon must consider the demographically unfair representation of the Shiite population in the National Assembly. Hezbollah's call for a fairer distribution of seats

aligns with Iran's foreign policy objectives but poses a dilemma for the EU in pursuing its foreign policy interests and normative agendas in the Middle East.

The alliance between Hezbollah and the Maronite Christian Free Patriotic Movement further complicates the Lebanese situation, dividing the society along social lines. Regionally, Hezbollah and its allies receive support from Iran and Syria, while the Lebanese political establishment, led by Fouad Siniora, garners support from Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.

Given the exceptionalities of Lebanon, the EU must carefully consider its foreign policy approach. The complex power dynamics and the consociational arrangement of Lebanese elites make it challenging for the EU to exert influence. Consequently, the EU tends to prioritize political pragmatism and tactical considerations, often neglecting its democracy promotion ambitions in Lebanon. The EU's reluctance to engage with Islamist organizations in the Mediterranean region puts pressure on its positioning in Lebanon and forces it to navigate the complexities of the "dual power" situation.

In conclusion, the Lebanese political situation is challenging for actual human rights promotion and invites realist behaviour.

Lebanese civil society and development sector

The civil society landscape in Lebanon presents a conducive environment for external powers to adopt a realist foreign policy. Civil society encompasses various actors, including formal and informal structures such as community associations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based organizations, and trade unions. Lebanon has a rich history of civil society

involvement, particularly during the Chehabist developmentalist era and the period of the Civil War (Kingston, 2013; Ben Nefissa, 2002).

From the nineties onwards, after – and in response to – the end of the civil war, the civil society sector experienced continued growth, with organizations increasingly engaging in human rights advocacy and expanding their areas of action (Kingston, 2008). However, despite the diversity and vibrancy of civil society in Lebanon, its effectiveness and impact have been limited, raising questions about its potential. The legal, political, and financial frameworks that govern civil society work can either enable or constrain the activities of these organizations, thereby undermining their capacity to make a significant impact (Kingston, 2013; Karam Karam in Ben Nefissa, 2005).

A comprehensive understanding of civil society actors in Lebanon necessitates an examination of their interactions with the state and the prevailing political opportunity structures. Lebanon's consociational liberal power-sharing regime provides a platform for negotiation and political bargaining with civil society actors. Following the withdrawal of the Syrian Army in 2005, the state adopted a more liberal approach toward civil society, although it relied on informal dependency networks and clientelism to maintain control (Kingston, 2013; AbiYaghi, 2012).

This dynamic suggests that civil society actors in Lebanon may inadvertently contribute to the resilience of the existing regime rather than challenging it. Advocacy efforts often rely on the support of political or religious figures, without exerting substantial pressure for comprehensive legal reforms, thereby perpetuating the prevailing socio-political status quo (Daou, 2015). Such maneuvering within dependency dynamics creates an opportunity for

external powers to adopt a realist foreign policy when engaging with civil society actors in Lebanon. The relative liberal atmosphere and the absence of a robust welfare state provide openings for domestic and foreign elites to maintain control and safeguard their interests, aligning with the principles of realpolitik.

EU foreign policy in Lebanon

The current state of academic debate is fragmented about what type of power the EU is in its foreign policy. This is no different for Lebanon. Different interests are responsible for different policies, some of which are normative, while others are more realist in nature.

EU support for human right policies is oftentimes influenced by other dynamics. An example is the EU policy of strengthening civil society in Lebanon. These outcomes are influenced by the intersection between civil society and state actors in Lebanon. The scope of civil society organizations (CSO) in Lebanon and their freedom of action is directly linked to the social, political and economic development of the state (Haddad, 2017). The ineffective judicial system in Lebanon means that CSOs, which are dependent on a well-functioning legal framework, cannot work efficiently. Additionally, the inefficiency explains why EU policies do not have desired or measurable outcomes, meaning that the success of EU policy beneficiaries is not an adequate indication of the success of the EU policy as a whole.

EU as normative power

Geopolitical discourse surrounding the European Union (EU) has characterized it with various adjectives appended to the noun "power," illustrating the EU's uniqueness in the

international arena. These descriptions include "civilian," "post-modern," "ethical," "structuring," and "transformative," among others. While the EU is not typically associated with military strength or economic self-interest, it adds an additional layer of considerations to geopolitical affairs, specifically regarding the spread of norms. Rather than pursuing economic hegemony or political dominance, the EU externally promotes that what it is based on: their values. The external promotion of values is what gives the EU delegations their *raison d'être*. This is why Ian Manners (2002) introduced the term "normative power," which gained widespread recognition.

However, the observation that the European continent, once an imperialistic world power , is now setting world standards in normative terms, presents a paradox. This statement oversimplifies the EU's intentions and practices and may lead to inappropriate conclusions. Although the EU is willing to set world standards, or at least promote them, as per Article 21 of the Treaty on European Union, these standards are already agreed upon as international law standards, and therefore not determined solely by the EU. Furthermore, even the impartial and universal nature of these norms can be contested.

For example, the notion of human rights, confirmed as universal by the United Nations Vienna Conference on Human Rights, is of dubious nature. Diplomatic coverage, rather than actual universality, is what is achieved through such conferences. It is misleading to assume that government delegates' participation in the formulation and adoption of human rights norms means sufficient popular acceptance of these standards and commitment to actual implementation in their respective countries. Despite this, the EU invests in the worldwide promotion of its ideology, which reshapes social reality and shapes conceptions of normal.

The EU, according to Alston and Weiler, is committed to human rights is a principal characteristic, both internally, as fundamental rights have become one of the constitutional principles of the EU, and externally, where EU institutions are increasingly responsible for defending fundamental values. Moreover, the protection of fundamental rights has shifted from a "passive" era to a "proactive" one; despite this progress, institutional defence of fundamental rights faces challenges, as member states may breach these values without facing consequences.

In conclusion, while the EU's unique approach to power dynamics may lead Manners (2002) and others describing the EU as a normative power, the actual implementation of normative standards is subject to debate. Nevertheless, the EU's ideological power and strong commitment to human rights serve as defining features of its international identity.

In the case of Lebanon, however, these lines are blurred. Seeberg (2009) argues that the EU is not really a normative power. The diffuseness of the policy documents shows that the EU is not interested in actually implementing these policies. Also, the EU must know that in order to actually build democracy in Lebanon, they must include Hezbollah as a political player. By failing to recognize the specific ‘dual power’ dynamic of Lebanese government, the EU willingly sets itself up for an empty policy. The language used in EU policy documents is also void of operational vocabulary. By not addressing the shortcomings in the Lebanese political system, the EU loses its credibility as an honest democracy builder in the Middle East.

Rationalism or realism?

Rationalism and constructivism are two major theoretical approaches in international relations theory. They differ in their assumptions about the nature of the international system, the role of ideas and norms, and the sources of state behaviour.

Rationalists believe that the international system is anarchic, meaning that there is no overarching authority to enforce rules or resolve disputes. In this environment, states are motivated by self-interest and seek to maximize their power and security. They do this by calculating the costs and benefits of different courses of action and choosing the one that they believe will give them the best outcome. Rationalists also believe that ideas and norms play a limited role in international relations. They argue that states are primarily motivated by material interests, and that ideas and norms are only important insofar as they affect those interests (Oakeshott, 1964). For example, a state may be more likely to cooperate with another state if it believes that doing so will benefit its security or economic interests.

Realism can be seen as falling under rationalism because it emphasizes the role of rational decision-making in state behaviour. Realists believe that states are rational actors who seek to maximize their power and security. They make decisions based on a cost-benefit analysis, and they will choose the course of action they believe will give them the best outcome (Waltz, 1979). For example, a realist would argue that a state would only go to war if it believed that the benefits of victory outweighed the costs of defeat. The state would weigh factors such as the size of its military, the strength of its allies, and the likelihood of victory before making a decision to go to war (Waltz, 1979).

This is consistent with the rationalist perspective on international relations, which argues that states are rational actors who seek to maximize their interests. Rationalists believe that states will choose the course of action that they believe will give them the best outcome, based on a cost-benefit analysis (Keohane & Nye, 1977).

Constructivists, on the other hand, believe that the international system is not anarchic, but is instead socially constructed. This means that the rules, norms, and institutions of the international system are created by states and other actors, and that they can be changed over time. Constructivists also believe that ideas and norms play a much more important role in international relations than rationalist believe. They argue that ideas and norms shape the way that states see the world and their interests, and that they can influence state behaviour in significant ways (Cobern, 1993). For example, a state may be more likely to cooperate with another state if it believes that doing so is consistent with its identity or values.

The debate between rationalism and constructivism is one of the most important debates in international relations theory. It is a debate about the nature of the international system, the role of ideas and norms, and the sources of state behaviour. As described before, in the normative power Europe debate, the alternative being offered for the EU as a normative actor, is realism (Seeberg, 2009), which this thesis tests as lens to assess the Lebanese situation. It assesses the EU in Lebanon as rational actor in an anarchic international system, with the EU human rights policy as a means to gain relative gains. Realism also entails an element of the actor leveraging material and economic power in the international arena (Legro & Moravcsik, 1999). The EU leverage their material and economic superiority to resolve international conflict. For example, the primary EU response to the Russo-Ukrainian conflict was sanctioning. Some

scholars would classify this sanctioning as a realist reaction. On the other hand, it is only an attempt to coerce Russia into following suit. The EU has no means to actually force Putin's hand, the results of which are clearly visible in Ukraine. In short: realism is a form of rationalism, but the reverse is not true. Realism is a good fit to describe alternative to soft power in the present thesis. On the other hand, soft power means that there is no direct coercion involved in any way. The EU persuades other states into a certain action because these other states believe this is the right thing to do. In a way, EU leads by example (Nye, 2004).

EU in Lebanon, normative, realist, or something in between?

This section aims to compare the EU human rights action in Lebanon against normative and realist assumptions. Usually, the EU is portrayed as either a realist or normative power. The EU may be classified as normative, because the human rights promotion in the EU neighbourhood policy is aimed at the export of European norms (Tocci, 2008). The other side of the debate claims that the EU, although not really a state, can be best defined as a realist actor in their external action (Hyde-Price, 2006). Structural realism can also be applied to non-state actors and does not solely revolve around power dynamics.

A third theory on the EU external action is proposed by Ruffa (2011), claiming the EU foreign action is best explained by combining several elements from both theories. Conveniently, Ruffa takes the EU Lebanon relationship as a case study. First it is important to explain the EU human rights policy towards Lebanon.

