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The EU actorness-sanctions nexus and the wars in Ukraine 2014-2023

Master's thesis in European Studies
Supervisor: Tobias Schumacher
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Abstract

This thesis is interested in investigating the extent to which European Union (EU) actorness has affected EU responses to the wars in Ukraine over the course of time and by extension in examining to what extent these responses and the wars in Ukraine as such have affected EU actorness. In doing so, the thesis sets out to answer the main research question and one sub-question, in the respective order. How has EU actorness impacted on EU responses to the conflict in Ukraine and how have the EU responses in turn impacted on EU actorness? To what extent has there been a change in the impact of EU actorness on EU responses to the conflict in Ukraine and the impact of EU responses on EU actorness between the first period (17th March 2014-24th February 2022) and the second period (24th February 2022-25th February 2023)? Process-tracing is applied in order to trace the impact of EU actorness on EU responses, whereas the impact of EU responses on EU actorness is addressed through a softer means of argumentation. The thesis goes into the sub-frame of effectiveness with the purpose of connecting the argumentation more clearly to the external behaviour of the EU and not just its predominantly internal capabilities. Further, within-case comparison is applied to look at how the impact of EU actorness on EU responses to the wars in Ukraine, and by extension the impact of EU responses on EU actorness, has evolved before and after the Russian full-scale invasion. EU actorness in conflict management has impacted on EU responses by allowing the EU to utilise policy tools despite diverging member state interests vis-à-vis Russia. The EU has coordinated and cooperated with its allies and partners in order to strengthen its responses to the wars. Meanwhile, the EU's presence in the Eastern neighbourhood involuntarily played a role in bringing about the conflict. Russia's aggressive reaction initially weakened the EU's presence in the Eastern neighbourhood, but it has subsequently been strengthened. The EU has experienced relatively broad global support; however, this has not translated into an unambiguously conducive opportunity structure. When it comes to the impact of EU responses to the wars in Ukraine on EU actorness in conflict management, the wars have for instance been accompanied by a stronger role for EU institutions in the field of security and defence, and a change in nature, which is making the EU become a geopolitical actor. Finally, the impact of EU actorness on EU responses, and in turn of EU responses on EU actorness, has been greater in the second phase after the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Sammendrag

Denne oppgaven er interessert i å utforske hvordan den Europeiske Unionen (EU) sin 'actorness' har blitt påvirket av EU-responser til krigene i Ukraina over tid og videre undersøke i hvilken grad disse responsene og krigene i Ukraina selv har påvirket EU sin 'actorness'. Oppgaven følger denne interessen ved å svare på et hoved forskningsspørsmål og et side forskningsspørsmål, i den respektive rekkefølgen. Hvordan har EU sin 'actorness' påvirket EU-responser til konflikten i Ukraina og hvordan har EU-responser igjen påvirket EU sin 'actorness'? I hvilken grad har det vært et skift i innflytelsen av EU sin 'actorness' på EU-responser til konflikten i Ukraina og innflytelsen av EU-responser på EU sin 'actorness' mellom den første perioden (17. mars 2014-24. februar 2022) og den andre perioden (24. februar 2022-25. februar 2023)? 'Process-tracing' brukes for å spore påvirkningen av EU sin 'actorness' på EU-responser, mens påvirkningen av EU-responser på EU sin 'actorness' belyses gjennom en mykere form for argumentasjon. Oppgaven benytter seg av konseptet effektivitet som et slags siderammeverk for i større grad å kunne knytte argumentasjonen til EU sine eksterne handlinger heller enn bare sine hovedsakelig interne kapasiteter. Videre brukes intern sammenligning for å se på hvordan påvirkningen av EU sin 'actorness' på EU-responser, og igjen påvirkningen av EU-responser på EU sin 'actorness', har utviklet seg før og etter den russiske full-skala invasjonen. EU sin 'actorness' innenfor håndtering av konflikter har påvirket EU responser ved å gjøre EU i stand til å benytte seg av politiske virkemidler til tross for ulike interesser blant medlemsstatene ovenfor Russland. EU har koordinert og samarbeidet med allierte og partnere for å styrke responsene til krigene. Samtidig bidro EU sin 'presence' i det østlige nabolaget på ufrivillig vis til konflikten. Russland sin aggressive reaksjon svekket først EU sin 'presence' i det østlige nabolaget, men den har senere blitt styrket. EU opplevde relativt bred støtte globalt, men denne støtten har ikke medført en klart fordelaktig 'opportunity structure'. Når det kommer til påvirkningen av EU-responser til krigene i Ukraina på EU sin 'actorness' innenfor håndtering av konflikter, har krigene eksempelvis sett en utvikling hvor EU-institusjonene har begynt å spille en større rolle innenfor sikkerhet- og forsvarspolitikk, og hvor endringer i EU sin natur gjenspeiles ved at EU blir til en geopolitisk aktør. Til slutt har påvirkningen av EU sin 'actorness' på EU-responser, og videre av EU-responser på EU sin 'actorness' vært av større betydning i den andre fasen etter den russiske full-skala invasjonen av Ukraina.

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Even now, as I am in the process of finalising my thesis, it seems almost surreal that my time as a student will soon be over. Looking back, I am grateful for the invaluable experiences that I got to make along the way. Certainly, the writing process has been challenging, and there are several people to whom I owe my thanks for making it to this point.

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Aaron Nieder

Trondheim, May 2023.

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

AA	Association Agreement
AB	Actor Behaviour
AC	Actor Capability
CES	Common Economic Space
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CoE	Council of Europe
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
EAEC	Eurasian Economic Community
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EC	European Communities
EEAS	European External Action Service
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EP	European Parliament
EPF	European Peace Facility
EU	European Union
EUAM	EU Advisory Mission
EUGS	EU Global Strategy
EUMAM	EU Military Assistance Mission
FAC	Foreign Affairs Council
G7	Group of Seven
G8	Group of Eight
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HR/VP	High Representative of Foreign Affairs and Vice-President of the Commission
IFI	International Financial Institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MFA	Macro-Financial Assistance
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
PSC	Political and Security Committee
SMM	Special Monitoring Mission
SSR	Security Sector Reform
SWIFT	Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications
TCG	Trilateral Contact Group
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNGA	UN General Assembly
UNSC	UN Security Council
US	United States

USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WTO	World Trade Organisation

1 Introduction

This thesis is interested in investigating the extent to which European Union (EU) actorness has affected EU responses to the wars in Ukraine over the course of time and by extension in examining to what extent these responses and the war in Ukraine as such have affected EU actorness. The thesis deals with the concept of actorness because it is one of the most discussed concepts in EU Foreign Policy Analysis (Drieskens, 2017, p. 1534). It needs to be pointed out that the thesis has no intention to engage with grand theories. Instead, the thesis seeks to use actorness as an instrument to go into the sub-frame of effectiveness. This endeavour is further linked to the conceptualisation of sanctions as an EU foreign policy. Actorness can tell us something about the EU's role in the world, especially when one goes beyond "what the EU is" to consider also "what it does" (Rhinard & Sjöstedt, 2019, p. 5). This thesis returns to an exciting research avenue by dealing with the external aspect of EU actorness as well as the interplay between EU actorness and effectiveness. It is evident that this thesis engages with and seeks to contribute to multiple research strands, notably on EU external action, EU actorness, and EU responses to conflict and war with a particular focus on the conflict in Ukraine.

There is no doubt that the war in Ukraine is an event of great importance for the EU. The ongoing war has for instance been described as "one of the most serious European security crises since the end of the Cold War, (…)" (Alcaro & Siddi, 2021, p. 146), and some may even say since World War II (Dijkstra, 2022, p. 2). The EU may be forced to undergo some changes as a security actor due to the security context looking so different in the light of developments in Ukraine (ibid., p. 5). As such, it is intriguing to consider what all of this means for the EU in the field of conflict management. French President Emanuel Macron described the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a "turning point for our societies, our peoples and our European project" (Le Monde Diplomatique, 2022 cited in Bosse, 2022, p. 531). Further, European Commission (Hereafter: Commission) President Ursula von der Leyen described the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine as a "watershed moment for Europe", and further noted that it "[marked] the beginning of a new era" (European Commission, 2022). Due to the significance of the Ukraine war itself, it is meaningful to look at EU responses to the conflict.

Sanctions are in a special position among EU approaches to conflict management in Ukraine. Underlining this, Alcaro & Siddi (2021) have called them the "cornerstone of the EU's policy in the Ukraine crisis" (p. 155). Allegedly, the sanctions imposed against Russia over Ukraine since 2014 also mark the first time that Russia is at the receiving end of EU sanctions (Hellquist, 2016, p. 997). The Russian invasion of Ukraine further led to the largest sanctions package that the EU has ever adopted, as declared by Commission President von der Leyen (EU Neighbours East, 2022 cited in Bosse, 2022, p. 532). Even though sanctions are such an important foreign policy tool, there exists a gap in the literature on EU sanctions that has resulted in a habit of looking at sanctions first and foremost through the coercion lens (Boogaerts, 2018, p. 140). In doing so, observers leave out other aspects of sanctions, thus resulting in an overly simplistic assessment that may paint an excessively negative picture of their effectiveness (Smith, 2014, p. 65).

The remainder of the thesis is structured as follows. After this introductory chapter, the thesis will introduce its framework of analysis. The chapter begins with a review of the literature related to the themes of EU actorness, sanctions, and EU-Ukraine relations. The second sub-chapter of chapter 2 defines the concepts of actorness and effectiveness. Then, the methodology sub-chapter explains how the concepts are applied in line with process-tracing and within-case comparison, the two methods chosen. The fourth and final sub-chapter of chapter 2 builds on the concepts and methodology in presenting the research questions and hypotheses. Chapter 3 sets the scene for the analysis by putting EU responses to the wars in Ukraine into a wider perspective. The three sub-chapters are dedicated to EU conflict management, EU-Russia-Ukraine relations, and the developments of the wars in their own right respectively. Chapters 4 and 5 are the main chapters for analysis. The main section is divided into two symmetric chapters in order to trace and compare the impact of EU actorness on EU responses across time. Chapter 4 deals with the timeframe 17 March 2014-24 February 2022, whereas chapter 5 deals with the timeframe 24 February 2022-25 February 2023. First, actorness is analysed in terms of capabilities, presence, and opportunity structure. Then, effectiveness is analysed through a four-step framework for sanctions effectiveness, and goal attainment against the backdrop of the opportunity structure. The chapters go from actorness to effectiveness because, as previously mentioned, the thesis is interested in looking at not only what the EU is but also what it does. Sanctions effectiveness is supplemented by goal attainment to avoid narrowing down the scope too much. Chapter 6 marks the end of the thesis by concluding on key findings.

2 Framework of analysis

2.1 Literature review

For this thesis, three strands of literature are of particular importance: EU sanctions as a part of EU responses to conflict and war, EU external action, and EU actorness. The most relevant works to be discussed in this literature review are the ones that deal with EU actorness, sanctions, and Russian aggression in Ukraine, and in particular those that establish a connection between all three aspects. There are two questions for debate in the literature that are of particular interest to this thesis. First, do sanctions hold a value as a foreign policy tool? Second, has Russian aggression in Ukraine, and following EU responses, had positive or negative implications for EU actorness? The sanctions literature first criticised the effectiveness of EU sanctions against Russia but has since come to recognise that the increasing escalation of the war itself has been matched by more far-reaching EU responses. As for EU actorness, there are examples, albeit not many, that explicitly link it to sanctions effectiveness (Boogaerts, 2018) and the EU as a conflict manager (Härtel, 2023). According to this literature, sanctions do reinforce the EU's pre-existing actorness. Nevertheless, the EU as a conflict manager is for instance dependent on operating within a conducive context.

In merging actorness and sanctions effectiveness, Boogaerts (2018) is interested in external, in-between and internal factors of the EU's external functioning (p. 141). Boogaerts (2018) acknowledges the other dimensions of sanctions effectiveness but identifies coercion as the main logic for analysis in his selected case. Härtel (2023) combines conflict management criteria with EU actorness criteria in an EU conflict management matrix to define what type of conflict manager the EU is (p. 275). Boogaerts (2018) acknowledges that the EU may successfully use its capabilities in form of sanctions to play the role of an international actor, with the limitation that this is highly dependent on contextual conditions at various levels (p. 151). Härtel (2023) concludes that the war in Ukraine has strengthened EU actorness but that the EU remains a partial and indirect conflict manager, for instance due to its sometimes-fragile consensus and its allegedly limited pool of resources (pp. 274-275, 285).

Looking at the 2014 EU sanctions against Russia over Ukraine, Smith (2014) considers them to be superficial (p. 65). It should be noted that there has been a tendency within the field of sanctions effectiveness to focus on one specific dimension of sanctions at the expense of others (Boogaerts, 2018, pp. 138-139). This dimension, the coercive dimension, is concerned with whether the sender succeeded in changing the behaviour of the target. Barron (2022) shows that the EU itself has also put emphasis on this dimension in an official press release (p. 123). Nevertheless, it is debatable whether that justifies such a narrow approach. However, the EU has also referred to other aspects of sanctions. For instance, in 2019 the EU also emphasised the alleged success of its sanctions along the constraining dimension (Härtel, 2023, p. 278). Boogaerts (2018) argues that an exclusive focus on one particular logic behind the use of sanctions may be justified if there is evidence that the sender itself prioritised it (p. 140). The thesis will return to a framework for the assessment of sanctions in the concepts sub-chapter below.

The sanctions literature poses that EU economic sanctions in theory should be effective against Russia because Russia is more dependent on the EU as a trading partner than vice versa (Boogaerts, 2018, p. 144). With that in mind, if one then were to assess the sanctions against Russia following the logic of coercion and only looking at the end goal, one might wonder why Russia is still waging war in Ukraine. However, Barron (2022) does provide an argument in defence of EU sanctions despite their failure to reach the EU's alleged goal of coercion. The argument is that President Vladimir Putin has been caught up in a romantic approach instead of a rational approach, which has prevented him from being receptible to EU sanctions (Barron, 2022, p. 126). It should also be noted that adoption at the EU level is still followed by implementation at the domestic level. There is divergence at the national level for instance when it comes to the severity of penalties for specific perpetrations or to the accessibility of the competent authorities (Giumelli et al., 2022, p. 40). Uneven enforcement among the member states could have a negative impact on sanctions effectiveness, but relations between third states and the target probably play a bigger role.

While the sanctions in 2014 are generally seen as ineffective, there seems to be some level of agreement that EU responses were improved as the war witnessed further Russian escalation (Bosse, 2022, p. 533). Moreover, Bosse (2022) states that one can even observe similar changes when limiting one's focus to the sanction packages adopted after the full-scale invasion (pp. 535-536). The fifth and sixth sanction packages were increasingly far-reaching than their predecessors. This is due to the sheer impact of banning coal and oil imports from Russia, as well as removing Russia's largest bank, which had been facilitating energy payments from Europe to Russia, from the banking system 'Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications' (SWIFT) (Bosse, 2022, p. 536). Meanwhile, Barron (2022) points out how dependencies in several member states prevented the EU from imposing significant sanctions against Russian gas and oil at an earlier point in time (pp. 123-124). Interestingly, Anghel & Jones (2022) find that the EU responded quickly and strongly to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine but argue that EU actorness initially exerted by the Commission has eventually become increasingly diluted by the member states (pp. 7-8).

Gehring et al. (2017) considers how the EU through a cross-policy effect has the chance to reap the benefits of its widely recognised economic power in the field of foreign and security policy (ibid., p. 728). Nevertheless, it should be noted that this route to EU actorness in great power politics has its limits since this kind of cross-policy effect typically occurs in an unintended manner. This is in line with the criticism about the EU's lack of strategic thinking that for instance has been voiced in relation to the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) (See: Haukkala, 2016). Meanwhile, Gehring et al. (2017) argues that the EU's use of economic sanctions against Russia over Ukraine serves as an exception from the lack of intentionality, while allegedly still being unreliable due to the requirement for consensus (p. 733).

Looking at what cooperation with other organisations means for the EU, Amadio Viceré (2021) shows how the latter has made use of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) as an important partner for instance (p. 499). One might generally assume that the EU would benefit from cooperating with other international organisations. However, Amadio Viceré (2021) argues that the outsourcing to a third party over which the EU cannot exert any formal control shows a lack of capabilities on behalf of the EU (pp. 499-500). Nevertheless, one could also argue that the outsourcing was due to a more general fear of escalation which reflects Russia's status as a nuclear

power and not lack of capabilities on behalf of the EU. Against this backdrop, OSCE was better suited than the EU also because the former traditionally has enjoyed a better reputation when it comes to cooperation with Russia (Amadio Viceré, 2021, p. 510). It should be noted that while the EU may not possess any formal control over the OSCE, this does not mean that the EU had no influence at all over the mission (ibid., p. 515).

In addition to the OSCE, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is also of importance to conflict management efforts in Ukraine. Tytarchuk & Khylko (2016) show the importance of transatlantic cooperation. For instance, the EU has cooperated with the United States (US) and Canada in adopting sanction packages (Tytarchuk & Khylko, 2016, p. 90). The move towards targeting Russian sectors by entering the 'third wave' was done in coordination between the EU, the US and Canada. Cooperation takes place between the EU and NATO, as well as the EU and OSCE, on a bilateral basis at the level of officials. While in the case of OSCE, the cooperation was allegedly an outsourcing to OSCE due to the lack of capabilities by the EU (Amadio Viceré, 2021), Tytarchuk & Khylko (2016) do not make such a claim about EU-NATO cooperation in Ukraine. The EU and NATO seem to have agreed on a certain division of labour where the EU for instance emphasises economic measures, whereas NATO emphasises the strengthening of the Ukrainian armed forces (Tytarchuk & Khylko, 2016, p. 95). Tytarchuk & Khylko (2016) find that neither the EU, NATO nor OSCE possess the necessary capabilities to stop Russian aggression in Ukraine alone (p. 96). Thus, cooperation is the best way for all the organisations to manage the situation.

