

Beyond declarations: Evaluating CFSP methodologies in Türkiye, the Western Balkans and the 'Accession Trio' countries



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ABSTRACT

Alignment with the European Union's (EU) Common Foreign and Security Policy has become a central benchmark of enlargement countries' strategic orientation and a key indicator of the enlargement process's credibility. Under Chapter 31 and relevant association agreements, candidates are expected to align their foreign, security and defence policies progressively with those of the EU prior to accession. This requirement has gained renewed political importance following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has heightened the role of sanctions, geopolitical positioning and foreign policy coherence within enlargement. However, past experience shows that formal pre-accession alignment does not always translate into post-accession cohesion, particularly where candidate countries maintain external dependencies or pursue hedging strategies. Current EU monitoring relies heavily on quantitative indicators, such as declaration alignment rates, which often fail to capture implementation and political intent. This study evaluates the existing methodology (2020–2025) and proposes a revised framework combining quantitative and qualitative indicators to provide a more accurate and policy-relevant assessment of Common Foreign and Security Policy alignment.

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List of abbreviations

AA	Association Agreement
AFET	European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs
CEFTA	Central European Free Trade Agreement
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DG ENEST	European Commission's Directorate-General for Enlargement and the Eastern Neighbourhood
EEAS	European External Action Service
EU	European Union
FIMI	Foreign information manipulation and interference
FTA	Free trade agreement
HR/VP	High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OPCW	Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
SAA	Stabilisation and Association Agreement
SALW	Small arms and light weapons
TEU	Treaty on European Union
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
USA	United States of America
WMD	Weapons of mass destruction

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Executive summary

Alignment with the European Union (EU)'s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) has become an increasingly important benchmark in the enlargement process, particularly following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the EU's growing emphasis on geopolitical cohesion. Candidate countries are expected not only to approximate the EU *acquis* domestically, but also to align their foreign, security and defence policies progressively with those of the Union. However, this study finds that the current methodology used by the European Commission and the European External Action Service to assess CFSP alignment is no longer sufficient for evaluating substantive foreign policy convergence.

Existing methodology relies heavily on quantitative alignment rates measuring candidate countries' endorsement of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission declarations and Council decisions. While this provides a useful baseline indicator, the study demonstrates that this approach systematically fails to capture implementation, political intent, strategic orientation and operational behaviour. As a result, countries with high formal alignment rates may simultaneously maintain strategic partnerships, political rhetoric or enforcement practices inconsistent with EU foreign policy priorities, while countries with lower formal alignment may still contribute meaningfully to broader European security objectives.

Using a mixed-methods approach combining document analysis, comparative case studies and elite interviews, the study evaluates current methodology against six analytical criteria: validity, objectivity, transparency, comparability, political relevance and accountability. Findings ultimately reveal a number of structural shortcomings.

Firstly, the methodology suffers from limited validity because it excludes politically consequential behaviour not directly reflected in declaration alignment rates, including sanctions implementation gaps, strategic relations with Russia or China and voting behaviour in international organisations. Secondly, objectivity is undermined by the disproportionate weight given to quantitative declaration counts relative to qualitative evidence of foreign policy divergence or convergence. Thirdly, transparency remains weak due to the absence of a publicly available written methodology and inconsistent disclosure of indicators, denominators and verification procedures. Fourthly, comparability across countries and over time is weakened by fluctuating denominators, retroactive alignment practices and inconsistent reporting standards. Fifthly, the methodology lacks political relevance because all declarations are weighted equally regardless of geopolitical significance. Finally, accountability mechanisms remain underdeveloped both for candidate countries and for the monitoring process itself.

To address these shortcomings, the study proposes a revised CFSP alignment methodology built around ten thematic dimensions combining quantitative and qualitative indicators. These include: alignment with High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission declarations and Council decisions; implementation of restrictive measures; voting behaviour in international organisations; relations with third countries; visa regime alignment; constructive foreign policy contributions; security and defence cooperation; non-proliferation and export controls; resilience against foreign information manipulation, interference and cyber threats; as well as regional relations and neighbourly cooperation.

The revised methodology uses structured expert interviews across ten thematic dimensions, combining more directly measurable indicators, such as timely alignment and voting behaviour, with qualitative assessment of implementation capacity, strategic orientation and resilience against foreign information manipulation, interference and cyber threats. This preserves comparability while also identifying where substantive divergence occurs, thereby improving its usefulness for parliamentary scrutiny and political decision-making. The framework explicitly excludes retroactive alignment from annual calculations and

places greater emphasis on politically salient issues such as sanctions against Russia, strategic dependencies and implementation capacity.

The study applies the revised framework to selected case studies, including Serbia, Türkiye, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine and Georgia. These cases demonstrate that the revised methodology provides a more nuanced and politically meaningful assessment than the current system, particularly by including improved capture of performative alignment, as well as strategic hedging in regard to implementation deficiencies and divergence between formal endorsement and practical conduct.

The study concludes that CFSP alignment should not be treated merely as a technical accession benchmark but as a test of candidate countries' readiness to participate fully in the political solidarity and strategic coordination required within the EU. A methodology focused primarily on formal declaration alignment risks obscuring important geopolitical realities and weakening the credibility of enlargement policy. Strengthening CFSP alignment assessment is therefore essential both for the accession process's integrity and the EU's future coherence as a geopolitical actor.

1 Introduction

The alignment of candidate and potential candidate countries with the European Union (EU)'s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) has become a central benchmark in measuring their strategic orientation and commitment for membership, as well as the enlargement policy's credibility¹. Countries applying for accession are obliged not only to approximate the *acquis* in domestic law but also align their international treaty obligations, foreign, security and defence policies with those of the Union ahead of membership². This expectation is embedded in Chapter 31 of the accession negotiations, which covers foreign, security and defence policy, further reinforced by Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAAs) that in some cases, establish a commitment to promote gradual alignment with CFSP³. Included here are Association Agreements (AAs) with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, together with SAAs with Western Balkan countries.

The European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) has repeatedly underscored that foreign policy alignment with the evolving CFSP *acquis* is not merely one technical condition among many but a crucial indicator of future political unity in an enlarged Union⁴. This emphasis has intensified following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the subsequent adoption of multiple rounds of EU (and Group of Seven) restrictive measures against Russia and its allies⁵. War on Europe's eastern border has reshaped the geopolitical context in which the EU conducts its CFSP and generated new fault lines in the international order. In response, the EU has made unprecedented use of sanctions and other CFSP instruments, explicitly framing enlargement as a geopolitical project, with a view to integrating states that share the Union's strategic orientation and willingness to shoulder the costs of collective foreign policy decisions⁶.

Drawing on past enlargement experience, early foreign policy divergence has often persisted post accession, particularly when candidate states retain asymmetric dependencies on external actors during negotiations⁷. For instance, Greece and Cyprus maintained distinct positions on Türkiye even after joining, highlighting the limits of pre-accession alignment as a predictor of post-accession CFSP cohesion – a risk amplified in today's highly fragmented geopolitical context. In practice, small and medium-sized states in contested regions may pursue complex strategies that combine formal alignment with the EU and

¹ Council, [Presidency conclusions on Enlargement](#), 16933/25, 16 December 2025.

² Council, [Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association Process – Council conclusions](#), 15935/22, 13 December 2022.

³ European Commission, [Communication on Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans](#), COM(2020)57, 5 February 2020; European Commission, [Remarks by Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi at the press conference on the revised enlargement methodology](#), Statement, 20 February 2020; Eur-Lex, [Association Agreement with Georgia](#), webpage, nd; Eur-Lex, [Association Agreement with Moldova](#), webpage, nd; Eur-Lex, [Association Agreement with Ukraine](#), webpage, nd; Eur-Lex, [Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Albania](#), webpage, nd; Eur-Lex, [Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), webpage, nd; Eur-Lex, [Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Montenegro](#), webpage, nd; Eur-Lex, [Stabilisation and Association Agreement with North Macedonia](#), webpage, nd; Eur-Lex, [Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Serbia](#), webpage, nd.

⁴ European Parliament, [EU enlargement: a strategic investment in Europe's security and stability](#), Press Release, 11 March 2026; European Parliament, [Serbia and enlargement: MEPs expect real commitment to EU values](#), Press Release, 8 July 2026.

⁵ Multiple Council Decisions (CFSP) on sanctions against Russia, 2022–2025 for example, Council, [Decision \(CFSP\) 2025/2572, amending Decision \(CFSP\) 2024/2643 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's destabilising activities](#), *Official Journal of the EU*, L series, 15 December 2025.

⁶ European Commission, [2022 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen](#), Speech, 14 September 2022; B. Lippert, [EU enlargement: geopolitics meets integration policy; the EU is set to add gradualist elements to its enlargement doctrine](#), *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit*, January 2024; H. Brandt et al., [Growing Resilient Together: Reshaping EU-Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy in a Geopolitical Era](#), InvigoratEU Conceptual Background Paper (D3.2), July 2024; F. Schimmelfennig, [Geopolitical enlargement](#), in M. Jopp and J. Pollak (eds), *The European Union's Geopolitics: The Lackluster World Power*, Springer, Cham, 2025, pp. 79–98; V. Anghel and J. Džankić, [Wartime EU: consequences of the Russia–Ukraine war on the enlargement process](#), *Journal of European Integration*, Vol 45, No 3, 2023, pp. 487–501. G. Bosse, [Has the EU Really Become More Geopolitical? Rethinking the Security-Values Nexus in EU Enlargement](#), *European Democracy Hub*, May 2024.

⁷ F. Schimmelfennig and U. Sedelmeier, [The Europeanization of Eastern Europe: the external incentives model revisited](#), *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol 26, No 6, 2004, pp. 1–20.

substantive ties with other powers, complicating any straightforward scoring of CFSP convergence⁸. Such hedging strategies – maintaining economic, military or diplomatic relations with Russia or China while formally endorsing EU positions – enable candidate countries to maximise flexibility in volatile geopolitical environments, where full alignment might entail significant domestic political costs or economic losses⁹. These findings highlight the need for a revised assessment framework that moves beyond aggregate alignment percentages to incorporate qualitative indicators of political will, implementation capacity and strategic orientation, thereby enhancing the usability of alignment assessment for political evaluation within the enlargement process.

Within this setting, the degree and quality of candidate countries' alignment with EU sanctions against Russia, their voting behaviour in multilateral fora such as the United Nations (UN) and their broader foreign policy choices *vis-à-vis* major powers such as the United States of America (USA), China and Russia have acquired considerable political salience. These stakes are heightened by the consensus-based nature of CFSP, where post-accession coordination will demand full commitment to EU positions, amid risks of internal division in an enlarged Union facing sustained great-power challenges. Against this backdrop, the central research question here is: Does the current system for measuring and monitoring CFSP alignment provide an objective, relevant and comparable basis for parliamentary scrutiny and political assessment of candidate countries' preparedness for EU membership?

The revised enlargement methodology adopted in 2020 already sought to strengthen the accession process's political steering and to 'allow for more thorough political discussions on thematic areas and to identify opportunities for early alignment and integration into EU policies'¹⁰. Chapter 31 on CFSP alignment was grouped in Cluster 6 on external relations, alongside Chapter 30, underscoring that external action and foreign policy coherence are integral to the overall assessment of readiness for membership. Subsequent Commission communications on enlargement have explicitly tied gradual integration benefits to rule-of-law performance as well as progressive and stronger alignment with CFSP, including restrictive measures. The 2025 Communication, for instance, praised Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina for maintaining full alignment with CFSP, as well as Ukraine and Moldova for a 'very high' alignment rate. At the same time, persistent implementation challenges were flagged regarding Serbia, Georgia and Türkiye, noting their low alignment rates. Hence, a significant increase in alignment with EU sanctions and foreign policy positions was strongly encouraged¹¹.

While measuring CFSP alignment is inherently challenging, the EU's current methodology – albeit a valuable starting point – requires revision not only to ensure that it offers an objective, relevant and comparable framework for assessing foreign policy alignment but also to address areas where it is incomplete, incorrect, misapplied or insufficient. European Parliament resolutions have pointed to an apparent tension between formal Commission reports and observable foreign policy behaviour, rhetoric and domestic implementation gaps in some candidate states¹². Commission reports are often built around quantitative indicators, such as percentage alignment with High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) statements and Council declarations. In a number of cases, Parliament has disputed the Commission's evaluations, notably on alignment with EU sanctions against Russia and has urged a more politically meaningful assessment that

⁸ C.-C. Kuik, 'The Essence of Hedging: Malaysia and Singapore's Response to a Rising China', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol 30, No 2, 2021, pp. 159–185.

⁹ C.-C. Kuik, 'Getting hedging right: a small-state perspective', *China International Strategy Review*, Vol 3, No 3, 2021.

¹⁰ European Commission, [Communication on Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans](#), COM(2020)57, 5 February 2020.

¹¹ European Commission, 'Commission reports on the progress of aspiring EU members', News Article, 4 November 2025.

¹² European Parliament, [Implementation of the common foreign and security policy – annual report 2024](#), P10_TA(2025)0057, *Official Journal of the EU, C series*, 9 September 2025; European Parliament, 'Serbia and enlargement: MEPs expect real commitment to EU values', Press Release, 8 July 2026

captures both the quality and extent of alignment¹³. Concerns about possible politicisation of enlargement portfolios, including debates around the role of the former Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, have further sharpened demand for transparent, objective and accountable methodology¹⁴. Thus, objective and robust monitoring, measuring and reporting of applicant countries' foreign policies has become vital for the political assessment of their alignment trends and the credibility of enlargement decisions.

This paper will first reconstruct and critically assess the EU's existing methodology for appraising candidate countries' foreign policy alignment with CFSP across the period 2020–2025, focusing in particular on sanctions against Russia, key CFSP decisions *vis-à-vis* major powers, such as the USA, China and Russia, as well as voting patterns in multilateral organisations. This explicitly includes assessing whether written methodological guidance exists, how comprehensive the underlying list of CFSP acts and statements is, whether monitoring resources are commensurate to the task and how retroactive, belated or reversed alignments are treated. It will then examine to what extent current practice meets the criteria of validity, objectivity, transparency, comparability, political relevance and accountability; shortfalls will also be examined, including those captured during implementation on the ground and politically salient acts that may be underweighted or omitted.

On this basis, the study will develop a revised methodology and scoreboard that place greater emphasis on qualitative, politically crucial alignment and genuine convergence of foreign policy behaviour. It will apply this framework to selected case studies representing both under-performing and apparently well-performing countries. The overall aim is to provide AFET and the European Parliament with an analytically grounded and practically usable tool that: combines quantitative and qualitative data; reflects foreign policy priorities; more accurately captures both formal CFSP alignment and its implementation in practice. The result is a more credible and strategically coherent enlargement policy.

1.1 Methodological approach

Adopted here is a mixed-methods design combining qualitative policy analysis, systematic document review, semi-structured elite interviews and comparative case study analysis covering the period 2020–2025. This methodological approach is designed to reconstruct and evaluate the European Commission/European External Action Service (EEAS)'s monitoring practices regarding candidate countries' alignment with CFSP. While quantitative indicators – such as declaration alignment rates reported by the EEAS and the European Commission – provide an important starting point, the study focuses primarily on assessing how these indicators are produced, interpreted and incorporated into enlargement reporting. To this end, documentary evidence, interview material and comparative case analysis are triangulated to identify the current methodology's strengths and weaknesses, thereby supporting development of an improved assessment framework.

The document review focuses on: European Commission enlargement reports (2020–2025); EEAS statistics and documentation concerning CFSP alignment; Council decisions and declarations relating to restrictive measures; European Parliament resolutions and AFET reports; UN voting records; relevant national legislation and implementation measures; as well as official statements by political leaders and government institutions in candidate countries. These sources were selected because they constitute the principal documentary basis through which CFSP alignment is monitored, reported, implemented and politically evaluated within the present enlargement process. The documentary analysis is further

¹³ I. Stasiukevych and M. Malovec, [EU sanctions against Russia: alignment of the EU enlargement countries](#), PE 639.327, *European Parliament's Directorate General for External Policies of the Union*, July 2022.

¹⁴ A. Mgaloblishvili, ['The Illiberal Shield: Hungary's Role in Averting EU Democracy Promotion in Georgia'](#), *Journal of Illiberalism Studies*, Vol 5, No 3, 2025, pp. 131–154.

complemented by scholarly literature on enlargement conditionality, foreign policy alignment, sanctions implementation and strategic hedging behaviour.

