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EU Trade and Non-Trade Objectives: New Survey Evidence on Policy Design and Effectiveness

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Abstract: EU trade policy increasingly focuses on the achievement of so-called non-trade policy objectives (NTPOs) such as the promotion of human rights or environmental protection, motivating research on the political economy determinants and effectiveness of linking of trade policy and NTPOs. This research note reports selected findings from a new expert survey of stakeholder perceptions on trade-NTPO linkage. These suggest that EU institutions' views align more with those of civil society organizations than business, but also reveal significant differences in the perceived effectiveness of trade-NTPO linkage strategies. Many stakeholder groups believe that policy instruments other than trade agreements are better tools to pursue NTPOs. These findings suggest that further research on EU trade policy and nontrade issues should consider the broader range of external policy tools available to the EU in pursuit of NTPOs and the determinants of differences in preferences for alternative policy instruments.

Keywords: EU trade policy, non-trade objectives, trade agreements, expert survey, issue linkage

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Introduction

The trade policy of the European Union (EU) increasingly includes a focus on so-called non-trade policy objectives (NTPOs) such as the promotion of human rights, labor standards or environmental protection in partner countries (Hirsch 2017; Lechner, 2016; Poletti and Sicurelli 2016; Raess et al. 2018). This is reflected in linkage strategies, i.e. conditioning access to the EU market on NTPO commitments by partner countries (Borchert et al., 2018), and inspired a long line of literature emphasizing that the successfully pursuing NTPOs through trade policy hinges on garnering support from domestic organized interests, including different business interests and civil society organizations (CSOs) (Meunier and Nicolaidis 2006; Young and Peterson 2014; Poletti and Sicurelli 2018; Dür et al. 2019). Yet, despite the quality of these works little is known about the alignment of EU policymakers' preferences with those of CSOs and other stakeholder groups and the degree to which different actors have similar preferences.

While research has found that EU trade officials often agree with the views of non-business stakeholders, when are they more (or less) likely to do so? Do the preferences of EU businesses and policymakers align in using trade agreements to pursue NTPOs? In this research note, we help answer these questions and focus on variation in actor preferences across alternative policy instruments available to the EU to pursue NTPOs. We present evidence from a new expert survey on preferences over NTPOs and perceptions on the salience and utility of alternative trade-relevant policy instruments, shedding light on a range of stakeholders' views over the EU's use of trade policy to pursue goals beyond trade.¹

The results suggest there is broad agreement to use trade policy conditionally (i.e., pursue trade-NTPO linkage), but substantial disagreement regarding the most appropriate (effective) instruments to achieve NTPOs. CSOs perceive targeted assistance to NGOs as the most desirable instrument to pursue NTPOs, while partner country governments and European business, on the other hand, show strong support for technical assistance. Amongst businesses, the views of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) mirror those of CSOs in preferring targeted assistance, while large firms are more supportive of bilateral expert

¹ The survey complements more public opinion polls such as the Eurobarometer polls or Pew Research Centre global surveys on attitudes towards economic globalization and the EU Commission public consultations. See <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm> for information on the different types of Eurobarometer editions and https://ec.europa.eu/info/consultations_en for EU public consultations. Pew surveys are at <https://www.pewglobal.org/category/publications>.

dialogues. In general, unlike EU policymakers, European firms, business associations and CSOs are more skeptical regarding the effectiveness of conditioning trade agreements on NTPOs. These findings raise questions regarding the dynamics underlying this variation in interest alignment between different actors and policy instruments to achieve non-trade goals in EU external relations. The findings contribute to academic research on societal preferences on linkages between trade and NTPOs and further help trade policymakers to reflect about effective policy designs to pursue economic objectives and NTPOs.

