

Forged in fire

The EU's normative influence on the US

after the crisis in Ukraine



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Master: International Relations in Historical Perspective

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Word count: 12.498

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1. Introduction

At the end of 2013, coming to terms with the fact that his country was spiralling into recession, Ukrainian President Yanukovich had to make a choice between Russian or European support. The EU offered him a long-term deal meant to foster trade and integration. Russia, on the other hand, offered to buy 15 billion dollars' worth of Ukrainian Eurobonds and to lower the cost of Russian gas. In the end Yanukovich chose for Russian help, which sparked protests in the capital. The revolt quickly grew and in the end, he was forced to flee to Russia; A new government was formed out of the opposition.¹ At the time the revolts were coming to an end, Russian military started doing previously unscheduled drills along the Ukrainian border. Masked men started appearing on the Crimean Peninsula simultaneously and started seizing strategic objectives in the area. The local Parliament among these. A new government was voted in and a referendum on the future of Crimea was scheduled for the 16th of March 2014. The referendum was intended to confirm Crimea's secession from Ukraine and consisted of two options: to enhance Crimea's independence from Ukraine or to join Russia. In the end 97% of the population reportedly voted to join Russia. The procedure, however, was condemned as illegal by Ukraine, the EU and the US. On the 18th of March 2014 president Putin then announced the formal addition of Crimea to the Russian federation. In response the EU coordinated sanctions against Russian and Ukrainian officials with the US. These were later expanded upon to include certain Russian banks, companies and restrictions on the trade of a list of materials. Remarks made by former US Vice President Joe Biden show that the Obama administration felt they had coerced the EU to agree to sanctions by keeping up the pressure.² However, as the conflict deteriorated, the member states took responsibility for solving the conflict, with the US watching from the sideline. The EU's reaction to this crisis and the subsequent developments in its relationship with the US are the object of this analysis.

Scholarly debate on the EU's involvement in the Ukraine crisis is diverse in nature, although there is a broad consensus that the coherence and decisiveness the EU has shown in the face of crisis has been unprecedented. Schilde has established, for instance, a change has happened in the member states attitudes towards defence due to the crisis, leading to the development of new strategies to cope with security issues.³ Pomorska and Natorski have instead focused on the role of trust in the process of foreign policy cooperation within the EU. They conclude that the crisis has led to an increase in trust in

¹ Alan Yuhas, Raya Jalabi, 'Crimea's referendum to leave Ukraine: how did we get here?' (13 March 2014), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/13/crimea-referendum-explainer-ukraine-russia>, accessed on Jan. 27, 2018.

² Sjursen, H., Rosén, G. 'Arguing Sanctions. On the EU's response to the Crisis in Ukraine', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 55 (2017) 1, 30; Council on Foreign Relations, 'Foreign Affairs Issue Launch with Former Vice President Joe Biden', last modified on Jan. 23, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/event/foreign-affairs-issue-launch-former-vice-president-joe-biden>, accessed on March 3, 2018.

³ Kaija Schilde, 'European military capabilities: enablers or constraints on EU power?', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 55 (2017) 1, 38-39.

the EU's institutions because of the relative success of the EU's actions. Conversely, Orenstein and Kelemen note the paradoxical nature of the EU's sanctions regime, as EU member states as Hungary and Greece still have economic dealings with Russia. Putin sees these relationships as advantageous and pursues these 'Trojan horses' to destabilize Europe from within.

Other scholars have focussed on the origins of the crisis. John Maersheimer argues that NATO and the encroaching West have triggered a 'zero-sum' game with Putin over spheres of influence. This statement puts the blame for the Ukraine crisis on the entire West, through NATO. Hiski Haukalla proposes similarly that the EU has failed to adapt in its relations with Russia and notes that the relations between Russia and the EU have largely followed the same pattern as those between Russia and the West. Therefore, as US relations with Russia declined, European relations with Russia have followed suit. These theories will be analysed more closely further down the line. Two main components to the conflict, however, stand out in both analyses.⁴

Firstly, the importance of US involvement in the conflict and secondly the promotion of Western norms in Europe. The state of the relationship between the EU and US was recently mapped by the European Council on Foreign Affairs, an independent thinktank situated in various cities across Europe. A report titled 'Towards a post-American Europe: a power audit of EU-US relations' was published in 2009. As the title suggests, it takes stock of the trans-Atlantic relationship 20 years after the cold war. The main conclusion is that Europe is not an equal partner to the US. This is not primarily caused by the reorientation of US attention, instead it is caused by European countries' failure to adapt to today's world. Four core misbeliefs that are held by the member states lie at the heart of this failure: the idea that European security still hinges on American protection, that American and European interests are identical at the fundamental level, that the need to keep the bilateral relationships close and harmonious trumps any specific objectives the EU might have, and finally, the idea that 'ganging up' on the US would be improper, since most European states believe they have a 'special relationship' with the US. This deferential relationship that most countries cherish is damaging to the development of the EU as a full-grown actor on the international stage.⁵ Europe's transatlantic partner is aware of these weaknesses and exploits various tactics to deal with Europe in an international context. Strategies such as ignoring or working around Brussels are employed, as well as engagement when views align. On the issue of Russia, however, the institutional elements of the EU are ignored, and support is garnered from the individual member states. The plan to station a rocket defence system in Poland and

⁴ Hiski Haukalla, 'From cooperative to contested Europe? The conflict in Ukraine as a culmination of a long-term crisis in EU-Russia relations', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 23 (2015) 1, 27-28; John J. Maersheimer, 'Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions that Provoked Putin', *Foreign Affairs* 93 (2014) 77, 79.

⁵ European Council on Foreign Affairs, *Towards a Post-American Europe: a power audit of EU-US relations* (2009), 7-8.

the Czech Republic during the 2000's was promoted through such means. It is concluded that America seeks a strong, independent transatlantic partner, but that the EU remains too divided to act conclusively on Russia.

The second component that both Haukalla and Maersheimer refer to is the normative influence the EU wields on the international stage. The foreign relations of the EU are determined on the intergovernmental level. Because each member state has a right to veto and supranational institutions are subsidiaries in the process, there are no formal channels for coercion. In theory, great power dominance is thus made impossible in the current format of EU foreign policy.⁶ The EU makes its ideas a fundamental cornerstone of its foreign policy. The norms involved are more to Europe than just a tool. European history, diversity and political organization have led to a genuine adoption of the norms that are promoted. Europe has become so intertwined with these norms that there is no choice to pursue them in international politics. As Ian Manners describes it: 'the most important factor shaping the international role of the EU is not what it does or what it says, but what it is.'⁷ Viewed from this perspective, the EU has a strong, unique incentive to take a normative stance on any issue. Ian Manners was first to focus on the normative power of the EU and to establish the connection between Europe's identity and its foreign policy. Other scholars, such as Andrew Moravcsik, have since established that the normative power framework is a useful tool for understanding EU foreign power.⁸

A state actor has the ability to exert three kinds of power to attain its goals: through material incentives such as trade, through physical force and through normative justification. IR theory on normative power discerns three dimensions. The first is that of normative theory, which concerns how truth claims are judged in the social sciences. The second dimension is that of *Puissance*, which is centred around the question to what extent the foreign policy of an actor is characterized by its use of normative power. The final understanding of normative power is the ability to use a normative justification instead of material incentives or force to attain one's goals in international relations. In most cases, however, a mix of these kinds of power is present. The EU is mostly seen as a power that is characterized by the norms it promotes and not as an actor that can affect change through these ideas.⁹

The effectiveness of the EU's foreign power is defined through the terms *enabled* and *constrained*. The enabling of power is defined as 'having new or stronger forms of power', while the constraining of power pertains to the inability to 'change or strengthen existing forms of power'.

⁶ Sjursen, Rosén, 'Arguing Sanctions...', 22.

⁷ Manners, I., 'Normative power Europe: A contradiction in Terms?', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40 (2002) 2, 252.

⁸ The Brookings Institution, 'The foreign policy of the European Union: Assessing results, Ushering in a new era', panel discussion (April 8, 2010), www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/events/2010/0408_european_union/20100408_European_Union.pdf.

⁹ Ian Manners, 'The European Union's normative power in global politics', in: Zimmerman, H., and Dür, Andreas (ed.), *Key controversies in European integration* (Basingstoke 2012), 130-132.

