



European Politics and Society: Václav Havel Joint Master Programme

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Jagiellonian University

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**From the EU's Geopolitical Awakening to Strategic Culture Building: A Window Into
the HR/VP's Discourse (2019-2024)**

Master's Thesis

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Wordcount: 18692 words

Submission date: June 2024

Abstract

After the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, declared the European Union's geopolitical awakening. Unwilling to stop there, Borrell wanted to turn the EU's geopolitical awakening into a permanent strategic posture. The HR/VP had argued that the EU needed to learn the language of power to maximise its geopolitical impact since he came to office in late 2019 as part of von der Leyen's 'geopolitical commission'. He also started writing a blog early on to offer his perspective on world affairs and contribute to cementing a common EU strategic culture. Those blog posts, together with speeches and op-eds published in various media, have been put together by Borrell and his team into four annual books, which condense the HR/VP's discourse on EU foreign policy throughout his tenure. This research aims to understand better the role geopolitics played in the HR/VP's efforts to build a common EU strategic culture by analysing Borrell's four books from a constructivist theoretical standpoint built upon the literature on critical geopolitics and strategic culture. To do so, I will examine the HR/VP's discourse through computer-assisted qualitative content analysis, working deductively with codebooks derived from the literature as well as inductively with the material. I will produce a cartography of Borrell's books and examine the presence of geostrategic discourse and a geopolitical lexicon within them. The findings suggest that Borrell displays a lexicon characteristic of practical geopolitics in his descriptions of world events. Also, Borrell draws increasingly from geostrategic discourse in his efforts to construct a common EU strategic culture. Notably, however, the HR/VP's geostrategic discourse seems to be affected by the Member States' position on a given foreign policy crisis. Besides, the empirical analysis shows that the concept of 'strategic autonomy' may have lost HR/VP Borrell's favour. Finally, the cartography of Borrell's books illustrates that the HR/VP's discourse has both a marked geographical dimension and a global reach.

Keywords: EU Foreign Policy, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, CFSP, Geopolitics, Strategic Culture

Abstrakt

Po pełnoskalowej inwazji Rosji na Ukrainę 24 lutego 2022 roku Wysoki Przedstawiciel ds. Zagranicznych i Polityki Bezpieczeństwa, Josep Borrell, ogłosił geopolityczne przebudzenie Unii Europejskiej. Ponadto, Borrell chciał przekształcić to geopolityczne przebudzenie UE w trwałą strategiczną postawę. HR/VP argumentował, że UE musi nauczyć się języka władzy, aby zmaksymalizować swój geopolityczny wpływ od momentu objęcia urzędu pod koniec 2019 roku jako część „geopolitycznej komisji” von der Leyen. Już na początku zaczął również pisać blog, w którym zamierzał przedstawiać swoją perspektywę na sprawy światowe i przyczyniać się do umacniania wspólnej strategicznej kultury UE. Te posty na blogu, wraz z przemówieniami i artykułami opublikowanymi w różnych mediach, zostały zebrane przez Borrella i jego zespół w cztery roczne książki, które kondensują myśli HR/VP na temat polityki zagranicznej UE w czasie jego kadencji. Niniejsze badanie ma na celu lepsze zrozumienie roli, jaką geopolityka odegrała w wysiłkach HR/VP na rzecz budowania wspólnej strategicznej kultury UE, poprzez analizę dyskursu Borrella w tych czterech książkach z konstruktywistycznego punktu widzenia, opierając się na literaturze dotyczącej krytycznej geopolityki i kultury strategicznej. Aby to zrobić, przeanalizuję książki HR/VP za pomocą komputerowo wspomaganą jakościową analizy treści (CAQDAS), używając dedukcyjnie kodów wywodzących się z literatury i indukcyjnie z materiału empirycznego. Stworzę kartografię książek Borrella i zbadam obecność w nich dyskursu geostrategicznego i leksykonu geopolitycznego. Wyniki sugerują, że Borrell wykazuje leksykon charakterystyczny dla praktycznej geopolityki w swoich opisach polityki światowej i wydarzeń. Ponadto, Borrell coraz częściej czerpie z dyskursu geostrategicznego w swoich wysiłkach na rzecz budowania wspólnej strategicznej kultury UE. Jednakże, dyskurs geostrategiczny HR/VP nie jest spójny w obliczu różnych kryzysów polityki zagranicznej. Ponadto, analiza empiryczna pokazuje, że koncepcja „autonomii strategicznej” może wychodzić z mody w przypadku HR/VP Borrella. Na koniec, kartografia książek Borrella ilustruje, że dyskurs HR/VP ma wyraźny wymiar geograficzny i globalny zasięg.

Słowa Kluczowe: Polityka zagraniczna UE, Wysoki Przedstawiciel ds. Zagranicznych i Polityki Bezpieczeństwa, WPZiB, Geopolityka, Kultura Strategiczna

Acknowledgements

I want to express my gratitude to dr hab. Magdalena Góra for her research supervision, and the Mutua Madrileña Foundation for their financial sponsorship of my studies. I would also like to thank everyone involved in the EPS programme for two unforgettable years. Last but not least, I thank my family and partner in crime for their unwavering support and trust.

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List of Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CAQDAS	Computer-Assisted Qualitative Content Analysis
CELAC	Community of Latin American and Caribbean States
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
EaP	Eastern Partnership
ESS	European Security Strategy
EU	European Union
EUCAP	European Union Capacity Building Mission
EUGS	European Union Global Strategy
EU NAVFOR	European Union Naval Force Atalanta
EUTM	European Union Training Mission
FAC	Foreign Affairs Council
HR/VP	High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the EU/Vice-President of the European Commission
IR	International Relations
PDSP	Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean
PSC	Political and Security Committee
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
TEU	Treaty on European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
UN	United Nations
US	United States of America

“Any serious geopolitical player displays a will to act, shows an awareness of space, and tells a narrative which links the past, present, and future of a given community. This is our point of departure” (van Middelaar, 2021).

1. Introduction

This research investigates discourse from the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) Josep Borrell Fontelles, looking at how geopolitics shaped the HR/VP’s discursive efforts to build a common strategic culture for the European Union (EU) during most of his tenure (2019-2024).

The EU has faced enormous challenges since Borrell assumed office as the HR/VP in December 2019: a worldwide pandemic only a few weeks into his mandate, mounting animosity between the world’s major powers, the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine, and the worst escalation in the Middle East in the past 20 years being the main but not the only ones. On the one hand, this set of cataclysms has tested the limits of EU external action and forced its leaders to deal with a seemingly permanent crisis mode. On the other hand, such crises have also allowed the HR/VP to advocate discursively for strategic thinking and action within the EU. Jean Monnet’s adage that crises forge the EU as it becomes the sum of the solutions adopted to solve them underscores the importance of understanding how a key actor in EU foreign policy, like the HR/VP, has offered distinctive avenues for the EU to follow during these turbulent times.

In his foreword to the EU Strategic Compass, approved by the Council of the EU in March 2022, Borrell begins by asserting that the Russian invasion of Ukraine proved that the EU was even in more danger than what he himself had claimed before. Because of this realisation, the EU was living through a moment of “geopolitical awakening” (European External Action Service, 2022, p. 4). To Borrell, waking up geopolitically meant grasping the weight of power politics in today’s world and understanding that the EU needed to become strategic or face the consequences. In his own words:

“We now need to ensure that we turn the EU’s geopolitical awakening into a more permanent strategic posture. For there is so much more to do. The essence of what the EU did in reacting to Russia’s invasion was to unite and use the full range of EU policies and levers as instruments of power. We showed that we are ready to pay a severe price to defend our security and that of our partners – the price of freedom. We should build on this approach in the period ahead, in Ukraine but elsewhere too” (European External Action Service, 2022, p. 4).

Taking Borrell's remarks seriously, this study aims to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the HR/VP's writings, which are hosted on the European External Action Service (EEAS) website and regularly updated with his insights on EU foreign policy. Specifically, I will look at the annual publications putting together entries from the HR/VP's blog 'A Window on the World' and other public communication artefacts (op-eds, speeches and interviews) in a series of books, which Borrell and his team curate as part of the HR/VP's efforts to "think and act ever more in geo-political terms" (Borrell, 2021, p. 14). At the time of writing this thesis, four books are available to download freely from the EEAS website, covering most of Borrell's time in office. The HR/VP wrote the introduction to the last book in early 2024.

Before turning to the question of why discourse from Borrell matters to research on EU foreign policy, it is insightful to let the HR/VP explain why his own writings represent a valuable object of study. As he described during a roundtable organised by the Groupe d'Études Géopolitiques where he presented his first book in 2021:

"I write so much because I enjoy it but above all because I believe in the importance of narratives. To me, a politician must be a storyteller because political battles are won or lost depending on how the issues are framed. In international politics, the same process applies. Hence, I always try to write from the standpoint of a protagonist, of an actor taking an active role. In my opinion, there is today a lack of common understanding of the world among Europeans, which is unfortunate because in order to make a change, you need to understand the world. As Marx once said: "Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways. The point, however, is to change it" (Borrell et al., 2021).

It is only logical to pay close attention to Borrell's words given the stated aims behind his writings and the HR/VP's institutionally privileged position. Moreover, the ambitions of the EU Commission president Ursula von der Leyen (2019a) to lead a "geopolitical commission" coupled with the mandate she gave to Borrell to "strengthen the Union's capacity to act autonomously and promote its values and interests around the world", warrant examining whether, at least in Borrell's discourse, the EU has become "more strategic, more assertive and more united in its approach to external relations" (von der Leyen, 2019b). Already during his confirmation hearing at the European Parliament, Borrell stressed that the EU needed a "shared strategic culture" (European Parliament, 2019). He also stated that the EU had to "learn the language of power", a mantra that will become part of his legacy (European Parliament, 2019). But what kind of language has the HR/VP been using himself?

1.2 Research Problem and Question

The research problem stems from the assumption that discourse from the HR/VP contributes to—or at least aims to play a role in—the construction of a common EU strategic culture. The grounds for this premise are articulated by Borrell himself in the introduction to his blog:

“(…) We live in a permanent ‘battle of narratives’ about the issues that determine our future. We have to understand these different positions if we want to look for a common ground. In particular common ground among Europeans, which is the duty of the HR/VP. With this blog, I intend to take a step back and contribute to building a European common strategic culture. The responsibilities of the HR/VP do not always allow me to speak out as clearly as I would like. But I will try to present here my personal views, looking through the glasses of a convinced European, on the main issues at stake for Europe and its global role” (European External Action Service, n.d.).

Accepting Borrell’s intentions, the following questions arise. How does Borrell construct the EU as a global actor in response to the current state of world affairs as he goes about leading EU foreign policy? What role does geopolitics play in Borrell’s discourse? Which geographies enjoy the most attention from the HR/VP? And ultimately, what does the world look like through Borrell’s eyes?

With these puzzling issues in mind, I aim to build a research design with two objectives. First, I intend to map Borrell’s discourse, build a cartography of the HR/VP’s books, and analyse the use of a geopolitical lexicon. Second, drawing on the literature on critical geopolitics and strategic culture, I will examine Borrell’s use of geostrategic discourse throughout his mandate. The research question is conceived as a response to the research problem and reads as follows:

How does HR/VP Borrell use geopolitics as part of his discursive efforts to build a common EU strategic culture, and what are the geographic dimensions of his discourse?

The present introduction is followed by a background chapter containing a short history of the HR/VP post until Borrell’s arrival, as well as my intended contribution to the literature. Next, a chapter on the theoretical framework delves into geopolitics and strategic culture from a constructivist standpoint and includes a section on how these streams of literature can be conceptualised to analyse the HR/VP’s discourse. The methodology and data operationalisation are addressed in a separate chapter before the empirical analysis is presented. Lastly, this thesis ends with a set of conclusions, a bibliography and an annex.

2. Background

My research is part of an ever-growing body of literature on EU foreign policy, the umbrella topic of this MA thesis. To study EU foreign policy, just as others have done before, I have chosen to focus on the HR/VP. This section will provide background on the HR/VP while reviewing the state of the field in the academic literature and highlighting the main contributions this work hopes to bring to it.

2.1 A Short History of the High Representatives before Borrell

The EU Member States created the post of EU High Representative with the Amsterdam Treaty, which was signed in 1997 and entered into force in 1999. Back then, the job title was High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, and the first permanent jobholder was Javier Solana, former NATO Secretary General and Spanish Foreign Affairs Minister. Solana remained the EU's foreign policy chief until 2009 and played a vital role in consolidating the High Representative post. Nevertheless, the first High Representative was hindered by an initially slim portfolio and few formal responsibilities recognised in the Amsterdam Treaty (Helwig, 2013). Solana was also given the job of Secretary-General of the Council of the EU and assisted the rotating presidencies in handling issues related to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), but the six-month-long presidencies retained the agenda-setting power (Vanhoonacker & Pomorska, 2013).

However, the rotating presidencies post-Amsterdam realised the EU had to have a stable presence in the post-conflict Western Balkans, something they were not fit for given their six-month mandate, and quickly delegated to the High Representative (Helwig, 2015). Solana managed to build upon his experience in the Western Balkans, earning legitimacy with the Member States to pursue other initiatives in CFSP despite the lack of formal power to do so (Helwig, 2015). If voters in France and the Netherlands had not rejected the EU Constitutional Treaty, Solana would most probably have become the first EU Foreign Minister. However, by the time the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe was adapted into the Treaty of Lisbon, signed by the Member States in 2007 and then became effective in 2009, Solana had already spent two terms as High Representative. His continuity was ruled out by both the Spanish government and the Barroso Commission (Helwig, 2015). It was time for the British Catherine Ashton, previously European Commissioner for Trade, to take on the challenges of the revamped and strengthened HR/VP role.

The Lisbon Treaty merged the attributions of the pre-Lisbon High Representative with those of the European Commissioner for External Relations and upgraded its status to that of Vice-President of the EU Commission, thus putting a ‘double hat’ on the HR/VP (Helwig, 2013). Crucially, the Lisbon Treaty tasks the HR/VP with conducting the EU’s CFSP—which includes the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)—and making sure the EU’s external action remains consistent (Article 18 TEU).

On the one hand, the HR/VP post-Lisbon chairs the intergovernmental Foreign Affairs Council (FAC)—composed of the Member States’ Ministers of Foreign Affairs—(Article 27 TEU) and shares the right to initiate policies in CFSP with the Member States (Article 30 TEU). In practice, though, HR/VPs are constrained by having to reach unanimity in the Council (Vanhoonacker & Pomorska, 2013). On the other hand, the HR/VP is also part of the supranational College of Commissioners and needs to safeguard coherence in the Commission’s external action policies like trade and development (Vanhoonacker & Pomorska, 2015). Besides, the HR/VP can propose the implementation of sanctions and the solidarity clause together with the Commission (Articles 215 & 222 TFEU).

Hence, since Lisbon, the HR/VP has had to act as a bridge between the Commission and the Council, reconciling the interests of both the Member States and the EU institutions. At the same time, the HR/VP represents the EU externally in CFSP matters and heads the EEAS (Article 27 TEU). With its own staff and Brussels headquarters, as well as over 140 delegations around the world, the establishment of the EEAS marked a breakthrough in the development of the EU’s diplomatic system (Vanhoonacker & Pomorska, 2015).

As the first post-Lisbon HR/VP, Ashton’s tenure was marked by the aforementioned institutional changes. In the words of Howorth (2011, p. 307), “the job description itself remained largely to be written by the incumbent”. After a tumultuous start due to its surprising nomination and critiques of her lack of foreign policy experience, Ashton focused on setting up the EEAS, which had to be built from scratch and required extensive negotiations with the Commission, the Parliament and the Member States to fill the gaps left by the Lisbon Treaty provisions (Helwig, 2013; Vanhoonacker & Pomorska, 2015). Yet events in the EU’s neighbourhood—the Arab Spring in the south and the Maidan revolution or the Russian illegal annexation of Crimea in the east—put Ashton’s performance on the international stage in the spotlight. Yet, the Member States took centre stage as she opted for a “quiet diplomacy” approach that contrasted with Solana’s (Helwig, 2015, p. 95).

After the 2014 European elections, EU leaders chose Federica Mogherini to succeed Ashton, despite her having only been the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs for six months and accusations of her being lukewarm on Russia at a time when relations with Moscow were rapidly deteriorating (Tocci, 2016). Still, during Mogherini's term, the EU's diplomatic efforts played a key role in securing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) —also known as the nuclear deal— with Iran in 2015, building on the work of Solana and Ashton (Bassiri Tabrizi & Kienzle, 2020). Moreover, in the context of Trump's presidential victory in the US and the UK's Brexit referendum, Mogherini led an internal process of "strategic reflection" lasting 22 months that ended up with the adoption of the EU's Global Strategy (EUGS) in 2016, the first strategic assessment emanating from the EU since the European Security Strategy (ESS) drafted by Solana's team in 2003 (Tocci, 2016, pp. 461–462). This shift in the EU's strategic posture immediately preceded Borrell's arrival at the helm of the EU's foreign policy.