Views on trade and non-trade policy objectives

Conventional accounts of EU trade policymaking suggest that businesses are largely hesitant or opposed to the inclusion of NTPOs, reflecting fears these may reduce competitiveness or market access (Lechner 2016; Poletti and Sicurelli 2016). CSOs, on the other hand, are held to favor linking EU trade policy to strong labor, environmental, and human rights provisions in trade agreements and granting of preferential access (Fritz 2010; Young 2016; Lechner 2016; Bossuyt et al. 2018). EU policymakers, in turn, are portrayed to be closely aligned with business interests, often overlooking the concerns of CSOs on trade policy (Elsig and Dupont 2007; Woll 2009). The logic underlying EU policy alignment on business preferences is that integrating business into trade policymaking increases EU bargaining power vis-à-vis third countries, strengthens legitimacy, and solidifies technical expertise (Bouwen 2002; Elsig and Dupont 2007; Van den Hoven 2006; Woll 2009). These accounts have been complemented with more nuanced studies that aim to capture differences in business interests with regard to their preferences over NTPOs. For example, some scholars have postulated that import-competing firms and sectors are more likely to be proponents of labor and environmental standards because of their potential to impose additional costs on foreign competitors (DeSombre 2000; Raess et al. 2016). On the other hand, importers and vertically integrated multinationals that rely on imports may mobilize against NTPOs, since such policies may increase the cost of doing business (e.g. Lechner 2016).

The growing politicization of trade policy increases the salience of analyses of the political dynamics and coalitions underlying EU trade policy (De Ville and Siles-Brügge 2015; Young 2015,2016). Recent scholarship demonstrates that CSOs have significant influence in EU trade policy making (e.g. Eliasson and Garcia-Duran 2018) and that EU policymakers increasingly consider the views of CSOs in using trade policy to pursue NTPOs. The literature

on 'normative power Europe' highlights the EU's pursuit of sustainable development goals in 'new generation' of trade agreements, with civic society supporting the foundations of a value-based discourse in trade policy (Van den Putte and Orbie 2015; Poletti and Sicurelli 2018; Young and Peterson 2014). We complement this scholarship by providing new evidence on preference alignment between organized interests and policymakers on the one hand, and between various stakeholders on the other.²

The survey instrument

The expert survey has several distinct features. It covers a wide range of stakeholder groups, in and outside the EU, and their views on EU trade policy making. The sample includes practitioners in EU institutions, governments (both EU Member States and non-EU partner countries), businesses and associations, civil society organizations working on trade, and academics in and outside the EU. Such comprehensive coverage of actors with an operational stake in EU trade policy helps us identify patterns of preferences over NTPOs and the extent to which actors' views are aligned with each other in a more systematic way. The questionnaire also includes questions on the perceived effectiveness of different trade-relevant policy instruments used by (available to) the EU. This permits mapping perceptions on the usefulness of different instruments across actors within and outside the EU. The inclusion of non-EU participants sheds light on EU trade partner's views. This is important as they are key in ultimately implementing the non-trade policies pursued by the EU (Harrison et al. 2019).

The data were collected through an online survey application from 5 July 2018 to 24 June 2019. The survey was sent to people identified through a contact list of trade policy experts).³ All responses were anonymized by the software application used. A total of 416

² The survey instrument is complemented by a series of essays by practitioners and experts reflecting on different aspects of EU trade policy and the efficacy of efforts to link trade to NTPOs. These are collected in Bilal and Hoekman (2019).

³ Respondents had the option not to answer a question, creating a missing value for the associated variable. The survey was disseminated by email using a contact list of about 2600 experts including practitioners and stakeholders (an initial email was followed by 6 reminders, staggered over time). Further dissemination of the survey within the relevant population of EU trade policy stakeholders was promoted by encouraging respondents to forward the questionnaire to colleagues (i.e., a snowballing approach). Note this methodology does not permit computing response rates as the size of the total population invited to take the survey is unknown to the analysts. Moreover, the anonymity of responses does not permit identifying the subset of contacts that did not take the survey. See Fiorini et al. (2019) for a detailed description of the survey design and implementation, as well as responses to all questions.

respondents affiliated with the stakeholder groups analyzed here took the survey, of which 348 completed the questionnaire.

Findings

The four groups we focus on in what follows are EU policymakers, distinguishing between EU institution staff and Member State officials; businesses, distinguishing between firms and business associations; civil society organizations; and government officials of EU trade partner countries. We report results for two additional categories which are covered in our survey: respondents from academia (and think-tanks), and from non-EU international organizations.⁴ To better understand stakeholder positions on trade-NTPO linkage and views on its effectiveness, we focus on three statements presented to participants from our survey instrument, outlined in Figure 1 below. These concern support for the strategy of using trade policy to achieve NTPOs, the perceived effectiveness trade-NTPO linkage, and the types of instruments that are most appropriate (effective).⁵ The results are consistent with the growing literature highlighting civic society's influence on EU trade policy design, but also reveal both expected and surprising differences in stakeholder preferences over NTPOs.

