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INFLUENCE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THE FIELD OF ROAD SAFETY: THE CASE OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

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Abstract: Road safety represents an important area of public policy in which the European Union has developed and promoted common standards, principles, and practices beyond its borders. In the context of Serbia's European integration process, the alignment of national legislation with the EU acquis also encompasses road safety. Drawing on the concepts of Normative Power Europe and Accession Conditionality, this paper examines how the EU influences the development of Serbia's institutional, regulatory, and strategic road safety framework. The paper aims to assess the extent to which the EU, through the diffusion of norms and standards and the mechanisms of European integration, contributes to changes in Serbia's road safety policy. Particular attention is given to legislative alignment, strategic development, financial and technical assistance, and capacity-building. The study adopts a qualitative research approach and uses Serbia as a case study, analysing relevant EU and Serbian legal and strategic documents. It further examines whether the EU influence is primarily an expression of normative power or is more closely associated with accession conditionality. The paper contributes to understanding how European norms and standards are translated into national policies and institutional practices, shaping the development of road safety policy and culture in Serbia.

Keywords: European Union; Normative Power; Accession Conditionality; Road Safety; Republic of Serbia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Road safety has become an increasingly important area of public policy at both the national and international levels. In 2025, around 19,500 people lost their lives on roads in the European Union (EU), while more than 100,000 are estimated to have been seriously injured (European Transport Safety Council [ETSC], 2026). In response to this continuing challenge, the EU has progressively developed a comprehensive road safety policy framework based on common principles, standards and targets, with the long-term objective of achieving zero fatalities and serious injuries on European roads (European Commission, [EC], 2019). The EU approach increasingly emphasises the Safe System, Vision Zero, shared responsibility among different actors, evidence-based policymaking, and the protection of vulnerable road users.

For countries aspiring to the EU membership, the development of road safety policy takes place within the broader process of European integration. The accession process involves the gradual alignment of national legislation with the EU acquis, as well as the development of

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institutional and administrative capacities required for its implementation (EC, 2026, -b). In this context, the EU influence may extend beyond formal legislative approximation and include the transfer of policy approaches, standards, knowledge, technical expertise and institutional practices. Through these processes, European principles and approaches may also indirectly contribute to shaping road safety culture at the national level, by influencing how road safety is understood, prioritised and addressed by institutions and other stakeholders.

The research problem addressed in this paper concerns the nature and extent of the European Union's influence on road safety policy in the Republic of Serbia. The analysis goes beyond legislative alignment and examines mechanisms through which the EU road safety norms, standards and policy approaches are transferred and incorporated into the Serbian policy framework. Particular attention is given to legislative approximation, strategic alignment, institutional cooperation, technical and financial assistance, capacity building and policy learning.

The main research question is: How and to what extent does the European Union influence road safety policy in the Republic of Serbia? The analysis further considers whether this influence can primarily be understood as an expression of the EU's normative power or as a consequence of accession conditionality. The paper adopts a qualitative research approach and uses Serbia as a case study, based on the analysis of relevant EU and Serbian legal, strategic and policy documents, as well as reports of the Transport Community.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: NORMATIVE POWER EUROPE AND EU ACCESSION CONDITIONALITY

2.1. Normative Power Europe

The concept of Normative Power Europe (NPE), introduced by Ian Manners in 2002, provides a useful framework for understanding the EU's ability to influence actors beyond its borders. Unlike traditional approaches to power that primarily emphasise material capabilities, NPE focuses on the EU's capacity to shape conceptions of what is considered appropriate, legitimate and desirable through the promotion and diffusion of norms and values (Manners, 2002). In this perspective, the EU's influence does not depend exclusively on economic or political incentives, but also on the attractiveness and legitimacy of the principles and standards it promotes.

Manners identifies mechanisms through which the EU norms may be diffused: contagion, informational diffusion, procedural diffusion, transference, overt diffusion and the cultural filter (Manners, 2002). These mechanisms include the unintentional diffusion of ideas, strategic communication, the institutionalisation of relationships with third countries, the transfer of norms through trade, aid and technical assistance, the EU's physical presence, and processes of political learning and adaptation in third countries. Importantly for this analysis, the cultural filter highlights the role of domestic contexts in mediating the impact of external norms, meaning that their adoption may result in learning and adaptation, but also in rejection or modification.

