



# FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Lund University  
Department of Political Science  
Peace and Conflict Studies FKVK02  
Bachelor thesis VT24

Ida Welén  
Supervisor: Hebatalla Taha

## Strategic Altruism: Analyzing Development Aid for Donor Strategic Objectives

A quantitative analysis of the strategic interests influencing European aid flows

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# Abstract

Based on the geopolitical situation in Europe and the European Union's (EU) initiative for further cooperation with its eastern neighborhood, this thesis analyzes the strategic interests behind the bilateral development aid allocation of the EU member states. The purpose is to, with a focus on aid directed to the Eastern Partnership states, provide the academic foreign aid field with a regional analysis of motives within the EU and its neighborhood.

Based on a theoretical framework combining realist IR-theory with models of the literature regarding aid motivations, this thesis is based on the consensus that national strategic interests are the main goal for the donor states of development aid. Through a quantitative statistical analysis, hypotheses regarding whether economic, security or/and political interests influence the European aid flows are tested.

The findings include that the political ideology (left-right) affects how the EU states prioritize their aid, as right-wing states focus more aid to the EaP-area. Addressing security interests, geographical proximity to the EaP border is found influential, illustrating that EaP-border states are more interested in this area due to security objectives. These findings provide knowledge of the internal foreign policy divides of the EU, questioning a united approach to the ENP. Also, it both supports previous research with regional examples, while also criticizing the common divides in the field.

**Keywords:** *Development aid, ODA, donor interest model, European Union, Eastern Partnership*

# Table of Contents

- 1 Introduction..... 1**
  - 1.1 Purpose of Research..... 2
- 2 Literature Review..... 4**
  - 2.1 The Implications of Foreign Aid..... 4
  - 2.2 The Academic Field of Aid Motivations..... 4
  - 2.3 Identifying Research Gaps and Thesis Contributions..... 7
- 3 Theoretical Framework..... 9**
  - 3.1 The Donor Interest Model and Realism..... 9
  - 3.2 Realist Theory and Foreign Aid..... 9
  - 3.3 Theoretical Hypotheses..... 11
- 4 Method..... 13**
  - 4.1 Operationalization..... 13
  - 4.2 Delimitations..... 16
  - 4.3 Research Design..... 17
- 5 Material..... 19**
  - 5.1 The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development..... 19
  - 5.2 Sources Establishing the Independent Variables..... 19
- 6 Results..... 21**
  - 6.1 Step 1: Bi- and Multivariate Linear Regression Models..... 22
  - 6.2 Step 2: Factoring for Geographical Proximity..... 24
- 7 Analysis..... 26**
  - 7.1 Evaluation of Hypotheses..... 26
- 8 Discussion..... 28**
  - 8.1 Implications of Results and Significance of Border States..... 28
  - 8.2 The European Context and Generalizability..... 30
- 9 Conclusion..... 32**
- Bibliography..... 33**

# List of Abbreviations

CHES	Chapel Hill Expert Survey
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EEAS	European External Action Service
ENP	European Neighborhood Policy
EU	European Union
IR	International Relations (theory)
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
UN	United Nations
US	The United States
WITS	The World Integrated Trade Solution

# 1 Introduction

*"United in diversity"*

The European Union (EU) motto proposes a united union despite internal state differences. As the region must cope with increasing geopolitical tensions, one might question the unity of the EU member states' national strategic interests and foreign policy goals. The European area is affected by security challenges arising from the east, internal polarization and diverging political perspectives (Brause & Kinski, 2024: 295). The 2022 Russia-Ukraine war has increased the already tense EU-Russia relationship and the concerns for EU security (Howorth, 2023; Kaunert et al., 2023: 1048), making the eastern EU border highly relevant for the region (UNP, 2020).

The EU focuses on Eastern cooperation and assistance mainly by granting candidate-status to Ukraine and Georgia (Gray, 2022) and continuing to bolster its European Neighborhood Policy-initiative (ENP), initiating increased bi- and multilateral partnership with the eastern division, Eastern Partnership (EaP), countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The ENP is an EU-initiative proposed in 2004 as a result of the eastern EU expansion (Hamzaoui, 2020: 105). Reformulated in 2015, the main focus is to: *"foster stability, security and prosperity in the EU's neighbouring regions"* (EEAS, 2021). Launched in 2009, the EaP division focuses solely on the eastern EaP-states. It proposes further integration and development support, preparing for deeper cooperation and potential accession within the EU (Hamzaoui, 2020: 105). The cooperation includes EU-projects for civil society, education and security (Stivachtis, 2018: 110), but is academically mainly analyzed as a strategic EU-project to increase security and stability in the neighborhood (Singh, 2016: 32; Kaunert et al., 2023; Kaunert & Pereira, 2023). To understand the intentions behind the EaP partnership, one cannot focus on the EU as one regional unity, but must include the national level. The bilateral track of the EaP initiative involves financial aid from individual EU member states. These foreign aid flows illustrate each states' participation in the EaP partnership, and should reflect the priorities of the ENP in line with EU policy (European Commission, 2015: 19).

The foreign aid literature proposes different views on the true intentions behind foreign aid. However, a recurring consensus is that *the motives behind foreign aid allocation are found to be serving donor state interests, rather than for the developmental needs of the recipient countries* (Qian, 2015: 282). These conclusions are the basis of the *donor interest model*. As foreign policy and foreign aid are assumed to be aligned, the bilateral aid to the EaP-area provides a possibility to investigate the true intentions behind the ENP and the EU states individual strategic interests affecting foreign aid.

By combining two highly relevant areas for understanding national and regional EU aid motivations, namely:

- 1) the tense security climate in proximity to the Eastern EU border and an increased EU policy initiative focused on the EaP-states, and
- 2) the national interest motives behind foreign aid motivations, in line with the academic aid allocation field

an area for detecting strategic motivations of foreign aid and EU policy is found. Assuming a realist perspective of the *donor interests model*, this thesis explores this area as described below.

## 1.1 Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research is twofold. First, this thesis aims to *expand the theoretical donor interest model* within the foreign aid research field by including a regional perspective on aid motives. By zooming in on the European/EaP-region and focusing on individual EU states, a more granular level is achieved compared to other quantitative research as previous studies often analyze the EU as one research objective (Kostadinova, 2009: 4). The functionality of the *donor interest model* will be tested in an area with high geographical proximity, alliance history, and where EU security interests are eminent. The second purpose is to draw conclusions regarding the European states and their *strategic interests* visible through foreign aid allocation. By adopting the realist perception that foreign aid is an instrument of foreign policy (Apodaca, 2017: 2), this thesis both examines the European states' aid allocation patterns and their internal foreign policy interests. By focusing on the years 2017-2019, it sets the preset of the Russian 2022 invasion in Ukraine. Therefore, this thesis aims to find patterns in European strategic interests, differing motives between individual EU states and introduce a further discussion of the attitudes towards the EaP-area. As per the following research question:

*How does foreign aid by individual EU member states to the Eastern Partnership countries align with their strategic interests?*

The strategic interests are defined as: *economic*, *security* and *political* interests, operationalized through hypotheses.

### 1.1.1 Outline

This thesis answers the research question by analyzing the aid flows from each EU member state to the EaP-area. In order to illustrate how strategic interests affect these flows, the academic model for foreign aid motivations, the *donor interest model*, and the realist IR-theory are used to develop hypotheses and the theoretical framework of this study. The hypotheses illustrate *economic*, *security* and *political* strategic interests, and are formulated as follows:

*H1: Increased trade relations between donor states and EaP states lead to a higher prioritization of ODA directed to the EaP region.*

*H2: Closer geographical proximity to the EaP-area leads to a higher prioritization of ODA directed to the EaP region.*

*H3: Greater right-wing influence within a donor state's parliament lead to higher priority assigned to ODA directed to the EaP region*

The hypotheses are evaluated through a quantitative statistical large-N study. Through bi- and multivariate linear regression models in a two step analysis, geographical proximity and right-wing political ideology influence are found to affect the aid allocation to the EaP-area. The implications of these results are discussed from a realist perspective, and the interconnectedness between trade and proximity, as well as the difference between EU-border states and the rest of the EU are analyzed and used to evaluate generalizability and the *donor interest model* overall.

### 1.1.2 Official Development Assistance

This thesis examines the foreign aid flows classified as Official Development Assistance (ODA), defined by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as:

*“[...] government aid that promotes and specifically targets the economic development and welfare of developing countries.” (OECD, 2024)*

ODA is the key measurement for assessing foreign aid targets and performance. It refers to international aid provided by an official government or government controlled agency with development intent for developing countries. Other criteria to qualify as ODA is to be provided on concessional terms; meaning that the grant element must be 10-45%, depending on the recipient<sup>1</sup>. Not included in the ODA definition is: military aid, peacekeeping, nuclear energy and cultural programmes (OECD, 2024).