We start by presenting descriptive evidence from the survey. Moreover, to better understand the association between stakeholder groups and their support for questionnaire statements on NTPOs we complement descriptive analysis with results of ordered probit regression models. We integrate both the descriptive and regression analysis with the study of relevant sub-categories that are identifiable in our data by splitting respondents into groups. We report separate results for SMEs and for large firms; public stakeholders in Western versus Eastern European EU member states; and government officials from partner countries with high vs. low levels of economic development.⁶

⁴ While these two categories of respondents represent groups with less direct interest in EU trade policy, they can be the source of policy advice which shapes preferences and actions of stakeholders. One caveat here is the fact that academia and think tanks are relatively over-represented in our data. All patterns discussed in this research note are robust to the exclusion of these two categories from the data.

⁵ The survey has questions on many more dimensions of EU trade and external policies that may be of interest from a research perspective. See Fiorini et al. (2019).

⁶ Model specification details and alternative operationalizations are provided in the online appendix.

1. Support for linking non-trade policy objectives to trade policy

The first question we analyze concerns support for linking NTPOs to trade policy. With regards to conditioning access to the EU market on non-trade issues, EU member state government officials and EU institutions' views are most aligned with those of CSO respondents in supporting the linkage strategy (Figure 1, Panel 1.1). Amongst business interests SMEs are the least positive towards conditionality, while large firms are more supportive of trade-NTPO linkages. While we refrain from generalizing given our small sample size on firms, large companies (likely to be multinationals) may be more able to accommodate costs associated with burdensome regulations – hence less likely to oppose them. Partner country officials are highly skeptical as well, consistent with hypotheses that national comparative advantages may be curbed by non-trade regulations (Harrison et al. 2019). Nonetheless, most respondents in all six groups support or are agnostic about linking NTPOs and market access.

The results from the associated probit models (Panel 1.1 of Figure 2) point to a statistically significant preference alignment between CSOs and EU policymakers. On the negative side of the spectrum, the ordered probit model suggests statistically significant alignment between partner country government respondents and companies. There is no statistically significant difference between SMEs and large firms, low and high-income partner countries, or western vs. eastern EU Member States: the confidence intervals around the point estimates for these groups overlap (see Figure 2 panel 1.2).

2. Do actors think pursuing NTPOs through trade policy works?

Turning to views on the efficacy of the trade-NTPO linkage strategy a different pattern obtains. From Panel 2 of Figure 1 and Figure 2 we can observe that respondents from EU institutions are more aligned with businesses (especially business associations) in thinking trade policy supports the realization of NTPOs. In contrast, CSOs are less inclined to believe that the strategy is effective. Thus, while CSOs are in favor of trade-NTPO linkage, they are not convinced of its efficacy – in contrast to EU policymakers. The data suggest no significant divergence between sub-categories of firms, partner countries and EUMS.⁷

⁷ The small number of data points for each subcategory implies very limited statistical power and thus generates rather imprecise estimates.

3. Does pursuit of NTPOs come at the cost of trade goals?

Panel 3 of Figures 1 and 2 reports stakeholder responses to the question whether EU trade policy is 'less effective with NTPOs'. Mirroring the results shown on Panel 2, businesses and government officials of EU partner countries perceive trade policy becomes less effective as a result of pursuing non-trade goals. The business result is clearly driven by SMEs (panel 3.2 of Figure 2), suggesting that smaller firms are particularly sensitive to trade-NTPO tradeoffs. CSOs, on the other hand, disagree strongly. While many of the CSOs do not think the strategy pays off in achieving NTPOs (as shown in Panel 2), they do not believe it adversely affects the realization of trade objectives. In other words, CSO responses suggest that trade policy *can* be used to induce change non-trade related areas, such as human rights and environmental protection. On this there is again alignment with respondents from EU institutions.

