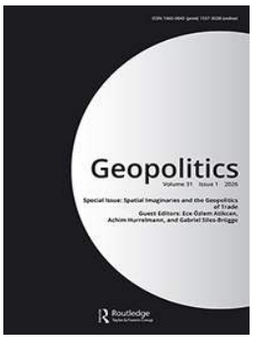

Geopolitics

ISSN: 1465-0045 (Print) 1557-3028 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/fgeo20

A New Brussels Consensus? Qatargate and the (Re)articulation of EU International Development Cooperation Governance

Susan P. Murphy & Cian McMahon

To cite this article: Susan P. Murphy & Cian McMahon (10 Nov 2025): A New Brussels Consensus? Qatargate and the (Re)articulation of EU International Development Cooperation Governance, Geopolitics, DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2025.2585304

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2025.2585304

Published online: 10 Nov 2025.

GEOPOLITICS
https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2025.2585304

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

RESEARCH ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS Check for updates

A New Brussels Consensus? Qatargate and the (Re) articulation of EU International Development Cooperation Governance

Susan P. Murphy [a] and Cian McMahon [b,c]

[a]Development Practice, Geography, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland; [b]Adjunct Research Fellow, Geography, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland; [c]Economics, University of Dundee, Dublin, UK

ABSTRACT

As the polycrisis of the current conjuncture interacts and unfolds across sites and scales, the core democratic institutions of the European Union experienced their own localised crises of confidence and legitimacy with the eruption of Qatargate, a bribery and corruption scandal involving cash transfers through fake non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to European Parliamentarians, in December 2022. In response, parliamentary debates called for reform of accountability and transparency mechanisms for EU NGOs and their collaborating non-EU NGO partners funded by and through the European Union (EU). But what are the implications and risks of such reforms? Is Qatargate a cause or a symptom of a shift towards enhanced EU/state control of NGOs? We examine the longer-term geo-historical context within which this crisis is embedded and undertake a critical policy analysis of EU policies and parliamentary deliberations on development cooperation and NGO accountability and transparency to address these questions. We find evidence of a distinct drift over time from universal to EU values and interests with a deepening role for the EU/state in controlling NGO relations and augmenting private sector involvement in development cooperation through de-risking mechanisms. We argue that an emerging Brussels Consensus problematises NGO collaboration with non-EU partners, legitimises EU/state-centred developmentalism, and risks the co-option of NGO capacities in the service of EU-state centred interests. Such shifts are consequential to processes of democratisation, governance, and human rights inside and outside the EU.

Introduction

A police raid on the offices of several European Union (EU) Parliamentarians on the night of December 9, 2022, marked the beginning of a corruption scandal that rocked the democratic credentials of the EU's most representative

CONTACT Susan P. Murphy susan.p.murphy@tcd.ie School of Natural Sciences, Discipline of Geography, Museum Building, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland

body (Hegewald and Schraff 2024). In what became known as the Qatargate scandal, several high-profile members of the European Parliament (MEPs), including the Parliament's Vice President, Eva Kaili, were accused of accepting political bribes and cash from the Qatari government in exchange for political favours. The cash was allegedly funnelled to MEPs through fake non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Qatargate prompted fractious debate between the main political-ideological groupings within the European Parliament resulting in a series of reform proposals and counterproposals relating to issues of funding transparency and accountability. Rather than focus on issues of corruption and bribery at the heart of the European Parliament, the scandal turbocharged calls for enhanced scrutiny of NGO funding due to fears over potential misappropriation of EU funds. It provided an opportunity to introduce new measures to facilitate closer oversight of NGO relationships and lobbying activities.

Of central concern in these debates are relationships between EU and non-EU NGOs engaged in international development cooperation. During the parliamentary debates, calls emerged for non-EU NGOs engaged in EU funded development interventions to be more heavily regulated and monitored. Such actions carry profound implications for the implementation of the EU's international development cooperation policy centred on the strengthening of NGO relationships and protecting civic space as a means of enhancing governance and democratisation processes in recipient states. That moves to co-opt and control NGO voice contradicts the bloc's public statements concerning the risks of overregulation and suppression of NGOs – especially those promoting universal liberal values and principles – both internally (in EU member states like Hungary) and externally (in non-EU states like Russia) was not lost on close observers of these events (Harth, Kriener, and Wolff 2023).

EU international development cooperation is deeply rooted in and influenced by Western capitalist development histories, norms and logics (Chaturvedi et al. 2021). Although a contested concept, development within this context is broadly understood as a set of processes where modernisation is achieved through economic growth and material progress. Funded through official development assistance (ODA), development cooperation refers to collaborative efforts between economically advanced 'developed' states (sometimes referred to, although descriptively inaccurate, as the 'Global North'), international organisations, national organisations and local actors to advance specific forms of political, economic, social, and environmental change in low/er income 'developing' states (somewhat contentiously referred to as the 'Global South'). It is further premised upon an assumption that there is a direct and somewhat linear relationship between economic prosperity and progressive social norms and values, perhaps most explicitly articulated through the United Nations' (UN) Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs). Globally governed, but locally enacted, development cooperation interventions have a direct bearing on the most intimate aspects of everyday life in affected populations and places (Murphy 2022). A distinctly cross-border activity, it is embedded within a dense array of transnational socio-spatial relations and dynamics, influenced by geopolitical trends and affected by geo-economic and global environmental stocks and flows, movements, and changes.

Since the end of the first Cold War global development policy has charted a trajectory towards increased recognition of, and policy positioning around, NGO led development aimed at strengthening civil society organisations (CSOs) in partner countries to support the spread of human rights and democratisation, with a significant amount of ODA flowing to and through civil society and non-governmental organisations (CSO/NGO) (Artner and Yin 2023; Murphy 2016; Novovic 2021). NGOs emerged as key entities deemed critical to building the social capital necessary to support the emergence of liberal democratic systems and, at the same time, deeper integration of states into the global economic order (Mohan and Stokke 2000, 2008). NGOs have been central to most development interventions either directly, leading to socio-economic human capital capacity development, or indirectly, supporting communities to adapt to larger-scale infrastructural and state-based transformations (Banks 2021; Brass et al. 2018). NGO-led development is enabled through partnerships between international NGOs (INGOs) and national and local civil society actors working together to deliver specified development interventions.

However, this dominant development paradigm now seems to be crumbling, evidenced by increasing and intersecting inequalities and multidimensional poverty, democratic backsliding, rising authoritarianism, shrinking civic space, and rising insecurity and military coup d'états in many donor darling states (Akinola and Makombe 2024; Cheeseman, Bertrand, and Husaini 2019). It is further challenged by rising calls for greater decolonisation of the development industry by key actors and institutions in the sector and recipient states (#Artner and Yin 2023; Doane 2024; Movement 2024). Questions around the effectiveness of development cooperation and modes of intervention abound within international organisations and institutions as dominant development cooperation policies and pathways now look at risk of coming undone at national and regional scales.

The Trump Administration's Executive Order to suspend and ultimately end the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in early 2025, followed swiftly by ODA reduction announcements in Britain and several EU states, points to newly emboldened political factions, alignments, and administrations actively turning inwards to national and regional (economic and foreign) policy prerogatives. The European Union (EU) seems to be a case in point, wherein an increasingly fractured national and regional

political milieu has emerged in recent years, with profound implications for EU/member-state development cooperation policy and practice. Within this context, calls for greater scrutiny and control of NGO partnerships within the EU parliament have caused alarm. Rather than defending NGO autonomy and freedoms, there are concerns that such actions could result in the silencing and subordination of NGOs to EU/member-state actors and interest.

