

Stefano Marras

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Student number: 6887120

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Supervisor: Dr. Paschalis Pechlivanis

**A realist power? A neoclassical realist perspective of the EU Neighbourhood Policy toward
Ukraine**

“The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must”

Thucydides. History of the Peloponnesian War.

Abstract

This thesis offers a neoclassical realist perspective of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) toward Ukraine. The main purpose is to reach a better comprehension of its theoretical underpinnings and historical role in relation to the Ukrainian crisis of 2013-2014. By taking into consideration the analysis of the systemic and unit-level analysis alike, this framework allows a broader and more comprehensive inquiry. Hence in relation to the systemic level, this thesis suggests that the ENP is the result of materialistic structural factors. In terms of internal variables, it shows how the EU's strategic culture and member states have reinforced the structural realist underpinnings of the ENP. As a result and contrary to most of the literature on this subject, it is argued that the EU can act as a realist power, too.

List of abbreviations:

- AA: Association Agreement
- DCFTA: Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
- EaP: European Eastern Partnership
- ENP: European Neighbourhood Policy
- EU: European Union
- NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
- UfM: The Union for the Mediterranean
- USA: United States of America
- USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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Introduction

Historiography and research question

The EU Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is a foreign policy instrument initiated by the EU in 2004 in order to regulate and enhance the relations between the EU and its neighbouring countries across various domains. While it does not include membership association, it entails the application of an Association Agreement (AA), which is a legally binding accord that acts as the framework for bilateral diplomatic relationships. Although the EU has stipulated various AAs with many countries over the last decades, in relation to Ukraine its application had profound geopolitical consequences. In fact, under Russia's pressures, at the end of 2013 the prime minister of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich, abandoned the negotiations with the EU and refused to sign the deal. This sparked off massive protests all over the country forcing the prime minister to flee to Russia in 2014 and a new government that was in favour to sign the AA was installed in Kiev¹. This series of events in Ukraine also triggered an aggressive reaction by Moscow, which seized the Ukraine-owned peninsula of Crimea, and militarily backed Russian-speaking separatists in the eastern regions of the country². In addition, because of Russia's military involvement, relations between the West and Russia plummeted to the lowest point since the end of the Cold War. Considering the AA as one of the main causes of this conflict, this thesis examines the theoretical logic of the ENP in historical perspective. More precisely, it investigates the period from its inception in 2004 until the signing of the AA at the beginning of 2014³.

In academia the ENP is analysed under a variety of perspectives. For instance, Frank Schimmelfenning and Hanno Scholtz examine it as a policy for democracy promotion⁴. A similar approach is taken also by Hiski Haukkala, who combines the EU concept of normative power with that of regional hegemony⁵. On the other hand, E. Wesselink and RA. Boschma examine the ENP from an historical perspective⁶. However, what most of the scholarly literature on this subject overlooks is a realist perspective that focuses on the relationship between the self-interest

1 It was not the only cause of the Euromaidan revolution, but it was certainly the sparkle that initiated it.

2 These regions are the Donetsk and Luhansk, also sometimes generally called as the Donbass.

3 It is during this period that it is possible to study the causes of the ENP and the historical role of the various actors involved.

4 Frank Schimmelfenning and Hanno Scholtz, "EU Democracy Promotion in the European Neighborhood: Political Conditionality, Economic Development and Transnational Exchange," *European Union Politics* (2008).

5 Hiski Haukkala, "The European Union as a Regional Normative Hegemon: The Case of European Neighborhood Policy," *Europe-Asia Studies* (2008).

6 E. Wesselink and RA. Boschma, "Overview of the European Neighborhood Policy: its History, Structure, and Implemented Policy Measures," *Utrecht University Repository* (2012).

materialistic features of the ENP and the EU's relative power in the international system. Adrian Hyde-Price and Ross Smith are two of the few scholars who offer a realist-based analysis on ENP⁷. However, both inquiries still have their respective limitations since they are unable to offer an holistic representation of the EU's foreign policy. While Hyde-Price takes into consideration only how the international system affect the member states' foreign policy, Smith investigates the EU as a proper international actor without considering the role of the EU's countries.

In order to overcome the limitations posed by the aforementioned realist analysis, this thesis adopts a neoclassical realist perspective. This theoretical framework, in fact, is based upon the assumption that to understand a unit's foreign policy, it is necessary to study both the international system and the internal characteristics of the unit. Therefore, given the interstate nature of the EU, neoclassical realism is capable of analysing the agency of the EU and that of the member states, as well. Besides, with its focus on power, conflict and systemic factors, a realist perspective is better positioned than others frameworks to offer an original and different perspective of the ENP and the EU's foreign policy. It is not able to explain everything, but it enriches the understanding of this case study by highlighting some aspects that other approaches have not.

To conclude, by adopting neoclassical realism as the main framework, this thesis seeks to answer the following research question: from a theoretical perspective, what is the underlying logic of the ENP in relation to Ukraine⁸? By addressing this question, I intend to contribute to a better theoretical understanding of the ENP toward Ukraine and more generally of the EU's foreign policy. Hence, this thesis suggests that the EU has been motivated primarily by realist structural factors, which has resulted to a systemic clash with Russia over Ukraine.

Structure

This thesis is structured in three chapters. The first chapter outlines the neoclassical realist theoretical framework, posing the conceptual basis for the historical analysis in the subsequent two chapters. In addition to illustrate its main axioms and concepts, the suitability of this IR theory for the case study selected will be illustrated, particularly highlighting how it can be applied to a non-state actor such as the EU. The second chapter examines the ENP from a systemic perspective and the following questions will be addressed: how have changes in the international system after the

7 Adrian Hyde-Price, "Realism and the European Neighborhood Policy," in *The Routledge Handbook on the European Neighborhood Policy*, ed. Tobias Schumacher, Andreas Marchetti, Thomas Demmelhuber (2017); Nicholas R. Smith, *EU-Russian Relations and the Ukraine Crisis* (2016).