The patterns of preferences across the eight main categories of professional affiliation highlighted so far are robust to alternative exercises, including ordered probit models with responses coded to take only 3 values instead of 5, as well as binomial probit specifications on dichotomized outcome variables.⁸ These robustness tests provide evidence of heterogeneity in the preferences of sub-categories of professional affiliations. SMEs and high-income partner countries reveal relatively weaker support for the conditionality strategy. Low numbers of observations as well as heterogeneous results across alternative models indicates further work is needed to better investigate the preferences of different sub-categories of stakeholders.

⁸ We replicated the ordered probit regressions reported in Figure 2 after aggregating responses to a 3 values support: $y = 1$ if "strongly disagree" or "agree"; $y = 2$ if "neutral"; and $y = 3$ if "agree" or "strongly agree". Standard statistical tests for the parallel regressions assumption for each specification with both the 5- and the 3-values outcome variables support the assumption to be verified for each specification for at least one of the two definitions of the outcome variable. Results do not changes if binomial probit regressions are run by dropping neutral answers and recoding remaining responses to take only 2 values: $y = 0$ if "strongly disagree" or "agree"; and $y = 1$ if "agree" or "strongly agree". Results are available upon request.

Which policy instruments are preferred?

CSO respondents, companies and business associations all support the trade-NTPO linkage strategy in principle, but CSOs seem less sanguine it is effective. This raises a corollary question regarding the instruments that are perceived to be most salient to pursue NTPOs.⁹ Much if not most of the literature on EU trade policy and NTPOs views matters through the lens of market access linkage: trade agreements that encompass sustainable development chapters and trade preferences that are conditional on NTPO commitments (the GSP+ program).¹⁰ The EU has access to many instruments in addition to trade agreement conditionality. In order to explore stakeholders' views on alternative policy instruments to achieve NTPOs the survey includes a question the appropriate (most effective) trade-relevant policy instruments available to (used by) the EU, including technical assistance, trade promotion, investment promotion, training and expert dialogues.¹¹ The results are presented in Table 1.

Overall, all eight categories of actors identify the same top two instruments to promote realization of NTPOs: targeted assistance to NGOs and expert dialogues between the EU and partner countries. CSO respondents reveal a strong preference for targeted assistance to NGOs (i.e., themselves), suggesting skepticism of instruments that involve other stakeholders (such as partner country governments or business groups) in addressing NTPOs. Respondents from enterprises and business associations show a strong preference for expert dialogues and technical assistance. Respondents put trade agreements in 6th place (7th if considering only sub-categories) when 'ranking' EU policy instruments in terms of salience for realizing NTPOs. Neither SMEs or large firms favor PTAs either and are more likely to support targeted or technical assistance. Respondents affiliated with EU institutions are the outlier, being the only group that puts trade agreements as a top choice. Other actors – notably

⁹ The research agenda proposed by Dür et al. (2019) does not address the question of instrument effectiveness or interdependencies between instruments.

¹⁰ The survey makes clear that EU trade agreements encompass the recent vintage agreements that include sustainable development chapters.

¹¹ The list of instruments included in the survey question was developed in collaboration with members of the RESPECT consortium (see <http://respect.eui.eu/>). Instruments designed specifically to address trade only, such as unilateral trade preferences under the General System of Preferences (GSP) were excluded as these are not linked to NTPOs. Sector-specific trade instruments that are directly linked to NTPOs, such as import restrictions for timber (e.g., the EU FLEGT program; conflict minerals) were also excluded as our main interest is to assess views on "horizontal", non-sector-specific instruments that can be used to achieve NTPOs and complement trade agreements, which by design cover all sectors.

policymakers from partner countries – consider trade agreements to be less effective than assistance to relevant NGOs, regulatory bodies in partner countries, expert dialogues, and technical assistance more generally. This is consistent with expectations that partner countries and businesses seek to avoid inclusion of costly labor or environmental standards in trade agreements, but the fact that other instruments dominate in the responses of all stakeholder groups suggests broad alignment in views that trade agreements are not the most effective instrument to attain NTPOs.

These findings are only suggestive given the small sample size but they point to diverging preferences on what particular instruments to use to pursue NTPOs, and the salience of efforts by the EU to enhance policy coherence (Carbone and Keijzer 2016) by complementing trade agreements with aid for trade (Hynes and Holden, 2016). A potential factor why respondents are not convinced trade agreements are an effective tool is the view expressed by many respondents that the EU does not effectively monitor how implementation of trade agreements impacts non-trade outcomes.

