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The European Union Foreign Policy: voting cohesion through Europeanization of the Nordic countries and the Netherlands in the UN General Assembly, 1993-2018¹

A Política Externa da União Europeia: coesão de votação através da Europeização dos países nórdicos e dos Países Baixos na Assembleia Geral da ONU, 1993-2018

La Política Exterior de la Unión Europea: cohesión de votación a través de la Europeización de los países nórdicos y los Países Bajos en la Asamblea General de la ONU, 1993-2018

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Summary

This article examines the voting patterns of Nordic countries and the Netherlands in the UNGA, highlighting their longstanding alignment. Notably, Norway and Iceland are not part of the

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European Union, which has been enhancing its foreign policy coherence since 1993. The central focus is to investigate if this integration has led to a divergence between EU member states and non-members. By calculating the voting cohesion rate among these countries in the UNGA from 1993 to 2021, the article found no significant variation in the cohesion rate, suggesting that European integration has not ended their historic alignment.

Keywords: Middle powers; European Union; United Nations General Assembly; Common Foreign Policy; Nordic Countries.

Resumo

Este artigo examina os padrões de votação dos países nórdicos e dos Países Baixos na AGNU, destacando seu alinhamento. Vale ressaltar que Noruega e Islândia não fazem parte da União Europeia, que tem aprimorado sua coerência na política externa desde 1993. O foco central é investigar se essa integração levou a uma divergência entre os Estados membros da UE e os não membros. Ao calcular a taxa de coesão de votação entre esses países na AGNU de 1993 a 2021, o artigo não encontrou variação significativa na taxa de coesão, sugerindo que a integração europeia não encerrou seu histórico alinhamento.

Palavras-chave: Potências intermediárias; União Europeia; Assembleia Geral das Nações Unidas; Política Externa Comum; Países Nórdicos.

Resumen

Este artículo examina los patrones de votación de los países nórdicos y los Países Bajos en la AGNU, destacando su alineación duradera. Es importante señalar que Noruega e Islandia no forman parte de la UE, la cual ha estado fortaleciendo su coherencia en política exterior desde 1993. El enfoque central es investigar si esta integración ha llevado a una divergencia entre los estados miembros de la UE y los no miembros. Al calcular la tasa de cohesión de votación entre estos países en la AGNU (1993-2021), el artículo encontró que no ha habido una variación significativa en la tasa de cohesión, lo que sugiere que la integración europea no ha acabado con su alineación histórica.

Palabras llave: Potencias medias; Unión Europea; Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas; Política Exterior Común; Países Nórdicos.





Introduction

This article seeks to complement the work initiated by Laatikainen (2003, 2006). The author questions the impact of the European Union's (EU) foreign policy on the cohesion of the votes of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden) and the Netherlands in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). The Nordic countries and the Netherlands historically voted very similarly in the General Assembly, with the Nordic countries constituting a formal group named the "Nordic Council". Through this group, the Nordic countries coordinated their votes and published joint declarations, seeking to join forces to increase their capacity to act within the United Nations (UN). If it is true that the Nordic Council seeks to harmonize its positions in the UNGA with the EU's foreign policy, this is a process that the literature refers to as Europeanization⁴. The Nordic countries and the Netherlands were selected because they are the traditional European middle powers⁵, in the words of Laatikainen (2006, 3), they "are foremost among the so-called good guys club which also includes Canada and Australia." The countries mentioned have held this position for several decades. Do Laatikainen's (2006) conclusions still hold after 18 years?

Iceland and Norway opted out of joining the EU⁶, while Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and the Netherlands decided to become member states of the bloc. In the last three decades, the European Union has deepened its integration process and expanded its prerogatives in many areas. In 1993, with the Treaty of Maastricht, it was agreed that the member states of the bloc should seek common positions in international forums and thus harmonize their foreign policy. This significant progress paved the way for deeper integration in subsequent years, ultimately reaching its apex with the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009. This pivotal agreement established a dedicated diplomatic service for the EU, bolstering the bloc's influence and representation at the UN.

4 This is not the only way Europeanization is characterized. As pointed out by Copsey (2015), Europeanization may also refer to a process in which the EU member states gradually adopt the EU's practices and procedures, even when they are not obliged to by the EU regulations and directives.

5 The classification of Iceland's status as a middle power is a topic of debate. While some authors, like Laatikainen (2006), emphasize foreign policy behavior over material capabilities and regard Iceland as a middle power, others, such as Thorhallsson (2018), classify it as a small country.

6 Norway decided not to participate in the EU in two different referenda, in 1972 and in 1994. In both referenda, the "no" option won by a small margin. Iceland submitted a membership application in 2008, but due to government changes, decided to suspend it by 2013. Both countries hold disagreements over the common fisheries policy and resist the idea of surrendering "their waters to supranational bodies" (Thorhallsson 2015, 47).





These institutional changes were driven by the recognition that the numerous challenges posed by the international system could be more effectively addressed through unified efforts within the bloc. Authors, such as Farrell (2006) and Birnberg (2009), have provided compelling evidence of the European Union member states' remarkable cohesion in their voting within the General Assembly. Based on this keen observation and the notable cohesiveness among the Nordic countries and the Netherlands, this article's question arises: has the strengthening of the Common Foreign Policy of the European Union led to a decline in the voting unity of the Nordic countries and the Netherlands in the United Nations General Assembly?

Laatikainen (2006) carried out a similar analysis, but the research developed by the author only until 2003, that is, it does not include the recent strengthening of the Common Foreign Policy of the European Union. In addition, other authors (Smith 2017; Lucas 2012) were more concerned with solving the question of cohesion of votes among members of the EU and not between member and non-member countries. Thus, there is a gap in the literature that this article wants to fill. The working hypothesis is that the cohesion of the votes of the Nordic countries and the Netherlands in the United Nations General Assembly remained stable over time, 18 years after the original Laatikainen (2006) research. This would happen because the position of the EU in the General Assembly is similar to the multilateralist positions that the Nordic middle powers had in the post-World War II period. Moreover, Norway, even though not an EU member state, coordinates its foreign policy with the Common Foreign Policy of the European Union (Hillion 2019). And, in the case of Iceland, it coordinates with the other Nordic countries, which in turn are influenced by the EU's preferred position (Thorhallsson 2018).

