

Abstract

The aim of the thesis is to examine how the European Union (EU) and its institutions deal with incoherence in their foreign policy towards authoritarian regimes. The main research question is: How do the EU and its institutions cope with situations where they act incoherently? The thesis uses a comparative study of Azerbaijan and Belarus in the period from 2009 to 2024, i.e. since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, which was supposed to increase the coherence of the EU in its external activities. The thesis works with three hypotheses: the European Parliament (EP) points to incoherence and sticks to the EU's basic principles and values; the Council of the EU ignores incoherence and focuses on compromises between member states; the European External Action Service (EEAS) denies the existence of incoherence as it would mean its failure. Both qualitative analysis, including semi-structured interviews with EEAS staff and experts, and discourse analysis of policy documents and media outputs are used to verify these hypotheses. The research finds that different institutions deal with incoherence in different ways. The EP employs consistent criticism of regimes, alerts other institutions when their policies are incoherent, and challenges them to pursue a normative agenda. The Council of the EU copes with incoherence through a complex system of decision-making, internal criticism of the Commission, and advocacy of the role of strategic interests over values, but it is aware of incoherence towards both regimes. The EEAS exclusively rejects incoherence and argues that the cases cannot be compared. Almost all hypotheses have been fulfilled, with the exception of the Council of the European Union, which was only partially fulfilled.