An expanding research agenda

The survey results suggest that EU policymakers and CSOs concerned with EU trade policy have similar views on the trade-NTPO linkage strategy but differ on its effectiveness. The findings confirm recent observations on evolving alignments between EU policymakers, business and CSOs on NTPOs. EU policymakers, CSOs and even various business actors seem to hold similar views on the role of NTPOs in trade policy. These alignment patterns vary considerably in terms of preferred policy instruments, which suggests differences in views regarding the specific instruments to pursue NTPOs through trade policy. These observations call for further investigation why actors prefer different policy instruments. What informs their choices? To what extent are perceptions supported by evidence on effectiveness of alternative instruments? These questions are not only of academic interest. They are relevant for policy design. For example, research has shown that EU trade policy is more effective if complemented by supporting policies, e.g., service sector regulation in the context of services trade policy reform (Fiorini and Hoekman, 2019).

Future research should consider EU trade policy-related instruments more broadly, suggesting an agenda that goes beyond the predominant focus on (reciprocal) trade

agreements and (nonreciprocal) trade preferences in the literature. Understanding differences in (determinants of) actor preferences across these traditional trade policy tools is important (Dür et al. 2019) but risks being too narrow. Research is needed as well on the design of different types of linkage strategies in the pursuit of nontrade objectives (Aidt et al. 2019) and the underlying mechanisms explaining stakeholder choices over a broader range of salient policy instruments. Moreover, as noted above, our design is unable to substantially consider differences in firm-level preferences over NTPOs. While we can observe business preferences overall, and certain differences between SMEs and larger firms, further research will benefit greatly from untangling firms' preferences and mobilization over policies linked to trade.

Finally, the survey reveals both the importance and the challenge of getting a comprehensive overview of stakeholder interests. Previous research often focuses on a subset of stakeholders involved in trade policymaking (e.g., Raess et al. 2018). The survey results complement existing studies by generating empirical evidence on perceptions and actor preferences on non-trade issues for many relevant stakeholders in a single study. The low number of responses we gathered from experts illustrates the difficulty in reaching the parties involved in or affected by the design and implementation of EU trade policies, and in a broader sense, mapping views on using trade as an instrument to achieve non-trade policy objectives.

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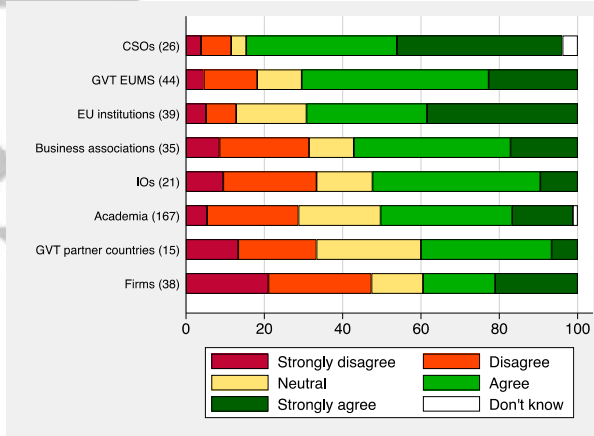
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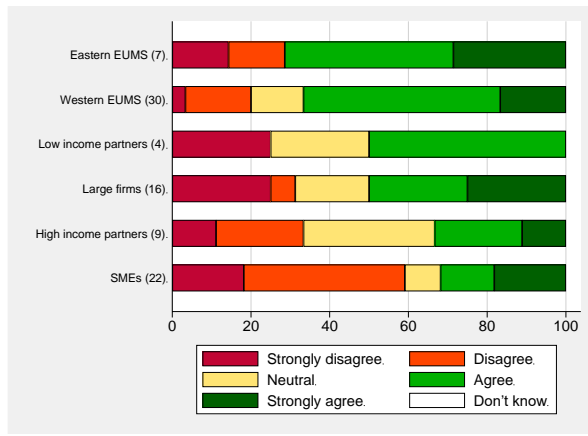
Figure 1: Selected survey results - descriptive analysis