This discontinuity is embedded within a heightened geostrategic power play between the emerging superpowers of China and its allies in the East, and US hegemony in the West, reminiscent in some respects of the first Cold War, though taking on a more integrated/networked form in the contemporary era of globalised and financialised neoliberal capitalism (Carmody 2024; Farrell and Newman 2023; Lapavitsas and EReNSEP Writing Collective 2023; Schindler 2023). The EU is positioned, both geospatially and geostrategically, in the middle of this hegemonic contest, loyal to the West (Global North) in terms of historical, cultural, military, trade, aid, and ethnic ties; but engaged also with the East (Global South) for growing trade and economic opportunities and the prospects of relative autonomy from the US (Biba 2024). Given the dramatic shift in US security, trade, and industrial policies under the Trump regime, calls for the EU to accentuate its 'strategic autonomy' have become louder (Varma 2024).

This professed desire for EU 'strategic autonomy' is confirmed by a leaked internal review of the EU's Global Gateway Initiative (GGI) with profound implications for international partnerships and the role and function of NGOs in practice. The GGI emerged in 2021 as the EU's geostrategic framework for development cooperation aimed at narrowing the global investment gap, super-charging efforts to attain the SDGs, and strengthening the EU's power and influence with key partner countries in the Global South (European Commission 2021). It represents the EU's response to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the US's Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) (Verhelst and E 2024) to better position Europe as a partner of choice for actors in the Global South. The leaked document points to shortcomings in the GGI's relatively disjointed and untargeted operation to date, advocating instead for a 'strategic corridor approach' focused on 'engaging our strategic partners with a policy mix driven by economic interest, and less so by more traditional and narrow development and foreign policy approaches. The economy has become the key playing field for geopolitical competition, yet, as it stands, we are still too often trying to do 'everything, everywhere, all at once', and avoid arbitration' (European Commission 2024, 1). In the present conjuncture, the document notes, 'Emerging Markets and Developing Economies live in an à la carte world and will pick and choose from a menu as they see fit. There is a battle of offers. Unless we invest more actively and strongly in our international partnerships, we risk being sidelined . . .. The EU cannot take its position for granted' (European Commission 2024, 1).

This is where the GGI comes in. 'Global Gateway is Europe's offer to help connect the world and boost resilience for the EU and partner countries alike. It allows us to support countries who seek to enhance their resilience (vis-à-vis our competitors/rivals) . . . , while strengthening partnerships that are important to Europe's own strategic autonomy' (European Commission 2024, 6 [emphasis added]). This signals a narrowing of the scope of EU Development cooperation to a more intentional focus on geostrategic partnerships that solidify EU-centric interests and alliances, away from the universalist principles of the SDGs. It further implies a tightening of avenues for development cooperation with emerging economies aligned to the BRICS(+) formation (Carmody 2024). Consequently, there are emerging and underlying tensions regarding the diversity of foreign, trade, and investment relationships within the EU's component member states. However, at the level of the EU's supranational institutions, the geostrategic repositioning is more clearcut, if not absolute, around a newly emergent *Brussels Consensus* that explicitly centres the interests of Europe into its development cooperation partnerships and planning (Biba 2024; European Commission 2024), thus potentially curtailing and channelling the capacities of NGOs and their partners in the service of EU interests and advancement.

The Qatargate scandal unfolded within this broader context of relational flux. But what are the longer-term, wider world-historical processes and dynamic transitions at play in the rearticulation of EU international Development policy? How/do these processes influence the development cooperation regime and in what ways? How do these relate to parliamentary scrutiny and debate concerning transparency and accountability of NGOs following Qatargate (Harth, Kriener, and Wolff 2023)? And what might we say about possible directions of travel given the ongoing deterioration of global cooperation more generally, and Michel Barnier's description of Europe's 'authoritarian drift' (Caulcutt et al. 2025)? This paper explores these questions.

In the following section, we place contemporary developments in their longer-term geo-historical context, focusing on the period since the 2008 financial crisis. International Development regime shifts are rooted in successive rounds of political-economic and socio-institutional dislocation, crisis, and socially innovative reassemblage in the world system – in other words, intermediate-term regimes or social structures of capitalist accumulation and crisis (McDonough, McMahon, and Kotz 2021) nested within longer-term 'systemic cycles of accumulation [turbulence] and chaos' (Galanis, Koutny, and Weber 2024; see also Arrighi [1994] 2010; McMahon 2025). We contend that the world system is in a protracted period of systemic turbulence, characterised by growing disorder, disintegration, experimentation, and competition/conflict over alternative courses of institutional reordering. We argue that this

interregnum and its morbid symptoms (including a deepening social-ecological rift and crisis of care more generally) are rooted in the structural crisis of globalised and financialised neoliberal capitalism (Fraser 2023; Lapavitsas and EReNSEP Writing Collective 2023) and associated hegemonic crisis and transition in the world system (Galanis, Koutny, and Weber 2024). The main consequence of such world-historic shifts for development cooperation appears to be the emergence of competing *varieties of* 'state capitalism' (Alami, Dixon, and Mawdsley 2021), taken generally to signify a reassertion of the state's role in capitalist development generally and development cooperation policy specifically. Within these shifts, we untangle the implications for NGOs as key actors in this context.

Section "Methodology" outlines the methodology and methods employed in the empirical part of the study. We carry out a comparative critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2013) of four interrelated, yet distinct, EU development policies and parliamentary reports concerning efforts to strengthen governance and scrutiny of NGO's before and after the Qatargate scandal. We trace the discursive shifts overtime, reflecting newly emerging political-ideological formations within the European Parliament marked by their emphasis on EU interests and values over global or universal interests, values and solidarities. With Qatargate acting as an unexpected intervening variable, these documents display a dramatic shift in the discursive framing of the role, independence, and autonomy of NGO and civil society organisations funded through EU development cooperation mechanisms. Using NVivo 14, we track the discursive-ideological shift sequentially throughout the period of publication (2017–2024).

Section "Document Analysis – Reshaping the EU International Development Regime" presents our findings, tracing a distinct turn away from the twin pillars of civil society strengthening and the promotion of universal liberal rights and values that underpinned *the European Consensus* towards greater EU-centricism and the re-legitimisation of state-led development processes and consequent justification for direct interference in EU Non-EU NGO relations and governance processes. The emerging *Brussels Consensus* is characterised by a distinct focus on EU/state centred developmentalism, with a corresponding de-legitimisation of NGO-NGO operations and explicit efforts to co-opt EU and non-EU NGO capacities in the service of EU inter/state interests. Contextualising the EU D/Development Regime Shift discusses our findings and explores the theoretical implications in the current conjuncture of global and EU development regime shifts. Lastly, Concluding Comments offers some tentative conclusions and suggestions about possible future directions of travel.

D/Development Regime Shifts Amidst Hegemonic Transition

Perhaps one of the most influential conceptions of international developmental regime shifts emerged through the work of critical geographer Gillian Hart, who distinguishes between two forms of development that are interconnected and co-created – big 'D' and little 'D' development. Drawing upon the theoretical foundations of Polanyi's double movement, and Gramsci's relation of forces, Hart defines 'big "D" Development . . . as the multiple-scale projects of interventions that emerged in the context of decolonization struggles and the Cold War. . . . Little "D" development refers to the development of capitalism as geographically uneven but spatially interconnected processes of creation and destruction, dialectically interconnected with discourses and practices of Development' (Hart 2010, 119). This gives rise to two distinct forms of praxis in the development space – one which is predatory and creatively destructive, the other palliative, caring and providing 'temporary, uneven and partial redress of the dislocations caused by the creative destruction unleashed by capitalism' (Mawdsley and Taggart 2022, 5). As noted by Alami, Dixon, and Mawdsley (2021), these are in a dialectical relationship as 'D'evelopment interventions are necessary to alleviate the suffering caused by 'D'evelopment as capitalist expansion. As such, big 'D' development is maintained and sustained by and within little 'D' development.