It is logical that sanctions become increasingly effective as more actors are joining the efforts and pulling in the same direction. In the case of EU sanctions against Russia over Ukraine, the number of third parties doing so has been rather disappointing. For instance, Hellquist (2016) finds that only 40 per cent of the potential aligning countries have decided to follow EU sanctions in the case of Russian aggression in Ukraine (p. 1004). That is compared to an average of 77 per cent in other sanctioning cases (ibid., p. 1004). This shows that EU neighbours have largely been afraid of the implications of their geographical proximity to Russia. Sanctions have fewer negative implications for the sender if the target is a lesser developed country further away. There are some countries, including Turkey, that seem to refuse alignment on sanctions over the war in Ukraine not because of the EU's inherent position on the issue, but rather due to disagreement with EU leadership and its exact use of sanctions in dealing with the issue (ibid., p. 1012). These should be the kind of non-aligners that provide the biggest challenge for the EU as an actor. Cardwell & Moret (2022) distinguish between 'alignment', where typically EU member states or (potential) accession candidates are explicitly asked to follow EU sanctions, and 'adoption', where other third countries may themselves decide to follow (p. 6). While alignment might be expected, adoption probably benefits the EU even more due to symbolic value. Looking at it differently, the absence of alignment might however also have a considerable impact.

Although sanctions have been central as a response since conflict broke out, another policy is essential for understanding EU actorness in the regional context of the Eastern neighbourhood and EU-Ukraine relations. Apart from bilateral relations, the EU is involved in the region through the ENP and in particular its sub-branch for the Eastern neighbourhood, namely the EaP, which was later created. While scholars usually want to avoid a blame game, there has been some discussion on whether the EU with its policies in its Eastern neighbourhood has provoked Russia (Cadier, 2019; Haukkala, 2016). Haukkala (2016) claims that neither the ENP nor the EaP were originally envisioned as a

part of some long-term plan but were rather unavoidable by-products of the Eastern enlargement, which the EU also had not exactly aimed for since the beginning (p. 657). This promotes the argument that the ENP and EaP did not originally represent some grand geopolitical strategy. Haukkala (2016) argues that even though there was no malicious intent towards Russia behind the ENP and the EaP, the EU failed to have a realistic perception of the situation when adopting those policies (p. 658). By asking whether "the EU [got] anything right" (ibid., p. 661), Haukkala paints a rather negative picture of the implications for EU actorness. Meanwhile, if the EU had acted in a way that would have addressed these shortcomings, it might have been at risk of giving up its civilian self-perception (ibid., p. 662). This observation seems to imply an understanding that an actor cannot be civilian or normative and geopolitical at the same time. Pointing towards a different understanding, Raik (2019) states that the EU may have to resort to geopolitics in defence of its norms, thus implicitly suggesting that the EU may be able to reconcile a normative image with increasing acceptance of 'harder' means (p. 65). Further, Haukkala's observation indicates that policy tools, in addition to being able to have a positive or negative impact on EU actorness, may also affect the nature of EU actorness.

Last but not least, it should be pointed out that there is a Special Issue in the Journal of Common Market Studies that looks at the EU as a foreign policy actor by asking how the so-called 'Russia-Ukraine crisis' has either enabled or constrained EU power (Cross & Karolewski, 2017). Although there are some nuances between actorness and power, actorness is essentially a prerequisite for power. The articles in the Special Issue comment on whether the conflict in Ukraine prior to the Russian full-scale invasion and EU responses had predominantly positive or negative implications for the EU. Howorth (2017) argues that the ENP has played a constraining role by contributing to the 'crisis', and that EU responses continued down the same path, further worsened by the Commission being faced with diverging interests among the member states. In another negative assessment, Kuzio (2017) states that the EU was constrained during the 'crisis' in three main ways. Firstly, EU responses were constrained because they did not include a membership perspective for Ukraine (ibid., p. 104). Secondly, the EU failed to seriously consider that Ukrainian leaders might be swayed by Russia (ibid.). Thirdly, the complexity of EU conflict management, which involves various institutional actors, constrained the EU (ibid.). Positioning themselves somewhere in the middle, Orenstein & Kelemen (2017) argue that the economic sanctions against Russia were enabling, but that 'Trojan Horses' driven by their bilateral relations with Russia were constraining by making the EU consensus vulnerable to Russian influence. In a positive assessment, Natorski & Pomorska (2017) claim that rising Russian escalation in Ukraine led EU member states to distrust Russia more and more, which in turn facilitated trust between the member states and towards the EU level. Finally, Schilde (2017) states that the 'crisis' has been enabling by motivating member states to increase their defence spendings, as well as leading to a change of focus, notably in the form of directing attention back towards defence at home.

This thesis enters the debate on EU actorness arguing that the wars in Ukraine and following EU responses have had more positive than negative implications overall. Through a within-case comparison of the phase before and after the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the thesis traces how the EU over time was able to draw on its actorness to a greater extent and with increasingly positive implications. Sanctions feature as a capability in the actorness concept, but also as a special focus in the sub-frame of effectiveness. The thesis enters the debate on sanctions by adopting a position

that moves beyond the coercing logic and arguing that sanctions do indeed hold a value as a foreign policy tool. The thesis aims at contributing to the literature by making use of the heavily discussed actorness concept in a way that takes into consideration not just internal but also external aspects of EU actorness. The sub-frame of effectiveness supplements actorness to examine what the external effectiveness of policy tools means for EU actorness by means of a softer argumentation. EU responses to Russian aggression in Ukraine have gotten more effective over time, and there is reason to believe that this has had a positive impact on EU actorness, since it for instance shows other international actors that the EU can in fact be a practical conflict manager. Sanctions in particular have gotten more effective in the second phase, even if certain key international actors are slowing down the process. It should also be noted that EU responses and the developments of the war itself are making the EU become a geopolitical actor.

2.2 Concepts

The literature on EU actorness originates from Sjöstedt (1974, 1977). Sjöstedt (1974) introduced the concepts of Actor Behaviour (AB) and Actor Capability (AC) (pp. 12, 15). In order to exert AB, AC is required. Sjöstedt (1981) defines AC as "(…) a measure of the autonomous unit's capacity to behave actively and deliberately in relation to other actors in the international system" (p. 16). He further comments "This property is variable, and may accordingly grow or diminish over time. The more of an actor capability the unit is in possession of, the more of an actor it is: the more certain it is that it will be able to behave as a single unit in any kind of situation in relating to any sort of partner or opponent" (Sjöstedt, 1981, p. 16). AB is defined as a transaction going from the community to some recipient in the outside world (ibid., p. 21). Examples of what could be transferred would be goods, capital, people or information. Sjöstedt (1981) notes that the division of activities into issue areas is of significance. Thus, this thesis does not just operate with EU actorness per se, but also situates it in the issue area of conflict management. Especially one of two basic functions of AC identified by Sjöstedt (1981) is interesting in the context of this thesis. "First, it is thought to be used as a diagnostic instrument for determining to what degree the EC is to be considered an international actor at a given point [in] time" (Sjöstedt, 1981, p. 117). Sjöstedt (1981) made several observations that appear relevant also in the case and temporal scope of this thesis. On the European Communities (EC) at the time, Sjöstedt (1981) commented that it has a higher capability when it comes to defensive rather than offensive actor behaviour (p. 98). In other words, the initiative usually has to be generated from the outside. He further points out that a system for crisis management must "(…) be capable of functioning at short notice in order to be able to respond to a rapidly evolving situation" (Sjöstedt, 1981, p. 98). Crisis management must also happen effectively and with a minimum loss of time. This thesis is interested in a change in the effectiveness and speed of the EU response to Russia through sanctions between 2014 and 2023. Additionally, in the thesis, the impact of behaviour from the outside, in the form of the developments of the war itself and Russian escalation, is in focus. Further, Sjöstedt (1981) stated that the involvement of another Great Power makes it extremely difficult to assess EU influence on conflict management (p. 100). The fact that Russia is the EU's counterpart in Ukraine does indeed make the situation unique and complicated. There is the blockade of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the fear of escalation. Finally, Sjöstedt (1974, 1977) considered his works to be tentative models in need of further elaboration at a time when most observers either took it for granted that the EC was in fact an actor

or used the term 'actor' as an equivalent for 'nation' without elaboration. According to Rhinard & Sjöstedt (2019), the subsequent literature embraced AC but not AB, thus favouring the internal aspect of EU actorness over the external one.

Jupille & Caporaso (1998) and Bretherton & Vogler (2006) are among the most prominent works to have contributed to the EU actorness literature since Sjöstedt (1977). Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that the concept of actorness, and especially who is an international actor, remains disputed (Drieskens, 2017, p. 1535). Although the theoretical concepts from Jupille & Caporaso (1998) and Bretherton & Vogler (2006) seem to be overlapping to a considerable extent, there are also differences between them. Notably, Jupille & Caporaso limit their work to the internal functioning of the EU to a greater extent than Bretherton & Vogler (Drieskens, 2017, p. 1537). Moreover, Bretherton & Vogler emphasise the significance of actual tools and resources for pursuing policy goals to a greater extent than Jupille & Caporaso (Rhinard & Sjöstedt, 2019, p. 7). These points are part of the reason for why this thesis takes as its point of departure the concept by Bretherton & Vogler.

Bretherton & Vogler (2006) present the concepts of 'opportunity', 'presence' and 'capability'. Opportunity is present if the external environment of ideas and events is conducive to the EU. Presence is defined as the ability to "shape the perceptions, expectations and behaviour of others" (Bretherton & Vogler, 2006, p. 27). In line with the understanding of normative power, presence is not a result of action but rather of the mere existence of the EU. As one aspect of presence, the EU's internal priorities and policies may have (unintended) consequences beyond its borders (Bretherton & Vogler, 2006, p. 23). Additionally, the EU as a unique political system and its identity are of importance for presence. Capability is defined as "those aspects of the EU policy process which constrain or enable external action" (ibid., p. 29). Bretherton & Vogler (2006) present four basic requirements for how capability can be translated into actorness. First, this can be facilitated by a common commitment to a set of overarching values as those found in the treaties (Bretherton & Vogler, 2006, p. 30). Second, the domestic acceptance of EU external policy in the member states is gaining in importance (ibid.). Third is the ability to agree on priorities and policies (ibid., p. 31). The authors present two variations: consistency and coherence. The former focuses on agreement between the member states, but also between EU level and the member state level, whereas the latter focuses on agreement between the EU institutions (Bretherton & Vogler, 2006, p. 29). Fourth, which policy tools the EU possesses but also how the EU manages these tools is of significance (ibid.). One could ask whether the Ukraine war provides the EU with an opportunity to adopt new roles and responsibilities (ibid., p. 26).

When assessing a case in terms of actorness, it is useful to connect the concept to a particular policy area. Since the sanctions against Russia essentially function as a means for conflict management, actorness in conflict management should be briefly considered. In their understanding of the EU as a conflict manager, Whitman & Wolff (2012) agree with the more general conceptual literature on EU actorness that capabilities are of importance. What potentially sets EU actorness in conflict management apart from EU actorness more generally could be a stronger focus on the external aspect of EU actorness. The existence of cooperation and coordination with third states and international organisations is one sign of capability, but effectiveness on the ground should also be examined (Whitman & Wolff, 2012, pp. 13-14). Whitman & Wolff (2012) seem to understand an effective conflict manager as an entity that manages to make use of its capabilities without being significantly restricted by the external context at the

global, regional, state, and local levels. There is arguably a rather complex relationship between actorness and effectiveness. Niemann & Bretherton (2013) state that "actorness logically precedes effectiveness" (p. 267). If an entity does not qualify as an actor, there is no point in evaluating its effectiveness as an actor. Simultaneously, however, there is no evident linear relationship between an increase in coherence, being an aspect of actorness, and an increase in effectiveness, understood as the ability of an entity to achieve its goals (Niemann & Bretherton, 2013, p. 267). In other words, actorness does not automatically imply effectiveness. To clarify, the assumption in this thesis is that the EU possessed actorness prior to the sanctions, however, the latter have the potential to increase the EU's degree of actorness. Similarly, Rhinard & Sjöstedt (2019) use the term 'feedback loops' about the ways in which the external aspect of actorness could potentially make the EU stronger internally (p. 20).

The definition of actorness adopted in this thesis consists of capability, presence, and opportunity. Capability is divided into the capability of EU member states to agree on common priorities vis-à-vis Russia, the capability of the EU to cooperate and coordinate with third states and organisations on the global stage and capability in the form of EU policy tools and how these are being utilised. Coherence or the capability of the EU to agree internally is one of the aspects of EU actorness that has received the most scholarly attention (Niemann & Bretherton, 2013, p. 267). Further, it is an important aspect in the light of the sanctions against Russia over Ukraine. The sanctions under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) require consensus, which usually amounts to a considerable challenge for the member states. The great diversity of bilateral relations between EU member states and Russia only adds to the challenge. Hence, coherence is once again receiving considerably scholarly attention. The coherence behind EU responses has been impressive but concerningly vulnerable at the same time (Cardwell & Moret, 2022, pp. 1, 6; Natorski & Pomorska, 2017, pp. 54, 58). Capabilities, presence, and opportunity are not static and closely interrelated. Actorness is assumed to impact on how the EU is responding to the wars in Ukraine by drawing on its capabilities, with sanctions being a prime example. When capabilities are used without much delay and achieve an impact, this helps the EU position itself globally. A change in opportunity structure has an impact on presence and the perception of the EU's presence by other international actors.

Groen & Niemann (2013) define effectiveness in terms of goal-attainment (p. 310). Although Rhinard & Sjöstedt (2019) criticise such an understanding of the term (p. 18), this thesis takes the stance that a definition of effectiveness based on goal attainment is well-suited for operationalisation. While Rhinard & Sjöstedt (2019) advocate an understanding of external impact as effecting behavioural change (p. 19), in the case of Russia, such a definition might not be the best fit, considering that Russia's assertive and aggressive behaviour towards Ukraine has not changed. Thus, this thesis rather accepts that a softer argumentation is necessary in the light of complexity and operationalisation concerns. The thesis adopts in part the approach of Groen & Niemann (2013) by considering to what extent goal attainment on behalf of the EU was enabled or constrained by the opportunity structure (p. 317). In order to do so, one has to take into account the goals pursued by other significant actors globally, and whether the EU has created a strategy for how to navigate this context in order to attain its goals (ibid.). It should be noted that, in contrast to Groen & Niemann, this thesis does not derive its actorness concept from Jupille & Caporaso, but from Bretherton & Vogler. Although this definition of actorness includes opportunity structure, that does not mean that this thesis intends to argue that actorness and effectiveness are identical. When exploring to what

extent goal attainment was enabled or constrained by the opportunity structure, one could argue that we take a step further by asking new questions and combining the elements differently. Given that sanctions as an EU response to the war in Ukraine are emphasised in this thesis, the above-mentioned definition of effectiveness is combined with a particular focus on sanctions effectiveness. Giumelli & Ivan (2013) introduce a four-step process for assessing EU sanctions. First, one looks at the role of sanctions in the context of a foreign policy strategy (Giumelli & Ivan, 2013, p. 1). Second, it is necessary to take into account the intentions behind the sanctions (ibid.). Third, one needs to look at the impact on the target, as well as the costs incurred by the sender (ibid.). Fourth, it helps to be somewhat critical and ask if other policy tools would have been better suited (ibid.).

Sanctions are rarely used alone. Therefore, it is important to look at coordination with other foreign policy tools. The expectation should not be for sanctions to solve the conflict on their own but to contribute to the overall strategy. If the first step is figuring out how sanctions fit into the bigger picture, then the second step is to focus only on the sanctions and consider what impact they are expected to have on the target (Giumelli & Ivan, 2013, p. 9). The three logics identified are to 'coerce', to 'constrain' and to 'signal' (ibid.). In the respective order, the meaning of the logics is to alter the behaviour of the target, limit the target's room of manoeuvre and to send a message, for instance related to norms or values. As Giumelli & Ivan point out, to coerce is easier when there is a willingness on behalf of the target (2013, p. 9). If there is more of a deadlock, the sender is more likely to constrain the target as a means of minimising the damage. Giumelli & Ivan (2013) claim that there are potential frictions when simultaneously using economic sanctions and the logic to signal against the same target (p. 10). This is intriguing in the case of this thesis because the EU has economic sanctions in place against Russia, but one could also argue that adopting and maintaining sanctions has been closely linked to the protection of norms and values. Giumelli & Ivan (2013) also point out that sanctions are flexible in the sense that they can undergo several phases following different logics (p. 10). In the case of the sanctions against Russia, it is possible that hope connected to the diplomatic efforts of the Minsk Agreements went hand in hand with a belief that Russia might still change its behaviour. Relations on various levels had in some form co-existed with the sanctions prior to the full-scale invasion. Against that backdrop, it seems plausible that the 24th of February 2022 marked a new phase in the logics underlying the sanctions.