Panel 1 question: The EU should make access to its markets by other countries conditional on non-trade outcomes (such as human rights, labor, environmental protection)

Panel 1.1: Main categories

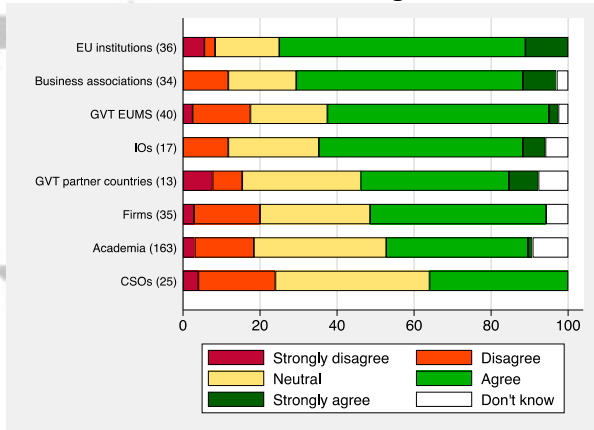


Panel 1.2: Sub-categories

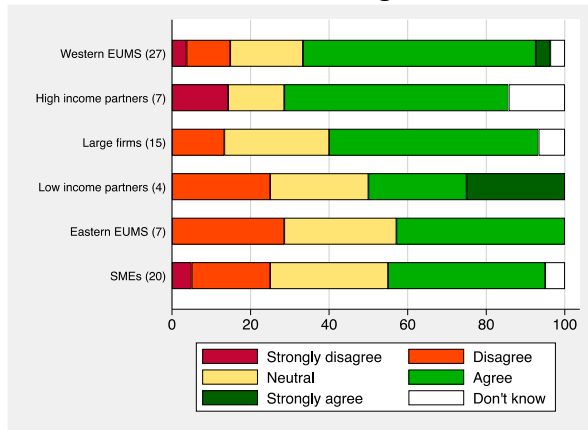


Panel 2 question: EU trade policy supports the realisation of EU non-trade objectives (such as human rights, labor, environmental protection)

Panel 2.1: Main categories



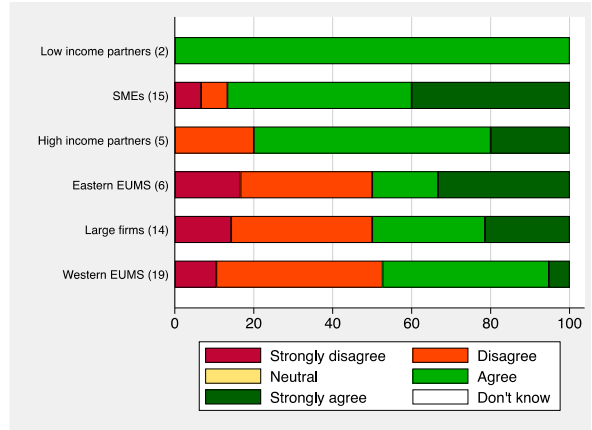
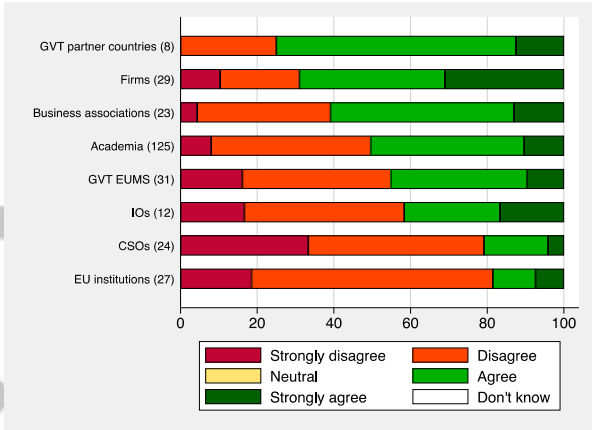
Panel 2.1: Sub-categories



Panel 3 question: Inclusion of non-trade objectives reduces the effectiveness of EU trade policy