Widely recognised as an instrument of statecraft and form of soft power within international relations, 'D'evelopment cooperation is marked by socio-spatial power relations between high-income donor states predominantly located in the Global North and low/er income, less industrialised recipient states predominantly located in the Global South. Globally determined but enacted and embodied locally, 'D'evelopment interventions fundamentally influence forms of communal life, social cooperation, and lifeworlds at micro, local, place-based scales. Within this context, NGOs have emerged as essential facilitators in the 'D'evelopment process, operating between states and markets, building legitimacy for liberal development imaginaries through partnerships with local civil society organisations, and supporting deeper engagement in market-based activities whilst alleviating suffering generated through economic transformation.

From Localisation of 'D'evelopment to the De-Risking D/Development State

Emerging from the 'D'evelopment effectiveness debates that commenced in the early 2000s, when decades of neoliberal reforms delivered under the Washington Consensus failed to achieve targeted human development gains (Schindler, Alami, and Jepson 2023), followed by further failures of the post-Washington Consensus development period (Alami, Dixon, and Mawdsley

2021), localisation and locally led 'D'evelopment (LLD) paradigms have been to the forefront of national and international 'D'evelopment cooperation policy formation since 2016 (Barakat and Milton 2020). Following Hart (2010), the rhetorical-aspirational shift in international 'big D' 'D'evelopment cooperation towards localisation appears in real practice to have been constrained by the imperatives of 'little d' (globalised and financialised) neoliberal (state) capitalist 'D'evelopment.

In theory, it is not immediately clear why neoliberalism should be expected to constrain or hamper LLD given its embrace of *the ideology of* decentralised market competition (Mohan and Stokke 2008). However, tracing its historical lineage, the neoliberal capitalist state has always relied on the undercurrent and ultimate backstop of political authoritarianism (counterpart to the economic concentration and centralisation of capital), particularly when coming under sustained counterattack or counterpressure from organised labour/social/environmental movements (Hart 2010). Hence, while it permits – even encourages – rhetorical discourses and *selective* practices of political and economic decentralisation, localisation, and autonomy, the resulting outsized liberal political-economic imaginary masks the essentially authoritarian neoliberal centralisation, concentration, and consolidation of capitalist (state and economy) development structures and processes (Hart 2010; Harvey 2005, 2012; Lapavitsas and EReNSEP Writing Collective 2023; Mirowski 2014). This neoliberal localisation agenda contains tensions and contradictions, holding out progressive as well as regressive consequences and possibilities. Yet the progressive potential and possibilities of LLD have been increasingly circumscribed in the post-2008 era with the (re)turn to overtly and aggressively state-led capitalist 'd'evelopment (Alami and Dixon 2024, Alami, Dixon, and Mawdsley 2021).

For illustration, as Hart notes, '[t]he human rights movement . . . helped to propel the massive burgeoning of NGOs all over the world in the 1980 s, many of which took on the mantle of "global civil society", helping to implement neoliberal reforms while also managing some of the destructive fallout [of capitalist geoeconomic expansion]' (2010, 130). This intertwined agenda is characterised by LLD in international Development discourse and policy, at least at the level of the capitalist state and supranational development bodies. NGOs act as a vehicle through which 'D'evelopment in general, and LLD in particular, can be operationalised, although it should be stressed that practices and outcomes vary widely across relatively autonomous and diverse NGOs and civic spaces (Banks 2021; Brass et al. 2018). So while the intention of the neoliberal capitalist state is often to co-opt discourses and practices of LLD to redistribute risk and responsibility for project implementation away from the central state apparatus while still taking the credit for any supposed efficiencies of decentralisation, Hart notes how, in certain instances, 'palliative measures designed to contain

popular discontent fed into a far more radical project of social change' (2010, 134). These unintended (potential) radicalising consequences of palliative derisking through LLD produced in turn their own countermovement, contributing over time to the recentralisation of international 'D'evelopment cooperation in the state apparatus (Alami, Dixon, and Mawdsley 2021).

This helps to explain the disjuncture between discursive theories and narratives of localised 'big D' international development, and the reality in practice of relatively weak and patchy follow-through on corollary policy commitments (see, for example, OECD 2023). Such theoretical discourse appears to operate primarily as political cover for selective and contradictory practices that ultimately aim to centralise, concentrate, and consolidate the 'soft power' of donor states and regional groupings in the (increasingly) contested field of international relations (Carmody 2019, 2024). Hart (2010, 130), by way of example, observes that 'the market orthodoxy that seemed so firmly entrenched in the early 1990 s gave way to far more overtly interventionist moves to contain disruptive tendencies' arising from economic liberalisation, such as subaltern struggles and anti-systemic/anti-globalisation movements that threaten neoliberal capitalist (state) power, privilege, and profit. This authoritarian/neoliberal reaction involved 'multinational and bilateral aid agencies actively reasserting and extending their mission of trusteeship *in the name of* Development, good governance, participation, social capital, and so forth' (ibid. emphasis added). The degree of North–South localisation and autonomy afforded to 'D'evelopment cooperation initiatives was thus severely curtailed.

What has emerged then, particularly since the global/North Atlantic financial crisis of 2008 – ushering the structural crisis of global neoliberal capitalism and associated (geo) political, economic, social, and ecological upheaval (Schindler 2023, Lapavitsas and EReNSEP Writing Collective 2023, McDonough, McMahon, and Kotz 2021) – is an ongoing turn to *varieties of* (neoliberal-authoritarian) 'state capitalism' in the 'new global D/development regime' (Alami, Dixon, and Mawdsley 2021; also; Alami and Dixon 2024). Such variation in part reflects the experimental, contested, and historically contingent nature of the present conjuncture, and as yet unresolved geostrategic struggles over the shape of the new global D/development regime (Lapavitsas and EReNSEP Writing Collective 2023). As Hart observes, drawing on Gramsci's relations of force, '[w]hile crises of capitalism hold out progressive possibilities, they also carry significant dangers – including the rise of new forms of fascism, racism, and xenophobia' (2010, 134; see also Silver 2019). Much depends on the outcome of indeterminate class and social struggles, albeit carried forward within the structural-institutional confines of historically given circumstances (Fraser 2017; McDonough, McMahon, and Kotz 2021; Silver 2019).

The present relations of force at various scales across the world system favour the increasing reliance of national, multilateral, and supranational 'D'evelopment actors on rhetorical discourses and selective practices of (neoliberal/authoritarian) 'state capitalism' – i.e. 'a significant *redefinition* of the Development project, in the context of the restructuring of global capitalism and profound geopolitical shifts'; one that is 'not only characterised by the further entrenchment of the centrality of market regulation, but also, crucially, by a *strategic ideological adjustment* concerning the place of the state in Development, including a partial embrace of its role as *promoter, supervisor, and owner of capital*' (Alami, Dixon, and Mawdsley 2021, 1295, original emphasis). There is thus 'a persistence of neoliberal thinking in this agenda' (ibid.), which seeks to further consolidate and expand market regulation under the auspices of the strong state (see also Alami and Dixon 2024, Schindler et al. 2023, Alami and Taggart 2024).

This strategic ideological *adjustment* indicates that traditional D/development cooperation actors, such as the World Bank and OECD acknowledge the successes of the developmental state, particularly given the rise of China and the Global South and associated implications for the continued demise of the Global North. This delicate balancing act involves, according to Alami et al., the 're-legitimation of the state in Development, and a limited embrace of state-owned capital' (2021, 1296), if still entwined with the further entrenchment of international market-based private finance. This state capitalist D/development agenda is exemplified in the Global North, and in particular the EU and US, by the 'de-risking state' of the increasingly assertive so-called 'Wall Street Consensus' (WSC) (Gabor 2021).