### 1.1.3 Disclaimer on Terminology

In this thesis, the terms: “*foreign aid*”, “*aid*”, “*development assistance*” and “*aid flows*” are used to describe the ODA distributed. Unless otherwise specified, all are referring to previous ODA-definition.

To answer the research question; “*national interests*”, “*donor/state interests*” and “*strategic interests*” are used interchangeably in this thesis, defined as economic, security and political interests.

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<sup>1</sup> OECD introduced a new measure of ODA, starting in 2018. This impacts the previous minimum level of grant element of 25%, with a new grant equivalent measure. For this thesis, ODA data from 2017, 2018 and 2019 is included irrespective of the measurement changes. The change is deemed equal for all states included, therefore barely impacting the final results.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 The Implications of Foreign Aid

Modern foreign aid was officially introduced after the Second World War. Since then it has been institutionalized and is today a key feature of international politics (Murad & Seb, 2016: 108; Balazcs, 2012: 68; Morgenthau, 1962: 301). Some scholars argue that aid does improve economic conditions, growth and decreases poverty (Findley, 2018: 377; Edmore et al. 2019: 1). In contrast, many are uncertain of aid effectiveness (Deaton, 2013: 52, Easterly, 2006: 12). Higher development level of the recipient (Mosley et al., 1992: 141; Rahnama et al., 2017), higher institutional quality (Abate, 2022: 6) and a good policy environment (Burnside & Dollar, 1997: 3) provides better ground for aid effectiveness. The results of this subfield are inconclusive and contain methodological problems, as country specific factors are hindering the generalizability of the effects of aid.

These inconclusive results are put in a political context by scholars criticizing the nature of foreign aid. Duffield (2007: 70-71) illustrates how Cold War foreign aid reflected “*geopolitical alliance-building*”, despite the goal of humanitarian assistance. Escobar (2012: 31) illustrates the harm caused by foreign aid, creating dependency between the “*Third World*” and industrialized states that hinders economic development. Foreign aid is thereby found to be a tool for control by donor states. In this research, the implications of foreign aid are not analyzed. However, by analyzing the self-interested motivations behind foreign aid, this research is in line with Duffield and Escobar’s perspectives, as analyzing the motives for aid might explain its ineffectiveness.

### 2.2 The Academic Field of Aid Motivations

The academic discussion combines the research fields of political economy, development and foreign policy. The research spans from individual case studies to global analyses. Despite the diversity in the academic approaches, two distinct paths of the general assumption of the nature of international development aid are identified (McKinley & Little, 1979: 237). These two paths are concretized as the 1) *recipient needs model* and 2) *the donor interest model*. Divided on whether foreign aid is 1) allocated dependent on the development needs of the recipient state or 2) if foreign aid flows are determined based on individual donor interest, these two models provide a framework of the main puzzle centered in the previous research (Qian, 2015: 277): In



this section, academic conclusions within both models are presented, answering: why do states allocate aid?

### 2.2.1 The Recipient Needs Model

Apart from the common quantitative statistical method of the *recipient needs model*, the theoretical assumption is that development needs of recipient states determine aid allocation (Pankaj, 2005: 104, Abate, 2022: 6). While mainly focusing on the economic state of the recipients, findings include that less economically developed states do not receive more aid (McKinley & Little, 1979: 236; Bigsten et al. 2011: 127), indicating that self-interest of the donor states are more influential (Alesina & Dollar, 2000: 22)<sup>2</sup>. In contrast, others argue that the recipient's need<sup>3</sup> does impact aid flows, but that self-interest of the donor states also affects (Hoeffler & Outram, 2008: 17). Qian (2015: 286) concludes that less populated, richer countries receive the most aid, while economic growth and other factors, such as natural disasters, have no influence on aid allocation.

Scholars differentiate between bilateral and multilateral aid flows, concluding that aid provided by multilateral organizations are more affected by the developmental level of the recipient state (Berthélemy, 2006:76; Apodaca, 2017: 1). For bilateral aid, the literature does not fully support the assumptions of the *recipient needs model*. In contrast, when national interests are found to influence the aid flows, the findings are more in line with the *donor interest model*.

### 2.2.2 The Donor Interest Model

Research in line with the *donor interest model* provides an assumption that donor state strategic interests are governing the allocation of aid (Balázs, 2012: 66). This subfield builds on quantitative measurements of donor states interests in order to determine what self-interests affect their bilateral ODA (Kostadinova, 2009: 4). The donor interest model was particularly evident in research analyzing the Cold War, where strategic and geopolitical interests affected the bipolar international context. The recurring findings are categorized in line with 1) the commercial theme and 2) the geopolitical theme (Dreher et al. 2024: 4).

#### *The Commercial Theme*

The commercial theme (1) analyzes economic variables connected to the commercial interest of donor countries (Dreher et al. 2024: 4). The consensus is that trading partners of donor countries receive more aid. This conclusion is reached from a combination of positive relationship between trade openness of recipient states (Alesina & Dollar, 2000:

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<sup>2</sup> The operationalization of "self-interest of donor states" varies: in terms of post-colonial relations and voting allegiance in the UN (Alessandra & Dollar, 2000), US trading ties, investment income and balance (McKinley & Little, 1979: 240).

<sup>3</sup> Operationalized as recipient income and aid received from other donors (Hoeffler & Outram, 2008: 9).

23) and recipient's import of donor's goods (Younas, 2008: 661; Schraeder, 1998: 294). Some motivations are that donors reward purchases, the interest to expand trade relationships and creating trade dependency (Marinov, 2018: 7). The academic conclusion is that economic interests in terms of trade are one common determinant for donor interest motivations. This conclusion is important for this thesis, as economic interests are here examined in the EU region.

However, to conclude that trade is the dominant variable affecting aid motivation might be too simplistic. Even though the commercial theme literature finds correlations between trade and aid, does this implicate that trade in itself is affecting the aid flows? The causality of these findings are questioned due to the complexity of the international system, where economic and political relations often are interconnected (Marlin-Bennett & Johnson, 2021: 1). The distinction between commercial and political interests might therefore be problematic and will be further discussed in this thesis.

### *The Political Theme*

The political theme (2) focuses on domestic and international politics. For domestic politics, similarities in political position of donor and recipient increases (Qian, 2015: 300), right-wing populism in the national government of the donor decreases the aid flows (Hackenesch et al., 2022; Thérien, 2002: 461). The results generally prove that national political interests are affecting aid flows (Faye & Niehaus, 2015: 3528), albeit in varying manners. Motives in line with international politics are connected to the foreign policy goals of donor states (Dreher et al., 2024:5). Political donor-recipient relationships, such as historical and political ties (Balázs, 2012), and geopolitical importance of the recipient state are proven to affect aid allocation. Previous donor-recipient colonial ties also create incentives for more aid (Alesina & Dollar, 2000: 22), which introduces a neocolonialist perspective on the *donor interest model* and the motive of upholding dominating structures (Fentahun, 2020).

Security interests are one subfield of research concerning geopolitical relationships. In line with findings that military cooperation increases aid (Apodaca, 2017:2; Kisangani & Pickering, 2015: 219), studies show that countries with significant security implications for the donor country affect aid allocation positively (Del Biondo et al. 2014:427; Schraeder, 1998: 294; Dreher et al., 2024: 5). Scholars also suggest that security interests are highly dependent on the international political context, finding how the Cold War context increased military and security strategies implications for aid allocation (Balázs, 2012: 68; Boschini & Olofsgård, 2007; Meernik et al. 1998). Other areas include migration containment objectives and preventing spillover effects from conflict situations (Dreher et al., 2024: 5-6).

Even though security interests often are categorized as political interests (Dreher et al., 2024: 5), this thesis argues that security in itself is an explanation for international behavior and should be separated from other political interests. Therefore, this thesis differentiates between political and security interests, which both are defined within the theoretical framework.

## 2.3 Identifying Research Gaps and Thesis Contributions

The conclusions based on the *recipient needs* and *donor interest model* illustrate research gaps in their scopes and regarding the EU states' individual motivations. This section explains how these are addressed in this thesis.

### 2.3.1 Scopes of the Field

The academic field covers most geographical areas by broadly analyzing global aid flows. This broadness leaves a gap for further analysis. A majority of studies focus on global distribution of aid from a few selected donor states (Hoeffler & Outram, 2008), for example specific EU states (Bigsten, 2011). The focus is generally to analyze differences between recipients receiving or not receiving aid, by either combining data from the donor states or finding global patterns of how individual donors allocate aid.

The general global focus of the field provides generalized conclusions, overshadowing the possible contribution from analyzing motives for allocation to specific recipient-areas. By switching from the global perspective to focus on multiple separate donor's allocation (the EU states) to one recipient-area (the EaP-area), this thesis contributes with a deeper knowledge of motives behind aid allocation in the specific geographical context. It abandons the common methodology of analyzing recipient characteristics, and instead focuses on the different properties of the donor states. By attempting to analyze aid flows in a different way, this thesis contributes with a reworked perspective on regional aid motives in the EU.