International crises are a pathway to change and either a more enabled or constrained EU. The EU is treated like a state actor in this context.¹⁰

The Ukraine provides a rich case for analysis of the EU's normative power. The fact that the EU has sanctioned Russia shows that there are situations that require old fashioned hard power. Both Maersheimer and Haukalla point to normative power as one of the aggravators in this crisis. In this case the EU's normative influence has constrained its option with regard to Russia. US involvement and the influence it exerts on Europe, however, are an essential cause as well. The ECFR report shows that the EU has traditionally followed the US where Russia is concerned. The implicit challenge to rise to the level of great powers was issued to Europe when the US decided to keep its distance. The goal of this research is to determine to what extent the EU's normative power towards the US has been enabled during the conflict in Ukraine. To do so, I have adopted a variation on a framework by Javier Argomaniz, who has focused on the normative influence the EU endures from the US. His analysis is specifically focused on the unilateral exertion of Border Security norms and the subsequent European adoption of those norms. The framework Argomaniz employs for his analysis is nonetheless of value to this research. He discerns three stages of US exertion of normative power. The first is unilateral and forceful norm advocacy by the US, followed by bargaining within the EU and finally norm mirroring and implementation. This framework provides the structure for the analysis of normative influence of the US on the EU, and vice versa. If the EU has managed to successfully exert normative power through the same dynamic, it will have *enabled* EU foreign policy with regard to the US.¹¹

Chapter two defines and positions the various actors involved in this case. The EU and its institutions, US, Russia and Ukraine and their historical interconnectedness provide the backdrop to the analysis of the case. Comparison of the theories of Maersheimer, Haukalla and others on the causes of the Ukraine crisis sheds additional light on the way the US and EU have interacted in the case of Russia. The third chapter is split into three parts, which deal with separate phases of the process. The first part traces the relationship between the EU and US through the early months of the crisis. From November 2013, when Yanukovich fled, to 17 March 2014, when Crimea voted to secede to Russia. Part two regards the decision to sanction Russia and the question whether it was pressure from the US that facilitated unity in the EU. September 2014 marks the moment the EU took on the weight of finding a solution to the crisis. Secessionists in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, supported by Russia, had kept the fight going in Eastern Ukraine since March 2014. The EU stepped in early to help negotiate a ceasefire in April. Nothing changed, however, as did the next treaty, Minsk I, in September. Germany and France were instrumental in bringing the parties back to the table in February 2015 after renewed

¹⁰ Cross, M. K. D., Karolewski, I. P., 'What type of power has the EU exercised in the Ukraine-Russia crisis? A framework of analysis', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 55 (2017) 1, 11.

¹¹ Javier Argomaniz, 'When the EU is the "Norm-taker": The Passenger Name Records Agreement and the EU's Internalization of US Border Security Norms', *Journal of European Integration* 31 (2009) 1, 123-124.

escalation. The resulting ceasefire, dubbed Minsk II, was still in place when President Obama left office at the end of 2016. Because this status quo remained in place and the foreign policy of President Trump is beyond the scope of this research, 2017 and 2018 are excluded from the analysis. The framework the ECFA report provides will in addition be central to analysing the strategies the US employs in its dealings with the EU.¹²

¹² European Council on Foreign Relations, *Towards a Post-American Europe: a power audit of EU-US relations* (2009), 18-21.

2. Historiography

The US has a peculiar relationship to the European continent. Many citizens of the US, today, are descendants of European fortune seekers and colonists. The European enlightenment during the 18th century had a major influence on the establishment of American independence, which kicked off the development of the US into the giant it is today. While ties between the European countries and the US persisted, the transatlantic relationship was reformed after the Second World War (WW2). With the rise of two superpower blocs, the US became the champion of freedom and protected the Western hemisphere with its impressive military capacities. European countries have, however, gradually realised their interests and those of the US do not always coincide.¹³

2.1 The transformation of European foreign policy cooperation

Early European foreign policy coordination originates in the early 1970's in the form of European Political Cooperation (EPC), which was a regular meeting between the foreign ministers of the Six and later the Nine. This cooperation was very effective from 1970-1974. 1973 is specifically mentioned. Instead of responding to the US' call for a new Atlantic Charter, Europe requested the US to acknowledge it as the secondary centre of political decision-making and used one voice to communicate with the US. When the European countries failed to establish a common energy policy in 1974, however, the decline of EPC rapidly set in. NATO became the centre of transatlantic cooperation once more. Since then, a gradual increase in foreign policy coordination between the member states has been observed over the years.¹⁴

Although EU foreign policy coordination originated in 1970, it would take another 20 years for further institutionalisation to see the light of day. In the 1970's, mainly East-West relations and the Arab-Israeli conflict were discussed. Throughout the 1970's and 1980's cooperation and coordination between the EPC and the European Community (EC) increased, even though the EPC acted outside of EC structures. This led to the founding of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in 1991 under the Maastricht Treaty and both were legally tied together within the framework of the European Union. In 1998, a new major development took place with the Saint-Malo declaration. This declaration between France and the United Kingdom (UK) was an expression of the need for a Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). In 2001, a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) was institutionalized to supplement the CFSP. The Lisbon Treaty, which entered into effect in 2009, then redefined the CFSP. A European foreign relations office was established in the European External Action Service (EEAS), headed by the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy (HR) and the ESDP was renamed CSDP. The seat of HR is currently occupied by Federica Mogherini, who

¹³ Daniel Möckli, *European Foreign Policy during the Cold War* (London 2009), 32-35.

¹⁴ Daniel Möckli, *European Foreign Policy during the Cold War* (London 2009), 4-5.

replaced Catherine Ashton, the first HR of the EU, on November 1, 2014.

Although the member states take the principal decisions on foreign relations, formal institutions are enshrined in the Common Foreign and Security Policy to enact these decisions. The central actor in the CFSP, as established in the Treaty of Lisbon, is the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security (HR). The HR is supported by the European External Action Service (EEAS), a de facto foreign ministry of the EU. In the Lisbon Treaty and the Council Decision of July 26th 2010, the manner in which the EEAS is set up and how different components of European foreign policy were integrated into the EEAS are established. This document also describes the way in which the EEAS is related to various EU institutions, which will provide insight in the way member states influence the HR's agenda.

The first mention of the European External Action Service is in the 13th article of the Lisbon Treaty. In article 13a the High Representative (HR) is called into existence with the mandate to chair the Foreign Affairs Council, be proactive in proposing policies and ensure implementation of said policies if adopted. In 13b is mentioned that the HR will be the representative of the EU to the outside world. He will talk to third parties and be the one to go to international organizations on behalf of the EU. In article 13c the EEAS is first mentioned as a service to support the HR. It will be established as follows:

“The organisation and functioning of the European External Action Service shall be established by a decision of the Council. The Council shall act on a proposal from the High Representative after consulting the European Parliament and after obtaining the consent of the commission.”¹⁵

This ‘organization and functioning of the EEAS’ is established in the Council Decision dating from 2010. The EEAS is defined as ‘a functionally autonomous body of the Union under the authority of the High Representative’.¹⁶ The first paragraph contains nineteen acknowledgements. After that the practical organization of the EEAS is described in a following paragraph.

The first two statements in the first paragraph formulate the responsibilities of the EEAS: 1. The EEAS is to ensure consistency in external action of the EU 2. The EEAS works to support the High representative, who is also the Vice-President of the Commission and the President of the Foreign Affairs Council. These clauses dictate a lot of power to the HR. The EEAS is built around her to support her in ensuring coordinated foreign policy. Additionally, both of her functions as Vice President and President tie her closely to the member states and the Commission. Because of this construction, it is

¹⁵ EUR-Lex, ‘Treaty of Lisbon: Amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty Establishing the European Community’, Dec. 17, 2007, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12007L%2FTXT>, Accessed on June 6, 2017.

¹⁶ European Council, Council Decision 427/2010, ‘Establishing the organization and functioning of the European External Action Service’ (26 July 2010).

possible to postulate the HR as speaking for the CFSP and thus for the member states. The seat of HR is currently occupied by former Italian Foreign Minister Federica Mogherini.