Applied to road safety, the NPE perspective allows the analysis to move beyond formal compliance with EU requirements and examine the broader diffusion of European road safety principles and approaches. Concepts such as the Safe System approach, Vision Zero, shared responsibility, evidence-based policymaking and the protection of vulnerable road users represent important elements of the contemporary European Road Safety Framework (EC, 2023). Their diffusion may influence national institutions and practices and, indirectly, contribute to the development of road safety culture. However, policy convergence alone does not demonstrate normative power, as the adoption of European standards may also result from

accession conditionality. Serbian case therefore provides an opportunity to examine whether changes in road safety policy reflect the diffusion and adaptation of European norms, accession-related requirements, or an interaction between these two (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2004).

2.2. EU Accession Conditionality and Rule Transfer

EU accession conditionality represents an important mechanism of external governance through which the EU influences candidate countries. It is based on the principle that progress towards EU membership is conditional upon the fulfilment of political, legal and institutional requirements, including the adoption and implementation of relevant EU rules and standards. Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier describe conditionality as a strategy of external governance in which the EU sets rules as conditions for receiving benefits associated with the integration process, with the prospect of EU membership representing the most significant external incentive for candidate countries (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2004). In this context, the accession process can create strong incentives for domestic reforms and the transfer of EU rules.

The effectiveness depends, among other factors, on the credibility of EU conditionality and the domestic costs of adopting the required rules (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2004). The authors emphasise that the likelihood of rule transfer increases when the EU conditions are sufficiently clear, the associated rewards are credible and the benefits of compliance outweigh the domestic costs of adoption. Conditionality is particularly relevant to the transfer of the EU acquis, which requires candidate countries to progressively align their legislation and institutional frameworks with the EU rules. At the same time, formal adoption of the EU requirements does not necessarily mean that the underlying norms have been internalised by domestic actors or effectively implemented, making it important to distinguish between formal alignment and substantive implementation.

In the field of road safety, accession conditionality can influence national policy through the approximation of legislation, alignment with relevant EU standards and requirements, and the development of institutional capacities necessary for their implementation. In the case of Serbia, the accession process therefore represents an important context for the adoption of European road safety standards and policy approaches. However, conditionality does not exclude other forms of EU influence. The same policy change may reflect an external incentive to comply with the EU requirements while also involving the gradual acceptance and adaptation of European approaches within domestic institutions. Distinguishing between these mechanisms is therefore essential for assessing whether, and to what extent, changes in Serbian road safety policy can be attributed to accession conditionality, normative influence, or an interaction between the two.

2.3. Normative Power and Accession Conditionality

The two theoretical perspectives presented above provide complementary explanations of the EU's influence on candidate countries. The concept of NPE focuses on the EU's capacity to shape the understanding of what is considered appropriate and desirable through the diffusion of European values, norms and policy principles (Manners, 2002). Accession conditionality, in contrast, emphasises the role of external incentives and the requirements associated with the EU integration process in promoting the adoption and implementation of EU rules (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2004). These mechanisms are analytically distinct, but they may operate simultaneously and reinforce one another.

This distinction is particularly relevant for analysing road safety policy, where alignment with the EU practices cannot necessarily be attributed solely to formal obligations arising from

the EU acquis. Legislative approximation may primarily reflect accession-related requirements, while the adoption of broader principles such as the Safe System approach, Vision Zero, shared responsibility and evidence-based policymaking may also reflect the diffusion of European norms and values, policy learning and institutional adaptation. In this sense, the EU influence may extend beyond formal regulatory compliance and contribute to changes in how road safety is understood, prioritised and addressed by public institutions and other stakeholders. Over time, such processes may also contribute to the development of a broader road safety culture based on shared norms, values and expectations regarding safe behaviour and responsibility.