### 2.3.2 The EU and the Member States' Aid Allocation

Differences among the EU states' aid allocations are not often highlighted in the literature, as many scholars analyze the EU as one entity (Kostadinova, 2009:4; Del Biondo et al. 2014: 426; Sutyryn, 2022). This provides a gap for increased understanding of the EU:s internal interests.

Even though multilateral aid is found to respond more to recipient needs compared to bilateral aid, the EU Commission is found to favor its member states' interests (Berthelemy, 2006: 80), for example by favoring previous colonies to its member states (Kostadinova, 2009:4). The EU's foreign aid policy is found to be turning more towards a security focused and self-interested policy (Del Biondo, 2014: 415), in order to strengthen the EU's geopolitical foreign policy agenda (Sutyryn, 2022). Despite EU policies attempting to increase and focus bilateral EU aid (for example the EU Neighborhood Policy), the EU member states' individual aid patterns are prominently different (Bigsten et al. 2011:129, Balázs, 2012). The Nordic countries are found to be more altruistic and less self-interest than other EU states (Berthelemy: 2006: 80), while larger EU states, such as France and the UK prefer bilateral aid to favor their foreign

policy interests (Bigsten et al. 2011:128). Balázs (2012) focuses on four of the Central and Eastern European donors, finding that political, security and economic interests are influencing their allocation, as they focus most aid to the West Balkans and Eastern Europe (Balázs, 2012:85).

Evidently, there are differences between the EU states' motivations for foreign aid. The context of the EU's Eastern Partnership policy, and the implied security interests, provides a possibility to evaluate region specific knowledge of how the *donor interest model* affects the EU member states as individual actors of EU's foreign policy separately. In conclusion, this thesis contributes by filling both a methodological gap in how aid is researched by focusing on regional aid with multiple donors, and a knowledge based gap on the combination of individual EU states motives connected to the EU foreign policy context.

# 3 Theoretical Framework

This section first presents the theoretical framework adopted: the realist international relations (IR) perspective on aid motivations in line with the *donor interest model*. Second, the hypotheses drawn from the theoretical framework are illustrated.

## 3.1 The *Donor Interest Model* and Realism

The literature review illustrates how foreign aid is criticized for not assisting in developmental change. Combining the discussion on the results of foreign aid with the conclusions within the *recipient needs* and *donor interest model*, a pessimistic view for those believing that aid will change current inequality structures is shown. The *recipient needs model* and the results of foreign aid illustrates that foreign aid is neither allocated for the recipient's needs nor assisting in catering to these needs. Instead, in line with Escobar (2012: 31), aid is understood as a strategic tool for donor states. The *donor interest model* is thereby the dominant model explaining aid flows. As the model focuses on strategic interests for aid allocation and is academically acclaimed, it will provide a result-based foundation for the theoretical framework.

The assumption of the *donor interest model* is that; *foreign aid is a tool for donor states to fulfill national interests*. The importance of national interests and state influence of the model, aligns with the realist view of the international system (Kostadinova, 2009:8; McKinley & Little, 1979: 238). Therefore, the realist definitions of the international system, national interests and the EU Neighborhood, as well as neorealist additions of security interests, are used to illustrate the realist nature of foreign aid motivations. In combination, the realist theory and the *donor interest model* construct the theoretical framework.

## 3.2 Realist Theory and Foreign Aid

### 3.2.1 The International System and National Interests

As an IR-theory, realism is divided into multiple paths. Grounded in the classical realism influenced by Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651) and Morgenthau (1962), Waltz's (1979) neorealist approach provides a contemporary structural analysis of state behavior. Within the neorealist framework, different security perspectives led to the offensive and defensive realist paths (Pollack, 2014: 4). Stemming from Hobbesian

assumptions, the international political system is characterized by anarchic relations and the state of nature, indicating that the international system is built upon struggles of power of individual states (Kashyap, 2022, 1; Wittner, 1985: 282). States are the primary actors mainly focused on self-preservation, security interests and international power relations (Malacalza, 2019: 12). They are rational actors using cost-benefit analyses to decide how to act within the anarchic international system in line with their national interests (Malacalza, 2019; Kashyap, 2022, 1; Morgenthau, 1962).

To maintain their national interests, states strive after power. Power in the international system is defined as either economic, military, or cultural (Manan, 2017: 177). Neo-realists focus less on power, and more on security. Security is defined in line with the realist perspectives as the security of the nation state, where security threats are mainly foreign coercions or attacks threatening state sovereignty and territorial integrity (Walt, 2010: 2). States are security maximizers, rather than power maximizers (Manan, 2017: 177; Waltz, 1979: 104), meaning that state survival and territorial integrity are the main drivers in the international system (Manan, 2017: 178). Offensive and defensive realists dispute over the implications of security (Waltz, 1979: 186). While offensive realists focus on maximizing military and relative power, defensive realists argue that other factors such as strategic interests, geographical position, and nationalism make states more inclined to cooperate and act defensively (Pollack, 2014: 4).

In line with the realist perspectives, foreign aid is used as an instrument to uphold these national interests (Malacalza, 2019: 8). Aid has been classified as a tool for pursuing foreign policy (Westerfield, 1960: 149), a weapon where military means cannot reach (Morgenthau, 1962: 308) and an instrument of diplomacy (Baldwin, 1966: 79). Thereby, foreign aid is used either to uphold power through economic, military or cultural means, or as a tool to ensure security.

### 3.2.2 The EU Neighborhood

The state-focused perspective of realism explains the importance of analyzing the individual EU-states to understand the interests driving the EU from within. However, classical realism is often criticized for being too deterministic while analyzing international cooperation (Pollack, 2014: 5), and not succeeding in explaining why states choose to cooperate due to the continuous zero-sum game for power (Manan, 2017: 177). European integration within the EU and its expansion is therefore better explained within the neorealist framework. Waltz (1979: 70) means that the European states started to cooperate in order to oppose external threats and created common security-related interests. Therefore, cooperation and integration are possible if states are individually benefiting from it (Waltz, 1979: 70, 105-106; Manan, 2017: 178).

From this perspective, the view of the EU Neighborhood is defined. The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) utilizes the term neighborhood and EU neighbors (EEAS, 2024) to define the states included, thereby the EaP-states. Based on Waltz's contributions (1979: 70), the cooperation within the EU is dependent on common security interests. The ENP initiative is therefore based on the EaP-states being considered a common area of security interest for all participating states.

### 3.3 Theoretical Hypotheses

The realist perspective theoretically explains the relationships between aid and national interests within the *donor interest model*. Based on the general themes presented in the *donor interest model* combined with realist theory, distinctions between *economic*, *security* and *political* interests are made. For each interest, one hypothesis is constructed.

#### 3.3.1 Economic Interests

As states utilize foreign aid as a foreign policy tool to increase and uphold power relations (Westerfield, 1960: 149), economic factors provide an importance. Utilizing the classical realist definition of power as economic power (Manan, 2017: 178) and the influence of the commercial theme illustrated by the *donor interest model*, economic influence and economic resources are foreign policy goals for donor states. Since states are continuously fighting for more power in the international system (Malacalza, 2019: 12), the hypotheses are based on the presumption that donors provide aid to the EaP-states in order to strengthen already existing economic relations and to keep their economic power positions. Hypothesis 1 (H1) focuses on the EU states wanting to strengthen donor-recipient trade relationships, and is formulated as follows:

*H1: Increased trade relations between donor states and EaP states lead to a higher prioritization of ODA directed to the EaP region.*

#### 3.3.2 Security Interests

In line with neorealism, security is the main priority of states and is essential for survival in the international system (Waltz, 1979: 104). The *donor interest model* provides examples of the importance of security for foreign aid allocation (Del Biondo, 2014; Schraeder, 1998: 294; Dreher et al., 2024: 5) and the impact of the political context when security is threatened. Dwelling on the latter, the political impact of the eastern EU border and the EU-Russia relations is addressed by hypothesis 2 (H2). The realist definition of the EU Neighborhood proposes that the EaP-area and the uncertain Russian influence from the east creates a security challenge, which impacts the perceived security of the EU states and thereby their aid allocation. In line with defensive realism, geographical position has an impact on states' initiative to cooperate with defensive measures (Pollack, 2014: 4). Combining the defensive realist importance of geographical proximity with the context of the EU neighborhood, H2 states that EU-states geographically closer to the EaP-states will provide more aid, due to the importance of security in an area closer to the donor state. H2 is stated as follows:

*H2: Closer geographical proximity to the EaP-area leads to a higher prioritization of ODA directed to the EaP region.*