The study draws on nine semi-structured elite interviews conducted with three officials from the European Commission's Directorate-General for Enlargement and the Eastern Neighbourhood (DG ENEST), three officials from the EEAS and five staff from EU Delegations in candidate countries, particularly officials working within Political Sections (all anonymised). Given the absence of a publicly available written methodology governing the calculation and reporting of CFSP alignment rates, the interviews served to clarify monitoring procedures, internal coordination mechanisms, verification practices, resource constraints as well as the treatment of issues such as retroactive alignment and sanctions implementation¹⁵. The interviews were not held to generate a representative sample of institutional views but rather complement, contextualise and verify findings derived from documentary analysis. Given the highly specialised nature of CFSP alignment monitoring and the relatively small number of officials directly involved in these processes, a limited number of expert interviews is appropriate and consistent with qualitative elite-interview methodologies.

The study included a comparative assessment of current CFSP alignment measurement across ten current EU candidate and potential candidate countries: the six Western Balkan candidates and potential candidates (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia), the three 'Accession Trio' countries (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia) and Türkiye. This comprehensive scope is justified by the Western Balkans' status as an enlargement priority since Thessaloniki 2003, as well as the significant variation in regional alignment performance. This varies significantly across the Western Balkans, from near-perfect declaration rates in Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia, to Bosnia and Herzegovina's performance tempered by sanctions implementation gaps and Serbia's persistent under-performance, around 20–30 % due to activities involving Russia. This offers a rigorous test of methodological consistency under comparable SAA frameworks and external (particularly Russian) influence gradients. The Eastern enlargement countries bring critical contrast as post-2022 applicants – albeit data regarding their alignment rates has been available since 2017 – with Ukraine and Moldova sustaining 'very high' alignment records amid wartime pressures, while Georgia's democratic backsliding, frozen accession process and declining alignment rates are testing the framework under varying geopolitical and domestic conditions. Finally, Türkiye, despite remaining a key strategic partner for the EU, stands out for its substantially lower level of alignment compared to other candidate countries (around 4 % on statements by the HR/VP on behalf of the EU and Council decisions on sanctions). A comparative account covering the existing state of play across all candidate states provides a necessary and useful starting point for designing a revised methodology as well as comparing current and proposed alignment approaches across strategically selected in-depth case studies.

The EU methodology was assessed through six criteria: (1) validity – or how comprehensively the CFSP acts selected for comparison, including HR/VP declarations, Council decisions and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions, capture politically critical decisions such as sanctions on Russia and other positions; (2) objectivity – whether the quantitative focus on declaration rates systematically downplays qualitative implementation and political will; (3) transparency – regarding public access to underlying indicators, scoreboards and verification steps; (4) comparability – across countries and over time, notably between longer-tracked Western Balkans/Türkiye and newer Eastern applicants; (5) political relevance – in prioritising high-stakes issues (sanctions enforcement, non-EU fora abstentions, Russia/China military ties) over routine declarations while assigning weightings proportional to salience; and (6) accountability – resource adequacy in EEAS/EU Delegations and handling of retroactive or reversed alignments. Each criterion will draw on triangulated evidence based on document analysis (enlargement reports against

¹⁵ The current methodology was not made available to the research team despite requests submitted through the appropriate channels

primary CFSP acts), interview insights into internal processes and case applications to identify patterns of any gaps or bias.

Drawing on these analytical findings, the study developed a revised methodology and accompanying scoreboard that combines quantitative and qualitative indicators, with weighted scoring which better reflects the state of foreign policy alignment and ensures comparability across case studies. Specific alignment scores, calculated on the basis of mixed-method assessment categories and ensuring comparability while also accounting for case-specific context, were defined thoroughly following the in-depth analysis. This revised methodology was then applied to a smaller set of strategically selected case studies (such as: Serbia and Türkiye – low alignment; Georgia – shifting alignment; Bosnia and Herzegovina – uneven alignment; Montenegro and Ukraine – high alignment) to demonstrate its analytical added value in greater depth, as well as showcasing how the revised methodology compares to and diverges from the current practice of measuring alignment.

2 CFSP alignment in enlargement architecture

The concept of a CFSP based on shared strategies and positions among Member States was initially met with considerable scepticism. Some Member States feared that a common policy framework would entail a significant loss of sovereignty, while both internal and external observers questioned whether the EU could develop coherent foreign policy positions. Thereafter, developments in the 1990s accelerated efforts toward a common foreign policy framework. The 1993 Treaty on EU (TEU) (Maastricht Treaty) established the CFSP as one of the pillars of the EU. While the 2009 Lisbon Treaty subsequently dissolved this pillar structure to grant the EU a unified legal personality, it did nevertheless retain specific, intergovernmental decision-making procedures for CFSP. Subsequent institutional reforms further strengthened the EU's foreign policy architecture, including the creation of the High Representative role and, later, the establishment of the EEAS under the Lisbon Treaty¹⁶.

By the late 1990s, CFSP alignment had also become an important benchmark in the EU enlargement process. Candidate countries were expected to align their international commitments along with foreign, security and defence policies progressively with those of the Union prior to accession. Beginning in 1998, the European Commission's annual enlargement reports monitored candidate countries' progress, including their degree of CFSP alignment¹⁷. In parallel, SAAs with Western Balkan countries and AAs with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia further institutionalised commitments toward gradual CFSP alignment.

2.1 Legal and procedural embedding

An expectation of CFSP alignment is rooted in the broader legal and political framework governing EU accession. Article 49 of the TEU states that 'Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union'¹⁸. Those values include respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights, including minority rights. Article 21 of the TEU links these internal values directly to the Union's external action, mandating that the EU advance democracy and the rule of law globally. Furthermore, Article 24(3) of the TEU obligates Member States and, by extension, aspiring candidates, to support the Union's external and security policy actively and unreservedly in a spirit of loyalty and mutual solidarity.

AAs and SAAs further institutionalise commitments by the Accession Trio and Western Balkan countries to align their foreign policy positions progressively with those of the Union. The AAs adopt particularly explicit language on CFSP alignment. For instance, the EU-Georgia AA states that 'the Parties [the EU and Georgia]

¹⁶ W. Wessels and F. Bopp, [The Institutional Architecture of CFSP after the Lisbon Treaty – Constitutional breakthrough or challenges ahead?](#), *CHALLENGE – The Changing Landscape of European Liberty and Security*, June 2008.

¹⁷ C. Hillion, ['Adaptation for autonomy? Candidates for EU membership and the CFSP'](#), *Global Affairs*, Vol 3, No 3, 2017, pp. 265–275.

¹⁸ EU, [Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union](#), *Official Journal of the EU*, C 202/43, 7 June 2016.

shall intensify their dialogue and cooperation and promote gradual convergence in the area of foreign and security policy, including the CSDP¹⁹. The SAAs similarly emphasise foreign policy by affirming that ‘the political dialogue is intended to promote in particular (...) common views on security and stability in Europe, including cooperation in the areas covered by the CFSP of the EU’²⁰. While these bilateral agreements established the initial legal architecture for gradual convergence, granting candidate status to the Accession Trio following the 2022 geopolitical shift fundamentally accelerated these requirements, moving them from a framework of voluntary cooperation to strict accession conditionality.

Regional strategies have further reinforced the importance of CFSP alignment. In 2018, the EU adopted a renewed strategy for the Western Balkans, which stressed that candidate countries ‘must also speed up their alignment with all EU foreign policy positions, including restrictive measures’²¹. The strategy further argued that EU membership ‘requires sharing the principles, values and goals the Union seeks to promote in its neighbourhood and beyond, including full alignment with the CFSP’²². This political expectation was operationalised under the European Commission’s 2020 Revised Enlargement Methodology. Within this framework, negotiation chapters are grouped into thematic clusters. CFSP (Chapter 31) and External Relations (Chapter 30) are housed under Cluster 6: External Relations. Crucially, the revised methodology links progress in individual clusters directly to a candidate’s overall political commitment, meaning stagnation or backsliding in CFSP alignment can actively freeze progress across the entire negotiation architecture.

Operationally, CFSP alignment is monitored under Chapter 31 (Foreign, Security and Defence Policy), which states that ‘applicant countries are required to progressively align with EU statements and to apply sanctions and restrictive measures when and where required’. Yet, Chapter 30 (External Relations) also covers issues that are of key relevance for CFSP, including the EU’s common trade policy, bilateral agreements with third countries, as well as development policy and humanitarian aid. While all negotiation chapters must be provisionally closed prior to accession, Chapters 30 and 31 represent the core of the EU’s external identity. Unlike highly technical chapters (such as agriculture or transport), Chapter 31 is deeply political and requires no transposition of EU law into national legislation; rather, it demands immediate, real-time political conformity with Council Decisions. Currently, a designated group of third countries, including EU candidate countries and European Economic Area states, participates in the alignment process based on longstanding political arrangements whereby they are formally invited by the HR/VP to clear EU declarations and restrictive measures²³. In addition, Kosovo aligns voluntarily to demonstrate its strategic orientation.

2.2 Institutional division of labour

The CFSP’s overall direction is determined by EU Member States, with decisions generally requiring unanimity in the Council. Within this framework, the HR/VP plays a central coordinating role by facilitating consensus among Member States as well as ensuring coherence and consistency regarding the EU’s external action²⁴. HR/VP also heads the EEAS, which is the EU’s diplomatic body responsible for supporting the formulation and implementation of foreign policy.

¹⁹ EU, [Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part](#), *Official Journal of the EU*, L 260/4, 30 August 2014.

²⁰ EU, [Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Albania, of the other part – Protocols – Declarations](#), *Official Journal of the EU*, L 107, 28 April 2009.

²¹ European Commission, [A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans](#), COM(2018) 65 final, 6 February 2018.

²² European Commission, [A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans](#), 6 February 2018.

²³ Interview with an EEAS official, 13 May 2026, written interview.

²⁴ European Council, [‘EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy’](#), webpage, nd.

In practice, though, CFSP decision-making often extends beyond formal institutional structures. Delreux and Keukeleire argue that foreign policy coordination frequently occurs through informal arrangements involving *ad hoc* coalitions of Member States working alongside the HR/VP and other senior EU actors²⁵. Such informal mechanisms have become particularly important in periods of geopolitical crisis, when rapid coordination and political flexibility are required.

Regarding enlargement, the EEAS plays a leading institutional role in monitoring CFSP alignment among candidate and partner countries. This includes inviting third countries to align with EU foreign policy declarations and restrictive measures, as well as assessing the degree of alignment. This effort is focused on the headquarters, with EU Delegations reportedly not having an active role in assessing the CFSP alignment rate²⁶. Yet, the European Commission leads efforts on negotiations with candidate countries and integrates CFSP alignment into the broader accession framework, evaluating candidates' progress alongside other political criteria. A functional division of labour, therefore, exists between the two actors. The EEAS is primarily tasked with technical coordination and monitoring CFSP alignment, whereas the European Commission incorporates these assessments into the accession process's political conditionality²⁷.

2.3 Political steering (2020 methodology)

Although CFSP alignment has long formed part of the EU's external relations and enlargement framework, its political significance has increased markedly over the past five years. Interviewees highlighted Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, broader geopolitical instability and the prospect of a second Trump administration as key developments that have brought CFSP alignment to the forefront of enlargement policy debates. These developments have intensified discussions on revising the enlargement methodology by elevating CFSP alignment to the accession process's so-called 'fundamentals'. In institutional terms, this refers to a growing demand among various Member States to relocate Chapter 31 into Cluster 1 (Fundamentals), which serves as the negotiation timeline's absolute gatekeeper. While CFSP alignment is currently a formal consideration in accession evaluations, it is nevertheless not treated as a decisive *de jure* criterion for advancement in the enlargement process. The 2020 methodology's emphasis on 'stronger political steering' and 'reversibility' has allowed Member States to leverage Chapter 31. Under these provisions, the EU can stagnate negotiations, pause funding, or refuse to open entire clusters if a candidate country exhibits strategic backsliding or diverges from EU restrictive measures. Increasingly, policymakers and experts argue that this informal leverage should be formalised, making full alignment a defining, non-negotiable condition for future enlargement.

3 Current Commission/EEAS monitoring practices

In 1993, TEU identified CFSP as one of the EU's key pillars. This resulted in greater emphasis and importance being assigned to achieving consensus on external policy decisions. Although the formal pillar structure was abolished by the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, CFSP retains specific decision-making rules and instruments distinct from other areas of EU external action. A similar logic was then applied to the enlargement process; candidate countries were and still are expected to align their foreign policy with that of the Union. A formal monitoring mechanism for this alignment began in 1998 when the EU first started publishing regular reports evaluating the status of accession progress, including CFSP, for each applicant

²⁵ T. Delreux and S. Keukeleire, '[Informal Division of Labour in EU foreign policy-making](#)', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol 24, No 10, 2016, pp. 1471–1490.

²⁶ Interview with a DG ENEST official, 5 May 2026, conducted online; Interview with an EEAS official 1, 6 May 2026, conducted online.

²⁷ Interview with a DG ENEST official, 12 May 2026, conducted online.

state. Thereafter, statistical records of alignment with CFSP declarations have been maintained since 2011²⁸.

However, findings from elite interviews show that there is no written methodology informing the monitoring of CFSP alignment. This process is described as 'fairly mechanistic', looking at the alignment of candidate countries with declarations on behalf of the EU, including those on sanctions²⁹. Each declaration is weighted equally, thus no additional importance is given to more politically salient declarations. This form of quantitative assessment captures solely the percentage of declarations a specific candidate country is aligned with. While it also claims to measure sanctions, it looks only at whether the country has aligned with EU declarations on such restrictive measures, not the actual implementation of measures into domestic law and practice.

EEAS drives the monitoring process by calculating declarations' alignment and providing this number to the Commission. Interviews have highlighted that some units within the Commission perform a quality check on the number provided, while others just accept the EEAS number³⁰. The Commission then uses this figure not only for the annual enlargement reports but also for high-level EU officials' speaking points at bilateral meetings with the country under consideration³¹. While elite interviewees described this division of labour as efficient, it also appeared to create some disconnect between officials directly involved in the mathematical monitoring and those who were not. Those outside appeared less familiar with the methodology and hence described it somewhat differently³².

Alongside the quantitative monitoring, which looks only at declarations, Chapter 31 in the annual enlargement reports covers a wide range of issues. An example is participation in CSDP missions; each enlargement report describes whether the country under consideration is actively participating in and making substantial contributions to EU crisis management missions and operations. Moreover, Chapter 31 assesses the institutional framework for CFSP and CSDP in candidate countries, examining participation in CFSP political dialogue formats and EU-led crisis management structures.

3.1 Tracking declaration alignment

Under the current methodology, which calculates only alignment with declarations (including those on sanctions), these alone determine the final CFSP alignment score. Declarations are never mentioned in the treaty and are not official Union instruments – as defined in Article 23(41) of the TEU. Hence, they do not carry any legal or formal value but are characterised as a form of 'informal instrument' akin to political dialogues with third countries³³. Considering the complexity in finding a common view, declarations are often worded in general terms and do not touch upon each foreign policy matter but simply those where Member States can find agreement³⁴.

Not all declarations and statements are analysed for CFSP alignment. Only statements by the HR/VP on behalf of the EU ('EU27 statements') are considered in the official methodology. Declarations by the HR/VP reflect the EU's official position as they are issued under the High Representative's authority only after prior consultation with and agreement from Member States³⁵. There are many other types of

²⁸ Figures drawn from individual country enlargement reports starting from 2011, available on: European Commission, '[Strategy and Reports – Previous documents](#)', webpage, nd.

²⁹ Interview with an EEAS official 1, 6 May 2026, conducted online; Interview with an EEAS official 2, 6 May 2026, conducted online.

³⁰ Interview with a DG ENEST official, 5 May 2026, conducted online; Interview with a DG ENEST official, 12 May 2026, conducted online.

³¹ Interview with a DG ENEST official, 14 May 2026, conducted online.

³² Interview with a DG ENEST official, 12 May 2026, conducted online.

³³ B. Van Vooren and R. A. Wessel, *EU External Relations Law: Text, Cases and Materials*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2014, pp. 381–382.

³⁴ P. J. Cardwell, '[Values in the European Union's Foreign Policy: An analysis and assessment of CFSP declarations](#)', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol 21, No 4, 2016, pp. 601–621.

³⁵ Interview with an EEAS official 1, 6 May 2026, conducted online.

statements and declarations issued by a variety of EU institutions and spokespersons but these do not require prior Member State agreement and, as such, would not provide a coherent picture of the Union's foreign policy. For instance, between 1 January and 31 December 2025, the EU issued 135 declarations with which candidate and partner countries were invited to align themselves³⁶.

