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# Anxiety and Fantasy: A Psychoanalytic Approach to the Continuity of the EU's Sanctions Policy Regarding Russia and Myanmar

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ABSTRACT

This article employs Lacanian psychoanalysis to explain why the EU maintains its sanctions against Russia and Myanmar despite their questionable effectiveness. The framework moves beyond traditional identity, normative and interest-based explanations. By integrating existential concerns with psychoanalytic insights, this article illuminates the understudied emotional dimensions of the EU sanctions policy, offering a deeper understanding of the sanctions policy continuity through the non-conscious dimension. It explains that the EU experienced existential anxiety when its idealised discourses – “Integration and Eastern Enlargement” for Russia and the “normative economic partnership with Asia” for Myanmar – became fragmented. The hidden political enjoyment of each discourse, which provided the EU’s sense of existence, became disrupted. Concurrently, a new political enjoyment emerged through a political fantasy involving a clear identification of “Us” (the EU) and “Them” (the targeted regime). Another central aspect of the political fantasy is narratives about the sanctions. These narratives function as transgressive elements of narratives of identification. Through the sanctions implementation, the EU repeatedly tried to actualise this new political enjoyment.

KEYWORDS

existential anxiety, Myanmar, political enjoyment, political fantasy, Russia, sanctions, continuity, the EU

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## INTRODUCTION

Sanctions have become the EU's signature foreign policy instrument. They are employed more frequently than military action or humanitarian aid, and yet their effectiveness remains deeply contested. The EU has two prominent prolonged sanctions regimes; the one towards Russia and the one towards Myanmar. Russia continues its war in Ukraine despite 11 years of EU sanctions against it, while Myanmar's military junta remains entrenched in power despite three decades of restrictive measures directed towards it. The paradox is striking: sanctions are both the EU's favorite tool and one of its least effective instruments. Why, then, does the Union maintain them?

The existing literature on the EU's sanctions employs diverse analytical frameworks to explain why the EU imposes sanctions. Studies like those of Bosse (2022) and Sjursen & Rosen (2017) mainly utilise normative approaches when examining the EU's sanctions on Russia. Similarly, research on the EU's sanctions on Myanmar, such as that of Beke & Hachez (2015) and Portela & Orbie (2014), uses normative frameworks. Beyond normative explanations, many scholars have explored alternative rationales for the EU sanctions policy. Regarding the sanctions on Russia, the analytical frameworks include the EU's territorial threat perception (Hofer, 2021; Hörbelt, 2017), interest-based bargaining (Orenstein & Kelemen, 2017; Stoop, 2016), actorship recognition (Giumelli et al., 2021; Noutcheva, 2018), and psychological dimensions such as the U.S.'s emotional influence on the EU (Beauregard, 2022) and the EU's mistrust towards Russia (Natorski & Pamorska, 2017). For the sanctions on Myanmar, the relevant research emphasises the EU's identity (Xuechen, 2018; Robertua, 2014), perceptions of Myanmar's capabilities (Meissner, 2023), and economic interests (Marchi, 2014) as explanatory registers. Additionally, an extensive literature confronts the effectiveness of these sanctions regimes; its studies on Russia (Morgan et al., 2023; Portela, 2016) and Myanmar (Dösch & Sidhu, 2015; Giumelli & Ivan, 2013) offer varying explanations for the sanctions against them. Collectively, this research explains why the sanctions are imposed and how they function, but it leaves underexplored the puzzle of persistence: why the sanctions endure even when they seem to fail.

One reason for this gap is the relative neglect of emotions in the analysis of the EU's sanctions. While most existing works on the EU's sanctions

on Russia examine strategic and normative considerations, emotional explanations of them remain rare. Beauregard's (2022) study stands out for emphasising transatlantic emotional resonance in the EU sanctions against Russia, but it largely treats European emotions, e.g. fear, as reactive to U.S. narratives evoking the trauma of the Cold War, and as underplaying the endogenous dynamics within the Union. Beauregard also adds that the EU's fear transformed into anger due to the shooting down of the MH17, thereby leading to the EU's sanctions on Russia. Consequently, even though he agrees that anxiety can resonate and become an explanatory register, his literature pays little attention to how collective anxiety shapes the EU's ongoing commitment to its sanctions policy. Meanwhile, in the literature regarding the EU's sanctions in the case of Myanmar, emotions are virtually absent from their analysis. In particular, the role of anxiety – a fundamental yet underexplored emotion – has not received sufficient attention there. Thus this article argues that existential anxiety is central to understanding why the EU maintains the sanctions despite questions of their effectiveness.

The EU faces recurring anxieties about how to reinvent itself and assert its greater global relevance in the face of external crises within the region and abroad. For example, the EU's existential anxiety has endured since Russia's Crimean annexation, which challenged European integration dynamics. Similarly, another global crisis, namely Myanmar's aggressiveness since 1996, has tested the Union's commitment to human rights promotion and its capacity to influence events beyond its immediate neighborhood. These anxieties push the Union to rely on established instruments such as sanctions as a way of managing institutional unease (NITOIU, 2025; KAUNERT & DE DAUS PEREIRA, 2023). This becomes a serious matter because the sanctions are not only instruments of coercion – they are also policy measures through which the EU expresses how it seeks its ontological existence.

Given that, this article shifts the analytical focus from imposition to persistence: from asking why the sanctions were launched to asking why they continue to persist. It inquires why the EU persists with the sanctions against Russia and Myanmar despite their limited effectiveness in resolving the crises and creating freedom for the attacked population. To address this question, this article requires the use of psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalytic approaches have already been applied to EU politics more broadly, as they offer tools for understanding the emotional dimensions of policy.

Volkan's (2017) research illustrates how collective perceptions of refugees as "others" prompted certain EU members to construct narratives portraying their nations as under threat from them. Similarly, Kinvall (2013) has illustrated how trauma and fear influenced European responses to the refugee crisis that resulted from the Arab Spring, revealing the psychological undercurrents that informed official policy positions.

Lacanian psychoanalytic theory has provided another avenue for analysis, particularly through its concepts of identity and enjoyment. Forchtner and Kølvråa (2012) and Kølvråa (2018) have utilised these frameworks to examine EU integration processes and major policy initiatives, exploring how these two factors shape European political narratives and actions. Complementing this approach, Loucas (2022) has employed the psychoanalytic concepts of dreams and desire to analyse the EU foreign policy toward Belarus, thus offering insights into the EU's normative power, which underlies its diplomatic strategies.

Furthermore, Mitzen's (2018, 2016) work illustrates how historical trauma can serve as both a catalyst and a constraint for political integration. According to her analysis, the collective trauma of World War II originally motivated European integration efforts, while the 2008 eurozone crisis, Brexit and migration issues reactivated anxiety about the potential dissolution of the European project. The EU's response to the latter involved promoting narratives about the strength and future prospects of continued European integration.