Sanctions can have an impact on the target in several ways. Material impact can be direct, indirect or unintended (Giumelli & Ivan, 2013, p. 10). Direct impact is the main burden calculated upon the target. Indirect impact is the harm that could be suffered by the population. Giumelli & Ivan (2013) mention higher price of electricity as one such example (p. 10). Giumelli & Ivan (2013) also remind us that it is important to be aware of potential unintended consequences, in other words, harm that had not been predicted beforehand (p. 10). Nevertheless, identifying unintended consequences is probably the most arduous task. The cost aspect is essentially focused on the member states. Cost is highly relevant in the case of the Russia sanctions. After all, the bilateral relations with Russia among the member states showed great variation. Therefore, the cost may be unevenly distributed among member states. While one might at first associate cost with a negative impact on the sender, the presence of a significant cost could for instance strengthen the signalling logic (Giumelli & Ivan, 2013, p. 10). When asking if any other tools could have been more effective than sanctions, EU lack of military capability notably is a topic for discussion.

2.3 Methodology

The research conducted in this thesis follows a qualitative approach. By conducting process-tracing, the thesis aims to explain causality between EU actorness, the Ukraine wars and EU responses to the wars. Collier (2011) defines process-tracing as "the systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analysed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator" (p. 823). Process-tracing allows for identifying and testing causal mechanisms (Bennett & George, 1997, p. 1). Causal mechanisms in turn are a means of making causal inferences by reflecting how causal variables produce causal effects (ibid., p. 2). Process-tracing should not be reduced to a historical narrative. By building on theoretical concepts, the causal explanation becomes an analytical explanation, as opposed to a purely historical account (ibid., p. 6). This thesis builds on theoretical concepts related to EU actorness, which were presented in the previous section. When dealing with causality, it should not be forgotten that researchers within the social sciences do not operate in laboratory-like conditions. For instance, it is impossible to re-run history in order to conduct a perfect experiment (ibid., p. 2). Naturally, this thesis is no exception to that constraint.

When elaborating a causal mechanism, it is necessary to search for mechanistic evidence in order to update our confidence in the original assumption in line with informal Bayesian logic (Beach & Pedersen, 2019, p. 155). In this thesis, anonymous semi-structured interviews are employed as a means of gathering evidence in the form of empirical material. This empirical material allows for triangulation with existing scholarly research and primary documents by comparing different types of sources with one another to strengthen the findings. The population for the interviews consists of persons internal and external to the EU. Notably, the EU dimension includes key officials from the European External Action Service (EEAS). Semi-structured interviews hold the potential of generating new data not yet presented in the existing literature, which indeed is necessary to update prior beliefs (ibid., p. 178). The thesis sets out to update the belief that sanctions are an ineffective tool for translating the EU's internal actorness into external actorness. As Beach & Pedersen (2019) state, when we have low prior confidence, even relatively weak confirming evidence will raise our confidence (p. 182). For us to increase our confidence in a causal mechanism, every single one of its parts has to be present (ibid., p. 185). If this is not the case, that does not automatically mean that we have zero confidence in a causal mechanism, but our confidence in the causal mechanism will be lower. Besides semi-structured interviews, the thesis makes use of primary documents such as conclusions from the Council of the EU (Hereafter: Council) and the European Council, publications from the Commission, and secondary literature such as academic articles, publications from think tanks, books and book chapters.

Beach & Pedersen (2019) define a case as "the unit in which a given causal relationship plays out" (pp. 12-13). The sanctions as a central component of EU responses against Russia over the Ukraine wars are well-suited for analysing the impact of EU actorness. The case is divided into two phases. The first is March 17th, 2014-February 24th, 2022. In 2014, the illegal Russian actions impinging on the territorial integrity of Ukraine started with the annexation of Crimea. The second is February 24th, 2022-February 25th, 2023. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24th marks the beginning. The tenth and most recent sanctions package was adopted on the 25th of February 2023. The date marks one year since the start of the full-scale invasion. This most recent sanctions package at the time of writing is a natural point to end the temporal scope of the thesis.

Although the timeframes are asymmetric in terms of duration, significant sanctioning activity took place during both.

According to Lange (2013), within-case methods consist of both primary and secondary methods. Primary within-case methods produce evidence, whereas secondary within-case methods are used to combine and synthesise this evidence (Lange, 2013, p. 4). The primary within-case method employed in this thesis is internal comparison over time, as indicated in the paragraph above. Process-tracing is the secondary within-case method utilised in this thesis. Internal comparison over time makes it possible to analyse change, as well as identify its potential causes (ibid., p. 22). The reason is that time has the potential of exhibiting causal impact on a process (ibid., p. 2). A within-case comparison over time provides insights into how EU actorness, the Ukraine wars and EU sanctions against Russia are linked by causality that would not have been fully appreciated otherwise. The EU sanctions against Russia witnessed a certain level of continuity over a period of nearly eight years. However, a critical juncture occurred on the 24th of February 2022, as Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, thus making temporality play a crucial role in the causal mechanism elaborated below. Therefore, it is desirable to divide the case into two phases.

EU actorness has impacted on EU responses to Russian aggression in Ukraine by allowing the EU to utilise harsher policy tools over time. This thesis makes an attempt at tracing that process. As a first contextual condition, presence in the Eastern neighbourhood has left the EU with an obligation to muster a response. The EU was able to use its diplomatic capabilities in the form of for instance institutional actors and institutionalised procedures to foster a common position despite diverging national preferences among the member states on relations with Russia. Notably, the Lisbon Treaty has played a crucial role in managing relations between institutional actors and the member states in EU conflict management. A common position has made it possible for the EU to utilise policy tools that require unanimity. Russian escalation, or lack of de-escalation, is a contextual condition that has played a role in allowing the EU to utilise its policy tools. The EU has made use of its capability to coordinate and cooperate with its allies in order to strengthen the external impact of its policy tools. However, challenges towards the global order built on international law and rules have turned an opportunity structure otherwise characterised by broad support into a partly constraining contextual condition for EU responses. When Russian aggression in Ukraine reached a level of escalation perceived as a game-changer, this created a contextual condition that put additional pressure on the EU and its member states. This pressure has resulted in a bargaining climate where it is not acceptable for any member state to be the one to ultimately make an EU response fail entirely, even if certain national differences have continued to exist. Thus, the EU has been able to utilise its policy tools in a harsher manner.

2.4 Research questions and hypotheses

As indicated by the literature review, there has been a substantial interest in whether the EU has been able to deal effectively with Russian aggression in Ukraine, and what this in turn has meant for the EU. A natural starting point for addressing this interest is to look at what policy tools the EU has at its disposal in the field of conflict management. How have its relevant institutions and procedures developed over the course of several decades allowed the EU to use, or prevented it from using, these policy tools? One then has to move from internal capabilities to the external context if one wants to assess EU conflict management in Ukraine. How do other international actors relate to the principles

underlying EU policies? It would have been possible to stop there, but there lies additional value in extending the scope by asking what all of this in turn means for the EU as an actor in the field of conflict management. The EU has been able to draw on its internal capabilities in a more robust manner than anticipated, and there are signs for instance of the EU being pushed by the evolution of the war to further develop these capabilities. Moreover, the Russian escalation displayed in Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022 was of such proportions that the EU was forced to take a big leap forward with its responses in order to match it. This leads us to the questions and hypotheses presented directly below.

Main RQ: How has EU actorness impacted on EU responses to the conflict in Ukraine and how have EU responses in turn impacted on EU actorness?

Main hypothesis: EU actorness has allowed the EU to respond without much delay and EU responses have in turn strengthened EU actorness through a positive feedback loop.

Sub-question: To what extent has there been a change in the impact of EU actorness on EU responses to the conflict in Ukraine and the impact of EU responses on EU actorness between the first period (17th March 2014-24th February 2022) and the second period (24th February 2022-25th February 2023)?

Sub-hypothesis: The impact of EU actorness on EU responses to the conflict in Ukraine and by extension the impact of EU responses on EU actorness have been greater in the second period.

The concepts of EU actorness and effectiveness are operationalised through the methodology consisting of process-tracing and within-case comparison. Concepts and methodology together make it possible to construct the research questions and hypotheses. The research questions and hypotheses serve as a means to guide the thesis in presenting the empirical evidence through process-tracing. The main research questions and hypothesis cover the concept of EU actorness and the idea of a feedback loop. Additionally, there is the idea that EU responses to Russian aggression in Ukraine and the evolution of the war in its own right not only have a positive impact on EU actorness but are also affecting the nature of the EU as an actor, thus making the EU become a geopolitical actor. Finally, the sub-question and sub-hypothesis reflect the within-case comparison aspect of the methodology across the two selected timeframes.

3 Setting the scene for the analysis

3.1 EU conflict management

EU conflict management consists of different types of policies. Allegedly, the EU itself has preferred terms such as conflict prevention and crisis management over conflict management (Whitman & Wolff, 2012, pp. 5-6). However, there is not just a difference in preference but also a difference in meaning. Conflict prevention has as its goal to bring about structural changes through long-term policies in order to deal with root causes of conflict (ibid., p. 6). Meanwhile, crisis management is more short-term and is targeted at escalation and/or the effect of a quickly deteriorating situation (ibid.). A third related policy is conflict settlement or resolution. This type is meant to aid the parties in settling disputes through political or judicial means instead of violence (ibid.). Whitman & Wolff (2012) essentially see conflict management as an overarching concept covering the three types of policies mentioned above in this paragraph. This leads them to define conflict management in the following manner: "long-term engagement with a particular country or region, an engagement that, over time, will necessitate different conflict management policies, including military crisis management, development and humanitarian aid efforts, and mediation between conflict parties" (ibid., p. 6).

EU conflict management has been formed gradually. It covers different policies that were not all established simultaneously. The CFSP was formally established in 1992 with the Maastricht Treaty (Gebhard, 2012, p. 23). In the early phases of EU conflict management, the emphasis was on development policy as a tool for conflict prevention (Shepherd, 2012, p. 33). Then the establishment of the CFSP was meant to provide political and diplomatic instruments as support to the largely economic ones already possessed by the Commission (ibid.). However, and somewhat paradoxically, one could argue that, by making political cooperation between member states a possibility from an institutional perspective, the Maastricht Treaty exacerbated coordination problems between the external economic and the foreign political agenda (Gebhard, 2012, p. 27). In the 1990s, the evolution of EU conflict management was fuelled by rapid global changes. In 1999, the European Security and Defence Policy, which later became the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), was established (ibid., p. 23). The CSDP brought with it a security and defence political element by providing the EU with the opportunity to eventually develop its own operational capacities for conflict management (ibid.). Another effect of the evolution of the CSDP was the creation of inter-institutional frictions for EU conflict management (ibid.). This is because some aspects of external action are supranational in nature, whereas the CFSP and CSDP are intergovernmental. A problem arises when complementary policies are kept apart due to struggles over who gets to decide.

With its different policies, EU conflict management is geared towards a comprehensive approach. Nevertheless, such an approach is highly dependent on inter-institutional coordination. The 2003 ENP with its 'softer' policies is another policy that has come to play a role in EU conflict management (Whitman & Wolff, 2012, p. 7). Organisational and institutional challenges arise from the fact that the EU has come to possess both operational and structural capabilities (Gebhard, 2012, p. 25). Policy development, decision-making, implementation and financing for EU conflict management follow different procedures due to being covered by both supranational and intergovernmental areas (ibid.). Indeed, the Nice Treaty laid out that the Council and Commission were to

cooperate on external action (ibid., p. 26). However, the Nice Treaty left behind a legal grey area regarding the exact relationship between the Commission and the Council domains of external action (ibid., p. 27).

The Lisbon Treaty of 2009 introduced changes to the relationship between the Commission and the Council in external action by introducing the role of High Representative of Foreign Affairs and Vice-President of the Commission (HR/VP) (Gebhard, 2012, p. 26). Moreover, the Lisbon Treaty abolished the pillar structure which formally represented the division into community and member state competences. Interestingly, the Lisbon Treaty was supposed to strengthen the EU's actorness globally (Drieskens, 2017, p. 1534), and the EU has considerably increased its activity in external action and conflict management in recent years (Gebhard, 2012, pp. 28-29). Nevertheless, in reality, the Lisbon Treaty maintained the institutional divide between external action more broadly and CFSP (ibid., p. 28). Further, there is not just a divide between institutional actors. Being more than an intergovernmental organisation but less than a state, the EU faces the difficulty that member states can act collectively in the realm of foreign and security policy but also conduct their own, sometimes contradictory, foreign policies (Orenstein & Kelemen, 2017, p. 88). With that being said, the Nice Treaty made several institutions, such as the Political and Security Committee (PSC), the EU Military Committee, and the EU Military Staff, a permanent part of EU conflict management. The Lisbon Treaty in turn situated these institutions under the HR/VP role (Whitman & Wolff, 2012, p. 12). Moreover, the Lisbon Treaty paved the way for the establishment of the EEAS (Shepherd, 2012, p. 47). The HR/VP and the EEAS are both involved in EU conflict management (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022, p. 154). Noteworthily, the HR/VP is responsible for conducting the CFSP and CSDP as well as assisting with their development as mandated by the Council (ibid., p. 98). Further, the HR/VP functions as the head of the EEAS (ibid., p. 99). The EEAS is a great asset that allows the HR/VP to guide EU foreign policy, as shown when the 2016 Global Strategy (EUGS) was developed (ibid., p. 100). The EEAS even has its own permanent crisis management structures embedded in order to make the CSDP policies operational (ibid., p. 104). The Lisbon Treaty also established EU Delegations inspired by pre-existing Commission Delegations (ibid., p. 105). Although supposed to cooperate with the diplomatic services of the member states, the EEAS, and the EU Delegations struggled to harmonise with the pre-established actors (ibid., pp. 103, 105). Similarly, while the function of HR/VP was created in the spirit of bridging a divide, the various roles of the HR/VP at times seem to be at odds with each other (ibid., p. 100). Other shortcomings in the balance, while not exhaustive, are that the HR/VP's link with the Council appears to be more fleshed out than that with the Commission, and that the HR/VP is dependent on the member states to a certain extent (ibid., pp. 99, 101). Thus, one could argue that the Lisbon Treaty has simultaneously exacerbated problems while creating potential for better inter-institutional coordination. It should also be noted that the EUGS of 2016 for instance was meant to better integrate various institutional actors through common working practices (Natorski, 2020, p. 740). As such, at least awareness around the internal coordination problems seems to exist.

When considering change in EU conflict management, it might also be helpful to consider that in the wake of the European Councils of Cologne and Helsinki in 1999, there had been a focus on the military aspects of CSDP, which then gradually transformed into a focus on promoting to a greater extent also the civilian aspect of CSDP (Gebhard, 2012, p. 29). The war in Ukraine marks a reversal to the tendencies of Cologne and Helsinki with more active developments on the military front in EU conflict management. Where

the trend previously was that of global threats requiring a comprehensive approach, Europe and the World are now witnessing the return of high politics.

3.2 EU-Russia-Ukraine relations

An overview of EU-Russia-Ukraine relations is necessary as it embeds the wars and corresponding EU policies in a broader geopolitical context which cannot be ignored. Thus, the thesis now turns to look at what happened between these three actors in the run up to the 'crisis' that developed into war. Without wanting to play a 'blame game', observers have discussed the roles the EU and Russia respectively have played in creating the 'crisis' (Cadier, 2019; Haukkala, 2016). However, a Ukrainian focus has at times been overshadowed. Indeed, one point of view on EU-Russia-Ukraine relations is that of Ukraine as a country that was caught in the middle of two integration regimes, namely the EU and, on the Russian side, what eventually took on the form of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2015, p. 6). This is a situation that only came about after the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was dissolved and Ukraine eventually became an independent state (ibid., p. 32). Even given the December 1991 referendum on independence, it took some time before Ukraine in reality was recognised as an independent state (ibid., p. 10). Meanwhile, the concept of Ukraine as an independent state in the long-term was never embraced in Russia (ibid.). In the 17th century, eastern and southern Ukraine had been incorporated into Russia (ibid., p. 11). In terms of identity, one could thus perhaps say that Ukrainian society had a western component and an eastern component with more similarities to Russia (ibid., p. 12). This is at least one reason for why Ukraine for a long time tried to balance ties with both Russia and Europe. Moreover, Ukraine has been dependent on Russia as a trade partner and energy supplier (ibid., p. 9).

In the wake of the fall of the USSR, Russia had not come to terms with the loss of its Great Power status, whereas Ukraine has been rather wary of becoming too closely integrated with Russia again (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2015, p. 9). Simultaneously, the dependencies implied in the above paragraph did not make it feasible for Ukraine to avoid integration with Russia entirely. While the economic relationship between Russia and Ukraine was asymmetric, Ukraine had perhaps a more romantic value to Russia (ibid., pp. 2, 15). Russia first relied on political persuasion and economic pressure in its attempts to include Ukraine in its various integration initiatives (ibid., p. 17). Ukraine remained rather sceptical in the 1990s and the Russian integration attempts through the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) were deemed to be ineffective (ibid., p. 19). In the early 2000s, Russia followed a new strategy by trying to convince Ukraine to join the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC) through a calculation of potential costs and benefits depending on its choice (ibid., pp. 19-21). In 2003, against the backdrop of Ukraine moving closer to NATO and the EU, Russia proposed a new initiative called the Common Economic Space (CES) (ibid., p. 22). While senior officials and the political elite were more sceptical, the Ukrainian leadership did not consider CES to be incompatible with European integration (ibid., 23-24). Hence, at this time, Ukraine was still performing a balancing act between Europe and Russia.