Current methodology assigns equal weight to all declarations, irrespective of their political relevance. In practice, this means that declarations on politically salient issues, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine, count the same as others which are less consequential.

Various interviewees identified the timing of alignment as a contentious issue, particularly regarding the permissibility of retroactive alignment³⁷. This practice emerged in 2014–2015, partly in response to the limited time previously available for partner countries to declare alignment. According to interviewees, declarations of alignment are now often accepted even months after the original CFSP act was issued, raising broader questions about how alignment should be measured and whether delayed alignment reflects the same level of political commitment as timely participation.

Retroactive alignment enables candidate countries to increase their alignment rate shortly before politically significant moments, such as the opening of accession negotiations or publication of annual enlargement reports. For instance, in 2025 Serbia made extensive use of this practice by significantly increasing its alignment only days before the enlargement report's launch. As a result, the process risks becoming largely performative, serving primarily to improve the candidate countries' political image at critical stages of the enlargement process rather than reflecting sustained policy alignment.

3.2 Sanctions and restrictive measures

Some declarations are adopted specifically to record third-country alignment with restrictive measures. In those cases, the HR/VP issues a declaration that refers directly to a recently adopted Council conclusion on sanctions, outlining which third countries have aligned themselves. These declarations typically include sentences such as 'They [the third countries] will ensure that their national policies conform to this Council Decision'³⁸. Such wording shows that the declaration itself merely records political alignment without tracking actual implementation or enforcement of the sanction regime. Similarly, the number itself does not provide insights into whether candidate countries facilitate sanction circumvention, as is the case for Türkiye³⁹.

The Commission already recognises these risks, particularly where sensitive goods may be re-exported to Russia through third countries. Common High Priority Items are especially relevant here, as they include dual-use and advanced-technology goods used in, or critical to, Russian military systems⁴⁰. This is also reflected in the enlargement process. In its 2025 enlargement reports, the Commission notes, for example, that Serbia cooperates with the EU on sanctions circumvention but should step up efforts to address the risk of trade triangulation⁴¹. Regarding Türkiye, the Commission recognises steps taken to prevent re-export of sanctioned and economically critical goods, while also flagging concerns about: continued non-alignment with EU Russia sanctions; persistent 'false transit' of Common High Priority List items declared for Central Asia but ultimately reaching Russia; and insufficient cooperation on falsified-origin cases⁴².

³⁶ I. Novaković et al., [An analysis of Serbia's alignment with the European Union's foreign policy declarations and measures: Annual review for 2025](#), ISAC – Centar za međunarodne i bezbednosne poslove, February 2026..

³⁷ Interview with a DG ENEST official, 5 May 2026, conducted online; Interview with EEAS officials, 14 May 2026, conducted online.

³⁸ Council, '[Statement by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the alignment of certain third countries concerning restrictive measures against cyber-attacks threatening the Union or its Member States](#)', Press release, 29 May 2026.

³⁹ M. Zolandz and S. Noorbaloochi, [Russia sanctions and circumvention: Fortifying global due diligence and screening in the face of evolving schemes](#), *Journal of Financial Compliance*, Vol 8, No 4, 2025.

⁴⁰ European Commission, [List of Common High Priority Items \(Version of February 2024\)](#), 22 February 2024.

⁴¹ European Commission, [Serbia 2025 Report](#), SWD(2025) 755, 4 November 2025.

⁴² European Commission, [Türkiye 2025 Report](#), SWD(2025) 756, 4 November 2025.

However, the current methodology fails to account for a candidate country's administrative and judicial enforcement capacity. While the Commission can initiate legal infringement procedures against EU Member States for failing to enforce restrictive measures, it lacks the legal jurisdiction to police customs or audit financial assets inside sovereign candidate states. Consequently, the EU's monitoring architecture remains fundamentally dependent on self-reporting by the candidate countries' national competent authorities. This heavily incentivises a performative approach where candidates pass legislative alignments on paper but lack the domestic enforcement mechanisms – or political will – to prosecute sanctions violations locally.

3.3 Remaining EEAS areas

As previously mentioned, the CFSP alignment figure simply factors in alignment with declarations, including those on sanctions. However, Chapter 31 addresses a variety of additional issues, namely: political dialogue, restrictive measures, engagement within international organisations, conflict prevention, non-proliferation and disarmament, strategic export controls, security measures, participation in CSDP missions and foreign information manipulation as well as interference and cyber threats. While declaration tracking relies on a strict, binary quantitative formula, these remaining areas are evaluated through a subjective, qualitative lens. For instance, one interviewee emphasised that, when it comes to voting records in international organisations, there is no predefined voting list that is systematically tracked across every year; rather, the focus varies from year to year, capturing those votes that were politically relevant in a given reporting cycle⁴³. The EEAS geographic units draft these narrative assessments based on political reporting, diplomatic demarches and bilateral security dialogues, making the final text highly dependent on the strategic context of one specific country in question.

Interviewees reported having a structure for Chapter 31, as for other Chapters, which is shared across different country teams and applicable to different countries⁴⁴. However, the structure and elements included can change depending on the country being considered, with Serbia and Türkiye, for instance, being tracked against a subchapter on engagement with third actors, including Russia and China. In recent monitoring cycles, this approach has also expanded to include Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) and cyber resilience.

3.4 Reporting patterns across candidate countries

Within the EEAS, responsibility for measuring CFSP alignment rests primarily with the individual country teams, each of which assesses alignment for its respective candidate country. In parallel, a thematic CFSP team conducts its own calculations before sharing its findings and alignment figures with the country teams, which have final responsibility for the assessment. Coordination between thematic and geographic teams is undertaken through the Enlargement and Regional Cooperation division. Interviewees mentioned coordination on CFSP across country teams within the EEAS, as well as inter-institutionally, especially between EEAS and the Commission⁴⁵.

Although this methodology is comparable across candidate countries and easily applicable to all, its significance varies depending on the country concerned and its proximity to EU membership, with CFSP alignment becoming increasingly relevant as a country moves closer. For instance, in relation to Türkiye, CFSP alignment is reportedly not a central determinant for the state of overall EU-Türkiye relations, as these are increasingly driven by frameworks other than accession⁴⁶.

⁴³ Interview with an EEAS official, 15 May 2026, conducted online.

⁴⁴ Interview with a DG ENEST official, 5 May 2026, conducted online.

⁴⁵ Interview with a DG ENEST official, 22 May 2026, conducted online.

⁴⁶ Interview with an EEAS official 2, 6 May 2026, conducted online.

4 Systematic evaluation of current methodology

The previous chapter reconstructed how the Commission, with the EEAS in a supporting role, currently measures and reports candidate countries' alignment with the CFSP. The discussion that follows tests that practice across all ten enlargement countries against six criteria, namely: validity, objectivity, transparency, comparability, political relevance and accountability. The methodological weaknesses identified below are systemic because the same 'blind spots' reappear across cases that differ markedly in their political trajectories.

4.1 Validity

Validity concerns whether the measurement actually captures what it claims to measure, namely meaningful CFSP alignment. The current approach operationalises it as a formal endorsement of HR/VP statements and Council Decisions, with separate descriptive treatment of: restrictive measures; CSDP participation; non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD); multilateral voting; and conduct *vis-à-vis* third actors. Only the number of endorsements enters the reported alignment rate. This produces three distinct kinds of 'under-specification' across the cohort.

The first is conduct excluded from the measured set. For instance, the Serbian score of 46–63 % across the cycle does *not* register: a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with China, in force since July 2024; the President's attendance at the Moscow Victory Day parade in May 2025; the launch of Russia Today Balkan on state-owned Telekom Srbija; or the fast-track grant of Serbian citizenship to Russian nationals⁴⁷ – each bearing directly on the strategic orientation that Chapter 31 purports to assess. In the case of Georgia, descriptive reporting omits Georgia's increasing political engagement with Iran as well as the downgrade in its strategic partnerships with the USA, the United Kingdom and some EU Member States since 2024. These issues are all indicative of the country's shifting strategic orientation and divergence from the EU's CFSP. Such a thematic dimension – capturing candidate states' diversified or non-diversified partnerships – should cover all candidate states.

The second 'under-specification' refers to sub-state conduct invisible to a state-level instrument. Bosnia and Herzegovina's constitutional architecture disperses foreign-policy conduct across the State, various entities and individual ministries but the score is calculated at state level only. High-level Republika Srpska's contacts with Moscow, the opening of a Russian political office in Banja Luka in May 2024 and the September 2025 memoranda of understanding signed by State-level institutes with Rosstandart do not enter the rating, which records 100 % in 2024 and 2025.⁴⁸

A third set of validity problems concerns gaps between formal alignment and substantive convergence. Montenegro's North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) membership since 2017 anchors it firmly within a framework whose positions substantially create an overlap of CFSP on Russia and European security. The methodology offers no instrument for separating candidate behaviour from alliance obligation and consequently, an uninterrupted 100 % figure systematically overstates the rating's political content. Albania presents a related issue: the qualifier 'when invited' in the 2020 and 2021 reports⁴⁹ leaves the domain of CFSP activity outside the invitation perimeter unspecified, while non-proliferation regime membership and compliance with EU common positions on the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court's integrity remain descriptive rather than counted.

⁴⁷ European Commission, [Serbia 2024 Report](#), SWD(2024) 695, 30 October 2024; European Commission, [Serbia 2025 Report](#), SWD(2025) 755, 4 November 2025.

⁴⁸ European Commission, [Bosnia and Herzegovina 2024 Report](#), SWD(2024) 691, 30 October 2024; European Commission, [Bosnia and Herzegovina 2025 Report](#), SWD(2025) 751, 4 November 2025.

⁴⁹ European Commission, [Albania 2020 Report](#), SWD(2020) 354, 6 October 2020; European Commission, [Albania 2021 Report](#), SWD(2021) 289, 19 October 2021.

North Macedonia adds a fourth variant: alignment with restrictive measures produces no direct legal effect domestically, since each measure requires a separate government decision before generating enforceable consequences⁵⁰. A 2024 amendment intended to close this gap was not considered by Parliament; repeated calls to align small-arms legislation, registered in every report since 2020, have not been operationalised. Kosovo falls outside the framework altogether: its annual reports across the 2020–2025 cycles contain no Chapter 31 section equivalent to that produced for the other candidates and a dedicated chapter has been announced only from the next reporting cycle⁵¹. Ukraine and Moldova, while showing high and increasing levels of alignment with HR/VP statements and Council decisions, 79–99 % and 54–91 % respectively during 2020–2025, are facing obstacles in implementing or aligning with certain restrictive measures⁵². For example, Ukraine, under the Criminal Code, has to date not criminalised sanctions evasion⁵³. Furthermore, as the 2023 enlargement report noted, Ukraine has yet to align with those restrictive measures *not* related to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine⁵⁴. Meanwhile, Moldova has aligned only with selected restrictive measures related to Russia’s war against Ukraine. Moreover, the country’s capacity for implementing sanctions requires improvement⁵⁵.

4.2 Objectivity

Objectivity here means the extent to which measurement is neutral, consistent and not skewed by indicator selection or methodological design. Tested against this standard, the current approach shows a consistent pattern: quantitative declaration counts are systematically overriding qualitative evidence of political divergence. The clearest illustration is Serbia. The narrative in annual reports is usually candid, including *inter alia*: strategic partnerships and high-level contacts with Russia; receptions of EU-sanctioned officials in Belgrade; Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) non-alignment; FIMI concerns; and the September 2024 General Assembly vote in which Serbia did not join the EU ‘in a crucial vote to avoid the derailing by Russia of the UN Pact for the Future’⁵⁶. All are documented in successive cycles. The chapter-level classification, though, has remained ‘moderately prepared’ throughout, even during the year that the Commission itself recorded ‘backsliding’. The narrative weight does not translate into the figure; the assessment instrument is, in practice, biased toward the formal count.

Montenegro illustrates inverse asymmetry. The description ‘a strong signal of strategic commitment to the EU path’⁵⁷ has been applied across cycles characterised by caretaker governments, parliamentary blockages and acknowledged enforcement gaps. The framing attributes the 100 % figure first and foremost to political will. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the rise from 43 % in 2021 to 81 % in 2022 is credited to ‘the initiative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’⁵⁸, while parallel obstruction from the side of ministries controlled by the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats is registered as context and does not enter the score. The qualification that alignment ‘remains a matter of political contestation’, present from 2022 to 2024,

⁵⁰ European Commission, [North Macedonia 2023 Report](#), SWD(2023) 693, 8 November 2023; European Commission, [North Macedonia 2024 Report](#), SWD(2024) 693, 30 October 2024; European Commission, [North Macedonia 2025 Report](#), SWD(2025) 753, 4 November 2025.

⁵¹ European Commission, [2025 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy](#), COM(2025) 690 final, 4 November 2025.

⁵² European Commission, [Opinion on Ukraine’s application for membership of the European Union](#), COM(2022) 407, 17 June 2022; European Commission, [Ukraine 2023 Report](#), SWD(2023) 699, 8 November 2023; European Commission, [Ukraine 2024 Report](#), SWD(2024) 699, 30 October 2024; European Commission, [Ukraine 2025 Report](#), SWD(2025) 759, 4 November 2025; European Commission, [Opinion on Moldova’s application for membership of the European Union](#), COM(2022) 406, 17 June 2022; European Commission, [Republic of Moldova 2023 Report](#), SWD(2023) 698, 8 November 2023; European Commission, [Republic of Moldova 2024 Report](#), SWD(2024) 698, 30 October 2024; European Commission, [Republic of Moldova 2025 Report](#), SWD(2025) 758, 4 November 2025.

⁵³ European Commission, [Ukraine 2025 Report](#), SWD(2025) 759, 4 November 2025.

⁵⁴ European Commission, [Ukraine 2023 Report](#), SWD(2023) 699, 8 November 2023.

⁵⁵ European Commission, [Republic of Moldova 2025 Report](#), SWD(2025) 758, 4 November 2025.

⁵⁶ European Commission, [Serbia 2024 Report](#), SWD(2024) 695, 30 October 2024.

⁵⁷ European Commission, [Montenegro 2022 Report](#), SWD(2022) 335, 12 October 2022; European Commission, [Montenegro 2023 Report](#), SWD(2023) 694, 8 November 2023.

⁵⁸ European Commission, [Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022 Report](#), SWD (2022) 336, 12 October 2022.

disappears from the 2025 report even as contestation intensifies. The Albanian case adds a more subtle form of the same problem: the 2023 caveat that ‘implementation of a fully common approach is yet to be achieved’ in international organisations disappeared in 2024 and 2025 without explanation⁵⁹. Hence, the narrative becomes more positive but there is no evidence to demonstrate that the underlying conduct has changed.

In relation to the Accession Trio countries and Türkiye, descriptive reporting largely reflects the alignment trajectory demonstrated by the quantitative measurement of alignment with HR/VP statements and the Council decisions. Throughout enlargement reports between 2022 and 2025, Ukraine has remained ‘moderately prepared’ and has shown ‘good progress’. However, while the reporting tone is largely positive, Ukraine’s non-alignment with restrictive measures not related to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine was reported only in 2023, before being discontinued in 2024 and 2025⁶⁰. Similarly, Moldova has shown ‘between moderate and good level of preparation’ in 2023 and 2024, which elevated to a ‘good level of preparation’ in 2025, while consistently demonstrating ‘good progress’ in performance⁶¹. Yet, in Moldova’s case, the practical and substantive extent of its alignment with restrictive measures against Russia remains inconsistently reported. The 2023 report mentions ‘some’ alignment with Russia-related restrictive measures, the 2024 alignment ‘with more than half of the EU’s new restrictive measures (sanctions) against Russia’ is noted and the 2025 report notes merely that Moldova ‘remains aligned with individual sanctions’ related to Russia⁶². Georgia remained ‘moderately prepared’ in 2023 and 2024 but this position was downgraded to ‘some and moderate level of preparation’ in 2025. Showing ‘limited progress’, ‘no progress’ and ‘backsliding’ in performance⁶³ captures well Georgia’s declining lack of political intent to orient itself strategically toward converging with the EU’s CFSP. Türkiye showed ‘some level of preparation’ throughout 2020–2025 albeit ‘backsliding’ during 2020–2022 and demonstrating ‘no progress’ as well as ‘limited progress’ in 2023–2024 and 2025, respectively, thereby capturing Türkiye’s misalignment with CFSP both in numbers and in substance⁶⁴.