EU in Lebanon as realist actor

In the realist theory, actors are ultimately responsible for their own security in the international arena, where states have to fend for themselves. As a consequence, the competition in said arena for power is strong. States, or for the purpose of this thesis, the EU, aim to maximize power and security in a hostile international arena. Furthermore, collaboration between states will only occur if it provides both sides with relative gains. In order to secure relative advantages in terms of power or economy, actors form alliances on the basis of how they perceive their environment (Halliday, 2005). From this doctrine, it follows that actors are interested in a stable and predictable external environment or, ‘from a realist perspective,

therefore, the EU external policy cooperation constitutes a collective attempt at milieu-shaping' (Hyde-Price, 2006, p. 224, cited in Ruffa, 2011). Finally, actors in the international arena have a series of 'second-order concerns' (Ruffa, 2011, p. 568) which are not necessarily aimed at security or power maximalisation (Waltz, 1979). This conception fuels the idea that realism extends beyond capability and security into value based and ideal foreign policy. One might even claim that this dimension is the normative side to realism.

Based on the realist theory outlined above, Hyde-Price (2006, p. 224) identifies three different kinds of realist actionable patterns in the international arena: *balancing, buck-passing and bandwagoning* (Waltz, 1979). *Balancing* refers to a strategy adopted by states to counterbalance the power and influence of a dominant state or coalition of states. According to realism, states seek to maintain a balance of power to safeguard their own security and prevent the domination of one state over others. *Balancing* can take various forms, such as increasing military capabilities, forming alliances with other states, or pursuing diplomatic and economic measures to counter the power of the dominant state. The aim is to create a more stable and secure international system by preventing the emergence of a hegemonic power. *Buck-passing*, on the other hand, is a strategy where a state attempts to shift the burden of addressing a particular security threat or issue onto other states. Instead of directly confronting the threat themselves, states may prefer to free-ride on the efforts of other more capable or willing actors. This strategy is often driven by a desire to avoid the costs, risks, or potential conflicts associated with taking the lead in addressing a particular challenge. *Buck-passing* can result in collective action problems, where no state takes sufficient responsibility, leading to a gap in addressing the security issue effectively. *Bandwagoning* is a strategy in which states align themselves with a

more powerful or influential state or coalition of states. Rather than attempting to balance or challenge the dominant power, states may choose to join forces with it to gain security benefits or access to resources. *Bandwagoning* is driven by a calculation that aligning with the stronger side will offer protection and increase the state's chances of survival in a competitive international system. It involves a strategic choice to follow the path of the dominant power rather than opposing it (Waltz, 1979).

An instance of *balancing* by the EU in the international arena could be that a certain action is done to balance a major power. The Middle East has been a major sphere of influence for the US after the fall of the Berlin wall, and even stronger so after 9/11. The EU, who considers the Middle East to be in their backyard, could balance the US influence in the Middle East by buying political influence in Lebanon. A way to do this could be funding human rights programmes. *Buck-passing* refers to the passing on of responsibility regarding certain security threats in order to focus resources to amass power or capabilities in a more accessible realm like economic issues. *Bandwagoning* refers to the alignment with the interests of another state. In foreign affairs it is taking in a position because it is easy to align with a more powerful state. For example, the Netherlands aligning themselves with the EU position on migration in Lebanon in order to increase their own security situation regarding illegal refugees departing from Lebanon. I will revisit these concepts to analyse the EU human rights instruments in a later chapter.

EU in Lebanon as normative actor

Another way to analyse the EU human rights action in Lebanon is through constructivism. Constructivism leans on the idea that actions in the international arena are shaped

by ideas and norm giving factors. Therefore, the EU as normative actor is stooled on the idea of constructivism, or the idea that one can construct policy outcomes based on values. Normative behaviour indicates carrying out these values in foreign policy. From this perspective, the EU in Lebanon is concerned with the dissemination of values through norms. The norms the EU tries to implement into Lebanon are human rights, democracy and economic prosperity. That is why, as mentioned earlier, Manner (2002) defines the EU as a normative actor. Additionally, there has been added to Manner's theory to discuss the meaning of which particular norms are exported by the EU, and what this exactly means for the EU as a foreign policy actor (Ruffa, 2011). As will be discussed later in this thesis, there is an additional academic discussion about the EU being a normative actor, that is diffusing universal norms, or the EU as civilising power (Bicchi, 2006). A civilising power refers to the idea of the EU not spreading universal norms, but rather spreading their interpretation of norms and values as a given fact throughout the world through their foreign policy. An important indicator that discerns normative motivated foreign policy from civilising foreign policy, is that normative motivated foreign policy also benefits the other side. 'The EU behaves normatively when it promotes values that empower actors affected by the European Foreign Policy' (Ruffa, 2011, p. 569). In this case the question is if Lebanon actually benefits from the EU human rights action. One of the questions at hand is thus if Lebanon benefits from the several EU human rights policies and funding that the EU provides, or if Lebanon values the same norms that the EU is trying to install and appreciates EU help in doing so. If all the above conditions are met, it contributes to the idea of the EU as a normative actor regarding their external action towards Lebanon. The EU human rights policies, being part of this external action, is to be tested on among others these norms.

Another important aspect about normative power is that it is also dependent on who is on the receiving end of the power relation. Power, and normative power, is relational. The recipients of the EU foreign aid should be positively affected by it. The recipients in Lebanon are also non-state actors, international as well as national. Additionally, the security situation in Lebanon is very diffuse with a wide range of actors, also international as well as national. Security in this sense is very much linked to stability and prosperity. If EU foreign aid is assessed to be normative in this highly specific context, a wide lens encompassing various understandings of security as well as the recipients needs to be employed (Ruffa, 2011).

EU Foreign Policy and human rights

Since the establishment of the EU common foreign and security policy framework (CFSP), there has been a visible increase in the integration of human rights in the EU external action (Lonardo, 2018). However, many scholars consider the EU engagement in the 'neighbourhood' through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) to revolve around stability and security, which directly clashes with Manner's perception of the EU as a normative actor security (Del Sarto & Schumacher, 2005).

The most recent revision of the ENP in 2015, the 'ENP review', was accompanied by the following text:

"In the reviewed ENP the EU will focus on areas that matter most. The stabilisation of the region, in political, economic, and security related terms, will be at the heart of the new

policy. The EU's own stability is built on democracy, human rights and the rule of law and we will continue to make the case for these universal values." (European Commission, 2015, p. 1)

This notion of stability rooted in democracy and human rights internally, but economic, political and security stabilization of the region, has been critically received by EU scholars (European Commission, 2015, p. 11; Schumacher, 2018, p. 48). This ENP review has clearly steered away from the previous incentive-based conditionality, moving to more pragmatical and transactional relations with their neighbours (Schumacher, 2018, p. 59). This 2015 review is therefore an important indication in the assessment of the research question. In this instance, the EU external action moved away from the norm giving human rights policy, and rather employed a more realist approach. Although human rights are mentioned, it is clear that stabilisation is the main target.

However, this normative power Europe debate is not the only predictor of EU foreign policy. The EU's interests are complex and reflect a myriad of dynamics that influence their foreign policy. Critics argue that this debate about normative power Europe fails to reflect this background (Del Sarto, 2016, p. 227). Human rights policy can be a vital part of securing economic and security interests. An often-heard claim during my studies of human rights was that human security is instrumental to lasting global peace and safety; this calls for a focus on human rights to achieve supposed policy goals in the future. A final axiom to keep in mind when talking about the interests and subsequent policies of the EU is that these are not inspired by one single interest. That is, a myriad of interests from individual governments blend together to form a common policy. These interests don't one on one stem from the interests of individual member

state governments, nor do they translate one on one into common policy. The EU and its policies are a separate entity and not a cumulative of all the member states interests. Some national actors have more normative, some more security driven interests, and often these interests also influence the EU policy-making process (Böttger, 2010, p. 138).

The 2020-2024 Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy

In this section, I will analyse the earlier mentioned EIDHR and the subsequent 2020-2024 Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy, or the Action Plan (EEAS, 2020). Firstly, the instrument emphasizes the importance of protecting and empowering individuals by safeguarding their rights and well-being. This includes promoting gender equality, abolishing the death penalty, eradicating torture, supporting human rights defenders, protecting civilians in armed conflicts, combating discrimination, advocating for minority rights, and addressing climate change impacts on human rights. These actions showcase the EU's dedication to human dignity, freedom, equality, and respect for human rights and solidify the idea of the EU as a normative actor (Jenichen, 2022).

Secondly, the Action Plan highlights the EU's goal of building resilient, inclusive, and democratic societies. It aims to strengthen democratic institutions, promote social cohesion and equality, enhance the integrity and inclusivity of electoral processes, support pluralist party systems, and foster the role of civil society in oversight and accountability. By prioritizing the establishment of transparent and accountable institutions, the EU seeks to uphold democratic values and the rule of law, once again characteristics of normative foreign policy (Wouters & Hermez, 2016).

Moreover, the Action Plan emphasizes the EU's commitment to promoting a global system for human rights and democracy. This involves engaging with international partners, supporting multilateral initiatives, and advocating for the universal respect and promotion of human rights worldwide. The EU seeks to strengthen regional partnerships, support peer learning for regional human rights institutions, and promote policy coherence between human rights and crisis response actions. By actively participating in global human rights discussions and initiatives, the EU acts as a normative power on the international stage (Jenichen, 2022).

By promoting dialogue, supporting independent civil society organizations and human rights defenders, engaging in public diplomacy, and strengthening cooperation at national and international levels, the EU demonstrates its normative power by actively working together with others to advance human rights and democracy. Additionally, the EU's written dedication to human dignity, freedom, equality, and respect for human rights serves as compelling evidence for its status as a normative actor. Again, normative power refers to a state or organization's ability to influence the behaviour of other actors by promoting norms and values rather than relying on coercive measures in the international arena. Additionally, normative power also has an element of demonstrated belief in the norms and values an entity exposes in its foreign policy (Manners, 2002). In the case of the EU, its written commitment to human rights principles and its efforts to promote these values both within its member states and globally with this action plan demonstrate its normative power.

In conclusion, the Action Plan is a normative policy document, laying out the framework for the EU to a value based foreign policy. As mentioned before, this does presuppose the idea

that the values and norms exported through the EU human rights policy are universal, while some authors criticise the idea of universal human rights, especially in foreign policy.