8 The question is not framed under the AA as this was included within the ENP, which represents a wider EU's policy.

Cold War affected the EU's foreign policy? Do the ENP and the AA respond to a realist logic? What has been the reaction of Russia and Ukraine? Finally, the third chapter inspects the ENP from a unit-level viewpoint. More specifically, it considers the EU's strategic culture, expressed in the form of liberal-democratic values, and the perceptions of the member states. Within it, a separate sub-chapter focuses on the role of Poland as it played an essential part in the development of the ENP. Thus, this chapter intends to address the following points: how the EU's strategic culture and the European member states have interacted with the systemic inputs? To what extent they have influenced the ENP and the AA? A final conclusion critically summarizes the main content and findings as well as reflecting on some further research on this topic.

Historical sources and methodology

In terms of historical sources, this thesis relies both on primary and secondary sources. In terms of secondary sources, academic articles and books on the ENP and on the EU's foreign policy toward Ukraine constitute the main basis for this research. Primary sources include online statements and documents that outline the official position of the relevant actors in relation to the selected case study. The text of the AA is the cornerstone of the historical analysis as it contains all the provisions of the accord and hence what it entails in realist terms. In addition, other important documents such as the European Security Strategy and the ENP framework are being referred to, as they provide insights to the EU's geopolitical outlook and can be integrated in the historical analysis. Regarding the individual countries, the websites of the foreign ministry of Russia, Ukraine and Germany are consulted, along with that of the Visegard Group⁹. Besides, media outlets such as Euroactiv, The New York Time, The Economist and Politico Europe are useful resources, as they conduct interviews and report on speeches and statements by various politicians. Finally, the World Bank website together with the database of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) have provided data and valuable information on various indicators of power, such as GDP, demographic and military expenditure.

However, all of these sources have not been taken at face value, but they have been analysed critically. Public statements, documents, speeches and interviews are in fact produced with the awareness that the general public and foreign countries will be able to read them, too. In addition to the diplomatic tone that is used in these primary documents, other motives and potential hostility and tensions between countries might have been concealed. Hence, a critical analysis and the core

⁹ The websites of Poland's government and foreign ministry were not investigated as I did not find any online sources in relation to the historical period taken in consideration in this thesis.

assumptions of neoclassical realism have been used to interpret the aforementioned historical sources. By doing so, this thesis combines the nomothetic approach of an IR theory with the idiographic strength of international history¹⁰. Therefore, on one hand, this thesis offers broad generalisations and highly theoretical elaborations for the purpose of developing a grand narrative that goes beyond the surface of the events. On the other hand, historical contingencies and a richness of details have been included too in order to show historical processes and avoid ill-suited anachronisms.

10 See George Lawson, "The Eternal Divide? History and International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations* (2010); John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (2004).

1)The Theoretical Framework

Which theory for the EU

Since its inception in 2004, the ENP has been an object of academic investigation by scholars of different disciplines. Various approaches, such as foreign policy analysis (FPA), international relations (IR) and historical studies, have contributed to its development as a separate field of research within the wider EU and European studies. Such eclecticism is due to the different and competing EU policy areas involved in the ENP as well as by the plurality of aspects and actors it engages¹¹. As Tobias Schumacher explains “the ENP features a unique combination of characteristics that are at the heart of multiple and diverse research agendas”¹². In turn, this complexity urges the adoption of a comprehensive approach which takes into consideration the multi-faceted aspects of the ENP. Mainstream IR theories, such as constructivism, liberalism and realism together with traditional European integration theories (intergovernmentalism and institutionalism), constitute the main theoretical and methodological lenses which have been used to explain the ENP and more in general the EU's foreign policy¹³. However, since they focus only on some of the ENP's characteristics, they do not have the explanatory capability to capture its complexity and fluidity.

For instance, constructivism focuses primarily on ontological research in the attempt to conceptualise what type of power the EU is. In addition, it interprets diplomatic relations between the EU and its neighbours as socially constructed and value-based, overlooking the role of material factors and distancing itself from the empirical analysis¹⁴. As Ross Smith argues “Constructivist studies of the EU's foreign policy tend to be overwhelmingly concept-heavy and empirically bereft, producing a body of literature more concerned with understanding what the EU is rather than explaining what the EU does”¹⁵. In fact, constructivist-oriented concepts such as that of normative

11 Theofanis Exadaktylos, “Methodological and Theoretical Challenges to the Study of the European Neighborhood Policy,” in *The Routledge Handbook on the European Neighborhood Policy*, ed. Tobias Schumacher, Andreas Marchetti, Thomas Demmelhuber (2017).

12 Tobias Schumacher, “The European neighborhood Policy”, in *The Routledge Handbook on the European Neighborhood Policy*, ed. Tobias Schumacher, Andreas Marchetti, Thomas Demmelhuber (2017), 3.

13 Federica Bicchì, “Defining European Interests in Foreign Policy: Insights from the Mediterranean Case,” *Centre for the Analysis of Political Change* (2003).

14 See Petr Kratochvil and Elsa Tulmets, “Constructivist Approaches to the Study of the European Neighborhood Policy,” in *The Routledge Handbook on the European Neighborhood Policy*, ed. Tobias Schumacher, Andreas Marchetti, Thomas Demmelhuber (2017)

15 Smith, *EU-Russian Relations and the Ukraine Crisis*, 13.

power with its exclusive focus on the role of values and ideas, have proved to be unsuccessful to explain the EU's behaviour in an holistic way¹⁶. Hence, constructivism cannot be regarded as a comprehensive theoretical framework suitable for the purpose of this thesis as it over relies on one aspect of international politics, while neglecting others. Neoliberalism too, due to its emphasis on inter-state cooperation and the inclusion of non-state actors, has been widely used in relation to the EU¹⁷. However, because of its feasibility chiefly on issues of cooperation and complex interdependence, neoliberalism is ill-suited for historical cases like this one, where power and security are the central elements. As Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane argue: “before one decides what explanatory model to apply to a situation or problem, one will need to understand the degree to which realist or complex interdependence assumptions correspond to the situation¹⁸. This implies that different case studies require different theoretical frameworks. Finally, concerning neorealism, the major flaw of this theory is the exclusive focus on structural factors. By failing to take into consideration a unit's internal characteristics, neorealism is limited in its ability to examine all the intricacies and complexity of the ENP¹⁹.