Furthermore, the practice of retroactive alignment allows candidate countries to increase their alignment rate by symbolically aligning with EU declarations ahead of consequential moments such as the launch of the European Commission’s annual enlargement package. This does not reflect the actual willingness of a country to align with EU foreign policy; rather, it enables candidate states to make strategic calculations aimed at improving their perceived level of compliance. Serbia’s 2025 Enlargement Report did note that the country’s alignment increased in the weeks prior to publication, as it retroactively aligned with various Council decisions and EU statements⁶⁵. Yet, the number itself still takes these into account.

4.3 Transparency

Transparency turns on public access to underlying indicators, denominators, weightings and verification steps. The cohort exhibits a uniform deficit. North Macedonia provides the clearest comparative case

⁵⁹ European Commission, [Albania 2023 Report](#), SWD(2023) 690, 8 November 2023.

⁶⁰ European Commission, [Ukraine 2023 Report](#), SWD(2023) 699, 8 November 2023; European Commission, [Ukraine 2024 Report](#), SWD(2024) 699, 30 October 2024; European Commission, [Ukraine 2025 Report](#), SWD(2025) 759, 4 November 2025.

⁶¹ European Commission, [Republic of Moldova 2023 Report](#), SWD(2023) 698, 8 November 2023; European Commission, [Republic of Moldova 2024 Report](#), SWD(2024) 698, 30 October 2024; European Commission, [Republic of Moldova 2025 Report](#), SWD(2025) 758, 4 November 2025.

⁶² European Commission, [Republic of Moldova 2023 Report](#), SWD(2023) 698, 8 November 2023; European Commission, [Republic of Moldova 2024 Report](#), SWD(2024) 698, 30 October 2024; European Commission, [Republic of Moldova 2025 Report](#), SWD(2025) 758, 4 November 2025.

⁶³ European Commission, [Georgia 2023 Report](#), SWD(2023) 697, 8 November 2023; European Commission, [Georgia 2024 Report](#), SWD(2024) 697, 30 October 2024; European Commission, [Georgia 2025 Report](#), SWD(2025) 757, 4 November 2025.

⁶⁴ European Commission, [Türkiye 2020 Report](#), SWD(2020) 355, 6 October 2020; European Commission, [Türkiye 2021 Report](#), SWD(2021) 290, 19 October 2021; European Commission, [Türkiye 2022 Report](#), SWD(2022) 333, 12 October 2022; European Commission, [Türkiye 2023 Report](#), SWD(2023) 696, 8 November 2023; European Commission, [Türkiye 2024 Report](#), SWD(2024) 696, 30 October 2024; European Commission, [Türkiye 2025 Report](#), SWD(2025) 756, 4 November 2025.

⁶⁵ European Commission, [Serbia 2025 Report](#), SWD(2025) 755, 4 November 2025.

because the methodology was, albeit briefly, more transparent than it is now. The 2020 report disclosed the denominator – 84 out of 91 measures, ‘when invited’⁶⁶ – thereby making the rate auditable. However, the ‘when invited’ qualifier disappears from 2021 onwards, the explicit denominator is no longer published and from 2022, only the headline 100 % is reported. The shift in what is being measured is not explained. A similar approach applied to Türkiye: in 2020, the ‘when invited’ qualifier showed alignment ‘with 19 out of 91 relevant HR/VP declarations on behalf of the EU and Council decisions’, while from 2021 onward, this practice disappears.

Across Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Albania, denominators, source lists and weighting rules are not published at any point in the cycle. For example, Bosnia’s precise percentages – 38 %, 81 % and 98 % – are reported without disclosing: the denominator against which they are calculated; the data source; or treatment of partial implementation. Montenegro’s 2025 upgrade to ‘well advanced’ follows a single act – formal notification on the bilateral immunity agreement with the USA – without disclosure of how one legal step warrants a categorical tier change. Similar patterns hold across Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia – which were included in the Commission’s enlargement reports from 2022 onward – and Türkiye. For example, Türkiye’s ‘limited progress’ in 2025 is arguably due to Ankara being ‘more open’ to engage in substantive exchanges on foreign policy and regional issues than to the extent of it implementing recommendations from the previous year: both in 2024 and 2025 Türkiye only ‘partially implemented’ the Commission’s recommendations but ‘limited progress’ was noted only in 2025⁶⁷. The cumulative effect is that none of these headline figures in any of the ten cases can be reconstructed independently from the published material.

The lack of a written methodology ultimately weakens the overall credibility of alignment assessment. Poor coordination among EU institutions further exposes a transparency issue within the Union itself. Some interviewees in the EEAS delegations and the Commission – not directly tasked with measuring alignment – were not aware of how the alignment rate was calculated and highlighted a lack of cooperation among those officials working on CFSP across different country teams.

4.4 Comparability

Comparability operates on two axes: across countries within a given cycle; and over time for a given country. Intertemporal comparability is undermined by structural and substantive problems. The denominator varies from year to year – the number of HR/VP statements changes – so percentages from different cycles are not calculated against the same base. More fundamentally, when countries cumulatively fail to align with specific topics across a number of years, aggregate percentages lose their meaning. For instance, Serbia has not aligned with any Russia-related restrictive measures throughout 2020–2025, yet its reported rate fluctuates between 45 % and 63 % depending on the year. Retroactive alignment further distorts the series. Serbia’s 2025 figure of 63 % reflects declarations issued in the final weeks before publication, after the contested votes and high-level visits documented elsewhere in the same report. Bosnia and Herzegovina presents a related challenge: fluctuations in its alignment rate with HR/VP declarations are strongly shaped by the background of the incumbent Minister of Foreign Affairs, limiting how much any changes in the score can be read as evidence of progress in sustainable CFSP alignment⁶⁸. Reports also mix August snapshots with year-end figures without marking the change of basis. Cross-country comparability suffers from identical scores that rest on different foundations. The ‘Western Balkans QUAD’ – Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Montenegro – announced collective 100 % alignment as a shared political signal⁶⁹. This illustrates how the score has acquired a performative dimension

⁶⁶ European Commission, [North Macedonia 2020 Report](#), SWD(2020) 351, 6 October 2020.

⁶⁷ European Commission, [Türkiye 2024 Report](#), SWD(2024) 696, 30 October 2024; European Commission, [Türkiye 2025 Report](#), SWD(2025) 756, 4 November 2025.

⁶⁸ Joint interview with two EEAS officials, 11 May 2026, conducted online.

⁶⁹ European Western Balkans, [‘Four Western Balkan Countries Launched “100% Alignment with CFSP” Platform’](#), 29 March 2023.

that the methodology cannot detect. Kosovo is not on the scale at all, rendering regional comparisons formally incomplete.

A similar pattern holds across Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Türkiye. The formal rate reflects alignment only with HR/VP statements and does not take into account other aspects of foreign policy convergence. For example, Georgia and Türkiye have not aligned with restrictive measures related to Russia in the time period studied, representing a substantive divergence with the EU's CFSP. While Türkiye underperforms in both formal and substantive alignment, with no room left for detecting performative alignment, Georgia's reported alignment rate, which fluctuates between 40 % and 61 % across 2020–2025⁷⁰, still creates a false perception of convergence with the EU's CFSP even if the country fundamentally reoriented itself from the EU accession process. Ukraine and Moldova's formal alignment rates largely capture their substantive policy convergence in CFSP, as both states are showing progress and political will in incrementally meeting with the Commission's recommendations. While being in a direct war with Russia increases Ukraine's incentives to align with restrictive measures related to Russia, a better reflection of substantive CFSP alignment would be demonstrated by its alignment with the EU's restrictive measures outside a war context. Similarly, while being the target of Russia's hybrid warfare activities aligns Moldova more with the EU's positions, its partial and selective alignment with restrictive measures related to Russia distorts the picture between reported and actual alignment. Certain EU representatives interviewed acknowledged the practice of retroactive alignment in relation to all candidate countries, allowing the candidate states to reap the domestic political rewards stemming from a higher alignment rate rather than showing actual political intent and strategic orientation.

CFSP alignment also assesses countries that are at very different stages within the enlargement process and occupy diverse positions in global politics. With Türkiye's enlargement perspective effectively stalled, CFSP alignment no longer features prominently in EU–Türkiye relations, which are increasingly rooted in alternative frameworks such as migration cooperation. Moreover, EU officials have acknowledged Türkiye's unique position as a large regional actor with an autonomous foreign policy agenda. In this context, CFSP alignment, a mechanism that does not allow candidate countries to shape the policies themselves, is considered of limited use in assessing EU–Türkiye relations.

4.5 Political relevance

Currently, the methodology aggregates declarations of equal nominal weight completely regardless of their political salience, with the starkest example being Serbia. This candidate has not aligned with any restrictive measure against the Russian Federation across the whole of the 2020–2025 cycle, or with measures targeting China, Iran, Belarus, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Venezuela or the destabilisation of Moldova. It voted against EU positions at the General Assembly in 2024 and 2025, publicly retracting its support for the EU-backed Ukraine peace resolution after the February 2025 vote had been cast⁷¹. Averaged with alignment on lower-salience statements, this divergence produces the 45–63 % range. The figure gives absolutely no indication of where this non-alignment sits – precisely where the political weight is at its highest – because each declaration counts as one.

Equal weighting also produces counterintuitive results at the scale's upper end. North Macedonia's 100 % rating in 2025 coexisted with the country's abstention on the UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution marking the third anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and with a vote in favour of the US-sponsored alternative⁷². These were two of the most politically consequential votes of the year, neither of which affected the candidate rating, which is anchored to HR/VP statements alone. Bosnia's 100 % in 2024

⁷⁰ European Commission, [Opinion on Georgia's application for membership of the European Union](#), COM(2022) 405, June 17 2022; European Commission, [Georgia 2023 Report](#), SWD(2023) 697, 8 November 2023; European Commission, [Georgia 2024 Report](#), SWD(2024) 697, 30 October 2024; European Commission, [Georgia 2025 Report](#), SWD(2025) 757, 4 November 2025.

⁷¹ European Commission, [Serbia 2025 Report](#), SWD(2025) 755, 4 November 2025.

⁷² European Commission, [North Macedonia 2025 Report](#), SWD(2025) 753, 4 November 2025.

and 2025 coexisted with: State-level institutes signing memorandums with EU-sanctioned Russian entities; ministries refusing to enforce flight or media bans; and with a Presidency member advocating neutrality on Ukraine. None of this was accounted for in the score. Montenegro's 2023 report acknowledged the 'mixed' record in sanctions implementation with a recommendation that Montenegro prevent the use of its territory for sanctions circumvention⁷³, all without affecting the quantitative figure. Across Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia, the persistent bilateral immunity agreement with the USA – in direct contradiction with the EU's common position on the Rome Statute's integrity – is reproduced in substantively identical wording across the cycle without any rating consequence⁷⁴. In short, this instrument is least responsive precisely where it would carry the most political information.

Across the Accession Trio and Türkiye, formal alignment rates also largely trump the issue's political salience, albeit there are some variations across cases. Türkiye represents an exceptional case as it refuses both alignment with the vast majority of HR/VP statements or with all restrictive measures outside the UN framework. Given that '23 Türkiye-based entities were listed under EU sanctions in regard to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine', according to the 2025 report⁷⁵, it is hard, if not impossible, for the Commission's methodology to register discrepancies between formal alignment rates and the actual substantive foreign policy convergence.

Georgia has acted similarly to Serbia in refusing to align with restrictive measures related to Russia or retracting support for the UN resolution it sponsored regarding Ukraine in 2025. Nevertheless, the country manages to show a formal alignment rate between 40 % to 60 % across 2020–2025, even if it diverges substantially from the EU's key foreign policy priorities. While no entity based in Georgia has so far been sanctioned by the EU, in early 2026 the Commission raised concern regarding the port of Kulevi's oil terminal and its role in sanctions circumvention, securing a formal pledge from Georgian authorities on ensuring compliance⁷⁶.

Given the war in Ukraine and Russia's destabilising activities toward Moldova, their formal alignment rate often captures politically salient issues such as the EU's restrictive measures related to Russia. Yet, Moldova lags behind in this regard and in terms of capabilities for sanctions implementation, while Ukraine has yet to criminalise sanctions evasion in its domestic legislation, thereby showing divergence in practice.

4.6 Accountability

Accountability refers to whether actors can be held responsible for alignment performance and for the monitoring process itself. The methodology shows weaknesses in both dimensions.

To a large extent, the framework does not establish systematic consequences for alignment failures. Recommendations tend to be generic and recurring: calls to 'improve alignment' or 'strengthen implementation capacity' appear across countries and cycles but their persistence suggests limited follow-through mechanisms. Preparedness classifications exhibit considerable stability, even where narrative assessments record shifts in performance. The continued broadcasting of RT and Sputnik via M-tel in Republika Srpska, despite Bosnia and Herzegovina's formal alignment with the relevant sanctions, has been noted in successive reports from 2022 to 2025 without triggering a methodological adjustment. By contrast, cases of Georgia and Moldova reflect, respectively, the negative and positive changes in preparedness classification, matching narrative assessments of performance with preparedness classification. Retroactive alignment is treated as equivalent to timely alignment in the reported figures, albeit the two reflect different levels of political commitment.

⁷³ European Commission, [Montenegro 2023 Report](#), SWD(2023) 694, 8 November 2023.

⁷⁴ As per the Montenegro 2025 Report, Montenegro notified termination of its bilateral immunity agreement in 2025. See European Commission, [Montenegro 2025 Report](#), SWD(2025) 754, 4 November 2025.

⁷⁵ European Commission, [Türkiye 2025 Report](#), SWD(2025) 756, 4 November 2025.

⁷⁶ Civil Georgia, ['EU Drops Kulevi Port Sanctions, Citing 'Commitments' from Georgia, SOCAR'](#), 10 March 2026.

The monitoring process lacks built-in accountability mechanisms. No verification protocol is described for testing whether formal declarations translate into operational compliance. Methodological adjustments – such as changes to publishing the total number of declarations to be aligned with the chapter structure – occur without accompanying explanation. Qualitative assessment criteria are not disclosed, thereby limiting the scope for external validation of how ratings are assigned. The absence of a documented written methodology means that neither the countries under assessment nor the assessment process itself are subject to structured accountability mechanisms that would enable systematic correction when needed.

5 Revised CFSP alignment methodology

Having analysed the current methodology, in what follows the framework proposed does not necessarily discard the Commission's existing approach. Any information collected through annual enlargement reports already covers most of what a politically meaningful assessment requires, including: declaration alignment rates, voting behaviour, narrative findings on restrictive measures, CSDP participation, third-country relations, foreign information manipulation, interference and cyber threats. The problem lies in how this information is processed. A single quantitative rate – alignment with HR/VP declarations – is presented as the CFSP alignment rate, which misrepresents the breadth of what foreign policy alignment actually requires. True alignment encompasses both rhetorical positioning and operational practice across a number of dimensions. The narrative findings in the Commission's reports are valuable and substantively richer but they are overshadowed by the headline rate, which rather than being aggregated into a comparable measure is left disconnected. The reader is expected to reconstruct a relationship between the narrative material and the quantitative figure without methodological guidance on how the two relate or should be weighted.

Hence, the methodology proposed here applies *ex-post* quantification to the qualitative material already gathered. Each thematic area receives a tailored five-point scale anchored in observable indicators, producing both a topic-by-topic profile and an overall score on a 50-point range.

Ten themes are assessed, each scored on a 1–5 scale. All themes are given equal priority, each having been selected precisely because of its respective political weight in the present geopolitical context. Hence, differential weighting does not arise at the level of theme selection. Aggregating to a 50-point total enables cross-country comparison and tracking over time; the disaggregated profile across themes preserves information that would otherwise be lost in aggregation, thus allowing readers to identify where divergence sits rather than merely how much there is. This approach builds on the Commission's existing five-tier preparation scale for accession chapters (from 'early stage of preparation' to 'well advanced'), which has demonstrated its policy-readability over many cycles. The descriptors used below are calibrated to the substance of each theme but follow the same underlying logic.

The scale criteria provided for each theme are illustrative rather than exhaustive. They establish a framework for consistent qualitative judgment without attempting to anticipate every circumstance that might inform an assessment. The examples given capture typical characteristics of each level; assessors then exercise judgment within the criteria's structure. These criteria are designed to reflect specific obligations and expectations attached to the accession process, while recognising that some dimensions also raise issues of proportionality, institutional capacity and comparability with existing Member States. Hence, they should be read as structured benchmarks for assessing preparedness for participation in CFSP, rather than as automatic accession conditions.

