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EUROPEAN UNION EXTERNAL ACTION IN UKRAINE: SECURITISING CRITICAL MINERALS

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Abstract

This article examines how the European Union (EU) securitises Ukrainian Critical Raw Materials in its external action following Russia's invasion in 2022. It asks how minerals such as lithium and titanium, once framed as economic assets, have been redefined as matters of European security, strategic autonomy, and geopolitical survival. The analysis of EU external action combines lenses from the Copenhagen and Paris Schools. It traces how EU leaders and policy documents construct critical raw materials as existential conditions for decarbonisation, resilience, and sovereignty. By linking supply chain dependence, climate transition and Ukraine, EU discourse repositions access to Ukrainian minerals beyond normal economic politics. Second, it examines how this securitisation is embedded in governance practices, including core EU external policy instruments. These instruments institutionalise security logics through regulatory alignment and financial conditionality, normalising the management of Ukrainian resources within EU value chains. The article argues that this securitisation operates through discursive power and bureaucratic practice. Framed through resilience and strategic autonomy, this technocratic logic carries political consequences. While it may accelerate European decarbonisation and reduce dependency, it also risks reinforcing centre periphery dynamics and prioritising European energy security over Ukrainian socio-economic and environmental concerns. By analysing Ukraine, the article contributes to debates on green geopolitics and EU external action, showing how climate transition, resource governance and security are (de)constructed within a geopolitical rationality that defines vulnerabilities, stabilises certain forms of expertise and marginalises alternative pathways. This (in)securitisation process of Ukrainian critical minerals within European supply chains reveals tension between the EU's normative self-understanding and the logic of green geopolitics.

Keywords

Critical Raw Materials, Critical Security Studies, Energy Transition, European Union External Action, Ukraine.

Resumo

Este artigo examina de que modo a União Europeia (UE) securitiza os minerais críticos ucranianos na sua ação externa, após a invasão russa de 2022. Questiona como minerais como lítio e titânio, outrora ativos económicos, foram redefinidos como questões de segurança europeia, autonomia estratégica e sobrevivência geopolítica. A análise da ação externa da UE combina perspetivas das Escolas de Copenhaga e de Paris. Investiga como líderes e documentos constroem os minerais críticos como condições existenciais para descarbonização, resiliência e soberania. Ao interligar a dependência das cadeias de

fornecimento, a transição climática e a Ucrânia, o discurso da UE reposiciona o acesso a minerais ucranianos para além da política económica normal. Em paralelo, examina como esta securitização se incorpora em práticas governativas e instrumentos centrais da política externa da UE. Estes institucionalizam lógicas de segurança por alinhamento regulatório e condicionalidade financeira, normalizando recursos ucranianos nas cadeias de valor da UE. O artigo argumenta que esta securitização opera através do poder discursivo e práticas burocráticas. Enquadrada em resiliência e autonomia estratégica, esta lógica tecnocrática tem consequências políticas. Por um lado, acelera a descarbonização europeia e reduz dependências, mas por outro, arrisca reforçar dinâmicas de poder centro-periferia e priorizar a segurança energética europeia sobre preocupações ucranianas socioeconómicas e ambientais. Através do estudo de caso da Ucrânia, contribui-se para os debates sobre geopolítica verde e a ação externa da UE, mostrando como a transição climática, a gestão estratégica de recursos e a segurança são (des)construídas geopoliticamente, normalizando medidas excecionais e marginalizando alternativas. Este processo de (in)securitização de minerais críticos ucranianos nas cadeias europeias revela fragilidades na imagem normativa e na lógica da geopolítica verde da UE.

Palavras-chave

Ação Externa da União Europeia; Estudos Críticos de Segurança; Matérias-Primas Críticas; Transição Energética; Ucrânia.

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EUROPEAN UNION EXTERNAL ACTION IN UKRAINE: SECURITISING CRITICAL MINERALS

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Introduction

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 forced the European Union (EU) to address its strategic vulnerabilities. Energy dependence, supply-chain fragility and geopolitical exposure rapidly shifted from limited policy concerns to existential strategic questions. Among these, critical minerals are now treated as a new object of (in)security governance, rather than merely an economic issue. As Ursula von der Leyen (2025) stated at an energy security conference: "We need critical raw materials. This is even more important in the context of looming trade restrictions and export bans. We see it already".