Similarly, European integration theories do not take into consideration the whole range of actors and issues of the ENP. As a case in point, institutionalist theories perceive the EU as an international actor, in which the European Commission (EC) overrides the member states and 'constrain' them to adopt some policies they would likely not have agreed upon by themselves²⁰. In doing so, they neglect the agency of the member-states in influencing and directing the EU's policies, making this approach too simplistic²¹. On the other hand, intergovernmentalism similar to realism, asserts that member states are the primary drivers of the EU. Decisions are taken through bargaining process in which the member states try to pursue their own interest in accordance to their relative power²². Thus, it understands the agency of the EU as a simple pawn in the hands of the member states. This way though, it overlooks the role of the EC and of the European Parliament (EP) in formulating the EU's policy as well as the existence in certain cases of some common European interests derived

16 Ian Manners, “Normative Power Europe: a Contradiction in Terms?” *Journal of Common Market Studies* (2002).

17 See Dorothee Bohle, “Neoliberal Hegemony, Transnational Capital and the Terms of the EU's Eastward Expansion,” *Capital & Class* (2006); Bicchi Federica, Gergana Noutcheva, Benedetta Voltolini, “The European Neighborhood Policy between Bilateralism and Region-Building,” in *The Routledge Handbook on the European Neighborhood Policy*, ed. Tobias Schumacher, Andreas Marchetti, Thomas Demmelhuber (2017); Bernd Weber, “The European Neighborhood Policy and Energy,” in *The Routledge Handbook on the European Neighborhood Policy*, ed. Tobias Schumacher, Andreas Marchetti, Thomas Demmelhuber (2017).

18 Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence* (2011), 11.

19 Hyde-Price, “Realism and the European Neighborhood Policy”.

20 Smith, *EU-Russian Relations and the Ukraine Crisis*.

21 Amelia Hadfield, “EU Member States and the European Neighborhood Policy,” in *The Routledge Handbook on the European Neighborhood Policy*, ed. Tobias Schumacher, Andreas Marchetti, Thomas Demmelhuber (2017).

22 Andrew Moravcsik, *The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messina To Maastricht* (1998).

from shared systemic pressure.

As a result, considering the limited explanatory power of the aforementioned theories, I argue that neoclassical realism is a more suitable framework for the purpose of this thesis. The reasons for this choice lay both in its epistemological and ontological status. In fact, neoclassical realism's main feature is the inclusion of systemic and unit-level of analysis, which leads to a more comprehensive and nuanced examination of a political unit's foreign policy²³.

In other words, in relation to the EU neoclassical realism is capable of showing the importance of the EU as a proper international agent with its own level of actorness, as well as the role of the member states. Therefore, while the EU is analysed from a systemic perspective and treated as a proper actor within the international system, the member states are part of the unit-level of analysis. In this way, it is possible to overcome the limits of neorealism, intergovernmentalism and institutionalism, as they only focus on the unit-level analysis. Besides and in contrast to constructivism, neoclassical realism includes both ideational and materialistic factors, and thus it widens the analytical perspective. In ontological terms, neoclassical realism is more similar to other realist strands as it holds a pessimist view of the world, in which conflict and competition are recurring and systematic features²⁴. Hence, considering the clashing elements and the power dynamics present in the case study, this framework is more suitable than the neoliberalism's focus on cooperation. By incorporating all these elements, which other theories analyse separately, neoclassical realism offers a broader understanding of international politics outcomes and foreign policy alike. In other words, it is capable of taking into consideration the various actors and issues involved in the ENP while showing its deep theoretical underpinnings. Finally, through the double analysis of structural and domestic factors, neoclassical realism is the theoretical framework closer to historical analyses as it gives great importance to historical contingencies and accidents²⁵. Hence, it fits well the aforementioned purpose of this thesis to connect IR with international history.

Neoclassical realism

The main feature of neoclassical realism is the combined analysis of the international system and

23 William Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions during the Cold War* (1993); Randall L. Schweller, "New Realist Research on Alliances," *American Political Science Review* (1997); Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics* (1998); Norrim M. Ripsam et al., *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (2016).

24 Ripsam, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*.

25 Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy".

domestic variables, which produces a better understanding of a unit's foreign policy. It differs from classical realism and neorealism as they only focus on one level of analysis²⁶. In fact, neoclassical realism was developed to correct this intrinsic flaw and thus it attempts to provide a stronger framework which is capable of offering a more articulated and holistic perspective. Hence, any neoclassical realist research begins with the analysis of the international system. By examining its structure and historical evolution, it is possible to understand the incentives and constraints a given actor is subjected to. Thereafter, neoclassical realism takes into consideration the internal characteristics of the political entity in question so as to investigate how it responded to the systemic inputs²⁷.

Power, expansionism and the international system

In relation to the international system, it is conceived to be structurally anarchical since there is not an higher authority that can establish rules and laws to be respected by the various political actors. This is because the various political units within the international system do not recognize the other's authority above their own. At the same time international organizations such as the UN lack the power to enforce international rules and norms. Hence, the net result of this state of affair is the creation of an inherent self-help system, where the units are independent, they do not know others' intentions and they maintain some offensive military capabilities²⁸.