5.1 Alignment with HR/VP declarations and Council decisions

This theme retains the existing alignment rate as its core indicator but applies a strict scale that does not treat retroactive alignment as adequate. Full alignment is required for the top score; anything below is graded down because AAs require progressive alignment with CFSP, not selective participation.

Retroactive alignments declared in the final weeks of the reporting period can be noted in the narrative assessment but are excluded from the year's calculation, to prevent candidates from artificially inflating their scores. Timely alignment matters, namely within one week after declaration publication, because a common European position on urgent issues requires immediate unity, not belated endorsement after political relevance has diminished

Score	Descriptor	Criterion
5	Full alignment	100 % endorsement of HR/VP declarations and Council decisions during the reporting period, exclusive of retroactive declarations
4	Strong alignment	90–99 % endorsement
3	Selective alignment	70–89 % endorsement
2	Partial alignment	50–69 % endorsement
1	Minimal alignment	Below 50 % endorsement

5.2 Implementation of restrictive measures

Being distinct from formal declaration of alignment, this theme assesses whether endorsed restrictive measures are operationally enforced. Indicators include domestic legal effect, action against sanctioned entities operating within the country and the absence of sub-state actors undermining state-level commitments. Countries that have not endorsed sanctions receive the lowest score automatically.

Score	Descriptor	Criterion
5	Fully effective enforcement	Effective endorsed mechanisms have direct domestic effect; sanctioned entities barred from operating; no sub-state obstruction (as in the case of federal countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina); criminalisation of sanction evasion
4	Mostly adequate enforcement	Documented enforcement actions but with minor implementation delays or technical gaps; full state-level cooperation; criminalisation of sanction evasion
3	Uneven enforcement	Documented enforcement actions but with significant gaps in select areas; partial cooperation across levels of government; criminalisation of sanction evasion
2	Weak enforcement	Existence of domestic legal basis but with significant operational gaps; persistent sub-state obstruction; or minimal enforcement of endorsed measures; no criminalisation of sanction evasion
1	Absent enforcement	No functioning enforcement mechanism; sub-state defiance unaddressed; or active facilitation of sanctions evasion: for example, presence of sub-state authorities openly obstructing enforcement

5.3 Voting in international organisations

This theme captures voting behaviour at the UNGA, the UN Human Rights Council, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the OPCW and other multilateral fora. The decisive factor here is

consistency with EU positions on resolutions of demonstrable political salience, as prioritised by the Commission in its annual enlargement reporting. Included, for instance, are: all UNGA resolutions where the EU coordinated a common position and campaigned; votes on Russia's aggression against Ukraine; restrictive measures; human rights situations; and protection of the international rules-based order. Abstentions on politically salient resolutions count as departures from EU alignment; alignment on routine technical votes does not offset divergence on key issues.

Score	Descriptor	Criterion
5	Consistent alignment	Aligned with EU on all politically salient votes during the period; no public retractions
4	Predominant alignment	Aligned in nearly all cases; abstentions limited to lower-salience issues
3	Mixed record	Aligned in most cases but with abstention or divergence on at least one politically significant vote
2	Frequent divergence	Multiple abstentions or votes against EU positions; support for alternative resolutions on salient issues
1	Systematic divergence	Votes against the EU on key resolutions; co-sponsorship of resolutions counter to EU positions

5.4 Relations with third countries

This theme evaluates the candidate's bilateral relationships with powers whose foreign policy positions diverge from or conflict with the CFSP, particular attention being paid to Russia, China, Iran, Belarus, or any other country whose positions diverged significantly from the EU's during the period analysed. The assessment focuses on politically salient forms of engagement, which include but are not limited to: strategic partnerships with states under EU restrictive measures; high-level state visits during sanctions periods; public alignment with foreign policy narratives counter to EU positions; FTAs that present strategic concerns; and rhetorical hostility toward EU positions from senior officials. Assessment accounts for both state-level and, where relevant, sub-state conduct.

Score	Descriptor	Criterion
5	No problematic engagement	No strategic partnerships with sanctioned states; no contradictory FTAs; no high-level state visits or rhetoric inconsistent with CFSP
4	Marginal concerns	Isolated or legacy arrangements that are not being actively expanded; no recent high-level political engagement or rhetoric inconsistent with CFSP
3	Notable concerns	Working-level cooperation with politically sensitive partners; occasional senior-level contacts or rhetoric of concern
2	Significant concerns	Active strategic partnerships, repeated high-level contacts, strategically concerning FTAs, or recurrent rhetorical alignment with sanctioned states
1	Counter-EU positioning	Public alignment with the foreign policy positions of sanctioned states; head-of-state visits during sanctions periods; senior-official rhetoric opposing EU positions

5.5 Visa regime alignment

The candidate's visa policy is assessed for its convergence with that of the EU. The relevant indicator is not only the number of countries with which the candidate maintains visa-free travel, where the EU does not but also the security risk that certain countries present. Visa-free regimes with states subject to EU restrictive measures or with the EU's strategic adversaries carry particular weight. Fast-track citizenship procedures that grant nationals of sanctioned states access to EU territory through visa-free travel are treated as the most serious form of divergence.

Score	Descriptor	Criterion
5	Full convergence	Visa regime aligned with EU; no visa-free arrangements with politically sensitive states
4	Near convergence	Minor divergence limited to low-significance third countries
3	Moderate divergence	Visa-free arrangements with various non-EU partners; no politically sensitive states involved
2	Significant divergence	Visa-free travel with at least one politically sensitive state (Russia, China, Belarus, Iran or similar)
1	Major divergence	Visa-free regime with multiple politically sensitive states; fast-track citizenship granted to nationals of such states

5.6 Constructive foreign policy contribution

This theme records positive contributions to EU foreign policy objectives that go beyond formal endorsement, in line with EU priorities stated in Council conclusions and evaluated proportionally to country size and capacity. Examples include: substantial humanitarian or military assistance to Ukraine; active prevention of sanctions circumvention through the candidate's territory or entities; deployment of personnel to peacekeeping and stabilisation operations outside of CSDP; hosting of EU initiatives or related multilateral mechanisms; and diplomatic initiatives advancing EU positions. Assessment should be based on observable and documented contributions rather than general declarations of support. The theme registers conduct that would otherwise be absent from a methodology calibrated only to compliance and provides credit where candidates contribute substantively in other ways, despite having incomplete declaratory alignment.

Score	Descriptor	Criterion
5	Substantial contribution	Significant humanitarian or military assistance to Ukraine; active sanctions circumvention prevention; active peacekeeping deployment; visible diplomatic initiatives in support of EU priorities
4	Notable contribution	Visible contributions across at least two of the above categories
3	Modest contribution	At least one substantive contribution; routine participation in multilateral cooperation
2	Limited contribution	Minimal contribution beyond declaratory support
1	No contribution	No visible support beyond formal endorsement; absent from collective EU efforts where capacity exists

5.7 Security and defence cooperation

This theme combines: participation in CSDP missions and operations; contributions to EU Battlegroups; bilateral defence cooperation with EU Member States; Security and Defence Partnerships where concluded; NATO partnership where applicable; and contributions to UN peacekeeping. Smaller countries are evaluated proportionally; the relevant question is whether available defence capacity is engaged in support of EU and EU-compatible operations rather than in alternative configurations.

Score	Descriptor	Criterion
5	Active and broad cooperation	Substantial participation across CSDP relative to available defence capacity, EU Battlegroups and peacekeeping; concluded Security and Defence Partnership where offered; high level of integration in EU security and defence-related agencies as well as programmes where offered.
4	Solid cooperation	Active participation in CSDP missions relative to available defence capacity; significant contribution to at least one major operation; significant level of integration in EU security and defence-related agencies, as well as programmes where offered.
3	Routine cooperation	Selective mission participation relative to available defence capacity; institutional framework operational; selective level of integration in EU security and defence-related agencies and programmes where offered.
2	Limited cooperation	Marginal operational participation relative to available defence capacity; engagement mostly declaratory; marginal level of integration in EU security and defence-related agencies, as well as programmes where offered.
1	Marginal cooperation	Absence from CSDP operations; no integration in EU security and defence-related agencies, as well as programmes where offered.

5.8 Non-proliferation and export controls

This theme covers: participation in international non-proliferation regimes on WMD; implementation of the Western Balkans small arms and light weapons (SALW) Roadmap; control of dual-use exports; membership in multilateral export control regimes; and consistency with the EU Common Position on arms exports. Arms transfers or diversion contrary to EU positions are treated as a serious downward indicator.

Score	Descriptor	Criterion
5	Fully integrated	Member of all major export control regimes; full SALW Roadmap implementation where applicable; aligned arms export controls; full integration with the EU control list and common position criteria.
4	Substantively aligned	Member of most regimes; effective SALW implementation; minor alignment gaps; substantive alignment with the EU control list and common position criteria.
3	Partial alignment	Selective regime membership; SALW implementation in progress; gaps in arms export controls; partial alignment with the EU control list and common position criteria.

2	Limited alignment	Few regime memberships; significant implementation gaps; weak controls on dual-use exports; limited alignment with the EU control list and common position criteria.
1	Misaligned	Outside major regimes; SALW commitments unmet or actively undermined; no alignment with the EU control list and common position criteria.

5.9 Resilience against foreign information manipulation, interference and cyber threats

This theme does not seek to assess 'hybrid threats' in the broadest sense. The concept of hybrid threats is widely used in EU policy discourse but remains broad and difficult to operationalise consistently. For the purposes of this methodology, the assessment is therefore limited to more observable dimensions that are directly relevant to CFSP alignment: FIMI, disinformation, cyber resilience, institutional preparedness and cooperation with EU or EU-compatible response mechanisms. The assessment combines institutional and behavioural indicators. Institutional indicators include the existence and implementation of relevant strategies, dedicated response mechanisms, cybersecurity structures, media-literacy or counter-disinformation frameworks and participation in EU or international cooperation formats. Behavioural indicators focus on whether: hostile foreign state media or state-aligned information operations operate within the country with state facilitation, tolerance or support; public authorities themselves amplify anti-EU or hostile foreign narratives; and documented cyber or information threats are followed by credible institutional responses. The score should not be read as a general ranking of vulnerability, given that all states, including EU Member States, remain vulnerable to cyber-attacks, disinformation and external interference. Hence, the purpose of this score is more limited, namely: to assess whether candidate countries demonstrate institutional preparedness, political willingness and practical cooperation with EU efforts to counter foreign information manipulation, interference and cyber threats.

Score	Descriptor	Criterion
5	Strong resilience	Comprehensive national strategy or policy framework implemented; dedicated institutions functioning effectively; active cooperation with EU or EU-compatible cyber and FIMI response mechanisms; credible responses to documented threats; no hostile foreign state operating with state facilitation
4	Solid resilience	National strategy or policy framework in place and being implemented; visible counter-FIMI and cybersecurity activity; cooperation with EU or international partners; problems are present but isolated rather than systemic
3	Developing resilience	National strategy adopted; concrete actions taken; institutional framework being built; cooperation with EU or international partners exists but remains uneven; mixed implementation record
2	Weak resilience	Limited strategic or institutional response; weak implementation capacity; hostile foreign media operating without significant restriction; cooperation with EU or international partners remains limited
1	Compromised	State infrastructure, state-owned operators or public authorities facilitating, tolerating or amplifying hostile foreign information operations; FIMI actors operating openly with state tolerance; institutional response absent, politically obstructed or directed against EU actors rather than against hostile external interference.

5.10 Regional relations and neighbourly cooperation

The theme covers bilateral relations with EU Member States in the region, good neighbourly relations with other candidate countries, active participation in regional initiatives (such as Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), the Common Regional Market, the Berlin Process) as well as the management or resolution of historical and border-related disputes. Participation in regional initiatives should be assessed through documented attendance, implementation of agreed commitments, avoidance of obstruction and contribution to dispute-management mechanisms, rather than through rhetorical support alone. The Belgrade–Pristina dialogue, as it is being treated outside the Chapter 31, is not part of this assessment.

Score	Descriptor	Criterion
5	Constructive regional actor	Stable relations with EU Member State neighbours and regional partners; active engagement in regional initiatives; all outstanding disputes (territorial, political and historical) actively managed
4	Cooperative posture	Most bilateral relations stable; visible regional engagement; minor unresolved disputes (territorial, political and historical)
3	Mixed record	Some unresolved bilateral tensions (territorial, political and historical); selective participation in regional formats
2	Limited cooperation	Several unresolved bilateral tensions (territorial, political and historical); selective participation in regional formats; frequent strained rhetoric
1	Poor regional standing	Active obstruction or withdrawal from regional initiatives; systematic blocking of regional agreements; threats or use of force against neighbours; official policy rejecting regional cooperation frameworks

5.11 Aggregation and reading the scoreboard

The ten theme scores combine to produce totals on a 50-point scale. To support headline readability and to remain consistent with the Commission's established tiered language, aggregates can be mapped onto five overall levels of CFSP alignment. The scores should be understood as structured expert assessments based on transparent criteria, not as mechanically generated indicators.

Aggregate score	Overall level of CFSP alignment
45–50	Well advanced
36–44	Good level of alignment
26–35	Moderately aligned
16–25	Somewhat aligned
10–15	Early stage of alignment

The aggregate is intended for headline reporting and cross-country comparison but it should not be used in isolation or treated as an automatic ranking of candidate countries. A disaggregated profile across these ten themes is the analytically more important output: it shows where divergence sits, whether it stems from political choice (low scores on themes 5.1, 5.3 or 5.4) or from institutional and operational gaps (themes 5.2, 5.8 or 5.9) and whether it is offset by constructive contributions on other dimensions (themes 5.6 and 5.7). The two views should be read together since neither is fully informative in isolation.

5.12 Implementation challenges and limitations

The revised methodology proposed in this study seeks to provide a more comprehensive, transparent and politically meaningful assessment of CFSP alignment. At the same time, its implementation would raise several practical and conceptual challenges that need to be acknowledged. Hence, this framework should be understood as a tool for structuring political assessment and parliamentary scrutiny, rather than as a mechanistic scoring instrument that can replace contextual judgement.

Firstly, the proposed framework is more demanding than the current methodology in terms of data collection, analytical coordination and institutional follow-up. A comprehensive application across all candidate countries would require additional time and personnel, especially if the methodology were applied annually and across all ten thematic dimensions. However, this revised methodology does not require the creation of an entirely new monitoring architecture. Many of the relevant indicators are already being collected, at least in narrative form, through: European Commission enlargement reports; EEAS political reporting; EU Delegation reporting; sanctions monitoring; assessments of voting behaviour in international organisations; as well as reporting on security, defence and resilience-related issues. The revised framework's key added value stems therefore from integrating and systematising information that is already partly available, rather than introducing a wholly new set of reporting obligations. Nevertheless, some dimensions, particularly sanctions implementation, FIMI, cyber resilience and implementation capacity, would require clearer internal guidance, more systematic verification procedures and closer coordination between the Commission, the EEAS, EU Delegations and relevant specialised services.

Secondly, not all dimensions can be assessed with the same degree of precision. Timely alignment with HR/VP declarations, alignment with Council decisions on restrictive measures and voting behaviour in international organisations can be measured relatively straightforwardly. By contrast, dimensions such as constructive foreign policy contributions, engagement in regional initiatives or resilience against foreign information manipulation, interference and cyber threats necessarily involve qualitative judgement. The proposed five-point scale should therefore be understood as a form of structured expert assessment rather than a purely mechanical quantitative indicator. Its purpose is not to eliminate but discipline interpretation by making the criteria for assessment explicit, comparable and open to scrutiny. In this respect, the revised methodology aims to improve on the current system not by claiming perfect objectivity but by making visible the evaluative judgements that are already implicit in enlargement reporting.

Thirdly, the proposed framework raises questions of fairness and proportionality. Some issues included in the revised methodology, notably sanctions enforcement, cyber resilience and responses to FIMI, are areas in which certain current Member States also face significant implementation challenges. Candidate countries are routinely held to standards that various current Member States do not fully meet – sometimes even in the rule of law, judicial independence and anti-corruption – an issue that has never been considered for fear of lowering expectations. However, the existence of shortcomings within the Union does not reduce what is required of candidates; it reflects the different legal status and different accountability instruments that apply inside and outside the EU. The purpose of including these dimensions is therefore not to impose additional accession conditions beyond the formal *acquis*, or require candidate countries to achieve a perfect track record across all CFSP dimensions before accession but to assess preparedness for participation in the CFSP that increasingly depends on implementation capacity, political solidarity and resilience against external interference. At the same time, similar vulnerabilities within Member States point to a broader need for stronger EU-level scrutiny, coordination and support in these areas across both current and future members.