Yet, despite these advances, psychoanalysis, especially the Lacanian variety, has not yet been mobilised to explain the persistence of the EU sanctions policy by comparing its sanctions on Russia and Myanmar. Thus this article uses Lacanian psychoanalysis to do so.

This article argues that the continuity of the EU sanctions should not be understood primarily as a policy failure, but as a discursive and affective logic through which existential anxiety is managed. It shows that

the EU confronts a recurring anxiety about its existential relevance following the disruption of two idealised discourses: that of European integration, which has been challenged by Russia's aggressiveness since 2014, and that of the normative economic partnership with Asia, which has been challenged by Myanmar's actions since 1996. These disruptions fractured previously stabilised sources of political enjoyment that underpinned the EU's sense of collective existence.

In response, the EU discourse articulates distinct political fantasies in each case, through which new political enjoyment is organised. These fantasies operate through narratives of identification and transgression, accompanied by beatific and horrific imaginaries. Within these narratives, sanctions function as transgressive signifiers: their material effects on targeted populations and the EU actors interacting with them symbolically reinforce distinctions between the EU and its Others. Rather than resolving anxiety, political fantasy sustains it through the perpetual deferral of the anticipated existential fulfilment while simultaneously stabilising new narratives of identification. Sanctions implementation repeatedly actualises this newly organised political enjoyment, providing nodal points around which the discourse is reorganised and existential anxiety is managed. In this sense, sanctions continuity operates as an affective logic embedded in discourse rather than as an outcome of rational optimisation or normative compliance.

Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, this article contributes to the scholarship on EU foreign policy and sanctions by foregrounding political enjoyment as an analytical lens (ZEVNIK & MANDELBAUM, 2023; GELLWITZKI, 2025). It elucidates three interrelated discursive logics: (1) the fragmentation of the idealised discourse producing a deficit of political enjoyment and existential anxiety; (2) the organisation of new political enjoyment through a recurring political fantasy; and (3) the actualisation of this enjoyment through sanctions enforcement. Together, these logics illuminate how EU identity is not merely preserved but recalibrated amid crises through affective investments.

This article does not claim to offer a primary causal explanation for the EU sanctions continuity. Rather, it provides a complementary interpretative framework that highlights emotional and non-conscious dimensions

that are often overlooked in accounts centred on a stable identity, moral commitment, or strategic calculation.

## LACANIAN PSYCHOANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: EXISTENTIAL ANXIETY AND POLITICAL FANTASY

Lacan's concept of *parlêtre* (speaking being) emphasises that language and existence are fundamentally intertwined – a subject exists because it speaks, and it speaks because it exists. In Seminar XVII (1969–1970), Lacan posits that discourse functions as the fundamental organising principle within all human encounters, transcending mere verbal exchange (ALPARONE & LA ROSA, 2020; TOMBRAS, 2017; ALCORN, 1994; BRACHER, 1994).

Through his tripartite structural logic (the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real), Lacan developed Freud's concepts to illuminate how language brings human beings into existence within their social and symbolic world. In the imaginary process, the subject identifies with an ideal ego, which is expressed through a discourse during interactions with others within a symbolic structure (LACAN, 2014 IN MURA, 2015).

However, the Real moves beyond the imaginary and the symbolic. It becomes something that cannot be captured by discourse. Crucially, the subject may not recognise its own incompleteness, including the hidden dimensions of its discourse (such as enjoyment), which contribute to its subjective experience of its perfect existence. When external challenges confront the discourse, they disrupt the subject's hidden enjoyment (JOHNSTON, 2022; ALCORN, 1994; BRACHER, 1994), precipitating what Lacan (2014) conceptualises as existential anxiety – not anxiety about merely losing a visible object, but anxiety about confronting the lack of enjoyment (VULOVIC & EJDUS, 2024; STAVRAKAKIS, 2010).

At the collective level, a discourse unifies multiple sub-entities into a coherent collective subject (SCHRANS, 2018) by providing certainty, coordinating disparate interests, and enabling confident collective bonds. This shared idealised discourse conceals an underlying political dimension implicitly generating political enjoyment through hierarchy and power (LACAN, 1977; MARGULIES, 2011, 2014, 2023). What appears as a neutral discourse latently

functions as a means of operating collective superior or dominant positions over others and conferring prestige (EVANS, 1996).

Yet this discourse remains vulnerable when external challenges disrupt the concealed enjoyment, whereas such enjoyment makes a collective subject feel its collective existence within the social or political order. The loss of political enjoyment triggers collective anxiety. Because the discourse is always idealised, the collective subject moves toward preserving it when it is threatened (GUNDER, 2003; ALCORN, 1994; BRACHER, 1994).

The collective's struggle for ontological primacy against external challenges (RUTI, 2014) is not a mere competition but a systematic defensive response. When a collective subject experiencing this existential anxiety develops a political fantasy to mitigate it, this fantasy operates through a logic that organises a new political enjoyment, directing subjects toward concrete actions. Importantly, political fantasy functions collectively without requiring uniform narratives because what matters is that varied narratives maintain their connection to the shared idealised discourse binding the collective together (SCHRANS, 2018).

Political fantasy has become crucial in international relations and foreign policy, as it has been employed by leaders like Cameron, Obama, and Putin (EBERLE, 2019) and in events like Brexit (HALL, 2018). Jacobsen (2020) fascinatingly links idealised discourse to political fantasy through the U.S. cyber defence case: when Snowden's revelations exposed contradictions in America's idealised cyber defence discourse, the U.S. constructed a political fantasy portraying China as a major security threat while publicising anti-ISIL operations to illustrate the transparency of its practices – this exemplifies how existential anxiety related to discourse disruption necessitates political fantasy construction.

Despite these examples, existing works fail to conceptually explain how political fantasy manages existential anxiety – specifically how policy continuity and fantasy provide new nodal points for the political subject's grand discourse, which is intertwined with its existence. To solve this gap, a further explanation of political enjoyment should be included here.

Political enjoyment within an idealised discourse is fundamentally linked to power and hierarchy. The political enjoyment derived within the symbolic order represents a regulated form of satisfaction, as discourse initially functions to shield the subject from encountering the excessive intensity of another type of political enjoyment called *jouissance*, including the transgressive aspects that prop up such extreme enjoyment (PROUDFOOT, 2010). Following the discourse disruption, *jouissance* as a new political enjoyment is produced within the political fantasy through narratives of identification along with transgression narratives. Such enjoyment cannot exist without transgression, which entails the presence of a little suffering as a worthy sacrifice (HOOK, 2017; PROUDFOOT, 2010). The political fantasy organises this new political enjoyment designating a promised coherent existence. The political enjoyment is embedded within the ongoing pursuit and even within the obstacles encountered. This enjoyment encompasses purposes and directions of the struggle for collective existence (DALY, 1999; GLYNOS & STAVRAKAKIS, 2008).