The WSC 'pushes developing countries to become more attractive to private financial capital [by providing a state-funded safety net], at the expense of [traditional] state-led industrialisation and development strategies' (Alami, Dixon, and Mawdsley 2021, 1295) – thereby leveraging the strong arm of the (de-risking) state to rearticulate and recalibrate the neoliberal strategic-ideological goals of the post-Washington Consensus. This is achieved primarily through (de-risking) state partnership with, and state subsidisation of, international market-based private financial capital in the design-through-delivery of 'D'evelopment cooperation initiatives, thus 'risk-proofing development assets' from financial loss (Gabor 2021) and operationalising Sustainable Development Goal 17 on the promotion of public-private and multistakeholder partnerships to implement 'investment promotion regimes for least developed countries' (SDG 17.5).

But where is the EU strategically and ideologically located in relation to the unfolding hegemonic context between the US and China and what are the implications of this for the shifting EU D/development paradigm and the reactions to Qatargate?

Stuck in the Middle: Placing the EU in the US–China Hegemonic Contest

Anxieties over the direction of global capitalist restructuring have their material-ideological genesis and political-economic basis in the 2008 financial crash and the prolonged recession and deepening secular stagnation that followed (Schindler 2023b, 9). Enhanced state intervention in dysfunctional private capitalist markets was re-legitimised first in response to the 2008 crash and then again in response to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP)-controlled state was particularly assertive in both instances, displaying mass coordinated fiscal and monetary policy interventions of global reach and significance. China's geo-political-economic rise and its effective crisis management were duly noted in the Global South, laying the basis for its increased D/development cooperation presence through the BRI since 2013 and the more recent China International Development Cooperation White Paper published in 2021. Consequently, China is now widely seen in the West as a 'strategic competitor' in the battle of ideas and policies shaping the emergence of a new international D/development regime (Alami, Dixon, and Mawdsley 2021; Schindler, Alami, and Jepson 2023).

Growing US–China geo-political-economic tensions and conflicts – and the EU's 'stuck-in-the-middle-ness' (Biba 2024) – can be understood more clearly in this light, given that 'Xi's "national rejuvenation" and Trump's "Make America Great Again" entrenched antagonistic foreign policy in both countries, leading to a consensus that the two are locked in zero-sum competition … a clash of restorative projects' in response to the 2008 financial crash and its aftermath (Schindler 2023, 9). Taking view of the longue durée, Schindler (2023) historicise the emergent US–China hegemonic contest as the 'Second Cold War', noting its distinct politico-ideological and spatial-territorial dimensions as compared to the first Cold War. They offer 'a process-oriented analysis in which the Cold War and the contemporary US-China rivalry are conceptualised as discrete periods in a longer historical sequence whose unifying principle is a sustained challenge to the US-led international order' (Schindler 2023, 2).

Central to this is the US and China's competitive projection on the world stage as leading international D/development partners (Schindler 2023, 11). It helps to explain broader the Western and Eastern drift towards varieties of 'authoritarian state capitalism' (ibid.), with the 'de-risking state' (facilitating international market-based private finance) the preferred mechanism in the West (Biba 2024; Gabor 2021); meanwhile, China's 'interventions are based on direct ownership and command over both productive resources and finance' (Lapavitsas and EReNSEP Writing Collective 2023, 273), with implications for the shape of emerging non-Western international 'D'evelopment finance initiatives and institutions through the BRICS(+) formation (Alami, Dixon, and Mawdsley 2021; Carmody 2024).

For the EU, there appears to be significant scope for strategic autonomy from both models of international 'D'evelopment finance. This depends crucially on partner states' respective levels of national economic 'D'evelopment and related geopolitical bargaining power (Biba 2024; Schindler, Alami, and Jepson 2023). As a relatively powerful, highly developed, and increasingly integrated regional supranational institution, as well as a system of cooperating member nation-states (see Robertson 2010), the EU potentially has the best of both worlds, given that, as things stand, its largest trading partners are the United States and China (Biba 2024; Farrell and Newman 2023). Notwithstanding its stated desire for greater "strategic autonomy" from both poles of the US–China hegemonic contest (Biba 2024; European Commission 2024), the EU has, until Trump's tariff and trade war, increasingly aligned itself with US foreign policy on China (Biba 2024). As Schindler (2023) observes, the EU referred to China as a "systemic rival" in 2019 and proposed de-risking the EU's economic relationship with China. This creates tensions within and between EU member states' national foreign policy stances, as some of the largest economies in the bloc are members of the BRI (see Farrell and Newman 2023; Lapavitsas and EReNSEP Writing Collective 2023).

But the implications of these processes for the EU development cooperation regime, and how they relate to the role and positioning of NGOs post-Qatargate are less clear. In the following sections, we set out the methodology and results of a critical discourse analysis of EU 'D'evelopment policy documents and parliamentary reports concerning NGO funding and relations to explore the implications of these dynamics. Findings in Document Analysis – Reshaping the EU International Development Regime bolster the view that the EU is rearticulating its 'D'evelopment commitments in the direction of a neoliberal/authoritarian state capitalist D/development regime. This does not bode well for global cooperation on the achievement and building upon of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in line with planetary boundaries (see Demaria et al. 2023). As discussed below, de-risking emerges as the expressed strategic-ideological orientation of the EU's rearticulation of its international 'D'evelopment policy through the Global Gateway Initiative (European Commission 2021, 2024). Our analysis further reveals the internalised neoliberal/authoritarian logic for the EU's clamping down upon and co-option of NGO operations – i.e. the partnering and empowerment of international private finance capital in EU Development policy, at the expense of localised partnerships between EU and non-EU NGOs on the ground in affected recipient communities. While NGOs may still be involved as partners in development activities, they are increasing co-opted by the imperatives of state-capital collaboration.

Methodology

The following draws upon Fairclough's (2013) critical discourse analysis (CDA) methodological approach to undertake a comparative critical policy analysis of relevant publicly available EU materials to reveal shifting trends and patterns emerging through the key debates on EU 'D'evelopment cooperation policy in general, and issues concerning NGO funding and transparency in particular. Starting with an initial reading of European Parliament commissioned studies of financing, democratic accountability and budgetary control of NGOs in 2010 and 2016 which to pointed to political concerns related to the lack of oversight and transparency of NGO fundings flows, we selected four key documents for deeper analysis that provide insights on the subject of NGO funding, governance, and 'D'evelopment cooperation before and after the Qatargate scandal. These are interrelated, but distinct documents concerning both EU 'D'evelopment policy positioning and parliamentary reports concerning the transparency and accountability of NGO funding in this space.

The European Consensus (European Commission 2017, hereafter EUC-2017) policy position is the foundational statement on EU 'D'evelopment cooperation, an intended touchstone for subsequent documents and reports in this area. *The Global Gateway Initiative* (European Commission 2021, hereafter GGI-2021) is the latest iteration of the EU's positioning on 'D'evelopment cooperation. In between the publication of both documents, and perhaps helping to explain their contradictory divergence, the European Court of Auditors (2018, hereafter ECA-2018) concluded its report into the transparency and accountability of NGOs' (part) funding through the EU. This report was commissioned in response to the earlier parliament studies pointing to a pattern of parliamentary probing and incursion into the NGO space within 'D'evelopment cooperation. This audit report also informed an EU Parliament (2024, hereafter EUP-2024) motion and adopted resolution on the same topic that was quickly debated through parliament following the eruption of the Qatargate scandal.