European defence integration is a field that is closely related to the foreign relations of the EU. Reluctance to relinquish control over such an inherently sovereign aspect of being a state has held closer cooperation back. A first impetus towards integration of defence capabilities was created with the Saint-Malo declaration in 1998, in which France and the UK expressed the need for advancement of the ESDP and the creation of a European army. While this army still remains a fiction, the sentiment is still present. In his 2016 State of the Union speech, president Juncker of the European Commission stated that he thought it time to strengthen EU security capabilities. He encourages the member states to undertake action to set up a permanent defence structure and speaks of EU-troops, as made possible by the Lisbon Treaty. The prevalence of NATO, however, has remained an important pillar of European security and especially the Eastern member states have relied heavily on this institution for reassurance.¹⁷

2.2 NATO and the US

As the Cold War ended, Russia favoured US presence in Europe and for NATO to keep existing as it would facilitate a stable Germany. Russian leaders, however, assumed the West was aware that expansion of the alliance was undesirable to them. The Clinton presidency turned out to believe otherwise and started pushing for the expansion that the Russians had dreaded. Two rounds of enlargement, in 1999 and 2004 respectively, followed, with Russian diplomats voicing discontent from the start. At the Bucharest Summit in April of 2008, membership of Georgia and Ukraine was discussed. President Bush pushed for initiating the Membership Action Plan (MAP) with regard to both countries. At this particular time the divide between ‘old’ and ‘new’ Europe was more firmly in place than it is now. The newer members, the Eastern European states, were in favour of the American position.¹⁸ Germany and France, however, opposed starting a formal procedure – not wanting to antagonize Russia - and instead a unilateral statement was issued: Georgia and Ukraine will join NATO. The 2008 Bucharest Summit clearly shows that the NATO position is a compromise between the foreign policy positions of the EU and the US. In this case the US engaged the EU by dividing them along the divisions of old and new Europe to get what they wanted.¹⁹

The EU has come to terms with the understanding that today’s US would have no interest in

¹⁷ European Commission, ‘State of the Union Address 2016: Towards a better Europe – a Europe that protects, empowers and defends’ (14 September 2016), http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/state-union-2016_en (30 September 2016).

¹⁸ Steven Erlanger, Steven Lee Myers, ‘NATO allies oppose Bush on Georgia and Ukraine’, Last modified on April 3, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/03/world/europe/03nato.html>, Accessed on Feb. 12, 2018.

¹⁹ NATO, ‘Bucharest Summit Declaration: Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008’, Last Modified on May 8, 2014, https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/official_texts_8443.htm, Accessed on Feb 12, 2018.

creating NATO, if it did not exist already. Instead, Barack Obama's foreign policy has 'rebalanced' the global arena. In lieu of the Cold War, US Presidents have overtly focussed their attention on the Middle-East and the rest of the Western world. Under the Obama administration greater prominence was given to Asia, bearing the rapidly growing economies of India and China in mind. Both Bush and Clinton have had the same idea, but the Balkans Crisis and 9/11 respectively found them focusing on Europe and the Middle-East. The alliance is likely to persist nonetheless, because of the 'commonalities in the relationship' between the EU and US.²⁰

James Goldgeier has discussed the state of NATO in recent years. His assessment is that NATO has estranged Russia by focussing on bringing Eastern European states into NATO. While US-Russian relations had been relatively good during the 1990's, the new millennium brought change. The US started asserting itself more unilaterally in its foreign policy after the attacks of September 11th, 2001. As US-Russian relations slowly deteriorated, Russia responded in kind. This has caused considerable unrest in Lithuania and Estonia. If Russia were to invade either country, it is unclear how NATO would react.²¹ In the European Parliament's 2007 report on 'Missile Defence and European Security' is visible what stances certain member states adopted towards US' plan to station a missile defence system in Poland and the Czech Republic. In it is also an overview of the positions of 'key EU member states' involved in the process. Poland was in favour of the idea, mainly because they wanted to strengthen ties with the US. Germany and France, however, viewed matters differently. France's approach is described as marked by pragmatism, which is in turn fuelled by the need for improvements to their military and intelligence capacity in the field of ballistic missiles. France, however, has a traditional deterrence strategy based on the fact that they have nuclear capacity and the US missile system would be a breach with this doctrine, which was reaffirmed in 2006 by President Chirac. It is noted that the French position has evolved over the years due to the apparent need for modernization. It is predicted nonetheless that France's position is not likely to further evolve, unless political advances are made on the ESDP. The French approach does not come as a surprise, since they have a somewhat troubled relationship with the US. France sees itself as a traditional superpower and had withdrawn from NATO in 1966. In 2009, however, France decided to once more become a full participant in NATO.²²

Karolina Pomorska offers more insight into the Polish side of this story. Before accession to the EU, Poland favoured NATO's European Security and Defence Identity over the ESDP. The Polish government saw no security guarantees in the ESDP and had a strong relationship with the US. Poland enhanced its position in Europe by actively supporting the US in the war in Iraq in 2003. Poland felt like it was often ignored by the EU member states and that it was perceived to be a lower priority

²⁰ James Goldgeier, 'The state of the Transatlantic Alliance', *European Foreign Affairs Review* 21 (2016), 407-408.

²¹ James Goldgeier, 'The state of the Transatlantic Alliance', *European Foreign Affairs Review* 21 (2016), 405.
²² European Parliament, 'Missile Defence and European Security' (November 2007), 12-14.

European country instead of an equal. Through political and military involvement with the US, Poland reinforced its position on the European continent and created an ‘insurance policy’ for itself. In this case, the EU’s own internal policies, or rather a lack thereof in the field of defence, drove Poland to diverge. The divide and conquer strategy that the US pursued, was in this case keenly observed and exploited by Poland.²³

2.3 Ukraine

The Maidan revolution was not the first politically motivated revolt in recent Ukrainian history. After having adopted basic democratic institutions at the end of the Cold War, Ukraine was confronted with a period of slow economic growth in the 1990’s, losing 60% of its GDP between 1991 and 1999. The declining economic conditions, in addition to crime and corruption prompted the masses to take to the streets regularly, as well as organize strikes. A new constitution was adopted in 1996 under President Kuchma, which stabilized the political climate. Kuchma was tainted by allegations of corruption and electoral fraud, which illustrates the long road ahead for Ukraine to becoming a democratic state. Then, in 2004, Viktor Yanukovich won the parliamentary elections. The opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko immediately challenged these results. Protests erupted in the streets once more and unrest remained until the Ukrainian Supreme Court ruled the elections had been rigged. New, highly scrutinized, elections were planned for December 26th, 2004. Yushchenko won these with 52% of the votes. The protests died down and the so called ‘Orange revolution’ came to an end.²⁴

Ukraine took a step towards closer cooperation with the EU in 2005 with the signing of a ten-year Action Plan (AP) and a List of Additional Measures as a part of the EU’s European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The ENP by no means revolves around the issue of membership of the EU. The documents contain an inventory of objectives Ukraine must achieve before cooperation can be intensified. Kataryna Wolczuk observed in 2006 that Yushchenko lacked the means to follow up on these promises. The outcome of the parliamentary election in that year, however, illustrates the steps Ukraine has taken towards democracy and closer cooperation to the EU. One of the key prerequisites for further cooperation was ‘free and fair’ elections, as established in the AP.²⁵ The fact that the governing party came in third speaks to the authenticity of the electoral process. Other priorities in the AP, however, received less attention because of these elections. Meanwhile, Viktor Yanukovich remained politically active. He returned as Prime Minister in 2006 and was finally elected president in 2010. Yanukovich was still in power when he froze preparations for the association agreement with Europe in favour of Russia on November 21, 2013.²⁶

²³ Karolina Pomorska, ‘Poland: learning to play the Brussels game’, in: Reuben Wong and Christopher Hill (ed.), *National and European Foreign Policies: Towards Europeanization* (Abingdon 2011), 183.

²⁴ Orest Subtelny, ‘Ukraine: A history’ (Toronto 2009), 312-314.

²⁵ Orest Subtelny, ‘Ukraine: A history’ (Toronto 2009), 358-359, 372-375.