The President of the European Commission's statement shows that access to Critical Raw Materials (CRM) is no longer viewed merely as an economic concern, but as a security and geopolitical imperative. This article analyses the EU's external action and examines how this growing perception of CRM as a security and geopolitical imperative translates into concrete security practices in Ukraine, problematising the mechanisms that transform them into an emerging security concern. The aim is, therefore, to identify the political, social and environmental implications of this securitisation. By doing so, the article seeks to answer the question: *How does the EU securitise Ukrainian critical minerals in its external action?*

This study employs a qualitative critical discourse analysis methodology, operationalising a combined Copenhagen-Paris School framework. Primary data comprise key EU official documents[1] since the beginning of the war in Ukraine. Data collection followed criteria of relevance and public accessibility, covering securitising discourses (Copenhagen School) and institutional practices (Paris School).

To address the research question, within Critical Security Studies theoretical framework, 'securitisation' is approached not merely as a 'speech acts' but as a process of social,

[1] The following instruments were considered: *EU–Ukraine Strategic Partnership on Raw Materials and Batteries* (European Commission, 2021); *Strategic Compass* (European Union, 2022); *Strategic Compass for Security and Defence* (European Union, 2022); *European CRM Act* (European Commission, 2023); *Ukraine Facility* (European Commission, 2024); *Ukraine 2025 Report* (European Commission, 2025).

political and institutional construction that involves discourses, practices, instruments, and expert networks. Together, this combined approach offers a more robust analytical framework for understanding the contemporary geopolitics of critical minerals. In this perspective, the EU's 'geopolitical turn' (Tocci, 2021; Nitoiu & Sus, 2019; Panke, 2019; Theodosopoulos, 2020) and Ukraine's centrality in the European energy transition (Kuzemko et al., 2022; Giuli & Oberthür, 2023; Goldthau & Youngs, 2023; Silva, 2025) are interpreted as a privileged laboratory for observing how new hierarchies of (in)security are constructed around CRM.

The originality of this article lies in two contributions. First, it operationalises a combined Copenhagen-Paris theoretical framework for studying EU external action in Ukraine, bridging discursive and practical dimensions of securitisation. Second, it provides a systematic analysis of how critical minerals securitisation is conducted in the EU-Ukraine relationship, examining key policy-relevant instruments with these critical lenses.

The article is organised into five parts. It begins with an introduction that presents the problem, the research question, and the contribution of the topic. This is followed by the theoretical framework, which integrates insights from the Copenhagen and Paris Schools, proposing a theoretical operationalisation of the EU's geopolitical turn. The third part explains the EU's external action in Ukraine, providing simultaneously a historical context and a literature review within the CRM topic. The fourth part analyses how the securitisation of CRM occurs within the EU's policy agenda, identifying the discourses, practices and instruments employed by the EU, as well as the political, social and environmental implications of this securitisation. The conclusion reflects on what this case reveals about the EU's emerging role as a green geopolitical actor and the risks of securitising the CRM.

Towards a combined approach in Critical Security Studies

Constructivism agrees that security is a social construct, but the critical constructivism, attempts to point out more explicitly how security works and how we can study its construction. It is central to our paper the concept of 'securitisation'. Indeed, we conceptualise it as a discursive construction of threat, in the case of our research, that leads to securitisation of critical minerals. Before presenting the case study on CRM, it is necessary to further elaborate on the two schools that embody this article.

The Copenhagen School[2] explores the relationship between security and identity and analyses how narratives of national identity become dominant in a particular context (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 119). The narrative of national identity, or in our case, European identity, reflects a political struggle that gives prominence to one discourse while marginalising others. Such post-positivist epistemological lens, shaped by the entity that attempts to describe or narrate it, argues "how meanings are produced and attached to various social subjects/objects, thus constituting particular interpretive dispositions which create certain possibilities and preclude others" (Doty, 1993, p. 298).

[2] The name refers to a small group of scholars based in Copenhagen Peace Research Institute. The key authors are Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, Jaap de Wilde, Lene Hansen.