Accordingly, this paper approaches the EU influence on Serbian road safety policy as a multidimensional process in which normative influence and accession conditionality are not treated as mutually exclusive explanations. The empirical analysis therefore examines how these mechanisms interact through legislative approximation, strategic alignment, institutional cooperation, technical assistance, capacity building and policy learning. This framework makes it possible to assess not only the extent of Serbia's formal alignment with European road safety requirements, but also whether European norms, values and policy approaches have been incorporated into the country's strategic and institutional framework and, more broadly, contributed to changes in the way road safety is conceptualised and addressed.

3. EU ROAD SAFETY POLICY AND MECHANISMS OF INFLUENCE

3.1. Evolution of EU Road Safety Policy

EU's road safety policy has developed progressively from a focus on reducing road fatalities through targeted measures towards a more integrated and systemic approach to preventing deaths and serious injuries. An important stage in this development was the *Third European Road Safety Action Programme (2003–2010)*, adopted by the European Commission in 2003, which established the objective of halving the number of road fatalities by 2010 and proposed a range of measures addressing road users, vehicles and road infrastructure (EC, 2003). Building on this experience, the European Commission adopted the *Policy Orientations on Road Safety 2011–2020*, which maintained the target of reducing road deaths by 50% between 2010 and 2020 and provided a framework for coordinated action at European, national and local levels (EC, 2010). These efforts may have resulted in Europe being the safest continent regarding road safety.

A further development took place with the Commission's *Strategic Action Plan on Road Safety* of 2018 and the subsequent *EU Road Safety Policy Framework 2021-2030 - Next Steps towards Vision Zero* (EC, 2019). This marked a stronger shift towards a Safe System approach, which recognises that human error is an inherent part of road transport and that the system should be designed and managed in a way that prevents human mistakes from resulting in death or serious injury. The EU established a target of reducing both road deaths and serious injuries by 50% by 2030, while maintaining the long-term objective of achieving zero deaths and serious injuries on European roads by 2050 under the principle of Vision Zero. The framework also introduced key performance indicators to support systematic and evidence-based monitoring of road safety performance (EC, 2019).

The evolution of the EU road safety policy therefore reflects a broader shift from an approach centred primarily on individual behaviour and specific safety interventions towards a shared-responsibility and system-based approach. Contemporary EU road safety policy combines legislation and regulatory measures with common targets, performance indicators, cooperation, knowledge exchange and the promotion of principles such as Safe System and Vision Zero. EC also emphasises safer infrastructure, safer vehicles, safer road use and better post-crash care as key elements of this approach (EC, 2019). This development is particularly relevant for analysing

EU's influence on Serbia, as road safety policy is transmitted not only through formal legal requirements, but also through strategic objectives, policy principles, institutional cooperation and the diffusion of approaches that shape how road safety is understood and addressed at the national level.

3.2. European Road Safety Model

The contemporary European road safety framework is structured around the Safe System approach, which translates the objective of preventing deaths and serious injuries into principles for the design and management of the road transport system. Its central premise is that human error is an inherent part of road transport and that the system should be designed so that such errors do not result in fatal or serious consequences. This requires multiple layers of protection, including safer roads and roadsides, safer vehicles, safer road use and effective post-crash response. The approach is closely connected to Vision Zero, which expresses the EU's long-term objective of moving towards zero deaths and serious injuries on European roads by 2050, while the EU has established the intermediate target of reducing both road deaths and serious injuries by 50% between 2020 and 2030 (EC, 2019).

An important characteristic of the European road safety model is its emphasis on shared responsibility and the protection of vulnerable road users. Road safety is not understood solely as a matter of individual behaviour, but as a responsibility shared by road users, public authorities, infrastructure managers, vehicle manufacturers and other stakeholders. Particular attention is given to pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists, whose greater vulnerability requires appropriate infrastructure, speed management, safer vehicles and measures promoting safer road use. In this context, European road safety policy reflects broader norms and values centred on the protection of human life, shared responsibility and the prevention of avoidable deaths and serious injuries. These principles extend the understanding of road safety beyond individual behaviour towards the design and management of a safer transport system (EC, 2019).