### 3.3.3 Political Interests

Hypothesis 3 (H3) focuses mainly on the interdependence of foreign policy and foreign aid (Westerfield, 1960: 149). This realist standpoint implies that states allocate foreign aid in line with national political interests. Based on conclusions that right-wing governments are less likely to provide foreign aid (Hackenesch et al., 2022), and that there is a left-right division on the purpose of foreign aid; H3 assumes that states that are governed with more right-wing influence are more likely to allocate aid based on national foreign policy interests in line with realist assumptions (Thérien, 2002: 461; Raunio & Wagner, 2020: 518). In contrast, left-wing states are providing aid more in line with the *recipient needs model*. Based on the EU Neighborhood definition, as the EaP-region is classified as an area of high political importance due to its proximity to the EU border, H3 assumes that donor states with more right-wing governance will provide more ODA to the EaP-region, as per the following hypothesis:

*H3: Greater right-wing influence within a donor state's parliament leads to higher priority assigned to ODA directed to the EaP region.*

**Table 1.** Illustrating the theoretical hypotheses

Abbreviation	Hypothesis (shortened version, see 3.3)
H1	<i>More donor-EaP trade relations -&gt; more ODA directed to the EaP area.</i>
H2	<i>Close geographical proximity to the EaP area -&gt; motives to provide more ODA to the EaP area.</i>
H3	<i>The more right-wing influence in national parliament -&gt; more prioritization of ODA to the EaP region.</i>



# 4 Method

## 4.1 Operationalization

### 4.1.1 The Dependent Variable

The dependent variable (v-ODA) illustrates the individual aid flows from each EU-member state to the EaP-area. It is operationalized as the ODA commitments (in million US dollars) from each EU-member state to the EaP-area. Aid commitments are written promises to provide a specified amount of ODA for a designated purpose. For analyzing donor states policy choices, commitments are preferred to disbursements, as commitments are decided the year they are reported, while disbursements often are delayed a few years (Berthélemy, 2006 :80). The data for ODA commitments is gathered from the OECD Data Explorer, and the measurement of *Aid (ODA) commitments to countries and regions [DAC3A]*. The value is decided through the following steps:

- 1) The commitments to each of the EaP-states are summed, separately for each year (2017, 2018 and 2019).
- 2) The sum is divided by the total amount of ODA per year. A percentage of how much EaP-aid is committed in relation to the states global aid commitment is created.
- 3) A mean of the percentage values from 2017, 2018 and 2019 is created.
- 4) Due to the skewness of these means, the values are log-transformed (log10) (West, 2022: 162). This way, the extreme values (high or low) can be included in the analysis, without impacting the correlation unproportionally.

Due to the aim of the thesis: to establish the motivations in terms of national interests, the hypotheses are focusing on the relationship between the EU-state(s) and the EaP-states. Therefore, v-ODA represents the relation between ODA directed to the EaP-states and the total ODA from each state. This illustrates the prioritization of the EaP-area in the ODA allocation, controlling for state wealth and size by setting it in proportion to the total aid distributed. Thereby, states that are providing a large amount of global ODA are not biased in the analysis. In this thesis, this variable is also referred to as states *prioritization* of EaP-ODA.

## 4.1.2 The Independent Variables

### *Trade Relations*

The variable for H1 (v-Trade) is trade relations between the EU-state and the EaP-states. It is operationalized as the mean of the percent (%) of imports to and export from the EaP-area for each EU-state for 2017, 2018 and 2019. By putting the EaP-EU import and export flows in relation to total import and exports for each EU-state, v-Trade symbolizes the importance of the EaP-area for each state's economic relations.

### *Geographical Proximity*

This variable is operationalized in two different ways in order to account for the potential impact of the distance to or having a direct EaP-border connection. The first operationalization is in line with hypothesis H2, assuming that proximity is affecting the state's ODA motivations as a continuous variable across Europe. The variable for H2 (v-Prox) illustrates the geographical proximity to the EaP-area for each EU-state. It is calculated as the straight-line distance between the EU-state's capital and the closest EaP-capital (in km).

The second operationalization differentiates between aid motivations for states with an EaP-border and states without. The purpose of this operationalization is to see if geographical proximity only affects aid motivations if the states are close to the border, and not dependent on the distance *per se*. The EaP-border states are defined as EU states connected to the EaP-area or within less than 200 km to the EaP-border. This variable is binary and constructed by two groups:

**Group 1:** States with close geographical proximity to the EaP-area (n = 7) : Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

**Group 2:** States geographically more distant to the EaP-area (n = 18), other states.

Only the first operationalization (v-Prox) is included in the regression analyses, as the second is a binary value. The second operationalization is the basis of a second step in the analysis (Step 2).

### *Political Ideology*

The variable for H3 (v-Pol) is representing the EU-states political ideology on a left-right scale, using the operationalization by the Chapel Hill Expert Survey trend file 1999-2019 (CHES) (Seth et al. 2022). For the 2014 and 2019 surveys, experts have estimated the party positioning of 268 (2017) and 277 (2019) parties in all EU states. For v-Pol, the CHES variable "LRGEN", symbolizing the party positioning in terms of "overall ideological stance", is used. LRGEN positions the parties on a 0-10 scale, where:

0 = Extreme left, 5 = Center, 10 = Extreme right

For v-Pol; Each party LRGEN value is multiplied with the party seat share (%) in the national parliament. All party values are then added, creating a total representation of the LRGEN value for the national parliament. Depending on the year of the national election, the values are categorized into 2017, 2018 or 2019, creating a representation of the political situation for each year. The mean of the three years values construct the v-Pol value. Thus, v-Pol illustrates the position and political ideology of the parties in the national parliament for each EU state.

Notably, v-Pol represents the political position of the parliament of each country, not the government. One could argue that the political position of the leading government would illustrate the state's foreign policy choices better. The choice to focus on the parliament is based on 1) the difference between the EU-states in how much the governmental parties are able to enforce their policies, 2) that v-Pol would differ more between states, not necessarily illustrating the correct political influence, and 3) the national parliament position illustrates the overall ideological position of the state and will differ less between each election in 2017, 2018 and 2019.

### 4.1.3 Confounding Variables

The hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 are derived from the realist perception of the *donor interest model*, focusing on national interest in terms of economic, security and political relations. Due to the focus of the EaP-area as an EU-priority, the member states' relation to the EU are included as confounding variables. EU-relations impact on aid motivations has not, to the best of my knowledge, previously been established. Therefore, they are included as possible confounding variables, illustrating whether the states' position as EU states impacts their focus on aid flows to the EaP-area:

#### *C1: Entry into the EU*

C1 represents how long before 2019 each state entered into the EU. The range for this variable is 6-62 years. This variable is based on the research regarding that newer EU states are acting more in line with EU policy (Marinov, 2018: 7).

**Table 2.** The variables included in the analysis

Variable	Abbreviation	Operationalization	Type of data**
Dependent	v-ODA	% of EaP-ODA*	Continuous: Ratio (%)
Independent	v-Trade	% of EaP-trade (import and export)*	Continuous: Ratio (%)
Independent	v-Prox	Distance (km) from EaP-border	Continuous: Ratio (km)
Independent	v-Pol	Political ideology in national parliament*	Ordinal/Continuous: Index (0-10)
Control	C1	Years since EU-membership	Continuous: Years 6-62
Control	C2	Stance to EU integration policy*	Ordinal/Continuous: Index (0-7)

\* Mean values for 2017, 2018 and 2019

\*\* Data in its basic form, before tampered with in operationalization calculations.

## *C2: EU-position on integration*

C2 establishes the EU-states position in relation to EU-integration policy. This variable is included to account for whether the states EU-policy interests affect their aid towards the EaP-area. C2 is operationalized similar to v-Pol. The CHES dataset is utilized, focused on the variable “EU\_POSITION”. This variable illustrates each party’s orientation towards European integration, on a scale from 1 (“*strongly opposed*”) to 7 (“*strongly in favor*”). The calculations are equal to the ones for v-Pol.

As confounding variables, C1 and C2 are included in the multivariate analysis to compare their possible explanatory potential to the effects of the other variables.

## 4.2 Delimitations

In this section, explanations for, and the implications, of the methodological choices of target years, to merge the EaP-states, the exclusion of Bulgaria, Malta and Cyprus, and excluded security-variables are presented.

### 4.2.1 The Target Years of 2017-2019

As the aim states, this thesis analyzes the political onset for the recent changes in European security as of the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war. The variables are created based on data from 2017, 2018 and 2019. This specific three year scope is selected due to 1) the 2014 Russian invasion of Ukraine, 2) the 2015 Review of the ENP and 3) the 2020 outbreak of Covid-19. The goal is to develop variables that are indifferent to specific changes during the period, therefore a mean value is preferred. The start year 2017 is set after the 2014 Russian invasion of Ukraine and the 2015 Review of the ENP (EEAS, 2024), in order to include the effect of these changes in the European policy and the European security climate. The outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020 affected the European states economic policies and priority of foreign policies. Therefore, 2019 is chosen as the last year in the present analysis.