The school argues that security is not an objective fact, so, a topic becomes a security issue when a political actor declares it as an existential threat. We draw on Floyd's (2007, p. 329) framework to trace how threats are articulated as existential and how these claims justify concrete security practices. Then, for securitisation to succeed, the 'securitising move' is needed. That is, when that referenced object is "accepted as such [threat] by a relevant audience, this enables the suspension of normal politics and the use of emergency measures in responding to that perceived crisis" (McDonald, 2008, p. 69).

In addition, we should not forget one of the key limitations of this school, namely the concept of (de)securitisation, as Floyd (2007, p. 330) underlines, "desecuritisation is left largely under-theorised and open to interpretation". In fact, there is room for multiple interpretations in empirical research outside the military domain. In our case study, this poses a specific challenge, as there is no clear consensus that the dependency or environmental threat are effectively accepted as securitized, despite being in the political realm.

To address these gaps and capture the materialisation of security, we incorporate the Paris School perspective to strengthen the practical dimension of our case study. While the Copenhagen School conceptualises security primarily through 'speech acts', the Paris School[3] shifts the analytical focus towards practices. Yet 'speech acts' alone tell only half the story. The Paris School exposes how security gets done, asking how security is produced, stabilised and normalised through everyday routines, professional expertise and institutional arrangements. "It has to do also, and above all, with more mundane bureaucratic decisions of everyday politics, with Weberian routines of rationalization, of management of numbers instead of persons, of use of technologies" (Bigo, 2008, p. 5).

A core assumption of the Paris School is the inspiration from Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality to analyse security as an art of governing rather than as an exceptional response to threat. As Foucault (2007, p. 108) defines it, governmentality refers to "the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations and tactics" through which forms of governance targets populations and that are a network of power that reinforce their control. So, security should be understood not simply as a reaction to a clearly existential threat, but as "a mode of governmentality that structures fields of possibility" (Bigo, 2002, p. 74). In turn, this perspective helps to identify practices of security and power webs that legitimise the exceptional security policies.

From this standpoint, we identify one limitation of the Paris School concerning broader empirical operationalisation. By focusing on selected practices, professional expertise and networks of power, this approach makes empirical analysis methodologically demanding. As Balzacq (2011, p. 12) notes, analysing securitisation as practice raises "notably the difficulty of identifying which practices actually produce security effects and how such effects can be empirically traced". As a result, empirical research relies on interpretive judgement rather than standardised criteria, making comparison across cases more demanding and context dependent, rather than strictly replicable.

[3] Paris School refers to a group of scholars associated with Critical Security Studies and French sociology. Key authors include Didier Bigo, Thierry Balzacq, Jef Huysmans and Anastassia Tsoukala.

Combining these two schools allows us to conduct a broader analysis. As Floyd's (2007, p. 337) defends "a combined approach is believed to enable the securitisation analyst to step into the security equation and on behalf of the actors encourage some securitisations/desecuritisations and renounce others". The analysis of the securitisation of critical minerals benefits from a plural theoretical framework. From the Copenhagen perspective, securitisation allows us to understand how the EU discursively constructs energy security and material dependence and climate change issues as an existential threat both to the sovereignty of the EU and the European identity. In turn, the Paris School shifts the focus from discursive exceptions to everyday practices and is useful for understanding how the EU deals with CRM in Ukraine.

The points of contact between the two schools lie in their rejection of an objective conception of security and their emphasis on the social processes that produce it. In our analysis, we operationalise this framework by initially identify the securitising moves in EU political discourse (Copenhagen) and then examining the specific instruments and governance practices (Paris) that materialise this security logic in the context of the war in Ukraine.

EU External Action in Ukraine

From normative power to a new (old) geopolitical actor

Before we engage in the analysis of its security documents, we need to understand the context and the historical evolution within the EU's security practice regarding CRM in Ukraine. Consequently, the EU External Action results from a gradual process of institutionalising classical geopolitical practices, combined with a normative power.