Subsequently, this self-help environment generates fear and distrust among political actors, making survival their main national interest. This, in turn, is guaranteed by considering the distribution of power in the system. Hence, depending on how it is distributed among the political units, the international system can be: unipolar, bipolar or multipolar²⁹. Besides, these distributions of power change constantly due to different economic growth among the political units of the system³⁰. The importance of the economy in determining one's power is an argument sustained by Kenneth Waltz too. In 1994 he claimed that "as military worries fall, economic worries rise. Competition continues, and conflict turns increasingly on technological and economic issues. Conflict grows all the more easily out of economic competition because economic comparisons are easier to make than military

26 In IR these different levels of analysis are also called images. In total three images have been analysed: the leader's role, the structure of the political unit and the effects of the international system. See Kenneth Waltz, *Man, The State, and War*, (1959).

27 Ripsam, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*.

28 John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (2001); there are contrasting views among realists on which one of these international systems is more peaceful. For instance, according to John Mearsheimer and Kenneth Waltz, bipolarism confers a higher degree of stability since the two powers check on each other. Conversely, for Robert Gilpin, unipolarity is the most peaceful and secure system.

29 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (1979).

30 Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, (1981).

ones...Decreases concern over security translates directly into increased concern over economic competitiveness³¹. In fact, although most realists sustain that military strength constitute the ultimate parameter to measure one's power, they agree that this form of power is ultimately dependent on economic strength. Considering that any national power is based on the economy, the wealthier a political unit is, the bigger the resources that can be mustered in foreign policy³². This does not mean that military power is altogether out of the equation. Only that its existence rests and depends on economic growth, which as such becomes the primary underpinning for a country's power and one of the chief parameter to any measurement of this type. In this way it is also possible to overcome the hiatus between low and high politics, which Waltz considered "misplaced", since the two elements are strictly interlinked³³. Therefore, neoclassical realism perceives interests and power in materialistic terms, while idealistic notions are less important. More importantly, it conceives these elements as the result of systemic change.

In order for political units to survive, in fact, it is essential for them to adjust their foreign policy according to the distribution of power. As Gideon Rose puts it "the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities"³⁴. Although there are many types of actions a political unit can undertake, in relation to the case study this framework considers only the expansionist policy³⁵. Neoclassical realism claims that since political units always seek for power and security maximisation and milieu shaping to guarantee their survival, a decline of a unit's power stimulates the other political units to augment their share of power³⁶. When outlining the basic principles of neoclassical realism, Rose claims that "an increase in relative material power will lead eventually to a corresponding expansion in the ambition and scope of a country's foreign policy activity and that a decrease in such power will lead eventually to a corresponding contraction"³⁷. Similarly, Mearsheimer argues that "the international system creates powerful incentives for states

31 Kenneth Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *Quarterly Journal: International Security* (1994) 66.

32 Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*; Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers* (1987).

33 Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," 63; Low politics deals with issues that are not vital to the survival of the state, such as the economy. While high politics regards all matters concerning security and conflict. However, since in order to conduct military missions it is necessary to have a strong economy, the two elements cannot be disjoint.

34 Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," 146.

35 The other two realist policies are balancing and bandwagoning, are the opposite of expansionism. In relation to balancing, the main purpose is to counterbalance a political unit with larger resources as this might represent a threat. On the other hand, when a country bandwagons, it aligns with the more powerful actor and not against it, since it is too weak to balance against the potential threat

36 Ripsam, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*.

37 Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy" 167.

to look for opportunities to gain power at the expense of rivals”³⁸. This argument is echoed by Gilpin too, who argues that “any development that increases the power and enlarges the opportunity of a state to increase its revenues will encourage political or economic expansion”³⁹. Hence, when having an incentive, governments always try to enhance their relative power within the international system in political or economic terms. By augmenting its share of power in the system, in fact, a political unit can better guarantee its survival and protect its interests. The best way to achieve that, according to neoclassical realism, is to become a global or regional hegemony. To be qualified as an hegemon, a unit needs to have the wherewithal to dominate the system and it cannot be challenged by other actors⁴⁰. Hence, depending if the system is considered in regional or global terms, one can be either a regional or global hegemon.

However, it is also important to note that sometimes countries do not attempt to expand their power and to achieve regional and global hegemony. This is because countries are supposed to act in a rational way by weighing the pros and cons. If the perceived costs are considered too high, the leaders prefer to maintain the status-quo. Yet, even by assuming that countries always act according to this rational logic, positive outcomes are not guaranteed and miscalculations can always occur. This is due primarily by the lack of perfect information, which can induce countries to embark on foreign policies, that considered to be perfectly rational at a given time, they might successively result to be a blunder and a fundamental strategic mistake⁴¹.

The unit-level variables

As mentioned previously, in addition to the analysis on international system, neoclassical realism regards an investigation on the internal factors as equally important. Indeed, systemic effects can be best described as to 'shove and shape' one's action. They do not results in a deterministic foreign policy since other domestic elements influence the formation of foreign policy. For neoclassical realists “there is no immediate or perfect transmission belt linking material capabilities to foreign policy behaviour”⁴². This point is also sustained by Gilpin and Waltz⁴³. Therefore, in order to develop a theoretical framework equipped with higher explanatory capabilities, neoclassical realism adds the unit-level analysis as a further layer in the academic research.

38 Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 11.

39 Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 53.

40 Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.

41 Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.

42 Rose, ““Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy”, 147.

43 Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*; Kenneth Waltz, “*International Politics is not Foreign Policy*” in *Security Studies* (2007); Waltz, however, never included domestic variables in his studies, claiming that his theory was just about international politics outcomes and not foreign policy.