2.2 State of the Field and Contribution

Even though the HR/VP is not the main point of attention within the study of EU foreign policy, the academic literature has gained traction since the changes introduced in the Lisbon Treaty. A special Issue of the *European Security* journal represents the most comprehensive approach to the HR/VP post-Lisbon to date. There, —among other contributions that I will review below— Amadio Viceré et al. (2020) provide a detailed introduction to the institutional and legal framework of the HR/VP. However, the only academic perspective on Borrell's term so far is limited to examining the HR/VP's role during the early stages of the pandemic (Amadio Viceré & Tercovich, 2020). Similarly, but looking back, Howorth (2011) constitutes one of the seminal accounts on the HR/VP post-Lisbon but is restricted to narrating the appointment process and gathering assessments of Ashton's initial performance, given it was too early to go deeper into analysing the new role.

With some more perspective but still focusing on Ashton, Helwig (2013) made the first significant contribution to the literature by introducing Hill's capability-expectations gap into the study of the HR/VP. Helwig (2013) concludes that overcoming the capability-expectations gap will be a matter of the Member States deciding to strengthen EU foreign policy via the HR/VP, given the largely intergovernmental structure limiting the HR/VP's course of action. However, some responsibility also falls on the incumbent, who needs to be proactive in developing good relations with its EU partners at the Commission and the European Council to stir action from the Member States (Helwig, 2013).

Vanhoonacker and Pomorska (2013) explored the HR/VP's agenda-setting power in the EU's foreign policy for the first time. They found Ashton mostly focused on trying to build credibility and develop the EEAS' capacities, as she lacked the authority to make the most out of the opportunities the Lisbon Treaty offered. They also pointed to the Commission as a potential fruitful partner for the HR/VP. Vanhoonacker and Pomorska (2015) looked too at the legacy of Ashton in the development of the EU's diplomatic system once her term was finished. They found that the HR/VP had not fulfilled the partnering promises with the Commission, which affected the overall coherence of the HR/VP, the Member States, and the EU's executive (Vanhoonacker & Pomorska, 2015). As a silver lining, setting up the EEAS increased the HR/VP's capacity, and there were improvements in policy continuity since the rotating presidencies ceased setting the agenda on external action (Vanhoonacker & Pomorska, 2015). Nevertheless, Ashton's weak leadership meant the larger Member States retained agenda-setting powers (Vanhoonacker & Pomorska, 2015).

Helwig (2015) draws a comprehensive parallel between Solana's time pre-Lisbon and Ashton's entire mandate, representing the first instance of a comparison between different jobholders. Helwig contends that, besides the constraints exerted by the institutional frameworks laid out by the different Treaties, the contrasts in leadership styles are key in explaining how Solana and Ashton performed differently. Although the HR/VP post-Lisbon remains largely in the hands of the Member States, Helwig (2015, p. 101) believes that an incumbent with the right skills, connections and ideas has room to be an "agent for the promotion of the EU's development into a 'smart power'", something that resonates with Borrell's stated ambitions.

As hinted above, the study of leadership in EU foreign policy is one of the main strands of the literature on the HR/VP, mainly due to its contested nature. Aggestam and Johansson (2017) explored the divergences in Member States' and EEAS officials' expectations of the leading role the HR/VP should take. While Member States see the HR/VP as primarily a representational figure, EEAS officials believe their chief should also be active in advancing foreign policy proposals (Aggestam & Johansson, 2017). Aggestam and Hedling (2020) examined the tenure of Federica Mogherini as HR/VP by focusing on how she used strategic communication to build her profile in the era of digital media. They provide a helpful conceptualisation of the development of the HR/VP's political leadership—or what they call "leaderisation"—in the context of EU foreign policy (Aggestam & Hedling, 2020). Lastly, by drawing on concepts from other disciplines—the dramaturgical approach from sociologist Erving Goffman—they built a novel theoretical approach (Aggestam & Hedling, 2020).

Also on the topical theme of the HR/VP's leadership, Koops and Tercovich (2020, p. 295) found that the "personal qualities" of HR/VPs Ashton and Mogherini played a significant role in setting up the EEAS' crisis management structures, while Bassiri Tabrizi and Kienzle (2020) obtained similar findings on the importance of Solana, Ashton and Mogherini's personality traits and ability to gain personal trust in the context of the nuclear negotiations with Iran.

The first case study on the role of the HR/VP on specific foreign policy dossiers focused on Kosovo and Ukraine (Amadio Viceré, 2016, 2018, 2020). Through the case of Kosovo and the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue, Amadio Viceré (2016) illustrated that the HR/VP can be an influential actor provided that there is a basic consensus at the ministerial and leaders' level. This finding was further confirmed when comparing the roles of Ashton with Mogherini in both Kosovo and Ukraine (Amadio Viceré, 2018, 2020). Focusing on CSDP, Biava (2020) brought agenda-setting back to the limelight and studied Mogherini's role in launching Operation Sophia to combat human trafficking in the Mediterranean. The findings from Biava (2020) link back to the importance of the political personality of the incumbent, as Mogherini's nationality and previous experiences in foreign policy guided her commitment to EU action, which was reflected in her willingness to push for a CSDP operation.

Biava (2020) argues Mogherini managed to become a policy entrepreneur by asserting the EU's authority to carry the mission and grounding her arguments on both morals and capabilities. Studies on the successful policy entrepreneurship of HR/VPs also include Sus (2021), who focuses on the entrepreneurial tactics Mogherini used in the process of crafting the EUGS (for an insider perspective on the EUGS see Tocci, 2016), and de Deus Pereira and Kaunert (2022), who analysed and compared Solana and Mogherini's approach to counterterrorism, again stressing the importance of the HR/VPs' personalities.

The main contribution to the study of discourse from the HR/VP comes from Bremberg (2020), who looked at how EU discourses on the Southern Mediterranean evolved during Solana, Ashton and Mogherini's terms. Bremberg (2020) examined official documents produced under their leadership, including Solana's ESS, Mogherini's EUGS and a joint Communication by Ashton and the Commission, launching a Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean (PDSP). Bremberg identifies enduring tropes in their discourses on the instability and threats coming from the other shore of the Mediterranean (Bremberg, 2020). More interestingly, Bremberg (2020, p. 371) notes that a "sense of crisis" around the Arab Spring facilitated new thinking and change in the EU's discourse.

The review of the state of the field underscores both some of the solid foundations and some of the research gaps in the academic literature on the HR/VP. On the one hand, there is a broad agreement on the essential role of the Member States in enabling and constraining the HR/VP's agency. When consensus emerges from the Member States on a given foreign policy dossier, the HR/VP can play a significant role and has done so in the past. When there is no such consensus, however, his or her capabilities are severely restricted, and Member States tend to become protagonists in foreign policy rather than the EU as a whole represented by the HR/VP. Furthermore, the academic literature points to the saliency of personal features in explaining how HR/VPs to date have steered the potential and limitations their job offers to their advantage by exerting some agenda-setting power, constructing their leadership and taking on policy entrepreneurial activities. On the other hand, the study of the HR/VP figure comes mainly from an EU governance perspective. Thus, researchers have only very limitedly focused on discourse from the HR/VPs and have mainly used institutional communication and official documents when doing so. Moreover, given that it is still a moving target, Borrell's term remains under-researched.

This work aims to at least partially address these gaps in the literature by taking Borrell as a new case study and looking at discourse coming from the actor himself. Given the stated importance of the individual holding office, their background and characteristics, I believe that Borrell's personal writings offer a promising research avenue that has so far remained unexplored. Although this thesis emphasises the importance of discourse from HR/VP holders, assessing the effectiveness of Borrell's communications is beyond the scope of this research, which focuses on scrutinising the construction of his discourse and not on how it is received. Lastly, this thesis endeavours to use a novel theoretical framework by bridging constructivist perspectives from critical geopolitics and strategic culture and hopes to contribute to the theoretical dialogue on the study of the HR/VP in particular and EU foreign policy in general.

Moreover, even though the main aim of this thesis is to advance academic scholarship on the HR/VP, I also hope to offer practical insights into the communication strategies employed by a key figure in EU foreign policy. In this sense, the findings of this study could be used to explore alternative discourses in the EU's response to the current state of turbulence and permacrisis in which the world is living. By emphasising a constructivist perspective, I contend that no discourse on the EU's role in the global arena is set in stone.

3. Theoretical Framework

This research draws from constructivist approaches to discourse in the study of EU foreign policy and applies it to a novel corpus of text authored by the HR/VP. As this chapter will explore, the discursive lenses used in this work come from the conceptual work found in the literature on strategic culture and critical geopolitics.

Since the 1980s, constructivism has enjoyed more and more popularity among international relations (IR) scholars, to the point of announcing a constructivist turn in IR theory (Checkel, 1998). However, with the widespread adoption of constructivism, a myriad of understandings about what it means have arisen. To begin with, Jørgensen (2004) points out that constructivism is metatheoretical in nature, amounting to a philosophy of science rather than a ready-to-go theory of IR. Checkel (2006) provides a useful typology, distinguishing between conventional, interpretative, and critical/radical constructivists. The first school remains attached to positivist orientations, looking at how norms and identities shape international politics; interpretative constructivists take a step back and focus on how language constructs social reality through the study of discourse, thereby adopting a post-positivist stance; lastly, radical/critical scholars add a normative layer to constructivism (Checkel, 2006).

Here, I adopt an interpretative constructivist position, and I follow Guzzini (2000), who offers a reconstruction of constructivism based on the idea that meaning and knowledge are socially constructed through discourse. In turn, discourse constructs social reality through a constant interaction between the natural world out there and the knowledge and interpretations we produce about it (Guzzini, 2000). In the words of Risse (2018, p. 131):

“The social environment in which we find ourselves, defines (‘constitutes’) who we are, and therewith, our identities as social beings. ‘We’ are social beings, embedded in various relevant social communities. At the same time, human agency creates, reproduces, and changes culture through our daily practices”.

When applied to the study of the EU, a constructivist approach can be most useful in questioning assumptions about the development of the EU’s identity. For example, as this work aims to do in the field of foreign policy, one can focus on “the ongoing struggles, contestations, and discourses on how ‘to build Europe’ over the years” (Risse, 2018, p. 132) thereby moving away from rational theories of action. Keukeleire and Delreux (2022) highlight the importance of identity to constructivist understandings of the EU’s foreign policy since it is not only seen as an influential factor but as a constitutive one.

An important caveat is that a given actor cannot simply construct something just out of will since “rules and norms guide the behaviour of actors, and they are intersubjective, not individual” (Guzzini, 2000, p. 155). This is even more true for HR/VP Borrell, given the complexity of the EU system and the structural constraints faced by anyone involved in efforts to build a common EU strategic culture. Individuals, however, can play a role in the conceptualisation of the normative level (Guzzini, 2000), and a key theoretical assumption of this work is that so does Borrell.

Moreover, following Jørgensen (2004), Borrell is part of the group of individuals worth looking at when studying EU foreign policy from a constructivist perspective—which includes diplomats, politicians, journalists, commentators, and academics—for the interaction of their discourses gives shape to the EU’s own discourse about its role and identity in world affairs.

Given the series of foreign policy crises the EU has faced since the fall of the Berlin wall—with special emphasis on the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, and the ongoing war—I follow Guzzini (2012b, p. 3) and argue that the EU is living through a time of “ontological anxiety” or a “foreign policy identity crisis”, where foreign policy identity means how an actor understands its role in the world. Building on constructivist approaches, Guzzini (2012a, p. 50) theorises the occurrence of such anxiety when the “ideational predispositions” of foreign policy leaders and experts are challenged, as was the case with several European countries post-1989.

In this context of crisis and anxiety, Guzzini (2012a) argues that geopolitics can come in handy by providing orientation and helping to regain coherence or even helping to establish a new foreign policy identity. Guzzini (2012a) focuses on the nation-state, yet he acknowledges that even though the EU has for much of its history based its own foreign policy identity on the rejection of classical geopolitics—namely through Duchêne’s or Manners’ notions of ‘civilian’ and ‘normative’ power—it was already possible to see the emergence of geopolitical language in and around the Brussels-based institutions since the 1990s.

Before delving into how discourse on geopolitics by HR/VP Borrell might be an answer to the current events and the resulting EU foreign policy identity crisis, it is necessary to define each of these concepts for the sake of clarity and analytical rigour. As Berger (1986, cited by Jørgensen, 2004, p. 23) notes, the first step in a constructivist approach must always be to dig up the meanings of the objects of study.

3.1 Strategic Culture: Definition and Relevance

Although most of the literature on strategic culture focuses too on the nation-state as a unit of analysis, the developments in the EU's CFSP and CSDP and the possible convergence of EU Member States' own strategic cultures have given way to a small but insightful literature on how to apply this contested concept to the EU.

For the purpose of this research, I use Meyer's (2006, p. 20) definition of strategic culture as "the socially transmitted, identity-derived norms, ideas, and habits of mind that are shared among the most influential actors and social groups within a given political community, which help to shape a ranked set of options for a community's pursuit of security and defence goals". Meyer builds on the influential work of Gray (1999, p. 50), who thought of strategic culture in constructivist fashion as being context, meaning both that strategic culture is "out there" and that it is "socially constructed" by those acting in that very same context that shapes their behaviour. Indeed, as Guzzini (2012a) acknowledges, this notion of strategic culture resembles the one on 'foreign policy identity' and the 'ideational predispositions' referred to above, albeit focused on security and defence rather than in a broader understanding of foreign policy.

It is important to note that, as Lock (2017, p. 5) points out, strategic culture is comprised of "ideational content only" as opposed to also including behaviour. Here, like Guzzini, I am only interested in the ideational level rather than in trying to link identity and behaviour, as part of the literature on strategic culture does. The starting point for the study of the construction of a given strategic culture is to find "where within society (and why and by whom) work is done to communicate ideas about strategy to large populations of people" (Lock, 2017, p. 13). Indeed, this research looks at Borrell's written artefacts on what a common EU strategic culture should look like and his public communication efforts to disseminate his thoughts.

Regarding the existence—or the mere possibility of its existence—of a common EU strategic culture, Meyer (2006) already identified convergence among national strategic cultures within the EU two decades ago, in part due to the Political and Security Committee (PSC) at the heart of the CSDP. At around the same time, Matlary (2006) observed an opportunity for the EU to develop a distinct strategic culture based on the EU's values as spelt out in the Copenhagen Criteria and anchored on multilateralism. Moreover, as argued by Biava et al. (2011, p. 8), the fact that the EU is not a state should not prevent us from looking at "the attitudes of elites, militaries and publics towards the management of sources of strategic insecurity (that is, their ability to think and act strategically)" at the EU level, as this research aims to do.

By focusing on the HR/VP's writings —and paying special attention to geopolitics— we can study the ideas he is advancing that could, if proven to be shared across the European Union's foreign policy elite, constitute a common EU strategic culture. Today, HR/VP Borrell is one of the leading figures of a new generation of “euro-strategists”, and I follow the terminology used by Rogers (2009, p. 832), building on what previous leaders and strategic thinkers advocated when the ESS was developed following the Balkan wars. Euro-strategists like then High Representative Solana pushed the EU's foreign policy “to assume a ‘global role, which requires the exercise of ‘full instrumental power’, mixing ideological, civilian and military components” (Rogers, 2009, p. 839).

3.2 What We Talk About When We Talk About Geopolitics

Geopolitics seems to be everywhere, not least due to the ever-growing popularity of the word in the context of increasing world-power competition and military aggression. But if strategic culture is a contested concept, geopolitics is as fuzzy and malleable as it gets. Besides offering a birds-eye view of the problematic history and use of the term in the late 19th and 20th centuries —from Rudolf Kjellén to Haushoffer— Dodds (2019, p. 44) distinguishes between two approaches to geopolitics: the first one being the everyday use of geographical templates as a shorthand to understand world politics by leaders, foreign policy experts and journalists, while the second one considers these geopolitical templates a form of discourse that produces and reproduces certain “spatial representations” of the world that can (and should) be scrutinised.

This work takes the latter approach to study the former, building on the literature on critical geopolitics, which emerged during the 1980s as a reaction to the lack of complexity and reflexivity of orthodox or classical geopolitics. Two of the main figures in critical geopolitics, Ó Tuathail and Agnew (1992, p. 192), defined it as “a discursive practice by which intellectuals of statecraft ‘spatialise’ international politics in such a way as to represent it as a ‘world’ characterised by particular types of places, peoples and dramas”. The community of ‘intellectuals of statecraft’ includes leaders, bureaucrats, foreign-policy experts and advisors (Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1992). In a later work, Ó Tuathail (1999, p. 107) narrowed the definition of geopolitics down to “a problem-solving theory for the conceptualisation and practice of statecraft”.

The key idea for scholars from the critical geopolitics tradition is that geopolitics aims to explain the world discursively and imperatively contend how to act on it. At the heart of this approach lies the acknowledgement that geography does not simply equate with nature,

meaning the physical reality out there. Instead, geography is understood as “a cultural and political writing of meanings about the world” (Ó Tuathail, 1999, p. 108) in rather constructivist terms. Hence, critical geopolitics is primarily concerned with how geographical knowledge is produced, situated, and used for foreign policy making and strategising.