²⁶ Cross et al, ‘What type of power...’, 4-5; Orysia Lutsevych, ‘The EU has not failed Ukraine’, last modified on

2.4 The EU's relations with Russia

The fragmentation of the Soviet Union meant that the EC had to rethink and reinvent its relationship with its eastern neighbour Russia. Both parties had stringent demands and fierce negotiations resulted in a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in 1994, which entered into effect in 1997. The original agreement was set for ten years, and has been extended on an annual basis after 2007. The goal of the document, as codified in the first article, was to be a 'framework for the gradual integration between Russia and a wider area of cooperation in Europe'.²⁷ Russia's demands with regard to trade allowed the EC to include broad conditions. The second article of the PCA introduced a human rights framework, with reference to the Helsinki final act, which gave the EC legal grounds to consider any breach of European values reason to terminate the PCA. In Russian circles the agreement is mostly regarded as unilaterally imposed, but scholars have shown that both parties fought hard for a final draft they could commit to.²⁸

The following years immediately strained the renewed relationship. By the time the negotiations were finished, the Russian outlook on foreign policy had changed from joining the community of modern states to one concerned with spheres of influence and equality with western partners. The way Russia intervened in Chechnya in December 1994 made the EU painfully aware of a lack of respect for European values on the other side. The Kosovo war then demonstrated to Russia that NATO would impose regime change if they felt it was necessary and simultaneously that NATO would do so without UN mandate. The Russian conduct in the second Chechen war then further disillusioned the EU in its dealings with newly elected President Putin.

The attitudes versus Russia within the EU revolved around a central dichotomy during the 2000's. Germany lead 'old Europe' in pursuit of dialogue and energy security. Having lived under communist regimes, the Eastern European took a tougher stance on Russia and underlined security concerns. The individual attitudes of EU member states, however, differ. Russia has sympathisers in Bulgaria, Cyprus and Greece due to religious Orthodox ties, while most Western EU states tend to regard Russia with 'cold pragmatism'.²⁹ However, views on a common stance versus Russia began to converge in the wake of the Bush presidency. Resolution of the conflict in Georgia, the economic crisis, which had hit Russia hard, and the gas crisis of 2009 created common ground for the old and new Europe to meet on. The widely accepted view prevailed that European interests were best secured

Nov. 28, 2013, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/media/comment/view/195808>, accessed on Dec. 6, 2017.

²⁷ Council of the European Union, 'Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation: establishing a partnership between the European Communities and their member states, of one part, and the Russian Federation, of the other part', (Nov. 28, 1997).

²⁸ Hiski Haukalla, 'From cooperative to contested Europe? The conflict in Ukraine as a culmination of a long-term crisis in EU-Russia relations', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 23 (2015) 1, 36-38; European Commission, *Memo: EU-Russia Summit*, (Jan. 24 2014).

²⁹ European Council on Foreign Relations, *Towards a Post-American Europe: a power audit of EU-US relations* (2009), 54-55.

through the EU, instead of NATO. Uncertainty retook the minds of the European leaders as president Obama announced his 'reset' of US relations with Russia, which led to old fears resurfacing in Eastern Europe. A group of 22 Central and Eastern European statesmen sent a letter to the US, urging it to not forget about the region. This, in turn, triggered a disgruntled response on the American front. The reaction by Eastern Europe underlines a lack of trust towards their allies, which is a key reason for diverging interests when it comes to Russia.³⁰

Hiski Haukkala discerns three main reasons for Russian and European interests having grown apart. He sees the interactions between Russia and the EU as a learning process, in which both parties have come to understand more about themselves, each other and their shared relationship. In addition to developing awareness of differing worldviews, it has become apparent that the EU and Russia have little interests in common. Putin actively questions whether he needs and wants what the EU has on offer. This ties in to the last point, the accession of Eastern and Central European states to the EU and the contention over influence in the 'common neighbourhood', of which Ukraine is a key part. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was introduced in an effort to avoid alienating the countries surrounding the EU after the 2004 enlargement. The ENP is a tool for the EU to pursue bilateral relations with sixteen Mediterranean and Eastern European countries. The arguments for pursuing the ENP are twofold: normative and security driven. The EU tries to ensure its security by tying surrounding countries into economic relationships. The normative aspect is strongly reflected in the central aim of the policy to ensure stability, prosperity, shared values and the rule of law. An offshoot of the ENP was created in 2009, catering specifically to the needs of six countries in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. This Eastern Partnership (EaP) offered tariff-free access to the European single market in exchange for the adoption of trade related EU legislation. The Ukrainian association agreement with the EU, that President Yanukovich turned down at the end of 2013, is a product of the EaP.³¹

Putin clearly saw the ENP and the association agreement as a threat to Russian interests. By pressuring former Soviet states into reconsidering their bilateral relations with the EU in favour of Russia's Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) with Kazakhstan and Belarus, which would be founded in 2014, he hoped to provide a counterweight to the influence of the European Union. At the Vilnius summit, scheduled for 28 November 2013, Ukraine would sign the association agreement with the EU as a part of the ENP. As a warning, Putin stopped all Ukrainian imports for increased customs scrutiny in August. Armenia then succumbed to Russian pressure in September 2013 and announced it would join the EEU. Tensions between the EU, US and Russia rose as the West condemned Putin's actions. As stated before, however, larger concerns such as NATO expansion and the spread of Western ideas

³⁰ *Ibidem*, 54-55.

³¹ Haukkala, 'From cooperative to contested Europe...', 26-27, 32.

overshadowed the years preceding the Ukraine crisis.³²

2.5 The origins of the crisis

Both John Maersheimer and Henry Kissinger – known for their realist views - attribute the responsibility for the Ukraine crisis to NATO. More specifically, to misconceptions in the West about the nature of international relations and Putin's perception of Russian strategic interests. The following aims to determine what influence the US exerts on the EU through NATO and whether this has been a deciding factor in triggering the Ukraine crisis. I will weigh the realist argument against that of Michael McFaul, the former ambassador to Moscow under Obama between 2012 and 2014. McFaul has written a response to Maersheimer's thesis to argue a different origin of the crisis. Both appeared at a Chatham House debate in July 2014, where they elaborated on their arguments. Dmitri Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, was also present and his Russian viewpoint presents the final perspective to the analysis of the origins of the Ukraine crisis..

President Saakashvili of Georgia was fiercely committed to joining NATO. In the summer of 2008 he sought to reintegrate two separatist regions, which Putin assessed as a threat to Russian security. Russian forces took control of the two provinces after fighting broke out in 2009. To Kissinger and Maersheimer the message was loud and clear: Russia sees the world from a realist perspective and will not tolerate further expansion of NATO along its borders. The fact that the EU chose not to implement sanctions against Russia because of this conflict has set a precedent for future reference for Putin. The events in Georgia, combined with EU attempts to integrate the Ukrainian economy and its promotion of democracy are, in their eyes, the essential preconditions for Russia's aggression in Crimea. The fraying tightrope finally snapped after Ukrainian President Yanukovich declined the association agreement with the EU. After Yanukovich fled, the threat of the West installing a sympathetic government prompted Putin to protect Russia's interest in Ukraine as a buffer state. Maersheimer concludes that Russia's willingness to use force is underestimated in the West, as the Georgian war and the Annexation of Crimea have shown the opposite to be true.³³

The realist perspective on the origins of the crisis is not uncontested., Michael McFaul, has replied to Maersheimer's claims with his own interpretations of what caused Russia's aggression. He believes the origins of the crisis lie in Russian politics instead of NATO enlargement. The realist approach, in his view, fails in explaining why Russia has not invaded Ukraine before, during the 2004 rose revolution for example, while fighting two wars in Chechnya that were more costly than the annexation of Crimea. The factors of NATO expansion, the encroaching EU and Western subversion

³² David M. Herszenhorn, 'Russia putting a Strong Arm on Neighbours', *New York Times*, last modified on 23 October 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/23/world/europe/russia-putting-a-strong-arm-on-neighbors.html>, accessed on Oct. 16, 2017.

³³ John J. Maersheimer, 'Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions that Provoked Putin', *Foreign Affairs* 93 (2014): 77, 78-80.

that Maersheimer observes are therefore important components for understanding Russia's stance under Putin, but only a part of the answer to who bears responsibility.