At the institutional level, individual policymakers and sub-institutions become conduits for expressing a political fantasy consisting of intertwined narratives of collective identification and transgression (GLYNOS, 2011) to organise a new political enjoyment and to channel the institution toward preferred actions and policies (LACAN, 1961–1962; GUNDER, 2003; SOLOMON, 2015).

The articulation of identification within political fantasy stems from (re)constructing a collective “We” – defining who “we” are by specifying who “they” are. This process recognises comparable features shared with other subjects while attributing the obstruction of goals or ideal conditions to obstacles or aggressors. This process can include antagonising opponents and conceptualisations of how “they” have “stolen” the wholeness or ideal conditions that rightfully belong(s) to the collective “We” (the institution) – even though this process is a necessary fiction allowing the institution to sustain the imagination of the original plenitude in its idealised discourse.

Identification narratives emphasise “We” – a community united in (re)generating asymmetrical power relations and a willingness to take politically transgressive actions, including sanctions (HOOK, 2017). Sanctions involve transgressions because they impose negative consequences not

only on the targeted subjects but also on an institution's population and its cooperation with those targeted. Sanctions narratives adhere to a collective redemptive projection made to the institution's worthy community (WARDLE, 2016) and have been justified through their potentials to eliminate malevolent forces and rescue the political or social order from chaos (SMITH, 2008, CITED IN HÖRNQVIST, 2021, P. 98).

Yet here emerges a fundamental paradox: the elimination of malevolent forces can remain perpetually deferred. If such forces were eliminated too fast, the political fantasy structure sustaining the collective "We" could not be strengthened (ELMER, 1995; GELLWITZKI, 2025). The enemy must remain present because it relates to narratives of identification expressing the critical trajectory, the loss of the initial conditions, and the obstructed goals of the idealised discourse. This also creates a system where suffering is both meaningful and ultimately redemptive, as it maintains the faith in the collective sanctions. The "desired condition" operates according to a perpetual not-yet: it is always on the horizon, always about to be achieved through just one more sanction.

Moreover, to prevent the misinterpretation that the sanctions are mere acts of anger or revenge, the transgression narratives must be embedded within a clear moral framework of identification delineating specific roles (HÖRNQVIST, 2021). This moral structure strengthens the legitimacy and meanings of potentially destructive transgressions or sanctions. An institution can assume institutional roles related to the recognition of its authority and leadership, or demonstrate its protective functions in relation to the community and universal order. The identification and transgression narratives may be accompanied by beatific or horrific descriptions of what will occur if "We" (do not) overcome obstacles (MAHER, 2023). These descriptions can also reach back to the past through historical parallels – though these "parallels" are retroactively selected and reinterpreted from the perspective of the present crisis for future visions. Past, present, and future exist in mutual constitution – "We", standing at the present, anticipate the future to create the relevance of the past, or "We" construct the past to legitimate the projected future and to create a sense of urgency in responding to the current crisis and choosing sanctions as a preferred policy.

The affective power of political fantasies derives from how they continuously carry out narratives of identification and transgression, providing an institution with new enjoyment while alleviating anxiety. This enjoyment is tied to the imperative of actualisation through concrete political actions (GLYNOS, 2011). Yet because a coherent existence is always beyond reach, the political enjoyment will always be only partial. This explains why actualisation of political enjoyment is tied to repetition.

Crucially, this repetition is temporally constitutive: each iteration retroactively restructures the meaning of previous acts while anticipating future ones. The second sanction redefines what the first “really meant,” and the third redefines the previous acts. Moreover, the identification operates through “precipitation in the act” – the construction of “We” crystallises along with the dynamics of narratives and the implementation of the sanctions, and thus identity can be fundamentally unstable (ELMER, 1995; GUNDER, 2003; WARDLE, 2016).

Thus, an institution’s political fantasy structure that organises the new political enjoyment, maintains the anticipation of its complete existential fulfillment, and crystallises its identification and preferred transgression, is naturally embedded in such a perpetual deferral.

## **THE EU’S IDEALISED DISCOURSES AND DISRUPTIONS: RUSSIA AND MYANMAR**

Given the above theoretical parts discussing the political subject’s idealised discourses in general terms, this article focuses on the EU as a specific institution whose particular discourses are disrupted by the aggressiveness of Russia and Myanmar’s respective regimes.

European integration aimed to achieve symmetrical benefits in political, security and social dimensions, and economic prosperity for the constituent member states and their populations. The sense of unity functioned as a critical substrate facilitating a shared interpretation of the process and values integration. It included the Eastern enlargement, revealing the EU integration’s attractiveness and institutional capacity to prepare states for accession (KØLVRAA, 2018).

The integration discourse positioned the EU as one regional organisation among others, but one that knew how to unify its post-conflict community. The discourse suggested that the EU's model – combining economic integration with democratic values, pooled sovereignty with respect for national identities, and market economics with social protections – represented a universal formula for stability and prosperity. The Eastern enlargement functioned as a proof of the concept, as former communist states were eager to join the EU precisely because the EU model worked for its members. This was where the idealised discourse of integration, which served as a type of symbolism, contained its own imaginary aspects of the EU itself, e.g. the EU as the future of countries in Europe (IBID.).

However, Russia's aggressive posture – namely the Crimea annexation and the military intervention in Ukraine – has confronted this superiority politically and militarily and created significant anxiety for the EU by undermining the completeness of the idealised integration discourse (GÜRKAN, 2024; NITOIU, 2025). It has challenged the very foundations of how the EU understood itself in its efforts to shape the European order.

Furthemore, the EU's idealised discourse regarding Myanmar rested on the assumption that its experience of combining economic prosperity with a healthy government and human rights protection provided a template that countries in Asia should follow. Stemming from its liberal triumph over communism, the EU's distinctive approaches in this respect linked its external economic cooperation with democratic values and human rights promotion in the post-Cold War period. This conditionality aimed to advance the application of European normative standards in Asia. In addition, through mechanisms like the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP), the EU created leverage for itself to encourage governance reforms in developing countries in Asia (DE VRIES, 2023; KØLVRAA, 2018).

Thus, this discourse both operated as a kind of symbolism and contained its own imaginary aspect, i.e. the EU as a normative exemplar whose norms have a universal applicability in efforts to achieve global peace and stability (DE VRIES, 2023; KØLVRAA, 2018).

However, Myanmar's detention of EU consul James Leander Nichols in 1996 and rejection of the EU engagement, combined with ASEAN

ASEAN maintaining its “ASEAN Way” while diminishing the EU’s importance and pursuing extensive partnerships with several East Asian countries, gradually undermined the EU-Asia engagement. Since this period, the EU has been unable to overcome its discomfort about its existential position in Asia (DU ROCHER, 2012; XUECHEN, 2018).