Fourthly, particular caution is required in relation to the terminology of 'hybrid threats'. The concept is widely used in EU policy discourse but it remains broad and can cover a wide range of activities, including cyber operations, disinformation, coercive economic measures, election interference and other forms of malign external influence. For the purpose of this methodology, assessment should therefore not seek to

measure hybrid threats in the broadest possible sense. It should focus instead on more observable dimensions, especially FIMI, disinformation, cyber resilience, institutional preparedness and response capacity. Even in these areas, the aim should not be to rank countries according to abstract levels of vulnerability, since all states remain vulnerable to cyber-attacks and external interference. Rather, any assessment should examine whether candidate countries have adopted relevant strategies, participate in EU cooperation mechanisms, develop institutional capacity, respond to documented interference attempts and align politically with EU efforts to counter such threats.

Finally, the scoreboard should be read as a decision-support tool. It can help identify patterns of convergence, divergence, implementation gaps and political salience more clearly than the current aggregate alignment rate. However, it cannot substitute for political judgement. Scores should therefore be accompanied by qualitative explanations, especially where candidate countries face specific geopolitical constraints, domestic institutional weaknesses or asymmetric dependencies on external actors. The revised methodology's value lies in making these contextual factors more explicit and comparable, while avoiding the false precision that can result from relying on a single aggregate alignment percentage.

6 In-depth case studies applying the revised methodology

This analytical section applies the revised methodology to five pre-identified country chapters, namely Serbia, Türkiye, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine and Georgia⁷⁷. Selection here has been designed to capture the full range of alignment trajectories: Serbia and Türkiye as persistent underperformers; Georgia as a case of shifting democratic and geopolitical orientation; Bosnia and Herzegovina as an uneven performer constrained by domestic institutional fragmentation; and Ukraine as a country maintaining very high alignment despite wartime conditions.

6.1 Serbia

Serbia has continued to engage in political dialogue with the EU on foreign and security policy issues, which includes contact at the highest level. The country has reiterated its strategic orientation toward EU membership while concurrently intensifying high-level engagement with the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China. Hence, Serbia's foreign policy trajectory continues to raise concerns regarding the country's progress on CFSP alignment.

Alignment with HR/VP declarations and Council decisions. According to the 2025 enlargement report, Serbia's alignment stood at 63 % for the reporting period, up from 59 % in 2024. The increase was driven by retroactive alignments declared only in the reporting period's final weeks, which under this revised methodology would be excluded from calculations. Serbia has not aligned at all with EU restrictive measures against Russia, or with a number of statements and measures linked to Russia, China, Belarus, Iran, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the destabilisation of Moldova. Effective alignment without retroactive declarations falls within the 50–69 % band. Serbia accordingly falls within the band of **partial alignment (2/5)**⁷⁸.

Implementation of restrictive measures. Serbia has not endorsed EU restrictive measures against Russia. Under the revised methodology, non-endorsement triggers the lowest score. This automatically corresponds to **absent enforcement (1/5)**.

⁷⁷ Unless otherwise referenced, this chapter relies primarily on the European Commission's 2025 enlargement reports for each of the case studies.

⁷⁸ It is important to note that the 2025 Serbia Report does not specify the number of declarations with which Serbia aligned retroactively, making it impossible to determine precisely what percentage the new methodology would detect. This methodology application exercise is based on the premise that the 2025 retroactive alignment boosted Serbia's score by no more than a couple of percentage points, resulting in only a modest increase from the 59 % alignment rate recorded in 2024. The precise calculation, however, would ultimately be for the Commission to make.

Voting in international organisations. According to the 2025 enlargement report, Serbia voted at the UNGA in favour of establishing an International Day against Unilateral Coercive Measures, hence against the EU position. It publicly retracted its support for the UNGA Resolution on a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine after the vote had taken place. Serbia supported a joint statement delivered by the Russian Federation at the UN Human Rights Council and abstained on the UN-Council of Europe cooperation resolution. It has not systematically aligned with EU statements at the OPCW, the UN Conference on Disarmament, or the UNGA First Committee. Under the revised methodology, this voting record amounts to **frequent divergence (2/5)**.

Relations with third countries. According to the 2025 enlargement report, Serbia's President attended the Victory Day parade in Moscow on 9 May 2025 and held a bilateral meeting with the Russian President, followed by a further meeting in Beijing during September. Frequent ministerial contacts with Russia continued throughout the period. Serbia participated in a joint military exercise with China in July 2025. Senior-level anti-Western rhetoric, including the characterisation of domestic student protests as a Western-backed colour revolution, accompanied these engagements. FTAs with the United Arab Emirates and Egypt entered into force, with further FTAs under negotiation. Taken together, these elements comprise **counter-EU positioning (1/5)**.

Visa regime alignment. Serbia maintains visa-free regimes with many politically sensitive states, including Russia and China. As a matter of extreme concern, the Commission flagged fast-track acquisition of Serbian citizenship by Russian nationals, granting them visa-free access to the Schengen area. Serbia's visa policy meets the criteria for **major divergence (1/5)**.

Constructive foreign policy contributions. Serbia has continued providing humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, including significant volumes of energy equipment, alongside financial support. Ammunition produced in Serbia has reportedly reached Ukraine indirectly via NATO Member State assembly chains. Serbia continues to prevent EU sanctions circumvention via its territory and through entities registered domestically. Contributions to four UN peacekeeping missions have continued. The cumulative picture qualifies as **substantial contribution (5/5)**.

Security and defence cooperation. According to the 2025 enlargement report, Serbia actively participates in EU military crisis management missions and operations in Africa, contributing substantively to EUNAVFOR Atalanta in the Western Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. Cooperation with NATO and its members continues, alongside contributions to UN peacekeeping and the Balkan Medical Task Force. Civilian CSDP participation remains blocked by the absence of implementing legislation under the 2023 law. However, operational engagement at this level corresponds to **solid cooperation (4/5)**.

Non-proliferation and export controls. According to the 2025 enlargement report, Serbia is implementing the 2023–2025 WMD non-proliferation strategy and engages on the Western Balkans SALW Roadmap. It is a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group but not of the Wassenaar Arrangement or the Australia Group, with applications from 2009 and 2017 still pending. Alignment with EU statements at the OPCW Conference of States Parties, the UN Conference on Disarmament and the UNGA First Committee has been inconsistent. Thus, selective regime membership and inconsistent statement alignment translate into **partial alignment (3/5)**.

Resilience against foreign information manipulation, interference and cyber threats. According to the 2025 enlargement report, the launch of Russia Today Balkan in December 2024, broadcast via the state-owned operator Telekom Srbija, places Serbian state infrastructure in direct facilitation of a hostile foreign information operation. The Commission also reports Serbian citizens and territory as being involved in Russian hybrid activities, including subversion around the Moldovan elections. This state-facilitated FIMI vector places Serbia firmly in the band of **compromised (1/5)**.

Regional relations and neighbourly cooperation. Serbia participates in CEFTA and the Berlin Process and is expected to continue implementing the 2025–2028 Critical Raw Materials action plan. Persistent bilateral tensions with Croatia and recurrent rhetoric incompatible with regional cooperation place Serbia below a cooperative posture. The country accordingly falls within the band of **limited cooperation (2/5)**.

The aggregate score for Serbia is **22 out of 50 (44 %)**, placing the country in the category of **somewhat aligned**. Under the current Commission methodology, the headline alignment figure stands at 63 %. The 19-point divergence reflects what the existing rate obscures: weak or absent implementation; voting behaviour at odds with EU positions; deepening engagement with sanctioned states; state-facilitated hostile information operations; and visa-regime divergence. Negative aspects are partially offset by genuine constructive contributions to Ukraine, peacekeeping and circumvention prevention.

6.2 Türkiye

This brief country case study applies revised CFSP alignment methodology to Türkiye and assesses the country's alignment with the EU's CFSP.

Alignment with HR/VP declarations and Council decisions on sanctions. According to the 2025 enlargement report, Türkiye's alignment with the EU's CFSP for 24 October 2025 is 4 %, with the final annual score unlikely to be much different. This corresponds to **minimal alignment (1/5)**.

Implementation of restrictive measures. Türkiye did not endorse the EU's restrictive measures in 2025. According to the 2025 enlargement report, by 1 September 2025 twenty-three Türkiye-based entities were listed under EU sanctions in the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. This corresponds to **absent enforcement (1/5)**.

Voting in international organisations. According to the 2025 enlargement report, Türkiye is not a State Party to major UN treaties, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, as well as the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, from which Türkiye withdrew in 2021. Türkiye does not have a National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on the Women, Peace and Security agenda. In 2025, Türkiye voted for the UN resolution 'Advancing a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine' but did not support creation of a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine set up within the Council of Europe framework. However, in June 2025, Türkiye did vote for the Gaza ceasefire resolution at the UN. This corresponds to a **mixed record (3/5)**.

Relations with third countries. Türkiye is engaged in bilateral political ties with many countries, including Russia, China and Iran. The country has had strategic cooperation with China since 2010 and the leaders of the two countries met in August 2025 as part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in China. At the same summit, the President of Türkiye met with the president of the Russian Federation – Türkiye and Russia enjoy partnership and exchange of high-level contacts in various areas. Türkiye and Iran also held high-level dialogue and exchange of high-level visits in 2025. Türkiye has preferential trade arrangements with numerous countries, including Iran. This corresponds to **significant concerns (1/5)**.

Visa alignment. Türkiye does not have a visa-free regime with the EU, yet it has been negotiating visa liberalisation since 2013. According to the 2025 enlargement report, 'the national visa policy is not aligned with that of the EU, in particular the list of countries whose nationals require a visa to enter the EU'. Moreover, Türkiye has not made any progress in fulfilling the visa liberalisation roadmap's six benchmarks. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye website, the country has a visa-free policy with Russia, China, Belarus and Iran⁷⁹. This corresponds to **major divergence (1/5)**.

⁷⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, '[Visa Information For Foreigners](#)', webpage, nd.

Constructive foreign policy contributions. Türkiye has contributed to: mediation of the Russia-Ukraine war during 2025 by hosting talks between Russia and Ukraine; mediation in the Gaza ceasefire; and support for transition in Syria following the Assad regime's fall in December 2024. Türkiye was also involved in UN peacekeeping operations but did not join the EU's restrictive measures against Russia, albeit actively cooperating in preventing sanctions circumvention. According to the 2025 enlargement report, Türkiye's cooperation in Ukraine's defence industry is ongoing. Moreover, it has expressed strong interest in Ukraine's reconstruction and is part of the 'Coalition of the Willing' initiative. This corresponds to **substantial contribution (5/5)**.

Security and defence cooperation. According to the 2025 enlargement report, Türkiye has continued as the biggest non-EU troops' contributor to the EU Force Operation Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina and has remained a major contributor to the NATO Kosovo Force (peacekeeping force in Kosovo). Türkiye has pursued involvement in CSDP and EU defence initiatives, while simultaneously maintaining its policy of excluding one EU Member State, namely Cyprus, from cooperation with NATO. Informal EU-Türkiye CSDP consultations were held on 11 June 2025, following a four-year hiatus. Türkiye has continued to express a strong interest in participating with EU defence initiatives, thereby showcasing its claim to play a significant role in strengthening future European security. This corresponds to **solid cooperation (4/5)**.

Non-proliferation and export control. According to the 2025 enlargement report, Türkiye is a party to most international treaties and conventions related to disarmament and non-proliferation. The country also participates in export control regimes and other politically binding arrangements, thus complying with its legally binding obligations and political commitments. However, Türkiye has not ratified the Arms Trade Treaty, to which it is signatory and does not align with EU statements in the framework of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. From 2025, Türkiye stopped aligning with EU statements regarding the Chemical Weapons Convention/OPCW and did not align with the EU position on certain multilateral export control arrangements. Hence, this corresponds to **limited alignment (2/5)**.

Resilience against foreign information manipulation, interference and cyber threats. According to the 2025 enlargement report, FIMI activities continued in Türkiye. Türkiye did not restrict the operations of Russian state-controlled media outlets vis-à-vis Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Pro-Russian narratives are widespread in Türkiye and significantly Russia-linked disinformation networks have penetrated Turkish information space, focusing on narratives related to the war in Ukraine, NATO, energy security and anti-Western sentiment. Furthermore, a new law on cybersecurity raises serious concerns due to vague rules and a lack of independent oversight. This corresponds to **compromised (1/5)**.

Regional relations and neighbourly cooperation. The accession process's bilateral relations with other enlargement countries were generally positive. However, they remained challenging with some neighbouring EU Member States, particularly Greece and Cyprus, thus rated as a **mixed record (3/5)**.

The aggregate score for Türkiye is 22 out of 50 (44 %), placing it in the category of **somewhat aligned**.

6.3 Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina has maintained full alignment with HR/VP declarations and Council decisions on sanctions throughout the reporting period, reaffirming its strategic orientation toward EU membership. Political dialogue with the EU has continued at all levels, with the country hosting the 12th EU-Western Balkans meeting of political directors on CFSP in Sarajevo in October 2025. Implementation of foreign policy has nevertheless been constrained by frequent divergent positions within the Presidency and by sustained sub-state obstruction from the Republika Srpska entity. The country's foreign policy strategy expired in 2023 and has not been replaced.

Alignment with HR/VP declarations and Council decisions. According to the 2025 enlargement report, Bosnia and Herzegovina maintained full alignment with HR/VP statements and Council decisions on

sanctions during the reporting period. This report records neither retroactive declarations nor any political contestation at the level of formal endorsement, which corresponds to **full alignment (5/5)**.

Implementation of restrictive measures. Alignment with EU restrictive measures remains politically contested. Ministries controlled by the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats party do not enforce key measures, including the failure to ban flights from Russia and the broadcast of Russian state-sponsored media. In September 2025, the state-level Institute of Metrology and the Institute for Standardisation signed memorandums of understanding with Rosstandart, an EU-sanctioned Russian entity. The pattern of sub-state obstruction has begun to extend to state-level institutions controlled by the same party. Hence, this sustained pattern of sub-state obstruction places Bosnia and Herzegovina within the band of **absent enforcement (1/5)**.

Voting in international organisations. Bosnia and Herzegovina aligned with EU positions at the UN, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Council of Europe on Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. This included co-sponsoring the UNGA resolution 'Advancing a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine' on the third anniversary of the full-scale invasion. Implementation of foreign policy was nevertheless affected by frequent divergent positions within the Presidency, including those in relation to UNGA resolutions, which constrain consistent alignment beyond the most salient votes. Despite internal political tensions, the country's voting record corresponds to **predominant alignment (4/5)**.

Relations with third countries. At state level, relations with sanctioned third countries do not present grounds for concern in their own right. However, the decisive factor is sub-state conduct: Republika Srpska entity authorities maintain frequent contacts with Russia at the highest levels. Moreover, Republika Srpska-controlled state-level institutions have begun stepping up cooperation with Russian counterparts, including the September 2025 Memorandums of Understanding with Rosstandart. The new methodology captures both state-level and sub-state conduct, with the latter being significant and sustained. Taken together, these patterns amount to **counter-EU positioning (1/5)**.

Visa regime alignment. The country's visa policy is not fully aligned with that of the EU. Bosnia and Herzegovina maintains visa-free regimes with Russia and China alongside Azerbaijan, Qatar, Kuwait, Türkiye and Vanuatu, the last of which was removed from the EU's visa-free list in December 2024. The presence of visa-free travel with many politically sensitive states places this country in the band of **major divergence (1/5)**.

Constructive foreign policy contributions. Bosnia and Herzegovina co-sponsored the UNGA resolution on comprehensive peace in Ukraine and contributed to the EU Training Mission in the Central African Republic. The Armed Forces participate in the Balkan Medical Task Force. There is no record in Chapter 31 of substantial humanitarian or military assistance to Ukraine, or of broader diplomatic initiatives advancing EU priorities beyond formal endorsement. This cumulative assessment qualifies as **modest contribution (3/5)**.

Security and defence cooperation. The Armed Forces continue contributing to EU Training Mission in the Central African Republic and participate in the Balkan Medical Task Force; the country has been in NATO's Membership Action Plan since 2019 and benefits from EUR 20 million in European Peace Facility assistance. The Commission explicitly invites the country to step up participation in CSDP military missions and operations, indicating that current engagement is below the level expected of a candidate. The institutional framework is in place but operational participation remains selective. Selective operational participation alongside an established institutional framework corresponds to **routine cooperation (3/5)**.