McFaul points out that Ukraine has never worked towards NATO membership, because of a lack of public support. Furthermore, he states NATO was rarely discussed in diplomatic relations with Russia. Russian foreign relations have also been diverse in approach even in recent history. After Obama announced the reset in US-Russia relations, he and President Medvedev worked together fruitfully between 2009 and 2012. The fact that this relationship was of mutual interest is demonstrated by Medvedev stating they 'enjoyed the best level of relations between the United States and Russia during those three years than ever during the previous decades' at the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit.³⁴ At Chatham House McFaul describes Putin as a realist, who thinks in terms of 'Russia versus the world' and who is distrustful of the US.³⁵ This view is corroborated later in the discussion by Dmitri Trenin, who states that Medvedev was only a scout for Putin and that there should be no illusions about who is in charge in Russia. Putin's distrust of the US grew exponentially after the US dethroned Khaddaffi in Libya, which prompted Putin to once more seize the reins and take Medvedev's place as President. His disillusionment with regard to the hypocritical American promise of liberal international order therefore prompted his response to Ukraine.

To say the NATO is the most important aggravator in the advent of the Ukraine crisis is an exaggeration at best. As Maersheimer argues, in combination with EU expansion and norm advocacy, NATO expansion has certainly helped shape Putin's attitude in regard to what he perceives to be Russian strategic interests. Russian behaviour in the Ukraine crisis is the result of the sum of American involvement on the international stage, instead of specific American or European policy towards Eastern Europe. The US is therefore largely responsible for starting the Ukraine crisis. The EU, however, is given the ultimate responsibility of solving the crisis. The following chapter evaluates the events that lead to this outcome more closely by analysing the three phases of European involvement in the conflict in Ukraine.³⁶

3 The US and EU during the crisis

Waves of protest started rippling through Ukraine in November 2013, collectively called the

³⁴ Obama White House Archives, 'Remarks by President Obama and President Medvedev of Russia after bilateral meeting', Last modified on March 26, 2012, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/03/26/remarks-president-obama-and-president-medvedev-russia-after-bilateral-me>, Accessed on Jan. 12, 2018.

³⁵ Transcript Chatham House 8

³⁶ Michael McFaul, Stephen Sestanovich, John Maersheimer, Faulty powers: Who started the Ukraine Crisis, *Foreign Affairs* 93 (2014) 167, 168-171.

‘Euromaidan’ protests. Riots broke out on November 21, shortly after President Yanukovich froze preparations for the signing of the bilateral Association Agreement (AA) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) with the EU. The President of the European Commission, Barroso, released a reaction to the decision of Yanukovich, in conjunction with the President of European Council, van Rompuy, on November 25. They encouraged Ukraine to sign the agreement with the EU and warn Russia to tread lightly.³⁷ Moscow had been coaxing Yanukovich towards a trilateral format, as opposed to the bilateral agreement the EU sought. There is no doubt the protests in Ukraine were about the EU. Emblematic is the reaction of the protestors to the call by opposition leaders to keep pressuring Yanukovich and his government to resign. On 9 December, a statue of Lenin was toppled, signalling a desire to break away from the historic influence Russia has had over Ukraine. A European flag was planted on the empty plinth, accompanied by a warning to Yanukovich: ‘you are next!’.³⁸

When protesting reached new heights in January, High Representative Catherine Ashton was sent to Ukraine to show support for the protestors. This decision came on the heels of a meeting between Putin and the European heads of state, in which Putin warned the EU to stay away from Ukraine.³⁹ Shortly thereafter, the Foreign Ministers of Germany, France and Poland travelled to Kyiv to facilitate a deal between the government and the opposition. The deal, which was finalized on February 21, contained constitutional changes and provisions for elections. The following day, unexpectedly, President Yanukovich fled. The Ukrainian Parliament swiftly voted to remove the President from power and scheduled elections. Following these events Putin decided to step in. On February 27, armed, unidentifiable gunmen took control of key buildings in Simferopol, the Crimean capital. A referendum for secession from Ukraine was hastily organized and scheduled for March 16.⁴⁰

3.1 The early stages of the crisis

US intentions in Ukraine were two-fold. As Obama was striving to rebalance US foreign relations, he deferred to Chancellor Merkel for European leadership, whilst trying to reassure Moscow it was not in competition with Russia over Ukraine.⁴¹ Divisions over Syria and Iran had already brought US-Russia relations to a new low and Merkel, who is fluent in Russian and leader of one of the strongest

³⁷ European Commission, ‘Joint statement by the President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso and the President of the European Council Herman van Rompuy on Ukraine’, Last modified on Nov. 25, 2014, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release MEMO-13-1052_en.htm?locale=en](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-13-1052_en.htm?locale=en), Accessed on Feb. 13, 2018.

³⁸ Gareth Jones, Alissa de Carbonnel, “Protesters fell Lenin statue, tell Ukraine’s President ‘you’re next’”, last modified on Dec. 9, 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine/protesters-fell-lenin-statue-tell-ukraines-president-youre-next-idUSBRE9B60DH20131209>, accessed on Jan. 10, 2018.

³⁹ Ian Traynor, Oksana Grytsenko, ‘Vladimir Putin tells Brussels to stay out of Ukraine’s political crisis’, last modified on Jan. 28, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/28/vladimir-putin-ukraine-crisis-eu>, accessed on March 3, 2018.

⁴⁰ Cross, M. K. D., Karolewski, I. P., ‘What type of power...’, 14-15; BBC News, ‘Ukraine Crisis: timeline’, Last modified Nov. 13, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26248275>, Accessed on Feb. 26, 2018.

⁴¹ Congressional Research Service, ‘Ukraine: current issues and U.S. Policy’, May 20, 2014.

countries in Europe, was seen as the most promising mediator.⁴² At the same time numerous American dignitaries travelled to Ukraine to express support for the protestors and to warn the Ukrainian government to show restraint with regard to the protesters, underlining the democratic principles of freedom of speech, press and assembly.⁴³ Riot police, sent to quell the disturbances, adhered to opposing principles. The protests were met with a violent response, which was quickly condemned by the US Secretary of State.⁴⁴ Throughout the course of the Euromaidan, the US kept expressing support and empathy for the protesters. Consequently, when disguised Russian forces took control of Crimea on Februari 27, President Obama released a statement to emphasize the US commitment to helping Ukraine stabilize as a country. The US was ‘deeply worried’, however, by Russian military movement in Ukraine and warns Russia that military intervention would not be without consequence. Obama mentioned the EU twice, once at the beginning and once more at the end, to emphasize the norm it expects its allies to adhere to.⁴⁵

The EU followed suit. In an extraordinary meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council on March 3rd, the ‘clear violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity by acts of aggression by the Russian armed forces’ was condemned. Accompanied by a warning that persisting ‘absence of de-escalating steps by Russia’ would determine the weight of European action against Russia.⁴⁶ The first step was to suspend preparations for the upcoming G8 summit in Russia, scheduled for June 2014. Besides indirectly through the mention of the G8-format, there is no reference to the US. The US position, however, is in line with the unilateral norm advocacy that Javier Argomaniz has observed to be an American strategy. In addition to that, regardless of Obama’s mentions of the EU, a last-minute meeting between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and US State Secretary John Kerry was organized in London on March 14. Although EU officials expressed disappointment in not having a seat at the table, working around the EU is one of the known strategies the US employs to secure their interests. Relations between the US and Europe largely followed familiar patterns in the phase leading up to the referendum of March 16.⁴⁷

This first phase is marked by a conflicted EU, in which it tries to maintain the peace through

⁴² Peter Baker, ‘Wary stance From Obama on Ukraine’, last modified on Feb. 24, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/25/world/europe/wary-stance-from-obama.html>, accessed on March 6, 2018.

⁴³ Kyiv Post, ‘Ambassador: US warns Ukrainian leadership against dispersing rally in Kyiv (Nov. 29, 2013).

⁴⁴ New York Times, ‘Kerry’s statement on Ukraine’ (Dec. 10, 2013).

⁴⁵ Obama White House Archives, ‘Statement by the President on Ukraine’, last modified on Feb. 28, 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/02/28/statement-president-ukraine>, accessed on March 29, 2018.

⁴⁶ Council of the European Union, ‘Foreign Affairs Council, Published 3 March 2014, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2014/03/03/>, Accessed on Feb. 6, 2018.