Whereas Ukraine tried to avoid becoming too deeply integrated with Russia, while managing its largely economic dependencies, Ukraine had been more positive towards European integration (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2015, p. 30). Ironically, Russia's unwillingness to let Ukraine go has played a role in making Ukraine seek out Europe. Ukraine realised that Russia did not want to permanently accept Ukrainian independence

and thus sought security with Europe (ibid., p. 31). Through the framing of Ukrainian presidents, Europeanness became crucial as it justified independence (ibid., p. 32). While Ukraine, as previously implicated, had significant economic dependencies vis-à-vis Russia, Europe played a different role in this regard. Firstly, Europe could provide technology, know-how and investment for modernisation (ibid.). Secondly, European standards and norms would make it easier to benefit from globalisation (ibid., p. 33).

Since the late 1990s, Ukraine wished for open-ended, comprehensive and binding integration with the EU (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2015, p. 37). However, the EU had its reasons to be more reluctant towards a Ukrainian membership perspective. Ukraine's failure to support foreign policy declarations with domestic change contributed to a difficult political and economic profile (ibid., pp. 35, 37). Hence, EU-Ukraine bilateral relations served as a substitute for closer integration, albeit to the discontent of Ukraine (ibid., p. 37). The EU and Ukraine signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in 1994, but, when it was ratified in 1998, Ukraine already longed for deeper integration (ibid.). Although not involving Ukraine, the 2004 eastern enlargement did have implications for the former (ibid., p. 39). It should be noted that, prior to the enlargement, Ukraine did not share a border with the EU. Essentially, Ukraine tried to use the ENP, which followed in the wake of the enlargement, as a means to align itself more closely with the Copenhagen Criteria and thus move closer to candidate status (ibid., p. 41).

Ukrainians got closer to this path through the 2004 Orange Revolution (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2015, p. 41). Surprisingly, the public protested against electoral fraud in favour of the presidential candidate preferred by Russia, Viktor Yanukovych (ibid.). In the ensuing second round, Yanukovych lost to the candidate perceived to be closer to Europe and the West, Viktor Yushchenko (ibid., p. 25). Because the EU had largely justified its reluctance with Ukraine's domestic failings, the EU was forced to react to these promising democratic developments in line with European values (ibid., p. 39). Since the member states were not ready to grant Ukraine candidate status, Ukraine was instead granted the outlook for a new agreement when it fulfilled certain political criteria (ibid., p. 42). Although developments did not always occur at the pace desired by Ukraine, the latter did eventually end up with an Association Agreement (AA) and a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) (ibid., p. 45). It should be noted that it was Ukraine who pushed for the term AA, whereas the EU was more hesitant and proceeded to emphasise that the term did not imply an explicit promise of a membership perspective to Ukraine (Wolczuk, 2018, p. 281).

In the early 2000s, relations with Russia had been the EU's main concern in the region (Wolczuk, 2018, p. 285). Even though Ukraine continued with the balancing act between the EU and Russia, the Orange Revolution effectively signalled the end of the CES as an initiative of political relevance (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2015, p. 25). Some ascribe special importance to the 2009 EaP in giving Russia the impression that the EU was threatening it in its post-Soviet sphere of influence (ibid., p. 26). However, the Russian feeling of threat only really culminated in 2013 with the AA that was planned to be signed between the EU and Ukraine at the November 2013 Vilnius summit (Sakwa, 2015, p. 569). Russia had already previously felt left out of the Atlantic security order and been sceptical of democracy promotion by the EU and the US, which it for instance viewed as a project impinging on state sovereignty (ibid., p. 565, 570). Against this backdrop, it is notable that the 2013 AA would have included cooperation on security issues between the EU and Ukraine (ibid., p. 569). This is further significant because the entry into force of the

Lisbon Treaty in 2009 introduced a requirement for accession countries to move their defence and security policies closer to those of NATO (ibid.). Although the AA did not confer on Ukraine a membership perspective, it nevertheless made Russia wary of losing Ukraine to the Atlantic security order (ibid.). Meanwhile, the EU was not aware of how closely associated Russia perceived the EU and NATO to be. Indeed, observers have pointed out that the EU did not fully comprehend how Russia viewed its policies in Eastern Europe (See: Haukkala, 2016). Perhaps this is due to the different significance given to the area by the EU and Russia respectively (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2015, p. 26). Simultaneously, Ukraine was disappointed by the 2009 EaP because it did not bring Ukraine closer to a membership perspective (ibid., p. 45). In that sense, the Vilnius summit provided Ukraine with a chance because the EU felt under pressure to showcase achievements with its Eastern partners (ibid.). The agreement that was offered to Ukraine in the light of these developments did not explicitly mention a membership perspective, which means that it also did not formally exclude a membership perspective, thus in principle leaving the path open for further developments (ibid., pp. 45, 47). At the same time, Russia did not remain silent. After several failures, Russia established an initiative that eventually evolved into the EAEU, which in fact put Ukraine under more pressure due to it being more viable but also requiring open-ended, binding integration with Russia (ibid., p. 27).

In the evolution of EU-Ukraine relations, President Yanukovych himself came to be a significant domestic factor (Wolczuk, 2018, p. 284). Yanukovych was so determined on staying in power that he started to develop authoritarian tendencies (ibid.). In 2012, the EU reacted by relying on the AA to link economic integration desired by Ukraine to a demand for improvement in the domestic political situation in adherence to democratic principles (ibid.). However, the EU was unaware of the political risks that this pressure meant for Yanukovych and his supporters, and the length to which Russia would go in order to steer Ukraine away from the agreement with the EU and towards its own integration initiative (ibid.). Ukraine found itself in a difficult economic situation when it was expected to sign the AA at the 2013 Vilnius summit (ibid., p. 285). After already having relied on conditionality previously to influence Ukraine, Russia now combined the offer of a US$15 billion loan with the promise of lowering the gas price from US$425 to US$268 in order to steer Ukraine away from the agreement with the EU (ibid., pp. 285-286). Essentially sticking to the balancing approach, Yanukovych portrayed the decision not to sign the AA as a technical delay that was necessitated by the agreement being too costly at the time, especially when compared to the Russian proposal (ibid., p. 286). However, in the eyes of the public, this decision brought to light the corrupt practices and authoritarian tendencies of the regime, and thus sparked mass protests (ibid.). The protests in the winter of 2013-14, known as *Euromaidan,* essentially became Ukraine's step away from the middle and towards European integration (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2015, p. 6). When a change of leadership ensued, Russia reacted by annexing Crimea and instigating war in eastern Ukraine (Wolczuk, 2018, p. 286). This brings us to the wars in Ukraine, the evolution of which will be briefly laid out in the following sub-section. Noteworthily, the full-scale invasion on the 24th of February 2022 has come to mark the onset of another change in EU-Ukraine relations.

3.3 Developments of the wars in their own right

Arguably, the conflict started when the mass protests in the light of Euromaidan were met with a violent crackdown by state security forces, which in turn led to escalation (Center for Preventive Action, 2023). Russian troops took control of Crimea in March

2014 (ibid.). Russia proceeded to annex Crimea in the wake of a so-called 'referendum', which, however, is disputed (ibid.). In May 2014, pro-Russian separatists in the eastern Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk followed with their own referendums (ibid.). This soon led to armed conflict in those eastern regions of Ukraine between Russian-backed forces and the Ukrainian military (ibid.). It should be noted that while Russia denied military involvement, Ukraine and NATO noted the build-up of Russian troops and military equipment that suggests otherwise (ibid.). Allegedly, this development already indicated the transition from proxy war to war (Blockmans, 2014, p. 2). Eventually, the conflict entered a phase of active stalemate, characterised by regular shelling and skirmishes taking place along frontlines separating Russian- and Ukrainian-controlled eastern border regions (Center for Preventive Action, 2023). Another dramatic event that should not be forgotten is the downing of the Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 (Wolczuk, 2018, p. 286). In February 2015, France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine initiated their efforts to negotiate the Minsk Agreements, which included provisions for a ceasefire, and ultimately were meant to contribute to a peaceful settlement of the conflict that respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine (SC Res. 2202, 2015). However, the efforts have so far not been very successful (Center for Preventive Action, 2023).

Over the course of 2021, Russia gathered troops near Ukraine's borders, supposedly in the context of training exercises (Reuters, 2022). In December of the same year, Russia demanded the withdrawal by NATO of troops and weapons from eastern Europe as well as a guarantee that Ukraine will never join the alliance (ibid.). Instead of giving in to the demands, NATO continued to pay attention to Russia's behaviour and take measures accordingly. In February 2022, Putin recognises two breakaway regions in eastern Ukraine as independent and orders so-called 'peacekeeping forces' into the regions (ibid.). After the leaders of Russian-backed separatists asked Russia for assistance against the Ukrainian army on February 23rd, February 24th marks the day of the full-scale invasion with Russian forces launching missile and artillery attacks against major Ukrainian cities, including the capital, all under the supposed label of 'special military operations' (ibid.). The invasion was launched from three different directions; from Belarus to the north, the Russian-annexed Crimea to the south, and Russian territory to the east (Psaropoulos, 2022). The invasion came from the land, sea, and air (ibid.). Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy declared martial law and general mobilisation in response to the Russian full-scale invasion (ibid.).

Following the onset of the invasion, Russian forces are reported to have committed atrocities, with the most notorious example being the massacre of Bucha, a Kyiv satellite town (Reuters, 2023). While the first phase had focused on taking control of Ukraine and replacing its government, the second phase, starting around March 25, shifted focus to the east Ukrainian provinces of Luhansk and Donetsk after Russia had not achieved its objectives of the first phase (Psaropoulos, 2022). As it eventually received increasingly powerful and longer-range weaponry from the US and Europe, Ukraine launched a southern counter-offensive around Kherson, which is arguably of special importance (Reuters, 2023). In what could be considered a phase three, Russia again widens its scope to cover the Ukrainian regions of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia (Psaropoulos, 2022). On September 30, Putin claimed that Russia had annexed Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia (Center for Preventive Action, 2023). On November 9, Russia ordered its forces to leave Kherson, which was the only regional capital to fall under Russian control (Reuters, 2023). Thus, it became clear that Russia did not possess full control of those four allegedly annexed regions (Pifer, 2022). As a response at the end of 2022, the Russian military increased missile attacks on Ukrainian cities, thereby turning electric

power supplies and central heating into the main targets (ibid.). In January 2023, Russia launched a new offensive with fresh recruits and the Wagner group (ibid.). Allegedly, Russia has been in a rush to make advances in the east and south before modern battle tanks and other potentially game-changing heavy weaponry from the West arrive in Kyiv (ibid.). The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine has by now lasted for more than a year.

4 The first phase (March 17, 2014-February 24, 2022)

4.1 Capabilities

4.1.1 Common position vis-à-vis Russia

As mentioned in the concepts section, unity is the first aspect of the actorness concept deployed in this thesis. EU responses, also those to conflict and war, will be hampered by the absence of such unity. On the 6th of March 2014, the Union's heads of state or government gathered for an extraordinary meeting in the European Council (European Council, 2014, p. 1). This meeting occurred before the first true restrictive measures but already indicated in several ways that the member states were intent on adopting a common stance vis-à-vis Russia. For instance, the heads of state or government reaffirmed that "[the EU] has a special responsibility for peace, stability and prosperity in Europe" (European Council, 2014b, p. 2). More specifically, on the 6th of March, the member states agreed to suspend both bilateral talks with Russia on visa matters and talks on the New Agreement in light of the strategic partnership that was believed to exist previously (ibid.). The heads of state or government also expressed their support for the financial response foreseen by the Commission through a comprehensive assistance package, as well as their readiness to react to humanitarian assistance requests without delay, noting that "[they] stand by Ukraine (…)" (ibid., p. 3). Moreover, the member states showed unity since March 2014 by supporting Ukraine's transformation in the context of the AA and DCFTA (ibid.). Indeed, on this topic, they stated that there was "commitment" inside the EU and that it was a "priority" (ibid.). In April 2014, the Council noted that the common position to extend the list covering assets freeze and visa ban was based on "(…) strong support for Ukraine's unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity (…)" (Council of the EU, 2014b, p. 1). One can thus see that this unity was based on norms that are important to the EU and have a central position in the global order advocated by the EU.

The meetings referred to in the paragraph above are only some selected examples. Indeed, the European Council convened in five extraordinary meetings, whereas the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) discussed the situation in Ukraine in thirteen of its meetings (Natorski, 2020, p. 738). These meetings serve as a snapshot of how unity inside the EU and among the member states has been stressed in the responses to Russia's actions in Ukraine. In addition to the sheer activity, there is also an explicit emphasis on the importance of unity to be found in the content of these meetings (ibid.). Nevertheless, this seeming unity that is expressed outward does not mean that all member states were necessarily in full agreement with each other on which exact responses should be preferred at a given point in time. A wide range of EU institutional actors has been involved in establishing and maintaining the unity required to adopt unanimous decisions in support of EU responses despite diverging preferences among the member states regarding how these responses should look (ibid., p. 734).

A particular challenge was to foster unity on the scope and timing of these kind of responses (Natorski, 2020, pp. 739-740). States like Lithuania, Poland, and the United Kingdom (UK) have generally been in favour of punitive sanctions (ibid., p. 740). In the middle, one would find Germany and France (ibid.). Member states like Austria, Cyprus,

Italy, Hungary, Greece, Spain, and Slovakia have tended to be more sceptical of punitive sanctions against Russia (ibid.). The main dividing line was that between the negative and unevenly distributed impact on national economies versus failure to coerce Russian behaviour vis-à-vis Ukraine (ibid.). More specifically, energy, trade, and financial interdependencies between individual member states and Russia were topics perceived to put the unity at risk (Natorski & Pomorska, 2017, p. 54).

For Germany, energy relations with Russia, and the Nord Stream gas pipeline in particular, were of importance (ibid., p. 58). Moreover, Germany had engaged in a modernisation partnership with Russia, whereby the former invested into the latter to assist with development (Orenstein & Kelemen, 2017, p. 96). France also had business interests with Russia between 2014 and 2015, noteworthily in the shape of contracts on Mistral helicopter carriers (Natorski & Pomorska, 2017, p. 59). Britain was tied to Russia by financial interests (ibid.). Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Cyprus, Finland, Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Spain all feared the economic implications of possible Russian counter-sanctions (ibid.). States such as Greece, Italy, and the Netherlands sent a significant amount of their agricultural exports to Russia (Sjursen & Rosén, 2017, p. 21). The national interests of Cyprus in relations with Russia were reflected by a deal to allow Russian naval ships to use its ports (Orenstein & Kelemen, 2017, p. 87). Additionally, Cyprus hosts many Russian firms in the offshore sector (ibid., p. 93). For Hungary, the economic interest of securing supply of nuclear fuel linked it to Russia (ibid.). Greece signed a gas pipeline deal with Russia (ibid.). Italy has had close ties with Russia in the field of energy production (ibid., p. 93). Indeed, there were plans in the making for the South Stream pipeline, involving the Italian Energy Company and Gazprom (Sjursen & Rosén, 2017, p. 21).

At the most fundamental level, all member states agreed that they needed to stand united against Russia (Natorski & Pomorska, 2017, p. 62). For sanctions in particular, more diverging preferences are visible. States such as Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were in favour; Poland, France and the UK were supportive but with certain reservations; Germany and Italy were somewhat reluctant supporters; while the Netherlands and Luxembourg had the most doubts (ibid.). Member states also differed on how quickly to adapt the responses to the evolution of the situation on the ground. For instance, Finland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic represented a wait-and-see approach to give Russia some time to continue with the process of brokering a ceasefire, while also claiming that the sanctions adopted so far had been ineffective (ibid., p. 64). By contrast, some previously hesitant countries, such as Belgium, Luxembourg, and Denmark, saw the lack of Russian progress following the diplomatic efforts as a confirmation for the need of adopting sanctions without delay (ibid.). Against the backdrop of economic interests, leaders from Hungary, Greece, Italy, and Cyprus all publicly voiced their opposition to EU sanctions against Russia in the early stages of the conflict in Ukraine (Orenstein & Kelemen, 2017, p. 93). It seems logical that these kinds of national economic interests would threaten the unity required inside the EU to muster responses to Russia's actions in Ukraine. However, some scholars have found that economic dependency does not necessarily determine support for sanctions, or the lack thereof (Moret et al., 2016, p. 16). Hence, diverging political and security considerations among member states also play a role in the challenge posed to EU unity (ibid., p. 18). Nevertheless, in the end, the EU has been able to reach and maintain a common position on its responses to the war in Ukraine through bargaining (Natorski, 2020, p. 740). In that sense, even though criticism existed, a common position was ultimately facilitated (ibid.).

The capability discussed in this sub-section shows that the EU has been able to display some degree of actorness. However, one could argue that EU responses, and sanctions in particular, were slowed and watered down by the national interests of the member states. Indeed, during the first phase, where the EU still followed the principle of selective engagement, member states were able to follow their own interests to a greater extent. Germany with its Nord Stream II gas pipeline serves as an example. Nevertheless, one should keep in mind that the member states allowed the EU as a conflict manager to supplement national initiatives with policy tools that are notoriously difficult to access. This was possible regardless of the member states not immediately agreeing on whether responses should include restrictive measures, or what fields and sectors exactly should be covered by those sanctions. Thus, we are left with a mixed assessment where the capability to agree on a common position impacted positively on EU actorness but perhaps could have done so to an even greater extent, which will become evident in the next main chapter looking at the second phase.