Non-proliferation and export controls. The country is not a participating State of any multilateral export control regime (Wassenaar Arrangement, Australia Group, Nuclear Suppliers Group, Missile Technology Control Regime). Moreover, its national non-proliferation strategy has expired. Alignment with the EU

Common Position 2008/944 on arms export control is largely complete but measures to prevent diversion of arms and ammunition under the Arms Trade Treaty remain to be established. Implementation of the SALW regional roadmap 2025–2030 is under way but with significant omissions including a unified weapons registry. Absence from multilateral regimes and an expired non-proliferation strategy translate into **limited alignment (2/5)**.

Resilience against foreign information manipulation, interference and cyber threats. The country has no overall policy framework for addressing foreign information manipulation, interference and cyber threats and its institutional response remains fragmented. The Banja Luka-based provider M-tel continues to carry the RT signal despite the country's alignment with EU sanctions against Russia. Alignment with EU statements on cyber and information-related threats is therefore positive but it is not matched by domestic institutional capacity or by enforcement against the FIMI vector operating from the Republika Srpska entity. The combination of an undeveloped framework and a tolerated FIMI vector corresponds to **weak resilience (2/5)**.

Regional relations and neighbourly cooperation. The 2025 Report does not record significant external regional tensions: Bosnia and Herzegovina participates in CEFTA and regional initiatives; bilateral relations with EU Member State neighbours are not flagged as a concern. The country's principal challenges in this area are domestic and constitutional rather than directed outward at regional partners. In the absence of identified concerns at state level, the country falls within the band of **cooperative posture (4/5)**.

The aggregate score of **26 out of 50 (52 %)** equates to the category of **moderately aligned**. Under the current Commission methodology, the country records 100 % alignment with HR/VP declarations and Council decisions; the 48-point divergence between the headline figure and the revised score is therefore enormous. It reflects something that the existing rate cannot capture: this is a formally compliant state whose implementation is systematically undermined from within. The aggregate is supported by full declaratory alignment and predominant voting alignment; it is pulled down by sub-state obstruction across implementation, third-country relations and resilience against foreign information manipulation, interference and cyber threats. Moreover, there is weak baseline capacity in non-proliferation and security cooperation.

6.4 Ukraine

This brief country case study applies the revised CFSP alignment methodology to Ukraine and assesses its alignment with the EU's CFSP.

Alignment with HR/VP declarations and Council decisions on sanctions. According to the 2025 enlargement report, Ukraine's alignment rate is at 99 % on 24 October 2025, with the final annual score being subject to minimal change. This corresponds to **strong alignment (4/5)**.

Implementation of restrictive measures. According to the 2025 enlargement report, while Ukraine has mechanisms in place to ensure effective implementation of sanctions, the sanctions implementation framework should be strengthened. Sanctions evasion is not yet criminalised in Ukraine. This corresponds to **weak enforcement (2/5)**.

Voting in international organisations. According to the 2025 enlargement report, Ukraine's cooperation in international organisations is 'strong and constructive', with the country continuing to align with EU positions at the UN, including supporting EU initiatives in the UN Human Rights Council. In February 2025, the EU and Ukraine jointly initiated the resolution 'Advancing a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine', marking the third anniversary of Russia's invasion. This signifies **consistent alignment (5/5)**.

Relations with third countries. In 2025, Ukraine did not maintain strategic ties or hold high-level bilateral exchanges with those third countries whose foreign policy positions diverge from or conflict with the EU's CFSP. Although since 2011, Ukraine and China have enjoyed a strategic partnership, the agreement as well

as the overall ties between the countries remain dormant, particularly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The Commission's 2025 enlargement report flags no contradictory FTA with hostile third countries. Yet, it flags Ukraine's existing and forthcoming trade arrangements with the United Arab Emirates and Türkiye, noting Ukraine's obligation to balance those commitments with EU membership requirements. Ukraine's political rhetoric remains consistent with CFSP. This corresponds to **marginal concerns (4/5)**.

Visa regime alignment. According to the 2025 enlargement report, Ukraine's national visa regime remains 'largely aligned' with the EU legislation, yet, according to the Eighth Report Under the Visa Suspension Mechanism, 'Ukraine's visa policy is not aligned with the EU as it maintains a visa-free regime with 15 countries that are on the EU list of visa-required countries'. The list includes Belarus – a country adversarial to the EU and being under its sanctions. No fast-track citizenship concerns detected in relation to Ukraine. This corresponds to **significant divergence (2 /5)**.

Constructive foreign policy contributions. Being in direct defensive war with Russia, Ukraine is itself a recipient of military support from the EU, yet its active defence against Russia contributes significantly to the security of the EU and its Member States. Given particular wartime circumstances, Ukraine and EU are engaged in extensive diplomatic cooperation to safeguard the rules-based international order, jointly initiating and sponsoring actions as well as resolutions across international organisations, including primarily the UN. This corresponds to a substantial **contribution (5 /5)**.

Security and Defence Cooperation. According to the 2025 enlargement report, Ukraine, the EU and its Member States significantly increased cooperation in defence and security, particularly within the framework of the European Peace Facility. Ukraine closely cooperated with EU CSDP missions. The specific wartime circumstances make Ukraine both recipient of military support and contributor to European security. This corresponds to **active and broad cooperation (5/5)**.

Non-proliferation and export control. According to the 2025 enlargement report, Ukraine was largely aligned with the EU internationally regarding non-proliferation. It complies with international legal obligations under international export control regimes. Ukraine still has to ratify the Arms Trade Treaty to align its national legal framework with the EU Common Position 2008/944/CFSP and needs to adopt a national strategy for countering and preventing illegal trafficking of SALW. On dual-use goods, Ukraine has yet to achieve full alignment with the latest EU acquis, namely Regulation (EU) 2021/821 and its annual updates as regards the list of dual-use items. Ukraine is a member of the Australia group, the Nuclear Suppliers Group and the Wassenaar Arrangement; it has also adopted and maintained a consolidated list of dual-use goods and technologies based on the EU acquis. This corresponds to **limited alignment (2/5)**.

Resilience against foreign information manipulation, interference and cyber threats. In addition to cooperating actively with the EU based on the 2024 bilateral security agreement, various state institutions are responsible for countering broader foreign information manipulation, interference and cyber threats and ensuring hybrid resilience. These include: the Ministry of Culture and Strategic Communications, the Centre for Countering Disinformation, the Security Service of Ukraine and the National Security and Defence Council. No hostile foreign state media is operating in Ukraine. This corresponds to **strong resilience (5/5)**.

Regional relations and neighbourly cooperation. Ukraine has maintained stable political and good neighbourly relations with EU Member States and candidate countries; it is actively involved in regional initiatives such as Eastern Partnership, the Central European Initiative, Black Sea Economic Cooperation, the Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development and the Regional Cooperation Council. Political differences with Hungary and Slovakia, as well as Georgia and Serbia, largely in relation to the Russia-Ukraine war, persisted in 2025. This corresponds to **cooperative posture (4/5)**.

Ukraine's aggregate score is **38 out of 50 (76 %)**, amounting to a **good level of alignment** in CFSP.

6.5 Georgia

Revised CFSP methodology is applied to Georgia, assessing its alignment with the EU's CFSP.

Alignment with HR/VP declarations and Council decisions on sanctions. According to the 2025 enlargement report, Georgia's alignment rate with CFSP was 40 % on 24 October 2025, with its annual alignment rating unlikely to be much affected. This corresponds to **minimal alignment (1/5)**.

Implementation of restrictive measures. In 2025, Georgia did not align with the EU's restrictive measures. The EU had expected Georgia to step up cooperation on preventing sanctions evasion on its territory and highlighted that re-exporting dual-use goods and advanced technology items listed as Common High Priority Items⁸⁰ and Economically Critical Goods⁸¹ remained a concern. This corresponds to **absent enforcement (1/5)**.

Voting in international organisations. According to the 2025 enlargement report, Georgia did not systematically align with international and EU initiatives in support of Ukraine, including resolutions adopted by the General Assembly of the UN, the Human Rights Council and the Council of Europe. Notably, Georgia did not participate in voting for the UN resolution 'Advancing a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine', which it had initially co-sponsored. Furthermore, Georgia did not support the creation of the Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine set up within the framework of the Council of Europe. This corresponds to a **mixed record (3/5)**.

Relations with third countries. In 2025, Georgia engaged in bilateral political relations with China, Iran and Belarus, while also economically engaging with Russia. Political engagement with Russia is limited due to the absence of diplomatic ties between the two countries and due to Russia's occupation of Georgian territories. Georgia has enjoyed a strategic partnership with China since 2023, expanding ties on a yearly basis with regular exchange visits. For instance, in November 2025, the Georgian Prime Minister visited China. In September 2025, the Georgian Foreign Minister met with her Belarusian counterpart on the sidelines of UNGA. In June 2025, Georgia's deputy Foreign Minister's name was entered in the book of condolences opened in Tbilisi in connection with the deaths of Iranian citizens, while the Georgian Prime Minister visited Iran for high-level meetings in July 2024. Georgia also enjoys preferential trade arrangements with China and Russia. According to the 2025 enlargement report, Georgian authorities were spreading disinformation and conspiracy theories against the EU and EU accession. This corresponds to **significant concerns (2/5)**.

Visa alignment. According to the Eighth Visa Suspension Mechanism Report, Georgia's visa policy diverges substantially from the EU *acquis* as it grants entry to nationals from 17 high-risk countries which are visa-required both in the EU and in Georgia, creating risk of illegal secondary migration. Furthermore, Georgia maintains a visa-free regime with 26 states, including China, Russia, Iran and Belarus. The EU also highlighted potential misuses of Georgian citizenship obtained by Russian nationals through simplified naturalisation procedures, creating risk for illegal migration and broader security implications. This corresponds to **major divergence (1/5)**.

Constructive foreign policy contributions. Georgia has provided humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, as well as selectively supporting EU initiatives or resolutions internationally. Georgia's decision not to vote for the UN resolution supporting Ukraine in 2025 stems from an alternative resolution proposed by the USA. In 2026, Georgia voted with a similar resolution supported by Ukraine and the EU. In 2025, Georgia backed a resolution demanding the return of Ukrainian Children. In December 2025, Georgia sent generators as humanitarian aid to Ukraine and extended support programmes for Ukrainian citizens entering Georgia following the war⁸². In terms of sanctions circumvention, the record is mixed: although Georgia has not

⁸⁰ European Commission, [List of Common High Priority Items \(Version of February 2024\)](#), 22 February 2024.

⁸¹ European Commission, [List of Economically Critical Goods \(Version of 24 February 2025\)](#), 24 February 2025.

⁸² Civil Georgia, ['Georgia Sends Generators to Ukraine, Extends Support Program for Ukrainians'](#), 29 December 2025.

been sanctioned in 2025 or before, the EU raised concerns about re-export of critical goods and the role of Kulevi Port oil terminal in sanctions evasion, requesting Georgian authorities to step up cooperation. This corresponds to **modest contribution (3/5)**.

Security and defence cooperation. In 2025, Georgia did not participate in the EU's CSDP missions. Security and defence cooperation between Georgia and the EU is frozen due to political developments in Georgia. In 2025, Georgia was absent from any EU defence and security related agencies and programmes. This corresponds to **marginal cooperation (1/5)**.

Non-proliferation and export control. According to the 2025 enlargement report, Georgia is actively engaged in supporting disarmament and non-proliferation, thereby fulfilling all its commitments to the International Atomic Energy Agency, the OPCW and the Biological Weapons Convention. Regarding SALW control, Georgia committed itself to the UN Programme of Action, which contains a wide array of measures to combat the illicit proliferation of weapons. Export controls on dual-use goods are applied in accordance with the 2013 Law on the control of military and dual-use goods, which was amended in 2019. Georgia has yet to develop its legislation covering export controls on goods that could be used for capital punishment, torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in line with the EU acquis on anti-torture, namely Regulation (EU) 2019/125. Georgia is a member of the Alliance for Torture-Free Trade. Georgia is not a member of multilateral export control regimes such as the Wassenaar Arrangement, the Nuclear Suppliers Group and the Missile Technology Control Regime. This corresponds to **partial alignment (3/5)**.

Resilience against foreign information manipulation, interference and cyber threats. Cooperation between Georgia and the EU on foreign information manipulation, interference and cyber threats is limited. Cooperation on countering FIMI with the authorities is constrained, while the EU cooperates with civil society in this regard. In August 2025, the Digital Governance Agency under the Ministry of Justice adopted the Cybersecurity Awareness Raising Strategy for 2025–2030, while the Communications Commission is institutionally responsible for promoting media literacy and countering disinformation. Yet, Georgia's growing autocratisation, erosion of checks and balances and institutional independence, leaves Georgian institutions subordinated to partisan interests. As the EU enlargement report noted, 'the Georgian authorities are actively spreading disinformation narratives and conspiracy theories, often targeting the EU and EU accession'. In the Georgian case, countering FIMI is often attributed to allegations by the Georgian authorities of interference by the EU and its Member States into Georgia's domestic affairs rather than to Russia, China, Iran or other malign actors. Georgian pro-government TV outlets are engaged in a persistent anti-EU disinformation campaign, mirroring ruling party officials, while complementing narratives often spread by malign actors such as Russia. This corresponds to **compromised (1/5)**.

Regional relations and neighbourly cooperation. According to the 2025 enlargement report, Georgia participates in regional cooperation platforms such as the Eastern Partnership, the Central European Initiative, the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, the Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development, the South-East European Cooperation Process and the Regional Cooperation Council. The country generally enjoys good relations with its neighbours and other enlargement countries. Political relations with Ukraine have been strained since 2022 albeit the two countries still support each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Political ties with Moldova have also become strained, particularly since 2024. Georgia has territorial conflicts with Russia, affecting political relations, albeit economic ties continue. This corresponds to **cooperative posture (4/5)**.

Aggregated score is **20 out of 50 (38 %)**, placing Georgia in the category of **somewhat aligned**.

6.6 Comparative assessment across the case studies

These cases illustrate that declaratory alignment alone is insufficient for genuine preparedness to participate in the EU's CFSP.

Bosnia and Herzegovina represents the clearest example of this limitation. While recording 100 % formal alignment with HR/VP declarations and Council decisions under the current Commission methodology, the country achieved only 52 % under the revised framework due to a number of weaknesses. These include: systematic implementation failures; sub-state obstruction; poor resilience against foreign information manipulation, interference and cyber threats; as well as problematic engagement by Republika Srpska authorities with sanctioned Russian entities. This case reveals that formal endorsement at state level may coexist with fragmented or obstructed implementation in practice.

Similarly, Serbia illustrates the limits of relying on headline alignment percentages. Despite a reported alignment rate of 63 %, the revised methodology produced a significantly lower aggregate score of 44 %. This divergence stems from: refusal to align with EU sanctions against Russia; sustained strategic engagement with Russia and China; visa-policy divergence; inconsistent voting behaviour in international organisations; and state-facilitated hostile information operations. At the same time, the Serbian case also demonstrates the importance of incorporating positive indicators into the assessment framework. Serbia scored strongly in constructive contributions and security cooperation due to its humanitarian support for Ukraine, sanctions circumvention prevention measures as well as participation in EU and UN missions. The revised methodology therefore captures the coexistence of strategic hedging and selective operational cooperation, which a single declaratory percentage cannot adequately reflect.

Türkiye presents a different pattern. Under the Commission's methodology, it records very low formal alignment with CFSP declarations and sanctions policy, reflected in the 4 % alignment rate. Yet the revised methodology produces a substantially higher aggregate score of 44 %, primarily because of Türkiye's extensive geopolitical and security contributions. Türkiye remains a major NATO actor, a significant contributor to EU and regional security missions, an active mediator in the Russia-Ukraine war as well as a relevant actor in Syria and the Black Sea region. This case demonstrates that the current methodology may understate forms of practical geopolitical cooperation that remain strategically relevant for the EU despite limited declaratory convergence.

Ukraine represents the strongest case of broad substantive alignment. Although its revised score of 76 % remains below the Commission's 99 % alignment rate, this divergence is far narrower than in the Western Balkan cases. Ukraine performs strongly across voting behaviour, constructive contributions, defence cooperation, resilience against foreign information manipulation, interference and cyber threats as well as strategic orientation. The lower revised score primarily reflects technical and institutional shortcomings in sanctions implementation, visa alignment and export-control frameworks rather than geopolitical divergence. The Ukrainian case, therefore, demonstrates that this revised methodology does not simply reduce alignment scores; rather, it differentiates between strategic convergence and remaining implementation gaps even in highly aligned countries.