Panel 3.1: Main categories

Panel 3.2: Sub-categories

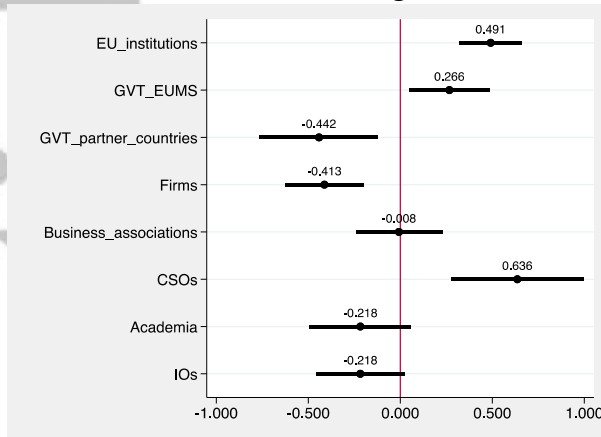


Notes: in the panels professional categories are sorted according to the percentage of strongly agree plus agree responses (from highest to lowest).

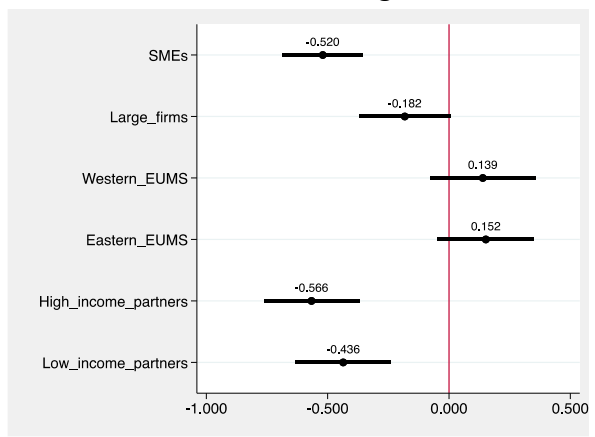
Figure 2: Selected survey results - regression analysis

Panel 1 question: The EU should make access to its markets by other countries conditional on non-trade outcomes (such as human rights, labor, environmental protection)

Panel 1.1: Main categories

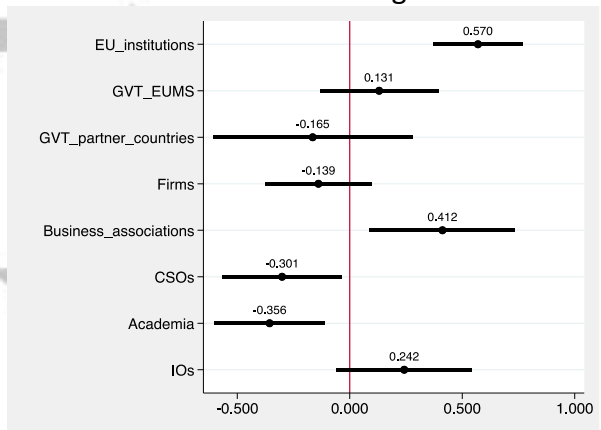


Panel 1.2: Sub-categories

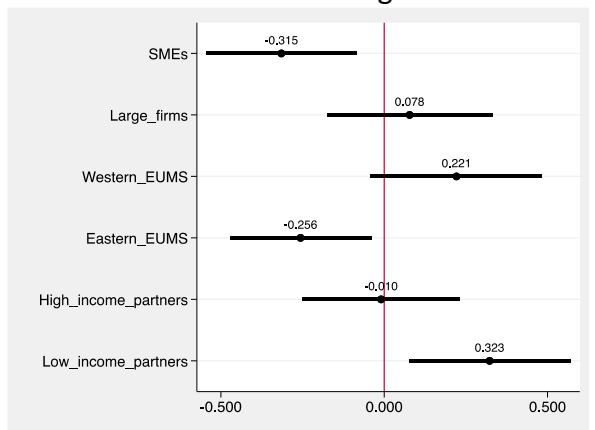


Panel 2 question: EU trade policy supports the realisation of EU non-trade objectives (such as human rights, labor, environmental protection)