To reinforce EU identity as an actor, it was the Treaty of Lisbon (2009) that marked the decisive transformation by integrating diplomatic instruments, creating the post of High Representative, and establishing the European External Action Service. As Helwig (2014, p. 129) noted, the Treaty of Lisbon sought to "overcome the fragmentation of external action" with greater coherence, possessing a more integrated diplomatic capacity, with external delegations and reinforced coordination mechanisms. At this period, we started to see economic competition and systemic rivalries between great powers, due to raw materials dependence and supply-chain fragilities.

The post-Lisbon strategic vision has been reinforced by documents such as the EU Global Strategy (2016), which identifies neighbourhood, resilience, and strategic autonomy as central vectors of external action. Moreover, an illustration of this narrative relies on a European policy briefing from Vasileios Theodosopoulos (2020, p.1), urging that, "in order to achieve greater strategic autonomy and technological sovereignty, the EU needs to enhance its security of supply and mitigate its extensive dependence in this domain". In his argument he defends that the EU should shift its geopolitical posture as a 'strategic relocation', to achieve strategic autonomy. This shift means, he highlighted, that the EU needs secure and reliable access to CRM by diversifying foreign suppliers, because European defence, technology and economy sovereignty are at risk.

In the security domain, the pandemic (2020) and later the war in Ukraine (2022) presented an opportunity for transformation of the EU as a geopolitical actor. As Tocci (2021, p. 14) summarizes, "the European Union can no longer conceive of itself merely as a normative project, but as an actor navigating a competitive environment". It also demonstrated an unprecedented consolidation of foreign policy among member states and a strengthened capacity to prepare for enlargement, a process that "triggered for the transformation of not only the territories adjacent to the EU, but also the structures of the EU itself" (Kandyuk, 2024, p. 177).

European identity plays an important role here. Hegemonic discourse of 'others', played by EU discourse serve as a geopolitical rendering of identity. Thomas Diez (2004, p. 320) draws out the distinction between temporal and geopolitical forms of 'othering' is useful to understand how the EU can frame environmental crises either as a rupture with its own violent past or as a justification for reinforcing territorial boundaries against external 'others'. These reinforcement of the European boundaries, is particularly useful for showing how narratives of climate change can shift from a 'temporal other' (industrial past) to geopolitical 'others' (mineral suppliers, 'autocracies', etc.).

Also, Nitoiu & Sus (2019, p. 9) argue that the EU underwent a geopolitical shift towards a more traditional way, named as 'hybrid approach', particularly a discursive change, that was expressed in official speeches and political initiatives, as cited, "[t]he most obvious shift has occurred at the level of rhetoric where the EU has increasingly thinking in realist terms about power and competition". They refer that the first time that EU identified the importance of its neighbourhood space was in 2015 by the revision of the European Union Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

A different perspective on EU foreign policy suggests that the Union has begun to display imperial-like behaviour. Rather than portraying the EU only as a normative power, this view contends that it increasingly acts as an empire that exports its own institutional and liberal political norms to neighbouring regions. In this interpretation, the Union seeks to "export its political order to the peripheries with the objective of establishing credibility and durability" (Panke, 2019, p. 14), which raises questions about the extent to which EU external action reproduces hierarchical centre–periphery relations, particularly in moments of geopolitical tension.

In this light, the EU's external action in its eastern neighbourhood appears to mark a return to more traditional geopolitical thinking: a more realist approach combining normative projection with strategic resource competition. Identity construction and the use of normative power play a central role in this process, as the outside is increasingly represented as dangerous or unstable, while the inside is depicted as safe, ordered and transformative.

Ukraine centrality in European energy transition

The 2014 *Association Agreement* transformed EU-Ukraine relations. Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022 accelerated this shift dramatically, marking a historic turning point in how the EU links climate, energy, raw materials and security with the possibility for Ukraine enlargement to EU. Sanctions packages, military funding through the *Strategic*

Compass and macro financial support became central instruments of EU external action. According to the European Union (2022, p. 10), "The European Union is more united than ever. We are committed to defend the European security order. (…) Supporting Ukraine in facing Russia's military aggression, we are showing an unprecedented resolve to restore peace in Europe, together with our partners."