The contested universality of human rights

The present section attempts to critically analyse the universal nature of EU human rights standards as stated in Article 21 TEU, which obliges the EU to promote and respect these standards. It will argue that the universality of human rights is not only contested by non-western leaders who use it as a political tool, but also by scholars who question the genuine commitment of state elites to Western human rights norms.

The universal nature of human rights is often taken for granted, with little critical examination of the concept. However, Sonia Harris-Short (2003) highlights the suspicious nature of this diplomatic coverage of human rights as universal. She argues that human rights were confirmed as universal in the UN Vienna Conference on Human Rights, but diplomatically expressed universality is contestable.

Moreover, scholars like Na'im (2010) contest the universality of Western human rights norms. Na'im suggests that the influence of Western thinking on state elites has resulted in a genuine commitment to these norms. However, this genuine commitment is questionable as it may not necessarily reflect popular perceptions and attitudes toward human rights in their respective countries. Na'im argues that there is a "human rights dependency," which misleads scholars into assuming broad popular acceptance of human rights standards based solely on the participation of government delegates in their formulation and adoption.

According to these scholars, human rights policy, and specifically the EU action plan, fits very well into a realist power relation. This is similar to what Seeberg (2009) argues: the EU is normative in its policy documents, but not in its actual interests and actions. Imagine Iran funding Shia mosques and religious education programmes in the Netherlands. Conceptualising the human rights policy in this way, funding projects for religious conservatism this would without a doubt lead to outrage.

In conclusion, the EU's promotion and respect for human rights standards in Lebanon may not necessarily reflect the genuine commitment of the Lebanese state elites or the broader society to these standards. This suggests that the EU's behaviour in Lebanon is better explained through a realist lens. While the EU's action plan on human rights and democracy outlines its normative aspirations and commitment to universal human rights, there are concerns about the actual interests and actions underlying these policies, which is incompatible with normative foreign policy.

EU human rights policy in Lebanon

The EU employs various strategies to tailor its human rights policy to specific countries, including Lebanon. Stachelhaus (2019) identifies financial and non-financial modes of assistance provided to Lebanese organizations both directly and through EU implementation partners. The EU emphasizes the importance of coordination among its own programs, those of its member states, as well as with the United Nations, in line with its commitments outlined in the Treaties (Art. 21 TEU). Such structuring/coordination ultimately yields long-term benefits by

ensuring an alignment of funding needs and available financial support. The EU leverages its diplomatic and economic power to promote and protect human rights. It employs measures known as 'conditionality'. This can be seen as the stick and the carrot: the stick to punish human rights violations, and the carrot to encourage human rights compliance. The EU has established guidelines on various human rights issues and engages in dialogues, consultations, political meetings, diplomatic démarches, and public statements to raise human rights concerns with third countries (Hafner-Burton, 2005). It also provides advice and support to strengthen human rights and democratic institutions while imposing restrictive measures in cases of serious human rights violations (Commission, 2011). Examples of such measures include asset freezes, arms embargoes, and visa bans, which happened in Lebanon when the Lebanese government failed to adhere to the EU imposed reforms (Killick et al., 2021).

Notably, even though the EU is the largest, there are many additional donors to Lebanon. Other actors such as the UN, the US or any other state also contribute to Lebanese development. These actors may have differing degrees of commitment to human rights. For instance, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, aiming to increase its influence vis-à-vis Iran and Hezbollah, has made substantial investments in Lebanon compared to the EU or the UN (Seeberg, 2016). Therefore, if the Lebanese government cherry picks its donors, turning to those that have lenient to no requirements, the EU's efforts to promote and protect human rights may face obstacles and limited leverage. Diplomatic promotion of human rights heavily relies on the cooperation and goodwill of local governments, thereby constraining the EU's ability to exert significant pressure for human rights compliance (Simma et al., 1999). Furthermore, with the US

shifting its focus away from the Middle East, the EU is losing an important partner in the promotion and protection of human rights based on shared values.

The effectiveness of diplomatic human rights promotion is contingent upon the willingness of local governments to cooperate. In Lebanon, where multiple active donors provide funding, the EU faces challenges in maintaining leverage for its human rights promotion, particularly when the government seeks funding from sources with less human rights requirements. This highlights the complexities and limitations the EU encounters as it strives to act as a normative power in promoting human rights in Lebanon and underscores the realist aspects of its approach.

Non-financial support

The EU can execute their human rights policy through non-financial means, establishing direct contact with civil society organisations (CSOs) and employing digital diplomacy. For instance, the EU utilizes digital platforms, such as social media outlets and EU Delegations' homepages, to disseminate videos and information about human rights defenders, enabling them to connect with one another and communicate globally (European Commission, 2020). Additionally, the EU plays a facilitative role in promoting dialogue among various actors and speaking out against specific human rights violations, which can positively impact the issues human rights organisations are addressing. This partnership between civil society and the EU is mutually beneficial, as the EU can draw upon the expertise and alternative communication channels provided by local organisations (European Commission, 2020). These organisations are

consulted as local experts on human rights policy and supported through networking opportunities and dialogue (European Commission, 2020).

Secondly, human rights defenders (HRDs) hold a particular significance for the EU since the first action plan (Council of the European Union, 2012). Continuing this, in the most recent 2020-2024 action plan the EU extends both political and financial support to human rights defenders through initiatives such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). The European Union published a handbook on human rights defenders, which outlines practical means to support and assist HRDs facing risks (European Union External Action Service, 2008). These guidelines propose various measures that EU Missions may undertake, including close coordination and information sharing with HRDs, maintaining regular contact through visits or invitations, providing visible recognition when appropriate, and attending and observing HRD trials (European Union External Action Service, 2008). Individual EU Delegations are however not bound to these guidelines - they can select actions they deem appropriate.

The EU handbook on guidelines for human rights defenders demonstrate the EU's primary interest in defending and supporting HRDs through information sharing and leveraging diplomatic contacts and publicity for their cases. The EU's support for HRDs does not appear to be part of a realist foreign policy, as the handbook advocates for public support especially when facing the risk of displeasing partner governments, even when the supported HRDs criticize their agencies. This reflects the EU's recognition of the interconnectedness of security and human rights, as articulated in the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders where an emphasis is

placed on the relationship of international peace and security with the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Financial support

Lebanon receives a wide range of financial support from the European Union (EU) both directly and indirectly. The EUs dedication to assisting Lebanon can be seen through the multiple funding streams and programs it provides. One example of direct financial support is the contributions from the European Commission's Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO). This funding aims to address humanitarian needs and ensure the well-being of the Lebanese population. Another initiative is the Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) which supports crisis preparedness peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts in Lebanon. This demonstrates the EUs commitment to promoting stability and peace in the region. Additionally, there is financial support from the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) that specifically focuses on civil society projects in Lebanon. The aim of the EIDHR is to strengthen democracy, uphold human rights, and protect fundamental freedoms in the country, highlighting the EU's dedication to supporting initiatives that promote democratic values and human rights in Lebanon. The Erasmus+ Programme, which champions open academic exchange between the EU and partner countries, also plays an important role by fostering cooperation between higher education institutions providing academic exchange opportunities and promoting educational rights in Lebanon (Stachelhaus, 2019).

In terms of sustainable development and economic growth the Neighbourhood Investment Platform (NIP) supports investments by European financial institutions primarily in

transport, energy, and environment sectors. This platform underscores EUs' commitment towards sustainable development in Lebanon as well as supporting economic growth. Initiatives such as Horizon 2020 Programme and Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) allocate funding for research projects in technology and innovation which can indirectly contribute to advancements in knowledge benefiting protection and promotion of human rights. While it is not possible to cover all aspects of financial support streams here, it is worth mentioning that these initiatives together contribute to the protection of individual human rights. For instance. Erasmus+ supports to right to education while the European Investment Bank (EIB) contributes to the right to development. The EUs' financial assistance to Lebanon is evidently in alignment with its commitment to upholding and promoting human rights principles.

The primary emphasis rests on the financial aid that the European Union extends to human rights organizations through various support mechanisms. As explained before, the funding system for human rights is relatively opaque, due to the broad conception of human rights policy as well as the myriad ways of indirect funding. The limited scope of the present research does however not mean that the EU funding is also limited to the policy documents featured in this thesis. According to the Single Support Framework 2017-2020, Lebanon can also receive additional support through various EU mechanisms, which encompass the Instrument for Stability and Peace, EU assistance for humanitarian purposes, initiatives related to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), as well as missions and operations under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Moreover, assistance is available through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, the Partnership Instrument, the Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation, thematic programs falling under the Development Co-operation

Instrument, and external actions covered by EU internal programs like research and innovation (Horizon 2020), energy, transportation, education and youth (Erasmus+), and culture (Creative Europe) (Commission, 2017, pp. 7-8).

This demonstrates the wide implementation of human rights policies throughout EU foreign policy. Again, the scope of the present study does not allow all financial support streams to be elucidated, so the present focus is policy documents tailored to Lebanon, in which human rights are explicitly mentioned: Single Support Framework (SSF) and the Multi annual Indicative Programme (MIP).

EU human rights funding in Lebanon

In the last funding cycle (2017-2020), the EU neighbourhood policy (ENP) was financially executed through the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI). In the new policy cycle (2021-2027), the funding will be provided through another commission instrument: NDICI (European Parliament, 2022).

The ENP is based on long-standing and periodically renegotiated international agreements between the EU and its partner countries, comprised of nations both within the EU neighbourhood and across the globe. The EU's human rights funding in Lebanon was directed by the Single Support Framework (2017-2020) as part of the above-mentioned European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) which is currently replaced by the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI).

In the old ENI system, the Commission offered funding tailored to countries based on the Single Support Framework (SSF). With the new NDICI instrument, the EU's human rights

development policy in Lebanon is guided by various political priorities, including the "Joint Communication on a Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood - A new Agenda for the Mediterranean." The priorities in this Multi-Annual Indicative Programme (MIP) for Lebanon align with the broader regional goals and commitments, such as those outlined in the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the EU-Lebanon Association Agreement. The MIP also aims to address the long-term impact of COVID-19 on Lebanon, as well as the persistent severe economic depression.

The IMF has reached an agreement with the Lebanese authorities on economic policies to restore confidence, promote sustainable growth, and create job opportunities. The recent parliamentary elections have unveiled a surge in favour of civil society candidates who are advocating for comprehensive reforms, presenting a unique opportunity to implement the fundamental pillars of reform outlined in the IMF agreement. Lebanon has encountered persistent crises, encompassing the Syria crisis, socio-economic hardships, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the repercussions of the conflict in Ukraine, but the European Union (EU) has consistently exhibited solidarity in assisting Lebanon during these tumultuous periods.