Georgia illustrates a further distinct trajectory, namely the interaction between democratic backsliding, geopolitical ambiguity and declining CFSP convergence. Unlike Bosnia and Herzegovina or Serbia, where strategic ambiguity coexists with formally pro-EU positioning, the Georgian case increasingly reflects broader political and ideological divergence from EU foreign policy orientations. The revised methodology captures this through low scores across sanctions alignment, resilience against foreign information manipulation, interference and cyber threats, security cooperation and relations with third countries, alongside concerns regarding anti-EU disinformation and growing authoritarian tendencies. The relatively limited divergence between Georgia's Commission alignment rate (40 %) and revised aggregate score (38 %) suggests that, in this case, low declaratory alignment already corresponds to broader strategic divergence.

Across all five cases, a number of broader comparative patterns become apparent:

Firstly, implementation gaps consistently emerge as one of the weakest dimensions across candidate countries. Even where formal declaratory alignment remains high, implementation and enforcement of

restrictive measures often remain partial, politically contested or institutionally weak. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Georgia demonstrate different forms of implementation failure, ranging from deliberate non-alignment to fragmented state capacity and sub-state obstruction.

Secondly, analysis highlights the growing importance of hybrid threats resilience and foreign information manipulation as indicators of substantive geopolitical orientation. Serbia and Georgia perform particularly poorly in this domain due to the tolerance or facilitation of pro-Russian information operations and anti-EU narratives. Bosnia and Herzegovina similarly demonstrates institutional vulnerability to hostile foreign influence. By contrast, Ukraine's strong institutional mobilisation against hybrid threats contributes significantly to its overall alignment profile.

Thirdly, relations with third countries increasingly function as a major differentiating factor in assessing CFSP convergence. Serbia's and Türkiye's sustained high-level engagement with Russia and China, Georgia's expanding ties with China and Iran and Republika Srpska's direct links with sanctioned Russian actors all indicate that external strategic positioning cannot be adequately captured through declaration alignment alone. The revised methodology therefore demonstrates the importance of integrating geopolitical conduct into enlargement assessments.

Fourthly, comparative analysis shows that constructive contributions and operational security cooperation may diverge substantially from declaratory alignment rates. Serbia and Türkiye both perform significantly better in operational cooperation than in formal sanctions alignment, while Ukraine combines both dimensions at a high level. This suggests that CFSP convergence is increasingly multidimensional and cannot be reduced to a binary distinction between alignment and non-alignment.

Overall, the comparative application of revised methodology demonstrates that current Commission alignment rates often obscure substantial differences in implementation quality, strategic orientation and institutional resilience. Hence, the revised framework provides a more differentiated and politically meaningful assessment of candidate countries' preparedness to participate in the EU's foreign and security policy structures. Rather than replacing declaratory alignment indicators, the methodology contextualises them within a broader assessment of actual foreign policy conduct, geopolitical positioning and institutional capacity, thereby offering a more reliable basis for parliamentary scrutiny and enlargement-related decision-making.

Table 1: Comparative application of the revised CFSP alignment methodology

Dimension	Serbia	Türkiye	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Ukraine	Georgia
HR/VP declarations and Council decisions	2/5	1/5	5/5	4/5	1/5
Implementation of restrictive measures	1/5	1/5	1/5	2/5	1/5
Voting in international organisations	2/5	3/5	4/5	5/5	3/5
Relations with third countries	1/5	1/5	1/5	4/5	2/5
Visa regime alignment	1/5	1/5	1/5	2/5	1/5
Constructive foreign policy contributions	5/5	5/5	3/5	5/5	3/5
Security and defence cooperation	4/5	4/5	3/5	5/5	1/5

Non-proliferation and export controls	3/5	2/5	2/5	2/5	3/5
Resilience against foreign information manipulation, interference and cyber threats	1/5	1/5	2/5	5/5	1/5
Regional relations and neighbourly cooperation	2/5	3/5	4/5	4/5	4/5
Aggregate score	22/50	22/50	26/50	38/50	20/50
Aggregate percentage	44 %	44 %	52 %	76 %	38 %
Overall category	Somewhat aligned	Somewhat aligned	Moderately aligned	Good level of alignment	Somewhat aligned

Table 2: Comparison between the current Commission methodology and the revised methodology

Country	Current Commission alignment rate	Revised methodology score	Difference	Key explanation for divergence
Serbia	63 %	44 %	-19 points	Weak implementation, Russia ties, foreign information manipulation, interference and cyber threats, visa divergence offset by constructive contributions
Türkiye	4 %	44 %	+40 points	Very low declaratory alignment but substantial mediation, defence cooperation and geopolitical contributions
Bosnia and Herzegovina	100 %	52 %	-48 points	Full formal alignment undermined by sub-state obstruction and weak implementation
Ukraine	99 %	76 %	-23 points	Strong wartime alignment tempered by implementation and visa-policy shortcomings
Georgia	40 %	38 %	-2 points	Low declaratory alignment broadly consistent with wider strategic divergence

7 Policy implications and recommendations

Findings from this study suggest that the EU's current approach to monitoring CFSP alignment requires substantial revision if it is to serve as a credible instrument for enlargement policy and geopolitical risk assessment. While the existing framework provides a useful baseline for measuring formal alignment with HR/VP declarations and Council decisions, it remains insufficient for evaluating substantive foreign policy convergence, implementation capacity and long-term strategic orientation. The growing geopolitical dimension of enlargement, particularly after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, requires a methodology capable of distinguishing between symbolic, selective and genuine alignment with the Union's external action.

Drawing on lessons from existing EU governance instruments such as the Justice Scoreboard and Rule of Law reporting mechanisms, this study proposes a revised CFSP alignment architecture combining structured quantitative indicators with implementation-based qualitative assessment. The objective is not to replace the Commission's current monitoring practices entirely but to operationalise and aggregate the information already collected into a more transparent, politically relevant and comparable framework as follows:

1. Adopt a revised CFSP Alignment Scoreboard

It is recommended that the European Commission and the EEAS jointly establish a formal CFSP Alignment Scoreboard based on the revised methodology proposed in this study. Similar to the EU Justice Scoreboard, we suggest this instrument combines quantitative indicators with structured qualitative benchmarks and enables year-on-year comparison across candidate countries.

The scoreboard could:

- assess candidate countries across many thematic dimensions rather than relying on a single declaration-alignment percentage;
- provide both aggregate scores and disaggregated thematic results to identify areas of convergence and divergence;
- distinguish clearly between formal declaratory alignment and substantive implementation;
- include transparent scoring criteria and publicly available methodological guidance;
- ensure comparability across countries and reporting cycles.

The revised scoreboard covers at minimum:

1. alignment with HR/VP declarations and Council decisions;
2. implementation and enforcement of restrictive measures;
3. voting behaviour in international organisations;
4. relations with third countries;
5. visa regime alignment;
6. constructive contributions to EU foreign policy objectives;
7. security and defence cooperation;
8. non-proliferation and export controls;
9. resilience against foreign information manipulation, interference and cyber threats;
10. regional cooperation and neighbourly relations.

Importantly, we recommend the revised system to avoid reducing CFSP convergence to a single headline percentage. Instead, it would provide a multidimensional assessment capable of capturing both strategic commitment and operational practice. This scoreboard could be introduced gradually, beginning with those dimensions for which data are already systematically available, such as timely declaration alignment, restrictive-measures implementation and voting behaviour, before expanding to more qualitative dimensions requiring additional institutional guidance.

2. Establish an inter-institutional calibration mechanism for qualitative scoring

The revised methodology relies on structured qualitative judgment across multiple thematic dimensions. While the illustrative criteria provided for each theme establish a consistent framework for assessment, their application across ten candidate countries and successive reporting cycles will inevitably raise questions of comparability. It is recommended that the Commission and EEAS therefore establish a dedicated inter-institutional calibration mechanism to support consistent application of the revised scoreboard.

In our view, the mechanism would:

- bring together representatives from DG ENEST, the EEAS thematic and geographic units responsible for CFSP monitoring;
- convene prior to the finalisation of annual Chapter 31 assessments to review borderline scoring judgments and cases where identical evidence might produce divergent scores across country teams;
- function as a calibration body rather than an override mechanism, with final political responsibility for assessments remaining with the Commission;
- document its deliberations in internal methodological guidance that is updated annually and made available to the European Parliament on request.

This approach draws on established precedent within EU governance. The annual Rule of Law Report is prepared through a structured process involving a network of national rule-of-law contact points, written contributions from Member States and stakeholders, country visits and an opportunity for Member States to comment on the analytical parts of draft country-specific assessments prior to publication. Meanwhile, the Commission retains full political responsibility for its assessments and recommendations. The EU Justice Scoreboard similarly evolves through dialogue with Member States and the European Parliament, with its methodology refined in close cooperation with contact personnel on national justice systems. A comparable calibration process for CFSP alignment scoring would strengthen the consistency and defensibility of the revised methodology without compromising institutional independence or adding disproportionate administrative burden.

3. Establish robust implementation verification protocols

A central weakness of the current methodology is the absence of systematic verification mechanisms assessing whether candidate countries actually implement the restrictive measures and foreign policy commitments they formally endorse. It is therefore recommended that the EU establish dedicated implementation verification protocols under Chapter 31.

In our view, these protocols would include:

- regular monitoring of sanctions implementation through customs, trade and financial data;
- assessment of domestic enforcement mechanisms, including prosecution capacity and criminalisation of sanctions evasion;
- systematic tracking of sanctions circumvention risks and dual-use export flows;
- verification of implementation at sub-state and entity level in federal or highly decentralised systems;
- structured cooperation between DG ENEST, DG FISMA (European Commission's Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union), the EEAS and EU Delegations in candidate countries.

EU Delegations would receive a stronger operational role in implementation monitoring, including the preparation of implementation assessments accompanying annual enlargement reports. Candidate countries would also be encouraged to establish dedicated domestic coordination mechanisms for restrictive measures implementation and reporting.

4. Strengthen Chapter 31 benchmarks and conditionality

The study demonstrates that CFSP alignment increasingly functions as a geopolitical litmus test within enlargement policy. However, Chapter 31 currently lacks sufficiently precise and operational benchmarks. It is recommended that the Commission and Member States strengthen the role of Chapter 31 within the accession framework.

In our view, this would include:

- clearer interim benchmarks linked to sanctions implementation, strategic alignment and resilience against foreign information manipulation, interference and cyber threats;
- stronger linkage between CFSP alignment performance and overall accession progress;
- explicit treatment of persistent sanctions non-alignment or systematic circumvention as grounds for slowing negotiation progress;
- stricter treatment of retroactive alignment, which would no longer count toward annual alignment rates;
- clearer differentiation between timely alignment and delayed symbolic endorsement.

It is recommended that particular attention is paid to politically salient divergences, especially regarding restrictive measures against Russia, voting behaviour in multilateral organisations and strategic dependencies involving China, Iran or other actors whose positions fundamentally diverge from EU foreign policy priorities.

5. Increase transparency and methodological accountability

The current methodology suffers from limited transparency, both externally and within EU institutions themselves. It is recommended that the Commission and EEAS therefore publish a formal written methodology explaining:

- the indicators used in CFSP assessment;
- weighting principles;
- treatment of retroactive alignment;
- verification procedures;
- calculation methods for alignment percentages;
- criteria for preparedness classifications under Chapter 31.

In our view, annual enlargement reports would also systematically disclose:

- the total number of declarations assessed;
- the denominator underlying alignment percentages;
- politically significant cases of non-alignment;
- implementation gaps related to restrictive measures;
- methodological changes between reporting cycles.

Such transparency would improve the credibility of enlargement reporting by strengthening information which is subject to parliamentary and public scrutiny.

6. Strengthen the European Parliament's role

It is recommended that the European Parliament, particularly AFET, play a stronger role in scrutinising CFSP alignment and ensuring political accountability within enlargement policy.

AFET could:

- systematically use multidimensional CFSP scoreboards during parliamentary scrutiny of enlargement reports;
- request dedicated implementation assessments regarding restrictive measures and sanctions circumvention;
- organise regular hearings with the Commission and EEAS on Chapter 31 monitoring practices;
- develop parliamentary benchmarks for politically salient alignment issues;
- encourage greater consistency between parliamentary assessments and Commission reporting.

The Parliament is particularly well-positioned to address the current divergencies between quantitative alignment figures and substantive political evaluation. In a number of cases, parliamentary resolutions have

already highlighted divergences overlooked or underweighted in Commission reporting. Institutionalising this scrutiny would improve the political robustness of enlargement assessments.

7. Encourage strategic convergence rather than performative alignment

Finally, it is recommended that the EU recognises that CFSP alignment is not merely a technical requirement but an indicator of long-term strategic orientation. The current methodology incentivises performative behaviour whereby candidate countries maximise formal alignment rates while concurrently maintaining contradictory foreign policy practices. In our view, a revised framework would instead reward substantive convergence, implementation credibility and demonstrated political commitment to the Union's external action.

8 Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the EU's current methodology for assessing candidate countries' alignment with the CFSP no longer sufficiently captures the political and geopolitical realities of enlargement. While the existing approach based on alignment with HR/VP declarations and Council decisions provides a useful baseline indicator of formal convergence, it remains too narrow to evaluate whether candidate countries are genuinely prepared to participate in the political solidarity, strategic coordination and collective external action required within the Union.

Analysis here has identified a series of systemic shortcomings in the current framework. Present methodology is far too reliant on quantitative declaration alignment while underestimating implementation, strategic orientation, political intent and operational behaviour. It struggles to distinguish between symbolic and substantive alignment, treats politically unequal issues as equivalent and permits retroactive endorsement practices that weaken the credibility of annual alignment rates. At the same time, limited transparency, inconsistent reporting practices and insufficient verification mechanisms undermine the comparability and accountability of assessments across countries and over time.

In response, the study has proposed a revised multidimensional methodology designed to provide AFET and the European Parliament with a more analytically robust and politically meaningful assessment tool. Rather than replacing existing Commission and EEAS monitoring structures, the proposed framework reorganises and operationalises information already collected through enlargement reporting. By combining quantitative and qualitative indicators across ten thematic dimensions, this revised scoreboard improves the capacity to identify where substantive convergence exists, where implementation gaps persist and where strategic divergence may undermine future CFSP cohesion inside the Union. The proposed framework should therefore be understood not as a mechanistic accession filter but as a decision-support tool that makes existing political assessments more transparent, comparable and evidence-based.

The analytical upgrades offer a number of advantages for parliamentary scrutiny and political assessment. Firstly, they move beyond a single declaratory alignment percentage toward a broader evaluation of foreign policy conduct and implementation. Secondly, they strengthen comparability across candidate countries while preserving the ability to assess politically salient divergences individually. Thirdly, they improve transparency by linking assessment outcomes to structured and publicly understandable criteria. Finally, they improve alignment of enlargement monitoring with geopolitical logic, increasingly underpinning EU enlargement policy after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

This study has also highlighted the broader strategic implications of failing to address shortcomings within the current methodology. If enlargement decisions continue to rely heavily on formal declaration alignment without adequately assessing implementation and strategic orientation, the EU risks importing unresolved foreign policy divergences into the Union itself. Past enlargements have already demonstrated that pre-accession alignment does not automatically translate into post-accession cohesion, particularly where candidate countries continue to maintain strong political, economic or security dependencies on external actors whose interests diverge from those of the EU.

These risks are amplified in the current geopolitical environment. Candidate countries pursuing hedging strategies, selectively implementing restrictive measures, facilitating sanctions circumvention, or maintaining strategic ambiguity toward Russia or China may formally satisfy existing quantitative benchmarks while remaining only partially aligned with the Union's broader foreign policy objectives. Once inside the Union's consensus-based CFSP framework, such divergences could complicate collective decision-making, weaken the credibility of EU external action and increase the risk of internal fragmentation during future geopolitical crises. Even if future reforms were to expand the use of qualified majority voting in CFSP, such changes would not remove the need to assess substantive foreign policy

convergence before accession, since strategic divergence could still weaken EU external action through implementation gaps, coalition-building, political signalling and the dilution of common positions.

In this regard, strengthening CFSP alignment assessment should be understood not merely as a technical improvement to enlargement reporting but as part of a broader effort to safeguard the future coherence and strategic capacity of the EU itself. Enlargement policy increasingly functions as a geopolitical instrument aimed at consolidating a Union capable of acting cohesively in an unstable international environment. A more rigorous, transparent and implementation-oriented methodology is therefore essential both for preserving the credibility of enlargement conditionality and for ensuring that future enlargements strengthen rather than dilute the EU's capacity for CFSP action.

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