### 4.2.2 The EaP-states as One Unity

The dependent variable (v-ODA) is illustrating each EU member state’s ODA committed to the EaP-states. The separately collected data on bilateral aid flow is combined to create one dependent variable for aid to the whole EaP-area. Therefore, this analysis does not include differences in aid for each of the recipient EaP-states, the different ENP policies and operations and the difference in level of development (Bosse, 2019). This decision is based on the aim to analyze the EU aid to the total EaP-area, following the EU Eastern Partnership policy distinction of these states as one unit and to analyze the differences of EU states in the EU area, and not in the EaP-area. This thesis recognizes the differences between individual EaP-states but does not address

those specifically. Thereby, this delimitation provides further research opportunities for the differences in EU aid towards the EaP-states and is not included in the scope of this thesis.

### 4.2.3 Excluded States and Variables

Due to insufficient data for the states of Bulgaria, Malta and Cyprus, they are not included in the analysis. For Malta and Cyprus, the aid towards the EaP-states is marginal and the states are not included in most related databases. For Bulgaria, the OECD database only has data on Bulgarian aid commitments from 2022.

As illustrated by the realist theory, security is often referred to as *military* security. Therefore, variables such as NATO membership would illustrate this security relation. However, this variable is excluded from the analysis due to the few cases of non-NATO states (n = 4). Alternative military cooperation variables for all EU states for 2017-2019 were not available.

## 4.3 Research Design

This thesis uses a theory-testing approach in order to assess the hypotheses drawn from the political realist and *donor interest* theoretical framework. The theory-testing approach is conducted through a large-N quantitative statistical analysis; consisting of bi- and multivariate regression analyses, combined with a forward stepwise regression model.

### 4.3.1 Theory-Testing

The theory-testing research method has the objective of contributing to the development of theory. The aim of this thesis is therefore to develop the *donor interest model* research field with a realist perspective on foreign aid motivations. Due to the existence of previously established theories of foreign aid motivations within the *donor interest model*, this thesis performs a replication theory-testing by including realist perceptions in the European area on regional aid (Dul & Hak, 2008: 63-64). It is developing the research field with a new focus area testing previously explored propositions.

### 4.3.2 Statistical Methods

Hypothesis testing is performed in order to reject or accept the theoretical claims. The hypothesis testing is conducted through a bivariate and multivariate statistical regression analysis. The bivariate analysis analyzes the relationship between the dependent variable (v-ODA) and each selected independent variable separately. The multivariate analysis is used to compare the impact of the independent variables and to

which extent they account for the variance in v-ODA. The *Pearson correlation coefficient (R)* and the *adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value* is used to illustrate the strength of the correlation (Ferguson, 2016: 534, Esaiasson et al., 2012: 366, 384; Hedrih, 2022: 138). To interpret Pearson's r-value, this thesis utilizes the levels of interpretation illustrated in table 3. The *p-value* illustrates the statistical significance of the correlation. In this analysis, a p-value lower than 0.05 is deemed statistically significant. All statistical analysis is performed using IBM SPSS Statistics (IMB Corp, 2016).

To find the best fit model and compensate for potential multicollinearity between the variables, a Forward Stepwise multivariate regression analysis is used. This method uses conditional limits to differentiate between the variables. Starting by including the best fitted and most statistically significant variable (Harrell, 2015: 71), it only includes other variables to the model if they improve the fit of the model and are statistically significant in combination with the other variables ( $p < 0.05$ ).

To analyze whether the difference between two groups (Group 1 and Group 2) is statistically significant, the Mann-Whitney U-test is performed. The data for ODA allocation is not assumed to be normally distributed, and therefore this nonparametric test is preferred (Nachar, 2008: 13). The difference is significant when the p-value  $< 0.05$ .

As this thesis analyzes EU member states, the number of cases are limited ( $n=25$ ). For statistical regression analyzes to illustrate accurate inference, research recommends a minimum of 25 cases (Jenkins & Quintana-Ascencio, 2020: 1; David, 1938), since statistical significance is less likely to be identified in smaller sample sizes (Thiese et al. 2016: 929). In the Step 2 analysis, only 18 cases ( $n=18$ ) are included in the regression analyses. The limitations of this smaller sample size must be noted, and the conclusions regarding r-value and adjusted r<sup>2</sup>, especially in the Step 2 analysis, should be interpreted with caution (Jenkins & Quintana-Ascencio, 2020: 1).

**Table 3.** Interpretation of Pearson's R

R-value (+ or -)	Interpretation
0 - 0.3	Weak
0.3 - 0.6	Moderate
0.6 - 1	Strong

# 5 Material

In this section, the material for the variables included in the analysis is presented. The sources discussed are: the OECD, the World Integrated Trade Solution, and the Chapel Hill Expert Survey.

## 5.1 The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

Data for the v-ODA and definitions of ODA are taken from the OECD databases and official website (OECD Data-Explorer, 2024). Formed in 1961, the OECD is an international organization working for the development of policies for economic and social-well being. With 38 member states (22 EU-states), it contributes with data collection and analysis, establishing standards and offers implementation support and reviews (Woodward, 2022: 135). The OECD Data Explorer is used for the data on bilateral aid commitment flows. Only foreign aid classified as ODA according to the OECD:s measurements is included in this data. Therefore, it is considered a transparent and reliable source for determining and comparing ODA-flows.

## 5.2 Sources Establishing the Independent Variables

### 5.2.1 The World Integrated Trade Solution

The data for H1 concerns trade relations; including the share of import and export for each EU-state. This data is retrieved from the World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS), a software developed by the UN Conference on Trade and Development, the International Trade Center, the UN Statistical Division and the World Trade Organization (WTO). The data utilized is the “*Trade balance, export and import by country and region*” [for 2017, 2018 and 2019] accessed through the “*Trade statistics by Country / Region*” (WITS, n.d.). The source is considered credible as controlled by the UN and reliable due to the transparency of the data collected.

### 5.2.2 Chapel Hill Expert Survey

The Chapel Hill Expert Surveys (CHES) are datasets where political science experts have estimated party positioning on different political standpoints (Seth et al. 2022).

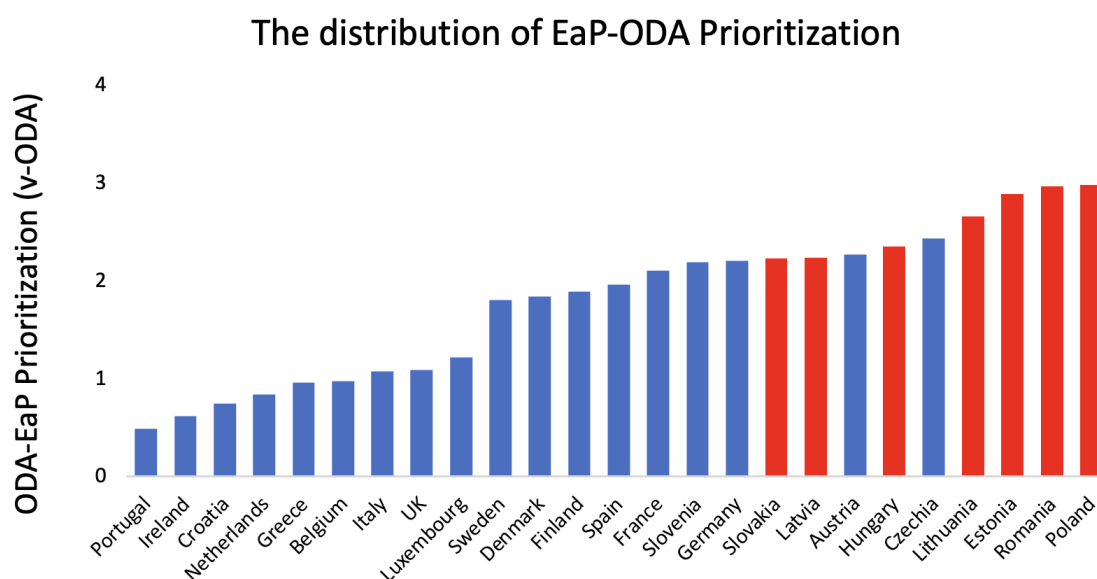
The reliability and validity of the data have been assessed; concluding that the dataset is an overall valid and reliable source (Hooghe et al, 2010: 13). However, the data may be influenced by the individual experts' biases and the reliability may vary (Hooghe et al., 2010: 10). Due to different methodologies for estimating political ideologies of parties, there is a variance between different sources (Hooghe et al, 2010: 13). The CHES is selected due to 1) the transparent methodology, indicating what questions have been asked and that the persons answering are political science experts, 2) the coverage of 2017, 2018 and 2019, 3) the academic confirmation of validity, establishing a position as a credible source.

Due to the differences in data for political ideology, conclusions must be made with care and generalizations on the impact of political ideology must be aware of the specific operationalization for this variable.



## 6 Results

Data collected indicates that states closest to the EaP-border are prioritizing ODA to the EaP-area, while states further away, such as Portugal and Ireland, prioritize the least (figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Diagram illustrating the distribution of the v-ODA for the 25 EU states.