## ANALYTICAL STRATEGY AND METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION (LEXICAL-INDICATOR-DRIVE)

This article utilises the following framework to examine the continuity of the EU sanctions through three analytical dimensions and their relationships:

**Existential Anxiety (Analytical Dimension A):** A collective ontological disturbance emerging when the EU’s idealised discourses are fragmented by disruptive realities, and encompassing a lack of political enjoyment.

**Political Fantasy (Analytical Dimension B):** Narrative structures managing existential anxiety through identification and preferred transgressions, generating new political enjoyment while legitimising sanctions.

**Sanctions Continuity (Analytical Dimension C):** A sustained implementation of the sanctions despite their contested effectiveness that involves continuously actualising the new political enjoyment and perpetuating goals of a coherent collective existence.

This article integrates critical narrative discourse analysis (CNDA) with Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts. CNDA itself can reveal how narratives function as cohesive forces within a grand discourse and how such a discourse can become institutionalised in narratives over time (SOUTO MANNING, 2012). However, Forchtner (2021) insists that the analytical focus on narrative components should be integrated with a specific theoretical construction to analyse how the narratives are related to a certain affect-related discourse, as CNDA remains insufficient to resolve this methodological issue.

This article employs a psychoanalytically informed critical narrative discourse analysis to examine how EU sanctions are articulated and

and sustained across different cases. The analysis does not follow a linear causal pathway but focuses on the iterative examination of three dimension: discursive fragmentation producing a deficit of political enjoyment, fantasy narratives generating a new political enjoyment, and sanctions implementation as a material enactment of political enjoyment. In the present study, the relevant texts are read iteratively through a close and intertextual reading that allows narrative patterns, affective intensities, and the fragmentation of discourses to emerge. Lexical indicators, informed by Lacanian concepts, are used as heuristic coding devices to guide the interpretative attention to narratives of such dimensions. Rather than functioning as deterministic indicators or measurements, these lexical cues serve as sensitising tools to trace how existential anxiety and political fantasy are discursively articulated. The analysis thus foregrounds the discursive and affective logics through which the sanctions continuity is rendered meaningful without claiming that there is a causal pathway or sequential process (DAS, 2011; PAVLENKO, 2008).

#### **ANALYTICAL DIMENSION A: EXISTENTIAL ANXIETY (LACK OF POLITICAL ENJOYMENT)**

Analytical focus of this dimension is a lack of political enjoyment constitutes existential anxiety. The analysis captures the initial disruption when the political subject perceives that something fundamental has been taken, damaged, or prevented from realisation. This is not an anxiety about specific losses but about threats to the subject's entire framework for understanding itself and its place in the world. The analysis is contextualised within the EU's idealised discourse in each case.

To strengthen the analysis of the lack of enjoyment, the analysis examines a set of individual statements by EU policymakers that describe the situations prior to 2014 and 1996 respectively as the baselines. These (earlier) speeches are usually saturated with idealisation and emphasise achievement, pride, progress, optimism, and satisfaction. Such language indicates that the EU initially derived political enjoyment from its idealised discourse.

### **Lexical Indicators:**

- **Articulation of Lost Initial Conditions:** Previous states of stability, prosperity, and security destroyed; disrupted patterns, relationships, and norms. These indicators reveal what baseline the EU considers “normal” and what deviations from it constitute a crisis.
- **Specification of Obstructed Goals:** Aspirations and plans were blocked by the targets’ actions. These indicators reveal what future the EU imagined for itself and how that future has been foreclosed.
- **Articulation of Threats:** Dangers, vulnerabilities, and potential harm emanating from the targets. These go beyond immediate security concerns and encompass threats to the EU’s self-conception and role.
- **Recognition of Critical Tipping Points:** Moments crossing irreversibility thresholds and demanding exceptional responses. These signal qualitative rather than quantitative changes – moments when “everything changes.”

### **ANALYTICAL DIMENSION B: POLITICAL FANTASY (ORGANISATION OF POLITICAL ENJOYMENT)**

The fantasy organises a new political enjoyment rather than regaining the original enjoyment. It offers an imaginary enjoyment through identifying opponents, expressing where the EU belongs, affirming primary commitments, deciding on specific promising measures, and carrying out a retroactive process. The key analytical task is identifying how fantasy narratives transform raw anxiety into a structured political affect that directs action. The analysis is contextualised within the EU’s idealised discourse in each case.

### Lexical Indicators:

- **Dire, Antagonising Language:** A language portraying the targets in antagonising or non-human terms – as monsters, animals, or evil forces; using dire terms like terror, horror, or blood. This language reveals how fantasy constructs enemies as ontological threats rather than mere political opponents.
- **Protagonistic, Heroic, and Valuing Articulations:** A heroic language portraying a subject as a collective with moral responsibilities connected to values of righteousness and justice, which advocates for victims and fights aggressors or enemies.
- **Exaggerated Visions and Predictions:** Hyperbolic predictions extending beyond evidence-based analysis to either wish-fulfilment or catastrophisation. These reveal political fantasy's colonisation of the temporal imagination of the future – namely the need to make present actions appear decisive in a struggle for enormous stakes.
- **Excessive Historical Linking:** Connections to past events that seem disproportionate, forced, or tangential to current situations. When every present crisis can be linked to a success or failure of the past, or previous wars, this signals that the temporal anchoring serves to strengthen fantasy rather than analytical clarity.

### ANALYTICAL DIMENSION C: SANCTIONS CONTINUITY (ACTUALISATION OF POLITICAL ENJOYMENT)

The continuity of the sanctions implementation is embedded in the actualisation and ongoing pursuit of the political enjoyment of the fantasy. The sanctions implementation is simultaneously experienced as both successful (harming targets, demonstrating one's power) and insufficient (not achieving a definitive victory). The analytical focus is also on how this paradox shows the not yet fully political enjoyment and drives the perpetual continuation and intensification of the policy. The analysis is contextualised within the EU's idealised discourse in each case.

## Lexical Indicators:

- **The Positive Bias on the Outcome of the Implementation:** Language regarding the successes of the destabilisation, impairment, and isolation. The EU emphasises evidence that the sanctions are “working” while avoiding admittance of a total failure of the sanctions implementation.
- **Maintenance Language:** Maintaining pressure, staying the course; the sanctions must/will continue or cannot be discontinued. This reveals that the sanctions are inherently ongoing rather than temporary measures.
- **Compulsion Language:** The sanctions are compulsory, required, necessary, and essential. The EU presents their continuation as obligatory rather than discretionary.
- **Paradox Emphasis:** Claiming that the sanctions demonstrably have effects like making targets collapse, while arguing for their indefinite maintenance because the targets remain too threatening and dire and unwilling to enter negotiations.
- **Language of Expansion and Extension:** Calls to expand the sanctions to new sectors and/or entities, or calls for their temporal extension. The EU progressively broadens the scope of the sanctions. The language can involve progressive markers such as “further”, “next” or “additional” sanctions/restrictive measures (the EU frames each round as leading to more rounds), or comparative intensifications such as that the sanctions must become “stronger,” “broader” or “tougher” (the EU continuously raises the bar for what counts as an adequate response).