Furthermore, Ó Tuathail (2006) divides critical geopolitics into three strands —formal, practical, and popular— where formal geopolitics concerns intellectual efforts to contribute to geopolitical thought, practical geopolitics involves the geographical assumptions and frames used by leaders in the everyday practice of foreign policy, and popular geopolitics refers to representations of the world found in popular culture. Practical geopolitics, or the pragmatic approach to making sense of the world by practitioners, will be the focus of this study. Hence, I will be shifting away from the state-centric theorising that is common in classical geopolitics to focus on HR/VP Borrell, and the role geopolitics plays in his vision of what a common EU strategic culture should look like.

A special issue of the journal *Geopolitics* tried to understand how world events during the past decade were forcing the EU to “engage with traditional aspects of geopolitics and strategic thinking in foreign policy”, with a particular focus on the Eastern Neighbourhood (Nitoiu & Sus, 2019, p. 2). The EU already seemed willing to embrace a “more traditional geopolitical approach” even if it meant accepting the limits of its civilian and normative power identity on the world stage (Nitoiu & Sus, 2019, p. 12). However, Nitoiu and Sus (2019, p. 6) posit that, at the time of their writing, the EU was still trying to couple orthodox geopolitics with “soft geopolitics” or the promotion of norms and values such as democracy, human rights, the rule of law and multilateralism with interests in the realm of security, leading to a hybrid form of geopolitics that is part of the development of the EU as a foreign policy actor.

More recent work from Bachmann and Bialasiewicz (2020) points to the ways in which insights from critical geopolitics can be used to examine discourses on the EU’s self-representation as a geopolitical actor. Particularly, Bachmann and Bialasiewicz (2020) point to the EUGS drafted under Mogherini’s tenure as HR/VP as an example of the current shift in the EU’s geopolitical vision. In one of the latest contributions to this strand of the literature, Johansson-Nogués and Leso (2024, p. 8) have applied critical geopolitics to analyse the EU’s wartime assistance to Ukraine, finding that EU leaders —both in Brussels and in the Member States’ capitals— have changed their “geopolitical mindscapes” but are yet to agree on a clear overarching geopolitical vision for Eastern Europe.

It must be noted that, although critical geopolitics has straddled between constructivist and poststructuralist approaches, the earlier generations were closer to constructivism, while poststructuralism is gaining more and more prominence as researchers focus on questions of power and hegemony (see Müller 2008, 2011). It is not surprising then that the work of the early writers in critical geopolitics proves most useful for this study, as they focused on the discursive practice of geopolitics by looking at “the construction of security in spatial terms” and the use of “classical geopolitical themes” (Dalby, 1990, p. 172) rather than providing alternatives that challenge the status quo, something that is beyond the scope of this research.

3.3 The Intersection of Strategic Culture, Geopolitics, and Discourse

Having explored the meaning of both geopolitics and strategic culture, I contend that they are closely intertwined, with each shaping the other. Moreover, the literature on practical geopolitics and strategic culture reviewed here share a constructivist approach, the object of study—the members of a given “strategic community” in the words of Snyder (1977, p. 8)—and the discursive nature of their research agendas.

In the words of geostrategists Gray and Sloan (1999, p. 3), “geography can be described as the mother of strategy”, given it directly influences strategic choices based on territorial realities and configurations. This approach is closer to orthodox geopolitical understandings. As has already been stated, this work takes the idea that geography is not just there but is constructed as a premise. However, the importance given by prominent writers on strategic culture to geopolitics proves the relevance of critically analysing geopolitical tropes. Having read Gray, Ó Tuathail (1994) concluded that geopolitics for him was “a tradition of thinking about grand strategy in terms of the most fundamental factor conditioning national security: geography”.

But Ó Tuathail (2003, p. 83) also offers a conceptual bridge between the literature on critical geopolitics and strategic culture when he introduces the idea of a “geopolitical culture” or “the cultural ways in which dominant institutions—states mostly but also alliances and international institutions like the United Nations (UN)—make sense of their position in the world and theorise their role within interstate society”. This notion is very similar to the definition of ‘foreign policy identity’ proposed by Guzzini (2012b, p. 3) as the “self-understanding” of a state and its role in world affairs. Importantly for this research project, Ó Tuathail (2003) thinks that strategic culture plays a part—together with what he calls geographical imaginations, geopolitical traditions and the broader institutional and political culture of a given state—in the development of a broader geopolitical culture.

Taking stock of the literature, I see the construction of an EU strategic culture not only as possible but as a process in the making as part of wider developments in the EU's foreign policy. Furthermore, following the literature, I believe discourse around geopolitics plays a role in these construction efforts. Using a constructivist approach and mixing insights from critical geopolitics and discourse analysis, Cadier (2019, p. 8) already identified a process of "geopoliticisation" or the "discursive construction of an issue as a geopolitical problem" around the EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP) in the 2010s.

Drawing on the concept of strategic culture, Rogers (2009) hinted at a shift from civilian to global power in the EU's foreign policy. The High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy pre-Lisbon was already part of a Brussels-based "institutional apparatus (...) geared towards dealing with geopolitical issues; the mobilisation of European armed forces and battlegroups and their deployment overseas; and the constant calls for more European action beyond the European homeland" (Rogers, 2009, p. 853). There was an "appearance of a changed discursive polity in Europe", concluded Rogers (2009, p. 854), but one that remained open, dependent on "potential dislocatory experiences". Looking at the historical timeline shaping these developments since the Balkan wars, the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 stands out for its magnitude, repercussions, and potential for dislocation. Hence, I see the post-2022 period as part of a critical juncture, a pivotal historical moment with the potential for significant and enduring change (Capoccia, 2015).

Disputing the notion that the EU was unfit to develop a strategic culture in the late 2000s, Toje (2009) explains that although strategic cultures run deep, they can change, even fundamentally, at critical junctures. Even more so if they have not solidified, as can be argued to be the case with the EU. But more importantly, strategic cultures are "generated at the crossroads of history, capabilities, geopolitics and values" (Toje, 2009, p. 4). In conclusion, strategic culture is particularly interesting to study when undergoing periods, like the one we are living in, of "high uncertainty and crisis when political actors tend to rely more on their conventional analytical prisms" (Meyer, 2023, p. 107).

As the return of geopolitics to European discourse post-1989 showed, the revival of geopolitical thought among certain foreign policy elites could be explained from a constructivist perspective, as geopolitics helped the development and establishment of a new identity that filled the vacuum caused by the events unfolding in the late 80s and early 90s (Guzzini, 2012a). This work takes the same approach and applies it to today's EU.

Geopolitics were already present in EU discourse before Russia's attack, as has been noted above. Yet, much like with 1989 and discourse coming from certain European states, I believe that the current pervasiveness of geopolitics in EU foreign policy discourse can be explained by the “ontological anxiety” referred to by Guzzini (2012b, p. 3), that is part of a broader “ontological insecurity” in the words of Kinnvall et al. (2021, p. 23¹), caused by a series of trends and events culminating—but not stopping, as developments in the Middle East were quick to prove—on the seismic date of February 24, 2022.

In their recent study, Johansson-Nogués and Leso (2024) conclude that the HR/VP might have prematurely rushed to announce the birth of a ‘geopolitical EU’ given the difficulties in translating words to action. Regardless of the degree of success he has had throughout his tenure, I see HR/VP Borrell as an agent in a wider struggle for an EU vision of the world and its role within, as well as the means necessary to act on it.

3.4 Conceptualisation

The blurred identities of strategic culture and geopolitics make it difficult to translate them into a precise concept that can later be operationalised. Moreover, even from a critical academic understanding, it is necessary to take into account the uses (and abuses) of the term in the practice of statecraft in order to capture what foreign policy leaders mean.

Successful attempts to conceptualise the study of geopolitical discourse include the notion of ‘geopolitical code’, popularised by Flint (2006) in his first edition of the book ‘Introduction to Geopolitics’, which has become one of the main entry-level works in the field. In its latest edition, Flint (2021, p. 50) defines ‘geopolitical code’ as “the manner in which a country orientates itself towards the world”, which again is semantically close to the notions of ‘foreign policy identity’ or ‘geopolitical culture’ previously discussed. In the latest edition of his ‘Introduction to Geopolitics’, Flint (2021, p. 50) expands on the calculations making up a ‘geopolitical code’: a survey of “current and potential allies” and another one of “current and potential enemies”, as well as of how alliances can be nurtured, and enemies (and threats) countered. Flint (2021) adds a last item to the list making up geopolitical codes: the rationalisation for the previous map of allies, enemies and courses of action that a given actor puts forward to the public and the global community means of justifying it.

¹ The accessed version for this source is the EPUB one, and page numbers may vary in different formats.

Although Flint's approach is valuable and has been used to analyse geopolitical codes discursively (see Huliaras & Tsardanidis, 2006; Flint et al., 2009, or Flint & Noorali, 2024), I believe it is not the best suited to analyse geopolitical discourses as part of an effort to build a strategic culture since it lacks a strategic focus and is very broad in terms of the discursive constructions that can be considered to be part of the 'geopolitical code'.

However, Flint's 'geopolitical code' is useful for grasping some of the main features of a given geopolitical discourse, such as allies and enemies. So is the concept of 'geopolitical endeavour' put forward by Cadier (2019), who argues that "projecting or seeking to deter hard power" is a key feature of geopolitical endeavours, together with territorial concerns and the logic of power competition. I will draw on these two concepts to build a descriptive codebook that surveys Borrell's discourse. Hence, the first codebook will include deductive codes on the EU's allies and enemies, as well as on the EU's hard power.

Interestingly, the notion of a 'geopolitical code' was first put forward by the historian John Lewis Gaddis (1982), who specialised in military history and grand strategy while studying the US national security policy since WWII through a strategic lens. Gaddis (1982 pp. VIII–IX) used 'geopolitical code' and 'strategic code' indistinctively to talk about "assumptions about American interests in the world, potential threats to them, and feasible responses".

For the purposes of this research, however, the narrower idea of 'geostrategic discourse' conceptualised by Ó Tuathail (2003) is the best placed to understand and analyse Borrell's efforts to build a common EU strategic culture from a geopolitical lens. For Ó Tuathail (2003, p. 95), geostrategic discourse is one type of geopolitical discourse "that makes explicit strategic claims about the material national security interests of the state across a world map characterised by state competition, threats and dangers". Ó Tuathail (2003, p. 96) claims this type of discourse is related to a strategic culture and is also part of processes of "geostrategisation" —which operate in a similar manner as 'securitisation' ones theorised by the Copenhagen School or Cadier's 'geopoliticisation'—, discursively constructing a foreign policy issue as 'strategic' by drawing on its "locational and transcendent material national interest qualities".

Taking this definition as a building block, this work will operationalise it into a second codebook in the next chapter, aiming to delve deeper into Borrell's strategic uses of geopolitics when he lays out the EU's security interests, identifies threats and dangers and describes competition in world politics.

Overall, I see ‘geostrategic discourse’ as the micro level of analysis, while strategic culture stands at the meso level and foreign policy identity at the macro level (see the diagram in Figure 1 below). Foreign policy identity is my preferred umbrella over ‘geopolitical code’ or ‘geopolitical culture’ because I believe it brings conceptual clarity and is less contested than terms coming from the historically contested geopolitical tradition.

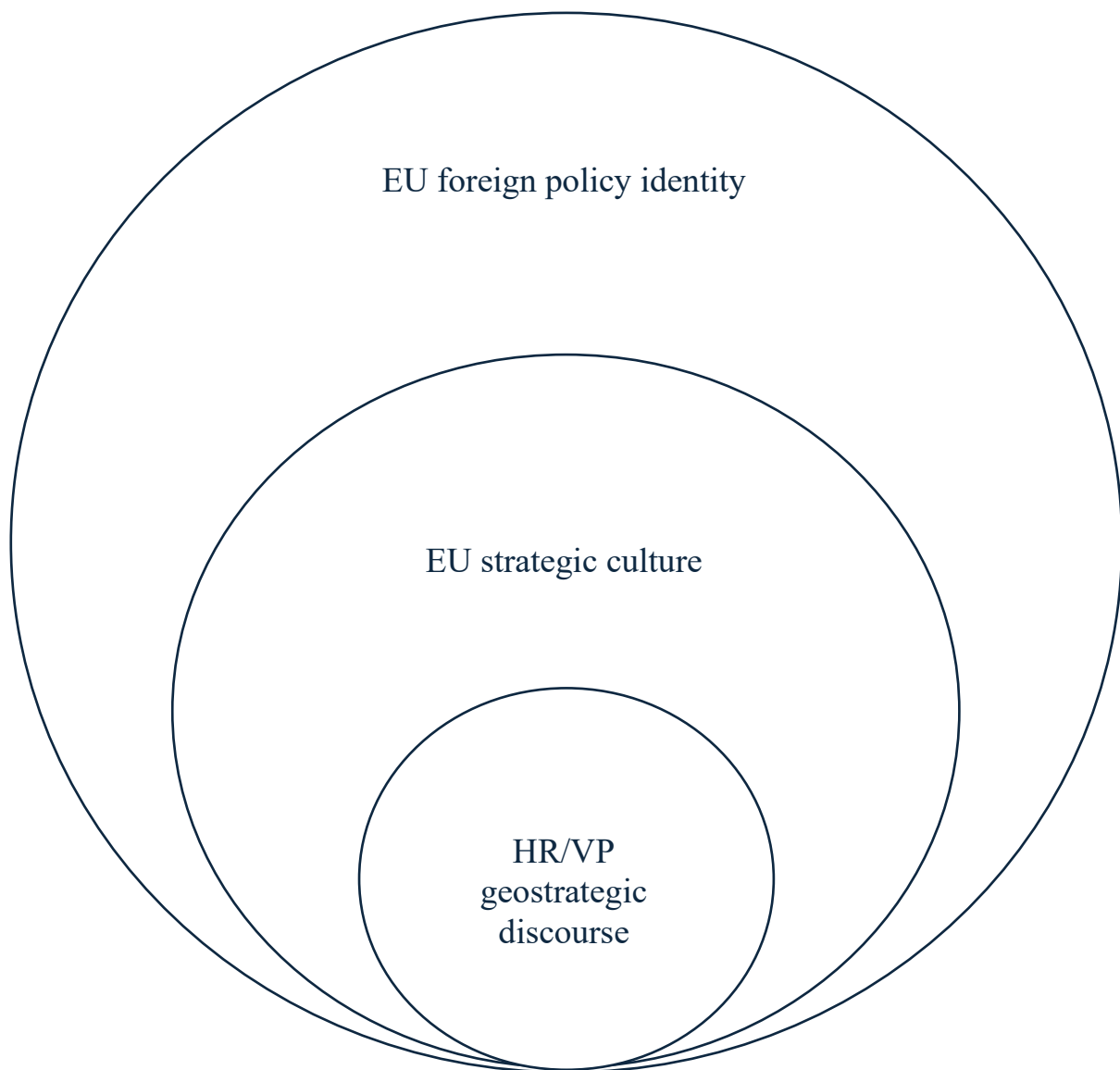


Figure 1 - Macro, meso and micro levels of analysis. Source: own compilation

4. Methodology

As explained above, the theoretical underpinnings of this work draw from constructivist approaches to the study of the EU's foreign policy. Concretely, I borrow from the literature on strategic culture and critical geopolitics to build a framework for understanding the construction of the HR/VP's discourse and how it evolved during Borrell's tenure.

Discourse analysis has become more and more popular in the study of EU politics since the 1990s, leading to various definitions of the central concept of discourse and different theoretical approaches. Following Lyngaard (2019), I take discourse analysis as a research methodology in line with my theoretical framework rather than as a theoretical approach in and of itself. Hajer (1995, cited by Lyngaard, 2019, p. 2) came up with a popular definition of discourse as “a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorisations that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities”. In the context of foreign policy analysis, Osterman and Sjöstedt (2022) add that discourse analysis seeks to understand how discursive practices give meaning and shape foreign policy.

Hajer's definition already hints at the tension at the heart of the production of discourse, that is, the agency-structure division: actors producing discourse are, in turn, bound by discursive structures. From a constructivist perspective, Carta and Morin (2016, p. 33²) argue that “by discursively interacting within a given structure, agents endogenously construct social reality”. At the same time, “interactions within the structural context contribute to reconstructing their preferences and interests” (Carta & Morin, 2016, p. 33).

When faced with this conundrum, I follow Lyngaard (2019), who argues the best research strategy is to see the agency-structure divide as a continuum, where hegemonic discourses are closer to the structure end, while strategic use of discourse aiming to provoke changes to the structure are located closer to the agency one. In the study of EU discourses, those focusing on agency “have pointed to the intentional or strategic use of European integration discourse by politicians and top civil servants to justify or delegitimise political activities and objectives” (Lyngaard, 2019, p. 24). Moreover, times of crisis —such as the ones I will be studying— are particularly suitable for studies that presume some agency to their actors since they have more chances of impacting the structure (Lyngaard, 2019).

² The accessed version for this source is the EPUB one, and page numbers may vary in different formats.

From a post-structuralist approach, Diez (2014, pp. 320–321) already illustrated the “discursive struggles” taking place in EU foreign policy and the construction of an EU identity. On the constructivist side, Jørgensen (2015) has argued in favour of analysing discourses from holders of the HR/VP job as a means to explore the discursive construction of European foreign policy, which is precisely what I aim to do.