4.1.2 Coordination and cooperation externally

In line with the underlying principles of multilateralism, the EU believes that it can achieve more as an actor when it cooperates with others, rather than if it were to act alone. Without much delay, the EU started to cooperate with international organisations in 2014 on how to manage the conflict, especially in the Donbas (Interview E). Most closely, the EU has cooperated with the OSCE by providing support to its Monitoring Mission (Council of the EU, 2014b, p. 2). On the 12th of May 2014, the Council engaged in talks with the Chairman in Office of the OSCE at the time, Didier Burkhalter (Council of the EU, 2014c, p. 2). On this day, the Council reaffirmed the continued support of the EU and the member states to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) (ibid.). Indeed, in light of the developments that would lead towards a civilian CSDP mission, the Council was explicit on the need to coordinate such a mission with that of the OSCE and other international actors, while keeping in mind the principle of complementarity (ibid., p. 3). The EU has included the efforts towards a political solution to the war in Ukraine, which the Minsk Agreements were supposed to reflect, in its conflict management responses (Council of the EU, 2014e, p. 2). Considering that the Council noted the importance of the OSCE SMM for successful implementation of the Minsk Agreements (ibid.), there is another indication of EU-OSCE coordination on conflict management in Ukraine. Moreover, the EU has backed the OSCE SMM in terms of staff, equipment, and extra-budgetary contributions (European Union, 2014, p. 2). Apart from the Council, the EEAS has been involved as a first contact when cooperating not only with the OSCE, but also other organisations such as the United Nations (UN) (Interview E). This reflects actorness through an EU dimension, as opposed to member state dominance.

Concerning the economic support provided to Ukraine, the EU coordinated its efforts with other international donors (Council of the EU, 2014d, p. 2). In fact, the donors essentially contributed to the Ukrainian reform agenda, meant to drive EU-Ukraine relations forward (European Commission, 2014). Coordination has occurred between the EU and international financial institutions (IFIs), notably the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (European Commission, 2014b). Regarding restrictive measures, the Council has encouraged other UN members to join the EU in considering such measures in response to the Russian annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol (Council of the EU, 2014c, p. 3). The EU has coordinated its responses with the other Group of Seven (G7) countries. Both individually and collectively, the G7 countries have imposed sanctions

against Russia in response to its violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity (European Commission, 2014b).

As shown by the capability of external coordination and cooperation, the EU has been able to cooperate with other actors. In principle, there is reason to believe that this has impacted positively on EU actorness, also due to the role of institutional actors in this kind of cooperation. Although the EU has not been able to cooperate with the UN on sanctions in particular, because of the Russian Federation being a permanent member of the UNSC, the EU has nevertheless cooperated with the UN in other fields, for instance in the context of the votes in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) (Interview E). Additionally, the EU has adopted sanctions unilaterally and coordinated them with its G7 allies and other partners. Being able to act even when one path is blocked reflects actorness. Simultaneously, one could argue that the EU has had to rely on the OSCE because the former lacks certain capabilities itself (See: Amadio Viceré, 2021). One could interpret this as something negative to EU actorness. However, cooperating with a regional organisation is perfectly in line with EU values. Overcoming internal limitations by other means can also serve as a sign of actorness. Additionally, the EU played to its strengths by coordinating with international donors. The cooperation with OSCE reflected greater actorness in the first phase. The OSCE SMM already faced challenges in the first phase, but these would grow into a deadlock in the second phase, as we shall see. Coordination with its G7 allies impacted positively on EU actorness, but perhaps even more so when this coordination further intensified in the second phase.

4.1.3 Policy tools and their utilisation

As previously noted, EU conflict management covers many different policies. The EU has used its funding capabilities to address the economic situation in Ukraine (Council of the EU, 2014d, p. 2). Since 2014, Ukraine has received support of several Macro-Financial Assistance (MFA) operations in the context of the conflict and its effects (European Commission, n.d.). In July 2015, the first tranche of the third MFA program (Hereafter: MFA III), worth €600 million, was disbursed after Ukraine had requested loans to address the economic effects of the war in Eastern Ukraine towards the end of 2014 (ibid.). However, it should be noted that the Commission could not disburse the last instalment under MFA III in 2018 due to Ukraine lagging behind on its domestic reform, in particular against corruption (ibid.). Although not always explicitly linked to Russian aggression, the EU's total loans to Ukraine under MFA amounted to €3.8 billion by 2020, which is the largest amount any partner country has received (ibid.).

While the political association and economic integration between the EU and Ukraine might have unwillingly come to play a role in the Russian war on Ukraine, the EU-Ukraine relationship could also be understood as a conflict management response due to the evolution of this relationship in the wake of the Euromaidan and subsequent events. On the 14th of April 2014, the Council granted unilateral trade preferences to Ukraine, thereby reducing, or eliminating customs duties on goods from Ukraine (Council of the EU, 2014b, p. 3). Essentially, this was a means to respond without much delay while bridging the process towards the implementation of the AA and DCFTA. On the 27th of June 2014, the AA and DCFTA were signed and implemented, although they only fully entered into force at a later point (European Commission, 2014). The process of the AA and DCFTA tells us that the member states and externalities are in control of EU responses to the wars in Ukraine to a large extent. With the AA, the member states were still not ready to promise Ukraine what it really wanted, and thus limited the latter's European choice by not yet granting it a candidate perspective (Dragneva & Wolczuk,

2015, p. 43). Hence, despite the EU supporting reforms in Ukraine, one could argue that the process of the AA and DCFTA reflects a more negative than positive impact on EU actorness. In particular, the Dutch referendum on 6th of April 2016 slowed down the ratification process of the agreement (European Council, 2016, p. 9). Although the AA was not scrapped entirely as a result of the negative referendum, concessions, such as not promising Ukraine a future within the EU, had to be made to get Dutch approval (ibid.). As will become evident in the second phase, it would take more severe Russian escalation to truly overcome these kinds of reservations among the member states. For the EU as a conflict manager the process of the AA and DCFTA shows that acting was possible, but that the response was essentially negatively impacted by the member states. Interestingly, the AA would include EU-Ukraine cooperation on conflict prevention and crisis management (European Council, 2016, p. 10). However, in 2016, the EU was clearly wary of taking on any obligations that could risk bringing the EU closer to a direct confrontation with Russia when specifying that this does not imply any collective security guarantees or even military support of any kind (ibid.).

Restrictive measures or sanctions have become increasingly recognised by the EU as a policy tool in the wake of the Maastricht Treaty (Giumelli, 2019, p. 116). EU sanctions have existed in various forms prior to the Maastricht Treaty as well. Nevertheless, the entry into force of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, creating the CFSP, meant shared decision-making power on sanctions, although with the member states in the driving seat, thus making the decisions legally binding (ibid., p. 118). Most commonly being situated under the CFSP, sanctions form a part of conflict management by for instance pursuing objectives such as the promotion of international peace and security, and the prevention of conflicts (ibid.).

The way EU sanctions are utilised is complicated by the involvement of several institutional actors in the process (Giumelli, 2019, p. 120), similar to what is the case in EU conflict management more generally. The HR/VP, a post which was created by the Lisbon Treaty, is the one responsible for proposing new sanctions (ibid.). Since sanctions have an impact on the regular functioning of the EU's economic and financial ties with a third country, the Council also plays a role (ibid.). The legislative procedure of sanctions in external relations involves the Council, which adopts the necessary measures by a qualified majority, the HR and the Commission, who issue a joint proposal, and the European Parliament (EP), which gets informed by the Council (ibid.). Sub-committees and working parties of the Council are usually involved as well in EU sanctions (ibid., p. 122). However, regarding the sanctions adopted against Russia over the wars in Ukraine, the political initiative has mostly originated from Conclusions of the European Council (ibid.). In other words, the member states have taken control of the sanctioning process to a larger extent than has been the case previously (Portela, 2022, p. 7). Essentially, member states have started to see their interests more directly affected by whether sanctions for instance are properly enforced or not (Interview B). However, the member states pushing the sanctioning activity have not been the typical 'leader states', namely France and Germany, but in fact the Baltic states (Maurer et al., 2023, pp. 235-236). This arguably makes the impact on EU actorness less negative, as it may suggest a collective European responsibility to act (ibid., p. 236).

Beginning on the 3rd of March 2014, the EU and those member states normally participating in the format suspended preparations for the Group of Eight (G8) Summit in Sochi (Council of the EU, 2014f, p. 2). On the 6th of March 2014, the heads of state or government suspended bilateral talks with Russia regarding visa matters and a new

agreement that had been in the making (European Council, 2014b, p. 2). On the 17th of March 2014, the Council adopted sanctions in the form of travel bans and asset freezes against 21 officials that were deemed to have played a role in threatening Ukraine's territorial integrity (Council of the EU, 2014, p. 1). On the 23rd of June 2014, the Council put in place restrictions on imports from Crimea and Sevastopol, as a part of its non-recognition policy (Council of the EU, 2014d, pp. 1-2).

Noteworthily, the tragic downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 led the Council to adopt the first economic sanctions targeting sectors of the Russian economy on the 31st of July 2014 (Council of the EU, 2014g, p. 1). First, Russian state-owned financial institutions were faced with restricted access to EU capital markets (ibid.). Second, an arms embargo was put in place against Russia (ibid.). Third, the exports of dual use goods and technology were prohibited if meant for military use in Russia or destined to Russian military end-users (ibid.). Fourth, exports of certain equipment and technology to Russia were now faced with strict controls if they were meant for specific use in the oil sector (ibid.). Simultaneously, the Presidents of the European Council and the Commission stressed that "when [Russia] starts contributing actively and without ambiguities to finding a solution to the Ukrainian crisis," responses that had been put in place could be removed (European Council, 2014c, p. 2). In that sense, one could say that EU sanctions were utilised based on negative and positive conditionality. By that logic, negative developments would be punished with stricter measures, whereas positive developments could be rewarded with relaxed measures, at least if they seemed credible and ambitious enough. The sanctions adopted on the 31st of July 2014 marked the EU's transition into the third stage of sanctions. Stage one, two, and three, in the respective order, consist out of suspending certain bilateral talks, postponing individual travel bans and asset freezes, and imposing economic sanctions (Natorski & Pomorska, 2017, p. 61).

The economic sanctions against sectors were deepened further in September 2014 due to a trend of more weapons and fighters entering Eastern Ukraine via Russian territory, combined with aggression by actual Russian military on Ukrainian territory (European Council, 2014d, p. 1). Since March 2015, the EU has explicitly linked the conditionality underlying its sanctions against Russia to the latter's implementation of the Minsk Agreements (European Council, 2015, p. 4). For the remainder of the first phase identified in this thesis, the EU mainly made minor readjustments, extended the duration of the sanctions in place, or added new entries to the existing lists. Since extending the temporal scope of sanctions requires anonymity among the member states, the fact that this hurdle has been overcome has had a positive impact on EU actorness. Simultaneously, the fact that the sanctions only entered into the third stage following the downing of MH17 reflects that the EU as a conflict manager is dependent on externalities. When an externality is decisive in allowing the common EU response to be strengthened, this makes the impact on actorness less positive. Similar to what happened with the capability to facilitate a common position, the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine made EU sanctions harsher and more impactful in the second phase, as we shall see.

In using sanctions as a policy tool, the EU institutions and member states have been working together to facilitate coordination regarding implementation since 2014 (Natorski & Pomorska, 2017, p. 64). In fact, the member states created a mechanism to serve as a link between them and the EU institutions in order to share information and address the risk of circumvention (ibid.). In general, EU institutions, such as the Commission and the EEAS were of importance in addressing the conflict in Ukraine together with the member states, for instance by providing information (ibid., p. 65). In order to speed up the

responses, member states even delegated the adoption of the third-phase sanctions to the working group level (ibid., p. 66). This seems to be a deviation from the different procedure followed on sanctions, as explained above. It might indicate that even though certain member states in particular started to care about the sanctioning process, time concerns trumped individual interests.

One way in which the EU seemingly was not able to make the most out of its institutional capabilities, is related to the post of HR/VP. Here, it should be noted that it was France and Germany who ultimately represented the EU in the diplomatic efforts, not the HR/VP for instance (Orenstein & Kelemen, 2017, p. 96). Yet, one also needs to remember that these efforts involved Russia, an actor that prefers engaging with other states rather than the EU (ibid., p. 92). Moreover, while France and Germany may have been the best-suited actors for brokering with Russia, they still cooperated very closely with the EU, notably through the EEAS (Interview E). This occurred as an alternative due to there not being unanimity among the member states for the EEAS to be involved more directly in seeking peace through the Minsk Agreements (ibid.).

Considering that Ukraine is still officially a neighbour, and that responding to the conflict in Ukraine falls under external action of the EU, the ENP Review of 2015 and the 2016 EUGS are two relevant trends related to the utilisation of policy tools. The ENP Review of 2015 can be seen as a response to the sense of crisis, in which the conflict in Ukraine plays an important, although not exclusive, role (Furness et al., 2019, p. 448). This sense of crisis, to which the conflict in Ukraine contributed, led the member states to prioritise security and stability, mostly represented through 'resilience', a term which has indeed also become important for the EU in Ukraine (ibid., pp. 448, 450). Some member states in particular saw the conflict in Ukraine as providing the need to establish greater coherence between the ENP and the CFSP (ibid., p. 455). Allegedly, the term 'resilience' was used to divert attention away from the fact that the securitisation process happened at the expense of the EU's previously more value-based approach to the neighbourhood (ibid., p. 465). It should be noted that the ENP Review and elaboration of the EUGS did not happen in isolation of one another. Essentially, the ENP Review and EUGS responded to the same overarching trends. This is also due to Commission officials working on the ENP Review informing themselves of the direction the work of the EEAS was taking on the EUGS (ibid., p. 466). The securitisation represented by the ENP Review and EUGS led to an increased focus on Security Sector Reform (SSR), including conflict prevention (Blockmans, 2017, p. 7). It should be noted that the focus on resilience in Ukraine for instance has meant improving public services and local self-governance bodies (Kakachia et al., 2021, p. 1346). One manner in which the EU has been rather successful in promoting resilience in Ukraine is through decentralisation reforms (ibid.). These reforms have improved governance at the municipal level as well as promoted local democracy (ibid.). Nevertheless, resilience, when seen in the context of conflict management and security, does not appear as an instrument that can be utilised against more serious conflicts, such as the war in Eastern Ukraine (ibid., p. 1347). In that sense, the strategies arguably reflect the EU's lack of appropriate capabilities to deal with Russian aggression in its Eastern neighbourhood, and thus have had a negative impact on EU actorness. Although one could argue that the EUGS represented at least some degree of EU actorness through the involvement of the HR/VP and the EEAS, the ENP Review was heavily influenced by groups of member states and their interests (See: Furness et al., 2019).

While it should be noted that the security aspect in the neighbourhood, and SSR in particular, was not entirely new, the civilian EU Advisory Mission (EUAM) launched in 2014 essentially appears to be in line with the trends that were later reflected by the ENP Review and the EUGS (Litra et al., 2017, p. 28). In fact, Ukraine had requested a CSDP mission in the wake of the illegal sham referendum in Crimea (ibid., p. 34). Yet, the nature of the mission that was eventually launched was not exactly what Ukraine had hoped for. In the end, EUAM was launched as a civilian mission without much of a 'security and defence' component (ibid.). The original mandate of the mission was to coordinate donor support to reforms, perhaps reflecting the typical budget role of the EU in conflict management, and to assist with strategic consultation (ibid., p. 35). As a result of Ukrainian stakeholders being discontent with the mission as it was, the mandate was changed ahead of schedule (ibid.). Notably, where the mandate had previously focused on strategic consultation, it now also hands-on advice, training, and other projects in support of reforms (ibid., p. 36). The civilian CSDP mission was utilised in a coordinated manner together with other EU capabilities, namely the EU Delegation to Ukraine and the EU Support Group to Ukraine, the latter which was for instance dealing with the coordination of donor support to reforms (ibid., p. 38). As seems to be the case for the securitisation approach more generally, EUAM lacked any concrete tools to deal with Russian aggression, which was after all the backdrop against which Ukraine called for help (ibid., p. 39). While it is positive that the EU updated the mandate of the mission, and coordinated it with other capabilities, EUAM was initially not deployed fast enough and failed to cover significant aspects in its mandate. This has a negative impact on EU conflict management.