In the field of resources, the EU has built excessive external dependence on a small number of suppliers of CRM, above all China and Russia (Silva, 2025, p. 18). This constituted a problem for the Union's capacity to secure its green transition, economy, and strategic autonomy because, for example, climate change acts as a key threat to its security. Accordingly, the hunt for critical materials can be considered as part of a larger strategy to ensure its energy transition and to be less dependent on Russia, China and other suppliers. So, the war in Ukraine has brought a qualitative shift in how Brussels understands energy security, increasingly tying it to decarbonisation and the expansion of renewables, to the point that "renewables moved to the heart of European security policy" (Goldthau & Youngs, 2023, p. 119). However, the EU lacks a common energy policy or integrated energy market, which amplifies member-state vulnerabilities and fragmentation in obtaining resources. This structural weakness has forced the Union to seek external energy partnerships, particularly with Ukraine, to compensate for the absence of internal market coordination.

More specifically, the *EU-Ukraine Strategic Partnership* (European Commission, 2021) signed in 2021 and reinforced by the 2023 *Critical Raw Materials Act* (European Commission, 2023), underline that the partnership with Ukraine is crucial for ensuring resilience in value chains. Although academic literature is still new regarding the articulation between critical minerals and EU external action in Ukraine, recent analyses by Johnston (2022), Lipeins (2024), Baranowski et al. (2025), and Talukdar (2025) demonstrate growing scholarly attention to Ukraine's strategic mineral becoming an emerging theme in both policy discourses and scholarly debates. An important article was written by Goldthau and Youngs (2023, pp. 120-121), describing this evolution as a form of 'green realpolitik' in which the EU uses climate and energy transition instruments as tools of geopolitical influence, for example by seeking access to critical minerals in third countries, reflecting a more realpolitik approach layered over its longstanding liberal order framing.

This discussion of Ukraine's central role in the EU's energy transformation and strategic autonomy shows how climate, security and CRM have become tightly intertwined in the Union's external action. Climate change functions as a structural driver that justifies accelerated decarbonisation and deep reforms in energy systems, while the war in Ukraine has turned these long-term objectives into immediate security priorities (Kuzemko et al., 2022; Giuli & Oberthür, 2023). Seen through this lens, partnerships on CRM with Ukraine are framed not only as economic opportunities but as necessary conditions for achieving climate neutrality and safeguarding European security in a more unstable geopolitical environment (European Commission, 2023; Goldthau and Youngs, 2023; Silva, 2025). The next section examines how these developments are articulated in EU mechanisms and discourses, analysing them through the lenses of the Copenhagen School and the Paris School, in order to assess the extent to which CRM are being securitised in both language and practice.

Securitisation of Critical Minerals in Ukraine

This section reflects on how the EU securitises Ukrainian CRM by bringing theory and empirical material into dialogue. It does so by moving between the 'exceptional' language of the Copenhagen School and the everyday security practices of the Paris School.

Analysis: existential threats

When we examine EU discourse on Ukraine, EU leaders explicitly construct Ukraine as facing existential threats. EU's leaders describe Russia's invasion as a "war of aggression" that threatens not only Ukrainian statehood but also Europe's security, values and "European path" (European Commission, 2025). This language constructs an existential threat to a shared political community: defending Ukraine becomes defending Europe. When the Commission stresses that the EU must reduce "dangerous dependencies" in energy and critical minerals and build "strategic autonomy" to remain able to act in an increasingly hostile world, CRM are implicitly positioned as indispensable conditions for European survival (European Commission, 2023; Goldthau & Youngs, 2023).

The empirical foundation for this securitisation narrative rests upon quantifiable material constraints. The European Commission's assessment notes that demand for some CRM is expected to increase substantially. Lithium demand, in particular, is projected to increase nearly 60 times by 2050, with significant increments required during the 2020-2030 period to support the transition towards electric vehicles and battery storage systems (European Commission, 2023; Delors Centre, 2024). Within this structural context of anticipated scarcity, Ukraine's endowment acquires strategic salience. Ukraine holds "some of Europe's largest confirmed lithium reserves" and ranks as a significant producer of titanium, "the largest titanium reserves in Europe (7% of global reserves)", gallium, and other materials classified as critical under European legislation (Liepins, 2024, p. 3). These deposits distinguish Ukraine from most other European states and position the country as a potentially significant contributor to European supply diversification.