In this article, it was calculated the cohesion rate of the Nordic countries and the Netherlands through the General Assembly votes between 1993 and 2021. The time frame for this study is defined from the signing of the Maastricht Treaty to the most recent year for which the dataset was fully available. Within this time limit, despite some oscillations, no expressive variation was found in the rate. Demonstrating that these countries maintained their similar voting pattern even with the difference in the issue of membership and the strengthening of the European Union's foreign policy.

The Nordic countries and the Netherlands individual adherence rate to the majority position of the group is also calculated, in the same conditions as the





group cohesion rate. All countries maintained high adherence to the majority's preference, as the rate only oscillated between 90% to 100%. Also, Norway and Iceland did not present a pronounced downturn in their cohesion rate after the European Union increased its efforts to coordinate its member states' foreign policy. Although a small decrease in Iceland's adherence to the EU can be observed after 2010, it remains more aligned with the majority's preference than Sweden.

Apart from the introduction and conclusion, this article is structured into four sections: middle powers, where the concept and definition of this category will be worked on; Nordic countries and the Netherlands at the United Nations, an analysis of the history of how these countries position themselves within the institution; European Union foreign policy, a historical recapitulation and analysis of the cohesion within the bloc; methodology and results, presenting how we conducted our research, and our findings.

Middle Powers

Middle powers can be defined through the intersection of four categories: material capacity; foreign policy; systemic role; and identity⁷ (Laatikainen 2006). When examining the material capabilities of a middle power, metrics such as gross domestic product (GDP), per capita GDP, territory size, population, and military spending are considered. The aim is to identify countries with capabilities lower than those of the great powers, but which still have relevant resources and are close to the great powers (Holbraad 1984).

Thus, the middle powers are in a privileged position where they do not represent a threat to the great powers, and they are not expected to carry the weight of great responsibilities in the international system. At the same time, they have sufficient material capabilities to conduct a foreign policy that meets their interests and to be efficiently present at all international forums they wish. Thus, when mentioning the situation of the middle powers at the San Francisco conference, which created the UN, Laatikainen (2006, 71) states that “unlike smaller powers that were exposed and vulnerable, middle powers had options, and they chose to pursue a multilateralism reflective of the ideals of liberal internationalism”.

⁷ Due to editorial space limitations, we are not able to fully address the differences between middle and great powers or to compare their foreign policy strategies. For further information on this topic, we recommend Navari (2016) and Onea (2021).





The characteristics of the foreign policy of a middle power are based on multilateralism, support for International Organizations (IOs), creation of consensus and bridges between different parties, and diplomacy based on technical knowledge (Laatikainen 2006; Park 2022). Middle powers use their intermediary material capacities and their positions in the IOs as a way of building legitimacy.

In addition to the search for legitimacy, the middle powers see the International Organizations as effective mechanisms to contain the great powers through the creation of regimental rules. IOs are also used as coalition-building sites. Coalitions can help maintain the *status quo*, constrain the actions of the great powers, or sometimes change international norms for the benefit of intermediary countries (Hurrell 2000). As asserted by Cox (1989) the main objective of these countries is to guarantee their national security through the maintenance of global stability, in this way, they can be essential components for the maintenance of a hegemonic order.

Among this group of countries, there is some diversity, the main division being between traditional middle powers and emerging middle powers. The traditional middle powers, on which the article focuses, are countries with consolidated, stable, egalitarian democracies and with low regional influence (Joordan 2003). These countries seek to preserve the status quo, absorb the idea of a “good global citizen” and build identities that are different from the great powers in their region. These middle powers highlight the importance of the global commons and contribute to peace missions, humanitarian aid, and the strengthening of human rights. Prominent examples of traditional middle powers include Australia, Canada, Norway, and Sweden.

On the other hand, the emerging middle powers are semi-peripheral countries, materially unequal, with young democracies, and have influence in their region. These countries, despite supporting the organization of the international system in general, seek to reform it. The emerging middle powers favor regional organizations and seek to build identities different from the weaker countries in their region (Joordan 2003). Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, and South Africa have garnered recognition as prominent emerging middle powers.

Other characteristics can also be used to create subdivisions within these categories. Some countries have a foreign policy that is more focused on specific niches where they can concentrate the application of their resources, such as Norway, while others have a more diffuse attitude, such as Sweden. The middle powers can also be divided into those who take risks in their foreign policy,





who take positions more firmly (Sweden), and those who prefer to act behind the scenes seeking consensus (Norway). Furthermore, these countries can be classified as having a combative (Malaysia) or accommodating (Argentina) policy towards the United States (US), and whether they have a regional (Malaysia) or multilateral/systemic (Argentina) focus (Cooper 1997).

Regarding the systemic role category, the middle powers are those that are “too big to play no role in the balance of forces, but too small to keep the forces in balance by itself” (Hurrell 2000, 3). These countries, and their leaders, seek to influence the international system through small coalitions or International Organizations (Keohane 1969; Jones 2019). Middle powers are also able to assume some responsibilities in maintaining the system. This can be observed in their participation in the United Nations peacekeeping missions or as non-permanent members of the Security Council (Palou 1993).

Finally, in the last category, identity plays a key role in determining middle power behavior. According to this perspective, a State assumes the role of a middle power only when it perceives itself as such, sparking a process of self-identification. This process involves introducing the concept of middle power into the national elites and intellectual circles, eventually finding expression in official speeches and foreign policy documents. As Wilkins (2019, 54) notes, “an identity is brought into being not only by policy acts that can be said to conform with such an “ideal-type” middle power model, but also by noting when policymakers actually justify their actions in relation to the state being a middle power.”