We track the discursive-ideological shift sequentially throughout the period of publication (2017–2024), placing this comparative CDA in its broader political-economic context – thus highlighting, in particular, the Brexit referendum and Trump's ascendancy to the US presidency in 2016 as an inflection point (see Carmody 2019); as well as interventionist state responses to the COVID-19 pandemic as an accelerator of the rise of varieties of state capitalism, coupled with the 'rise of China' and 'rise of the [Global] South' in geopolitical-economic affairs (Carmody 2024; Lapavitsas and EReNSEP Writing Collective 2023). Data organisation and coding are assisted by NVivo 14 computer software. Themes emerge through a process of primary and axial coding related to our primary research question(s). We trace discursive-

ideological trends over time and between different types of related (policy and parliamentary) documents.

Document Analysis – Reshaping the EU International Development Regime

The findings of our CDA indicate distinct tensions and contradictions between the policy documents, that point to an ongoing rearticulation and evolution of EU international 'D'evelopment policy positioning and practice in response to significant geopolitical shifts since 2016. With Qatargate (2022) acting as an unexpected intervening variable, these documents display a dramatic shift in the discursive framing of the role, independence, and autonomy of NGO and civil society organisations funded through EU development cooperation mechanisms. At the time of writing, this discursive shift has lurched further to the right as evidenced in the GGI leaked report of 2024.

Findings suggest Qatargate directly amplified the calls to increase regulation of NGO partnerships, programmes, funding, transparency and accountability based on unfounded concerns regarding NGO modes of operation through partnership with non-EU NGOs, essential to the practice of LLD. Ongoing commitments to LLD now appear to be more evasive and ambiguous. The approved parliamentary resolution (EUP-2024) calls for increased registration, monitoring and reporting, thereby implicitly contributing to the delegitimating of NGO independence and autonomy within the D/development regime. This is found to coincide with and seems to act as an accelerant on a pre-existing trend towards a neoliberal/authoritarian state capitalist D/development regime.

The following discussion is split into two subsections examining: 1) the shift in language over time from a universalist discourse that emphasise themes of global partnership, multistakeholdership, and locally led practice, to an EU-centric focus that emphasises themes of undue foreign interference and the need for greater funding transparency, accountability, and conditionality. Our findings indicate that this shift from global to regional interests and values was already unfolding between 2017 and 2021, but Qatargate provided an accelerant to this shift as articulated in the parliamentary resolution of EUP-2024; and 2) the shift of *imputed meaning* within these discursive-ideological themes that indicates a similar direction of semiotic travel.

De-Localising and De-Universalising EU Development Cooperation Discourse

EUC-2017 places a strong emphasis on themes of (in order of magnitude[1]) D/development 'partnership', 'cooperation', 'mutuality', 'localisation', 'multistakeholdership', 'inclusion', 'multilateralism', 'ownership', and 'empowerment', with some passing reference also to global 'justice', 'reparation', and

'citizenship' – all broadly in line with the twin pillars of civil society strengthening and commitments to universal rights and norms inherent in emerging liberal democratic states and consistent with the principles of development effectiveness centred on local ownership, partnership and leadership.

> 'In relations with partner countries, the EU and its Member States will put renewed emphasis on country ownership, partnership and dialogue, in order to contribute to greater effectiveness'. (EUC-2017, 42)

It positions NGO/CSOs and support for civic space as central enablers of this policy.

> 'The EU and its Member States will deepen their partnerships with CSOs in support of sustainable development. They will promote an operating space and enabling environments for CSOs, with full public participation, to allow them to play their roles as independent advocates, implementers and agents of change, in development education and awareness raising and in monitoring and holding authorities to account'. (EUC-2017, 43)

The relatively strong localisation discourse is supplemented in EUC-2017 by a (somewhat contradictory) discourse that stresses *universalist* 'rights', 'access', 'diversity', and 'values'.[2] For example,

> ' . . . the EU is guided by the universality, indivisibility, interrelatedness and interdependence of all human rights, the EU and its Member States will promote intercultural dialogue and cooperation and cultural diversity'. (EUC-2017, 16)

Additional examples abound, but a striking observation from our review of the later documents is the near disappearance of the language of localisation and universalism over time, barring a small handful of passing references. This is somewhat understandable in the case of ECA-2018, given that it is a technical report concerning EU funding to NGOs. However, the shift in the language used in GGI-2021 is less explicable and marks a more definitive shift in tone and intention. Here, we find a notable decline in the use of terms such as 'inclusion', 'multistakeholdership', 'partnership', and 'localisalisation', coupled with a shift away from the language of human rights and universal values towards the language of European/EU values and interests. The GGI notes

> 'In implementing the Global Gateway, the EU will work closely with like-minded partners to develop synergies between their respective efforts on connectivity and quality infrastructure with third countries and achieve the maximum impact in closing the global infrastructure gap'. (GGI-2021, 11)

Within this work, civil society and NGOs are still included as partners in building legitimacy and linkages with local communities, centring their contribution to 'D'evelopment and essentially co-opting this sector to serve the interests of investors and funders.

> 'Those most affected by potential projects – local communities, businesses and partners – must have their full say through proper public consultations and civil society involvement'. (GGI-2021, 3)

As we will see below, the underlying meanings of key terms have changed overtime between EUC-2017 and GGI-2021. Further, references to localisation and universalism continue to decline in EUP-2024. This decline starts to make more sense when viewed through the geo-historical-political-economic lens outlined in earlier sections of this paper. The ascent of Trump to the US presidency, alongside the Brexit referendum, in 2016 (both arguably political consequences of the 2008 financial crash and persistent underlying contradictions of neoliberal capitalism), followed by the COVID-19 pandemic shock in 2020 and the accelerated rise of China and the Global South (particularly the BRICS(+) formation) have accentuated the sense of global crisis and contestation within the hegemonic imperial bloc. The ripples could be felt in the EU polity from 2016 onwards; and ripples grew into waves of change during the early 2020 s (see Farrell and Newman 2023), with the Qatargate scandal crashing against an increasingly fractured political Union in 2022 (Harth, Kriener, and Wolff 2023; Hegewald and Schraff 2024). Each of these upward inflection points is followed closely by the publication of the documents in our sample: EUC-2017 and ECA-2018 following Trump/Brexit; GGI-2021 following Covid-19; and EUP-2024 following Qatargate and the Russian war on Ukraine. The rising counter-discourse to localisation and universalism becomes clearer in this contextual light.

Within this context of turbulence, a series of reports into the transparency and accountability of the EU funding to NGOs culminated in the European Court of Auditors report (ECA-2018). The language of this report, given its technical accounting nature, is less politicised; but this didn't prevent the re-politicisation of its (relatively innocuous) findings post Qatargate, as evidenced in EUP-2024. The main themes to emerge from our coding of ECA-2018 are funding 'traceability' (by far the largest incidence), as well as NGO 'classification', 'monitoring', and 'oversight'. However, it is important to note that the main critique within the report points to inadequacies in the European Commission's reporting tools and processes, rather than any suggestion of lack of transparency and accountability on the part of funded NGOs. Its main recommendations focused on the EU Commission systems and process improvements to facilitate more extensive reporting on funding flows and partnership arrangements.

Interestingly, the European Commission pushed back against some of the ECA recommendations, in particular as these generate the potential to curtail and control NGO activities.

> 'as recording the NGO status is not a legal requirement and as NGOs do not have a legal definition, the accounting system does not record funds specifically channelled to the NGO sector' (Replies of the Commission to the Special Report of the ECA 2018, 1); ' . . .