The EU has also adjusted its approach vis-à-vis Russia in response to the conflict in Ukraine. In 2016, HR Federica Mogherini presented the five guiding principles on relations with Russia. These five principles include the centrality of the Minsk Agreements, stronger relations with the partners in the eastern neighbourhood, and the option to approach Russia on matters of interest (Council of the EU, 2016, p. 4). A joint communication from the Commission and the HR clearly conveyed the mixed approach in its title "push back, constrain and engage" (European Commission, 2021). This approach reflects that Russia in principle has the potential of being a key partner of the EU, in particular from an economic aspect (ibid., p. 2). However, it also shows that the political situation is not one in which the EU can foster a strategic partnership with Russia (ibid., pp. 2-3). The EU has stated that interest for selective engagement persists on issues such as climate, environment, and energy (ibid., p. 7). Allegedly, some limited specific results were even achieved in the fields of trade, economic and digital matters, and home affairs (ibid.). It is worth pointing out that in the first phase identified in this thesis, the EU still hoped to find ways that may contribute to a gradual change towards more predictable and stable relations with Russia (ibid., p. 11). One could argue that this approach was effectively too appeasing, and that it gave more leeway to the interests of individual member states. Hence, the five guiding principles had a predominantly negative impact on EU actorness. As will become evident in the second phase, the overarching EU approach to Russia was only changed following the latter's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

4.2 Presence & opportunity structure

In a scenario where the EU's presence, in terms of internal policies and their underlying principles, is perceived positively by other actors globally, the EU is faced with an opportunity structure that is conducive to itself. This in turn would mean that the EU can

pursue its external policies without much resistance from other international actors. After all, if they agree with the norms and values underlying EU action, there should in theory be no reason to be fundamentally opposed. Further, since the EU supports the global order based on international laws and rules, in which diplomacy and multilateralism stand strong (European Commission, 2021, p. 1), declarations, votes and the likes in other international institutions or organisations in line with the EU's principled position indicate an opportunity structure conducive to the EU. However, when influential international players act based on principles that undermine the rules-based multilateral global order (ibid.), then this may essentially cancel out otherwise broad support and decrease the EU's room of manoeuvre, thus resulting in a constraining opportunity structure. In that sense, the effectiveness of EU policies may depend on what other international actors decide to do. Notably, China was explicitly mentioned by the EU as an actor challenging the multilateral rules-based order (ibid.). Although Russia is not a third state in this case but the aggressor in Ukraine, its status as a global power essentially makes it capable of paralysing diplomatic and multilateral efforts. The UN is mentioned as an example further below in this section. Hence, even when diplomatic and multilateral efforts are made, key international players may arguably prevent the rules-based multilateral global order from operating as effectively as possible. While this has a negative impact on EU actorness, one could argue that it is not something that the EU, or any other actor in its place, can realistically do much about.

On the 6th of March 2014, the heads of state and government noted that the EU and Ukraine together have set out on the path towards the AA, including a DCFTA (European Council, 2014b, p. 3). Meanwhile, Russian assertiveness has contributed to a split among the EU's eastern neighbours in the EaP, with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus taking a different route from Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine by deciding not to aim for closer relations with the EU (Stefanova, 2021, p. 331). For instance, Armenia was drawn by Russia into the customs union of the EAEU instead (ibid., p. 338). This comes to show that the EU's presence in its Eastern neighbourhood was not viewed exclusively in a positive light but was in fact contested. In revising the ENP as a response in part to these trends, the EU has come to prioritise interests over values in its Eastern neighbourhood (Furness et al., 2019, p. 464). Hence, it becomes evident that the contestation has forced the EU to acknowledge that its old value-based approach lost its attractiveness for the Eastern neighbours. Naturally, this had negative implications for EU actorness. However, one can argue that the new focus on resilience and reforms of domestic institutions has again strengthened the EU's presence throughout the first phase (Stefanova, 2021, p. 343), thus alleviating the negative impact on EU actorness to some extent.

The position of Russia as a permanent member of the UNSC, which allowed the former to veto Ukraine's attempts of reaching a peaceful and negotiated solution through this international mechanism, serves as an example of this challenge (Council of the EU, 2014, p. 1). Notably, the EU has had to adopt its sanctions unilaterally instead of following the UN. The UNGA did adopt a resolution on the 27th of March 2014, stressing the obligations of all States under international law, referring for instance to the UN Charter and the Helsinki Accords (UNGA, 2014, p. 1). While this does, at least at first glance, imply an opportunity structure in which the norms and values held by the EU stand strong globally, such conducive conditions are of course challenged due to this kind of resolution not carrying the same weight as for instance an initiative through the UNSC. Meanwhile, the suspension of Russia's accession to the Organisation for Economic Co-

operation and Development (OECD) sends a positive signal regarding the international community sharing the EU's stance on Russia's actions in Ukraine (OECD, n.d.).

Prior to the Minsk Agreements, the EU, the US, Russia, and Ukraine engaged in diplomatic efforts and in April 2014 produced the Geneva Statement, which among other things focused on ending the violence and establishing a national dialogue across all of Ukraine (EEAS, 2014, pp. 1-2). In this text, Russia for instance agreed to contribute to the OSCE SMM (ibid.). Convening under the Normandy France and Germany have brokered with the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG), consisting out of the OSCE, Russia, and Ukraine. The Minsk Protocol and Memorandum were agreed this way in September 2014, and, following the lack of results, the Minsk II Agreement in February 2015. This kind of diplomatic effort is something we would expect to see in a global order guided by multilateralism and international laws, as advocated by the EU. In the end, however, Russia has not lived up to its commitments, thus rendering the diplomatic efforts ineffective. Instead, Russia for instance challenged key principles of the OSCE and Council of Europe (CoE), which are obligations of Russia, and which are crucial to European security and cooperation (European Commission, 2021, p. 1).

4.3 Effectiveness

4.3.1 Sanctions effectiveness

4.3.1.1 Step 1 – Situating sanctions in the bigger foreign policy strategy

As we have seen, EU sanctions co-existed with diplomatic efforts at mediation. Sanctions played a role in getting Russia to accept the OSCE SMM (Secrieru, 2015, p. 41). The mediation efforts most notably culminated in the Minsk II Agreement. Since 2015, the EU has made the lifting of its sanctions contingent on implementation by Russia of its parts of the agreement. This point was also included in the EU's general approach to relations with Russia in 2016. Aside from that, economic support from the EU alongside international donors has focused on domestic reform in Ukraine to make the latter more resilient. This support to reform was provided in the context of EU-Ukraine relations, which eventually produced the AA and DCFTA. Although more emphasis was put on resilience in the wake of the ENP Review of 2015 and the EUGS of 2016, the EU launched a civilian SSR mission already in 2014. As such, sanctions have not been the only EU foreign policy tool utilised in Ukraine since the start of the conflict. However, as far as strategies go, it has been implied that the EUGS for instance fell short of providing specific responses to Russia's aggression against Ukraine (Blockmans, 2017, pp. 1-2). The clearest linkage has been that between sanctions and the Minsk Agreements. Nevertheless, it did not take much time before the ceasefire was violated, and Russia has not shown any true willingness to live up to its commitments under the agreement, despite sanctions.

4.3.1.2 Step 2 – Logics underlying the sanctions

Originally, the EU utilised sanctions with the aim of making the Russian government change its course in Ukraine (Connolly, 2015, p. 29). Bringing about a change in the policies of the Russian government would be in line with a coercing logic. In theory, this could be achieved by imposing economic sanctions which manage to affect the political economy of Russia in a way that provides the government with new incentives (ibid.). EU sanctions have certainly also followed a signalling logic to a great extent. By supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity and stressing Russia's unlawful behaviour, the EU sent a

signal of disapproval to Russia (Dreyer et al., 2015, p. 76). While a negative signal was sent to Russia, a positive signal was sent to Ukraine. Indeed, the EU has for instance noted that the sanctions on Russia "(…) strongly signal the EU's support to Ukraine and its territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence" (European Commission, 2021, p. 3). In that sense, the EU also uses sanctions against Russia to send a message to Ukraine that it is not fighting alone. Essentially, the EU also sent a signal to the global community as a whole that the breach of international laws and rules would not be tolerated. Constraining logic was applied by raising the costs of Russia's policies in Ukraine. Notably, the EU restricted Russia's access to EU capital (ibid.). The EU also sought to constrain the ability of the separatists to exert violence (Giumelli, 2015, p. 1). Essentially, this is done both by sanctioning local persons and entities in Crimea, and by sanctioning others who are providing their support (ibid., pp. 1-2). The assessment of the EU itself in 2021 suggested success in constraining Russia's actions in Ukraine. This is shown by the following quote: "The EU measures have increased Russia's cost of further aggression and constrained the further use of military capabilities and expansion in Ukraine" (European Commission, 2021, p. 4).

4.3.1.3 Step 3 – Direct impact, indirect impact, unintended consequences, costs

Both inside and outside of Russia, politicians have acknowledged that EU sanctions have had a direct economic impact on Russia (Connolly, 2015, p. 29). Meanwhile, it has at times been particularly challenging to measure this direct impact. In 2014, Russia's economy was already facing difficulties, which were further exacerbated by a dramatic fall in oil prices (ibid., p. 30). Allegedly, sanctions prohibiting investment in certain industries have had the clearest impact (ibid., p. 34). Meanwhile, the direct economic impact has not translated into a significant impact on the Russian government. For instance, the Russian regime can put the blame for the difficult economic situation it was already facing on the EU sanctions (ibid., p. 38). Other unintended consequences have been a closer relationship between Russia and other challenging actors, notably China, as well as oligarchs in Russia becoming more dependent on resources from the regime, thus strengthening the latter's position (Giumelli, 2015, p. 2). It appears that EU sanctions in the first phase identified in this thesis have had a direct economic impact, but without making Russia financially uncompetitive (Connolly, 2015, p. 38). The latter part should not come as a surprise, given that EU sanctions targeted certain industries in specific sectors. This selective targeting means that the indirect impact on the overall economy and on the Russian population was not extreme, even if it might have been felt to a degree (Portela, 2019, p. 2). Additionally, one could argue that the sanctions have had a direct impact by constraining the military advances achieved by Russia's aggression in Ukraine (Secrieru, 2015, p. 42). Although Russia has imposed countersanctions, which took the form of a ban on food imports originating in the EU and a travel ban on Western diplomats (Dreyer et al., 2015, p. 77), the costs on EU member states were at least initially not more significant than the impact (Giumelli, 2015, p. 2).

4.3.1.4 Step 4 – Alternative policy tools

In the absence of military capability, sanctions are typically seen as the only realistic alternative. If one were to engage in a counterfactual exercise, one could argue that if the EU institutions had been better staffed and more flexible prior to 2014, the EU might have been able to muster a harsher sanctions response with better results (Dreyer et al., 2015, p. 81; Giumelli, 2015, p. 2). It is possible that improved coordination between the Commission, the EEAS and the Council for instance could have contributed to a faster and better prepared response (Dreyer et al., 2015, p. 81). With that being said, the

absence of sanctions could have led to a scenario in which the territorial integrity of Ukraine would have been compromised by Russia to an even greater extent, and in which the EU would have been significantly weakened as an actor (Giumelli, 2015, p. 2).

4.3.2 Goal attainment in the light of opportunity structure

If one were to understand the overall goal of all EU responses as facilitating a solution to the war in Ukraine, then the assessment would be that the opportunity structure constrained the EU from attaining that goal. However, as indicated for sanctions above, individual responses usually also have smaller goals that they are meant to achieve. Arguably, signalling is not heavily reliant on a counterpart to attain its goal. The EU attained a constraining effect through the mostly economic direct impact. However, sanctions were rather ineffective in bringing about the implementation of the Minsk Agreements. Another goal of the EU was to make Ukraine resilient through reforms. This was a goal within the context of EUAM Ukraine, as well as the AA. Although this kind of resilience was not geared towards solving the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, at least it did make Ukraine better able to co-exist with the threat in a sense. The opportunity structure was enabling in some ways and constraining in others. Globally, third countries and organisations have expressed their support to Ukraine in line with international law and rules. Simultaneously, however, Russia is not the only country that seems to prefer a multipolar global order. The responses of the EU and its allies could arguably have had greater leverage vis-à-vis Russia if there was greater unity globally. The EUGS as a strategy did seek to address Russian aggression in Ukraine, however, following the envisioned approach towards other key global actors remains a challenge, also due to bilateral relations of the member states (Grevi, 2016, p. 6). As such, the assessment indicates that effectiveness in the form of goal attainment was constrained rather than enabled by the opportunity structure in the first phase.

5 The second phase (February 24, 2022-February 25, 2023)

5.1 Capabilities

5.1.1 Common position vis-à-vis Russia

On the 24th of February 2022, the heads of state and government explicitly stated that "[t]he EU is united in its solidarity with Ukraine (…)" (European Council, 2022, p. 2). Indeed, European unity has again been surprisingly strong, even more so following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Krastev & Leonard, 2022, p. 2). This is not to say that the various diverging interests among the member states disappeared. A main divide between member states identified in May 2022 was that on whether it is of greater importance to settle the war as soon as possible, or to achieve an outcome that fully respects Ukraine's terms vis-à-vis Russia (ibid., pp. 2-3). In January 2023, new findings indicated that unity inside the EU had actually been strengthened since May 2022 (Krastev & Leonard, 2023, p. 2). For instance, it seems like the developments of the war itself, notably marked by the impressive achievements of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, have played a role in reinforcing European unity (ibid., p. 8).

Thus, although divergences between the member states persist, the level of aggression, making Russia's actions an even clearer breach of various international laws and rules, resulted in an atmosphere where the member states had to be stricter on Russia, despite national interests (Interview A). Admittedly, Hungary in particular has still tried to save its economic interests at times (ibid.). Serving as a specific example, Hungary has an agreement with the Russian state-owned company Rosatom on the construction of atomic energy plants (ibid.). This has been accompanied by the political visits of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó to Moscow, despite the disapproval of several other member states (ibid.). Hungary also decided to abstain from the decision to support the Ukrainian Armed Forces through European Peace Facility (EPF) operations (ibid.). Essentially, the abstention signalled Hungary's stance without hindering the decision-making of the other member states at the EU level (ibid.). Hungary has been the member state least worried about glossing over its national interests. On some aspects, the views in Budapest seem to be rather close to those in Moscow. Among the examples one finds the importance ascribed by both parties to power and geopolitics, downplaying human rights when faced with issues of state sovereignty, and generally not welcoming meddling from the outside into internal affairs (Liik, 2022, p. 13). Further, Hungary does not seem opposed to a global order where there are several power centres, such as China and Russia (ibid.). This basically means the multipolar global order which the EU has portrayed as the counterpart to the rules-based multilateral order which it promotes itself. In terms of rhetoric, Prime Minister Orbán for instance presents Russia and Ukraine as equal sides in the war, thus not portraying Russia as the aggressor (ibid.). Additionally, Hungary has not sent any weapon deliveries to Ukraine, and even goes so far as to not allow any such deliveries to cross its territory (ibid.). When it comes to EU sanctions against Russia, Hungary is the only member state that has displayed its opposition in public by threatening to use its veto power when the next renewal would be required (ibid.). Despite all this obstruction, Hungary has arguably not yet prevented EU responses in a truly critical manner. This is

reflected by the Russian Federation adding Hungary to its list of unfriendly states (Interview A).

There are also member states that have taken a turn which reflects the increase in unity that has otherwise taken place. Germany and Italy in particular could be mentioned here. While certain member states had already been complaining for some time, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine at last made Germany abandon the Nord Stream II pipeline from Russia to Germany under the Baltic Sea in a hurry (Meister, 2022). Prior to the invasion, not just Hungary but also Germany, Italy and Austria had been driven by their economic interests, notably in the form of gas, to improve relations with Russia (ibid.). Although the EU was able to facilitate responses during the first phase, these were softened by national interests being pursued to a greater degree by several member states vis-à-vis Russia. Russia tried to use the existing vulnerability on the side of the EU to its advantage by further reinforcing it, for instance by the means of disinformation (ibid.). In the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, former Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi was forced to acknowledge that improving relations with Russia was no longer realistic given the political context (Liik, 2022, p. 9). Specifically, Italy for instance became a supporter of the price cap on Russian petroleum products and granting Ukraine candidate status (ibid.). This suggests that the overall unity among EU member states vis-à-vis Russia grew stronger in the second phase, despite the behaviour of Hungary.

The transition from phase one to two, marked by the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, has led to an increase rather than decrease in unity among EU member states. This has impacted positively on EU actorness. Simultaneously, it is clear that externalities in the form of the severe escalation displayed by Russia played a key role in pushing the member states to go further with their common responses at the EU level. Moreover, Hungary in particular has slowed and watered down the responses as a part of bargaining to safeguard its national interests. As such, a decrease in the vulnerability of EU member state unity does not imply no vulnerability. With that being said, the member states did come together more closely in the second phase, thereby facilitating stronger EU responses. Hence, one might say that the impact on EU actorness is more positive than negative, but only slightly.

5.1.2 Coordination and cooperation externally

The heads of state or government have emphasised that the EU would carry on with closely coordinating its responses with partners and allies, while referring in particular to the multilateral fora represented by the UN, OSCE, NATO and the G7 (European Council, 2022, p. 2). Additionally, the EU continued to work with international partners on funding to Ukraine (European Council, 2022b, p. 3). In a Joint Statement almost immediately after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the leaders of the Commission, France, Germany, Italy, the UK, Canada, and the US reflected this sense of coordination. They stated that "(…) we, as well as our other allies and partners around the world, imposed severe measures on key Russian institutions and banks, and on the architects of this war, (…)" (European Commission, 2022c).

Indeed, the diplomacy and preparations in the context of the G7, and at bilateral level, have been praised for having been substantial (Szép, 2022, p. 1). Arguably, on the EU-side, this level of coordination has been driven by the Baltic republics, and Poland especially (Interview B). When these member states saw their security interests increasingly threatened by Russia, this sparked a new interest for sanctions

implementation and enforcement (ibid.). This in turn has made the EU more dedicated in its formulation of sanctions and coordination with allies and partners, hence also speeding up the process (ibid.). In fact, the Commission created a 'Freeze and Seize' task force to facilitate coordination with the 'Russian Elites, Proxies, and Oligarchs' task force of the G7 (Portela, 2022, p. 7). While the coordination at the national level and inside the G7 has been excellent overall, there have been some challenges regardless. Notably, the EU is bound by international law to a greater extent than its G7 allies, and also shares the closest economic link with Russia, hence giving allies such as Canada more opportunities without the same risks in terms of adopting sanctions (Interview B). Concerning coordination with the US in particular, it should be noted that, during the build-up to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was invited to participate in FAC meetings (ibid.). Although this participation falls short of involvement in decision-making (ibid.), it underlines nevertheless that there was close coordination. Throughout 2022, a form of coordination on sanctions has also occurred with Candidate Countries, potential candidates, and other neighbour countries, such as from the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). These countries have followed the EU invitation and aligned with sanctions on several occasions, as exemplified by a declaration dating from early March 2022 (Council of the EU, 2022h). While this indicates that third countries do align with EU sanctions, it seems like the European Council has seen a need to further improve this coordination. In October 2022, the heads of state or government stated that "efforts [on alignment] should be stepped up" (European Council, 2022e, p. 2).