The analysis is divided into two steps. For **Step 1**: A bivariate linear regression analysis is performed for each of the variables separately on the entire population ( $n = 25$ ). If there is no statistically significant correlation or if there is an obvious covariance between the variables, they are excluded from further analysis. A multivariate linear regression analysis then is performed through a forward stepwise model. This concludes which variable(s) construct the best fitted model and which variable provides the most statistically significant explanation.

For **Step 2**: The descriptive analysis of the impact of EaP-border states (Figure 1) will be assessed. Based on the apparent difference between the states with closest EaP-border proximity and the rest of the EU states, the Step 2 analysis tests the robustness of the impact of geographical proximity. From Step 2, conclusions are drawn regarding the impact of the EaP-border states and which variables are mostly affected by them.

## 6.1 Step 1: Bi- and Multivariate Linear Regression Models

### 6.1.1 Bivariate Regression Models

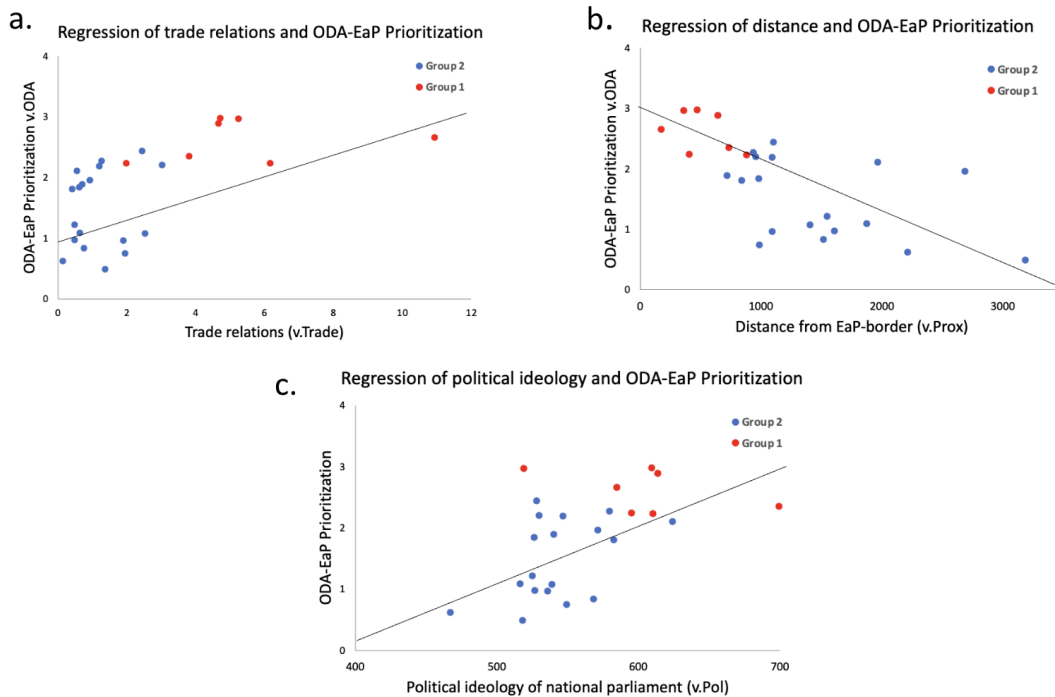
**v-Trade:** Trade relations with the EaP-area (v-Trade) and the ODA directed towards the EaP-states (v-ODA) are significantly correlated ( $p$ -value = 0.002). The bivariate linear regression illustrates a moderate positive correlation coefficient (Pearson) of 0.582, with an adjusted R-square of 0.310 (table 4). Due to the high significance of the model and the high correlation coefficient, trade relations are an influential variable and are therefore included in the multivariate analysis.

**Table 4.** Bi- and multivariate regression analyses (Step 1)

Variable	Bivariate regression analyses			Multivariate regression analysis			
	Pearson's R	Adjusted R2	P-value	Adjusted R2	Pearson's R	P-value	N
<b>Multivariate model</b>				<b>0.476</b>		<b>0.003</b>	
Trade rel. (v-Trade)	.582**	0.310	0.002		.199	0.321	25
Export (v-Exp)	.571**	0.296	0.003				25
Geo. proximity (v-Prox)	-.659**	0.410	<0.001		-.349	0.096	25
Political ideology (v-Pol)	.534**	0.254	0.006		.269	0.119	25
Entry into the EU (C1)					-.058	0.712	25
EU-integration (C2)					-.153	0.412	25

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**v-Prox and v-Pol:** The correlation between geographical proximity (v-Prox) and ODA directed to the EaP-area (v-ODA) is statistically significant ( $p = <0.001$ ). A strong negative correlation ( $r = -0.659$ ) and a fitted model ( $r^2 = 0.410$ ) indicates that



**Figure 2.** The bivariate regression lines for a. = v.Trade, b. = v.Prox and c. = v.Pol. The red and blue colors illustrate the divide between Group 1 (red) and 2 (blue).

**Table 5.** Bivariate correlations

		Political ideology v.Pol	Geo. proximity v.Prox	Trade rel. v.Trade	EaP-ODA Proritization v.ODA
EaP-ODA Proritization v-ODA	Pearson Correlation	<b>.534**</b>	<b>-.659**</b>	<b>.582**</b>	1
	P-value	.006	<.001	.002	
Trade rel. V-Trade	Pearson Correlation	.346	<b>-.607**</b>	1	
	P-value	.091	.001		
Geo. proximity v-Prox	Pearson Correlation	-.372	1		
	P-value	.067			
Political ideology v-Pol	Pearson Correlation	1			
	P-value				
N		25	25	25	25

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

geographical proximity is an important variable for explaining the ODA flows and is included in the multivariate analysis (figure 2). The impact of political ideology (v-Pol) on the allocation of ODA (d.v) is illustrated in Figure nr. There is a statistically significant ( $p = 0.006$ ) moderate positive correlation between the variables (0.534). The adjusted R-square value is 0.254. Due to the statistical significance, vH5 is included in the multivariate analysis.

The bivariate analysis shows that v-Trade, v-Prox and v-Pol display moderate to strong statistically significant correlations (table 5). v-Prox, illustrating geographical distance, is the most significant variable with the lowest p-value ( $< 0.001$ ). However, geographical proximity (v-Prox) is strongly correlated to trade relations (v-Trade) ( $p = 0.001$ ,  $r = -0.607$ ). This can affect the multivariate analysis.

## 6.1.2 Multivariate Regression Model

As showing significant bivariate relationship with v-ODA, v-Trade, v-Prox and v-Pol are included in the multivariate regression analysis. Apart from these variables, confounding variables (EU-integration and years since entering) are included.

Table 4 shows the results of the multivariate linear regression analysis. The multivariate model is statistically significant at  $p = 0.003$ , with an adjusted R-square of 0.476. However, as figure 4 illustrates, there are no statistically significant results for the individual variables. This can be due to the variables being correlated to each other (multicollinearity) and in a multivariate regression this may reduce the reliability of the results. In order to decide the best fit model and to single out the variable(s) possibly impacting the multicollinearity, a Forward Stepwise Regression is executed. Figure 6 illustrates this analysis, concluding that geographical proximity (v-Prox) has the highest significance ( $p < 0.001$ ).

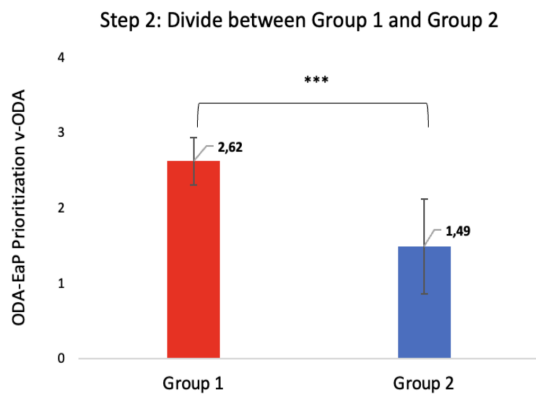
**Table 6.** Results of the Multivariate Forward Stepwise Regression Analysis (Step 1)

Variables included	Model 1			Model 2		
	Pearson's R	Adj R2	P-value	Pearson's R	Adj R2	P-value
Model		.410	<.001		.489	<.001
Geographical proximity (v.Prox)	-.659		<.001	-.534		.003
Political ideology (v.Pol)				.335		.045

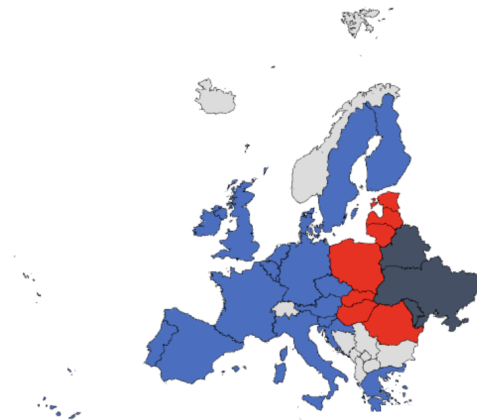
However, the best overall model is reached when the next best variable (ideology, v-Pol) is added (adj.R-squared = 0.489). The result is a model consisting of both geographical proximity (v-Prox) and ideology (v-Pol), where both variables are statistically significant ( $p = 0.003$  for v-Prox and 0.045 for v-Pol).