In response to the devastating Beirut Port explosion in 2020, the EU collaborated with the United Nations and World Bank to establish the "Reform, Recovery, and Reconstruction Framework - 3RF." This framework prioritizes the advancement of reforms in critical domains, such as macro-economic and monetary policies, the rule of law, anti-corruption measures, as well as the financial and energy sectors. Progress in these areas is instrumental in securing support for the reconstruction efforts (Abdo et al., 2020).

The EU and Lebanon maintain a longstanding partnership across various sectors, guided by the EU-Lebanon Association Agreement and the EU-Lebanon Partnership Priorities. Besides bilateral cooperation, a regional programming document is being devised to address regional collaboration, particularly in mitigating the enduring consequences of COVID-19 and fostering regional integration.

Lebanon shoulders the highest per capita refugee burden globally due to the protracted Syrian crisis (Baumann, 2021). The EU continues to extend support to Lebanon in its commendable efforts to accommodate Syrian refugees, specifically in domains such as education, social assistance, healthcare, livelihood opportunities, as well as water and sanitation facilities. Furthermore, the MIP (Multi-Annual Indicative Program) will ensure synergies with thematic programs focusing on human rights, civil society empowerment, peace promotion, stability, conflict prevention, tackling global challenges, and educational initiatives.

Single Support Framework

As per EU-Lebanon partnership priorities, the Single Support Framework for Lebanon (European Commission, 2017) acknowledges the strategic importance of EU-Lebanon cooperation and highlights the progress made with the endorsement of a new electoral law by Lebanon's Parliament. The framework recognizes the challenges Lebanon faces due to the Syrian crisis, which has put tremendous pressure on the country's institutions, economy, infrastructure, environment, and socio-economic stability (European Commission, 2017). Lebanon hosts a significant number of Syrian refugees, with over 1.1 million registered refugees, in addition to

the existing Palestinian refugee population of approximately 300,000. It is estimated a significant number of unregistered refugees also reside in Lebanon (Fakhoury & Stel, 2022).

Amid ongoing political hardship and stalemate, Lebanon has been without a president since Michel Aoun stepped down in 2022. Presently there exists a declining confidence amongst the Lebanese in politics, further hindering the nation's ability to implement necessary reforms, and the country's growth. In response to the challenges faced by Lebanon, the EU's assistance takes into account the significant burden related to hosting refugees. The 2017 Brussels Conference highlighted the need for a combination of emergency assistance and longer-term responses to address Lebanon's socio-economic challenges, promote economic growth, and create employment opportunities. In addition to traditional assistance provided through grants under the SSF, the EU also explores innovative financial instruments such as blending loans with grants and concessional financing to support and scale up interventions outlined in the SSF 2017-2020. The objective of the Lebanese Government, as presented at the Brussels Conference, is to restore economic growth as a foundation for stability, social cohesion, and job creation. This framework recognised the ongoing security challenges in Lebanon, with a volatile security situation within the Palestinian camps and a fragile stability along the border between Lebanon and Israel. Despite the efforts of Lebanon's security agencies, the security situation remains a concern (Stachelhaus, 2019).

The SSF has a budget for the following sectors: promoting growth and job creation, fostering local governance and socio-economic development, and promoting the rule of law, enhancing security, and countering terrorism (European Commission, 2017).

In the sector of promoting growth and job creation, the framework recognizes the impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon's socio-economic difficulties. It emphasizes the importance of private sector development, addressing challenges faced by the private sector, and improving the business operational environment. The framework also highlights the need for rehabilitating critical infrastructure, promoting research and innovation, and creating economic opportunities (European Commission, 2017).

The sector of fostering local governance and socio-economic development acknowledges the pivotal role played by municipalities in Lebanon's resilience during the refugee crisis. The framework aims to address challenges related to basic service delivery, infrastructure, and job opportunities at the local level. It focuses on integrated and multi-sectoral local development strategies, improving governance, enhancing mechanisms for social accountability, and providing economic opportunities and improved basic services (European Commission, 2017).

In the sector that discusses the rule of law & security, the framework highlights the effective efforts of Lebanon's security and law enforcement agencies. The EU provides support to the c Lebanese Armed Forces and promotes a holistic approach to the security sector by emphasizing the need for clear roles and cooperation among security actors, security sector reform, and strengthening the rule of law. The framework also addresses border control and management, countering terrorism and violent extremism, and fostering inter-ministerial cooperation and citizen engagement in security measures (European Commission, 2017).

Additionally, there are two elements mentioned in the single support framework for Lebanon. Regional cooperation and coordination between relief, rehabilitation and development (European Commission, 2017). It simply mentions that the EU will not only support Lebanon

directly, but that regional programming may also positively affect the Lebanese. The coordination between relief, rehabilitation and development relates to a trend discussed previously: the increasing overflow between different policy and development areas. Oftentimes, especially in Lebanon, humanitarian aid and relief as well as development are different sides of the same coin. With the overlap of multiple crises, the multiple development and aid funding streams also coincide. Later this thesis will further discuss this overflow as a critical note to the EU human rights funding.

Following the strategy of Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD), the EU combines development objectives, measures for conflict prevention, support for human rights, and humanitarian aid. To maintain a seamless transition between relief and development, the EU employs various funding instruments from its toolkit, including the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) Special Measures, the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis ('Madad' Fund), and humanitarian assistance. Additionally, programs like the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA) are being utilized in a coordinated manner to achieve the desired outcomes of EU assistance. Given the increased scale of EU support to Lebanon and the intricate nature of the humanitarian-development nexus, the EU will prioritize joint analysis of vulnerabilities and risks, information exchange, collaborative planning, and the implementation of monitoring and evaluation frameworks like the Joint Humanitarian-Development Framework (JHDF) established in 2016 to ensure synergy and complementarity.

Lebanon has additionally benefited from other thematic EU funding instruments incorporating human rights including the development cooperation instrument, the EU

instrument for democracy and human rights or EU internal programmes such as Horizon and Erasmus.

Although human rights are only mentioned once in the three thematic sections, *"the promotion and protection of human rights is an overarching theme throughout the three priority sectors, together with transparency, accountability and the fight against corruption and a rights-based approach will be pursued in all interventions, in line with the new European consensus on development."* (European Commission, 2017, p. 4).

To verify the results of this framework, the EU added an annex indicating the results and the means to verify these results. Presented below is an example of the first objective, which fits very well in a normative lens to EU foreign policy.

The SSF and migration

Throughout the SSF migration is mentioned only six times, of which three times in the context of harnessing the Lebanese overseas diaspora for the development of Lebanon. The SSF calls for a *"comprehensive approach that includes ensuring a positive impact of migration on Lebanon's development"* (European Commission, 2017, p. 4)

The specific idea to ensure this positive impact is mentioned later under a section that delegates 5% of the SSF budget for complementary support for capacity development and institution building:

"c) Addressing the implementation of priority commitments deriving from EU agreements, not directly covered under the three principal priority sectors, including the

migration and mobility dialogue and the eventual implementation of the EU-Lebanon Mobility Partnership, if signed" (European Commission, 2017, p. 6)

This migration and mobility dialogue has been criticised by multiple authors as a tit-for-tat trade deal where the EU offers development money and Lebanon keeps their refugee population from fleeing to Europe. These deals have since 2014 been covered in the Mobility Partnership (Seeberg, 2017).

The designation of the dialogue between the European Union (EU) and Lebanon as a "dialogue on migration, mobility, and security" raises concerns about the underlying motives and priorities of this engagement. While it is important to acknowledge the complex migratory movements and significant refugee population in Lebanon, including Syrian refugees and other vulnerable groups, the emphasis on migration and mobility in the dialogue overshadows critical issues and fail to address the underlying root causes of the crisis.

The EU and Lebanon both have vested interests in addressing security concerns stemming from the protracted Syrian crisis. However, the parallel drawn with Jordan's situation is problematic, as it overlooks the distinctive dynamics and complexities within Lebanon. Unlike Jordan, where the response to the Syrian crisis has garnered a relatively broad consensus among the population, Lebanon faces internal divisions and political affiliations that have further complicated the situation (Seeberg, 2017). Notably, the active support of Hezbollah, a powerful political and military group in Lebanon, for the Syrian regime demonstrates a significant departure from the EU's stance and raises questions about the EU's approach to countering terrorism.

The spillover of violence from Syria into Lebanon, including armed conflicts and attacks on Lebanese security forces, highlights the fragile security environment and the challenges faced by the Lebanese government. Additionally, the prolonged delay of parliamentary elections due to the pretext of the problematic security situation raises concerns about the erosion of democratic processes and citizens' rights in Lebanon.

While financial commitments from the EU towards addressing the refugee crisis in Lebanon are commendable, the focus on refugee-related challenges tends to overshadow the broader mobility partnership and its potential benefits. The EU's engagement with Lebanon seems primarily reactive, driven by the urgency of addressing the refugee crisis and the spillover effects from Syria. This approach may overlook crucial aspects of long-term stability and development in the region.

In light of these considerations, it is necessary to critically examine the underlying motivations and effectiveness of the mobility and migration dialogue between the EU and Lebanon. The narrow focus on migration and mobility, without adequately addressing the complex political, social, and economic challenges faced by Lebanon, raises questions about the comprehensive nature of the EU's engagement and its commitment to sustainable solutions. A more holistic and nuanced approach that considers Lebanon's exceptional circumstances and promotes inclusive dialogue is crucial to effectively address the security interests of both Lebanon and the EU.

The SSF through a realist lens

The EU's approach in Lebanon reflects elements of *buck-passing*, *bandwagoning*, and *balancing*. *Buck-passing* refers to the act of shifting responsibility or avoiding a proactive role in addressing an issue. In this context, the EU's strategic objectives prioritize economic development, potentially expecting Lebanon to address its internal security challenges and necessary reforms. This implies a degree of *buck-passing* as the EU may rely on coordination with other actors rather than assuming direct responsibility.

Bandwagoning, on the other hand, involves aligning or cooperating with a more powerful actor to gain advantages or protection. The EU's focus on fostering local governance and socio-economic development in Lebanon reflects *bandwagoning* as it seeks to collaborate with and support local authorities. By leveraging their knowledge and initiatives, the EU aims to enhance stability and socio-economic development in the country.