Indeed, for neoclassical realism, only by looking at the different domestic variables and how the systemic stimulus are filtered and perceived by the internal features of the political units is possible to understand one's foreign policy⁴⁴. One of the main interpretations of the internal variables is offered by Ripsam et al, who in their seminal work have identified four of the most used unit-level variables in the scholarly literature: images and perceptions of state leaders, the strategic culture, state-society relations, and domestic institutional arrangements⁴⁵. Among these, two internal factors have been considered suitable for the EU and capable of shedding new light on this topic: the strategic culture and the leaders' perceptions.

In terms of strategic culture, this thesis refers to a set of beliefs, ideologies, shared expectations and world views embedded in a given political unit. These elements are deeply entrenched in the physical institutions and in the society at large. The strong influence of strategic culture on actions carried out by a political unit is highlighted by Ripsam et al: “policy makers will choose to frame, adjust, and modify strategic choices to reflect culturally acceptable preferences to maintain domestic political support”⁴⁶. Therefore, the strategic culture defines what is deemed acceptable and unacceptable, thence limiting the possibilities of actions by the political actor. Besides, given the non-materialistic nature of this variable, it is possible to examine and include ideational factors, too.

With regards to the perception of state leaders, considering the supranational nature of the EU, the focus of this framework has been adjusted and redirected to the member-states' role and perceptions⁴⁷. More precisely, this thesis analyses how different member states have perceived the systemic incentives and what role they have played in the formulation of the ENP. Here, the realist-oriented concepts of balance of threat and geopolitical lessons are particularly useful, as they shine light on how the EU member states perceive the systemic inputs. According to the former notion, a given country perceives a threat, not only by considering the distribution of power, but also according to three other parameters: geographical proximity, offensive capabilities and offensive intentions. The first parameter relates to geopolitics. The closer a unit is to a more powerful country, the bigger the potential for a threat. Offensive capabilities gives more importance to those elements of a country capable to cause considerable damage to others. Finally, some states might appear

44 Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy”.

45 Ripsam, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*.

46 Ripsam, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 9.

47 This is possible also because as Ripsam et al. explain neoclassical realism can modelled to meet one's specific academic requirements. Hence, there are many empirical variants of this theory.

more aggressive than others because of their actions and/or public narrative are considered to be potentially dangerous⁴⁸.

On the other hand, the concept of geopolitical lessons rests on the assumption that past events are crucial elements in influencing the countries' perceptions in a given geopolitical situation. As Larseen argues “History is the single most important point of departure for the national interpretative element of foreign objective events”⁴⁹. As this applies both to negative and positive experiences, its political effects can either result in expansionist or restraining policies⁵⁰. As a result, the strategic culture and nations' perceptions (understood through the concepts of balance of threat and geopolitical lessons) constitute the domestic variables that have interacted with the systemic stimulus and have shaped the EU's response to these inputs.

The EU and realism

Some scholars may argue that due to the ontological status of the EU, neoclassical realism cannot be applied to this case. In fact, the EU is usually considered by the scholarly literature as a political actor antithetic to realist dictates, and that privileges the adoption of a value-based policy and soft-power instruments. As Hyde-Price claims “since the end of the Cold War, liberal and idealist notions have shaped much of the discourse of European Studies and International Relations”, which “regard the EU as a novel and uniquely benign entity in international politics which serves as the harbinger of a Kantian foedus pacificum”⁵¹. This point is further supported by John Mearsheimer, who argues that “whatever merits Realism may have as an explanation for real-world politics and as a guide for formulating foreign policy, it is not a popular school of thought in the West. Realism's central message - that it makes good sense for states to selfishly pursue power - does not have broad appeal”⁵². As a consequence, alternative concepts have been developed in order to explain the EU's foreign policy character. In particular, the notion of normative power, according to which the EU tries to achieve its foreign policy goals through the power of ideas and norms has enjoyed great popularity⁵³.

Despite these views, this thesis argues for a different interpretation of the EU. Even if the EU's

48 Stephen M. Walt, “Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power”, *International Security* (1985).

49 Henrik B.L. Larsen, *NATO's Democratic Retrenchment* (2020) 39.

50 Larsen, *NATO's Democratic Retrenchment*.

51 Adrian Hyde-Price, “Normative Power Europe: a realist critique”, *Journal of European Public Policy* (2006) 217.

52 Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 12.

53 Manners, “Normative Power Europe”.

rhetoric and self-perception hint toward non-realist policies, if analysed critically, in practice it has often acted differently, and thus reflecting a gap between the political declaration and the actual implementation of its foreign policy. A point made also by Mearsheimer, who claims that in the West “behind closed doors... the elites who make national security policy speak mostly the language of power, not that of principle”⁵⁴. This argument is also supported by some recent research that suggest a realist-oriented behaviour of the EU in some cases. For instance Hubert Zimmermann and Maria Garcia analyse how the EU market policy has been determined by a realist logic instead of idealistic notions⁵⁵. Similarly, Sven Biscop argues that often material interests have been more important than values and norms⁵⁶. Therefore, this thesis argues that despite the claim and the public narrative of the EU as a sui generis power bent on promoting peace and liberal values, in some cases the EU might behave similarly to other international actors as it too seeks to selfishly protect its own interests. The selected case study in this thesis, which shall be discussed in the following chapter, reveals the materialistic concerns of the EU, namely stability, security and power.

In addition, some might argue against the application of neoclassical realism on the EU because they regard this institution as a non-state actor. This is because nation states are considered to be the primary actors of international politics, and entities such as the EU are considered to be merely pawns which countries exploit to further their own interests. However, considering the peculiar legal development of the ENP, and drawing from Ross Smith's academic research as well as on the existing literature on the EU's actorness, this thesis argues that neoclassical realism can be applied to the EU, too⁵⁷.

In fact, the ENP is a foreign policy produced by a multiplicity of actors within the EU's institutions. For instance, the EC, and in particular the DG External Relations and Enlargement, the EU High Representative and the member states have all participated, albeit at varying degrees. Above all, the EC and the member states were the most important actors in its development and management⁵⁸. The EP played an important role too, acting as promoter of the EU's common interests as well as unifier among the various member states⁵⁹. Besides, while the EU external actions are usually

54 Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 13.