Some countries have their status as middle powers disputed, such as: Belgium; Israel; and Thailand. While these countries have the material capabilities to be considered in this category, they don't behave in the international system as it is expected of middle powers. Belgium historically sees itself as a small power, self-limiting its material capabilities (Jacques, Swielande, and D'estmael 2022). Consequently, the country fails to fulfill a crucial criterion of a middle power: self-conception, which essentially requires acknowledging its status as a middle power (Swieland 2019). Israel, despite having significant economic and military power, is too dependent on the United States and on the Jewish diaspora support to be considered a middle power (Merom 2022). In the context of Thailand, internal conflicts have significantly impeded the country's capacity to engage effectively in regional and global forums. These ongoing internal tensions have transformed Thailand's foreign policy from a means of asserting its position in





the international system to a tool primarily utilized to influence domestic political dynamics (Freedman 2022).

Besides, there is no definitive consensus on which countries should be considered middle powers, and there may never be. Scholars have taken different approaches to define them. While some have focused on assessing material capabilities (Holbrood 1984), others have emphasized the systemic impact of a country (Keohane 1969). Paiva and Mesquita (2022) have adopted Ruvalcaba's (2019) World Power Index, in order to classify countries as middle powers or not. In line with the objective of this article, which is to reevaluate Laatikainen's (2003, 2006) conclusions in light of the EU's strengthened foreign policy, we adopted the author's view of which European countries could be listed as middle powers - the Nordic countries and the Netherlands. It is still a heterogeneous group, composed of two non-members of the EU, Norway and Iceland, and four EU members, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and the Netherlands. The next section examines their participation at the United Nations.

The Nordic Countries and the Netherlands in the United Nations: Active Engagement and Changing Dynamics

The Nordic countries and the Netherlands have a history of support and activism for the multilateral actions of the United Nations since the creation of the institution:

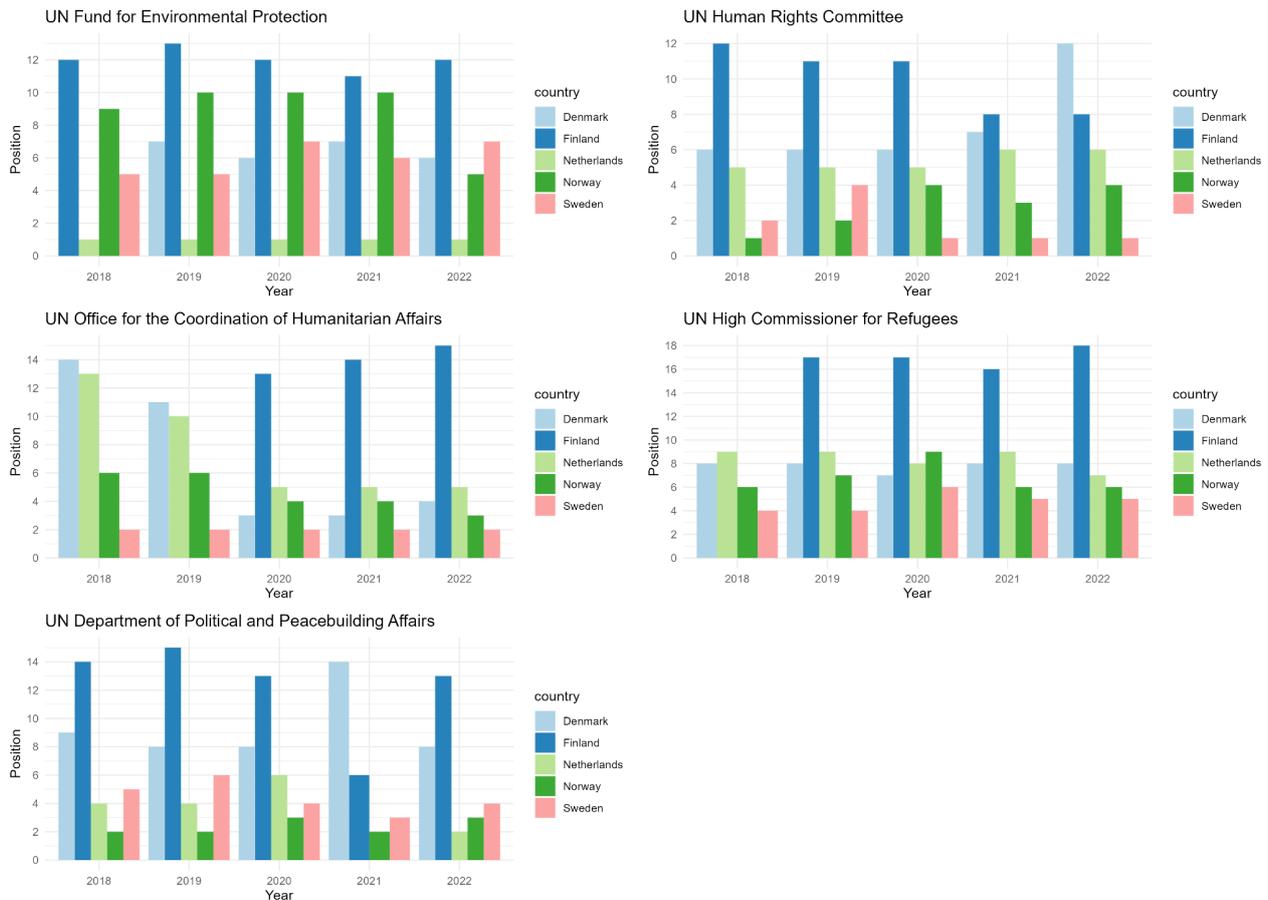
The Dutch and Nordics are frequent troop contributors to peacekeeping operations as well as innovators in the areas of peace-building and civil police functions; they have for many years met or exceeded UN development assistance targets; they have been ardent promoters of human rights protections within the United Nations system; and they enthusiastically embraced and integrated the concept of "sustainable development" (Laatikainen 2006, 73)

The prominent positions of Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and the Netherlands in the United Nations can be seen from their financial contributions to different initiatives of the institution. These contributions are ranked in the graph below: the position was only added if the country was among the top twentieth largest contributors for that committee. The data refers to the years (2018-2022):





Figure 1: Nordic and Dutch relevance in the funding of UN committees (2018-2022)



Source: own elaboration, with data from the UN committees' annual reports (UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs 2023; UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2018, 2023; UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2022; UN Human Rights Committee 2023; UN Fund for Environmental Protection 2023).