A further element of the European road safety model is evidence-based road safety management, supported by systematic data collection, monitoring and the exchange of knowledge and experience. The EU CARE database contains detailed national data on road crashes resulting in death or injury and is used to identify and quantify road safety problems, evaluate the effectiveness of measures and facilitate the exchange of experience. These data are complemented by the European Road Safety Observatory (ERSO), which provides comparable statistics, country profiles, thematic analyses and key performance indicators (EC, n.d. -a). The EU has established key performance indicators covering areas including speed, alcohol, distraction, protective equipment, vehicle safety, infrastructure and post-crash care, while the Commission has supported harmonised methodologies for their collection and reporting (EC, 2026, -a). In this respect, European road safety standards extend beyond formal legislative requirements to encompass common approaches to data collection, performance monitoring, evidence-based policymaking and the exchange of good practices. These mechanisms are particularly relevant for analysing EU influence on Serbia, as the adoption of comparable data practices and participation in European systems of information and knowledge exchange can represent an important form of institutional and policy transfer.

3.3. Mechanisms of EU Influence

The European Union can influence the development of road safety policies in candidate countries through several interconnected mechanisms. These include the transfer of the EU acquis and legislative approximation, accession conditionality, financial and technical

assistance, institutional capacity-building, policy transfer and knowledge exchange, as well as participation in European cooperation and projects. These mechanisms differ in their nature and degree of formality. While legislative approximation and conditionality are closely connected to the accession process and the transfer of EU rules, other mechanisms may facilitate the diffusion of European standards, expertise, policy approaches and institutional practices without being based exclusively on formal legal obligations.

The EU acquis and legislative approximation represent a formal channel through which European rules and standards are incorporated into national legal and institutional frameworks. In the field of transport, Chapter 14 - Transport Policy covers the relevant EU acquis concerning road and other modes of transport, including common rules on technical and safety standards. For Serbia, the process therefore involves the gradual alignment of national legislation and institutional arrangements with the relevant EU rules and their implementation (EC, 2025). Accession conditionality, while closely related to this process, concerns the incentives and requirements associated with the EU membership. The EU may condition progress in the accession process on the fulfilment of specific requirements, creating incentives for candidate countries to adopt and implement the EU rules. In the context of acquis conditionality authors argue that the effectiveness of EU rule transfer is influenced by the credibility of the EU's membership incentives and the domestic costs of adopting the EU rules (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2004). Thus, in the present analysis, legislative approximation refers primarily to what is being aligned, while conditionality helps explain why and under what conditions alignment takes place.

Beyond legislative approximation and accession conditionality, the EU influence may also operate through financial and technical assistance, institutional capacity-building, policy transfer, knowledge exchange and European cooperation. These mechanisms can provide national institutions with access to financial resources, technical expertise, training, research, professional networks and opportunities to exchange experience and good practices (EC, n.d. -b, n.d. -d, n.d. -g). In this way, European influence may extend beyond the formal adoption of EU rules and contribute to institutional learning and the development of national policy practices. These mechanisms are particularly relevant to the analysis of road safety, where effective policy implementation depends not only on legislation but also on institutional capacity, technical knowledge, cooperation and practical application. Their role in the development of Serbia's road safety policy will be examined in the following chapter.

4. EU INFLUENCE ON ROAD SAFETY POLICY IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

4.1. Institutional and Strategic Framework of Road Safety in Serbia

Road safety in the Republic of Serbia is governed through a multi-level institutional framework based on coordination among national authorities, specialised institutions and local self-government. An important role in this system is played by the National Coordination Body for Road Traffic Safety, which brings together representatives of seven relevant ministries and Road Traffic Safety Agency (RTSA) and provides a mechanism for inter-institutional coordination. Such a structure reflects the cross-sectoral nature of road safety policy, which requires cooperation between the transport, interior, health, education and other relevant sectors (Strategija bezbednosti saobraćaja, 2023).

At the institutional level, apart from the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Construction, Infrastructure and Transport, RTSA has a professional and administrative role in the road safety system. Established in 2009, the Agency performs developmental, professional and regulatory activities and is responsible for a range of tasks concerning drivers and vehicles, road safety

research and analysis, prevention and education, as well as cooperation with other institutions and organisations (ABS). Other relevant institutions include the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, while local self-government plays an important role through local road safety councils, which coordinate and implement road safety activities at the local level.