However, the geopolitical context complicates this picture. Russian territorial occupation of eastern Ukraine has placed portions of these minerals beyond Ukrainian governmental control, introducing territorial contingency into EU supply-chain planning. When the Commission frames Ukraine as holding resources "essential to the Union's decarbonisation and autonomy" (European Commission, 2023, p. 4), these framing registers both the material magnitude of the deposits and the political precarity of their access. Securitisation of Ukrainian critical minerals therefore reflect not merely rhetorical escalation but alignment between declared security objectives and observable material dependencies.

In contrast, these moves differ from the pure emergency 'speech acts' as described in early Copenhagen formulations. This narrative is layered in multiple topics and indirect manner: climate change appears as a meta threat, a structural danger that makes rapid decarbonisation unavoidable (Engström, 2025); Russia's weaponisation of gas is narrated as a negative precedent that proves the risks of dependency (Kardas, 2023); China's dominance in processing is invoked as a potential future lever of coercion (Goldthau &

Youngs, 2023, p. 119). Rather than naming one single enemy, EU discourse weaves a collection of threats around supply-chain, resilience and autonomy. As Floyd argues, securitisation is not inherently positive or negative, but "issue dependent" which means that contemporary security practices often aim to protect a variety of referent objects beyond simple state survival, making the evaluation of their consequences more demanding, particularly when, as in the EU-Ukraine case, security claims cover climate, energy and geopolitical objectives at once (Floyd, 2007, p. 339).

Looking more closely at primary texts such as the *EU-Ukraine Strategic Partnership* (European Commission, 2021), the *Ukraine Facility* (European Commission, 2024), and the *Ukraine 2025 Report* (European Commission, 2025), a cumulative series of 'speech acts' becomes visible. These documents reconfigure the EU-Ukraine relationship, where Ukraine is framed simultaneously as a frontline state and a future member of the European security community. Reconstruction, energy reform, and integration into EU value chains are presented as necessary not only for Ukraine's resilience but also for the Union's own security and climate objectives (European Commission, 2025).

When the *Ukraine Facility* refers to Ukraine's "resilience" and commits to "predictable, continuous (...) support" for reconstruction and reform (European Commission, 2024), and when the *EU-Ukraine Strategic Partnership* explicitly establishes cooperation on "raw materials and batteries" as a priority for mutual benefit and for the green transition (European Commission, 2021), these documents quietly elevate CRM and energy infrastructure to matters of high politics. Unlike traditional securitisation, which relies on dramatic "existential threat" language against a specific enemy (Buzan et al., 1998), this process operates through technocratic administrative logic. In the Commission's broader *EU-Ukraine Strategic Partnership* (2021) on CRM and von der Leyen speech (2025), they are described as indispensable inputs for Europe's green and digital ambitions and for reducing "dangerous dependencies" that threaten economic resilience and open strategic autonomy (European Commission, 2023). By linking Ukrainian lithium and battery production to these long-term structural objectives, the Commission moves these sectors into the realm of security, legitimising extraordinary financial instruments and regulatory alignment without resorting to military rhetoric.

Within this theoretical setting, the securitising force lies in the linkage between Ukraine's resources and European survival: by framing Ukraine's critical minerals as essential to the EU's decarbonisation and autonomy, these documents perform what the Copenhagen School calls a securitising move, whereby an issue is elevated beyond normal politics through claims of existential necessity (Buzan et al., 1998; Wæver, 1995). Governing these resources thus becomes a security task not because of an immediate national threat, but because their loss is constructed as threatening the EU's capacity to exist as a green, competitive and autonomous actor.