## 6.2 Step 2: Factoring for Geographical Proximity

As concluded by the multivariate Forward Stepwise Regression model, geographical proximity (v-Prox) is the most statistically significant variable, impacting the v-ODA the most. To assess the importance of the variables without the strong impact of geographical proximity, a sub analysis including only the states without close geographical proximity to EaP (Group 2) is performed (figure 4). First, the difference between Group 1 and Group 2 regarding v-ODA was confirmed using the Mann-Whitney U-test ( $p < 0.001$ )(figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Diagram illustrating the difference between Group 1 and Group 2 of the v-ODA.  
\*\*\* Difference is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).



**Figure 4.** The red and blue colors illustrate the divide between Group 1 (red) and 2 (blue). The red states are in Group 1 ( $n=7$ , closest to the EaP-border) and the blue states are Group 2 ( $n = 18$ , the rest of the EU states). The dark grey area illustrates the eastern EaP states.

### 6.2.1 Bivariate Linear Regression Model for States in Group 2

As illustrated by the results of the bivariate regression analysis in table 7, only political ideology (v-Pol) has a statistically significant impact on the v-ODA ( $p = 0.049$ ). Both

**Table 7.** Bi- and multivariate regression analyses (Step 2)

Variable	Bivariate regression analyses (Group 2)			Multivariate regression analysis (Group 2)			
	Pearson's R	Adj R2	P-value	Adj R2	Pearson's R	P-value	N
<b>Multivariate model</b>				<b>.137</b>		<b>.250</b>	
Trade rel. (v.Trade)	.183	-.027	.468		.089	.714	18
Geo. proximity (v.Prox)	-.434	.138	.072		-.03	.241	18
Political ideology (v.Pol)	<b>.470**</b>	.172	.049		.421	.091	18
Entry into the EU (C1)					-.122	.612	18
EU-integration (C2)					-.091	.705	18

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

geographical proximity (v-Trade) and trade relations (v-Prox), which are statistically significant when analyzing the entire dataset with all states included (n = 25), are no longer significant in this sub analysis (n=18) (p = 0.468 and 0.072).

In Group 2, the geographical proximity (v-Prox) is not significantly associated with d.v, indicating that the EaP-border states dominate the analysis in Step 1. The previously statistically significant variable v-Trade, has lost its significance in the Group 2 sub-analysis (Table 7). This result can be interpreted as the variable mainly being affected by the border states' trade relation. Political ideology is the only variable impacting both with or without the EaP-border states included, illustrating a statistically significant relationship (p = 0.049).

### 6.2.2 Multivariate Linear Regression Model for States in Group 2

To evaluate if the model is improved by the combination of the variables, despite their bivariate insignificance, a multivariate analysis is performed. The combined model is not statistically significant (p-value = 0.25). The analysis shows insignificant relationships for all variables, with political ideology (v-Pol) being the strongest (p = 0.091).

In a forward stepwise regression model (Table 8), only political ideology is added to the final model. The model is therefore in line with the bivariate regression results, with political ideology statistically significant (p = 0.049).

**Table 8.** Results of the Multivariate Forward Stepwise Regression Analysis (Step 2)

Variables included	Model 1		
	Pearson's R	Adj R2	P-value
Model		.172	.49
Political ideology (v.Pol)	.470		.49

# 7 Analysis

This research has analyzed the strategic motivations behind the EU states' ODA allocated to the EaP-region. The purpose has been to contribute to the *donor interest model* with a regional scope to find motivations for the EU states to engage with the EaP-area. The results illustrate that geographical proximity and political ideology best account for the variance in the prioritization of ODA allocated to the EaP-area. Moreover, the EU states with an EaP-border stands out, proving to be most important to the proximity and trade relations relationships.

## 7.1 Evaluation of Hypotheses

The realist theoretical framework explains aid motivations as dependent on national state interests (Morgenthau, 1962: 301-302). The present results provide two different broad explanatory frames for realist strategic interests of aid motivation in the EU: the *security* frame and the *political* frame. The following analysis discusses the hypotheses and what strategic interests they imply for foreign aid relations.

### 7.1.1 Economic Interests

H1 proposes a positive relationship between trade relations and the prioritization of ODA to the EaP-area. The analysis finds that economic interests statistically significantly correlate bivariately with the prioritization of ODA allocated to the EaP-area. However, in the multivariate analyses, trade relations are proven to not be an independent contributor. Trade relations may illustrate an example of the economic flows between the donor and recipient, of which ODA is already a part. However, one cannot conclude that trade relations are an insignificant variable for aid allocation, but the correlation between trade relations and geographical proximity (v-Prox) illustrates that trade relations are dependent on other factors. Thus, the bivariate significance of v-Trade does not illustrate the impact of *trade relations* in itself, but in combination with other factors.

**Table 1.** Illustrating the theoretical hypotheses

Abbreviation	Hypothesis (shortened version, see 3.3)
H1	<i>More donor-EaP trade relations -&gt; more ODA directed to the EaP area.</i>
H2	<i>Close geographical proximity to the EaP area -&gt; motives to provide more ODA to the EaP area.</i>
H3	<i>The more right-wing influence in national parliament -&gt; more prioritization of ODA to the EaP region</i>

### 7.1.2 Security Interests

H2 proposes that security interests are affecting ODA allocations, and assumes that closer proximity to the EaP-area leads to more prioritization of ODA to the EaP-states. Analyzing all EU states, this hypothesis is confirmed as the most significant. The theory proposes that proximity to the EaP-area makes the area more important for national security, in line with defensive realism (Pollack, 2014: 4). This promotes states to provide more aid to the EaP-area, in order to uphold security in the neighborhood that affects the state itself. However, only close geographical proximity, defined as having an EaP-border, affects aid allocation. Instead, other variables (v-Pol) are more important when the states closest to the EaP-border are excluded from the analysis (Step 2). This may suggest that security interests only are prominent when there is border proximity. It could also imply that geographical proximity reflects different kinds of security interests that are not covered by only looking at this specific variable. This will be further discussed under 8.1.

### 7.1.3 Political Interests

H3 proposes that political interests influence why states allocate aid and that more right-wing influenced states tend to focus more on aid that benefit their strategic interests. The EaP-states are categorized as strategic interests due to their proximity to the EU. In the present study, v-Pol is identified as the only variable independently contributing to ODA, both over all and when EaP-border states are excluded. Political interests are thereby not correlated to geographical proximity (v-Prox). These results indicate that the difference in political ideology does impact a state's motivation of aid flows, as per the realist hypothesis and conclusions within the political theme of the *donor interest model* (Hackenesch et al., 2022; Thérien, 2002: 461).

The political ideology relationship illustrates another kind of strategic interest than security- and economic interests does. It illustrates that more right-wing influence in the national parliament, makes the EU-states allocate aid in line with its national state benefits. This implies more aid to the EaP-states as they are of national importance due to their categorization as EU Neighbors (as defined in the theoretical framework). The area is thereby assumed to be strategically important for the EU states. What does this variable tell us about political trends in the EU? Due to increasing influence by right-wing politics in the EU parliament elections (Mudde, 2024: 65), the present results, suggesting ideology as a major determination factor for aid allocation, suggest that EU foreign aid policies will continue and focus more on the *donor interest model* and realist motives for foreign aid in the future (2019-). As foreign aid illustrates foreign policy goals (Westerfield, 1960: 149), this may indicate that more strategic interest objectives will affect EU foreign policy.

# 8 Discussion

## 8.1 Implications of Results and Significance of Border States

The strong correlation between trade relation and geographical proximity and how they both affect states' prioritization of EaP-ODA allocation (v-ODA), gives insight into how these factors are interrelated in the international system. This paragraph discusses these correlations in a broader context and concludes that studying these factors separately may not be a constructive approach. Thereafter, a continuing discussion on other contextual factors possibly impacting/explaining the proximity-aid relationship is added, concluding with a discussion of the difference between analyzing relationships and national factors for the *donor interest model*.

### 8.1.1 Interconnectedness within the *Donor Interest Model*

As trade relations are correlated with security interests, this thesis criticizes the division of these themes in the research. My results suggest that further analysis on the actual causal mechanisms are needed, as the commercial theme and political theme within the *donor interest model* are in this study found to be connected. Even though the literature establishes that commercial interests are important (Younas, 2008: 661; Marinov, 2018: 7), do trade relations actually *independently* impact aid allocation? And do trade relations actually *impact*<sup>4</sup>, or is it a consequence of other already established relations? The bivariate regression results are not informative regarding other explanatory variables of the relationship it suggests. This is a common methodological problem for quantitatively analyzing relationships in international relations (Esaiasson et. al. 2003: 316). It is difficult to determine the actual factor affecting the relationship, due to the international context. My research, adding to this problem, leads to a critique of both separating different interests as variables, and the concept of the *donor interest model*. Is it truly possible to draw conclusions regarding the importance of specific donor interest motivations, when they are interconnected within the structure of the international system?