⁴⁷ Georgi Gotev, ‘EU shunned from US-Russia meeting on Ukraine’, last modified on March 14, 2014, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/eu-shunned-from-us-russia-meeting-on-ukraine/>, accessed on March 27, 2018.

dialogue. The US, on the other hand, is eager to sanction Russia in conjunction with the EU. The norms of freedom and democracy that both countries underline are the same, but Obama felt the need to urge his European counterparts to take action. These remarks are indicative of a worldview in which the US is in charge and the EU is expected to follow suit. The US has employed their signature divide-and-conquer strategy to coerce Europe to join them in sanctioning Russia. The EU has, however, managed to reject American pressure to sanction up to the moment Russia annexed Crimea. As the employed strategy did not net any results for the US, it was decided to once more work around Europe by meeting the Russian representative in a bilateral setting right before the referendum. The fact that the US effectively takes the EU out of the picture this way, is a constraint on the effectiveness of European foreign policy, which is in turn caused by a lack in coherence and effectiveness of the EU's foreign agenda. This somewhat vicious cycle was then broken when Russia took the initiative out of the hands of the member states.

3.2.1 The sanctions regime

The US and EU coordinated sanctions after the provisional Crimean government announced independence from Ukraine and requested for Russia to absorb Crimea. Obama's chosen strategy was to isolate Russia on the world stage. The sanctions regime was the means to this end. The EU, however, was initially more hesitant to sanction Russia. Due to its vicinity, close economic and political ties have emerged between the European continent and the bear in the east. When President Putin signed a law into effect absorbing Crimea, however, the EU had no choice but to act. The arguments the individual EU member states wielded show that two narratives prevailed. Those geographically close to Russia, such as former Warsaw Pact countries, defined the problem primarily in terms of security. Concerned NATO might not provide in these needs, they pushed for a strong reaction by the EU. The UK and Sweden pursued the same goal, out of solidarity with the formerly mentioned states. The two other great European powers, France and Germany, were initially more reluctant to pursue sanctions. France was about to sell two warships to Russia and Germany was internally divided over the right approach to Russia. The two countries have enjoyed a better relationship than any other western country has had with Moscow. As the US preferred European leadership in case of Ukraine, initial expectations for German leadership were high across the Atlantic. Chancellor Merkel stressed the need to reach a solution through diplomacy from the beginning, as she holds Moscow's ear in Europe. Fear of economic repercussions was a second motivator for peaceful conflict resolution, as the EU's economy is strongly connected to Russia.⁴⁸

American trade with Russia amounted to \$40 billion in 2012, which is significantly less than the EU's \$437 billion entanglement. When President Putin signed a law into effect to formally absorb

⁴⁸ Philipp Wittrock, Gregor Peter Schmitz, 'All eyes on Merkel', *Der Spiegel*, last modified on March 4, 2014, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/angela-merkel-plays-central-role-in-russia-diplomacy-over-crimea-a-956834.html>, accessed on March 12, 2018.

Crimea into the Russia, time was short. The EU acted swiftly and decisively, relying on consensus. One might expect the more ‘powerful’ member states of the EU to wield their influence to coerce their counterparts. In reality, these states underlined the need for decisions to be made in the context of the intergovernmental EU. Other scholars have noted that the crisis has served as an exercise in the building of trust between member states, which has the potential to inspire future cohesion.⁴⁹

The Foreign Affairs Council concluded on March 17 that the referendum was unconstitutional, citing authoritarian tactics used, such as media blackout and intimidation, as well as the unquestionable Russian presence in the area. The declaration was accompanied by sanctions against 21 Russian and Ukrainian officials in the form of asset freezes and travel bans.⁵⁰ The lists of names overlapped with that of the US. American sanctions, however, additionally targeted three Russians close to Putin the EU had omitted. In an effort to stabilize the political climate of Ukraine, the political provision of the Association agreement were signed shortly thereafter, on 21 March. Council President Van Rompuy issued a statement on the agreement, in which he underlines the EU’s commitment to the rule of law and stresses the fact that the economic parts of the agreement must follow shortly. Until these are signed, the EU agreed to open the European market to some extent to help the Ukrainian economy, simultaneously committing Ukraine to regional integration with the EU. The statement is a signal by the EU that it will not be bullied and is willing to counterweigh Russian geopolitics in a shared border region.⁵¹

3.2.2 Into the realm of economic sanctions

As Crimea became a part of Russia once more, a part of the population of the province of Donbass in eastern Ukraine, that holds a high percentage of the Russian speaking population, took to arms. Pro-Russian separatists took control of government buildings in early April 2014 and called for a referendum on joining Russia. Shortly thereafter, the secessionists declared the areas of Donetsk and Luhansk, two major cities in the area, to be independent from Ukraine and so the Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) and the Luhansk People’s Republic (LPR) were founded. Kiev responded by taking military action and the area quickly devolved into a battleground.⁵² In the meantime, Putin stationed 40.000 troops on the border with Ukraine and supplied weapons and troops to the separatists, while

⁴⁹ Michal Natorki, Karolina Pomorska, ‘Trust and Decision-making in Times of Crisis: The EU’s response to the events in Ukraine’, *Journal of Common Market Studies* 55 (2017) 1, 27-29, 66-67.

⁵⁰ Council of the European Union, ‘Council conclusions on Ukraine’, Last modified on March 17, 2014, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/141601.pdf, Accessed on Jan. 14, 2018.

⁵¹ Obama White House Archives, ‘Fact Sheet: Ukraine-related Sanctions’, Last modified March 17, 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/03/17/fact-sheet-ukraine-related-sanctions>, Accessed on Feb 6, 2018; Van Rompuy, H. (2014). Statement by President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy at the Occasion of the Signing Ceremony of the Political Provisions of the Association Agreement Between the European Union and Ukraine, Brussels, 21 March 2014, EUCO 68/14, Presse 176, PR PCE 61.

⁵² <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-rebels-insight/pushing-locals-aside-russians-take-top-rebel-posts-in-east-ukraine-idUSKBN0FW07020140727>;

denying any involvement. His strategy has been described as finding a ‘grey zone’ between evoking stringent economic sanctions and ‘muddying the waters’ in Ukraine.⁵³

Seeking to stabilize the situation, Germany initiated talks in Geneva between the EU, Russia, the US and Ukrainian representatives that took place on April 17th. Expectations were low going in, but after hours of deliberation an agreement was reached in this Geneva-format. In it the Ukrainian government promised to cease military action against protestors, pardon them and to increase the provinces’ independence from Kiev. Furthermore, the OCSE Special Monitoring Mission was determined to be the most suitable tool for de-escalation and would be expanded to aid the Ukrainian authorities. The agreement was accompanied by a western call for Russia, which had deployed troops along its border with Ukraine, to refrain from encouraging the separatists.⁵⁴

Fighting in the Donbass region continued nonetheless and frustration with the Russian involvement kept growing in the west. Merkel had warned Putin that continued lack of Russian backing of the agreement of 17 April would lead to further sanctions. The sanctions regime was consequently expanded to include more persons, but the EU remained hesitant to establish economic sanctions as it held to belief in a diplomatic solution. Fear for an economic backlash from Russia remained an important consideration as well. Simultaneously, the White House was split over how to approach Russia and its European allies. A modest increase in NATO presence and activity in the Baltic States and Poland was realised to reassure the member states.⁵⁵ Before that, Vice President Biden had visited Lithuania on March 19, to reaffirm the US’ commitment to NATO article 5, which states that an attack on one of the allies will be considered an attack on all allies. By doing so, the US sought to garner support for heavier sanctions by once more approaching the EU in a divide and conquer framework.⁵⁶ The EU’s reluctance in sanctioning Russia persevered, however, which was perceived to be a sign of weakness by some in the US’ State and Defence departments and these officials promoted heavier, unilateral sanctions by the US. The underlying assumption being that the EU required American leadership and would follow the American line eventually, as it ‘historically’ always had. Obama, however, decided a unified front on sanctions would represent a stronger message to Putin. An

⁵³ Geoff Dyer, Christian Oliver, “Quandary for West as Russia finds Sanctions ‘grey zone’”, last modified on April 15, 2014, <https://www.ft.com/content/8777fd52-c3ee-11e3-b2c3-00144feabdc0>, accessed on March 24, 2018.