For the purpose of this research and in line with my theoretical framework, I think of HR/VP Borrell as a key actor in EU foreign policy during a period of crisis who enjoys a limited degree of agency and is making use of it with purpose and intent, trying to stir change. The sources analysed —described below— comprise all available annual publications by Borrell since he took up the job in late 2019. Not only are they valuable as documents produced by the actor I am studying (together with his team), but they also allow for a longitudinal study and self-comparison, making it possible to analyse the evolution of discourse (Lyngaard, 2019).

To best capture discourse by the HR/VP in the vast material at hand, I will use computer-assisted qualitative content analysis (CAQDAS) by looking at the “word categories and possibly relationships between categories” present in the texts through two codebooks based on the theoretical framework and a third one adapted in a deductive-inductive fashion as the analysis is performed (Lyngaard, 2019, p. 57). Kuckart and Rädiker (2023, p. 21) define qualitative content analysis as “the systematic and methodologically controlled scientific analysis of texts, pictures, films, and other contents of communication”. Qualitative content analysis is well suited for the study of discourse, given it does not have a theoretical background, lending itself to use in different theoretical contexts (Kuckart & Rädiker, 2023).

4.1 Data, Operationalisation and Research Design

The empirical material coded and analysed in this research comes from primary sources: the four books authored by the HR/VP, issued by the EU’s publication office and freely available for download from the EEAS website. The first book is 304 pages long, the second one 470, the third one 323 and the fourth one 420. They consist of blog posts, op-eds and speeches “addressing the most pressing issues for EU’s foreign and security policy” (Borrell, 2024, p. 420). All of them include an original introduction, written as a corollary of the year, where the HR/VP takes stock of the main events and highlights the most important content of the book. Subsequently, the writings are presented anachronously, grouped first by themes and then by regions. Lastly, they include an annex summarising the year’s key activities and events, but these will not be analysed because of their schematic nature.

The four books published since Borrell came to office in late 2019 include:

Borrell Fontelles, J. (2021). *European foreign policy in times of COVID-19*, Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2871/69415>.

Borrell Fontelles, J. (2022). *Staying on course in troubled waters: EU foreign policy in 2021*, Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2871/69074>.

Borrell Fontelles, J. (2023). *The year that war returned to Europe: EU foreign policy in 2022*, Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2871/90017>.

Borrell Fontelles, J. (2024). *Europe between two wars: EU foreign policy in 2023*, Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2871/10332>.

Based on my research question and the theoretical framework, I have aimed to operationalise the articulation of Borrell's discourse on geopolitics through the three codebooks shown below. Drawing on the literature on 'geopolitical codes' from Flint (2021) and 'geopoliticisation' from Cadier (2019), Codebook 1 aims to illustrate the allies and enemies mentioned by Borrell and his references to the EU's military and economic hard power (e.g., sanctions). Codebook 2 focuses on 'geostrategic discourses' as conceptualised by Ó Tuathail (2003) and aims to cast light on the ways in which Borrell draws on geopolitics strategically. Working inductively with the material, I have compiled Codebook 3, which aims to illustrate the geographies and geopolitical lexicon of Borrell's discourse, as well as the crises he paid more attention to.

The research design follows a two-part structure. First, I conducted a mapping exercise by coding word for word all mentions of countries and disputed territories, regions (later grouped by UN geographic regions: Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern America, and Oceania), seas and other geographies (e.g., space). I also coded inductively all the terms starting with the geo- prefix that Borrell uses and passages discussing the three major foreign policy crises the EU faced during his mandate: the pandemic, and the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East. At the same time, relying on the first and second deductive codebooks, I coded paragraph by paragraph all those that include references to allies, enemies and hard power, as well as those that include examples of geostrategic discourse. In the second stage, I built a cartography of HR/VP Borrell's discourse, including geographic and linguistic patterns based on the emerging codes. Lastly, I zoomed in on the coded geostrategic discourse and analysed it in conjunction with the geographies and crises mentioned at the same time.

Codes	Definition	Example
Alliances	Mentions of allies	“It is striking to what extent Russia’s war against Ukraine has brought greater unity to, and even a revival of, the transatlantic alliance. The squabbles in 2021 over the manner in which the US withdrew from Afghanistan or how the AUKUS alliance came about are gone, never mind the rather fundamental clashes under the Trump administration” (Borrell, 2024, p.234)
Enemies	Mentions of enemies	“The coronavirus has not only Europe but the entire global community in its grip and is the world’s common enemy. An enemy we can only defeat with a global approach and cross-border coordination” (Borrell, 2021, p. 69)
EU hard power	Mentions of the EU’s military or economic hard power	“I am convinced that the EU must be more than a soft power: we need hard power too. However, we need to realise that the concept of hard power cannot be reduced to military means: it is about using the full range of our instruments to achieve our goals. It is about thinking and acting in terms of power. And, bit by bit, the conditions for this to happen are being fulfilled” (Borrell, 2023, p. 54)

Codebook 1 - Survey of allies, enemies and EU hard power. Source: own compilation.

Codes	Definition	Example
EU security interests	Mentions of EU security interests	“But Europe’s security challenges go beyond NATO’s traditional remit. From the Sahel and Libya to the eastern Mediterranean, there is no shortage of crises that demand a strong European response. The task for the EU is to define a common position from which it can act in the interest of maintaining regional stability” (Borrell, 2021, p. 37)
Competition	Mentions of world competition	“With Europe surrounded by crises and the world increasingly marked by great power competition, I have repeatedly argued that we must be realistic and approach the world as it is – not just as we want it to be” (Borrell, 2022, p. 20)
Threats and dangers	Mentions of threats and dangers	“The risk of growing instability in Russia is another serious consequence of Prigozhin’s mutiny, especially for a country that holds nuclear weapons. But here comes another lesson learnt from the ongoing Russian war of aggression: Putin’s Russia represents the biggest threat to European and global security and its nuclear arsenal makes it not less but more dangerous for the entire civilised world. (Borrell, 2024, p. 74)

Codebook 2 - HR/VP’s geostrategic discourse. Source: own compilation.

Codes	Definition	Example
Geopolitical lexicon	Mentions of terms starting with the prefix geo-	“Unwittingly, Vladimir Putin has helped to bring about the geopolitical Europe we were hoping for” (Borrell, 2023, p. 11)
Geographies	Mentions related to countries, territories, regions, seas and other geographies	“Russia is another priority of ours. I am travelling to Moscow today at a difficult time” (Borrell, 2022, p. 30).
Foreign policy crises	Mentions of the pandemic, the wars in Ukraine or the war in the Middle East	“If we do not succeed in fighting COVID-19 effectively everywhere, the virus will eventually return to our shores again” (Borrell, 2021, p. 74)

Codebook 3 - Geopolitical lexicon, geographies and crises in the HR/VP's discourse. Source: own compilation.

4.2 Limitations

The methodology presented above has limitations that can affect the consistency and replicability of the findings and must be acknowledged. First, there are limitations inherent to a master's thesis, which include the time constraints to conduct the research and the need to finish within the deadline despite the vast material at hand.

Although the selection of data sources has the benefit of covering most of Borrell's mandate, as well as being comparable and interoperable, I may have excluded relevant documents that would offer a different picture simply because they have not been curated beforehand by the HR/VP and his team. Given that this is the first time an HR/VP has published these kinds of books, there is no opportunity to replicate the study with previous post-holders and no certainty that it will be doable in the future, possibly limiting this research to a time-anchored case study.

Moreover, despite using a structured set of codebooks, the coding process itself is inevitably interpretative. Coding biases may affect this research, which would have greatly benefited from teamwork throughout the coding process to ensure that it remained consistent and accurate. Lastly, by trying to bridge the concepts used in the literature on strategic culture and critical geopolitics and apply them to the study of EU foreign policy, I have tried to develop an original framework theoretical framework. I can only hope the originality offsets the risks inherent to a novel theoretical approach and that despite its limitations, this research contributes to a preliminary empirical exploration of the geographies of HR/VP Borrell's discourse and his articulation of geopolitics as part of the EU's strategic culture.

5. Analysis

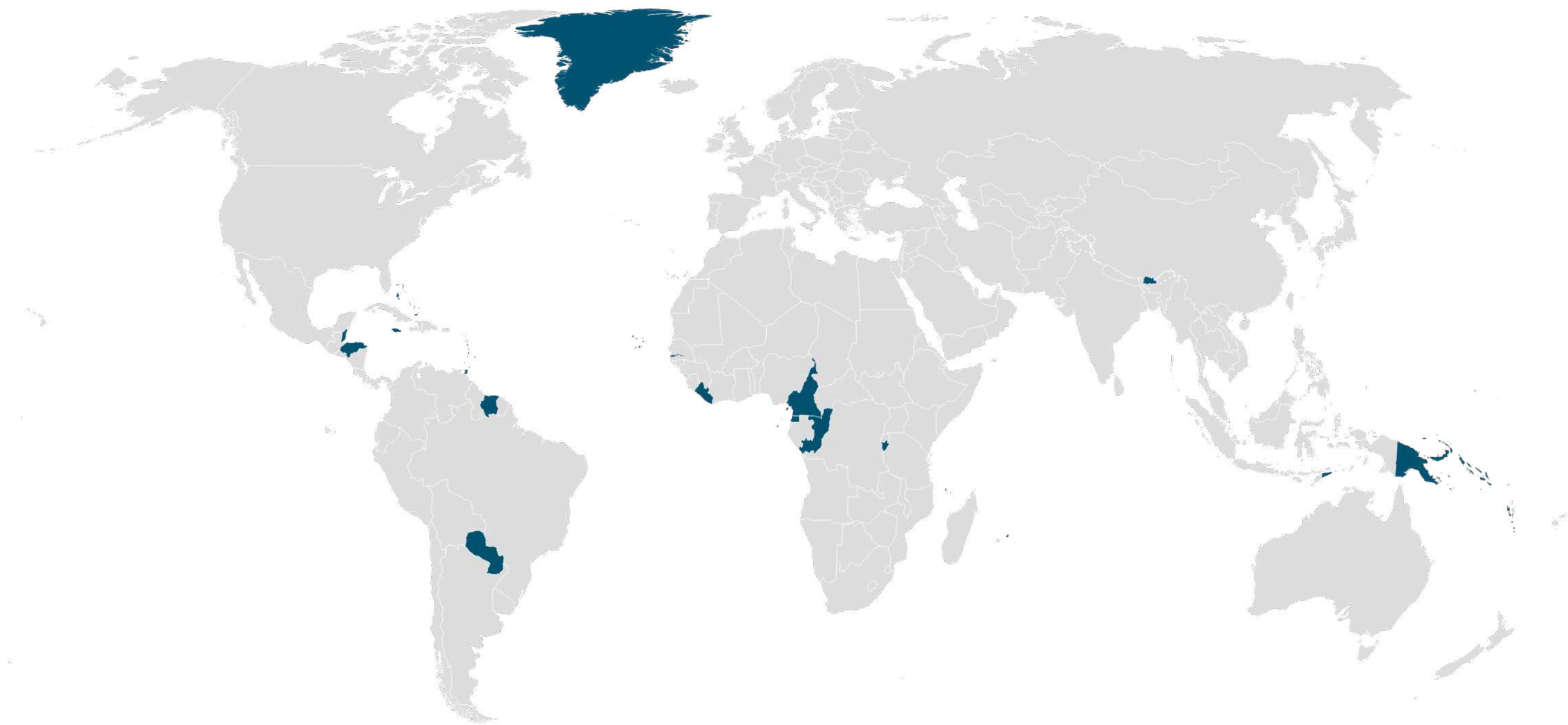
In the following section, I will present and discuss the results arising from the coding of Borrell's four annual publications. I will begin by presenting a cartography of Borrell's discourse, highlighting which countries, regions and other geographies featured more prominently in the HR/VP's writings, as well as those that do not receive any attention from the HR/VP. Then, I will try to untangle the explicit use of a geopolitical lexicon to understand what is meant by formulas such as 'geopolitical Europe' or the EU's 'geopolitical awakening'. Lastly, I will be zooming in on how Borrell applied geostrategic discourse throughout his tenure, how it evolved as different crises played out, and where it was focused geographically.

5.1 A Cartography of the HR/VP's Discourse

Given the debate over whether the EU is or not a global actor, it is remarkable to see that Borrell's writings span all world continents and oceans, as well as a majority of the United Nation's 193 Member States. Concretely, over 150 countries and contested territories are mentioned at least once throughout the four available annual publications, showing that—at least discursively—Borrell wants the EU to be involved in world affairs on a truly global scale.

Before discussing which countries and geographies are given more attention throughout the four books, it is worth highlighting those that are absent, for silence can also be revealing. The missing countries and territories are highlighted in Map 1, which also helps to understand the broad geographical scope of Borrell's writings since all territories in grey are mentioned at least once.

Among the absences, what the UN calls Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Caribbean, the Pacific, the Atlantic, and the Indian Ocean feature prominently, together with ministates in Europe that are too small to be seen on the map, notably Andorra, Monaco, San Marino and the Vatican City State. Some non-SIDS countries or ministates never mentioned and worth highlighting include Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, Liberia and Equatorial Guinea in the African continent; Bhutan in Asia; Honduras and Belize in Central America; and Paraguay and Suriname in South America. Lastly, the island of Greenland is also highlighted—despite its autonomous status within Denmark—since it is never mentioned explicitly, regardless of its strategic location and the importance Borrell places on the Arctic.



Map 1 - Cartography of the HR/VP's discourse: countries not mentioned. Source: own compilation from Borrell (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024)

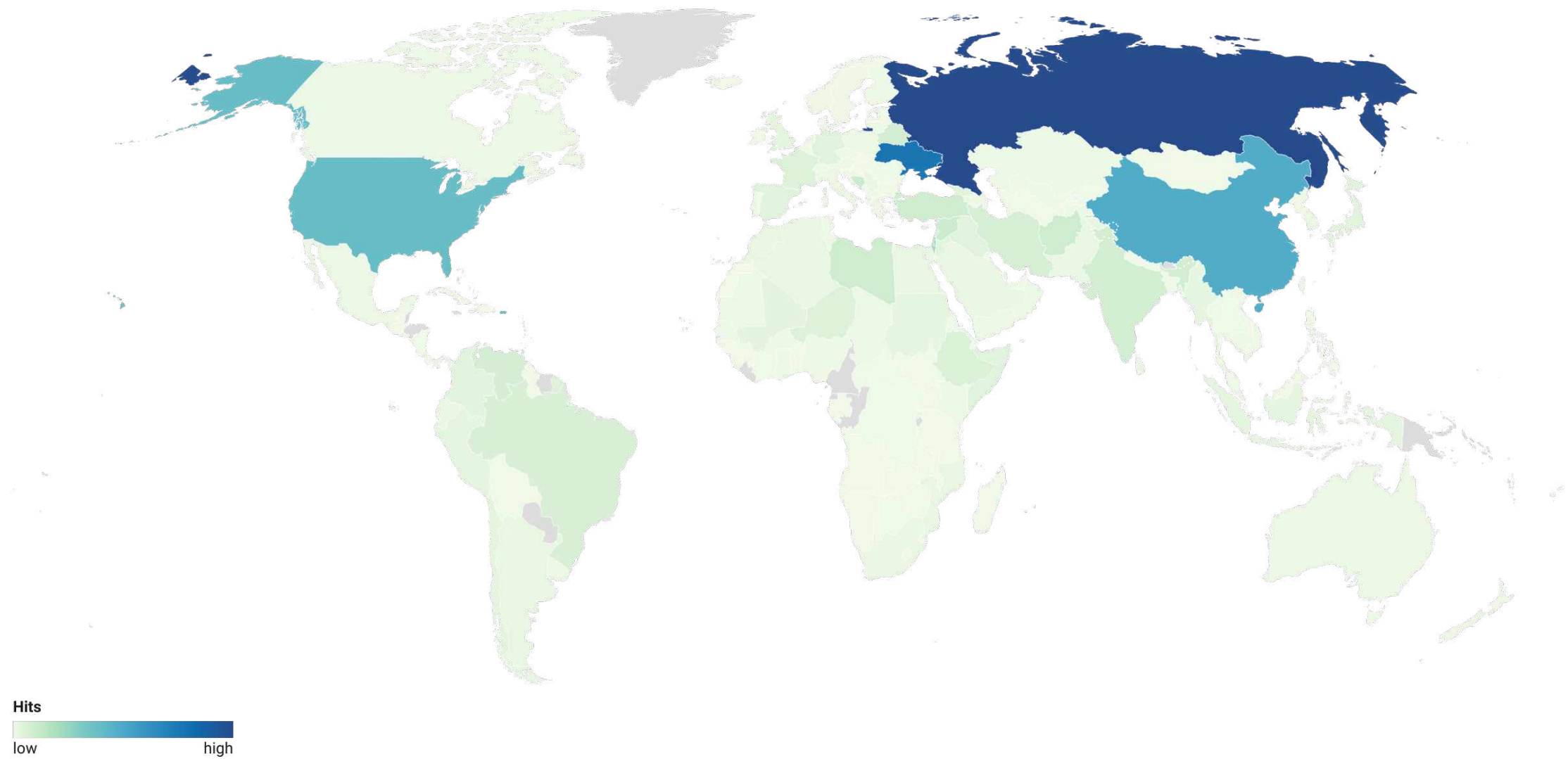
Focusing now on the countries that Borrell does mention in his books, Map 2 provides a bird-eye view of where the HR/VP paid more attention throughout his tenure. Russia and Ukraine, in this order, top the list of mentioned countries due to the importance of the Russian 2022 full-scale invasion and the ensuing war for the EU, with Borrell referring to both countries well over 1000 times each. However, this was not the case in all four publications. Russia started getting more attention after Borrell's fiasco visit to Moscow in early 2021, and Ukraine did so as tensions mounted at the border throughout that same year.