## EMPIRIAL CASE STUDY I: RUSSIA

### LACK OF POLITICAL ENJOYMENT FOLLOWING THE DISRUPTION OF THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION DISCOURSE

*Baseline (Statements about the Pre-2014 Period):* “I have been working together with the Commission and also with the Member States for the last 10 years to build a constructive relationship with Russia, while supporting our neighbours’ efforts and sovereign choices to reform, to modernise and build closer relations with the European Union” (BARROSO, 2014).

“Our relationship with our Eastern partners does not have to be an exclusive one. Our model of engagement is that of open regionalism, and not of autarchic self-entrenchment. We are not asking, not even suggesting to our partners from the Eastern Neighbourhood, to turn their backs on Russia. On the contrary, we encourage them to have good neighbourly relations, to enhance their traditional trade ties” (IBID.).

### The Following Disruption:

- **Lost Initial Conditions:** “What happened in Crimea was an unprovoked and unacceptable violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity” (IBID.).
- **Obstructed Goals:** “The developments which started with the people of Ukraine expressing a clear wish to take their future into their own hands” (IBID.).

“We cannot pursue this important positive agenda when Crimea is illegally annexed” (BARROSO & VAN ROMPUY, 2014).

- **Articulation of Threats:** “The present situation directly challenges our conscience as individuals, our unity as Europeans, our policies as decision makers, and values we hold, such as peace and democracy” (BARROSO, 2014).
- **Critical Tipping Points:** “It is not only the destiny of Ukraine that is at stake. It is Europe’s destiny” (VON DER LEYEN, 2025A).

In regard to Russia, the EU’s lack of political enjoyment following the disruption of the European integration, which constituted existential anxiety, was articulated through the lost initial conditions, the articulation

of security threats, the obstructed goals, and the critical tipping point. Furthermore, this disruption foregrounds three interconnected dimensions of the loss of core enjoyment for the EU.

First, Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity – which are significant not only for Ukraine but for the EU itself – came under direct attack due to the annexation of Crimea. This threat directly undermined Ukraine's long-term goal of EU membership, transforming Ukraine into a strategically vital partner whose future was now imperiled.

Second, it undermined the territorial stability and security that the EU had established with a peaceful integration rather than military force. These achievements had underpinned the Union's successful relations with and expansion into the former communist nations throughout Central and Eastern Europe, including Ukraine, during 2004 and 2005 (PETROV, 2023). Simultaneously, it damaged the framework of the open regionalism with Russia that the EU had been developing through the enhanced cooperation and exchange with it – an approach designed to foster constructive EU-Russia relations in the twenty-first century and promote regional prosperity (SOLIOZ & STUBB, 2009).

Third, and most critically, it challenged the EU's foundational integrative values. The Union had operated on the core principles of unity, peace, and democracy, believing these values constituted the magnetic appeal that attracted countries like Ukraine toward EU membership. Russia's actions directly contested these principles, which led to the EU's future existence being uncertain – the EU's status quo was not sustainable, yet the EU could not remain silent and thus let the wrongdoings continue.

These three dimensions expose what truly sustained the EU beyond its stated integration discourse – the **core of political enjoyment of being a stable, unhindered and attractive model of regional integration** – a deeper reality that exceeds the symbolic representation of the EU as merely the future of European countries. Yet Russia's annexation of Crimea severely undermined this core enjoyment, thereby disrupting the idealised discourse of European integration.

Barroso's pre-2014 statements support this interpretation. He emphasised how the EU had devoted the previous decade to constructively

developing its relations with Russia while simultaneously assisting neighbouring countries in reforming and strengthening their ties with Europe. Significantly, Barroso stressed that the EU never pressured candidate or neighbouring countries into membership or compelled them to sever their ties with Russia. This characterisation implicitly positions countries as voluntarily seeking EU membership, as they are drawn by the Union's values and integration model as avenues to their prosperity and progress. Russia's assault on these fundamental values therefore constitutes an existential challenge to the EU's very identity and purpose.

### NEW POLITICAL ENJOYMENT IN POLITICAL FANTASY: THE EU AS A MODERN ACTOR

→ **Dire, Antagonising Language:** "The Ukrainian people have already shed too much blood in this process" (BARROSO, 2014).

"Strong Russian State sponsored nationalist propaganda continues supporting the illegal actions of armed separatists" (BARROSO & VAN ROMPUY, 2014).

"There is no place for the use of force and coercion to change borders on the European continent in the 21st century" (VAN ROMPUY, 2014).

"Russia is cruel, aggressive, and a danger to us all..." (KALLAS & VON DER LEYEN, 2025).

"Every day, Russia lies about its desire for peace. Putin is taking the world for a ride" (IBID.).

"A peaceful nation was invaded, with no reason except Putin's imperial obsession" (VON DER LEYEN, 2025A).

→ **Protagonistic, Heroic, and Valuing Articulations:** "Together with other G7 leaders... we have strongly and unequivocally condemned this action" (BARROSO, 2014).

"We strongly condemn the unconstitutional referendum in Crimea; we will not recognise it, nor will we recognise the annexation" (VAN ROMPUY, 2014).

“The European Union has a special responsibility for peace and stability in Europe... We stand by Ukraine and its people. We support their right to choose their own future” (IBID.).

→ **Excessive Historical Linking:** “The page of last century’s history should be turned and not re-written. I believe in a European continent where the rule of law prevails over the rule of force, where sovereignty is shared and not limited, where the logic of cooperation replaces the logic of confrontation. We don’t need new Cold Wars. And we certainly do not want them” (BARROSO, 2014).

→ **Exaggerated Visions and Predictions:** “We are seeing that the shadow of sanctions is already having an effect on Russia’s investment climate” (VAN ROMPUY, 2014).

“We know that our sanctions are an effective tool of economic pressure. And we will keep using them until Russia comes to the negotiation table with Ukraine for a just and lasting peace” (VON DER LEYEN, 2025B).

The EU’s political fantasy, which is evident in its dire and antagonising language, protagonistic and heroic language, exaggerated visions and predictions, and historical linking, reveals the organisation of a new political enjoyment across three interconnected dimensions.