55 Hubert Zimmermann, “Realist Power Europe? The EU in the Negotiations about China's and Russia's WTO Accession”, *Journal of Common Market Studies* (2007); Maria Garcia, “From Idealism to Realism? EU Preferential Trade Agreement Policy”, *Journal of Contemporary European Research* (2013).

56 Sven Biscop, “The ENP, Security, and Democracy in the Context of the European Security Strategy” in *The European Neighborhood Policy In Perspective* (2010).

57 Smith, *EU-Russian Relations and the Ukraine Crisis*.

58 George Christou, “European Union Security Logics to the East”, *European Security* (2010) 420.

59 Marise Cremona and Christophe Hillion, “L'Union fait la Force? Potential and Limitations of the European Neighborhood Policy as an Integrated EU Foreign and Security Policy” *EUI LAW Working Paper* (2007) 14.

divided and assigned across three different pillars the ENP comprises all of them⁶⁰. According to Schumacher the ENP “sits on the fence between the EU’s internal and external dimension and transcends the intergovernmentalism–supranationalism divide”⁶¹. Therefore, from a bureaucratic-legalistic point of view, the ENP can be best described as the product of different European agents. This includes first and foremost the nation states, but not exclusively as the EC and other actors have played an important role too, then strengthening the Europeanness of the ENP.

In addition, Smith successfully demonstrates how neoclassical realism can be applied to the EU as “in certain geopolitical context is susceptible to systemic and material drivers of foreign policy”⁶². In particular, border management is one of those issues that affects the EU as a whole and for which it is possible to talk of EU's interests, although different member states have different degrees of exposure⁶³. In other words, in some cases every member state is subjected to the same systemic pressures, which in turn compel them to respond together (through the EU) to these inputs. This entails the development of some some sort of (pan)European interests in addition to the national interests of the member states⁶⁴.

Finally, to further support the realist case for the EU is the concept of European actorness, which was developed for the first time by Gunnar Sjostedt in the late 70s. It is based on the conceptualisation of the EU as a proper international actor which therefore should be analysed as full-fledged nation states⁶⁵. Following Sjostedt, a wide array of other scholars have further contributed to investigate the EU's actorness, both empirically and theoretically. However, a literature review of this concept evades the scope and scale of this thesis. As a result, it will just be claimed that this thesis adopts the concept of EU's actorness understood as “the capacity to behave actively and deliberately in relation to other actors in the international system”⁶⁶. This ability has been further strengthened after the Lisbon treaty in 2007, when the EU acquired a legal status which conferred it legal personality and it allowed it to be a full-fledged member of international organisations. This legitimacy has authorised the EU to sign international treaties and deals with other external actors,

60 Guillaume Van Der Loo, Peter Van Elsuwege, Roman Petrov, “The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement: Assessment of an Innovative Legal Instrument”, *EUI Department of Law* (2014); The first pillar includes economic, energy, social and environmental matters; the second, concerns issues of foreign policy and security, while the third pillar is about terrorism and organised crime.

61 Schumacher, “The European Neighborhood Policy”, 3.

62 Smith, *EU-Russian Relations and the Ukraine Crisis*, 20.

63 Andre Barrinha, “Progressive realism and the EU's international actorness”, *Journal of European Integration* (2016).

64 Adrian Hyde-Price, “Interests, Institutions, and Identities in the study of European Foreign Policy”, in *Rethinking European Union Foreign Policy*, ed. Ben Tonra and Thomas Christiansen (2014) 102.

65 Gunnar Sjostedt, *The external role of the European Community* (1977)

66 Sjostedt, *The external role of the European Community*, 16.

hence recognizing it as a proper entity of the international system⁶⁷. As a case in point, in this case study Ukraine recognized the EU's agency by dealing with it as a proper legal actor. To conclude, as Otto Holman argues “it is clear that we cannot interpret the EU in traditional, foreign-policy terms as a political actor comparable to sovereign states... Nonetheless, the EU does possess actorness, and increasingly so”⁶⁸.

67 Kateryna Koehler, “European Foreign Policy after Lisbon”, *Caucasian Review of International Affairs* (2010).

68 Otto Holman, *Global Europe: The External Relations of the European Union* (2019) 67-68.

2)The EU and the systemic level

The European order after the Cold War

The first and most important political development to take into consideration when examining the international order in the 21st century is the dissolution of the Soviet Union (USSR), which led to a profound alteration in the distribution of power at the international and regional levels. More precisely, it left the USA as the only superpower in the world, causing in the early 90s and 2000s the international system to change from bipolarity to unipolarity⁶⁹. This is reflected both in economic and military terms, where the US trumped all other countries by a large margin. In 2008, at the peak of American supremacy and before the economic crisis, the USA had a GDP of \$14,713 trillion, second only to that of the EU and much bigger than that of Japan, the third economy in the world⁷⁰. However, in contrast with the EU, the USA was a full-fledged country with powerful and experienced armed forces at its disposal. In addition to control over 800 military bases overseas, a number by far superior than any other nation, the USA in 2008 had a military expenditure of over \$621,131 billion⁷¹. By comparison, in the same year, the second strongest military power in financial terms, the People's Republic of China, spent only \$86,372 billion⁷².

This US's primacy in the international system has been reflected on its foreign policy. According to realists, in fact, in the last century the USA main realist interest has been to prevent other powers to become regional hegemonies in their respective areas of interest. This proactive policy has been directed toward the European continent, east Asia and the Persian Gulf, where the concentration of power by just one polity could eventually create a peer to the USA⁷³. Thus, for realists, the USA's intervention in the two World Wars, as well as its engagement with the USSR, have been motivated chiefly by the strategic goal of preventing the European continent and the whole Eurasia landmass to be dominated by one single powerful country, which would pose a security threat to the USA⁷⁴.