> any attempt at defining an NGO is to be balanced against the need to protect the operating space of NGOs' (ibid 2)

Setting aside any genuine issues of adequate traceability or definitional squabbles, there are no findings or implications in ECA-2018 of political corruption or misappropriation of funds. These conclusions contrast sharply with the discourse emerging in the parliamentary debates following Qatargate (Harth, Kriener, and Wolff 2023). Themes of 'corruption', 'conditionality', 'foreign influence', and 'control' emerge particularly strongly in EUP-2024, with respect to the EU's funding of NGOs, while barely featuring (if at all) in the preceding documents. EUP-2024 also contains some passing thematic references to third party/country 'entryism' and 'front organisations', alongside the emergence of a particularly strong discourse demanding NGO adherence to EU-centric 'values'. Some examples are again illustrative, with Qatargate doing the heavy lifting, short of any additional/systematic evidence of NGO misappropriation of EU funds.

> '[The European Parliament i]s of the opinion that certain alleged corruption cases, which generated public discontent, such as Qatargate, could have been prevented through the consistent enforcement of existing transparency requirements and an obligation for involved entities, including NGOs, to disclose their sources of funding and their internal structures; notes that, in some cases, the involved entities profited from EU funding' (EUP-2024, para. 12). . . . '[The EP] Condemns the increase in the exploitation of EU funds against EU principles and values, especially when the use of funds and transfers to other organisations are not entirely traceable; warns of the danger of EU funds ultimately being used within corrupt circles and being subject to fraud and irregularities, foreign interference or entryism' (EUP-2024, para. 13). . . . 'exploitation of EU funds against EU rules, principles and values is on the rise; whereas individuals and front organisations, most often under foreign influence, seek to obtain EU financial support and the respectability that results from it, whatever the amount, but in reality use EU funds for activities that undermine fundamental EU principles and values'. (EUP-2024, para. H)

The political formation of EUP-2024, and the requirement to amass enough votes to pass the resolution, means that that this distrustful geopolitical discourse around (generally ill-defined[3]) foreign interference and threats to EU values is counterbalanced to an extent by the remnants of a localisation discourse keen to stress the democratic and human rights benefits of NGOs and civil society. These two discourses sit side by side in uneasy tension, with the protection of NGO autonomy and self-determination seemingly incorporated as something of an afterthought. It points to internal debate and unresolved conflict at best, and political cover at worst.

> '[The EP] r]ecalls that transparency and accountability should not be used to curtail the space for independent civil society or to silence critical voices' (EUP-2024, para. 10) and '[c]ommends the crucial role of NGOs in EU and non-EU countries in defending the rule of law and democratic values, fighting corruption and promoting human rights and democracy' (EUP-2024, para. 50) and '[i]s of the opinion that no margins of appreciation

should be left for Member States to subject NGOs to fatally restrictive requirements and obligations'. (EUP-2024, para. 29)

Yet, despite this recognition, the Parliament

'calls on all EU institutions to ensure far stricter implementation and enforcement and supervision of adherence to the current provisions on the EU transparency register' (EUP-2024, para. 43). And further '[c]alls on all NGOs and entities committed to full transparency and accountability, the EU Charter and promoting democratic and EU values, to request to be included in the Transparency Register when applying for EU funds'. (EUP-2024, para. 46)

Strategic 'Partners of choice': De-Localisation and De-Risking

In keeping with the emergence of an EU-centric values discourse in EUP-2024, an EU-centric rearticulation of 'partnership' in line with EU geostrategic interests is evident in GGI-2021. It is indicative of de-localisation of the EU's development cooperation discourse, especially when compared to the meanings imputed to partnership in EUC-2017. Far from decolonial mutuality and local ownership of 'D'evelopment projects, GGI-2021 instead emphasises de-risking – of the donor state from foreign interference (Schindler et al. 2023), and of international private financial investment from potential losses through state subsidy and public–private partnership. The EU, as a supranational institution, now sees itself in competition with China in particular, and BRICS(+) more generally, for leadership of geostrategic D/development cooperation partnerships. The emerging EU-centric discourse is thinly veiled with the remnants of a localisation/decolonisation or universalist agenda. Once again, these vying discourses co-exist in uneasy tension, with strong hints of political manoeuvring through a strategy of ideological-discursive attrition. The spectre of China/BRICS(+) looms large (Carmody 2024; Farrell and Newman 2023; Alami and Dixon 2024).

'By offering a positive choice for global infrastructure development, Global Gateway will invest in international stability and cooperation and demonstrate how democratic values offer certainty and fairness for investors, sustainability for partners and long-term benefits for people around the world' (GGI-2021, 2); 'Global Gateway projects will be designed, developed and implemented in close cooperation and consultation with partner countries. Infrastructure projects will be based on the needs and opportunities that they identify for their local economies and local communities, as well as the EU's own strategic interests' (GGI-2021, 3); 'We will cooperate with partner countries to enable their just energy transition and to diversify our clean energy supply at the same time' (GGI-2021, 5); 'We will also work with partner countries to invest in infrastructure for developing sustainable and resilient raw materials value chains'. (GGI-2021, 6)

De-risking is a central foundation of this policy, with NGOs and civil society as key enabling partners, building legitimacy and linkages with local communities, but in the service of EU/state determine development priorities. It once again demonstrates the neoliberal state's preference for discourses and selective practices of administrative decentralisation and local autonomy ultimately in service of monopoly-finance capital, as discussed in D/Development Regime Shifts Amidst Hegemonic Transition, adding an additional layer of insight into the modus operandi of the de-risking state in the realm of international D/development cooperation (Gabor 2021).

> 'The EFSD+ [European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus] guarantees are offered on favourable, highly competitive conditions. They allow private investors to finance projects in more challenging markets, by assuming the risks of more unstable environments while avoiding market distortions' (GGI-2021: 10); ' . . . [W]e will develop Global Gateway together with partner countries and invite the active participation of civil society as well as the local private sector in our exchanges'. (GGI-2021, 14)

Contextualising the EU D/Development Regime Shift

The ideological-discursive drift evident in our document analysis between 2017 and 2024 indicates at the very least a weakening and narrowing of the EU's international 'D'evelopment policy commitments and positionings. Our findings lend support to the geo-historical political economy framework and narrative outlined in D/Development Regime Shifts Amidst Hegemonic Transition. The LLD agenda has always been shot through with contradictions, given the backdrop of neoliberal capitalism against which its (partial and selective) implementation unfolded (Mohan and Stokke 2000). What the period since the 2016 political earthquake in the Global North demonstrates, however, is that even the ideological discourse of localisation and universalism is waning in the face of rising (neoliberal/authoritarian/de-risking) state capitalism.

Under EUC-2017, civil society strengthening and commitments to democratisation and universal human rights dominated the discourse. Multilateral cooperation is a much stronger theme here than in subsequent statements – in particular, the GGI-2021 and EUP-2024 – which introduce new and modified discourses around foreign interference, funding conditionality, transparency and accountability, EU-centric values and strategic interests, and de-risking. Short of any real evidential basis of a systematic problem in these respects, it appears that anti-NGO elements within the EU Parliament have weaponised the Qatargate scandal, which has much broader implications for political lobbying and corruption across all types of organisations, to reassert a pre-existing authoritarian agenda.

Given the strained political environment and the prominence of several widely publicised NGO governance failures/scandals in recent years, it is important for NGOs to engage with transparency and accountability debates and reform processes in good faith. At the same time, it is also imperative that NGOs do not cede the organisational and programmatic autonomy and self-determination necessary for working across multiple funders and (political) geographies. NGOs also stand to benefit from strategic autonomy in their 'D'evelopment cooperation partnerships in an increasingly multi-polar/multi-lateral global political economy. In this context, it may be in the EU's interest to grant NGOs the same strategic autonomy that it seeks for itself to navigate existing trading relationships, the diversity of member states' foreign and trade policy positionings, and the shifting geographies of historical capitalism and global hegemonic power. Unelected and unaccountable supranational foreign, trade, and security policy positioning is not a recipe for a stable political-economic Union in the present climate post Brexit. Better for the EU to provide guidance to member states by recommitting to multilateralism and locally led sustainable D/development.