Another relevant aspect of the Nordic countries and the Netherlands is the similarity of their economic and social indexes and their positions in the United Nations. These nations are classified as liberal democracies by the V-Dem Institute (2023) and are positioned among the world's most socially developed and affluent societies, as well as, among the least gender-unequal countries (United Nations Development Programme, 2022). The Nordic countries not only cooperated but coordinated their positions in the UN, aligning their votes as a way of joining forces and asserting their positions. There was an informal duty to consult the other Nordic partners if the country wanted to change its voting position, whether there was a common position agreed upon. It was also usual for these countries to issue joint declarations (Laatikainen 2003).

The Nordic group continues to be active in 2023. As an example, one area of continuous cooperation is climate action. In 2019, the Nordic group countries issued a joint declaration stating their ambition to provide climate leadership



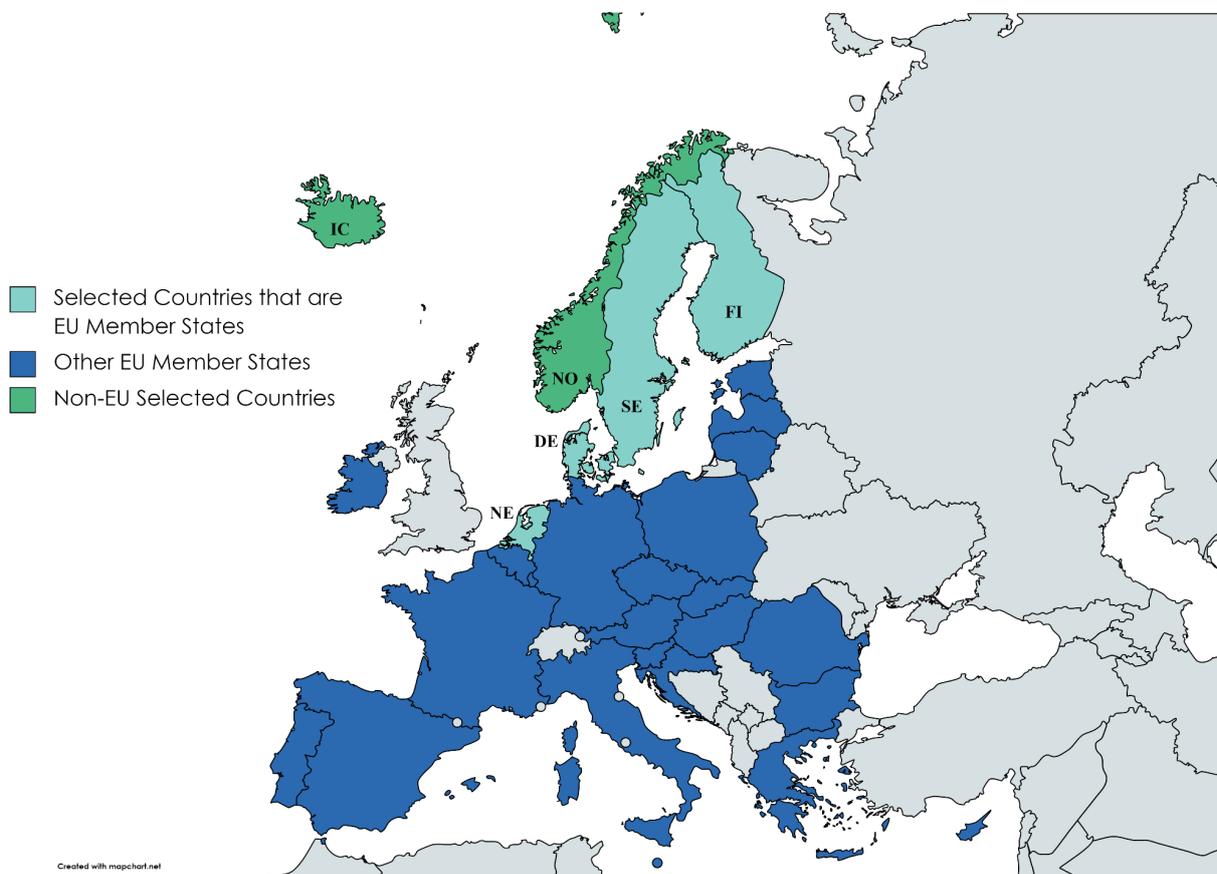


globally, and to cooperate to achieve their Paris Agreement national goals. Also, the members of the group which participates in the EU (Sweden, Denmark, and Finland) traditionally consult with each other before the EU’s Council of Ministers’ meeting to align their declarations and votes in the institution (Andersen 2021).

Although these countries continued to adopt similar positions in the UN General Assembly in the 1990s, Laatikainen (2003) identified many changes in the way the Nordic group positioned itself in the United Nations: the Nordic group’s meetings no longer aimed to align their votes in the UNGA, but to share information about the position of the European Union as a whole; Iceland and Norway lost an important forum without joining a powerful club like the EU, as the EU membership takes precedence over participation in the United Nations groups (Smith 2017).

These two countries, compared to their Nordic partners, began to act more as spectators of the decisions taken by the EU than active builders of a coalition that served their interests. Both countries have to live with an economic and political giant in their neighborhood, with Iceland being especially sensitive to trade with the EU (Hilmarrsson 2021), without having a formal voice in formulating the bloc’s positions.

Figure 2: Map of selected middle powers and the European Union



Source: own elaboration.





Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands, being members of the European Union, have to consider the institution's Common Foreign Policy. While this is not the case for Norway and Iceland, both countries have opted to assign several treaties, especially in the economic arena, with the EU. As a result, they are members of the European Economic Area, an extension of the EU's Single Market. The economic security and opportunity of integration with great European powers, the possibility to influence European politics, and to use the EU as a platform to impact global affairs, represented the high costs of being an outsider (Gron, Nedergaard, and Wivel 2015). For these reasons, these countries seem to be interesting cases to analyze whether their cohesion in the UNGA was affected by the strengthening of the European Union's foreign policy. This analysis will be carried on in the next section.

The European Union's Foreign Policy and its Cohesion in International Forums

The EU's foreign policy is formulated by its members, and despite the prominence of great European powers within the EU, the middle powers can use windows of opportunity to advance their interests and ideals. In 1997, the Netherlands achieved a more prominent position than its material capabilities would indicate in the negotiation for the Kyoto Protocol. The country achieved this feat thanks to its technical knowledge in the environmental area, its reputation for successfully reducing carbon dioxide emissions, and also for assuming at that time the rotating presidency of the European Council. The Netherlands, using the prerogative and legitimacy of the presidency, coordinated the different national proposals of the member states into a single proposal for the EU. This raised the country's position on the international stage (Kanie 2007).

The formal involvement of the EU in the foreign policy of its member countries originated mainly from the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, which established the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union. Among its objectives, there are positions often found in the foreign policy of middle powers, such as the defense of multilateralism and the preservation of the international system: "to preserve peace and strengthen international security, in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter as well as the principles of the Helsinki





Final Act⁸ and the objectives of the Paris Charter⁹; to promote international cooperation” (Treaty on European Union 1992, 58).

The European Union’s foreign policy, similarly to traditional middle powers, has been guided by the promotion of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. Also, the EU has a history of success as a mediator and “bridge-builder” (Keukeleire and Delreux 2014). The European Union’s mediation has had a stabilizing effect in at least three cases: Montenegro’s independence; Kosovo-Serbia conflict; and between Georgia, and its breakaway provinces Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Bergmann 2020).

Due to its structure, and its limitations, as an International Organization that promotes peace and cooperation in Europe, the institution has as its values the support of other IOs, a focus on normative power as opposed to military power, and the construction of the idea of a good global citizen:

These values are not the result of balancing of interests among member states but an expression of “fundamental values” such as the rule of law, democracy and human rights, open market economics, social solidarity, environmental and economic sustainability, and respect for cultural diversity. In this perspective, EU foreign policy is essentially about values, while member states may continue to have *realpolitik* interests (Laatikainen 2006, 85).

The Treaty of Lisbon (2009) strengthens this policy even further by creating a diplomatic corps for the European Union, the European External Action Service, and enhancing the position of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The EU uses its diplomatic corps to maintain delegations both in New York and Geneva to help and encourage the coordination of national delegations at the UN.

The material capabilities of the EU are enormous, as the organization has at least two great powers within it, France and Germany. The EU had a GDP of 16.6 trillion dollars in 2022, which represents about 1/6 of the global economy (IMF 2022). The European Union is the largest recipient and investor of foreign

8 Diplomatic agreement that aimed to improve relations between East and West during the Cold War and addressed various issues such as human rights, security, and cooperation.

9 The charter reaffirmed principles of democracy, human rights, and fundamental freedoms, while also promoting economic cooperation and security in the region.





investment in the world (European Commission 2022b), as well as the largest donor of humanitarian aid (European Commission 2022c). As for its systemic position, France, one of the EU member States, holds a vital seat at the United Nations Security Council as a permanent member, and possesses nuclear capabilities. Even countries that are not members of the EU can be highly associated with it, as it is the case with Iceland and Norway, which despite not being members are part of the Schengen Treaty¹⁰ and the European Economic Area¹¹.

One of the main focuses of the European Union's foreign policy is that its member states adopt common positions in international forums. One way to observe if the foreign policies of the European Union's member states are becoming more cohesive over time is through the vote in the United Nations General Assembly. The cohesion rate between the European Union's member states in the General Assembly between 2005 and 2011 calculated by Lucas (2012) is around 95% when considering abstentions as a contrary vote and around 80% when they are considered as a "half" vote. Observing only the General Assembly resolutions that deal with security policy, the cohesion rate when abstentions are considered as a contrary vote drops to around 90%, while when abstentions are considered as "half" a vote, the rate holds at around 80%.

Burmester and Jankowski (2014) corroborate this statement by pointing out a cohesion rate in the votes on General Assembly resolutions, between 1990 and 2011, of 0.8 on a scale of 0 to 1, where the closer to 1 the more cohesive the group. Abstentions were computed as a "half" vote. When voting becomes close, the cohesion rate jumps to close to 1, indicating that the EU is more cohesive when it is most necessary to coordinate votes. This is a differential between the EU and other regional blocs, where the tighter the voting, the less the votes of the countries in the groups converge.

Birnberg (2009) when analyzing the resolutions that were voted on in the General Assembly, the cohesion between the member states of the European Union, how each country voted, and what was the national interest of that State, reached a similar conclusion. According to the author, even when there is a divergence between the particular interest of the State and the position of

¹⁰ Treaty of 1985 that allows the free movement of people between the signatory countries.

¹¹ Treaty of 1994 that allows the free movement of goods, services, people, and capital between the signatory countries and the members of the European Union. Non-member countries must follow a series of regulations unilaterally established by the European Union.





the majority of the other members of the EU, the State tends to vote with the majority, forming a single voice in the institution.

However, this cohesion is not uniform, it tends to vary according to the area of the resolution that is being voted on. Areas where the European Union has more authority, such as trade, have greater cohesion than areas where the national States are prominent, such as defense and security. Smith (2017) states that the EU has difficulty coordinating votes, especially on issues of nuclear disarmament and decolonization.

In areas of the United Nations seen as more consequential, such as sending troops to UN peacekeeping operations, the EU coordination is very limited when compared to the UNGA. This could be because the propositions in the General Assembly range from a broad number of issues, some of which the smaller EU member states may have no particular interest in. As a result of that, they opt to embrace the EU position. This is commonly referred to as one of the aspects of the Europeanization of member states' foreign policy (Keukeleire and Delreux 2014).