69 Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of great Power Politics*; Joseph S. Nye, "American strategy after bipolarity", *International Affairs* (1990); Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment", *Foreign Affairs* (1990); This unipolarism is considered now questioned due to the rise of China and other countries. See Christopher Layne, "This Time it's Real: The End of Unipolarity and the Pax Americana", *International Studies Quarterly* (2012); Graham Allison, "The New Spheres of Influence" *Foreign Affairs* (2020).

70 The World Bank, "GDP Japan, United States" 1965-2015.

71 David Vine, "Where in the world is the U.S. Military?" *POLITICO Magazine*, (2015); The World Bank, "Military Expenditure USA" 1960-2015.

72 The World Bank, "Military Expenditure China", 1960-2015.

73 Regarding the Persian Gulf, the discussion revolves more around the importance of the energy supplies, rather than the emergence of a peer power of the USA.

74 Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.

However, with the dissolution of the USSR in the early 90s, the USA's strategic interest on the European continent has weakened, at least until the Ukrainian crisis⁷⁵. The most significant example of this occurrence has been a downsize of the American military presence in Europe by more than 85%⁷⁶. Yet Washington has kept a significant military and political presence in the European continent since the stabilization and security of Europe continues to be a vested American interest⁷⁷. The main difference to the previous period is that with a lower USA's engagement, European countries and the EU had to take more responsibility, especially in relation to regional issues. As a consequence, while NATO and the USA continued to be the main security guarantor of Europe, the EU acquired an important role too in the geopolitical stabilization of the central and eastern parts of the continent⁷⁸. This was pursued in various ways and above all through the EU incorporation of the former socialist countries within the EU's institutions⁷⁹.

Therefore, in the 90s and 2000s, as it obtained new responsibilities in the ordering of the European geopolitical space as well as increasing by a large margin its share of power through an expansion eastward, the EU underwent profound changes which affected its position in the regional system⁸⁰. This was possible chiefly through the economic power the EU wields which has been used especially in trade negotiations where the EU could exploit its large market to impose its own conditions and exert influence on third actors⁸¹. Indeed, in terms of GDP, the EU has been the biggest economic power from 2003 to 2014, when the USA surpassed it. In 2008, at the zenith of its power, the EU had a GDP of \$19,157 trillion, while in the same year, Russia's economy was only \$1,661 trillion⁸². As a result, this thesis argues that the EU not only acquired a more important role because of geopolitical events, but it has also enjoyed a regional dominance in economic terms since the 90s⁸³. Nonetheless, it is important to note that these economic indicators need to be analysed critically when making these comparisons. Especially in relation to the EU, which because of its institutional structure, could not translate its large economic resources into political power. Furthermore, considering the bureaucratic nature of the EU, the unanimity-process on foreign

75 Stephen M. Walt, "The Ties that Fray. Why Europe and America are drifting apart", *The National Interest* (1999).

76 U.S. European Command, "U.S. Military Presence in Europe (1945-2016)".

77 John S. Duffield, "NATO's Functions after the Cold War", *Political Science Quarterly* (1995).

78 Hyde-Price, "Normative Power Europe: a realist critique".

79 Hyde-Price, "Normative Power Europe: a realist critique"; In 2004 Cyprus, Poland, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Slovakia and Slovenia joined the EU, while in 2007 it was the turn of Bulgaria and Romania.

80 However, it is always important that the EU did not act as a lone wolf in this process. The USA, although less present compared to the Cold War-period, was an active and important actor, too.

81 To better understand this form of power, the concept of Market Power by C. Damro (2012) is particularly useful.

82 The World Bank, "GDP European Union, Russian Federation, Ukraine, USA", 1965-2015.

83 Kristi Raik, "The EU as a Regional Power: Extended Governance and Historical Responsibility", in *A Responsible Europe?* ed. Hartmut Mayer and Henri Vogt (2006).

affairs matters and that hard-military power has remained a prerogative of member states, the EU has several limitations in its capacity to project power.

The ENP as a realist policy

As the EU extended its reach to the border of Ukraine and Russia and given the anarchical self-help nature of the international system, the EU assumed a leadership role in the economic, political and social ordering of its new neighbourhood⁸⁴. As a consequence, the EU developed the ENP in 2004 with the intention to establish “political coordination and deeper economic integration” between the EU and its neighbouring countries as well as to “bring enormous gains to all involved in terms of increased stability, security and well being”⁸⁵. Therefore, one may conclude that the formation of the ENP in 2004 represents how the EU responded to systemic incentives when ordering and managing its new neighbourhood⁸⁶. As David Cadier puts it “the creation of the ENP was mainly motivated by geopolitical consideration”⁸⁷. This is evident when one refers to the split of the ENP in 2009, through which the policy was divided into two branches according to their geographical location: the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative⁸⁸. The reasons behind this split were twofold. It allowed for a more tailored policy in relation to the various countries and it constituted a response to the destabilising effects and uncertainty created by the Russia-Georgia war of 2008⁸⁹. This reasoning is highlighted by the deliberation of the EC in the article ‘A Changing Context’, in which it is stated that ‘The European Union has a vital interest in seeing stability, better governance and economic development at its Eastern borders’ as it is “a strategic imperative and a political investment for the EU”⁹⁰. Hence, the creation of the EaP was strongly motivated by the increased level of threat the EU perceived as result of the Russia-Georgia, and therefore the need to secure a stable and friendly neighbourhood⁹¹.

84 Cristian Nitoiu, “Toward Conflict or Cooperation? The Ukraine crisis and EU-Russia relations”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* (2016).

85 Commission of the European Communities, “European Neighbourhood Policy. Strategy Paper”, (2004) 5; The European Parliament, “The European Neighbourhood Policy. Fact Sheet”, (2019) .