Balancing refers to pursuing policies or actions to maintain equilibrium or stability by countering the power of other actors. The EU's emphasis on promoting the rule of law, enhancing security, and countering terrorism in Lebanon exemplifies *balancing*. Through capacity building and institutional support to Lebanon's security and law enforcement agencies, the EU aims to strengthen stability and address potential security threats in the region.

In summary, in the SSF elements of *buck-passing*, *bandwagoning*, and *balancing* can be identified. *Buck-passing* is evident in the prioritization of economic development, *bandwagoning* is seen in the support for local governance, and *balancing* is demonstrated through efforts to enhance security and counterterrorism.

The SSF through a normative lens

Although EU human rights policy as laid out in the SSF may exhibit realist tendencies, such as taking into account strategic interests and security concerns, the predominant normative orientation of the EU's objectives, values, and approaches in Lebanon suggests its role as a normative actor driven by the promotion of principles and ideals, rather than self-serving realist calculations being its sole motivation. Firstly, the EU's strategic objectives in the SSF for Lebanon prioritize the promotion of good governance, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. These normative goals go beyond traditional realist concerns of power and self-interest. The EU's focus on fostering growth, job creation, and socio-economic development aligns with its normative principles of promoting stability, prosperity, and human well-being.

Secondly, the EU's emphasis on migration and mobility in the SSF highlights its normative approach. Rather than solely focusing on security concerns related to migration, the EU here seeks to adopt a comprehensive approach that recognizes the potential positive impact of migration on Lebanon's development. This arguably reflects the EU's commitment to humanitarian values, human rights, and inclusivity.

Furthermore, the support expressed in the SSF for local governance and socio-economic development demonstrates its normative commitment to empowering local communities, enhancing democratic participation, and addressing socio-economic inequalities. The EU's engagement with civil society and promotion of transparency and anti-corruption measures further illustrate its normative aspirations.

Additionally, the EU's coordination efforts, joint programming, and engagement with other international partners in Lebanon showcase its commitment to multilateralism and

cooperation, which are central tenets of its normative framework. The EU's regional cooperation initiatives and support for regional integration processes highlight its normative pursuit of peaceful relations and collective action.

While realist elements can be observed in the EU's actions, such as the consideration of strategic interests and security concerns, the overall normative orientation of the EU's objectives, values, and approaches in Lebanon suggests that it operates primarily as a normative actor seeking to promote its principles and ideals, rather than pursuing purely self-interested realist calculations.

The Multi-Annual Indicative Programme

The Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) for EU-Lebanon cooperation focuses on three crucial priority areas: enhancing good governance and supporting reforms, strengthening the resilience of the economy, and promoting a green and sustainable recovery. These priorities align with key policy frameworks and agreements, including the Joint Communication on A Renewed Partnership in the Southern Neighbourhood, the Reform, Recovery, and Reconstruction Framework, and the IMF Staff-Level Agreement.

Lebanon is currently grappling with multiple crises inducing severe economic challenges, including a deep economic depression, widespread poverty, soaring unemployment rates, and significant emigration. To address these crises and meet the aspirations of the Lebanese people, the MIP underscores the urgent need for extensive economic and governance reforms. Striking a delicate balance, the program aims to promote good governance and reforms, rebuild an inclusive and resilient economy, and ensure a green and sustainable recovery.

The MIP's priority areas are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. They encompass enhancing good governance and supporting the reform agenda, strengthening the resilience of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and the agricultural sector, and fostering a green and sustainable recovery. Gender equality and women's empowerment are integral components, with dedicated support for women's leadership, workforce participation, and protection against violence. Once again human rights is not specifically mentioned, but the

The justification and context of the MIP shed light on the severe economic depression in Lebanon, exacerbated by factors like the COVID-19 pandemic, default on public debt, rapid currency devaluation, restricted access to savings, sudden removal of subsidies, and challenges in wheat imports. According to the World Bank's Lebanese Economic Monitor, Lebanon has witnessed the highest economic contraction globally, with elevated inflation, meagre government revenue, and escalating debt levels. Furthermore, the country shoulders the responsibility of hosting a significant number of refugees, further intensifying its vulnerability.

The prospects for economic recovery hinge on the stringent implementation of the IMF Staff-Level Agreement. Critical measures include restructuring the financial sector, reforming state-owned enterprises (especially in the energy sector), establishing transparent monetary and exchange rate systems, implementing sound fiscal policies, and combating corruption. However, Lebanon faces significant governance deficits, including subpar public services, corruption, inadequate infrastructure, policy instability, and limited access to financing. The judiciary encounters challenges in terms of integrity, independence, and resources, while access to justice remains compromised, particularly for women and children.

Lebanon's economy primarily relies on services, with limited contributions from industries and agriculture. MSMEs play a vital role but have been significantly impacted by the banking and electricity crises. The formal private sector has witnessed a decline in sales and employment, with women's representation remaining disproportionately low. Agriculture, covering a significant land area, serves as an essential source of income generation and resilience in rural areas. Transitioning to sustainable farming practices is imperative to address water scarcity and environmental degradation. Lebanon also faces risks from climate change, pollution, and degradation, which pose significant threats to natural resources, biodiversity, economic recovery, and public health. The malfunctioning power sector, heavily dependent on imported fuel oil and diesel, burdens the economy and contributes to environmental deterioration (Abdo et al, 2020).

In summary, the MIP sets out to tackle Lebanon's economic challenges by prioritizing governance reforms, building a resilient economy, and supporting green recovery. It acknowledges the challenging context in which Lebanon finds itself and underscores the need for comprehensive reforms to achieve sustainable development and overcome the prevailing crises.

An example of the MIP objectives can be found in the table below, which is adapted from the MIP (European Commission, 2022, p. 8).

Specific objective	*Indicators*
To strengthen and promote democracy and inclusive democratic processes	▪ Economic Intelligence Unit - Democracy Index

To promote advancement and empowerment of women	▪ Gender Development Index (GDI)
Expected results	*Indicators*
Improved inclusiveness of democratic process	▪ Number of EU EOM recommendations implemented
Key legislative reform and measures that protect women from all forms of violence enhanced	▪ Number of relevant gender-sensitive laws

The Multi-annual indicative programme compared to the Single Support Framework

The present section seeks to compare the SSF and the MIP to determine whether EU human rights policy is getting increasingly realist. As mentioned previously, the two frameworks have differing priorities, laid out for comparison in the table below, adapted from the SSF and the MIP.

SSF	MIP
Sector 1- Promoting growth and job creation	Priority area 1: Good governance and reforms
Sector 2- Fostering local governance and socio-economic development	Priority area 2: Inclusive and resilient economy
Sector 3- Promoting the Rule of Law, enhancing security and countering terrorism	Priority area 3: Green and sustainable recovery
- Complementary support for capacity development and institution building - Complementary support in favour of civil society	Support actions - In favour of civil society - Cooperation facility

The comparison between the Multi-Annual Indicative Programme (MIP) and the Single Support Framework (SSF) reveals a striking resemblance, indicating a significant overlap in their objectives and approaches. The MIP can be seen as a continuation and refinement of the SSF, building upon the foundations laid by its predecessor. Both frameworks prioritize important areas such as good governance, economic resilience, and sustainable recovery, demonstrating a continuity in the EU's priorities in Lebanon.

Through the MIP, the EU aims to address the severe economic challenges faced by Lebanon, including the deep economic depression, widespread poverty, and high unemployment rates. The program recognizes the urgent need for extensive economic and governance reforms to rebuild an inclusive and resilient economy. It emphasizes the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment, dedicating specific support to enhance women's leadership and workforce participation.

The MIP's objectives are closely aligned with key policy frameworks and agreements as laid out in the SSF, including for example the Joint Communication on A Renewed Partnership in the Southern Neighbourhood and the Reform, Recovery, and Reconstruction Framework (3RF). These frameworks reflect the EU's commitment to supporting Lebanon's development and recovery efforts.

Moreover, the MIP takes into account the unique challenges faced by Lebanon, such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, currency devaluation, and restricted access to savings. It recognizes the country's role as a host to a significant number of refugees, which adds to its vulnerability and necessitates additional support.

Furthermore, the MIP underscores the need for environmental sustainability and resilience in the face of climate change. It recognizes the challenges posed by pollution, water scarcity, and environmental degradation, and calls for a transition to sustainable farming practices and a shift towards cleaner and more efficient energy sources.

In summary, the MIP shares thematic similarities with the SSF. The MIP takes into account the evolving context and specific needs of Lebanon. Its objectives align with key policy frameworks and emphasize the importance of governance reforms, economic resilience, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. Overall, the MIP reinforces the EU's normative orientation and commitment to promoting human rights displayed in the SSF, rather than reflecting a distinct realist approach.

Apart from this thematic similarity, the two also share a distinct similarity in the financial framework. The similarity becomes evident when the two are compared side-to-side in a graph on the next page. This comparison demonstrates that the financial engagement of the EU regarding the promotion of human rights has mainly been influenced by events like the earlier mentioned COVID-19 pandemic or the Beirut port blast rather than by a changed perception of the international arena by the EU.