Analysis: specific practices

Where does security materialise if not through declarations of enemies? What Bigo showed (2006, p. 395) helps us to see in the EU-Ukraine case: security becomes visible in the "expansion of the internal security dimension beyond state boundaries" via

bureaucratic networks. Applied to EU-Ukraine CRM policy, the Commission's approach avoids enemy narratives, instead uses a technical vocabulary that frames security as an administrative problem. For example, the *CRM Act* identifies sets of numerical thresholds (10% extraction, 40% processing, 25% recycling, max 65% from a single third country) to manage "risks" and "vulnerabilities" in supply-chains (European Commission, 2023, pp. 4–7). These are presented as industrial and resilience policy, not as declarations of war or explicit securitizing speeches. The EU performs security work without declared drama. These thresholds are masked as technical standards. Their power lies precisely in appearing apolitical.

The technical governance apparatus materialises through nested mechanisms. The *CRM Act* establishes classification procedures whereby mining and processing initiatives meeting specified criteria (contribution to Union supply security, technical feasibility, and sustainability alignment) are designated as "Strategic Projects" (European Commission, 2023, p. 2). Once classified, these projects benefit from "streamlined permitting procedures" and preferential financing via the *Ukraine Facility* (European Commission, 2024, p. 7), concentrating decision making authority in Commission directorates. In parallel, the *CRM Act* introduces new obligations for large EU companies using strategic raw materials to regularly assess and map their supply chains, including sourcing locations and concentration risks (European Commission, 2023). This observational capacity "rendering supply networks legible and calculable to central authorities" exemplifies Foucauldian governmentality: the transformation of populations into objects of management through data collection systems presented as neutral tools rather than instruments of power (Bigo, 2006, p. 395).

This approach normalises security through transnational bureaucratic practice. The *EU-Ukraine Strategic Partnership* (European Commission, 2021) institutionalises technical cooperation on geological mapping and the alignment of regulatory frameworks without framing these as emergency measures. By establishing quantitative metrics, these instruments function as a Foucauldian 'technology of security' (Foucault, 2007) that makes the population, including EU supply-chains and Ukrainian resources, knowable, calculable and manageable. Climate change serves as a background condition legitimising this expanded regulatory control across borders, blurring the line between internal EU economic policy and external geopolitics. These instruments are presented not as weapons but as technocratic solutions, yet they institutionalise a security logic that treats CRM, energy transition, and supply-chains as part of a single package of "security and resilience" as articulated in the *Ukraine 2025 Report* (European Commission, 2025).

Where does security work in EU governance of Ukrainian resources? Bigo (2006) suggests that security operates through bureaucratic networks rather than through declarations of threat. The Commission's directorates like DG GROW and DG ENER, together with industry alliances such as the European Raw Materials Alliance, form interconnected institutions[4]. Expert groups and financial instruments link these organizations into what Bigo calls a web of security institutions. What makes this important is that security work

[4] DG GROW (Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs) is responsible for implementing the *Critical Raw Materials Act* (European Commission, 2023). The European Raw Materials Alliance (ERMA), launched in September 2022 and managed by EIT RawMaterials, coordinates over 150 industrial and non-industrial stakeholders across the CRM value chain (EIT RawMaterials, 2022).

now happens through routine administrative practice rather than through exceptional emergency measures. This is what scholars call governmentality (Bigo, 2002; Foucault, 2007).

Then, security in the EU-Ukraine CRM relationship can consequently be understood both as a gradual securitisation of renewables and supply-chains, and as their ongoing management through bureaucratic practices of risk and resilience.

Discussion: securitisation and its consequences

Bringing Floyd's (2007) consequentialist framework allows us to evaluate whether securitising Ukrainian CRM is justified by its outcomes. On the one hand, framing CRM as a security issue can be seen as positive: it accelerates investment in decarbonisation, reduces Europe's vulnerability to coercion by dominant suppliers, and ensures long-term financing for Ukraine's reconstruction and integration into the EU (Goldthau & Youngs, 2023, p. 121). If energy security, in Klare's (2008, p. 488) argument, means securing sufficient, diversified and climate friendly supplies while reducing exposure to manipulative suppliers, then some degree of securitisation may appear both rational and protective.

Conversely, Dalby (2009) and Deudney (1999, p. 214) highlight profound risks: elevating minerals to high politics can militarise or centralise decisions better suited to cooperative, participatory models. For Ukraine's sovereignty, this is acute. As Zhou and Gergun (2025) argue, Brussels' framing of CRM as a cornerstone of European autonomy rests on "exaggerated claims regarding Ukrainian reserves of rare earths and other critical minerals", risking the treatment of Ukrainian territory as a mere 'strategic reserve' managed for EU priorities and sidelining local agency.