Harsher EU sanctions in the second phase were accompanied by intensive coordination with the G7 allies especially, thus building on what had already been impressive during the first phase. As an example of this intensification, the Commission established a task force during the second phase to further improve coordination with the G7 allies. This has impacted positively on EU actorness. In the wake of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the EU put even more emphasis on cooperating with international organisations (Interview E). However, at least in the field of conflict management, the OSCE and the UN have arguably both been paralysed by Russian uncooperative behaviour, which has become increasingly clear since the second phase (Interview A; Interview C). Although multilateral cooperation continues to stand strong, dependence on a Russian contribution to these efforts holds negative implications for EU actorness in conflict management. While NATO has been more visible in conflict management than the OSCE and the UN, one could argue that this makes EU strategic autonomy a secondary concern (ibid.), hence having more of a negative impact on EU actorness in the field. Finland's accession to NATO strengthens this interpretation (ibid.). Simultaneously, this should not overshadow the positive impact arising from member state recognition of the EU as a complementary actor requiring military capacity to perform its role as a conflict manager (Interview A). Indeed, the development of the EU along the military sphere has seen the Commission in particular, but also other EU institutions, extend its influence in this field by using the legal basis in industrial policy (ibid.).

5.1.3 Policy tools and their utilisation

Building on the economic sanctions against Russian sectors from 2014, additional sectoral sanctions were adopted by the EU against Russia in 2022. The first package from the 23rd of February 2022 introduced sanctions that went further in restricting Russia's access to EU capital (European Union, 2022, p. 74). The fact that the package was introduced already on the 23rd of February shows that the EU was quick to react. A

second and third package of economic sanctions were adopted over the course of just a few days (Council of the EU, 2022b; Council of the EU, 2022c), thus displaying the EU's ability as a conflict manager to react through policy tools without much delay. Notably, with the third package seven major Russian banks were cut off from the important financial messaging system, SWIFT, thus further isolating Russian financial institutions globally (Council of the EU, 2022d). Notably, in a fifth sanctions package in April 2022, four significant Russian banks that had previously been cut of SWIFT were isolated even further (Council of the EU, 2022e). In June 2022, the EU set out to reduce Russia's income from oil exports through its sixth sanctions package. More specifically, the EU planned to cut its dependence on Russian energy by imposing an embargo on crude oil as well as certain petroleum products originating in Russia (Council of the EU, 2022f). Due to the importance of oil for economic ties between the EU and Russia, this was a powerful way to use sanctions. Precisely because of the economic significance, however, concessions had to be made to certain member states, and in general the measure did not enter into effect immediately but rather gradually. Regarding financial sanctions, three additional Russian banks were kicked out of SWIFT, among them Sberbank, being the largest bank in Russia (ibid.). Notably, leaders of Russian troops responsible for particularly horrible episodes of the war, such as the massacre of Bucha or the siege on Mariupol, were faced with individual sanctions as a part of the sixth package as well (ibid.). In October 2022, individuals and entities that arranged the illegal sham referendums in the four Ukrainian regions were added to the individual listings (Council of the EU, 2022g). In addition, the restrictions following the non-recognition policy were extended to include the non-government controlled Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions of Ukraine (ibid.). Adopted in February 2023, the tenth sanctions package carried symbolic meaning because it marked that one year had elapsed since Russia launched its unprovoked and unjustified full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This package for instance included sanctions in the energy sector, to reduce Russia's chances of weaponising gas by essentially banning Russian nationals from storing gas in the EU (Council of the EU, 2023). The general trend for the sanctioning activity presented in this section is that individual listings were extended, sectoral sanctions were strengthened, certain specifications and adjustments were made, and the duration of sanctions was extended. Ultimately, the sanctions regime against Russia has become even harsher than it was prior to 2022 (Portela & Kluge, 2022, p. 2). When it comes to the utilisation of sanctions as a policy tool during this period, the EU has for instance continued working on ways to improve coordination among member states on the implementation of sanctions, and to prevent the circumvention of sanctions (European Council, 2022d, p. 2). Serving as an example, the EU appointed in December 2022 an International Special Envoy for the Implementation of EU Sanctions in order to improve this particular aspect of sanctions as a policy tool (Interview A).

The EU's sanctions response was faster and harsher during the second phase compared to the first one. In fact, one could consider the sanctions in response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine the most intense EU sanctions response yet (Interview C). This impacts positively on EU actorness in conflict management. Meanwhile, there are caveats to be considered. First, as indicated in section 5.1.1, despite the impressive EU sanctions, there have still been instances of certain member states preventing specific points that are not in line with their national interests from being added or slowing down the process (ibid.). Secondly, the faster and harsher sanctions response in a sense followed an externality, namely the increased severity of Russian aggression in Ukraine. Although EU sanctions have already moved in that direction in 2022, it has been argued that the

sanctions response could be designed in a more strategic and less reactive manner (Liik, 2022, p. 22). The sanctions during the second phase surpassed those during the first one, both in terms of quantity and quality. At the time of writing, ten sanctions packages have been imposed. These cover a wide range of economic sectors, notably also the energy sector to a greater extent since the oil embargo. This has a positive impact on EU actorness because it reflects the EU's ability to overcome reservations among the member states at least to some degree, even if the oil embargo could have been implemented faster (Taran, 2022, p. 5). While it was mentioned for the first phase that the member states have taken control of the sanctioning process, this is arguably only one side of the coin. Especially in the second phase, there has also been a focus on improving coordination between EU institutions and the member states to speed up the sanctioning process. Notably, less time is spent on discussing and seeking a common position among the member states, and the Commission has become more involved in directly gathering their preferences for the common package (Interview D). Additionally, the Commission has for instance impacted positively on EU actorness by establishing a new position to improve sanctions effectiveness.

Although sanctions are emphasised in this thesis, they are of course not the only policy tool that the EU utilised in response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The EU for instance supported the Ukrainian Armed Forces through the provision of 'lethal aid' alongside the third sanctions package. In that regard, it is interesting to note that the heads of state or government made clear at an informal meeting in March 2022 that shared values of freedom and democracy with Ukraine were the motivation underlying their responses (European Council, 2022f, p. 2). As such, one can see that normative motives are still underlying EU responses essentially, even if they have become 'harder' in nature. Simultaneously, the new geopolitical reality following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine pushed the EU member states to embark on the road towards improving their defence capabilities (ibid., p. 3).

A change in rhetoric can be observed in the statement that "the European Union is unwavering in its commitment to help Ukraine exercise its inherent right of self-defence against the Russian aggression and build a peaceful, democratic and prosperous future" (European Council, 2022c, p. 1). This marks a change from the more careful rhetoric prior to 2022, when the EU had emphasised that cooperation in conflict management with Ukraine did not include military aid of any form, as mentioned previously in this thesis. Simultaneously, one can see that the end goal remains to defend those shared values that Ukrainians aspired to already in 2013/2014. While building resilience in Ukraine became a fundamental part of EU-Ukraine relations already in the first phase identified in this thesis, in June 2022, the European Council used the wording "(…) strong support for Ukraine's (…) military (…) resilience (…)" (European Council, 2022d, p. 1). This shows how the established term resilience seemingly was adapted to cover 'harder' means as well.

When the EU decided that it would provide additional support in the form of equipment to the Ukrainian Armed Forces through the EPF, it also decided to launch a Military Assistance Mission (EUMAM) to complement the support through the EPF with the training required to make the most of the equipment (European Council, 2022e, p. 2). It is worth noting as well that the EU adjusted EUAM, its civilian SSR mission launched in the first phase identified in this thesis, to aid Ukraine in the international efforts of addressing crimes committed by Russia in Ukraine (European Union, 2022b, p. 33). The EU has already launched seven operations under the EPF, with the total military support

provided by the EU and its member states amounting to almost EUR 12 billion (European Council, 2023, p. 3). However, it should be noted that the support provided under the EPF has at times been criticised, for instance when a promise for fighter jets was not realised (Blockmans et al., 2022, p. 4). Essentially, this reflected the challenge that sometimes exists in coordinating between institutional actors, such as the HR/VP in this case, and the member states. Naturally, this challenge has negative implications for EU actorness in conflict management. Moreover, observers have noted that the EU could draw out more of the EPF's potential if there was increased political accountability, for instance by bringing the instrument on-budget and including the EP in the decision-making procedure (ibid.; Koenig, 2022, p. 7).

In March 2022, the Strategic Compass was approved by the FAC of the EU (Koenig, 2022, p. 1). Essentially, the Strategic Compass built on the securitisation process of the 2016 EUGS (Blockmans et al., 2022, p. 2). While the member states tasked the HR to start working on the document already in 2020, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine prompted the member states and the EEAS to make readjustments at short notice (ibid.; Koenig, 2022, p. 1). The Strategic Compass was intended as a strategy in the field of security and defence, and, although the document may not originally have been envisaged as a response to the war in Ukraine specifically, it was effectively shaped by the invasion (Blockmans et al., 2022, p. 2; Koenig, 2022, p. 2). In its earlier draft phases, the Strategic Compass had adhered to the underlying idea of the five guiding principles on Russia (ibid.). However, the readjustments made by the member states and EEAS made clear that approaching Russia on matters of interest was less feasible in the light of the political situation haven taken another significant turn for the worse (ibid.). The emphasis on security and defence in the Strategic Compass stands in the same spirit as the Versailles Declaration, in which it was agreed that the member states should increase their defensive capabilities (ibid., p. 3). Essentially, the Strategic Compass reflects an increased willingness on behalf of the EU to supplement its other conflict management responses with force if required (Blockmans et al., 2022, p. 2).

It is historic that the member states jointly finance weapon supplies at the EU level. Thus, the EPF operations in support of the Ukrainian Armed Forces have impacted positively on EU actorness in conflict management. In fact, for the military dimension of EU conflict management, this has perhaps been the most significant development. Nevertheless, it should be noted that this was not an easy step for the member states, and Hungary is not contributing to EPF operations in support of Ukraine (Interview A; Liik, 2022, p. 13). Additionally, dependence on the member states is reflected by the fact that they are the ones who at the end of the day need to provide the equipment, even if it is financed by the EU (Gressel, 2022, pp. 10-11). One could also argue that EU actorness in conflict management is somewhat compromised by the institutional architecture of the EU. Essentially, the treaties require the EPF to be used as an off-budget tool as things stand (Blockmans, 2022, p. 9; Macchiarini Crosson, 2022). On the one hand, this situation prevents the EPF from unfolding its true potential. On the other hand, the ability to find alternative solutions within the confines of institutional restrictions arguably also displays EU actorness in conflict management. While EUMAM was not ground-breaking, it was a necessary supplement to the EPF operations in Ukraine. EUMAM Ukraine was designed by the EEAS, an institutional actor which was in turn created by the Lisbon Treaty. Hence, EUMAM has had a positive impact on EU actorness. As for the Strategic Compass, it may at first glance appear to impact positively on EU actorness since it reflects the will of the member states to engage with security and defence issues at the EU level, while involving institutional actors in the

process. However, the hectic revision that was needed in the wake of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine makes a positive impact on EU actorness in conflict management more questionable (Blockmans et al., 2022, p. 3). With that being said, the progress displayed by the EU in the field of security and defence in the second phase does contribute to a more positive impact on EU actorness compared to the first phase, during which EU responses had largely stayed clear of security and defence.

Following the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, new developments took place also in the light of the latter's political association to the EU. The AA already marked Ukraine's European choice following the conflict that started in 2013/2014. However, Ukraine's European choice now took on a different form in the membership application of 28 February 2022, and the recognition of Ukraine by the EU as a part of "our European family" (European Council, 2022f, p. 2). On the 23rd of June, the heads of state or government in the European Council responded to Ukraine's application on the 28th of February by granting the country candidate status (European Council, 2022d, p. 4). Most of all, perhaps, one could say that this response reflected the EU's level of determination to act as a conflict manager in its Eastern neighbourhood. After all, enlargement is a notoriously difficult issue, as illustrated by the Dutch referendum in 2016 to prevent even the granting of a future membership outlook to Ukraine (European Council, 2016, p. 9). In the light of these past difficulties, it is very positive for the EU that it was able to respond this way. However, member state opinions on the issue only changed with the Russian full-scale invasion. On one side, certain member states had been previously obstructing Ukrainian EU membership, and an externality played a key role in changing this situation, thus somewhat dampening the positive impact on EU actorness. On the other side, the Baltic states pushed the issue of granting Ukraine candidate status inside the EU (Maurer et al., 2023, p. 236). The fact that it was the Baltic states, and not France and Germany, who were the drivers behind EU agreement on granting Ukraine candidate status again points towards a "collective European responsibility to act" (ibid.), which has positive implications for EU actorness in conflict management. Meanwhile, it should not be forgotten that accession is not a swift process, thus revealing the challenges of the EU's complex institutional structure. Notwithstanding this mixed assessment, the fact that the EU ultimately was able to send such a powerful political signal has had a positive impact on EU actorness. Naturally, candidate status in the second phase had a more positive impact on EU actorness than the AA in the first phase, since reservations on behalf of certain member states were overcome to achieve the progress displayed thus far.

Like in the first phase identified in this thesis, the Commission organised economic support to Ukraine for instance through the conflict management tool of MFA also in the second phase (European Council, 2022d, p. 2). Notably, in response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the EU launched both emergency MFA and exceptional MFA to the latter (European Commission, n.d.). Under emergency MFA, the Commission, with approval from the member states, disbursed €1.2 billion to Ukraine over two instalments, in March and May 2022 respectively (ibid.). As a part of reconstruction under exceptional MFA, the EU for instance provided Ukraine with €4.5 billion in loans over the course of October and November 2022 (ibid.). This shows that EU economic support to Ukraine has grown even stronger in the second phase. Considering that funding is also a significant capability for a conflict manager, the Commission's role in particular in managing economic support to Ukraine has had a positive impact on EU actorness, even more so in the second phase.

5.2 Presence & opportunity structure

The HR/VP made clear on the 22nd of February 2022, that Russia by recognising the two non-government controlled territories as independent, and proceeding to order Russian troops into these territories challenged the global order built on international rules and agreements, such as the UN Charter, Helsinki Final Act, Paris Charter, and Budapest Memorandum (Council of the EU, 2022). The HR/VP also pointed out that Russia challenged the principle of multilateralism by moving further away from implementing the Minsk Agreements, which are not just supported by the EU, but the implementation of which is also required by UNSC Resolution 2202 (ibid.). The heads of state or government noted how Belarus is also challenging the global order by involving itself in the aggression against Ukraine instead of living up to its international obligations (European Council, 2022, p. 1).

The UNSC failed to adopt a resolution in the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, given the former's position as a permanent member and the veto power that follows. However, the UNGA adopted a resolution on the 2nd of March 2022, which essentially condemned the Russian actions, and demanded that Russia cease the aggression and withdraw its forces from Ukraine (UNGA, 2022, pp. 2-3). The vote ended in a majority of 141 against 5. The UNSC again failed to adopt a resolution when Russia illegally annexed the Ukrainian regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson. The UNGA then adopted a resolution on the 12th of October 2022, in which it essentially condemned the illegal sham referendums and demanded that Russia reverse its decisions concerning the status of these Ukrainian areas (UNGA, 2022b, p. 2). The vote ended in a majority of 143 against 5 in favour of adoption. Both votes come to show that there is in principle broad support for the norms and values held by the EU, as well as that Russia finds itself in a minority.

A plurilateral statement made by several members of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on the 15th of March 2022, showed that there are third states that jointly with the EU are willing to protect the global order guided by international rules and multilateralism (WTO, 2022, p. 1). In this context, Albania, Australia, Canada, Iceland, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the republic of Moldova, Montenegro, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, the UK, and the US jointly with the EU expressed their support for Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression (ibid.). These WTO members considered that it was no longer appropriate for Russian products and services to be given most-favoured-nation treatment, or for the accomplice Belarus to have an active accession status (ibid.). In addition to signalling support by an international organisation, this decision should also have an economic impact on the Russian trading sector. As in the above paragraph, this international trend shows that the EU does enjoy support in its promotion of a multilateral rules-based global order.

The European Council itself has made it clear that Russian disinformation is challenging the "rules-based international order" (European Council, 2022e, p. 1). Essentially, this shows that the EU is wary of Russian efforts to make third countries less supportive of the EU by portraying EU responses to Russia's war in Ukraine as the cause for crises affecting those third countries (ibid.). As such, one could say that Russia is competing with the EU over the global opportunity structure. The European Council noted that Iran was challenging this international order as well by providing military support to Russia (ibid., p. 3). This comes to show that while Russia may be relatively isolated in the

international order, there are nevertheless other third countries seemingly willing to challenge this rules-based order.