Concluding Comments

This paper traces and reveals the ideological-discursive shifts in the EU's international D/development policy and position over the past decade by placing its widening D/development contradictions in world-historical context, and through comparative analysis of several touchstone policy positions and reports in the years since the financial crisis, Brexit and the emergence of Trumpism. D/development regime shifts have accelerated as the structural crisis of globalised and financialised neoliberal capitalism has deepened.

The coming months and years will be instructive as to the shape of things to come. The indications are bleak for substantive international 'D'evelopment cooperation through global inter-state cooperation. The more likely direction of travel appears to be a sharpening of hegemonic crisis and contestation/conflict in the global political economy. This tracks with the rise of (varieties of) state capitalism in the global D/development regime, and the consequent silencing/co-opting of NGOs into the service of state actors, with deepening restrictions of EU and non-EU NGO collaborative activities, voice and advocacy capacities. Regional power blocs and formations are gaining influence at the expense of multilateral organisations. Competition rather than cooperation seems to be the order of the day. As our critical discourse analysis indicates, recently emerging political-ideological formations within the European Parliament marked by their emphasis on EU interests and values over global or universal interests, values and solidarities are clearly influencing the shape and discursive logic of the emerging Brussels Consensus. Consistent with Barnier's concern regarding evidence of an 'authoritarian drift' in the EU,

the current direction of travel, marked by reductions in ODA and increases in defence budgets, points to concerning indicators of an evolving EU-First agenda

As Lapavitsas and EReNSEP Writing Collective (2023, 186) argue, '[t]he interregnum that commenced with the Great Crisis of 2007–09, marked by the Pandemic Crisis and the Russo-Ukrainian War, has witnessed the end of sole US hegemony'. This presents opportunities, particularly for 'middle powers' such as the EU, to leverage their strategic autonomy in (re)articulating an independent position on international 'D'evelopment policy. The EU could attempt to mediate between the US and China, so that hopefully 'existing tensions can be kept within bounds to allow for greater coordination and cooperation' (Carmody 2024, 16). Both East and West – Global North and Global South – clearly have lessons to learn from one another regarding (sustainable) D/development policy successes and failures. Bi-directional emulation of 'D'evelopment policy discourse and practice is already evident (see Alami, Dixon, and Mawdsley 2021), though this (so far partial and selective) shared learning is often not explicitly acknowledged. One possible alternative route suggests the (re)embedding of international 'D'evelopment policy and partnership in existing and expanded global frameworks and agreements that stress localisation, locally led 'D'evelopment, and decolonisation (see Artner and Yin 2023). This approach could help to remedy democratic and solidaristic deficits across the emerging varieties of state capitalist D/development.

This emancipatory rearticulation runs counter to neoliberal/authoritarian varieties of international 'D'evelopment partnerships, which aim merely to shift risk and responsibility from the state to civils society actors and NGOs as part of a broader privatisation and liberalisation agenda, while ultimately concentrating and centralising capitalist (state and economic) power in response to (at best) contradictory developmental implications.

But the winds of change are volatile, and precision in prediction is futile: those hoping and struggling for a better world will need to shape and seize the opportunities that arise. The legacies of multilateralism and global civil society will be difficult to erase entirely and may reassert themselves in surprising new forms as events unfold. Democratic and participatory governance reform is crucial to the legitimacy and effectiveness of NGOs as sustainable post/development actors and change makers.

Notes

1. Themes are generally listed according to order of magnitude (i.e. number of codes) throughout Document Analysis – Reshaping the EU International Development Regime of this paper. The precise number of codes is not reported for each theme, as relative magnitudes are deemed more relevant and insightful, alongside the (changing) qualitative

meanings imputed to codes. However, the coding structure and NVivo analysis (including quantitative coding data) is available upon request from the authors of this paper.

2. The Eurocentric genesis of supposedly universalist human rights and values cannot be ignored (Brohman 1995; Wallerstein 1997).
3. See Harth, Kriener, and Wolff (2023). Though EUP-2024 proposes restricting EU funding to 'all EU funding beneficiaries, including NGOs, that have misused or misappropriated EU funds, or engaged in activities contrary to the EU values enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union and the EU Charter, including inciting terrorism, hate speech, su pporting or glorifying violence, political and religious extremism as well as spreading disinformation under the disguise of intentionally falsified scientific data' (para. 50). These are of course contested terms that many in the Global South would ascribe to Western neo/colonialist adventurism, past and present (see Hickel 2017).

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

Funded/Co-funded by the European Union (ERC, GEOFORMATIONS, [101077353]). Views and opinions expressed are, however, those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

ORCID

Susan P. Murphy http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2270-9198
Cian McMahon http://orcid.org/0009-0004-5281-9525

References

Akinola, A. O., and R. Makombe. 2024. Rethinking the resurgence of military coups in Africa. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 60 (5):00219096231224680. doi: 10.1177/00219096231224680

Alami, I., and A. D. Dixon. 2024. *The spectre of state capitalism*, First ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Alami, I., A. D. Dixon, and E. Mawdsley. 2021. State capitalism and the new global d/development regime. *Antipode* 53 (5):1294–318. doi: 10.1111/anti.12725

Alami, I., and J. Taggart. 2024. A partial conversion: How the 'unholy trinity' of global economic governance adapts to state capitalism. *European Journal of International Relations Online First* 30 (4):867–93. doi: 10.1177/13540661241226472

Arrighi, G. [1994] 2010. *The long twentieth century: money, power, and the origins of our times*. Verso Books.

Artner, A., and Z. Yin. 2023. Towards a non-hegemonic world order – emancipation and the political agency of the global South in a changing world order. *Third World Quarterly* 44 (10):2193–207. doi: 10.1080/01436597.2023.2251422

Banks, N. 2021. The role and contributions of development NGOs to development cooperation: What do we know? In S. Chaturvedi et al. (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Development Cooperation for Achieving the 2030*. Cham: Springer International Publishing. pp. 671–88. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-57938-8_31

Barakat, S., and S. Milton. 2020. Localisation across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 15 (2):147–63. doi: 10.1177/1542316620922805

Biba, S. 2024. The European Union's place in United States–China strategic competition: How role dynamics drive Brussels towards Washington. *JCMS Journal of Common Market Studies* 63 (1):71–88. doi: 10.1111/jcms.13605

Brass, J. N., W. Longhofer, R. S. Robinson, and A. Schnable. 2018. Ngos and international development: A review of thirty-five years of scholarship. *World Development* 112:136–49. doi: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.07.016

Brohman, J. 1995. Universalism, Eurocentrism, and ideological bias in development studies: From modernisation to neoliberalism. *Third World Quarterly* 16 (1):121–40.

Carmody, P. 2019. *Development theory and practice in a changing world*. London: Routledge.

Carmody, P. 2024. 'Brics' enlargement: Power expansion or contraction in a changing world order?' https://www.tara.tcd.ie/handle/2262/104838.

Caulcutt, C. 2025. Michel Barnier slams 'authoritarian drift' in Brussels under Ursula von der Leyen – Politico https://www.politico.eu/article/michel-barnier-authoritarian-drift-ursula-von-der-leyen-france-eu/?utm_source=email&utm_medium=alert&utm_campaign=Michel%20Barnier%20slams%20%E2%80%98authoritarian%20drift%E2%80%99%20in%20Brussels%20under%20Ursula%20von%20der%20Leyen.