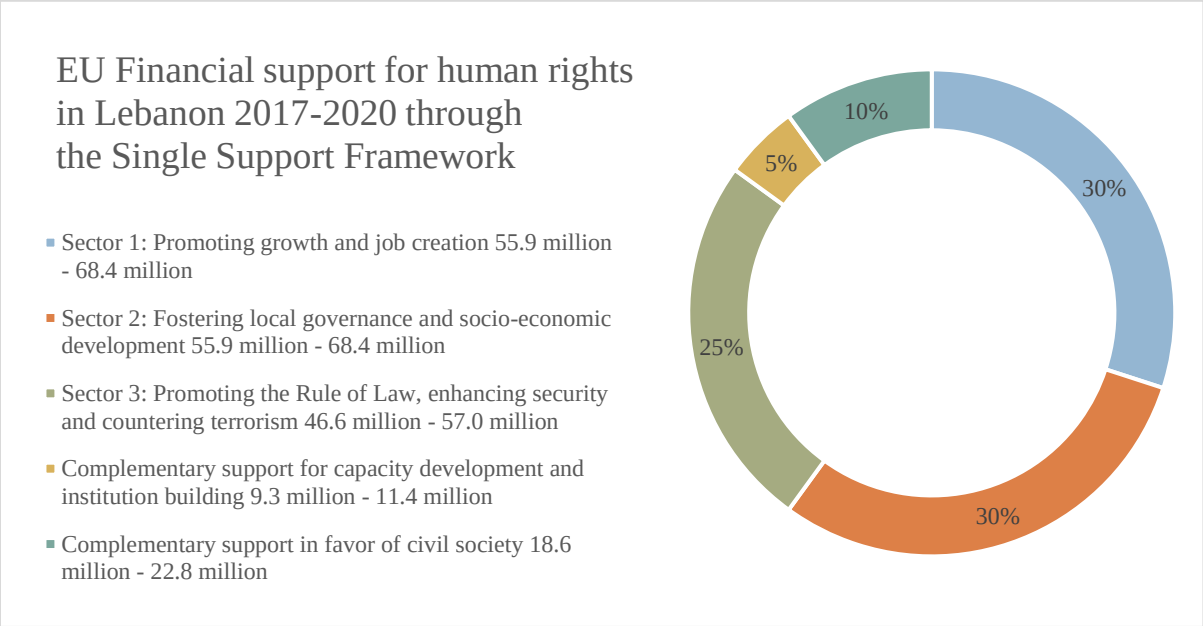

Figure 1 – EU Financial support for human rights in Lebanon 2017-2020 through the SSF. Graph made by the author based on data from the EU Aid explorer (European Commission, 2023)

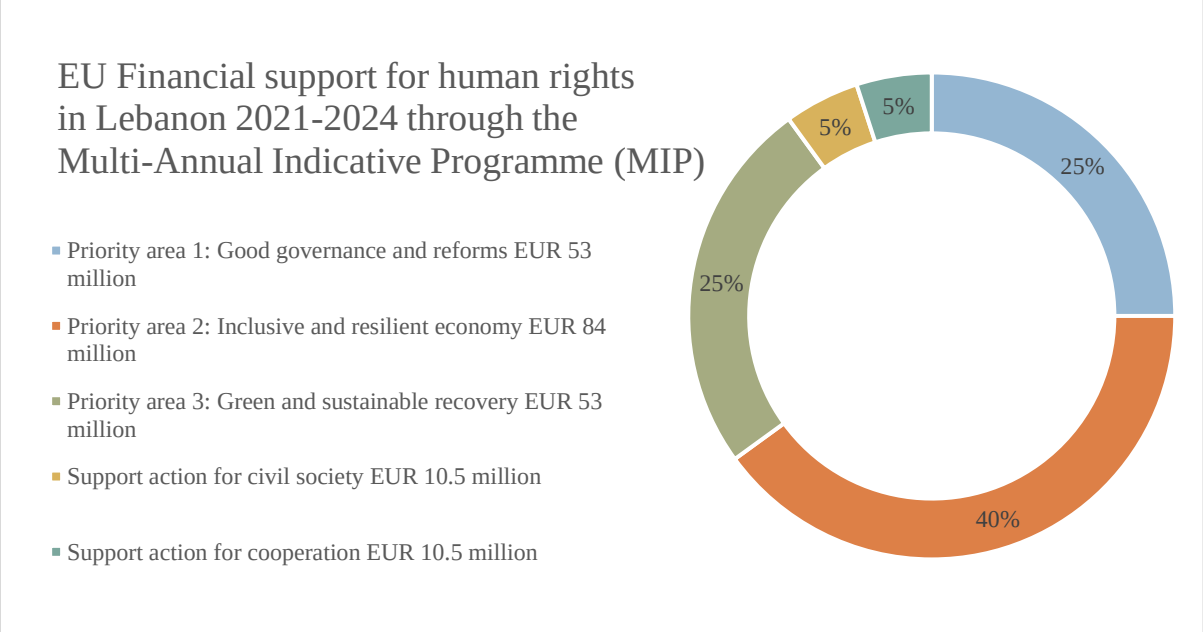

Figure 2 - EU Financial support for human rights in Lebanon 2021-2024 through the MIP. Graph made by the author based on data from the EU Aid explorer (European Commission, 2023)

Human security

There is only one factor that might indicate a shift towards realism in the EU human rights policy. The MIP incorporates human security. Human security is a multidimensional concept that resists the classic idea of security as a state-centric business. It recognizes that the well-being and safety of individuals are crucial aspects of security, complementing the traditional notion of state security. Human security places the individual at the centre and seeks to protect people from various threats and vulnerabilities that can undermine their lives, dignity, and livelihoods (Stivachtis, 2023).

According to some scholars this complements human rights as the idea of human rights is aimed to enhance citizens human security and they cover similar themes: freedom from violence, economic security etcetera (Stivachtis, 2023). Human rights provide the normative framework for human security by recognizing and protecting the fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals. Human security extends the concept of human rights by addressing the broader range of threats that individuals face beyond the traditional understanding of civil and political rights. While human rights focus on individual entitlements and state obligations, human security takes a holistic approach by emphasizing the need for collective action, cooperation, and policy interventions to address the complex and interrelated challenges to individuals' well-being and security (Ramcharan, 2002).

Other scholars claim that human security is more of a threat than a blessing for human rights. States can instrumentalise the concept of human security, hijack it and use it to further security measures that are infringing on people’s human rights. Instances where human security undermines human rights arise when *balancing* the need for security with the protection of

individual rights. Challenges include curtailment of civil liberties, discrimination and profiling, torture and ill-treatment, detention without due process, and surveillance infringing on privacy. Striking a delicate balance is crucial, prioritizing transparency, accountability, and the rule of law to uphold both security and rights (Howard-Hassman, 2012).

In the case of the MIP, human security can be considered a euphemism for state security. The MIP speaks about the human security in a context of terrorism, trafficking and illegal migration.

"Ensuring human security at individual and community level is a key priority in the current context. The instability in the whole region, compounded with an unprecedented economic crisis, is having a destabilising effect on the security situation in Lebanon. Petty and violent crimes are on the rise since 2019, as are terrorist threats. The management of land borders has improved recently, and now Lebanon intends to reinforce its maritime and air borders management to counter cross border crimes, including smuggling and trafficking." (European External Action Service, 2020, p. 8)

This is an example of where the EU has instrumentalised human rights language to address security concerns, indicating their reluctance to engage with human rights, but solely use the terminology to appear less concerned with their own interests.

Critical assessment of the European Union human rights funding in Lebanon

There are three main ways that EU development money can end up in Lebanon. Firstly, the EU puts out a call for projects, where interested NGOs can sign up to execute a project. A project like this is for example a 2021 project to ensure environmental protection for the Chouf national reserve. Secondly, the EU looks for an implementing partner for a certain project. For example, the EU wants to do a development project under the flag of the right to development. An implementing partner could be the UNDP, an intergovernmental organisation with development know-how as well as local implementing capacity. A final way the EU financially supports human rights in Lebanon is through bilateral support for larger NGOs. For example, in the protection and promotion of Human Rights, Human Rights Watch is an important partner. This organisation is internationally established and has a trustworthy track record, thus the EU simply trusts that the funds will end up in the right place.

HR-defenders & NGOs in Lebanon have played an active role in advocating for human rights and democratic reform in the country. The EU has been a key partner for many of these organizations, providing financial and political support (Youngs, 2020). However, there are concerns about the effectiveness of EU and its approach. The active HR-defenders and NGOs are often dependent on funding from the international community. The EU has specific wishes, rules and regulations for providing funding, enshrined in policy instruments such as the EU-Lebanon Association Agreement. This value-based approach in the provision of EU human rights support, exerts a strong influence over the NGOs and HR-Defenders that receive this support (Broberg & Sano, 2017). As a result, it also influences the EU human rights reputation (Lucarelli &

Fioramonti, 2009). In the context of Lebanon, several studies have examined the EU's human rights policy and its impact on local civil society. For example, Altan-Olcay & Icduygu (2012) conducted a study on EU support for civil society in Lebanon, finding that while the EU has provided significant funding for human rights organizations, there is a need for more effective coordination and communication between the EU and local actors. Others have analysed the EU's human rights policy in the context of Lebanon's refugee crisis, arguing that the EU's response has been inadequate and overly focused on security concerns (Facon, 2022).

Problems with EU funding in Lebanon

The reliance on donor funding, the EU being the largest donor in terms of value, has a significant impact on the programming and development policies of civil society organizations (CSOs) due to limited public government funds. The constraints imposed by project-based funding restrict the responses, interventions, and strategies of local organizations. Moreover, the power dynamics in partnerships between donors and CSOs often favour the donors, influencing project development and overall cooperation. The formal requirements set by donors, such as logistics, financial management, and result-based reporting, are seen by local actors as mechanisms for control rather than increased transparency.

Furthermore, (Abiyaghi et al., 2019) highlight that these dynamics may result in the imposition of human rights principles on local actors. While CSOs may adopt human rights language in their proposals and reports, the integration of these principles into their approach and internal practices is often lacking. As a consequence, many CSOs working on social justice fail to implement basic labour and social security benefits for their staff.

Although criticized for making organizations more logistically rigid and less responsive to contextual needs and opportunities, the trend of NGOization has created a need for ongoing and sustainable funding. This constant search for funding has intensified competition among local actors, with donors often favouring medium and large-sized organizations already in their networks or establishing new "local" organizations specifically for funding purposes. As a result, the proliferation of CSOs in Lebanon is seen as a fragmentation rather than a sign of a vibrant civil society.

The dominance of service-oriented organizations that provide social services and rights, coupled with the absence of a welfare state, contributes to a charity-oriented approach that reinforces sectarian and communal reflexes rather than a civil and civic spirit. This situation deviates from a fully integrated human rights-based approach and hinders the long-term development and policy impact of CSOs. Consequently, CSOs are often confined to an implementation role with limited influence on development and policy outcomes (AbiYaghi et al. 2020).

Additionally, the line between human rights support and humanitarian support in Lebanon is fading. Because of the continuing Lebanese overlapping crises, over 60 percent of the Lebanese population now live below the poverty line. A lot of these people are urban marginalised groups like Palestinians living in refugee camps, or Syrians that fled the war in their home country. Projects that supply these people with food or basic services like water and sanitation (WASH) is hardly human rights promotion, but humanitarian aid.

Local views of the EU human rights policy

During the next section I discuss the views of local human rights actors and stakeholders in the assessment of the EU human rights policy in Lebanon. I have firstly addressed the non-financial support of the European Union, which mainly translates into public policy. There are no official instances of the European Union being directly engaged in human rights defending in court, which is affirmed by the EUDEL interviewees. The EU's non-financial support consists of tweeting, demarchés, and openly supporting human rights in their policy efforts.