The negative effect of the sovereignty can be seen in the field of the Dobra lithium project, awarded in January 2026 under a production-sharing agreement to a US-linked consortium, illustrates this constraint, as long-term revenue sharing and investor control raise questions about domestic value capture and processing capacity (Reuters, 2026). Such arrangements reproduce 'centre–periphery' extraction dynamics with foreign control and limited local value (Nitoiu & Sus, 2018, p. 7; Dalby, 2009, p. 265).

At this point, environmental and social consequences must be noted. Floyd's (2007, p. 329) framework asks whether securitisation protects or undermines Ukrainian wellbeing, including potential environmental and social harms from accelerated mining. For the environmental case, it risks groundwater depletion and pollution from mine tailings in already-degraded eastern zones (Marx et al., 2022). Dalby (2009, p. 265) warns that resource abundance, more than scarcity, drives ecological harm; a "green rush" into Ukrainian minerals could thus reproduce Global South patterns. Socially, it fosters corruption in mining rights allocation and community marginalisation, as seen in rising human rights abuses at Ukrainian mines (Babanina & Watson, 2024).

This raises a core question from both Copenhagen and Paris perspectives: the politics of alternatives. Nevertheless, the documents analysed were locked into security agendas and expert routines, instead of civil society voices or environmental concerns (Bigo,

2006, p. 400; Deudney, 1999, p. 214). The urgency narrative of war, climate crisis and great power competition can legitimise opaque practices and narrow debates to technocratic options. This does not mean that securitisation of CRM is inherently illegitimate, but as Floyd (2007) insists, its ethical and political consequences must be debated, not assumed as benign.

The case of Ukrainian CRM thus, illustrates both the analytical power of Copenhagen and Paris framework and the need to keep questioning who is secured, by whom, and at what cost when the EU turns resources into matters of security.

Conclusion

This analysis has shown that the securitisation of Ukrainian CRM is not just a rhetorical move but a complex process of external action. Returning to the central question*: How does the EU securitise Ukrainian critical minerals in its external action?* The answer lies in a dual process of discursive elevation and bureaucratic embedding.

First, through the Copenhagen lens, CRM are securitised by the EU via framing them as existential conditions for survival. Linking minerals to the 'war of aggression' and 'strategic autonomy' constructs a narrative where access to Ukrainian lithium is a matter of European sovereignty. Second, through the Paris lens, this securitisation is solidified through the normalisation of security into technical instruments. The *CRM Act* and *Ukraine Facility* function as everyday practices that map, monitor, and integrate Ukrainian resources into European value chains.

What distinguishes this securitisation from traditional geopolitics is its reliance on technocratic language. Rather than identifying enemies, it mobilises the soft discourse of resilience and partnership. Yet this framing obscure a material asymmetry: whilst the EU gains access to critical minerals essential for decarbonisation and strategic autonomy, Ukraine's integration depends on regulatory alignment with EU standards. This approach mobilises resources for reconstruction but structures economic dependency around extraction focused-development model, potentially limiting Kyiv's sovereign economic and industrial policy.

For this paper it is necessary to mention its own limitations, that is relying only on official policy documents and public discourses, which may not fully capture the informal negotiations or the specific reception of these policies by Ukrainian local actors. Besides that, future research should shift focus to the 'target audience', investigating how Ukrainian civil society and elites receive these narratives. Furthermore, comparative studies with African or Latin American countries would determine whether this model is unique to Ukraine or a structural feature of the EU's evolving external action.

The (in)securitisation of critical minerals mobilises extraordinary EU resources for policy action, but it also narrows the space for alternative, non-securitised approaches to Ukrainian reconstruction and development, locking it into an asymmetric centre-periphery extraction resource focused model. It binds Ukraine firmly in the West, but also it reveals a deep tension between the EU's normative aspirations and its geopolitical

survival instincts, by anchoring Ukraine's integration around EU supply security needs rather than Ukrainian long-term peace priorities.

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