The third and fourth most mentioned countries overall, China and the United States of America (US), hint at the weight placed by Borrell in the competition of the two world superpowers. Both are mentioned over 700 times, with China ahead. This was particularly the case in the first two books, covering the start of Borrell's mandate (years 2020 and 2021) in the context of the pandemic. China was the most mentioned country in the first book, while the US was at the top of the second one, and both remained of primary concern for the HR/VP in the third and fourth books, albeit lagging behind Russia and Ukraine.

Then Palestine and Israel come in fifth and sixth, respectively, with over 350 mentions. The Middle East conflict did not receive much attention in the first three books, but that changed dramatically after the October 7, 2023, attack by Hamas and the ensuing war in Gaza. The next set of countries that featured prominently in Borrell's discourse throughout the years includes Syria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Afghanistan, Libya, Türkiye, Belarus, India, Venezuela, Iran, Brazil, Ethiopia, Lebanon, all being mentioned over 100 times (see the annex for a top-20 list).

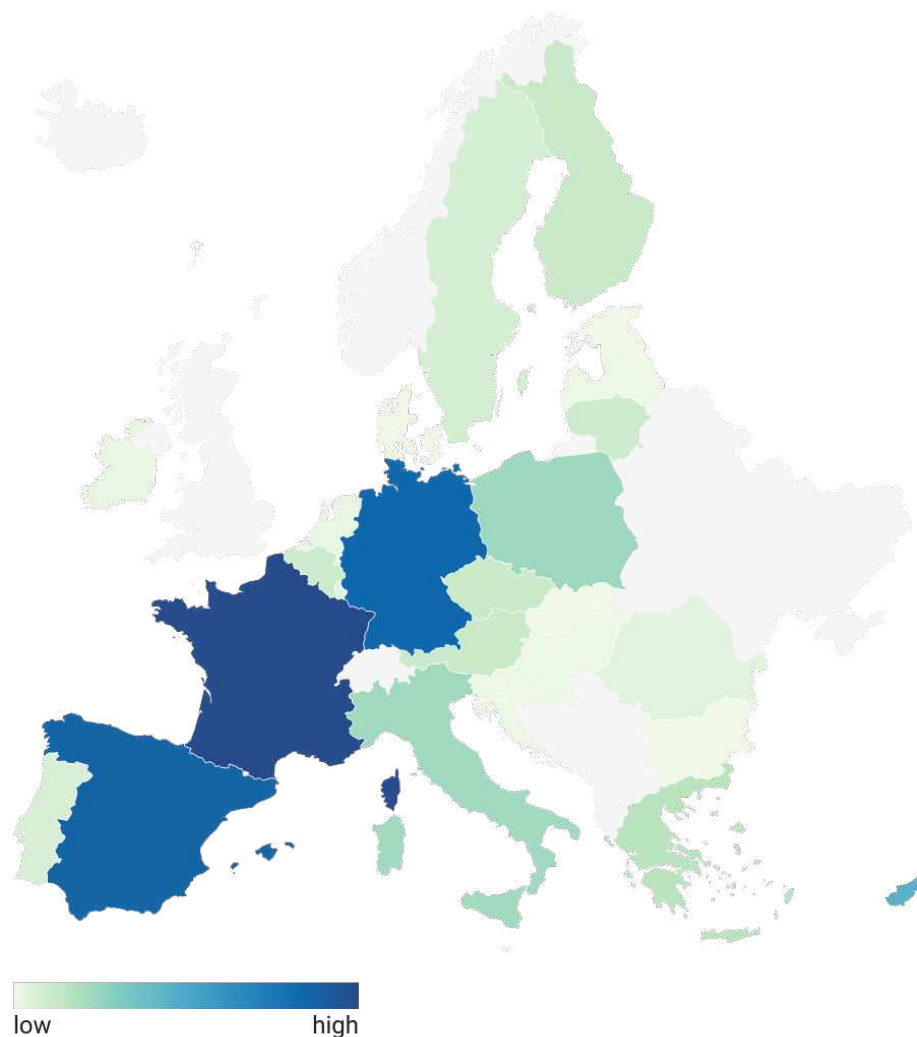
The case of Türkiye shows how some of these countries became very present in Borrell's articles and speeches or lost salience as events forced the HR/VP to look in different directions (see the annex for maps illustrating each book). Türkiye was the third most mentioned country in the first book, while tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean flared up in 2020 but then steadily lost attention as relations improved with Greece and Cyprus, only being talked about in the context of the war in Ukraine and shipping through the Black Sea in the last two books.

Lastly, Niger, Somalia, Iraq, Georgia, Colombia, Jordan, Mali, Japan, Chile and the United Kingdom received between 50 and 100 mentions, while Sudan, Indonesia, Kosovo, Peru, Myanmar, Pakistan, Morocco, Argentina, Serbia, Egypt, Mozambique, Algeria, Rwanda, Qatar, South Africa, Moldova, Saudi Arabia, Ecuador, South Korea, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Uruguay, Australia, Mexico, Canada, and Chad are mentioned between 20 and 50 times each. The rest of the countries highlighted on the map received between one and 20 mentions overall.



Map 2 - Cartography of the HR/VP's discourse: countries mentioned. Source: own compilation from Borrell (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024)

When it comes to the EU, Borrell managed to refer to all Member States at least once. However, there are some clear imbalances highlighted by Map 3. France is the most mentioned Member State with 91 references. Spain ranks second with 79, and Germany is third with 77. Cyprus is the fourth most mentioned Member State with 42 references, while Poland and Italy stand at 22 and 21, respectively. Greece is mentioned 15 times, Finland and the Czech Republic are mentioned 11 times each, and Lithuania and Belgium are mentioned ten times. The rest of EU Member States receive less than ten mentions each (see the annex for a full list). These statistics are partly explained by bilateral initiatives from the bigger Member States picked up by the HR/VP, as well as references to their leaders. The case of Spain is exceptional since most of the time Borrell mentions it, he refers to his times as part of the Spanish government or makes analogies from his personal history with the country. As for Cyprus, the large amount of mentions of a small Member State is explained by the ongoing conflict over Northern Cyprus and the tensions with Turkey, particularly during 2020.



Map 3 - Cartography of the HR/VP's discourse: mentions of EU Member States. Source: own compilation from Borrell (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024)

Apart from the country level, the HR/VP puts a significant emphasis on the regional level. Although Borrell is not totally consistent with the terms he employs and often refers to the regional organisations present in other parts of the world, I have grouped them using the UN’s division of the world into geographical regions to allow for comparisons.

Africa—including mentions of the African Union—stands out as the most important UN geographic region for the HR/VP (see Figure 1). Within the African continent, the Sahel is the area that Borrell mentions the most (160 times), followed by the Horn of Africa (38 times), Sub-Saharan Africa (32 times), the Gulf of Guinea (20 times), West Africa (14 times), the Maghreb (13 times), Northern Africa (11 times), and Southern Africa (eight times).

Asia ranks second, in part thanks to the significant level of engagement Borrell dedicates to Southeast Asia, including 212 mentions to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The Middle East and the Gulf, with 73 and 63 mentions, respectively, show the importance of West Asia, even if the HR/VP does not use that label himself. Central Asia is the third most looked-at area in the Asian continent, particularly during 2021 and 2022, with 69 mentions in total. The Caucasus, including Nagorno-Karabakh, is mentioned 27 times. South Asia, North Asia, the Himalayas, the Gulf of Aden, and the Strait of Hormuz receive only residual attention, with less than ten mentions for each.

Latin America and the Caribbean—including mentions to the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), Central America, South America and Mercosur—complete the regional podium but receive considerably fewer mentions than Africa or Asia in total. Finally, North America and Oceania are largely ignored in favour of the countries representing those regions themselves: the US, Canada, Australia or New Zealand.

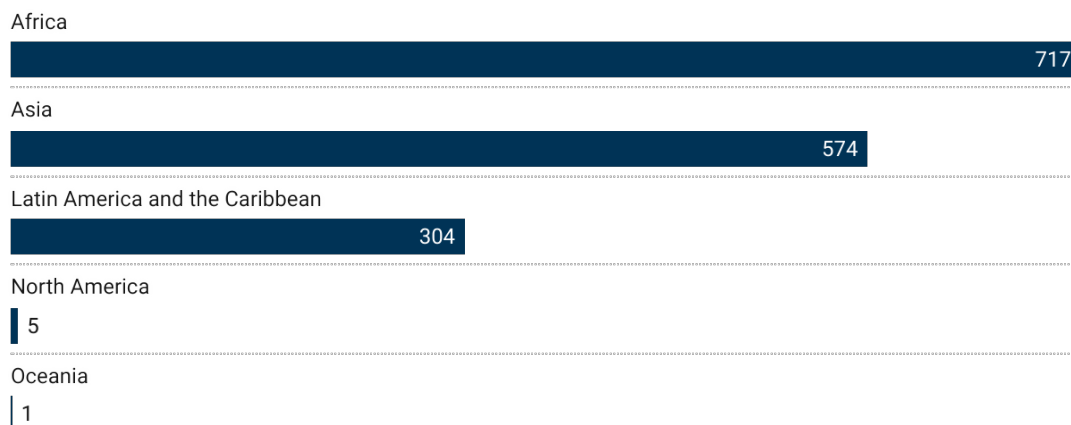


Figure 2 - Mentions grouped per UN geographic region. Source: own compilation from Borrell (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024)

No cartography would be complete without looking at the world’s oceans and seas (ranked in Table 1 below). Here, Borrell’s discourse is mainly split in two, between the Mediterranean and the Indo-Pacific. The Mediterranean leads with 128 mentions, with a particular focus on the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (20 mentions each). The Indo-Pacific comes in close with 121 mentions, being particularly prominent in Borrell’s second book about the year 2021, when it overtook the Mediterranean as Borrell pushed for the EU to get more involved in the area. The Pacific Ocean is the third most mentioned sea, including 23 mentions of the South China Sea and nine of the Taiwan Strait. The Black Sea gained prominence after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, while the Arctic was mostly mentioned in Borrell’s second book but then faded away. The Atlantic and Indian Oceans lag behind, and the Baltic and Red Seas receive only minimal attention.

Seas	Hits
Mediterranean	128
Indo-Pacific	121
Pacific	60
Black Sea	45
Arctic	41
Atlantic	24
Indian	10
Baltic	3
Red Sea	2

Table 1 - Mentions grouped per sea. Source: own compilation from Borrell (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024)

Lastly, it is worth highlighting the importance of those geographies that are harder to represent on a map, like outer space or digital cyberspace. The case of outer space is particularly relevant since it is mentioned 166 times over time, putting it on par with some of the most referred to countries and on top of any body of water. Cyberspace is mentioned 16 times explicitly and three times as ‘cyber domain’. Nevertheless, the cyber- prefix appears well over 100 times, qualifying words that are relevant to this study, such as attacks, security, and threats, which is a testament to the importance the HR/VP gives to cyberspace.

5.2 Of Allies and Enemies

Identifying the EU's allies is not an easy task. Since the EU is not a military alliance, it seems the HR/VP refrains from using these terms. Borrell uses "current security and defence alliances", "Atlantic alliance", and "transatlantic alliance" to discuss the EU's cooperation with NATO but prefers "transatlantic relationship" or "transatlantic partnership" to talk about EU-US relations. Nevertheless, Borrell refers eight times to the US as an ally, but the label partner is much more common. Sometimes, these appear together, as when Borrell welcomes Biden's re-election: "For the EU, the US is our most important ally and partner, and we believe the same is true in reverse" (Borrell, 2021, p. 90). Similarly, but just once, the UK is described as a "key ally and strategic partner on the world stage" (Borrell, 2022, p. 256).

In the context of the war in Ukraine, Borrell mentions once a "global alliance" built by the EU to condemn Russia's invasion (Borrell, 2023, p. 68). Borrell also uses the third-person plural "Ukraine's allies" when talking about EU Member States' support (Borrell, 2024, p. 31). Although he does not use the term EU ally, after an informal FAC in Kyiv, Borrell concludes that "as a non-military alliance, the strongest security commitment that the EU can give to Ukraine is EU membership" (Borrell, 2024, p. 90).

In an economic sense, the HR/VP argues that it will be necessary to forge "alliances with exporting countries" to obtain raw materials as part of the green transition, again without naming specific countries (Borrell, 2022, p. 176). Lastly, Borrell talks once about building a "strategic alliance between two regions, among the world's most closely aligned in terms of interests and values" when advocating for the completion of the EU-Mercosur Association Agreement (Borrell, 2024, p. 366).

Speaking of EU enemies is even harder since the HR/VP only names and shames the SARS-CoV-2 as a "common enemy" and "external enemy" (Borrell, 2021, p. 50), which shows the war-like rhetoric employed during the pandemic. Borrell also uses a vague formula two times to speak of "the enemies of democracy" in the context of disinformation and fake news (Borrell, 2021, p. 94; 2022, p.234). On only two occasions, the HR/VP uses "enemy lines" (Borrell, 2024, p.40) and "enemy radio signals" (Borrell, 2024, p. 174) while discussing developments on the Ukrainian battlefield. This is the closest Borrell gets to openly calling Russia an enemy. As for China, the HR/VP makes clear that even if Chinese officials dislike the concept of a 'systemic rivalry' going on, the EU and China are "rivals, not enemies" (Borrell, 2024, p. 361). Indeed, Borrell refers to China as a rival 84 times, the highest number for any country.

5.3 Understanding the HR/VP's Geopolitical Lexicon

Using inductive coding, as explained in the methodological chapter, a wide range of terms starting with the geo- prefix emerged from the HR/VP's four books. As Table 2 illustrates, these include adjectives such as 'geostrategic', 'geospatial' and 'geostationary', adverbs like 'geopolitically' and 'geographically', and nouns including 'geopolitics', 'geography' and 'geoeconomics'. However, one term stands out for its pre-eminence over the rest: the adjective 'geopolitical'. This section of the analysis will focus on Borrell's use of the word 'geopolitical' while also paying attention to 'geopolitics' and 'geostrategic' as part of the top three.

Term	Hits
Geopolitical	236
Geopolitics	20
Geostrategic	19
Geography	9
Geographical	8
Geospatial	7
Geographic	5
Geopolitically	4
Geo-economic	4
Geostationary	3
Geographically	3
Geo-economics	2
Geothermal	1
Geocompetitive	1

Table 2 - Survey of terms starting with the geo- prefix. Source: own compilation from Borrell (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024)

To begin with, I will provide a definition and some context on the general use of the adjective 'geopolitical'. The Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) states that something qualifies as being geopolitical when it is "connected with political activity as influenced by the physical features of a country or area, or with the study of the way a country's size, position, etc. influence its power and its relationships with other countries". The Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.) estimates that the use of the adjective 'geopolitical' has increased sixfold since the 1960s.

As Ó Tuathail (1994) recalls, the main reason geopolitics was popularised in the English language was the repeated use of geopolitical language and tropes by Henry Kissinger in the 1960s and 1970s. In Kissinger's memoirs on his time as US Secretary of State in Nixon's administration, the noun 'geopolitics' and the adjective 'geopolitical' appear continuously (Ó Tuathail, 1994). While 'geopolitics' is never explicitly defined, 'geopolitical' is used to qualify a set of nouns like 'interests', 'ambitions' or 'consequences' (Ó Tuathail, 1994).

In a similar way, Borrell does not define what he means by geopolitics. It can evoke the game of IR, where the EU is a "player in world geopolitics" (Borrell, 2021, p. 32). It can be the force behind paralysing world tensions when "geopolitics divides the international community", as Borrell argues happened when Myanmar's strategic location between China and India prevented the UN Security Council from reacting to the 2021 coup d'état and the ensuing violence (Borrell, 2022, p. 386). However, most of the time, geopolitics is used as a buzzword in the formula 'the geopolitics of X'. The geopolitics of... water, climate change, migration, energy, the green transition, the Covid-19 crisis, vaccination and the post-pandemic world are all present in Borrell's books (2021; 2022; 2023; 2024). Addressing the 'geopolitics of X' seems a way of portraying these issues as being of strategic importance in a context of power competition where the EU needs to be realistic and pragmatic.

Like Ó Tuathail (1994) found in Kissinger's case, I argue the HR/VP uses terms like 'geopolitical' and 'geostrategic' as a guide for action in the conduct of statecraft. The following excerpt from Borrell's first book serves as one of the best illustrations of how 'geopolitical' and (on a smaller scale) 'geostrategic' serve as lenses through which Borrell wants the EU to look at the current state of the world and find its place within it:

"In a world of geostrategic competition, in which we see increasingly the use of force in different ways and in which economic and other instruments are weaponised, we must relearn the language of power and conceive of Europe as a top-tier geostrategic actor. This is certainly not the case yet and it is a difficult learning process, and in the area of European Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) we still punch below our declared ambitions.