Although the Lebanese organisations generally recognized the importance of the EU non-financial support, they do not directly feel supported. This makes sense because the European Union does not directly engage in capacity building, technical assistance, training workshops, mentoring, and knowledge sharing platforms. The EU provides a platform and funding for these activities and then often partners with an implementing partner to actually execute these programmes (EU Delegation in Lebanon, 2022).

As a case study we can look at the role of the EU in the 'she leads' programme. The 'she leads' programme is a programme funded by the Netherlands, aimed at improving women's rights, but more broadly, aimed at improving the social, economic and political status of women in Lebanon. This programme is funded by Kingdom of the Netherlands but receives non-financial support from the EU. It is implemented by Plan International Netherlands, Defence for Children, African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) and Terre des Hommes. For this implementation they also included various local stakeholders and consultants of women's rights. Moufeeda Haidar, programme manager for Restless Development was involved in this project.

However, there are areas where we feel that the non-financial support from the EU falls short. Firstly, there can be a lack of tailored and context-specific support that addresses the specific challenges faced by local civil society organizations in Lebanon.

"The EU tweets about several programmes and human rights, but most of the official statements they make do not directly benefit the local organisations. Sure, they are contributing to the same goal, but what do we buy for a tweet by Ralph Tarraf [EU ambassador to Lebanon] on children's rights? Recently, the EU tweeted about their funding for a fund [TREF] which was set up to help the Lebanese children. They worked together with the Lebanese Ministry for Education and Higher Education. In my opinion, the government has failed their responsibility to actually help these children and they should just give this money to the NGOs. The government has not earned these people's trust and does not deserve it. In the meantime, there are a lot of NGOs doing great work in the realm of human rights that are structurally underfunded. (…) They could make serious impact with the money that these EU and UN people get paid." - Moufeeda Haidar (Restless Development)

This statement captures a general sentiment that the EU and other international organisations fail to shake off: too much of the funding ends up in the pockets of the international community. Although the statement can be put in perspective. In addition to that, according to the interviewees the EU also fails to do a good job in the public diplomacy surrounding this funding.

“Look, the main problem is that the EU is not selling their help well. Trust me, they put millions and millions of dollars in the Lebanese development. Way more than the Chinese or the Russian or any other foreign aid. But there is this perception here that human rights are somehow an impairment for development. The EU needs to engage more practically: fund development projects that people directly benefit from.” Interviewee 3 (Oxfam)

“If you compare the Chinese with the our [EU] money, they are just way more business. The Chinese don’t ask about human rights if they develop a project somewhere. They just offer their support to build a bridge or another large infrastructure project. You can’t pay for it? No problem, just sign here that if you still can’t pay for it in 30 years, the place will be ours. The EU comes here with all these intangible projects to reach these vague goals. A 15 minute cut on your commute between home and the city is just easier to rally behind than a project that ‘improves the long term societal and political integration of Syrian women’.” – Interviewee 2 (EUDEL)

“This is not to say that it doesn’t work or that the EU does useless work. The EU just does a – excusez le mot – shit job in showing it to the people. The Syrian women that actually participated in this project will probably be really grateful for their lives having improved. But then they only have capacity for .1 percent of these women. So the EU should focus on societal change, but then you will have to deal with this stakeholder that has proven completely useless in Lebanon, the government. It truly is a ‘damned if you do, damned if you don’t’situation – Interviewee 1 (Triangle, research)

The interviewees put the sentiment under words that is salient in the smaller NGOs: the EU does not fund the right NGOs and the NGO landscape is not democratic in Lebanon. Additionally, it is very overcrowded. This shift of responsibilities contributes to the NGOization in Lebanon.

NGOization

On the other hand, it is precisely this 'NGOization' that has actually created all these responsibilities (Abu-Assab et al., 2020). "NGOization" encapsulates the dynamic process of proliferating and elevating the prominence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) across various societal realms, encompassing the social, political, and economic spheres. In the specific context of Lebanon, NGOization has emerged as a noteworthy phenomenon, entailing a complex interplay of positive and negative implications (Gianni et al, 2021).

From an academic perspective, the surge of NGOization in Lebanon can be comprehended as a response to the shortcomings of state institutions in delivering essential services and meeting the diverse needs of the population. NGOs, originating both domestically and internationally, have assumed a crucial role in bridging these gaps, particularly in domains like social welfare, healthcare, education, and human rights advocacy. This upsurge has been propelled by diverse factors, including the weakening of state institutions, persisting political instability, and the influx of external funding dedicated to development and humanitarian endeavours. This NGOization arguably results in the Lebanese government taking less and less responsibility for societal needs and public services, which depoliticises pressing societal issues. As NGOs concentrate on providing targeted services or addressing specific concerns, there exists

a risk of diverting attention away from the underlying structural problems that necessitate comprehensive social and political transformations. In inadvertently becoming engaged in service provision, NGOs may inadvertently perpetuate the prevailing status quo, inadvertently perpetuating existing power dynamics rather than actively challenging them (Gianni et al., 2021).

Another significant challenge arises from the potential prevalence of donor-driven agendas and resulting dependency. Numerous NGOs in Lebanon heavily rely on external funding, frequently tied to specific project outcomes or the thematic priorities set by donors. Consequently, an environment may emerge wherein NGOs prioritize meeting the requirements of donors over genuinely addressing the needs and priorities of the local communities they aim to serve. Moreover, the competitive nature of fundraising activities may foster a fragmented and disjointed NGO landscape, characterized by duplicated efforts, inefficient resource allocation, and limited collaboration between organizations (Abu-Assab et al., 2020).

NGOization can also contribute to the professionalization of activism, potentially leading to a disconnect between NGOs and grassroots movements. As NGOs progressively institutionalize, adopting bureaucratic and professionalized frameworks, there is a risk of losing touch with the realities and demands of grassroots activism. Such a disconnect may generate a substantial gap between the agendas and priorities of established NGOs and the concerns and aspirations of marginalized communities. In Lebanon, there is an increasing number of consultancies that position themselves as forces for good, while actually mainly approaching the development sector as a profitable market.

“In Lebanon, most people can’t afford healthcare because it is privatised and expensive. NGOs have jumped into that hole, funded by donors with human rights or social development instruments. In practice this means for most people that if you need an ambulance, you call the red cross, rather than the emergency services.” – Interviewee 1

This also is indicative of another trend that is harmful to the human rights development sector – the overlap of humanitarian aid with human rights and the subsequent politicization of humanitarian aid. This is not a new trend (Fox, 2002), but in combination with the NGOization in Lebanon it can be seen as less and less incentive for the government to address root causes for the societal problems in Lebanon.

Furthermore, the proliferation of NGOs has led to an increasingly crowded yet ineffective civil society space, subsequently leading to fragmentation and intensified competition for limited resources. Limited coordination and cooperation among NGOs can undermine their collective impact and hamper their ability to effectively address systemic challenges. Cultivating effective networks and forging alliances, while simultaneously fostering a culture of collaboration, will become more and more important for maximizing the potential impact of civil society organizations in Lebanon.

In conclusion, while NGOization in Lebanon has played a pivotal role in addressing social and developmental gaps, it is not exempt from challenges. Depoliticization, donor-driven agendas, dependency, disconnection from grassroots movements, and fragmentation constitute some of the prominent issues associated with NGOization. Mitigating these challenges necessitates that NGOs maintain their independence, prioritize the needs of local communities,

foster collaboration, and actively engage in critical dialogue to address the underlying structural issues and promote enduring social transformation.

Moreover, the accessibility of non-financial support can be a concern. Limited information and communication about available resources, training opportunities, and mentoring programs can make it difficult for organizations to take full advantage of the support offered by the EU. Transparent and user-friendly mechanisms for accessing non-financial support would greatly enhance its impact and reach within the local human rights sector.

Additionally, while training and capacity building are essential, they need to be accompanied by ongoing support and mentorship to ensure their long-term effectiveness. One-off workshops or short-term programs may not be sufficient for sustainable impact. Continuous engagement, follow-up, and mentoring are crucial for translating the acquired skills and knowledge into tangible outcomes and sustained action.

"Regarding the appreciation of EU funding, I have mixed feelings, but I feel it has always been this way. I mean we depend on the EU support, but we'd rather we didn't (…). It gives an advantage to the larger players in the development field and creates unhealthy competition. Also the monitoring and evaluation demands: there is no way a small organisation like ours [Skoun] can comply with those with the resources we get. – Michelle Wazan

Local human rights actors have diverse perceptions of EU funding. Some organizations appreciate the funding as it enables them to carry out vital projects and initiatives addressing human rights issues in Lebanon. However, others express concerns about the conditionalities

attached to the funding, which may restrict their autonomy and hinder their ability to address sensitive or politically charged topics freely.

The specific activities, initiatives, or programs funded by the EU vary, but they generally aim to contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights. These may include projects related to legal reform, advocacy and awareness campaigns, capacity building for civil society organizations, and support for marginalized communities. By focusing on these areas, the funded activities contribute to raising awareness, fostering dialogue, and empowering individuals and communities to assert their rights.

Unfortunately, local civil society organizations face several challenges in adequately accessing EU support. Firstly, when it comes to non-financial support, there is a lack of transparent and accessible information about available resources, application processes, and evaluation criteria. This lack of clarity makes it difficult for organizations to navigate the system and present competitive proposals. Additionally, the bureaucratic procedures and lengthy approval processes associated with EU funding can discourage smaller and grassroots organizations from even attempting to apply (Facon, 2023).

Financial support also poses challenges for local civil society. The distribution of funds often favours larger, more established organizations with greater capacity to comply with complex reporting requirements and administrative burdens. This can lead to a concentration of resources in the hands of a few, limiting the participation and diversity of the human rights sector in Lebanon. Moreover, the reliance on short-term funding cycles makes it difficult for organizations to plan and sustain long-term projects effectively.

While EU funding has played a role in facilitating capacity building efforts, there are concerns about its sustainability and long-term effectiveness. The reliance on project-based funding limits the ability of organizations to engage in strategic planning and invest in long-term organizational development. Furthermore, the funding cycles can create a dependency mindset, where organizations focus on securing short-term grants rather than building sustainable structures for their work. Therefore, it is crucial to explore ways to enhance the sustainability and long-term impact of EU-funded initiatives.