⁵⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/17/ukraine-diplomats-meet-in-geneva-in-bid-to-ease-crisis-live-coverage?view=desktop#block-5350089ce4b056a9012cda6f>; Elizabeth Pond, Hans Kundnami, ‘Germany’s real role in the Ukraine crisis: caught between East and West’, *Foreign Affairs* 173 (2015) 94, 174-175.

⁵⁵ Mark Landler, ‘In Poland, Biden promises Allies Protection’, last modified on March 18, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/19/world/europe/ukraine-crisis-reaction.html>, accessed on March 20, 2018.

⁵⁶ Scott Wilson, ‘In Eastern Europe, Biden finds allies anxious about Russia, uncertain of U.S. commitment’, last modified on March 19, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/in-eastern-europe-biden-finds-uncertain-allies/2014/03/19/916ab67a-af66-11e3-a49e-76adc9210f19_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.9f62763c4918, accessed on April 3, 2018.

additional consideration was fear that cooperation with Russia on the Middle-East and Afghanistan would collapse.⁵⁷

US patience with its allies ran out the day before commercial airliner MH17 was shot down over Eastern Ukraine. On 16 July, President Obama announced a new round of sanctions, targeting the Russian economy more heavily by taking aim at large Russian corporations.⁵⁸ The decision to depart from the previous deference to European interests originated in intelligence findings that Russia was still providing material support and fighters to the separatists. Obama had shared these findings with European ambassadors hoping to spur his transatlantic counterparts into action. Still, the EU held back. The downing of flight MH17 over Ukraine brought about a change in attitude. Obama spoke of a wakeup call for Europe and stepped up the pressure on the EU to expand sanctions into the economic realm. The missile that had successfully hit the commercial airliner was fired from a rebel occupied area in the Donbass region. As it had already become apparent Russia was supplying arms and this particular weapon was of military grade, MH17 proved to many that Russia was staging an attack on Europe. On 27 July, the Council agreed on economic sanctions, once more in conjunction with the US. Meanwhile, the process of adopting the AA with Ukraine was still in motion. The plans were put on a 14 month hold, however, as per agreed between the EU, Russia and Ukraine.⁵⁹ A third wave of sanctions was finally introduced in December 2014. At the end of the year asset freezes and visa bans were in place on 132 persons and 28 companies from both Ukraine and Russia that were deemed to be involved in the violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity. Additionally, bans on loans to five major Russian banks, as well as energy and weapons related products were in place.⁶⁰

Sjursen and Rosén (S&J) have found that agreement on the EU's response was grounded in the understanding that 'fundamental principles of international law were breached', instead of in security concerns. As views aligned, the process of agreeing on the contents of the sanctions regime was influenced by the supranational institutions of the EU. The Commission provided the outline of the economic costs of sanctions per state and the EEAS prepared the list of people to be sanctioned. The involvement of these institutions as well as the time constraints they placed on member states facilitated agreement. Regardless of how agreement came about, it is clear that the EU prioritized presenting a strong unified front in the sanctioning of Russia. S&J conclude, however, that the cohesion in response

⁵⁷ Peter Baker, C. J. Chivers, 'U.S. weighs harder line on Russia than European allies', last modified on April 27, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/28/world/europe/a-white-house-split-over-russia.html>, accessed on March 22, 2018.

⁵⁸ The Guardian, 'Vladimir Putin condemns latest US sanctions against Russia', last modified on July 17, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/17/vladimir-putin-condemns-us-sanctions-against-russia>, accessed on March 29, 2018.

⁵⁹ <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-09-17/russia-blocking-a-free-trade-area-between-eu-and-ukraine>

⁶⁰ European Union Institute for Security Studies, *Do sanctions against Russia work?*, December 2014; Cross et al., 'What type of power...', 1, 5.

to the crisis is unique and that future crises are unlikely to provoke a similar response by the EU.⁶¹

NATO reassurance is the most likely reason for a decrease in direct security concerns among the concerned EU member states, which allowed the normative argument to prevail. Sjørnsen and Rosén show that the EU initially lagged behind because it was waiting to be sure about what was happening in Crimea. When the extent of Russian involvement became known it was the normative factor, the breach of Ukraine's sovereignty, that was decisive. American patience with the EU ran out right before the EU was forced to act. The fact that the US put economic sanctions in place before the EU did is another show of unilateral norm advocacy by the US. In addition it signifies a shift away from the strategy of engaging Europe through divide-and-conquer to one in which the US works around the EU, as was also observed in the final days before Crimea was annexed. The normative power relationship between the EU and US remains largely unchanged in the second phase of the conflict. The fact that the US decided to sanction Russia unilaterally, however, shows that the EU was still resisting American pressure to act. The final phase of the analysis concerns the way the EU has exercised power through its newfound unity.

3.3 European normative power in the context of Minsk II

The Geneva format that was formed in April 2014 was the first and unsuccessful attempt to solve the conflict in Eastern Ukraine on the international level. The US, Ukraine, Russia and the EU negotiated a treaty that rapidly collapsed. After learning the situation in Eastern Ukraine had once more deteriorated into chaos, the US started contemplating the option of sending offensive weaponry to Kiev to support the Ukrainian government in their fight against the secessionists. Up to that point, only defensive weapons, such as bullet proof vests and riot shields, had been donated to the Ukrainian military by the west. The fact that the rebels were heavily armed with modern weapons, which could only have come from Russia, however, sparked debate on expanding military support to include offensive weaponry. Especially in the US, many in the state department felt it was time to get more directly involved. Obama decided to take the careful route nonetheless and decided to wait. A second attempt to come to an arrangement was undertaken in early September. The Trilateral Contact Group consisting of representatives of Ukraine, Russia and the OCSE prepared a protocol and follow-up memorandum dubbed Minsk I. On 5 September Russia, Ukraine and representatives of the DPR and LPR signed these documents. The agreement was intended to be a cease-fire deal, but never came to fruition. The deal collapsed completely after a heated battle over Debaltseve in January 2015. In an attempt to prevent further escalation and as a reaction to American eagerness to send offensive weaponry into Eastern Ukraine, Germany and France presented a peace plan on February 7, 2015. The plan was largely based on the Minsk I agreement, which facilitated the return of Ukraine and Russia to the negotiation table, as they had set out these seemingly satisfactory terms before.⁶² Thus the third

⁶¹ Sjørnsen, Rosén, 'Arguing Sanctions...', 32-34.

⁶² BBC, "Ukraine Crisis: 'Last Chance' for Peace says Hollande", last modified on Feb. 7, 2015,

attempt to resolve the conflict was organized through the Normandy-format in February 2015, which had been set up in June 2014 to facilitate dialogue.⁶³ Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France negotiated new measures to combat the ongoing instability in the region. To add more weight to the agreement, the leaders of the respective countries negotiated the deal personally. The outcome, dubbed Minsk II, was a package consisting of 13 points to be implemented, of which a cease-fire was the first. The changes, such as de-armament and elections for rebel controlled areas, would be rolled out gradually, with the OCSE as the observing party. Realizing the value of this agreement as a diplomatic tool, the EU's heads of state decided to tie the lifting of sanctions against Russia to full implementation of the agreement. Interest in Minsk II was short-lived, however, in part due to the lack of an enforcement mechanism. Although some de-escalation was realized, most points have either been implemented partially or not at all.⁶⁴

It was Merkel's insistence on finding a diplomatic solution that kept Obama from going down this route.⁶⁵ The strategy of the German chancellor, however, also included opposition to a permanent NATO presence in the Baltic states. Instead she favoured exploring alternative strategies to find a balance between ensuring safety through NATO and antagonizing Russia by placing armed forces on their border.⁶⁶

The Minsk II agreement provided a spark of hope for resolving the conflict. The outcome, however, fell far short of the ambition. On June 22, half a year after the most recent expansion of sanctions, the Council decided to prolong the implemented sanctions by six months until January 31, 2016. Since the Minsk II protocol had not been fully implemented, the EU doubled down on their decision to make Minsk II the guidepost for any future lifting of sanctions. At the end of 2015 a resolution followed to once more extend the sanctions to a new deadline of 31 July, 2016. As other Western countries such as Canada and the US pursued similar strategies, a status quo was cemented. The EU has shown though to be able to think independently from the US in the case of Ukraine. The refusal to send offensive weaponry into Ukraine and instead enticing Russia and Ukraine into renewed negotiations proves that Europe can respond creatively to threats in its neighbourhood.⁶⁷

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31185027>, accessed on May 12, 2018.