The geopolitical upheavals we are witnessing underline the urgency with which the EU must find its way in a world increasingly characterised by raw power politics. We Europeans must adjust our mental maps to deal with the world as it is, not as we hoped it would be" (Borrell, 2021, p. 22).

Context words	Hits
Geopolitical tensions	26
Geopolitical context	20
Geopolitical competition	15
Geopolitical issue/s	11
Geopolitical consequences	10
Geopolitical challenges	9
Geopolitical Europe	9
Geopolitical actor	7
Geopolitical awakening	7
Geopolitical interest/s	6

Table 3 - Most frequent context words qualified by the adjective 'geopolitical'. Source: own compilation from Borrell (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024)

Table 3 shows the ten most common context words that Borrell uses next to ‘geopolitical’, amounting to more than half the times ‘geopolitical’ appears in the HR/VP’s annual publications. Out of the ten most used formulations, the majority are descriptions of the world’s issues and context as dangerous, plagued by tensions, competition, and challenges.

Borrell also uses the term to construct the EU’s image as ‘geopolitical Europe’ or a ‘geopolitical actor’. He states that the EU is going through a ‘geopolitical awakening’ and has ‘geopolitical interest/s’. I will now explore what he means.

Already in August 2020, the HR/VP argued that developing ‘geopolitical Europe’ was the way to deal with “new empires” like China, Russia and Turkey and settle conflicts with them peacefully (Borrell, 2021, p. 121). For that to happen, the EU needed to build upon its economic weight and develop as a “political pole” capable of defending multilateralism and its own interests (Borrell, 2021, pp. 216–217).

After the 2022 full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, Borrell proclaimed the “belated birth of a geopolitical Europe” and went further into providing substance as to what that meant: a “more robust and security-conscious” EU, “with unity of purpose and capabilities to pursue our political goals on the world stage” (Borrell, 2023, p. 42). He assigns a core task to ‘geopolitical Europe’ aside from supporting Ukraine: “to protect our citizens, to support our partners and to face our global security responsibilities” (Borrell, 2023, p. 62).

Nevertheless, Borrell also acknowledges that becoming a ‘geopolitical actor’ will require investing in Europe’s “collective capacity to act” (Borrell, 2023, p. 149), and he warns that otherwise, the EU will have to “accept being an object and not a subject in foreign policy – and then scale back the rhetoric of being a geopolitical actor” (Borrell, 2023, p. 149).

5.4 The Evolution of the HR/VP’s Geopolitical Lexicon

In fact, as Figure 3 shows, Borrell scaled back his geopolitical rhetoric. Whereas the number of times he uses the adjective ‘geopolitical’ increased from the first book to the third book, mentions of ‘geopolitical’ clearly decreased in the fourth and last book. As described in the methodological chapter, the second and fourth books (in this order) are significantly longer than the first and third books, which is why I prefer the percentage of the text covered by mentions of ‘geopolitical’ to measure its prevalence —as calculated by the software MAXQDA— instead of absolute frequencies, which also peak in the third book. In other words, Borrell used the term ‘geopolitical’ even more in the first and third books when compared to the other publications if we measure the presence of the term in relation to the total number of words of each book, accounting for the imbalances in length.

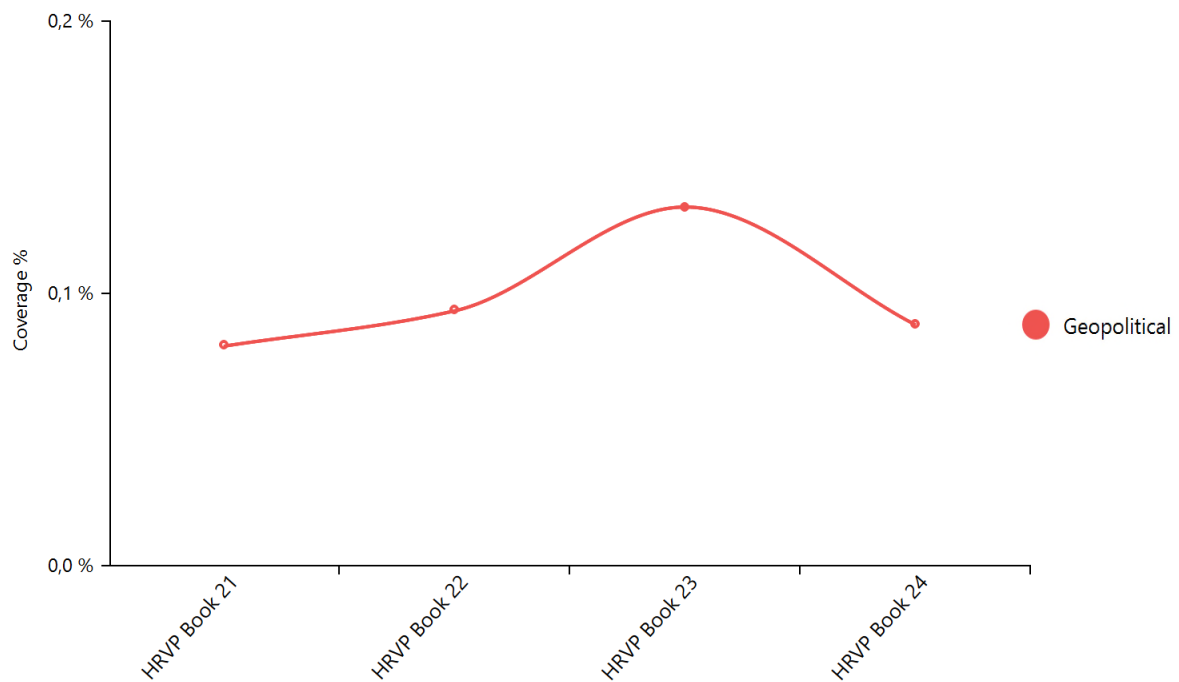


Figure 3 - Evolution of the use of the term 'geopolitical' by the HR/VP. Source: own compilation from Borrell (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024)

A possible explanation for this phenomenon is found in Table 4, which represents the number of times the word ‘geopolitical’ was present in passages of text that were coded as referring to the covid-19 crisis, the Ukraine war after the Russian invasion on February 24, 2022, and the war in the Middle East after Hamas’ attack on October 7, 2024. While Borrell is ready to use the term ‘geopolitical’ when discussing the war in Ukraine, he is much less inclined to use it when talking about the Middle East. In fact, he uses the adjective ‘geopolitical’ more often to talk about the coronavirus pandemic than about the conflict in the Middle East. Given the internal division between the Member States and following Borrell’s own logic, it could be that the HR/VP is not ready or willing to talk geopolitically about a conflict for which the EU has not built up the collective capacity to act.

Crisis	Covid-19	Ukraine war (post Feb 24)	Middle East (post Oct 7)
Geopolitical	12	50	3

Table 4 - Use of ‘geopolitical’ in relation to major foreign policy crises. Source: own compilation from Borrell (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024)

Moreover, following Borrell’s own logic again, I have looked at the EU’s language of power as a measure of its geopolitical condition by tracking mentions of hard power —comprising both mentions of military and economic hard power like sanctions— in relation to the same three foreign policy crises. As Table 5 illustrates, the differences are even starker than in the case of the use of ‘geopolitical’.

Crisis	Covid-19	Ukraine war (post Feb 24)	Middle East (post Oct 7)
Hard power	3	164	1

Table 5 - Mentions of hard power in relation to major foreign policy crises. Source: own compilation from Borrell (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024)

Whereas Borrell constantly discusses the use of sanctions against Russia in his annual publications, he does not mention them once in relation to the Middle East conflict. The only time the HR/VP refers to hard power in connection to the war in the Middle East he does so in connection with Ukraine and Afghanistan and states the following: “the precipitous departure

from Afghanistan in August 2021, as well as Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the tragic events currently unfolding in the Middle East, have demonstrated, if proof were needed, that Europeans need to invest more in their defence capacities, and above all to do so in a more coordinated way, so as to be ready to deal with any crisis that may arise outside the Union" (Borrell, 2024, p. 195).

The fact that there is no mention of sanctions for any actor in the Middle East conflict in Borrell's last book does not mean the HR/VP has not worked for them to be applied to Hamas or West Bank settlers since they have been approved by the FAC in 2024 (Council of the European Union, 2024a; 2024b). However, it points out to how long it has taken the EU 27 Member States to agree, with the Council only approving the first batch in January 2024 and the second one in April 2024. The fourth and last book available covers up to the end of 2023.

5.5 Examining the HR/VP's Geostrategic Discourse

Having explored the cartography of Borrell's annual publications, as well as his use of a geopolitical lexicon, I will now focus on examining the presence of geostrategic discourse throughout the four books. As introduced in the methodological chapter, I follow Ó Tuathail's conceptualisation of geostrategic discourse as a form of geopolitical discourse that makes explicit strategic claims about the material national security interests of the state across a world map characterised by state competition, threats and dangers" (Ó Tuathail, 2003, p. 95). When coding the HR/VP's books, I differentiated between passages that made claims about the EU's security interests, passages that described instances of competition and passages that described the world or particular events as dangerous and threatening. Before delving into the evolution of Borrell's geostrategic discourse, I will briefly introduce some examples of each category.

Discourse on the EU's security interest includes both explicit mentions of the words 'interest/s' and 'security', as well as imperative calls for the EU to act in the realm of security and defence. An example of an explicit mention of the EU's security interests is the following:

"The call from EU citizens is clear: last year, 77% of Europeans supported the efforts to develop a common EU security and defence policy. It is up to all of us, and in particular for me as High Representative for foreign and security policy, to deliver this. This means building up our collective capacity to protect our security interests, by having the right means and the will to use them" (Borrell, 2022, p. 130).

Instances of a rather implicit call for the EU to protect its security interests include the following excerpt, where Borrell argues that the EU's security interests –e.g. upholding a rules-based order– are not confined to Ukraine and points to the African continent as a strategic geography secure the EU's interests:

“In Europe, we are very focused on Russia's aggression against Ukraine and its implications for European security. But other crises and global problems do not stop. On the contrary, they have often been aggravated by the consequences of this war. We need more than ever to continue to work with our partners around the globe to defend the rules-based order and to keep up our work on global challenges. For this purpose, the EU's close partnership with Africa is crucial” (Borrell, 2023, p. 305).

In a similar vein, the HR/VP claims that Asia is of strategic importance for the EU's security interests by framing the EU's presence as a security actor in the region as a precondition for becoming a geopolitical actor:

“I have stressed several times during my mandate that the history of the 21st century will be written to a great extent in Asia and that we must be much more engaged with this region. If the EU wants to be a geopolitical actor, we also have to be perceived as a political and security actor in the Asia-Pacific region, not just as a development cooperation, trading or investment partner” (Borrell, 2023, p. 270).

An excerpt from the last book shows again how Borrell implicitly discusses the EU's security interests by framing investment in defence as an imperative. The HR/VP claims European societies “need” to grasp the new normality or face challenges that could be “existential” if not met with the right response, in this case, defence spending:

“I was very surprised when one important European banker told me that the risk committee of his bank would advise not to finance defence projects. Our society needs to understand that we have to invest public but also private money in defence. Defence expenditure is not a waste of money but an existential requirement to face the many challenges of our world. The defence industry can also support the economy, creating jobs and helping boost innovation” (Borrell, 2024, p. 202).

Examples of world competition are mostly explicit and tend to describe the state of US-China relations, competition for resources in regions like the Arctic, what Borrell calls a “battle of

narratives” over the covid-19 pandemic, the distribution of vaccines against the coronavirus and the rise of authoritarianism, as well as the ‘weaponisation of everything’:

“The task could not be more urgent. We need to prepare and position ourselves for the post-pandemic world. Even if we are not yet out of the pandemic, some overall trends are clear. None are fully new, but all have been accelerated by the crisis. The first is that our world is becoming more multi-polar than multilateral, with the strategic competition between the United States and China often paralysing multilateralism. Second, interdependence is increasingly conflictual and soft power is often weaponised: vaccines, data and technology standards are all instruments of political competition. Third, some countries follow ‘a logic of empires’, arguing in terms of historical rights and zone of influence, rather than adhering to agreed rules and local consent. And fourth, the world is becoming less free and democracy is under attack – both at home and abroad. We face a real battle of narratives” (Borrell, 2022, p, 82).

Descriptions of the world as a dangerous place and the identification of threats have indeed been part of Borrell’s discourse since the beginning of his mandate, as he likes to recall, but became even more prevalent with the publication of the EU’s Strategic Compass. The second book contains an introductory speech to the Strategic Compass he gave in Brussels a few weeks before the Russian invasion of Ukraine:

“The core message is this: Europe is in danger. I wish it were different, but the last two years have seen a serious worsening of our strategic environment. To the extent that I am convinced that today we are living through the most dangerous moment of the post-Cold War period” (Borrell, 2022, p. 147)

Notwithstanding the above individual examination of each kind of geostrategic discourse, the application of these codes was not exclusive. The HR/VP also refers to the EU’s security interests, describes world competition and cites dangers or threats all at the same time, as the following excerpt illustrates:

“The Ukraine/Russia crisis demonstrates that we face an increasingly competitive strategic environment. But the debate on European security and defence goes far beyond the Ukraine/Russia crisis. We have security interests and stakes around the world, in the western Balkans, the Middle East, Africa and the Indo-Pacific. These days, threats are coming from everywhere and manifest themselves in all strategic domains: cyber, maritime and space”. (Borrell, 2023, p. 151).

5.6 The Evolution of the HR/VP's Geostrategic Discourse

Although geostrategic discourse already had a significant presence in Borrell's first book, it increased over time as events like the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, the war in Ukraine and the latest episode of the Middle East conflict shaped the HR/VP's vision of the world. As Figure 4 illustrates, the percentage of the whole text that was coded as containing examples of geostrategic discourse rose steadily until it reached a plateau with the third and fourth books. The evolution of Borrell's geostrategic discourse signals that it has firmly established itself as part of the HR/VP's vision for a common EU strategic culture. However, as will be shown below, the three types of geostrategic discourse evolved differently and differed in relation to each crisis the EU faced over the past years and the EU policies mentioned by Borrell.

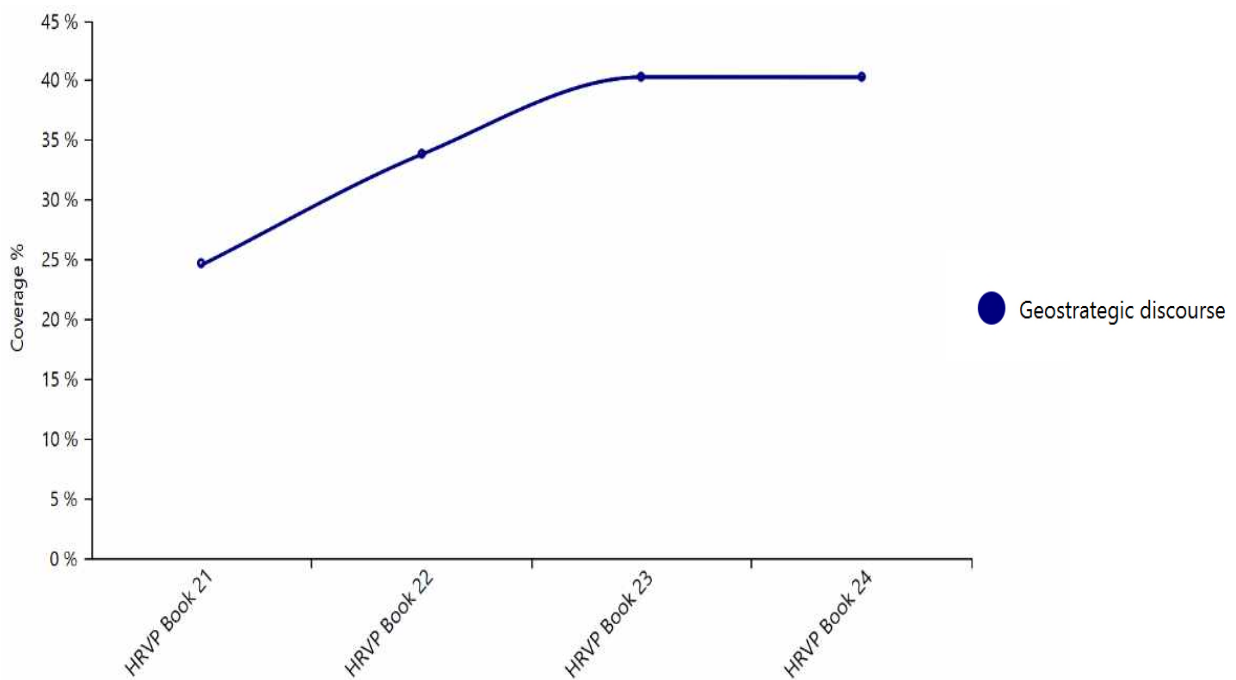


Figure 4 - Evolution of geostrategic discourse. Source: own compilation from Borrell (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024)

While passages related to competition decreased slightly after the first book and then remained somewhat stable throughout the rest, as Figure 5 shows, those mentioning threats and dangers peaked in the third book —after the Russian invasion of Ukraine— and those on the EU's security interest rose already in 2022 with the publication of the EU Strategic Compass interest but did not peak until the fourth book. Both Figure 4 and Figure 5 show the presence of geostrategic discourse as a share of the total amount of text of each publication. Again, this measure allows for comparison, avoiding the risk of giving more weight to geostrategic discourse in some books over others due to their differences in length.