Blurring line between human rights, humanitarian aid and for-profit development

The distinction between human rights and humanitarian aid in Lebanon has become increasingly blurred as the country grapples with successive crises. Lebanon's ongoing economic and social rights violations, particularly regarding the right to a decent living wage, have exacerbated the situation. Not only does Lebanon fail to enforce decent wage standards across organizations, but even the state itself falls short in providing adequate remuneration. In the wake of the economic crisis and subsequent rampant inflation, public sector employees, including civil officers and military personnel, receive salaries well below the poverty line. As a result, they are compelled to seek additional employment or establish side businesses to make ends meet (Guechati & Chami, 2020).

The projects supported by the EU in Lebanon aimed at building a resilient economy, often fall short in effectively assisting the expanding population increasingly reliant on food aid. The Lebanese state, citing limited capacity, evades assuming responsibility for this issue. Consequently, the burden of addressing the growing food insecurity falls upon NGOs, while the

EU expects these funds to contribute to human rights promotion and social development objectives. However, the pursuit of human rights and social development goals can appear secondary when individuals struggle daily to secure basic sustenance (Abu-Assab et al., 2020).

In essence, Lebanon's persistent crises have eroded the distinction between human rights and humanitarian aid. The country's repeated violations of economic and social rights, including the right to a decent living wage, have created a precarious environment. The EU-funded projects that aim to foster a resilient economy often fail to address the increasing number of people reliant on food assistance. Meanwhile, the Lebanese state avoids assuming responsibility, leaving NGOs to bear the burden. Consequently, the pursuit of human rights and social development goals is overshadowed by the pressing need for individuals to secure their daily sustenance. At the same time, for-profit development NGOs proliferate of this phenomenon (Van Wassenhove & Parsa, 2023).

In conclusion, the phenomenon of NGOization in Lebanon has brought about both positive and negative implications. While NGOs have played a crucial role in filling the gaps left by inadequate state institutions, there are challenges associated with depoliticization, donor-driven agendas, dependency, disconnection from grassroots movements, and fragmentation within the civil society space. Mitigating these challenges requires maintaining the independence of NGOs, prioritizing local community needs, fostering collaboration, and engaging in critical dialogue to address underlying structural issues. Furthermore, accessing non-financial support and ensuring its effectiveness requires transparent mechanisms and ongoing support and mentorship. The blurring line between human rights and humanitarian aid in Lebanon highlights

the urgent need to address economic and social rights violations and the growing food insecurity, which overshadow the pursuit of human rights and social development objectives.

Conclusion

The European Union (EU) has developed a comprehensive human rights policy that aims to promote, protect, and enforce human rights both within its member states and in its external relations. The EU's human rights policy is rooted in the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. These documents form the basis of the EU's commitment to values such as human rights and democracy.

In the context of Lebanon, the EU's human rights policy is implemented through a range of instruments and initiatives, with two salient versions of a similar funding instrument: The European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) and the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). These two main funding instruments that support the EU's engagement in Lebanon, the ENI being used up until 2020 and the NDICI replacing and updating the ENI afterwards. These instruments aim to promote regional stability, security, and human rights through various programs and projects.

The EU's human rights policy in Lebanon is also supported by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIHRD). This instrument focuses on supporting civil society projects and initiatives that promote democracy, human rights, and fundamental freedoms throughout the world, but are also applied in Lebanon.

The EU's human rights policy is reflected in the 2020-2024 action plan on human rights and democracy, which outlines five focus areas: protecting and empowering individuals, building resilient and inclusive societies, promoting a global system for human rights and

democracy, harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges posed by new technologies, and addressing emerging challenges through coordination and stakeholder dialogue. These focus areas demonstrate the EU's commitment to human rights, democracy, and with that establish the EU as a normative actor.

Although the EU applies a wide range of instruments with different approaches, the implementation of the EU's human rights policy in Lebanon faces challenges and criticisms. Critics argue that the EU's policy has been inconsistent and at times subordinated to security concerns. For example, the provision of military aid to the Lebanese armed forces despite concerns about their human rights record, has raised questions about the EU's commitment to human rights in Lebanon. The complexities of the Lebanese political system, characterized by a "dual power" situation and sectarian fragmentation, also pose challenges to the EU's efforts to promote human rights and democracy in the country.

In evaluating the EU's human rights policy in Lebanon, different theoretical perspectives can be applied. The EU's approach to promoting and protecting human rights and democracy in Lebanon can be seen as a combination of normative and realist foreign policy. While the EU strives to promote its norms and values, its actions are also influenced by realist considerations of power, security, and strategic interests. The EU's engagement in Lebanon can be analysed through the lenses of balancing, buck-passing, and bandwagoning, which are strategies adopted by states to address security challenges and pursue their interests when a realist lens is applied to international relations.

The EU's engagement in Lebanon through a normative lens is shaped by constructivism, where actions are influenced by ideas and norm-giving factors. The EU aims to disseminate

values through norms, particularly human rights, democracy, and economic prosperity. There is a debate about whether the EU is a normative actor diffusing universal norms or a civilizing power spreading its interpretation of norms and values. This leaves the conclusion if the EU is a normative actor in Lebanon open: it is impossible to assess whether Lebanon benefits from EU human rights policies and values the same norms as the EU, because it is impossible to compare the value systems if the universality of these values is in question.

The universality of human rights is contested both by leaders from developing nations, accusing leaders of developed countries using it as a political tool and scholars questioning the genuine commitment of state elites to Western human rights norms. There is a need to critically examine the concept of universality and the influence of Western thinking on state elites versus popular perceptions and attitudes toward human rights in specific countries.

Finally, it is important to consider that the EU's foreign policy is not solely driven by normative power but also by complex interests that reflect various dynamics. Human rights policy can be instrumental in securing economic and security interests, and the EU's policies are influenced by a myriad of interests from individual member states. The comparison between the funding instruments for these human rights policies also are convincing evidence of either a normative or realist power EU. The comparison over time does not indicate a distinctive shift towards realism. Thus, the EU's human rights policy in Lebanon is a combination of normative and realist approaches.

With respect to the EU human rights policy in Lebanon in the normative power Europe debate, the EU utilizes diplomatic and economic power, employing conditionality and providing financial and non-financial support to Lebanese organizations. However, cooperation from the

Lebanese government and challenges posed by other donors impact the effectiveness of EU human rights promotion. The EU engages with civil society organizations and human rights defenders, reflecting its normative commitment. Financial support focuses on stability, peace, democracy, and sustainable development. Overall, the EU human rights policy aims to be normative, but can sometimes be interpreted as realpolitik.

The critical assessment of EU human rights funding in Lebanon reveals both strengths and challenges. The NGOization phenomenon has led to the proliferation of NGOs, bridging gaps left by weak state institutions. However, depoliticization, donor-driven agendas, dependency, and disconnection from grassroots movements pose significant challenges. The blurring line between human rights and humanitarian aid further complicates the situation. Accessing non-financial support and ensuring its effectiveness require transparent mechanisms and ongoing support. To maximize impact, NGOs must maintain independence, prioritize local needs, foster collaboration, and engage in critical dialogue. Addressing economic and social rights violations and food insecurity is crucial to promoting human rights and social development in Lebanon.

In conclusion, the EU presents itself as a normative actor promoting human rights and democracy in Lebanon. The actual impact and effectiveness of its policies are harder to assess: neither local perceptions nor the EU policy documents can provide a satisfying answer. The EU's engagement is influenced by both normative and realist considerations, and the perceptions and interests of local actors in Lebanon are not one-on-one translatable into the normative-realist dichotomy of foreign policy.

Discussion

The research conducted on the EU's human rights policy in Lebanon has attempted to shed light on several important aspects of the EU's approach and its impact on the country. However, it has also revealed certain challenges and limitations in understanding the dynamics of EU foreign policy and its normative power in the region.

One significant finding is the EU's preference for being perceived as a normative actor rather than pursuing explicit foreign policy goals. This is evident in their foreign policy documents, which emphasize normative principles and values. By presenting themselves as a force of good, the EU aims to avoid being seen as engaging in political interference in a sovereign nation like Lebanon. The EU's desire to be perceived as normative perhaps epitomises their perception of Chinese funding of infrastructure projects in Africa, which the EU undoubtedly sees as a more realist approach. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the idea of universality in human rights is contested, and different nations and societies hold different perspectives on norms.

An area that could have been explored further in the research is a comparison between EU aid and other forms of foreign aid. Examining the EU's human rights policy in the context of different aid sources could provide valuable insights and a broader perspective on the EU's role in Lebanon. This approach would help contextualize the EU's human rights policy and assess its impact more effectively.

Furthermore, the research highlights the influence of Lebanese internal affairs and global events on the EU's human rights policy. The port explosion and subsequent economic crisis, as well as the global COVID-19 pandemic, have shaped the EU's approach to Lebanon. However,

geopolitical shifts like the US pivot away from the Middle East or the Chinese One Belt One Road initiative do not appear to have a significant impact on the EU's external human rights policy, at least not explicitly documented. This observation further supports the notion of the EU as a bureaucratic and technocratic entity that carries on with its policies regardless of geopolitical shifts.

One aspect that emerged from my personal experience researching in Lebanon is the ambiguity of Lebanese nationals towards the Lebanese society. In my conversations with Lebanese friends, they often expressed their wish to get out, because they feel like Lebanon induces a sense of hopelessness and lack of opportunities for prosperity. A documentary film called ‘Anxious in Beirut’ that I saw recently epitomised this feeling by saying there’s only two options in the life of a young Lebanese: *tabout aw tayyara* – a coffin or a plane. The dependency on foreign aid to provide basic services fits in well with this bleak image, as it sustains a reliance on the development sector and the large international community present in the country. While the EU's projects may appear to contribute positively, it is important to question their long-term sustainability and the potential unintended consequences of this dependency. I think this is more the direction I set out to research in.

The presence of millions of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, without the country having the capacity to sustain them, further complicates the situation. The EU's involvement in Lebanon is undoubtedly influenced by the need to address the humanitarian crisis and support the country's stability – which was what I set out to discover.

Reflecting on the research process, I acknowledge the challenge of consolidating various pieces of research into coherent literature of this size. The thesis touched on different aspects,

including descriptive analysis of the EU's human rights policy, an assessment of the EU's aid in Lebanon, and the exploration of the alternative perspectives and implications. Sometimes these independent parts did not form a sufficient whole. Additionally, the interview data was not particularly relevant for addressing the questions I set out to answer. I wish I could have given my interviewees more platform, their openness and criticism would have deserved that. Despite the difficulties faced, the research contributes to the understanding of the EU's human rights policy in Lebanon, the normative power Europe debate and the perception of EU human rights funding in Lebanon. It hopefully opens avenues for further exploration and analysis.

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