Panel 2.1: Main categories



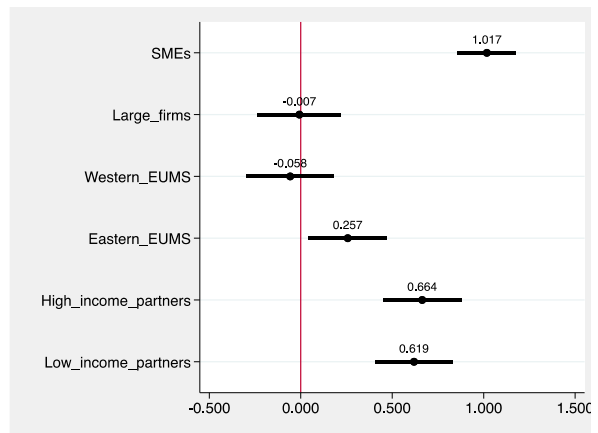
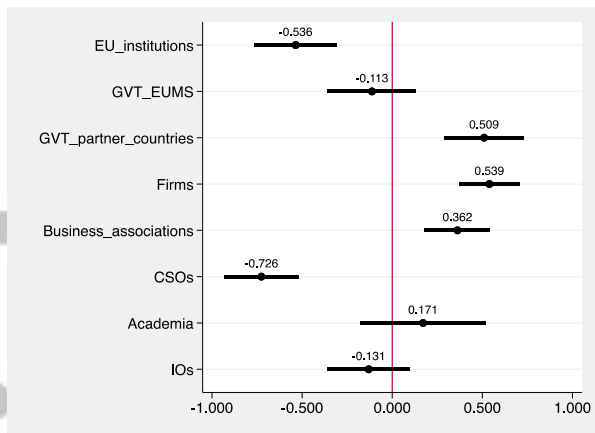
Panel 2.1: Sub-categories



Panel 3 question: Inclusion of non-trade objectives reduces the effectiveness of EU trade policy

Panel 3.1: Main categories

Panel 3.2: Sub-categories



Notes: Panels report point estimates and respective 95% confidence intervals from ordered probit models.

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Table 1: Instruments for the realization of NTPOs

	Targeted assistance	Expert dialogues	Technical assistance	EU assistance funds	Bilateral	Trade agreements	Study tours and Development	Direct investment by	Twinning of cities	Other instruments	National export	Total number of	Total number of	
EU institutions	20	20	11	15	5	1 6	2	4	5	0	2	0	33	96
GVT EUMS	20	15	12	9	1 5	7	8	3	3	5	1	2	39	14 3
GVT partner countries	18	15	15	10	1 0	0	8	8	1 0	5	0	0	13	39
Firms	17	19	12	7	5	8	1 2	3	7	5	3	1	33	95
Business associations	16	18	14	8	8	8	8	4	6	6	4	0	33	10 6
CSOs	23	14	10	10	8	9	9	3	5	2	4	3	25	92
Academia	17	15	12	12	8	9	9	8	4	4	2	0	15 0	46 6
IOs	13	15	13	8	1 3	8	7	5	8	3	3	2	18	60
Total number of respondents from main categories	19 6	17 4	13 2	11 6	9 9	9 6	8 7	6 1	5 5	4 4	2 7	1 0		
SMEs	21	21	13	10	2	8	6	2	1 0	2	2	2	18	48
Large firms	13	17	11	4	9	9	1 7	4	4	9	4	0	15	47
Western EUMS	21	16	11	8	1 6	4	7	4	3	5	1	3	26	95
Eastern EUMS	18	9	18	9	1 8	1 4	5	5	0	5	0	0	7	22
High income partners	21	17	17	8	1 3	0	8	0	8	8	0	0	7	24
Low income partners	8	0	17	17	8	0	8	2 5	1 7	0	0	0	4	12
Total number of respondents from sub-categories	46	39	31	21	2 8	1 5	2 2	1 1	1 4	1 3	4 4	4		

Note: The green parts of the table report percentage shares of each instrument (columns) as chosen by a respondent category (row) over the total choices made by that category (e.g. 20% of all choices made by respondents from EU institutions indicated targeted assistance for NGOs/unions/regulatory bodies as one instrument most effectively promoting non-trade objectives). Instruments (columns) are sorted according to the total number of respondents selecting each instrument across the 8 main professional categories in our analysis. The first

orange row of the table reports these totals while the second orange row (last row of the table) gives the total number of respondents choosing each instrument across the 6 sub-categories. The final two columns report the total number of respondents and responses per professional category. There are more responses than respondents, as each respondent could select more than one instrument.