Another possible reason is that the votes in the General Assembly are viewed as an extension of the “Declaratory Foreign Policy”, which has limited consequences. An example of this can be seen in Hungary's actions towards the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine. Hungary, together with the whole EU, voted in the United Nations General Assembly in favor of a resolution to condemn the Russian invasion (UN General Assembly 2022), but inside the bloc, it has opposed many of the EU's economic sanctions against Russia (Bosse 2022).

Coordination is also asked by the European Union of non-member countries with which it closely cooperates, such as Norway, Iceland, or members of its Neighborhood Policy (European Commission 2022a). Since 2007, the EU has urged these countries to join its foreign policy declarations, essentially requesting them to align their foreign policy to the EU's position. In the case of Norway and Iceland, when analyzing the EU declarations related to sanctions it enacted against other countries between 2007 and 2020, both countries participated in more than 80% of these declarations. Also, Iceland has replicated all EU sanctions since 2014, except for sanctions against Russia after its illegal annexation of Crimea (Cardwell and Moret 2022). Notwithstanding, Iceland proceeded to implement analogous sanctions against Russia, not formally replicating them as a way of





trying to contain domestic opposition and limit the damage in its relation with Russia (Thorhallsson and Gunnarsson 2017).

Methodology and Results

This article's problematization is whether the cohesion of the Nordic countries and the Netherlands in the United Nations General Assembly has decreased as a result of the strengthening of the Common Foreign Policy of the European Union. This article hypothesizes that the cohesion of the votes of the Nordic countries and the Netherlands in the United Nations General Assembly has remained stable over time. This would occur because the position of the EU in the UNGA is similar to the multilateralist positions that the Nordic middle powers had in the post-World War II period.

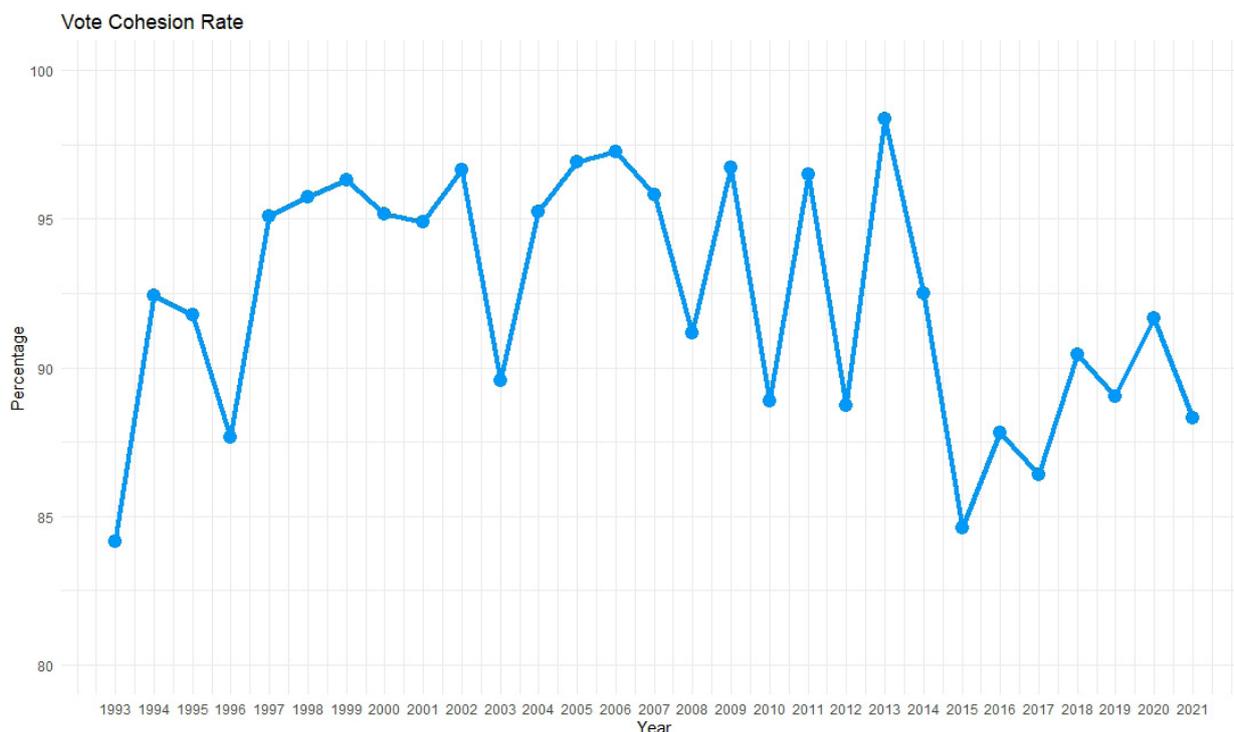
To verify the level of cohesion between these countries, Erik Voeten's dataset was used (Voeten 2013). Only votes on entire resolutions in the General Assembly were analyzed, i.e., votes on paragraphs or amendments were discarded. Resolutions with non-attendances of the selected countries were also discarded, in order to not equate absences with abstentions, as recommended by Voeten (2013). A time frame was delimited from 1993 to 2021, starting with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, and ending in the latest year in which the dataset was complete.

It was observed how many resolutions were passed and how many resolutions the Nordic countries and the Netherlands voted unanimously, and the cohesion index was produced by dividing these two results and multiplying them by 100 to obtain percentages. Following the example of Voeten (2000) and Volgy, Frazier, and Ingersoll (2003), abstentions were considered votes against the resolution. According to Voeten (2000) as UNGA resolutions lack binding force, the crucial aspect is whether a State is willing to publicly declare its support for a resolution. In practice, the likelihood of defeating a resolution is low, making no practical distinction between voting against it or abstaining from voting. Both methods essentially communicate the State's reluctance to adhere to the resolution's wording. The results of the annual rates can be seen in the graph below:





Figure 3: Graph of the cohesion rate of the selected countries in the UN General Assembly



Source: Graph elaborated from records of the UN General Assembly votes, from 1993 to 2021, in Erik Voeten’s dataset (Voeten 2013¹²).