⁶³ Cross et al. 6

⁶⁴ Hrant Kostanyan, Stefan Meister, 'Ukraine, Russia and the EU: Breaking the deadlock in the Minsk process', CEPS working document 423 (2016), 2-3.

⁶⁵ Shaun Walker, Alec Luhn, Spencer Ackerman, 'Ukraine: US considers military help for Kiev as separatists plan to mobilise army', last modified on Feb 2, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/02/ukraine-us-considers-military-help-kiev-separatists-plan-mobilise-army>, accessed on March 22, 2018.

⁶⁶ Deutsche Welle, 'No permanent NATO troop presence in Eastern Europe, Merkel says', last modified on Sept. 3, 2014, <http://www.dw.com/en/no-permanent-nato-troop-presence-in-eastern-europe-merkel-says/a-17897288>, accessed on April 3, 2018.

⁶⁷ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/12/21/russia-sanctions/>

3.4 The US returns to the limelight

As the Minsk II initiative proved ineffective, the US decided to get more directly involved. Although US-Russia relations were at a low point, Obama and Putin had reached a temporary agreement on the resolution of the conflict in Syria at the G20 summit in November 2015. Recognising the potential for a new Cold War, both leaders realised they could not ignore each other. On January 15, 2016, representatives of the US and Russia met to discuss the resolution of the Ukraine conflict. As the divide and conquer strategy proved ineffective and outsourcing to the EU had provided equally disappointing results, the US decided to go back to working around the EU. The cooperation between the US and the EU continues nonetheless. At the end of his term Obama made sure to express strong commitment, in unison with Europe's leaders, to keep sanctions in place, in the face of uncertainty with regard to Trump's positions on foreign policy. This act showcases the continued need for Europe to have a strong partner it can look up to and which it needs to further its own goals in the global theatre.⁶⁸

3.5 Conclusion

There is no doubt that the US has greatly influenced the development of post-Cold War Europe, some of it for the better, some of it for worse. The American insistence on increasing NATO in size, combined with its disdain for unfavourable regimes, are two of the core factors that forged the preconditions for the crisis in Ukraine. Some of the responsibility falls to the EU as well, which failed to understand Putin's worldview and encroached on Ukraine. Up to this point, the US' divide and conquer strategy had proven the most effective in dealing with the EU on Russia. The strong stance Merkel has taken and the decisiveness of the member states' reactions to Putin's transgressions, however, have shown that when it comes to their neighbourhood, the EU will take action, but on its own terms. The fact that the US preferred if the European leaders negotiated the issue and the absence of the US in the Minsk I and II proceedings is based in the offloading of responsibility to the EU. The Ukraine crisis had turned into a major obstacle in US-Russia relations and Germany and France were expected to solve this problem for their transatlantic partner. The reason to do so could be out of fear for a renewed Cold War, or simply for not wanting to take responsibility for a crisis they helped create. The member states of the EU have, however, displayed the ability to live up to the challenge. Although the effectiveness of the EU's actions in the Ukraine crisis remains up for debate, the unity that grew out of the crisis has certainly enabled Europe's normative power capabilities with regard to the US. This is the most apparent in the fact that Obama chose to postpone the decision to deliver offensive weaponry to Ukraine because of Merkel's insistence on diplomacy. The frequent changes in US strategy in engaging the EU additionally betray the frustration of not being able to get the EU to fall in line. The results of the European conflict resolution were not to Uncle Sam's liking either, however. So instead

⁶⁸ Melissa Eddy, Gardiner Harris, 'Obama and E.U. Leaders Agree to keep Sanctions on Russia', last modified on Nov 18, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/19/world/europe/obama-eu-sanctions-russia-ukraine.html>, accessed on May 11, 2018.

of working with Europe, the tactic of passing the EU by was employed once more in the end.

4. Conclusion

President Yanukovich could not have foreseen the amount of chaos his decision to decline the European Association Agreement would bring forth. The speed at which Ukraine was swept up in revolutionary elements, both those in favour of the EU, as well as the separatist movements that revealed themselves later, shows how deep the divides in this country really are. The EU tried to weave a web around itself of border states, bound by shared values and economic interests. It soon found itself up against the threat of an awoken bear, who had lain sleeping in the east.

NATO expansion, European efforts to spread its influence eastward and Putin's disillusionment with US commitment to the liberal world order it propagates, laid the foundations for what happened in Ukraine. The first and last of these factors illustrate the extent to which the US is responsible for this conflict. Because of the deplorable state of US-Russia relations, however, the task fell to Europe's leaders. It took some time to get to the tipping point nonetheless. Sanctions against persons were issued alongside the US, but America's patience ran out just before Europe became forced to act. The downing of flight MH17, combined with the certainty Russia was providing the rebels with support, proved to be the final push towards the next level of sanctions. The fact that Putin sees the world in realist terms, makes the realist conceptualization of spheres of influence the most suitable framework for studying and understanding Russia. The fact that the EU is willing to stand up to Russia in this matter over its neighbourhood, shows that Europe considers Ukraine vital to its own sphere of influence as well and is learning to exercise hard power.

In its relationship with the US, however, the use of hard power is not an option. Before the Ukraine crisis, the EU had little to no power capacity to coerce the US. As stated in the introduction is the EU mostly seen as an international actor that is characterized by its norms, but has little ability to exert purely normative power besides that. In its relationship to the US, material incentives and physical force were routes that were not open to the member states unfortunately. The US was certainly, based on Maersheimer's argument alone, in part responsible for creating the preconditions for the crisis. The responsibility for solving the crisis, however, is offloaded to the EU. The American unwillingness to take responsibility and be in control has proven a challenge to the member states. The advent of Merkel as lead mediator between the West and Russia, however, certainly tempered the flames. It was her insistence on diplomacy and her unique position to do so believably, that made Obama reconsider sending offensive military equipment into Ukraine in early 2015. This fact is the most telling of all, as it is an example of purely normative power being wielded by the EU to coerce the US into following Europe's lead. Throughout 2015 the conflict simmered, a status quo no one dared to touch. The parallel crisis in Syria, however, brought Putin and Obama back to speaking terms and consequently bilateral consultations on the conflict in Ukraine started early in 2016. This frequent changes in strategy

throughout the conflict demonstrate that the US attitude towards Europe is still a pragmatic one. The EU, however, has proven itself to be able to contend on the highest level of international politics through the exertion of normative power on its greatest and most stubborn ally. The scope of this research unfortunately does not allow for the studying of a greater amount of cases to determine the full range of effects the Ukraine crisis has had on European foreign policy and its potential to exercise normative power. Potential future research could focus on the role of trust between the EU and its allies and whether or not the normative power of the EU keeps increasing if the EU keeps being true to its word and ideals. Besides that, incorporating the respective relationships the EU and US have with Russia has the potential to shed further light on the full implications of the conflict for the EU.

It can by no means be concluded that the EU will be able to exercise this kind of power in the future. The trust the member states have shown each other, should be remembered. These steps towards greater self-reliance for the European continent have come at the right time, as the US' commitments to its allies are becoming more unpredictable in nature as the Trump presidency proceeds. With the US providing security through NATO, defence spending among the European countries has gone down significantly since the changing of the millennium. President Trump, however, has voiced a disinterest in NATO, calling the alliance 'obsolete'. He has also made attempts to spur NATO allies into paying their dues; the 2% of GDP that was agreed upon when NATO was founded. Trump has even gone as far as presenting the German chancellor Angela Merkel with a printed invoice regarding due payments for NATO – with added interest.⁶⁹ This newest chapter in American history has also brought the relationship between Russia and the West into a new light. The subversive nature of recent Russian foreign policy is giving rise to challenges within Western societies. The following years will be deciding in determining the success of the EU, as it will have to prove it is capable of taking on responsibilities associated with great powers, such as representing an ideal and facing off against other great powers to defend that ideal.

⁶⁹ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/donald-trump-angela-merkel-nato-bill-defence-ignore-usa-germany-spending-a7650636.html>.

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