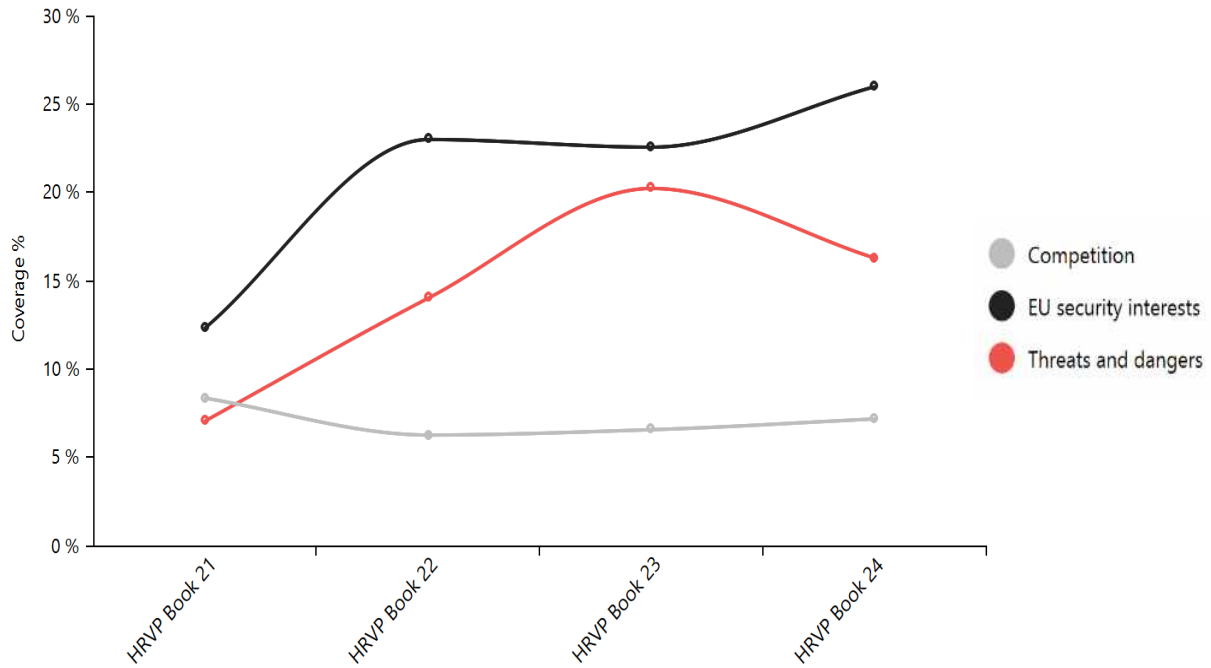


Figure 5 - Evolution of geostrategic discourses by type. Source: own compilation from Borrell (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024)

5.7 The HR/VP's Geostrategic Discourse by Crisis

The relationship between Borrell's geostrategic discourse and the different crises experienced by the EU clearly shows that the war in Ukraine is the main geostrategic focus of the HR/VP. Table 6 illustrates the number of passages coded as containing geostrategic discourse and referring to the covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine after February 24, 2022, or the Middle East post-October 7, 2024, at the same time.

Crisis	Covid-19	Ukraine war (post Feb 24)	Middle East (post Oct 7)
Geostrategic discourse	187	790	118

Table 6 - Passages coded as geostrategic discourse per crisis. Source: own compilation from Borrell (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024)

Since the Ukraine war has been raging for longer than the latest episode in the Middle East conflict, it is only logical that there are more instances of geostrategic discourse present in the HR/VP's mentions of Ukraine than in those of the Middle East. However, by focusing on the last publication —the only one that covers both crises— it is possible to establish a fairer comparison between the two. Figure 6 shows the total number of mentions of each crisis in the last book only, as well as the instances of geostrategic discourse per crisis.

Again, the war in Ukraine received significantly more mentions, but that can also be qualified by the fact that violence in the Middle East only started late in the year, leaving less room to write and give speeches about it before the last book was finished. More interesting is the differences in the type of geostrategic discourse Borrell applies to each crisis.



Figure 6 - Type of geostrategic discourse used per crisis in the HR/VP's last book. Source: own compilation from Borrell (2024)

Whereas geostrategic discourse on the Ukraine war focuses on the EU's security interests, these are less important —although still significant— when it comes to the war in the Middle East, which is mostly characterised as a dangerous stage of the conflict and a humanitarian catastrophe. Both crises are similar in the sense that none of them is marked by the display of power competition, a geostrategic discourse that Borrell mainly used in relation to the covid-19 pandemic and vaccine diplomacy.

5.8 The HR/VP's Geostrategic Discourse by Geographies

To close the analysis section, I will highlight the more prominent geographies in the HR/VP's geostrategic discourse. Table 7 includes a ranking of the most mentioned countries, UN geographic regions, seas, and other geographies, such as space or the EU neighbourhood. Also, Map 4 illustrates the geostrategic mentions of countries worldwide.

Russia and Ukraine are the countries mentioned most in the HR/VP's geostrategic discourse, which aligns with the EU's focus on the war in Ukraine and the overwhelming presence of both countries in the last two books. When Borrell uses geostrategic discourse to talk about Russia and Ukraine, he does so predominantly by referring to the EU's security interests or threats and dangers emerging from the war.

Geographies	Geostrategic discourse hits ▼
Russia	1,229
Ukraine	932
China	578
United States	372
Africa	288
Asia	256
Palestine	217
Space	185
Israel	124
Libya	123
EU neighbourhood	117
Turkey/Türkiye	115
Afghanistan	109
Indo-Pacific	98
Latin America and the Caribbean	94
Somalia	91
Mediterranean	85
Belarus	65
India	64
Iran	63

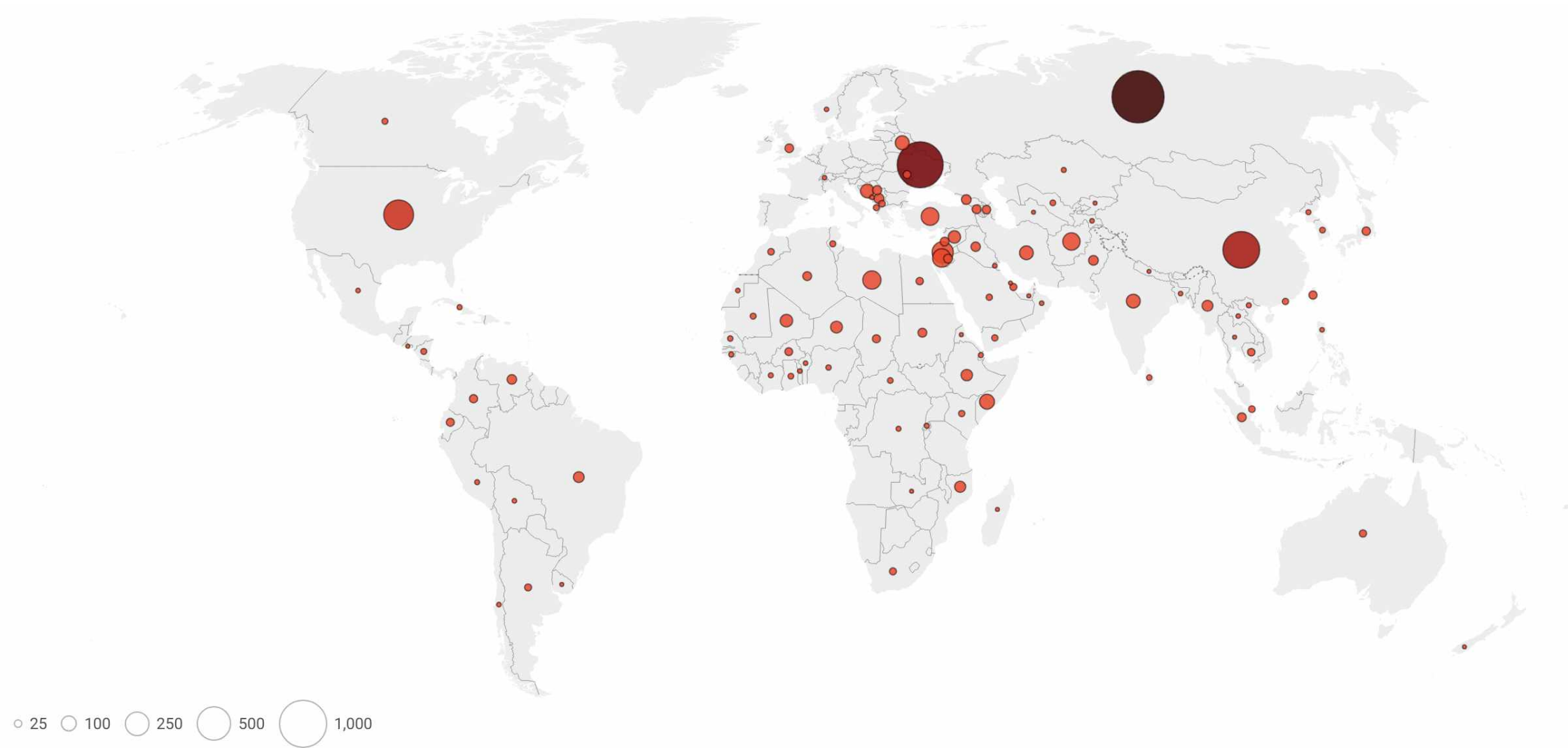
Table 7 - Top 20 geographies within the HR/VP's geostrategic discourse. Source: own compilation from Borrell (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024)

China and the United States follow suit in total mentions within Borrell's geostrategic discourse, but here, the focus of the HR/VP shifts from threats and dangers to competition between them. Borrell also identifies competition directly with the EU, mostly coming from China, although some developments in US economic policy, like the Inflation Reduction Act, merit Borrell's attention from the point of view of economic security.

Aside from the world's superpowers and the war in Ukraine, Borrell identifies Africa as a key geostrategic region for the EU and believes its security interests are at stake in the neighbouring continent. The Sahel stands out as an area where dangerous developments are taking place (notably in Mali and Niger) and threaten the EU's security interests. In Northern Africa, Borrell talks geostrategically mostly about Libya, where the EU's naval mission Irini oversees the UN arms embargo. The HR/VP also highlights the importance of the Horn of Africa and Somalia for the EU's security interests due to the presence of an EU Training Mission (EUTM) and a European Union Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP), as well as Operation European Union Naval Force Atalanta (EU NAVFOR).

In Asia, the second most mentioned region in geostrategic terms, the HR/VP focuses primarily on the wider Middle East or West Asia. As discussed above, Borrell highlights the spillover and humanitarian dangers of the conflict in Israel/Palestine over the EU's security interests, which are nonetheless mentioned often. In Afghanistan and Iran, EU security interests are slightly more mentioned than threats and dangers. Moreover, Borrell describes Southeast Asia mainly as a place where competition is taking place with China, and the Indo-Pacific is stressed for its influence on the EU's economic security interests. A key Asian player like India also features prominently in Borrell's geostrategic discourse, focusing on increasing great power competition and how it affects the EU's security interests.

Closer to the EU, its security is at stake in the Mediterranean, with particular emphasis on defusing tensions with Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean. In the neighbourhood, south and east, threats and dangers abound. Borrell wants the Western Balkans to move forward in their EU path and argues enlargement is in the EU's strategic interest but worries mostly about ongoing tensions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia. Moving away again from the EU's borders, Borrell wants the EU to look more towards Latin America and the Caribbean, where he believes the EU can secure its economic interests by working with countries like Brazil but faces increasing competition from China. Lastly, the HR/VP believes the EU's security depends on looking up at space strategically, for it is the new geopolitical frontier.



Map 4 - Country mentions within geostrategic discourse. Source: own compilation from Borrell (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024)

5.9 The Twilight of Strategic Autonomy?

Perhaps counterintuitively, one of the main findings of coding Borrell’s books is that, at the same time there is a constant rise in geostrategic discourse overall, one notices the apparent demise of the concept of ‘strategic autonomy’. As Figure 7 reveals, mentions of ‘strategic autonomy’ covered an almost equal share of the text in the first two books. In fact, the EU’s quest for ‘strategic autonomy’ was even featured in the back of the first book and second book, and Borrell defines it early on:

“[Strategic] autonomy should not imply total independence or isolation from the rest of the world. Rather, it refers to an ability to think for oneself and to act according to one’s own values and interests. The European Union needs to achieve this kind of autonomy, while at the same time strengthening our alliances and preserving our commitments to multilateralism and openness” (Borrell, 2021, p. 35).

Already in Borrell’s second book, the HR/VP notes that there’s been enough discussion about what ‘strategic autonomy’ means and that it is time to act (Borrell, 2022), yet nothing in his discourse throughout the book hints that the concept is about to fall out of fashion. Yet discourse on ‘strategic autonomy’ is abandoned almost entirely in the last two books following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It receives a total number of four and three mentions in the course of 2022 and 2023, respectively.

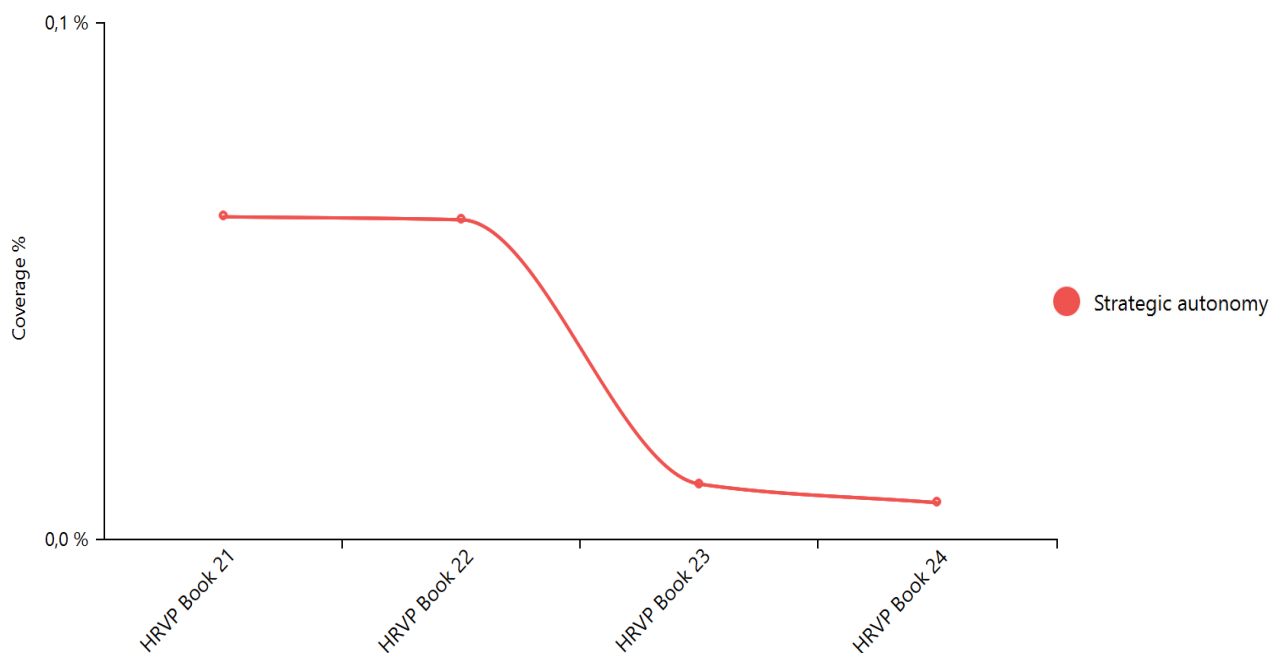


Figure 7 - Mentions of ‘strategic autonomy’. Source: own compilation from Borrell (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024)

Furthermore, out of the four times that Borrell mentions ‘strategic autonomy’ in his third book, at least one is not necessarily positive towards the concept itself, showing a certain degree of exasperation at conceptual debates over its meaning:

“We need to put more defence and security in our mindset and stop theological discussions about strategic autonomy. We can call it any way we want, but we have to take our security in our own hands. It has nothing to do with weakening the transatlantic alliances, which, by the way, is stronger than ever: in the current crisis, our transatlantic unity has been 100%” (Borrell, 2023, p. 44).

In the fourth and last book, two out of three mentions of ‘strategic autonomy’ are accompanied by alternative formulations like “strategic responsibility in the context of EU defence” (Borrell, 2024, p. 201) and “de-risking” in the context of the economic relationship with China (Borrell, 2024, p. 335). Borrell equates these concepts to ‘strategic autonomy’ in their respective contexts by using the conjunction ‘or’. However, ‘strategic responsibility’ was already mentioned once in Borrell’s second book and did not gain significant traction in the last two books, with four and three mentions, respectively. On the other hand, ‘de-risking’ appears for the first time in the last book, yet it is mentioned 16 times, signalling that it might become one of the new buzzwords in EU foreign policy. Nevertheless, no clear alternative to ‘strategic autonomy’ emerges from Borrell’s books. Rather, the HR/VP seems to be trying to convey that it is high time for the EU to stop messing with the vocabulary and start taking action.