The three dimensions are as follows. First, there is the construction of an enemy of regional security: the EU depicted the effect of Crimea’s annexation using visceral imagery like “Ukrainian people hav[ing] already shed too much blood” when it characterised Russia as cruel, aggressive, and imperialist, and as lying to the world about its desire for peace, supporting illegal separatists and employing military force to destroy the peace in Ukraine and change European borders – actions framed as beyond Europe’s rational ways, and dangerous for and incompatible with Europe’s modern security order.

Second, there is the collective protagonist positioning and bonding: the EU established itself as a moral protagonist by aligning with the G7 leaders in condemning Russia’s actions in Crimea. This positioning drew heavily on Cold War narratives, invoking that era as a closed chapter that

must not be reopened. By insisting that “the page of last century’s history should be turned and not re-written,” the EU reinforced the collective imagination about the painful past to encourage its collective awareness of the potential impacts of the crisis if it did not take an action, while establishing a clear boundary between “We” (the EU and its allies) and “Them” (Russia). In addition, this identification includes the EU’s institutional commitments to protecting the European peace and stability and advocating for Ukraine’s right to self-determination.

Third, there is pressuring: the EU’s identification was reinforced through its sanctions narratives. It used the exaggerated term “shadow of sanctions” as if the sanctions had truly weakened Russia’s investment climate even before their full implementation. This was the EU’s way of predicting that the sanctions would economically damage Russia. Additionally, the EU’s narratives of the sanctions continued to show its confident visions of the sanctions effectively making Russia suffer, thereby leading it to the negotiation table in the future. Yet these narratives actually functioned as a form of wishful thinking that strengthened the EU’s identity as a protector of peace against Russian aggression, which was depicted as causing bloodshed and instability. Through these narratives, the EU seemingly wanted to ignore the deeper complexities in regard to the sanctions implementation as a response to Russia’s aggressiveness in Ukraine.

These dimensions converged to produce a transformed identity. No longer deriving its core political enjoyment from being a stable, unhindered, attractive and integrative power, the EU produced a new core political enjoyment by repositioning itself as a **modern security actor wielding non-military hard power against Russia as an aggressor**. This fantasy managed a critical tension: confronting Russia militarily would have made the EU indistinguishable from its opponent, while the sanctions offered a morally superior alternative aligned with European values. The dramatic portrayal of the pressure of the sanctions on Russia, which made them sound like a remedy for Europe, convinced the audience that this approach best preserved stability.

Crucially, the identification and sanctions narratives expose that European integration required not only an open cooperation but also the confronting of disruptive actors. The EU’s new core enjoyment of being a modern European security actor established a new nodal point for the

integration discourse. The EU positioned itself as progressively providing the security and stability necessary for European integration, no longer relying solely on the belief that the integration proceeded without any military obstacles. However, the core enjoyment of being a sanctions-wielding security actor was tied to a concrete actualisation carried out through the implemented measures to sustain this political fantasy.

#### ACTUALISATION OF FANTASY'S POLITICAL ENJOYMENT OF BEING A SECURITY ACTOR THROUGH THE SANCTIONS IMPLEMENTATION

→ **Paradox Emphasis:** "Russia will find itself increasingly isolated by its own actions. The European Union remains ready to reverse its decisions and reengage with Russia when it starts contributing actively" (BARROSO & VAN ROMPUY, 2014).

"Together with the United States, we can really force Putin to negotiate seriously. Every day Russia continues its war, the price must go up, and that is why we are proposing this 18th package of sanctions" (KALLAS & VON DER LEYEN, 2025).

→ **The Positive Bias of the Previous Implementation:** "We do all this because sanctions work, every sanction weakens Russia's ability to fight" (IBID.).

"Russia has lost tens of billions in oil revenues. Its economy is shrinking, and its GDP has dropped. Sanctioning the Shadow Fleet has been particularly impactful: after our last sanctions package, the 17<sup>th</sup> sanctions package, the oil exports from Russia via the Black Sea and Baltic Sea routes declined by 30% in a week" (IBID.).

→ **Expansion Logic:** "Today the European Union has agreed a package of significant additional restrictive measures... [that will] limit access to EU capital markets for Russian State-owned financial institutions, impose an embargo on trade in arms, establish an export ban for dual use goods for military end users, and curtail Russian access to sensitive technologies particularly in the field of the oil sector" (BARROSO & VAN ROMPUY, 2014).

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“As the President said, the next round of EU sanctions against Russia will target Russia’s energy revenues, including the shadow fleet, its military industry and its banking sector” (KALLAS & VON DER LEYEN, 2025).

The implementation of the sanctions highlights the tension between the EU’s fantasy and the actual outcomes of its acts as a modern security actor. The EU had actualised some of the enjoyment dimensions – e.g. its collective positioning with the aim to pressure Russia. The sanctions implementation succeeded in isolating Russia, progressively making it lose billions of US dollars in oil revenues and weakening its economy and capability to fight – which exceeded the initial expectations. However, this success also created contradictions.

That duality became complex as the EU acknowledged that the relations with Russia that it built before 2014 had fundamentally changed and that Russia continued in its war. At the same time, the EU felt obligated to provide security and stability to Europe. The EU reaffirmed its pursuit of a diplomatic engagement or negotiations with Moscow in order to resolve the Ukraine crisis, thus demonstrating the unfulfilled dimension of its commitment to conflict resolution that it made as a modern security actor. This desire of the EU to complete its identity as a modern security actor also illustrated that fractures within the discourse of European integration continued to exist, and thus they were also embedded in the necessity of the continuity of the sanctions.

Concurrently, the EU expanded its sanctions regime to target Russia’s financial institutions, military technology sector, and petroleum industry, and increased the sanctions’ effects on broader aspects of Russia’s energy revenues. These escalating measures served two interconnected objectives: at the surface level the continued sanctions aimed to limit Russia’s capacity to sustain its military operations in Ukraine while at the non-surface level, they simultaneously aimed to reinforce the EU’s identity and power structure as an advanced security actor, thereby also maintaining its superior hierarchical status in the European regional security landscape.

## EMPERICAL CASE STUDY II: MYANMAR

### LACK OF POLITICAL ENJOYMENT FOLLOWING THE DISRUPTION OF THE DISCOURSE OF THE EU'S NORMS ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP WITH ASIA

*Baseline (Statements about the Pre-1996 Period):* “The [EU] ministers noted that there had been some positive developments in Myanmar. They expressed the hope that ASEAN’s policy of constructive engagement and the EU’s willingness to engage in a critical dialogue will contribute to achieving more sustainable improvements in all fields” (EU MINISTERS, 1994).

“The EU Ministers reviewed with satisfaction the positive result of development cooperation by the EU and ASEAN countries in the less developed countries of Southeast Asia. They further recognised the interest of EU and ASEAN to put forward a joint effort to promote development including the alleviation of poverty in these countries in order to facilitate their full participation in the economic growth of Southeast Asia [sic]” (IBID.).