Based on these results, despite the occurrence of oscillations, there were no major changes in the vote cohesion rate of these countries in the last twenty-eight years. The lowest rate was in 1993 with 84% cohesive and the highest was in 2013 with 98% cohesive. The strengthening of the European Common Foreign Policy, with the creation of the diplomatic corps, and with the European Union missions in the United Nations, do not seem to have interfered with the voting cohesion of the observed countries. From 2009, the date of signature of the Treaty of Lisbon, onwards, was the best time to observe any change if it had occurred.

When the cohesion rate found in these results is compared with the cohesion level found by the authors cited above for the EU, it can be inferred that both groups tend to vote together. It is important to emphasize that it is not possible to make a direct comparison between the cohesion rates, since the indexes are calculated in different ways. Despite this, it is possible to conclude that both groups are cohesive.

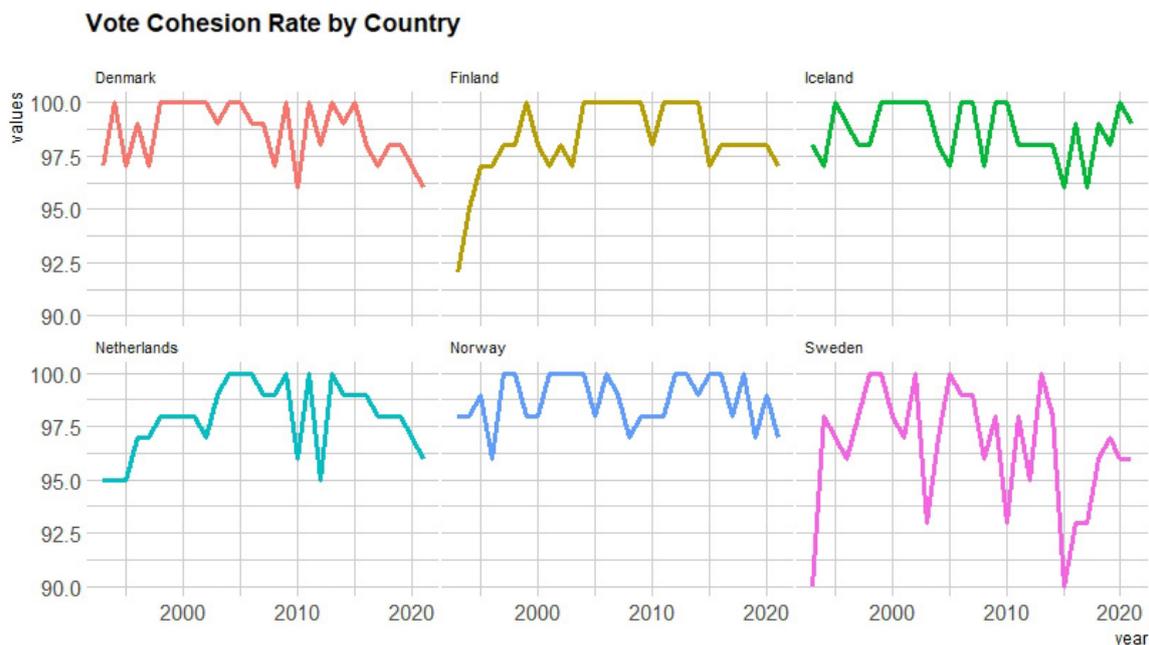
¹² The dataframe was last updated in mid-2022, incorporating data from 2021. The dataframe’s year is referred to as “2013” due to a specific request by its author.



In order to analyze the countries' individual adherence to the majority's preference, and verify the presence of outliers or patterns, the same dataset was used, with the same conditions. The countries votes were coded in 0 (no and abstentions) and 1 (yes), then added by resolution. If a resolution result was equal to or higher than three, the majority position was considered as "yes", otherwise it was considered as "no". When the group split in half, it was determined that three "yes" votes would mean a "yes" majority. The Nordic Group only split in half one time in 1993, 1995, 2010, 2017, 2019, 2020, 2021, and two times in 1997.

If the country voted with the majority in each specific resolution, it would be attributed the number 1, otherwise it would receive a 0. After that, the country score was added, divided by the number of resolutions, and multiplied by 100 to obtain the percentages. The results can be viewed in the graph below:

Figure 4: Graph of the cohesion rate by country of the selected group in the UN General Assembly



Source: Graph elaborated from records of the UN General Assembly votes, from 1993 to 2021, in Erik Voeten's dataset (Voeten 2013).

When the countries are analyzed individually, it is possible to determine that all the members of the Nordic Group maintain a high level of adherence to the group's majority, as the cohesion rate never dropped below 90% for any country. Moreover, Denmark and Norway consistently voted 100% with the group majority in 12 separate years, while Iceland and Finland did so in 11 different years. The



Netherlands aligned completely with the majority in 6 years, and Sweden did so in 5 years. Notably, the non-EU members did not exhibit a consistent decline in their adherence after 2009; rather, Iceland and Norway emerged as the countries most aligned with the group majority since 2015. Interestingly, Sweden stood out as the country that voted the least with the majority during this period.

As there is no significant decrease in the level of cohesion in the votes for the General Assembly between the Nordic countries and the Netherlands, nor a low cohesion between the members of the EU, it can be theorized that both vote similarly. This claim is also supported by the decades of Norwegian adherence to the EU position in the UNGA (Gunes and Ozkaleli 2022).

Although it is to be expected that further integration in the EU's common foreign policy should face no discrepancies among its members, the two non-EU member states in the Nordic group, Norway and Iceland, have taken a very different approach to the European Union and deserve more attention here. Norway's presence in the EU institutions can match the presence of a member State country, and the Icelandic presence is very limited in comparison (Gron and Wivel 2018).