The strategic framework is primarily defined by the National Road Traffic Safety Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for the period 2023–2030. The Strategy establishes the objective of reducing the number of road fatalities and seriously injured persons by 50% by 2030 compared to 2019, while setting the specific objective of zero children killed in road traffic by 2030. The Strategy is structured around five key pillars of road safety: road safety management, safer roads, safer vehicles, safe road users, and post-crash response. The Strategy further translates these priorities into specific objectives, measures and activities, with defined responsibilities, indicators and implementation periods through the accompanying Action Plan (Strategija bezbednosti saobraćaja, 2023).

The legal framework is primarily established by the Law on Road Traffic Safety, which regulates the main areas of road safety, including the behaviour of road users, driver licensing, vehicle safety, traffic infrastructure and institutional responsibilities (Zakon o bezbednosti saobraćaja, 2009). The Law is complemented by a range of by-laws that provide more detailed requirements and procedures for its implementation. Together, the institutional, strategic and legal frameworks provide the basis for the development and implementation of road safety policy in Serbia and constitute the national framework within which the influence of European norms, standards and accession requirements can be examined.

4.2. EU Acquis, Legislative Approximation and Accession Conditionality

The European integration process has established an important framework for the gradual alignment of Serbia's transport and road safety legislation with the EU acquis. Serbia formally opened accession negotiations in January 2014, while Chapter 14- Transport Policy was opened in December 2021 as part of Cluster 4- Green Agenda and Sustainable Connectivity. The EU transport acquis covers road transport, railways, inland waterways, combined transport, aviation and maritime transport and includes common rules concerning technical and safety standards, security, social standards, State aid and market liberalisation. Within this framework, road transport is relevant to the present analysis, as the acquis contains requirements related to road safety, vehicle standards, social rules, market access and enforcement (EC, 2014).

The Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) provided first an important legal framework for Serbia's progressive approximation to the EU acquis. The Agreement establishes Serbia's commitment to approximate its legislation in relevant sectors to that of the EU and to ensure its effective implementation and enforcement. It therefore provides a formal basis for legislative approximation within the broader Stabilisation and Association Process, while the subsequent accession negotiations introduced a more detailed framework for monitoring alignment and implementation within individual negotiating chapters (EU, 2013).

The accession process involves not only the adoption of legislation but also the monitoring of its implementation and the development of the administrative capacity necessary for its enforcement. EC regularly assesses Serbia's progress through its country reports and identifies areas where further alignment, implementation or institutional strengthening is required. In 2025 Report, Serbia was assessed as having a good level of preparation in transport policy. At the same time, the Commission called for continued implementation of the Road Safety Strategy for 2023–2030 and its Action Plan, more systemic use of tools supporting road safety improvements, continued exchange of data with the European Commission in accordance with the EU CARE protocol, and full transposition of social and market rules in road transport (EC, 2025).

A particularly important example of European influence beyond formal legislative approximation concerns road accident data and information exchange. In 2023, Serbia was granted observer status in the EU Community Database on Accidents on the Roads in Europe (CARE) by the EU High-Level Group on Road Safety, following a feasibility study supported by the Transport Community and the European Commission (Transport Community, [TC], 2023). Under this arrangement, Serbia shares disaggregated road crash data annually with the European Commission and participates as an observer in the CARE expert group (EC, n.d. -a). The process is connected with the harmonisation of Serbian road accident data with the Common Accident Data Set (CADaS) methodology, which provides common definitions and standardised data elements intended to improve the comparability and analysis of road accident data. The alignment of Serbian data with the European methodology and its subsequent exchange through CARE therefore represents a form of European standardisation that extends beyond formal legislation to data collection, classification, monitoring and evidence-based road safety policy (EC, n.d. -h).

Transport Community Treaty provides an additional regional framework for the implementation and diffusion of the EU transport acquis in the Western Balkans, framework for the integration of regional transport markets, while its Action Plans provide roadmaps for implementing agreed measures. The *Next Generation Action Plans 2025–2027* are based on the updated EU legislative framework, as well as relevant EU policy documents, including the *EU Road Safety Policy Framework 2021–2030* (TC, 2025). The *Road Safety Action Plan* promotes safety management, safer infrastructure and the protection of road users, and supports the implementation of the acquis related to road safety. It also provides a framework for regional cooperation and the exchange of experience and good practices among the Western Balkan partners (TC, 2025).