#### The Following Disruption:

- **Articulation of Threats:** “The situation in countries like Myanmar/Burma is but a stark reminder of our common challenge, which is: to move from the era of codification of human rights... into an era of effective and worldwide application and protection of human rights” (FERRERO-WALDNER, 2007).
- **Critical Tipping Points:** “For Europe, Myanmar is more than a humanitarian concern. It is a test of the EU’s credibility” (SABATUCCI, 2025)

“We have read this story before. The priority now is ensuring that Europe’s economic, political and societal presence continues so that the EU remains relevant for the people of Myanmar. When I first arrived in Myanmar, Europe mattered. As I return to Europe now, the question is whether it continues to matter” (IBID.).

Regarding Myanmar, the EU's lack of political enjoyment leading to existential anxiety was articulated through its articulated threats and recognition of critical tipping points.

Superficially, Myanmar challenged the universal human rights standards enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Yet more fundamentally, this disruption threatened two interconnected dimensions of the EU's core political enjoyment. First, it undermined the credibility of the EU's external human rights framework, which was commonly related to universal humanitarian concerns. Unlike the UN's focus on basic rights and democracy, the EU's external approach actually encompassed broader concerns such as peace, security, sustainable development, fair trade, poverty reduction, and children's rights. This differed from the EU's narrower internal framework, which addressed social exclusion, discrimination, and gender equality – areas where member states largely complied voluntarily. So the EU had to achieve a high credibility for itself through the application of its standards in Asia. Myanmar's initial progress toward EU standards enhanced the credibility of its external framework only between 1994–1995.

Second, the EU recognised the critical tipping point of its political and economic credibility and relevance in Asia. While the EU realised that Myanmar could not immediately achieve an ideal democracy after decades of authoritarianism, the democratic progress between 1994 and 1995 would have enabled regulatory improvements and a trade liberalisation. Such progress would have benefited not only the economic development for the lower classes in Myanmar but also EU business and investment interests in Southeast Asia. As the EU expanded its economic ties across Southeast Asia, however, Myanmar's unresolved conflict complicated efforts to align ASEAN integration with EU standards, potentially hindering EU goods, services, and investment flows. Thus, establishing EU-style human rights clauses as conditions would have also reduced the competitive pressures facing the EU in Myanmar and Asia broadly.

These dimensions reveal the core political enjoyment which was lost in the disrupted idealised discourse of EU norms in the economic partnership with Asia: **the EU's progressively compromising efforts to become the dominant external political, economic, and social actor in Asia.** This core

political enjoyment concerned “pursuing recognition as an influential actor” rather than “already being one.” It compensated for the EU’s limited authority over its member states in terms of human rights enforcement, which stemmed from the EU’s reliance on attraction rather than domination during its own integration.

This political enjoyment appeared in EU statements at the 1994 EU-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, where the discussions focused on economic cooperation – in trade, investment, and industry. The statements consisted of expressions of the EU’s approval of Myanmar’s progress without mentioning the military regime’s pre-1994 aggression, which made them seem like a subtle praise of the regime’s peaceful handling of rebel groups at that time. The statements also emphasised the EU’s efforts to find a compromise between its own approach and ASEAN’s constructive engagement for the purpose of Myanmar’s further democratic changes. The EU also expected its progressive engagement with ASEAN to contribute to further democratisation and poverty eradication in Myanmar because this process helped the EU strengthen its partnerships with and positioning regarding the ASEAN countries in all fields, but particularly the social economy. Following this progress, the EU even granted Myanmar GSP status. The Union also illustrated its strategic calculation in this regard.

This political enjoyment was not directly captured in the idealised discourse and exceeded its symbolic representation of the EU as a normative exemplar in the area of global peace.

#### NEW POLITICAL ENJOYMENT IN POLITICAL FANTASY: THE EU AS AN ASSERTIVE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND NORMATIVE POWER IN ASIA

- **Protagonistic, Heroic, and Valuing Articulations:** “I would like to pay particular tribute today to the role of civil society actors and human rights defenders as indispensable partners of the European Union in our fight for the full respect for human rights worldwide. As of this year, the EU has even better and more flexible means at its hands to help those who dedicate their lives to help[ing] others” (FERRERO-WALDNER, 2007).

“...when our political and trading partners fall below universally accepted standards of human decency, it is right that the EU should impose political and economic sanctions” (TRUSCOTT, 1997).

- **Exaggerated Visions and Predictions:** “ASEAN’s credibility will only be damaged if Burma is offered membership” (IBID.).
- **Excessive Historical Linking:** “Today’s actions by the Tatmadaw bring back painful memories of previous decades. Democracy must prevail. We are in touch with our international partners on this most pressing issue to ensure a coordinated response” (BORRELL, 2021).

The EU’s political fantasy for overcoming its existential anxiety was articulated through protagonistic-heroic and valuing articulations and exaggerated visions, revealing the organisation of a new political enjoyment across three interconnected dimensions.

First, the EU solidified its identification on the global level as the leader in human rights defence by emphasising its inclusive, protagonistic articulation. It implicitly established itself as the primary global defender of human rights. By engaging civil society actors and human rights defenders as integral partners, the EU projected itself as a listener of grassroots voices providing direct evidence of violations, including those from Myanmar. The EU enjoyed imagining itself as “the good guy” standing on the front lines against human rights violations. Myanmar became a “stage” where the EU could play this heroic role, even though its real power in Asia, compared to that of ASEAN in Myanmar, was very limited.

Second, the EU affirmed its economic-political-normative sovereignty in Asia, a region far beyond its borders, by positioning itself against allegedly uncivilised and undemocratic political and trading partners like Myanmar. By evoking painful memories of and feeling connected to the past situations of the Myanmar junta’s aggressiveness, the EU tried to create a sense of responsibility for standing with Myanmar’s people and the prevailing democratic efforts in Myanmar. This identification was reinforced through narratives that valued the EU’s collective response, particularly its sanctioning capacity. These articulations reveal that the EU preferred

imposing sanctions over remaining silent, framing such measures not as an isolation of Myanmar's population but as a principled moral action. The EU created an emotional narrative that made them feel connected and responsible – as if their destiny was closely tied to Myanmar. But this was more of an imagination than a geopolitical reality.

Third, the EU constructed a normative-political hierarchy within its relationship with ASEAN through exaggerated visions of regional differences. The EU subtly contrasted its sanctions against Myanmar with ASEAN's decision to accept Myanmar as a member despite its clear violations. In addition, the EU positioned its moral assessment as superior to ASEAN's, arguing that this distinction stemmed not from geographical proximity but from its own sharper ethical judgment. The EU claimed a prescient awareness: should ASEAN fail to act decisively and Myanmar's conflict escalate, the EU anticipated it. This comparison positioned the EU as making a greater effort to uphold its human rights leadership and political dignity than ASEAN, thereby distinguishing its credibility from ASEAN's approach. These narratives illustrate that the EU built the fantasy about itself at the top of the moral-political pyramid in ASEAN while the EU was far away from ASEAN both geographically and culturally. The EU seemed to hardly or only pragmatically acknowledge ASEAN's vigilant and non-interventionist approach, which may actually be more effective for Myanmar and its Southeast Asian regional context.