6. Conclusion

This master's thesis has explored the role of geopolitics in HR/VP Borrell's efforts in building a common EU strategic culture throughout the annual compendiums of his writings, op-eds, and speeches published during his tenure. I have focused on uncovering the geopolitical lexicon and geographies that characterised Borrell's discourse, as well as the presence of geostrategic discourse describing the EU's security interests, world competition and threats and dangers.

Despite the EU's traditional understanding of itself as a civilian or normative power, the HR/VP argued from the beginning of his mandate that the EU needed to become geopolitical. But what did he mean? Borrell never explicitly defines geopolitics as such. However, the analysis presented above shows that Borrell's discourse includes abundant terms starting with the geo-prefix and highlights the adjective 'geopolitical' as particularly salient.

The analysis also demonstrates that the HR/VP's discourse on what being geopolitical means is closer to a realist vision of IR —where power politics, competition and the pursuit of self-interests are the norm— than to a deeper understanding of the relationship between geography and politics. According to Borrell, for the EU to become geopolitical, it needs to be united, conscious of its security environment and responsibilities, and capable of acting accordingly and pursuing its own goals.

Hence, Borrell's books display a growing importance of geostrategic discourse, characterised by a constant look at the world as a competitive place, a permanent scanning for threats and dangers, and an increasing discussion of the EU's security interests across the globe. This pattern aligns with the theoretical framework, which understood the resort to geopolitics as a function of the worsening security situation in and around the EU and a resulting foreign policy identity crisis in Brussels. As the analysis illustrates, Borrell's use of geopolitical lexicon and geostrategic discourse as a template for foreign policy practice resembles that of figures like Kissinger in the US, providing orientation in times of turmoil.

However, the analysis points out a divergence in the use of geostrategic discourse and geopolitical lexicon when addressing different foreign policy crises. Concretely, the HR/VP's discourse differs markedly on the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East. This pattern and the seeming reluctance to identify allies and enemies signal that the EU has only partially become geopolitical in the HR/VP's understanding of the term.

Perhaps Borrell was too quick to state the EU's geopolitical awakening after Russia's invasion of Ukraine not only because translating words into action is proving to be difficult in the Ukrainian battlefield, as some of the literature already indicates, but also because maintaining discursive consistency is not easy either, as the Middle East conflict exemplifies. I have not addressed the reasons behind this phenomenon sufficiently, but the literature hints at how division among the Member States could hinder even the discursive agency of the HR/VP.

A significant finding from my study is the apparent demise of the concept of 'strategic autonomy'. A decade after its first appearance in official EU documents—see the European Council conclusions from December 2013, as noted by Damen (2022)—Borrell seems to have abandoned the term after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Although I do not try to establish causality and do not wish to fall for the 'post hoc ergo propter hoc' fallacy, mentions of 'strategic autonomy' drop close to zero in the last two books examined here. Since the object of study is still a moving target, this may change in the last months of Borrell's mandate, something that could be analysed in the future by looking at the blog or in the event he publishes a last book. Lastly, no clear alternative emerges from the HR/VP's discourse, although 'strategic responsibility' is sometimes used to signal the EU's willingness to cooperate with NATO in defence and 'de-risking' is making its way in Borrell's vocabulary towards China.

On the geographic dimension, the cartography of Borrell's books shows that his discourse is intensely geopolitical if we understand geopolitics as the relations between space and politics. The geographic scope of the HR/VP's discourse spans almost the whole globe. All continents, over 150 countries and contested territories, most bodies of water and outer space are all part of Borrell's considerations. The HR/VP discourse has a marked regional dimension, relating the EU to similar organisations and Europe to other regions, but also demonstrates granularity in identifying concrete spaces of EU interest on the map.

Going back to the research question that guided this thesis, HR/VP Borrell's lexicon is in line with the tradition of practical geopolitics. He mostly uses the adjective 'geopolitical' to survey the world's context, its tensions, issues and challenges, and construct the EU as an actor with interests, needs, and tasks in the security realm. Besides, Borrell puts forward a geostrategic discourse that provides content for a common EU strategic culture. Regardless of how successful Borrell has been in convincing others of the merits of his understanding of IR, this thesis shows the importance of geopolitics in the HR/VP's efforts to nudge the EU into becoming strategic and offers an empirical taste of his world vision for the EU's security goals.

In a geographical sense, Borrell's discourse ultimately shows the degree to which the HR/VP wants the EU to be a global actor and how he pursued a global agenda himself. Overall, HR/VP Borrell demonstrates a certain degree of agency and entrepreneurship by laying out his mental map of the globe and the place the EU should have in it while updating and adapting to the changing circumstances of world politics. However, the analysis also hints at constraints inherent to the job and the complexities of the EU as a system, particularly in foreign policy.

To sum up, this research hopes to have contributed to further the understanding of EU foreign policy by looking at original and untapped sources that reveal how the HR/VP's discourse constructs a common EU strategic culture through the prism of geopolitics. Moving forward, future research avenues include studying the relationship between geostrategic discourse and different policies with an external dimension and linking it with policy outcomes. Moreover, future researchers could explore the evolution of the geopolitical lexicon, geographies mentioned, and geostrategic discourse as new HR/VPs take over. A comparison with different EU leaders in the field of foreign policy, if similar sources are available, would yield exciting results on the degree to which there are convergent or competing visions of the world at the helm of the EU institutions and the Member States. Lastly, this thesis looks mostly at discourse from the HR/VP towards the rest of the world, but it is just as important to turn inward and examine the role geopolitics plays in discourses on the EU and the Member States themselves.

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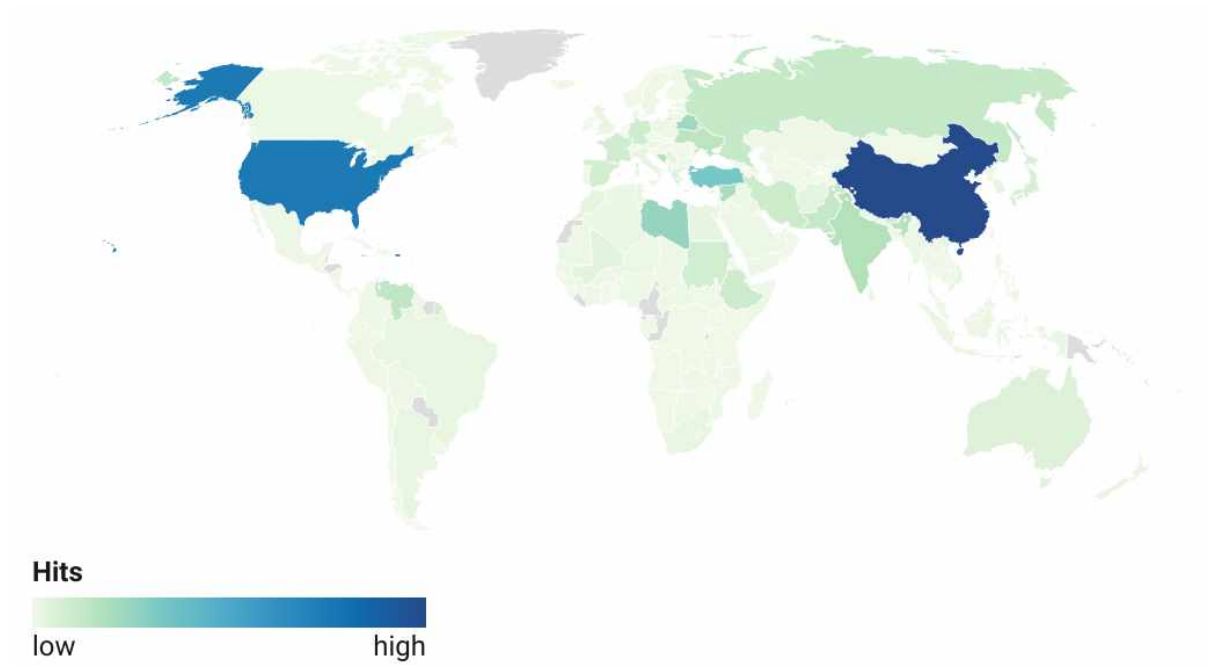
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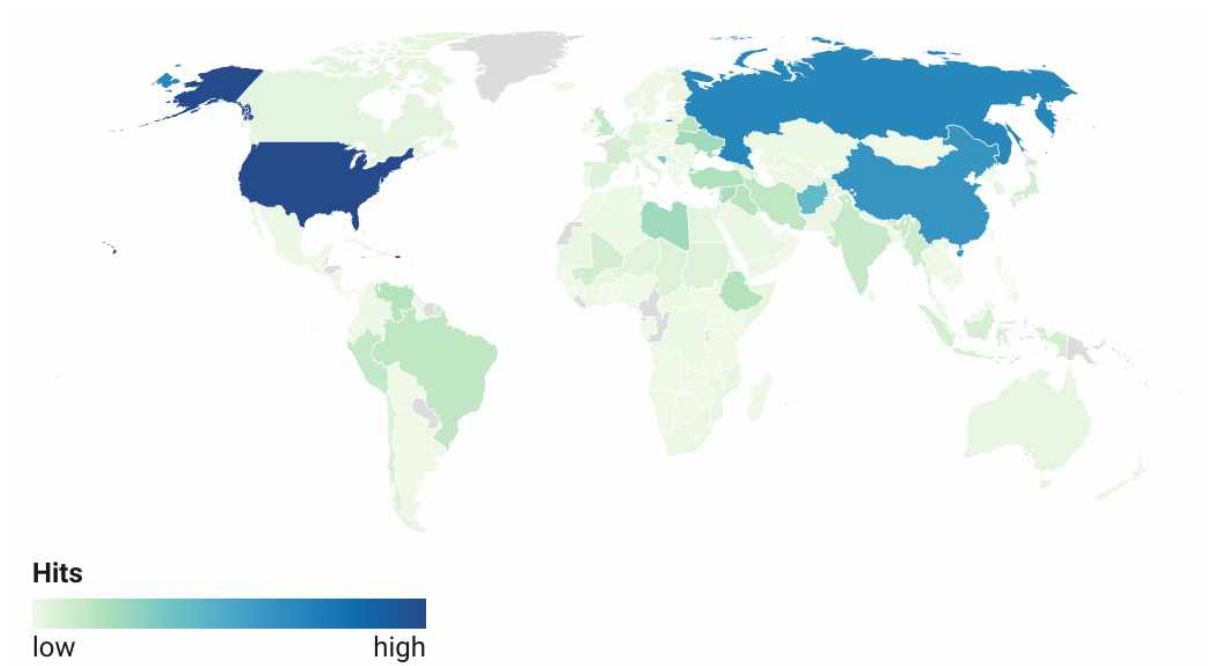
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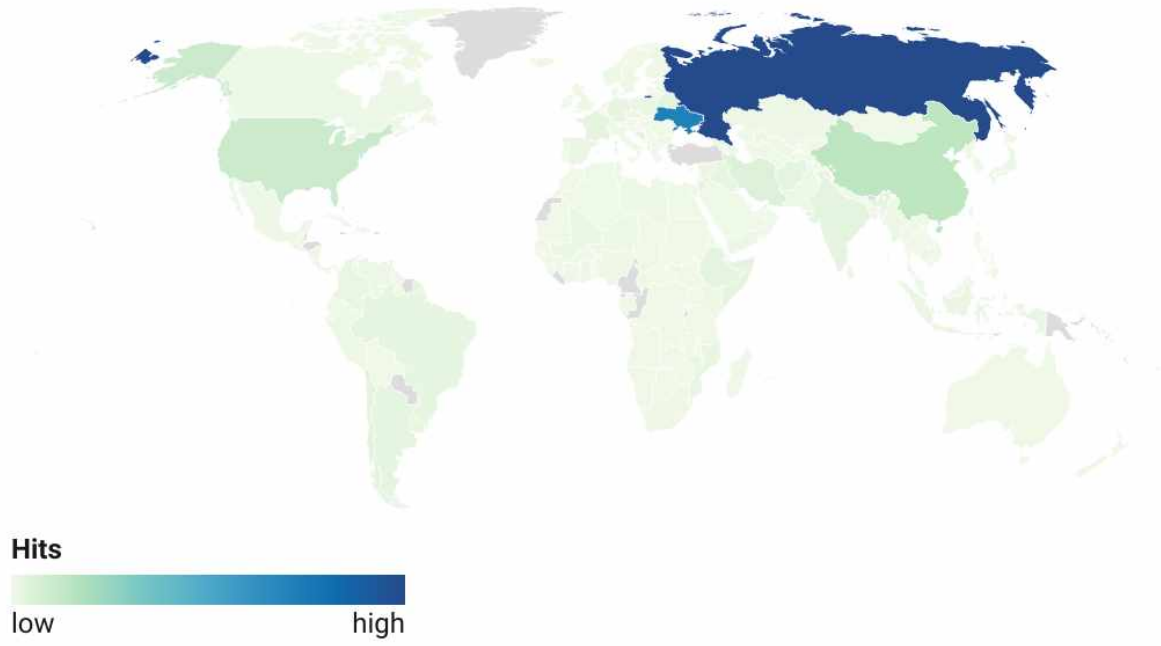
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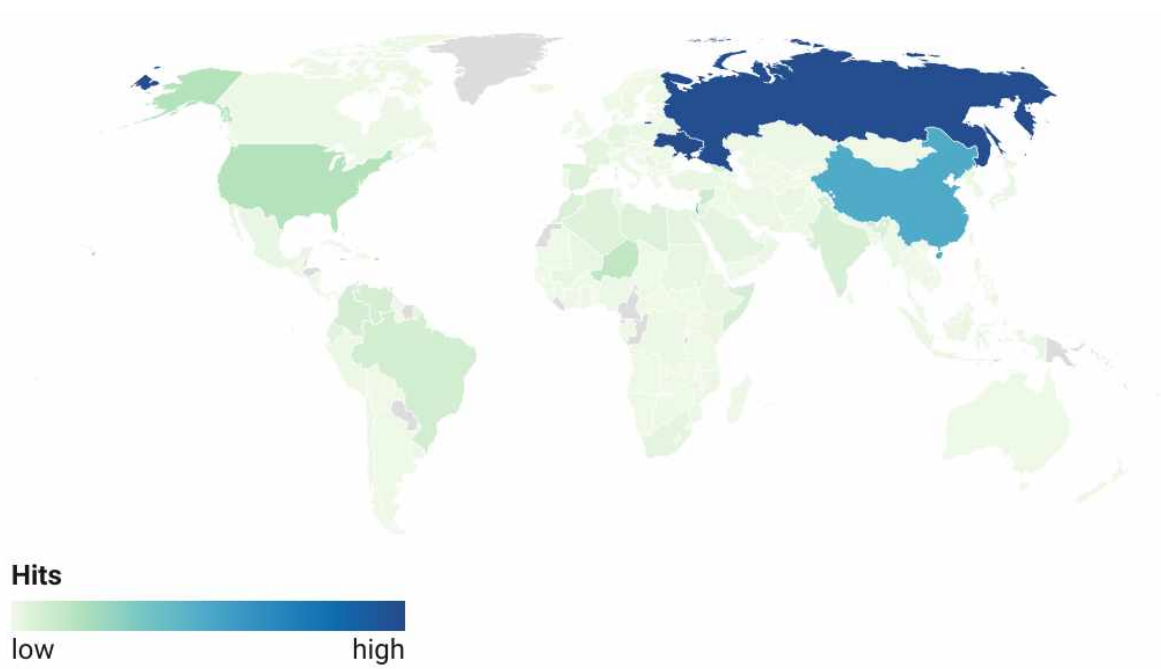
Map 5 - Countries mentioned in the HR/VP's first book. Source: own compilation from Borrell (2021)



Map 6 - Countries mentioned in the HR/VP's second book. Source: own compilation from Borrell (2022)



Map 7 - Countries mentioned in the HR/VP's third book. Source: own compilation from Borrell (2023)



Map 8 - Countries mentioned in the HR/VP's fourth book. Source: own compilation from Borrell (2024)

Countries	Hits
Russia	1,799
Ukraine	1,378
China	856
United States	704
Palestine	450
Israel	356
Syria	181
Bosnia and Herzegovina	177
Afghanistan	175
Libya	170
Turkey/Türkiye	164
Belarus	148
India	148
Venezuela	135
Iran	129
Brazil	120
Ethiopia	118
Lebanon	114
Niger	95
France	91

Table 8 - Top-20 countries mentioned in the HR/VP's books. Source: own compilation from Borrell (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024)

EU Member States	Hits
France	91
Spain	79
Germany	77
Cyprus	42
Poland	22
Italy	21
Greece	15
Finland	11
Czech Republic	11
Lithuania	10
Belgium	10
Sweden	8
Portugal	7
Romania	5
Malta	4
Luxembourg	4
Ireland	3
the Netherlands	3
Croatia	2
Slovenia	2
Hungary	2
Latvia	2
Estonia	2
Slovakia	1
Bulgaria	1
Denmark	1

Table 9 - Member States mentioned in the HR/VP's four books. Source: own compilation from Borrell (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024)