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<sup>4</sup> *Impact*: if it is an independently contributing variable affecting the dependent variable.



### 8.1.2 Security Interests Connected to the EU-border Proximity

The Step 2 analysis shows that it is not geographical proximity generally, but specifically the EaP-border states, that prioritize more aid to the EaP due to security interests. This may provide other explanatory factors that deepen the security paradigm discussion. Balázs (2012) focuses on the aid allocation of the Visegrad countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) as emerging donors. These are overlapping with the states classified as EaP-border states in this thesis<sup>5</sup>, making the conclusions comparable albeit being built on different methodology<sup>6</sup>. In line with this research, the findings illustrate that the Visegrad countries also are focusing more on aid to the closest Eastern European states (defined as EaP-states in this thesis). Balázs agrees that geographical proximity is a determining factor, but also singles out historical and cultural relations, drawing connection to the Communist era (Balázs, 2012: 66). From the neo-realist security perspective (Waltz, 1979: 104), the Soviet Union's dominance over eastern Europe during the Cold War still affects relations with Russia from two perspectives. First, states included in the USSR or/and the Warsaw pact still share similar geopolitical interests due to historically established ties (economic and political) (Zhu, 2023: 16; Naimark, 2010: 176). This connects to the definition of *neighborhood*. By protecting the EU *neighborhood* interests, national interests are also secured. Second, another perspective is the security threat of Russia. Instead of using aid to secure *neighborhood* interests, Eastern Europe turned towards the EU community to seek security by distancing themselves from Russia and integrating with the rest of Europe (Miles, 2024: 84). From this perspective, Russia is the main security threat, which can be illustrated by a military security perspective due to Russian invasions in Ukraine 2014 and the threat of further Russian military advancement (note that this is before the 2022 escalations).

To conclude, geographical proximity is a constant variable. Nothing impacts a state's geographical position, but rather it influences other factors, such as historical ties and trade relations, that by themselves also might impact the motivation to give aid.

### 8.1.3 Comparing Relations vs. National Characteristics

Despite both being categorized as political interests in the literature (Dreher et al, 2024:5), political ideology and geographical proximity are not correlated in the present study. The impact of political ideology is the only variable not dependent on the EaP-border states. One possible explanation for this is the difference between focusing on national factors only or focusing on relations between states, as distinguished from the literature. Both trade relations and geographical proximity (as well as historical ties previously discussed) are illustrating the EU-member states *relation* to the EaP-states. In contrast, political ideology only demonstrates the political stance of the *national* parliament, not connected to any relation with the EaP directly. However, political

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<sup>5</sup> With the exemption of the Czech Republic.

<sup>6</sup> Balázs focuses on only the Visegrad countries total aid allocation, while this research includes the entire EU:s aid to the EaP-area, which is found most relevant in Balázs research. Both use similar OECD data, but this thesis includes more “Eastern European” states as that data recently has been made available. Therefore, some of these countries are separate focus areas in both theses.

ideology has also been presented as a relational concept in the literature, by looking at similarity between the donor and recipient (Qian, 2015: 295). If political ideology would have been operationalized like that, it may have been correlated to the other variables demonstrating *relations* (based on the historical similarities within the previous Eastern bloc). Thereby, these results propose another way to divide the explanations within the *donor interest model*: either focused on *relations* or focused on *national characteristics*.

## 8.2 The European Context and Generalizability

By analyzing the strategic interests behind the EU-states' foreign aid, this thesis aims to contribute to the perspective of the internal divides within the EU and contribute to the academic field of foreign aid. First, the generalizability of the strategic interest findings are discussed, followed by a discussion on the contribution of this research for the academic field.

### 8.2.1 Generalizability

The findings of this thesis suggest that strategic interests in line with security and political ideology are impacting the motivations of foreign aid, similar to the findings within the *donor interest model*. These results illustrate specific relations within the EU and the EaP-area. But, can these results be generalizable, or are they specific for the EU area?

Historical and political ties and trade relations are not always related to geographical proximity, even though the present results may indicate so. Some EU member states have been found to prioritize aid to previous colonies (Kostadinova, 2009:4). Within the political theme of the *donor interest model*, aid is used to support states with similar political ideologies and not necessarily dependent on proximity. This was especially prominent for the US during the Cold War in order to support non-communist regimes (Little, 1979: 238). Thus, geographical proximity may impact the donor-recipient relations regionally, but not necessarily in global contexts.

This is in line with two different perspectives on security and power relations within the realist framework. The first is that aid is used to protect security within the neighborhood. Similar to the neo-realistic priority of protecting the nation state and its borders, proximity is therefore important (Balázs, 2012). Second, and in contrast, colonial and political perspectives drive aid motivations to uphold power relations in areas, independent of proximity. This is more in line with classic realist perceptions of power dynamics in the anarchic system (Kashyap, 2022, 1). To understand whether the EU border is a specific case for security interests, research testing the hypotheses in another regional context (for example the American or Asian region) is needed.

## 8.2.2 Contribution to the Foreign Aid Field

This research has contributed to the foreign aid field and *donor interest model* by demonstrating how political ideology and geographical proximity impacts aid allocation in the European area. Through the realist lens, these relations are explained as states seeking security and national interests depending on their political ideology, thereby confirming some of the *donor interest* theories and finding connections between others. It has also contributed to the discussion of different motives within the *donor interest model*. By finding connections between trade and proximity, as well as historical and political ties, these defined research categories are questioned, in line with other authors stating the difficulty in determining causality (Esaiasson et. al. 2003: 316). Lastly, this thesis contributes by filling the knowledge gap regarding the individual EU states' motivations for foreign aid. By the identified roles of political ideology and EaP proximity for EaP-aid, patterns in how EU states' prioritization affects foreign aid allocations can be seen. These conclusions describe the EU states' relation to the ENP and aid motivations before the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Building on these results, a comparison with results after 2022 would illustrate how and if these motivations change and new connections to security might be drawn.

## 8.2.3 Validity and Reliability

The chosen strategies and objectives for construction and implication of the variables for political ideology (v-Pol) and geographical proximity (v-Prox) may impact the outcomes, and therefore caution when interpreting the results is needed. Aspects regarding the validity and reliability of v-Pol have been discussed (Sections 5.2.2 and 4.1.2.). For v-Prox, this thesis operationalizes security interests by geographical proximity, in line with the neo-realist perspective on security for state survival in the anarchic world. However, previous research differs in this operationalization, including for example military or building strategic relationships or fear of spillover (Dreher et al., 2024: 5-6). This is not specifically a validity problem, but must be noted when attempting to generalize the results.

As stated, this research focuses on the years 2017-2019 and all variables are constructed as mean values. By doing so, the robustness of the values and analysis is increased, with the potential disadvantage that changes between years cannot be assessed. Therefore, other methodological approaches, for example including year by year changes (panel data analyses), may lead to different results.

## 9 Conclusion

In the European context of the EU, its eastern border and the security implication this area has on the EU member states, this thesis addresses the following research question:

*How does foreign aid by individual EU member states to the Eastern Partnership countries align with their strategic interests?*

Strategic interests are defined as *political*, *economic* and *security* interests. Through a theoretical framework based on realist theory and the *donor interest model*, this thesis performs a quantitative statistical analysis to determine the EU-states' strategic interests. It finds that political ideology affects how the states prioritize aid to the EaP-area, in line with political interests. Illustrating security interests, it also finds that proximity to the EaP-border creates more incentives to allocate aid. However, as the EaP-border states differ significantly from the other EU-states, these results could also imply other kinds of relationships within the realist security frame; such as political and historical ties.

In line with the purpose to expand the theoretical foreign aid framework, this thesis provides a regional example where realist strategic interests are affecting the EU states aid allocations. While partly confirming the *donor interest model* in the EU context, the model is also criticized due to the deterministic divides between political and commercial explanations.

Strategic interests are found to align with the foreign aid allocated by the EU member states, in terms of political and security interests. This provides a new perspective on the internal EU interests. The EU states are using their foreign aid in line with foreign policy objectives. This provides a realist perspective on the motives steering the ENP, while also illustrating how divided the states are in relation to the EaP-area. The EU-states with border proximity to the EaP-area, have a different relationship to the area. This illustrates that the EU internally prioritizes EU eastern initiatives differently. For the EU, the impact of strategic interest for its member states could be significant when further eastern expansion and cooperation is discussed. To conclude, the strategic interests aligning the foreign aid of the EU-states illustrates patterns of internal EU division, different foreign policy relations to the EaP and questions whether the EU actually is "*united* in diversity".

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