Chaturvedi, S., eds 2021. *The palgrave handbook of development cooperation for achieving the 2030 agenda: Contested collaboration*. Cham: Springer International Publishing. doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-57938-8.

Cheeseman, N., E. Bertrand, and S. Husaini. 2019. *A dictionary of African politics*. First edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press (Oxford quick reference). doi: 10.1093/acref/9780191828836.001.0001

Demaria, F. 2023. Post-development: From the critique of development to a pluriverse of alternatives. In S. Villamayor-Tomas and R. Muradian (eds), *The Barcelona school of ecological economics and political ecology*. Cham: Springer International Publishing (Studies in Ecological Economics), pp. 59–69. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-22566-6_6

Doane, D. 2024. *Ingo problem: power, privilege and renewal*. RUGBY: Practical Action Pub.

EU Parliament. 2024. 'Transparency and accountability of non-governmental organisations funded from the EU budget'. Texts adopted. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0036_EN.html.

European Commission. 2017. 'European Consensus on development - "our world, our dignity, our future"'. https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/european-development-policy/european-consensus-development_en.

European Commission. 2021. 'The global gateway'. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_en.

European Commission. 2024. *International partnerships*. Briefing Book. https://www.politico.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/18/draft-IntPa-briefing-for-next-Com-April-2024-1-cleaned.pdf.

European Court of Auditors. 2018. Transparency of EU funds implemented by NGOs: More effort needed. Special report no 35/2018. https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/publications/SR18_35.

Fairclough, N. 2013. Critical discourse analysis and critical policy studies. *Critical Policy Studies* 7 (2):177–97. doi: 10.1080/19460171.2013.798239

Farrell, H., and A. Newman. 2023. *Underground empire: how America weaponized the world economy*. Henry Holt and Company.

Fraser, N. 2017. A triple movement? Parsing the politics of crisis after Polanyi. In M. Burchardt and G. Kirn (eds), *Beyond Neoliberalism*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 29–42. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-45590-7_3

Fraser, N. 2023. *Cannibal capitalism: how our system is devouring democracy, care, and the planet and what we can do about it*. Verso Books.

Gabor, D. 2021. The Wall Street consensus. *Development & Change* 52 (3):429–59. doi: 10.1111/dech.12645

Galanis, G., C. Koutny, and I. Weber. 2024. Systemic cycles of accumulation and chaos in the world capitalist system: A missing link. *Socio-Economic Review* 22 (4):007. doi: 10.1093/ser/mwae007

Hart, G. 2010. Developments after the meltdown. *Antipode* 41 (s1):117–41. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8330.2009.00719.x

Harth, L., F. Kriener, and J. Wolff. 2023. The EU response to foreign interference: Legal issues and political risks. *Zeitschrift für ausländisches öffentliches Recht Und Völkerrecht/Heidelberg Journal of International Law* 83 (2):197–208. doi: 10.17104/0044-2348-2023-2-197

Harvey, D. 2005. *A brief history of neoliberalism*. USA: Oxford University Press.

Harvey, D. 2012. *Rebel cities: from the right to the city to the urban revolution*. Verso books.

Hegewald, S., and D. Schraff. 2024. Corruption and trust in the European Parliament: Quasi-experimental evidence from the Qatargate scandal. *European Journal of Political Research*. Online First. 10.1111/1475-6765.12654

Hickel, J. 2017. *The divide: a brief guide to global inequality and its solutions*. Random House.

Lapavitsas, C., and EReNSEP Writing Collective. 2023. *The state of capitalism: economy, society, and hegemony*. Verso Books.

Mawdsley, E., and J. Taggart 2022. Rethinking d/Development. *Progress in Human Geography* 46 (1):3–20. doi: 10.1177/03091325211053115.

McDonough, T., C. McMahon, and D. M. Kotz. 2021. *Handbook on social structure of accumulation theory*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

McMahon, C. 2025. Modern social structure of accumulation (SSA) theory: An integral innovation in heterodox economics. *The New School Economic Review* 13:29–44. https://www.nsereview.org/index.php/NSER/article/view/152.

Mirowski, P. 2014. *The political movement that dared not speak its own name: The neoliberal thought collective under erasure, institute for new economic thinking*. Accessed July 29, 2024. https://www.ineteconomics.org/research/research-papers/the-political-movement-that-dared-not-speak-its-own-name-the-neoliberal-thought-collective-under-erasure.

Mohan, G., and K. Stokke. 2000. Participatory development and empowerment: The dangers of localism. *Third World Quarterly* 21 (2):247–68. doi: 10.1080/01436590050004346

Mohan, G., and K. Stokke. 2008. The politics of localization: From depoliticizing development to politicizing democracy. In *The sage handbook of political geography*, ed. K. R. Cox, M. Low, and J. Robinson, pp. 545–62. Sage. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Giles-Mohan/publication/42794198_The_politics_of_localization_From_depoliticizing_development_to_politicizing_democracy/links/0deec51d316c801c20000000/The-politics-of-localization-From-depoliticizing-development-to-politicizing-democracy.pdf.

Movement, S. 2024. *Too southern to fund: The funding bias against the global South*. Peace Direct, (UK). https://www.peacedirect.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Final-Report-Too-Southern-To-Be-Funded.pdf.

Murphy, S. P. 2016. *Responsibility in an interconnected world: international assistance, duty, and action*, 1st ed. Cham: 2016 Springer International Springer (Studies in Global Justice, 13). 10.1007/978-3-319-31445-7

Murphy, S. P. 2022. The relationship between poverty and prosperity: A feminist relational account. *Journal of Global Ethics* 18 (1):82–99. doi: 10.1080/17449626.2022.2052155

Novovic, G. 2021. Can agenda 2030 bring about "localization"? Policy limitations of agenda 2030 in the broader global governance system. *Development Policy Review* 40 (4):dpr.12587. doi: 10.1111/dpr.12587

OECD. 2023. *Development co-operation report 2023: Debating the aid system*. OECD (Development Co-operation Report) doi: 10.1787/f6edc3c2-en

Robertson, S. L. 2010. The EU, 'regulatory state regionalism' and new modes of higher education governance. *Globalisation, Societies & Education* 8 (1):23–37. doi: 10.1080/14767720903574033

Schindler, S. 2023. The second Cold War: US-China competition for centrality in infrastructure, digital, production, and finance networks. *Geopolitics* 1–38. doi: 10.1080/14650045.2023.2253432

Schindler, S., I. Alami, and N. Jepson. 2023. Goodbye Washington confusion, hello Wall Street consensus: Contemporary state capitalism and the spatialisation of industrial strategy. *New Political Economy* 28 (2):223–40. doi: 10.1080/13563467.2022.2091534

Silver, B. J. 2019. Chapter 3: "Plunges into utter destruction" and the limits of historical capitalism. In *Capitalism in transformation*, ed. R. Atzmüller, B. Aulenbacher, U. Brand, F. Décieux, K. Fischer, and B. Sauer, pp. 35–45. Edward Elgar Publishing. https://www.elgaronline.com/edcollchap/edcoll/9781788974233/9781788974233.00008.xml.

Varma, T. 2024. European strategic autonomy: The path to a geopolitical Europe. *The Washington Quarterly*. 47 (1):65–83. doi: 10.1080/0163660X.2024.2327820

Verhelst, K., and W. A. X. E. 2024. *Focus harder to rival China's vast global investment plan, Brussels is told, Politico*. Accessed June 12, 2024. https://www.politico.eu/article/focus-hard-rival-china-investment-plan-belt-road-initiative-brussels-eu-global-gateway/.

Wallerstein, I. 1997. Eurocentrism and its avatars: The dilemmas of social science. *Sociological Bulletin* 46 (1):21–39. doi: 10.1177/0038022919970102