These three dimensions converged in one new core political enjoyment: **being an assertive political, economic, and normative power in Asia** with a new nodal point for the EU's disrupted discourse of its norms in its economic partnerships with Asia. The political fantasy narratives projecting the EU's assertive power beyond its territorial borders were attempts to illustrate its relevance in Southeast Asia despite ASEAN's limited concern for relations with it.

The EU's enjoyment of its political fantasy of being an assertive political, economic, and normative power was tied to its actualisation and intensification through concrete measures.

#### **THE SANCTIONS AS A MATERIAL ENACTMENT OF A FANTASY'S POLITICAL ENJOYMENT OF BEING AN ASSERTIVE POWER IN ASIA**

- **Paradox Emphasis:** “It is to be welcomed that a number of US and European companies, including Heineken, Carlsberg and PepsiCo, have pulled out. But other companies still trade in Burma, turning a blind eye to the human rights abuses occurring all around them... This is just not acceptable. What are these European companies doing with Burmese blood on their hands?” (TRUSCOTT, 1997).
- **Maintenance Logic:** “I hope the EU maintains the pressure on the Burmese authorities so that they feel compelled to embrace democracy and liberate the Burmese people from their suffering and oppression” (IBID.).
- **Expansion Logic:** “There are other broader moral grounds for taking action against Burma... Political opponents, ethnic minorities and the wider population face daily intimidation and worse” (IBID.).

“Cultural and religious pretexts were refuted by the witnesses and, naturally, contacts were also made with the Buddhist area of the country, where it was in fact confirmed to us that Buddhism is in no way a protection against slavery” (MARIN, 1997).

“This was done irrespective of the intellectual or political repugnance any one of those of us there may have felt. In a verbal note, the Burmese government rejected our invitation [to a meeting]” (IBID.).

The implementation of the sanctions against Myanmar highlights the tension between the EU’s fantasy and the actual outcomes. These measures only partially materialised the EU’s new core political enjoyment.

Through the imposition of the sanctions, the EU actualised all aspects of its new core political enjoyment, as was illustrated by some major European corporations like Heineken and Carlsberg withdrawing from Myanmar. However, this success was also incomplete, as other European companies remained operational in the country. The EU characterised this situation as foreign businesses being complicit in the violence perpetrated by Myanmar’s government. As all the dimensions of the core

enjoyment were only partially fulfilled, the EU's overarching enjoyment of being an assertive political, economic, and normative power remained unaccomplished.

This shortfall was tied to maintaining the sanctions regime, framed as an effort to liberate Myanmar's oppressed population. Concurrently, the EU carried out an expansion of the sanctions by revoking the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) benefits, which was justified by citing slavery, forced labour, and the persecution of religious minorities. Furthermore, when Myanmar's government refused the EU invitations to diplomatic meetings, the EU had one more reason to intensify the measures.

Like the Russia case, the Myanmar case illustrates how a partial actualisation of a new political enjoyment led to a continued need for its intensification. The EU could not claim a complete success here, yet it could not admit failure either. In each case, the new political enjoyment became a new nodal point for the EU grand discourse and mitigated the EU's existential anxiety.

## CONCLUSION

This article using Lacanian psychoanalysis illuminates why the EU persists with the sanctions despite their debatable effectiveness. It reveals an underlying political enjoyment embedded within its ostensibly neutral idealised discourses. This political enjoyment, providing a sense of collective existence, encountered disruptive challenges activating political fantasies. Such fantasies organise a new political enjoyment through narratives of identification and transgression (sanctions). This political enjoyment was actualised through concrete sanctions implementations, which served as tangible expressions of the perceived superiority and dominance of the EU compensating for the fundamental political enjoyment within the idealised discourses. The sanctions implementation intensified during the ongoing crises because the EU recognised that one sanctions implementation could not actualise the new political enjoyment immediately and perfectly.

This article illustrates that the EU's persistent sanctions policy on Russia and Myanmar stemmed from its existential anxiety over the challenges to its idealised discourses of "European Integration and Eastern

Enlargement” and “the EU’s norms in the economic partnership with Asia” respectively.

Based on the preliminary analysis, the core of the political enjoyment of the EU’s idealised discourse of European integration was “being an unhindered superior model of regional integration”. However, Russia’s Crimea annexation destroyed this core enjoyment by disrupting territorial stability, obstructing the open regionalism with Russia, and challenging the EU’s integrative values of unity, peace, and democracy. The EU constructed a new political enjoyment of being a modern security actor through political fantasy. The fantasy consisted of identification narratives depicting Russia as a cruel aggressor incompatible with the European order, while the EU positioned itself as a moral protagonist alongside its G7 allies by invoking Cold War narratives to establish “We versus Them” boundaries. Meanwhile, the EU’s sanctions narratives portrayed these non-military measures as its protective capabilities that fit its identification narratives. Furthermore, the sanctions implementation created a paradox: while isolating Russia economically, the EU remained willing to engage with it diplomatically, thus revealing an incomplete actualisation. It was tied to the gradual intensification of the sanctions implementation targeting Russian financial sectors, military technology, and oil industries as an attempt to fully materialise the EU’s core political enjoyment of being a superior modern security actor.

Furthermore, based on the preliminary analysis, the core of the EU’s political enjoyment of its idealised discourse of its norms in the economic partnership with Asia was its progressive efforts to be an influential political, economic, and social actor in Southeast Asia. However, this enjoyment was disrupted as Myanmar’s regression undermined the EU’s credibility in promoting its external human rights regime and obstructed its political and economic expansion in the region. Through political fantasy, the EU re-positioned itself as an assertive normative, political and economic power, claiming a leadership position in defending human rights, and its superiority over ASEAN through sanctions narratives that showed the EU’s political, economic and normative sovereignty beyond its territorial borders. The sanctions implementation partially actualised this new political enjoyment because when some European companies withdrew from Myanmar, other firms continued presence there was perceived as if

they indirectly supported the Myanmar junta's violence. The unfulfilled political enjoyment created an incompleteness that led to an increasing emphasis on the EU's efforts to intensify its measures through GSP withdrawal and expanded justifications based on issues of forced labour and slavery. All these acts were attempts to fully materialise its core political enjoyment of being an assertive political, economic, and normative power.

In both the Myanmar and the Russia case, abandoning the sanctions policy implementation entirely would be like giving up on the logic of the organisation and actualisation of a new political enjoyment. If it happened, the EU would forever end up in a state of existential absence from Europe and Asia.

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