Regional cooperation facilitated through the Transport Community complements the formal accession process by creating opportunities for policy learning, institutional cooperation and the exchange of road safety practices. Through its technical committees, action plans, regional monitoring activities and the Western Balkans Road Safety Observatory (WBRSO), Transport Community supports the comparison of road safety performance and the dissemination of common approaches among the regional partners. These activities contribute to the gradual alignment of national road safety policies with European standards while also strengthening cooperation between national institutions and European and regional actors.

Taken together, these mechanisms demonstrate that the EU's influence on Serbia's road safety policy operates through several interconnected channels. Legislative approximation provides a formal mechanism for aligning national rules with the EU acquis, while accession monitoring and conditionality create incentives for continued alignment and implementation. At the same time, mechanisms such as CARE, CADaS and the Transport Community facilitate the transfer of common data standards, methodologies, monitoring practices and policy approaches. European integration therefore affects not only the formal regulatory framework of road safety in Serbia, but also the ways in which road safety data are collected, standardised and exchanged, how performance is monitored, and how evidence is incorporated into policy development. These developments provide an important empirical basis for assessing the relative significance of accession conditionality and the broader diffusion of European norms and practices.

4.3. Financial, Technical and Institutional Channels of EU Influence

Beyond formal legislative approximation and accession conditionality, the European Union influences road safety policy in Serbia through financial assistance, technical support, institutional capacity-building and participation in European research and cooperation

programmes. The Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) represents one of the principal financial instruments through which the EU supports reforms in candidate countries, including institution-building, administrative capacity and implementation of the acquis. The EU financial assistance therefore provides resources and expertise that can support reforms extending beyond the formal adoption of legislation (EC, n.d. -c). In this sense, financial assistance represents not only a material instrument of support but also a channel through which European priorities and policy approaches can be incorporated into national reform processes (EC, n.d. -e).

In the field of road safety, technical assistance can contribute to the development of institutional and professional capacities through expert support, training, exchange of experience and the introduction of European methodologies. Cooperation through the Transport Community, for example, has supported the collection and monitoring of road safety Key Performance Indicators according to European methodologies, facilitating the comparison of road safety performance across the Western Balkans and with the EU Member States (TC, n.d.). Such activities demonstrate that European influence may operate through the transfer of expertise, methodological approaches and professional practices, rather than exclusively through legally binding requirements.

Institutional cooperation provides another channel through which European practices and expertise can be transferred. Instruments such as TAIEX and Twinning bring together public administrations from partner countries and the EU Member States through workshops, expert missions, study visits, peer learning and longer-term institutional cooperation. TAIEX provides short-term, demand-driven technical assistance, while Twinning supports longer-term institutional cooperation and the development of public administration capacities (TC, n.d. -f). In the context of road safety, these forms of interaction can facilitate the exchange of administrative knowledge and practical experience and support the implementation of European standards within national institutions.

European research and innovation programmes provide an additional channel of interaction. Serbia's participation in Horizon Europe enables Serbian institutions to cooperate with European partners and participate in projects addressing common policy challenges. A relevant example is *Roads4All – Co-creating safer Living Roads for all through a holistic, multi-level, participatory approach to cultural transformation*, a Horizon Europe project running from 2025 to 2028. The project brings together 14 partners from eight countries and includes Road Traffic Safety Agency and the University of Novi Sad-Faculty of Technical Sciences as Serbian participants. It seeks to strengthen traffic safety culture through interventions addressing individual, organisational and institutional factors and explicitly aims to develop values and norms supporting safer behaviour and long-term cultural change (EC, 2025). Participation in such European research cooperation provides an opportunity for Serbian institutions to engage in the development, testing and exchange of European approaches to road safety, including approaches concerned with behaviour, institutional practices and safety culture.

Taken together, financial assistance, technical cooperation, institutional interaction and participation in European projects represent channels of EU influence that operate beyond formal legal alignment. They create opportunities for policy learning, professional exchange, institutional adaptation and knowledge transfer, while exposing national institutions to European approaches to road safety management, monitoring and evidence-based policymaking. These mechanisms therefore complement legislative approximation and accession conditionality and are particularly relevant for assessing whether European influence extends beyond regulatory convergence to changes in institutional practices and, indirectly, the broader culture of road safety in Serbia. Table 1. shows all main channels of EU influence.