Norway's close political coordination with the EU can be observed in a publication of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2015). In this document, the Norwegian government reiterates that "cooperation with the EU is crucial for safeguarding Norwegian interests in priority areas" (16). The publication also states that besides the biannual foreign policy consultations between Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein, policy coordination and consultation happen daily. As opposed to other areas, the coordination in foreign policy between Norway and the EU is largely based on *ad hoc* meetings and informal arrangements (Hillion 2019).

According to this 2015 document, the goal of coordination is "to safeguard common positions" (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015, 16). The document continues to affirm Norway's support for the European Neighborhood Policy, and its intention to help to develop the EU's military capabilities. Also, it declares that one of the main tasks of The Mission of Norway to the European Union is to "work closely with the EU institutions on the further development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defense Policy" (26).

In a report, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2018, 5) reaffirms the importance of the EU for Norway by stating that:





Norway's security, freedom and prosperity depend on Europe as a whole developing in a positive direction [...] Norway accepts its share of the responsibility for contributing to this, by engaging in binding cooperation [...] Due to Norway and the EU's shared set of values and interests, the Government's priorities are often consistent with EU policy. This is reflected in our close cooperation in multilateral forums such as [...] the UN. In these settings, Norway and the EU stand side-by-side in defense of fundamental values and common rules not only in Europe but also globally.

Norway also takes a series of initiatives to strengthen its bilateral ties with countries that will assume the EU council presidency. As an example, the Norwegian Prime Minister traditionally visits a country about six months before it assumes the EU council presidency. These actions are taken in an attempt to increase its influence and access in the EU decision-making process (Haugevik 2017).

In the case of Iceland, the political coordination with the EU is largely restricted to European Economic Area matters. Iceland considers the United States and NATO as the cornerstones of Icelandic security and defense (Government of Iceland Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2021). Iceland's national security policy reiterates this position by stating that NATO is "the main forum for Western cooperation" (Iceland 2016, 1). In European affairs, the country closely coordinates and cooperates with other Nordic countries, as it is also stated in its national security policy.

Iceland's participation in the European integration was largely a result of the costs associated with losing its integration with the other Nordic countries. Iceland does not show an interest in foreign policy coordination with the EU, as it does not see the EU as a viable replacement for the security the US currently provides (Bailes and Rafnsson 2012).

With the end of the Cold War, the United States lowered its interest in Iceland, which culminated at the end of the US military presence in the country in 2006. Faced with this new reality, Iceland increased its cooperation with other Nordic countries. Even with the return of the US military to Iceland in 2016, the other Nordic states continue to greatly influence Icelandic foreign policy and its European policy (Thorhallson 2018). This great association between Iceland and other Nordic nations means the country is indirectly very exposed to the EU's foreign policy (Gron and Wivel 2018). Ultimately, despite Iceland's formal autonomy from the European Union, it nevertheless tends to align with the EU's foreign policy objectives (Thorhallson and Gunnarsson 2017).





The Norwegian and EU positions in the UN General Assembly seem to result from political coordination. As Keohane (1984) defined, policy coordination does not mean harmony. Harmony is characterized by an automatic alignment between parties' interests and choices' adjustments are not necessary. Not only is there no automatic alignment between the Norwegian foreign policy with the EU's, but at times, they are not able to find a common position, as when Norway refused to sanction Venezuela in 2017 (Cardwell and Moret 2022).

As for Iceland, more research on the country's individual adherence to the EU's position in the General Assembly is needed, as this article largely examines the Nordic countries and the Netherlands as a group. That being said, a possible explanation is that both share common foreign policy principles, such as: the promotion of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law; the defense of multilateralism; and the preservation of the international system. And that Iceland indirectly adheres to the EU's preferred position by coordinating with the other Nordic countries.

Therefore, this article arrives at a similar result to that found by Laatikainen (2006). The analyzed countries transitioned smoothly from the concept of middle power diplomacy to a Europeanized diplomacy, even if Iceland did so indirectly. That being said, it is important to continue to observe the strengthening of the European Union's foreign policy and how this policy will behave in more sensitive issues such as the ones that are discussed in the Security Council. It is not certain that Iceland and Norway will continue to vote cohesively with their Nordic partners and the Netherlands if the EU adopts a more great-power diplomacy.

Conclusion

In this article, it was demonstrated that the cohesion between the Nordic countries and the Netherlands in the votes of the United Nations General Assembly was maintained between 1993 and 2021, despite the strengthening of the European Union's foreign policy. It was possible to observe this result through the analysis of the voting results of the resolutions approved by the General Assembly. Thus, both the initial hypothesis of the article was confirmed, and our results corroborate the argument presented by Laatikainen (2006) about the Europeanization of the Nordic countries and the Netherlands in contrast to the concept of traditional middle powers.





It is also possible to conclude that there was no significant variation in this cohesion index is not a result of the EU's failure to coordinate its member States, but because the principles and values of the EU's foreign policy largely resonate with the principles of a traditional middle power. Furthermore, it was also observed that Norway coordinates much of its foreign policy with the EU (Hillion 2019), in contrast with Iceland which preferred coordination with the other Nordic countries (Thorhallsson 2018) and it is thus influenced by these countries' relations with the EU.

Examining the countries' individual cohesion rates to the group's majority, it was found that Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Iceland were the countries that most times voted 100% with the majority. Significantly, non-EU members did not consistently show a decrease in their adherence after 2009. Instead, Iceland and Norway have stood out as the countries most aligned with the group majority since 2015. It is worth highlighting that the cohesion rate in Iceland has progressively risen over time. In contrast, Sweden diverged the most and attained the lowest cohesion rate of the group, reaching 90% in two years.

Future research should address whether Iceland's individual adherence to the EU's affects its relations with the other Nordic countries; how Iceland-US relations affect its coordination with the other Nordic countries; what explains Sweden's positions as the least adherent country to the majority's position; and why Norway and the EU prefer *ad hoc* coordination rather than an institutionalized coordination.

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