The UNGA votes and reactions from other international organisations indicate that multilateralism and rules still stand strong globally (López-Aranda, 2022). Given that these are among the principles underlying EU responses to Russia in Ukraine, this further implies that the EU continues to exert a relatively strong presence. Where the EU's presence in the Eastern neighbourhood was strengthened throughout the first phase, following an initial weakening, this presence further increased in the second phase. Notably, Georgia and Moldova were granted a membership perspective alongside Ukraine (Interview C). This in turn serves as a motivation for further domestic reforms, which were part of the reason for why EU presence in the Eastern neighbourhood recovered during the first phase (Stefanova, 2021, p. 343). Since the values underlying EU policies against Russian aggression and in support of Ukraine are viewed positively by a vast majority of the international society, the opportunity structure is, at least in theory, conducive to the EU. Moreover, it should be noted that certain Central Asian countries arguably sent a positive signal to the EU by abstaining in some UNSC votes, despite their close ties with Russia (Interview B). As such, the UN votes, and other global reactions since 2022 have had a positive impact on EU actorness, more so in the second phase compared to the first one. Indeed, there is a feeling that officials in third countries likely have come to recognise the EU as a global actor to a greater extent (Interview D), and that EU responses to Russian aggression in Ukraine may have contributed to more positive global perceptions of the EU (Interview E). However, the caveat remains that some of the states either abstaining or voting against the UNGA resolutions are key global actors with significant influence (Interview C), with China and Russia of course being the prime examples. Through their actions, these players undermine the rules-based global order which they supposedly support (López-Aranda, 2022). While not preventing the EU from acting as a conflict manager, this situation does serve as a constraint.

5.3 Effectiveness

5.3.1 Sanctions effectiveness

5.3.1.1 Step 1 – Situating sanctions in the bigger foreign policy strategy

Notably, in the second phase identified in this thesis, the EU has begun to incorporate military capabilities into its responses to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. While economic support had already been provided to Ukraine by the EU in coordination with international donors previously, the EPF was now used increasingly to provide military equipment to the Ukrainian Armed Forces, even including military equipment classified as lethal. Moreover, where there had previously been only a civilian mission, the EU now launched a military mission to supplement the support provided through the EPF. Hence, where the sanctions had previously been the most realistic alternative to a military response, EU responses in the second phase encompassed both harsher economic sanctions and the provision of military equipment alongside a military mission. Meanwhile, it should be mentioned that EU sanctions in the first phase had become closely tied to the diplomatic peace efforts of the Minsk Agreements (European Council, 2015, p. 4). However, while the Minsk Agreements may have still been pending in the second phase, it now became clear that the expectations held towards the agreement had effectively only been pretence on the side of Russia (Interview A). On the political

front, EU-Ukraine relations further evolved in the second phase. Following Ukraine's application shortly after the invasion, Ukraine was granted candidate status by the EU. As far as strategy is concerned, there was the Strategic Compass, which reflected the same trend also manifested through the EPF and EUMAM, namely the willingness to consider military responses when necessary. Thus, while it may have become less realistic for the EU to rest its sanctions strategy on the diplomatic efforts of the Minsk Agreements, other foreign policy tools, even of a military nature, have come to co-exist with the sanctions.

5.3.1.2 Step 2 – Logics underlying the sanctions

In the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, one can perhaps most clearly identify an increased emphasis on the constraining logic. Commission President von der Leyen has for instance spoken about stopping Putin's war machine (European Commission, 2022b). The severity of the escalation carried out by Russia against Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022 made apparent the need to rethink the previous approach of selective engagement, thus leading to the punitive purpose of EU sanctions being strengthened (Interview A). Simultaneously, the additional listings of members from the elite have followed a coercing logic aiming to change their behaviour into withdrawing their support to the regime (Interview B). The signalling logic remained in play as well. The EU sanctions still signalled the unacceptability of breaking international laws and rules, while also signalling that the EU is a unified actor in advocating for a global order built precisely on international laws and rules (Portela & Kluge, 2022, p. 4).

5.3.1.3 Step 3 – Direct impact, indirect impact, unintended consequences, costs

The direct economic impact of EU sanctions in response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has been smaller than expected (Alcidi et al., 2023, p. 1). However, as one would assume from the harsher sanctions, the direct impact seems to have been greater than during the first phase identified in this thesis (ibid., p. 2). It should be noted that unprecedently high oil and gas prices likely distorted the direct impact of EU sanctions on the Russian Gross Domestic Product (GDP), thus making the direct impact appear smaller than it was (ibid.). The direct economic impact might also have been cushioned by countries such as China and India purchasing more oil from Russia, although only to an extent as this happens at lower prices and involves costly shifts for Russia (ibid.). Additionally, a recovery in Russian imports has been facilitated by increased trade with countries such as Belarus and Turkey (ibid., p. 5). The Kremlin has focused on building up resistance to economic pressure over time (Portela & Kluge, 2022, p. 4). Moreover, the Central Bank of Russia has taken measures to soften the impact of EU sanctions on the real economy (Alcidi et al., 2023, p. 8). However, the sanctions have had a direct impact on Russia's exports for instance (Portela & Kluge, 2022, p. 5). Notably, limitations on goods and technologies have hit manufacturing sectors in Russia (ibid.). Further, the Russian regime has had to react to the direct economic impact of sanctions by spending more of the federal budget (ibid.). Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that the Kremlin has enough resources stored up to keep it going possibly for the next couple of years (ibid., p. 6). The Authoritarian nature of the regime has forced the elites to be cautious, thereby keeping political rivalry in check, also in light of the sanctions (ibid.). The oil embargo, mostly in place since February 2023, is considered to have the most significant direct impact (Taran, 2022, p. 5). Although the Kremlin might have been able to manage the imminent economic crisis in the short term, an indirect impact on the population is highly likely, given that foreign companies leaving the country are negatively affecting potential growth, and given that economic activity is vulnerable to a lasting reduction (Demertzis et al., 2022, p. 2). With regards to unintended

consequences, they are bound to follow such harsh sanctions aimed at the economy as a whole (Interview B). However, in the light of several parallel developments, it might take some time for the unintended consequences to crystallise (ibid.). Finally, as for costs, Russia has significantly cut its gas exports to Europe as a form of retaliation (Demertzis et al., 2022, p. 16). This has put pressure on the EU but has not been without consequences for Russia either (ibid.). Since the EU has realised the need for being less dependent on Russian energy supplies, one could argue that this cost has forced the EU to make a painful but necessary change.

5.3.1.4 Step 4 – Alternative policy tools

Where all EU responses were clearly distant from a security dimension prior to 2022, the second phase identified in this thesis has seen two responses of a military nature. Hence, the EPF and EUMAM have supplemented sanctions with alternative policy tools that were previously absent. However, if one were to engage in a counterfactual exercise, there are of course things that could have been done differently in theory. It seems safe to say that not responding to the significant increase in escalation showcased by Russia with harsh sanctions would have only left the EU weaker. In fact, this time around, the EU was better prepared than in 2014 because American intelligence allowed the G7 to start planning possible sanctions responses beforehand (Interview B). Since the rapid and harsh response was seen as a sign of strength, the absence of the sanctions would not have been a better alternative. Meanwhile, it has been suggested that making the oil embargo enter into force faster would have had a greater impact on the real economy of Russia and would have thus improved chances of constraining Russia's war machine in Ukraine sooner (See: Demertzis et al., 2022; Taran, 2022).

5.3.2 Goal attainment in the light of opportunity structure

As indicated above, the EU continued to send signals through its sanctions, utilising a logic that is not directly dependent on the opportunity structure. Where EU sanctions during the first phase had been ineffective in achieving the implementation of the Minsk agreements, the end of selective engagement allowed them to be more effective in constraining Russia through a direct economic impact throughout the second phase. However, the pace at which this logic takes effect has been constrained rather than enabled by the opportunity structure. Notably, this has been due to countries such as China, India, and Turkey further intensifying their trade relationships with Russia rather than participating in the sanctions, hence preventing a truly global sanctions regime (Taran, 2022, p. 6). When it comes to military support through the EPF and EUMAM, one could identify the goal of supporting the ability of the Ukrainian Armed Forces to maintain their resistance against the military aggression exerted by Russia. Although operations under the EPF were launched rapidly, one could argue that goal attainment by the EU specifically was compromised by the fact that the EPF is limited to provision of funding, whereas individual member states deliver the equipment (Gressel, 2022, pp. 10-11). With that being said, EUMAM seems to supplement the EPF in a way that raises the chances for goal attainment, at least as long as the training progresses at the right pace (ibid., pp. 4, 25). One could argue that granting Ukraine candidate status has perhaps most clearly signalled to Ukraine the EU's support to the former's resistance against Russia's military aggression, which by extension represents a challenge towards shared values of the EU and Ukraine (Interview A). However, the constraining logic of sanctions arguably has synergies with the integration path that have not yet fully been taken advantage of (Taran, 2022, p. 10). The economic and political integration between the EU and Ukraine could make it possible for sanctions to replace Russian products with

Ukrainian products in the EU market (ibid.). No strategy like the 2016 EUGS was conceived during the second phase. The Strategic Compass, although rapidly adjusted following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, was first and foremost a follow-up to the EUGS in the specific field of security and defence (Blockmans et al., 2022, p. 2). Meanwhile, one could argue that the Strategic Compass narrowed the EU's focus as a security provider to the neighbourhood (Koenig, 2022, p. 2). While we have seen that the opportunity structure slowed down the direct economic impact of sanctions, the pressure on global actors to position themselves on Russia's actions has increased following the rise in the severity of the escalation. Even so, an otherwise conducive opportunity structure has been constrained by certain key global actors.

6 Conclusions

In summary, the thesis has shown that once Russia's aggressive reaction to the Euromaidan protests had sparked a conflict, the EU was indeed surprisingly quick to react. While the EU for instance may not have reacted fast enough in the case of EUAM to provide Ukraine with the exact mission design it requested before Russia had already worsened the situation in Eastern Ukraine, there is no guarantee for CFSP policy tools to pass the hurdle of unanimity in the first place. Yet, the EU mustered the unity to introduce sanctions in March 2014. This was possible thanks to diplomacy between the member states at the EU level in order to establish a common position despite diverging national interests. A feeling of responsibility deriving from the EU's pre-established presence in the Eastern Neighbourhood, which involuntarily played a role in creating the conflict, has enabled the EU in adopting responses. The opportunity structure has shown broad support for the EU in supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence in line with international laws and rules. However, due to the global power status of third states that prefer a multipolar global order, such as China notably, the opportunity structure has effectively been constraining, even in the light of broad international support. Even so, the EU has drawn on several policy tools when responding to Russian aggression in Ukraine. The EU coordinated sanctions with its allies and partners. Further, the EU responded to new episodes of Russian escalation in the war by intensifying its policy responses. At the end of July 2014, EU sanctions entered the third stage to target Russian economic sector in response to the tragic downing of MH17. One way in which EU responses to the war in Ukraine can be said to have strengthened EU actorness is by showing observers that the EU can find a common position to utilise CFSP policies, even when up against a global power with which it is closely interlinked. The EU not only did so when introducing the sanctions but has basically kept it up every six months in order to keep the sanctions in place. However, it is questionable whether the results of this strengthening effect would show in a different context in the future. Although the EU has not yet achieved its end goal of making Russia cease its war in Ukraine, EU responses have been more effective in reaching what one may call part goals. For instance, EU sanctions have been effective in signalling to the world that the EU is a united actor and in constraining Russian military advances in Ukraine to some extent. While EU responses were not free of internal shortcomings, it seems safe to say that the biggest hurdle to effectiveness has been a constraining opportunity structure. One should also not forget that Russia is a global power. In light of this empirical evidence, the main hypothesis is at least partially strengthened.

Regarding the sub-hypothesis, it is clear that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022 was a game-changer. The EU has certainly adopted harsher policy responses to Russia's war in Ukraine in the second period. Externalities connected to the evolution of the war played a significant role in mobilising the member states, but EU responses also benefited from coordination between EU institutions and member states. While adopting harsher responses would not have been possible without a common position internally, external coordination also played a role here. The EU and its G7 allies were better prepared in terms of sanctions due to American intelligence that warned them ahead of time. Moreover, there was now a greater pressure on other third countries to follow the EU and its allies in their responses as well. Meanwhile, the opportunity structure remained the same in the sense that even if global support might have gotten even broader in the second phase, the global powers constraining it did not significantly alter their stance. In terms of effectiveness, sanctions did for instance have

a stronger direct economic impact in the second phase. Additionally, the broader policy framework now even included tools of a military nature. Notably, the Commission for instance has played a significant role in the evolution of the EU in the military sphere. Moreover, the way the EU has used the EPF in Ukraine to provide 'lethal support' during times of war is perhaps the best example of how the EU is becoming a geopolitical actor. Simultaneously, it is evident that norms, values, and civilian means remain important to the EU. Another way in which EU actorness has been strengthened is through the EU being perceived to a greater extent as an actor on the international stage. Where EU responses to the war in Ukraine positively surprised observers in the first phase, this effect was without a doubt even stronger in the second phase. At the end of the day, the opportunity structure did however constrain effectiveness. Hence, the first part of the sub-hypothesis is clearly strengthened, whereas the second part is more modestly strengthened. While it is difficult to know exactly how the strengthening of EU actorness witnessed in the Ukraine wars would translate into EU responses in a different future context, this could be a question for further research.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: List of interviews

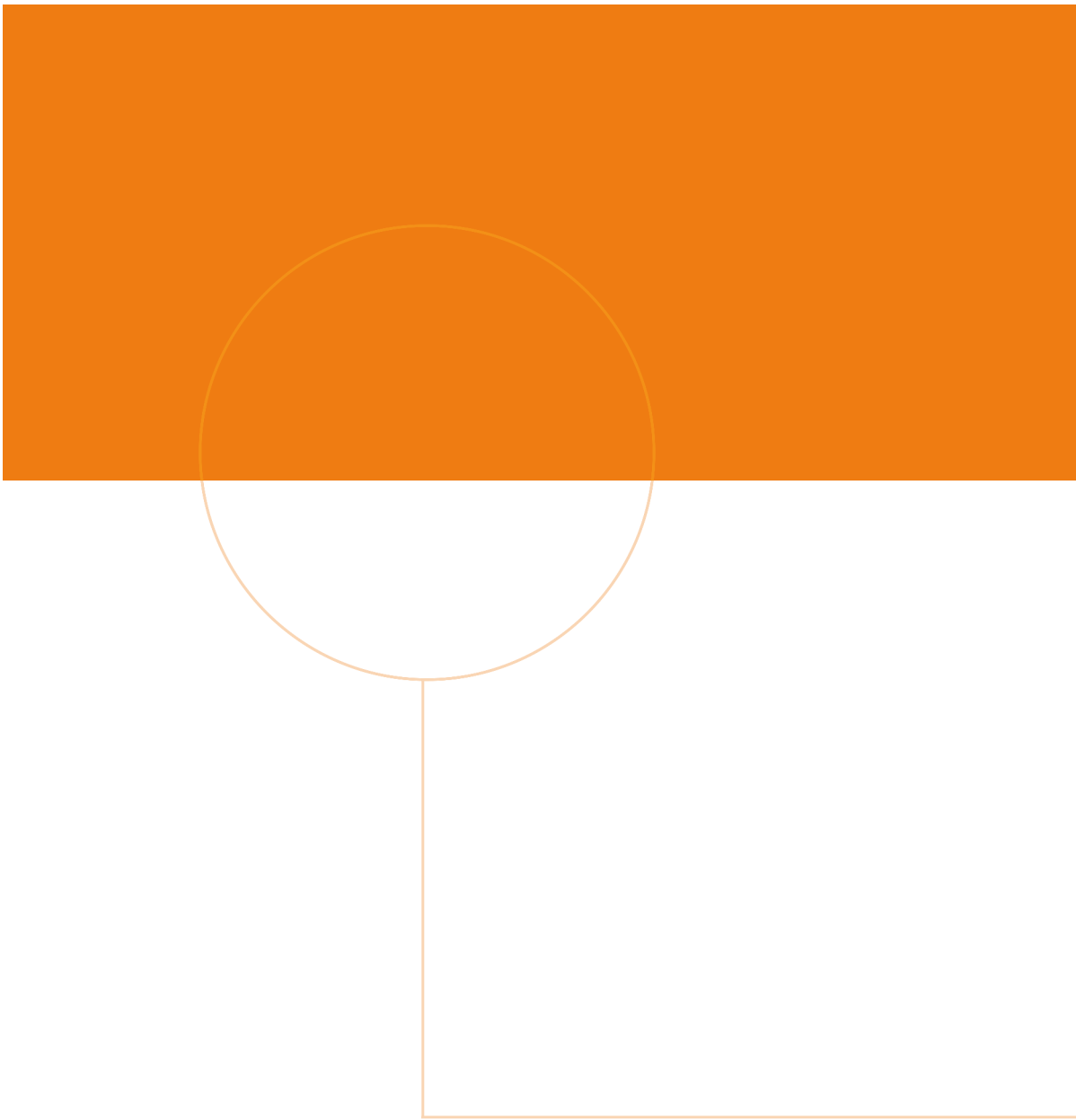
Interview A – Zoom, 5 April 2023, Expert, Brussels-based think tank.

Interview B – Zoom, 17 April 2023, Sanctions scholar.

Interview C – Zoom, 24 April 2023, Former EU official familiar with the area.

Interview D – Zoom, 28 April 2023, Representative, EU agency.

Interview E – Zoom, 3 May 2023, EU official familiar with the area.



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