Table 1. Main Channels of EU Influence on Road Safety Policy in Serbia

EU influence	Mechanism	Example in Serbia
EU rules and standards	Acquis and legislative approximation	Alignment of national legislation with relevant EU rules; Chapter 14
Membership incentive	Accession conditionality	Accession process, monitoring and European Commission assessments
Expertise and technical support	Technical assistance	Expert support, training and EU-funded technical assistance
Institutional learning	Capacity-building and institutional cooperation	Training, expert exchange and cooperation between Serbian and EU institutions
Knowledge and data	Data exchange and harmonisation	CARE-related data exchange; CADaS and ERSO methodologies
Norms and values	Normative influence and policy diffusion	Safe System, Vision Zero, shared responsibility and road safety culture
Networks and cooperation	European and transnational cooperation	Transport Community, Horizon Europe and other EU-funded projects

4.4. Assessing the EU's Influence: Normative Power or Accession Conditionality?

From the perspective of Normative Power Europe, the relevant question is not only whether Serbia has adopted European rules, but whether European norms, values and policy approaches have influenced the way road safety problems are understood and addressed domestically. The diffusion of approaches such as the Safe System, Vision Zero, shared responsibility, evidence-based policymaking and the protection of vulnerable road users may indicate a broader process of normative and ideational influence. Similarly, participation in European cooperation and research projects creates opportunities for learning, socialisation and adaptation. The *Roads4All* project is particularly relevant because it explicitly addresses road safety culture, values, norms and behaviour, providing an example of European cooperation that extends beyond formal regulatory alignment (Manners, 2002).

At the same time, accession conditionality provides an important explanation for changes directly connected with the EU accession process. Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier conceptualise EU rule transfer to candidate countries through acquis conditionality, in which the EU sets conditions for membership and provides the prospect of accession as an incentive for compliance (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2004). In the Serbian road safety sector, this mechanism is particularly visible in legislative approximation, the requirements associated with Chapter 14 and the monitoring of implementation through the accession process. However, the adoption of European rules does not necessarily demonstrate the internalisation of the norms underlying those rules. This distinction makes it necessary to examine whether particular changes represent primarily compliance with accession requirements or whether they are accompanied by learning, adaptation and the incorporation of European approaches into domestic institutional practices.

The Serbian case can therefore be approached through the interaction of conditionality and normative influence, rather than as a simple choice between the two. Conditionality provides a strong explanation for formal legislative alignment and reforms directly linked to accession requirements, while the normative power perspective is useful for examining the diffusion of European ideas, values, standards and practices through cooperation, learning and institutional interaction. The distinction can be operationalised by examining the nature of the change, the mechanism through which it occurred and the extent to which European approaches have been adapted and incorporated into domestic practice.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined how the European Union influences road safety policy in the Republic of Serbia. The analysis demonstrates that the EU influence is present both in the formal regulatory framework and in broader policy and institutional practices. The accession process has contributed to the alignment of Serbian legislation with relevant the EU standards, while European cooperation, technical assistance, data exchange and participation in EU-funded programmes have created additional channels for the transfer of knowledge, expertise and policy approaches.

The findings indicate that European influence in Serbian road safety policy extends beyond the formal adoption of the EU rules. European approaches such as the Safe System, Vision Zero, evidence-based policymaking and shared responsibility have increasingly become part of the broader policy discourse and institutional framework. At the same time, the extent to which these approaches are internalised within domestic institutions and society remains difficult to establish solely on the basis of formal policy and legislative changes.

Overall, the study shows that the EU influence on road safety policy in Serbia is multidimensional, combining regulatory alignment with broader processes of institutional cooperation, knowledge exchange and policy learning. The case therefore illustrates that European integration can affect not only the legal framework of road safety, but also the ways in which road safety is conceptualised, managed and implemented. Further research could examine more directly how these European approaches are perceived and internalised by national and local institutions, professionals and citizens.

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