86 Although the ENP comprised various countries, in this thesis it refers in relation to Ukraine.

87 David Cadier, “Eastern Partnership vs Eurasian Union? The EU-Russia Competition in the Shared Neighbourhood and the Ukraine crisis”, *Global Policy* (2014) 77.

88 For simplifications, when possible the EaP and the ENP terms will be used interchangeably as they refer to the same policy.

89 Nathaniel Copsey and Karolina Pomorska, “The Influence of Newer Member States in the European Union: The Case of Poland and the Eastern Partnership”, *Europe-Asia Studies* (2013).

90 Commission of the European Communities, “Eastern Partnership”, (2008) 2-15.

91 Marco Ferraro, “After the Georgia War: the EU and Eastern Europe”, *ISPI* (2018); George Christou, “European Union Security Logics to the east: the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership”, *European Security* (2010).

In relation to Ukraine, these factors were combined with larger considerations of power. According to Ross Smith, because of the “European regional economic power distribution in the scope of Ukraine, it is clear that there is an opportunity and an incentive for the EU to utilize its economic asymmetry over Russia to gain a more favourable outcome in Ukraine”⁹². As the EU perceived Russia as a weaker and declining power, although still capable of causing unrest and instability, Brussels took advantage of the opportunity to further expand its power and influence over Ukraine⁹³. And while this ordering policy by the EU was embedded into a wider Western dominance led by the US, the EU's role has been sufficiently autonomous and distinct from that of the USA⁹⁴. The main difference between the USA and the EU's policy is that the former focused more on security and defence issues, while the latter concentrated mainly but not exclusively on the economic dimension⁹⁵. In both cases though, power was a central element.

With regard to the ENP, this element is clearly represented in the Association Agreement (AA), namely a legal treaty developed in 2007 for the purpose to regulate diplomatic and economic relations between the EU and Ukraine. In general terms, it constitutes the main instrument of the ENP and it replaced the previous Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA). This was a loose and general framework for economic cooperation between the EU and Ukraine that was signed in 1994 and activated in March 1998. Thus, it can be argued that the AA provides a stronger and deeper legal framework than PCA. This can be evidenced by the creation of The Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), which is aimed at gradually integrating Ukraine's economy into that of the EU⁹⁶. The enhanced framework of AA has also been noted by Roman Petrov, Guillaume Van Der Loo and Peter Van Elsuwege, as they regarded the AA as “an innovative legal instrument providing for a new type of integration without membership”⁹⁷. Similarly, the Ukrainian government refers the AA as “the biggest international legal document in the history of Ukraine and the biggest international agreement with a third country ever concluded by the European Union”⁹⁸. Therefore, while the PCA was just an agreement to manage basic economic

92 Nicholas Ross Smith, “The Underpinning Realpolitik of the EU's Policies toward Ukraine”, *European Foreign Affairs Review* (2014) 591.

93 Smith, “The Underpinning Realpolitik of the EU's Policies toward Ukraine”.

94 Nitoiu, “Toward Conflict or Cooperation?”.

95 This is not to deny the existence of a security sphere within the EU, but that defence-related issues are mainly a prerogative of the individual countries and that all EU-defence missions are civilians in nature and characterized by low-intensity conflicts; See Annika Bjorkdahl, “Normative and Military Power in EU Peace Support Operations”, in *Normative Power Europe* ed. Richard G. Whitman (2011).

96 Guillaume Van der Loo et al., “The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement”.

97 Guillaume Van der Loo et al., “The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement”, 1.

98 Ukraine Government Portal, “Association Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine”, (ND) n/a.

interactions between the two polities, the AA aims for further economic integration and for a gradual alignment of Ukraine's regulations and laws to those of the EU⁹⁹. In fact, by compelling Ukraine to change its regulative and economic structure to that of the EU, the ENP indirectly extends the EU's power and influence.

In addition, the AA contains essential geopolitical and security elements, as well. For instance, it establishes regular political dialogue at the highest political level in order to enhance civilian and military dialogue. Namely, it sets to increase trust between the two political units and regularise yearly meetings at the summit level¹⁰⁰. In security and foreign-policy terms, the article 7 states that “The Parties shall intensify their dialogue and cooperation and promote gradual convergence in the area of foreign and security policy, including the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), and shall address in particular issues of conflict prevention and crisis management, regional stability, disarmament, non-proliferation, arms control and arms export control as well as enhanced mutually-beneficial dialogue in the field of space”¹⁰¹. Article 9 instead focuses on regional stability, for which “The Parties shall intensify their joint efforts to promote stability, security and democratic development in their common neighbourhood, and in particular to work together for the peaceful settlement of regional conflicts”¹⁰². Finally, military and technological development are discussed too, in article 10: “the Parties shall explore the potential of military-technological cooperation. Ukraine and the European Defence Agency (EDA) shall establish close contacts to discuss military capability improvement, including technological issues”¹⁰³. Based on the provisions quoted above, it is clear that the elements of security and stability are crucial in the AA. In neoclassical realist terms, they further strengthen the EU's relative power in the international system. They bolster economic growth and cooperation, they enhance diplomatic relations with a special focus on regional stability and they entail a gradual convergence between the two units in terms of defence and security issues. Furthermore, although the AA does not entail EU membership for Ukraine, it does constitute an important and essential step toward it¹⁰⁴. Hence, the inclusion of Ukraine within the EU would certainly represent a decisive increase of the EU's relative power.

From the above analysis, it is evident that the ENP toward Ukraine was developed mainly based on systemic factors and a deep materialistic self-interest. The decline of Russia had opened up an

99 Guillaume Van der Loo et al., “The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement”.

100 Official Journal of the European Union, “Association Agreement”, (2014).

101 Official Journal, “Association Agreement”, 8.

102 Official Journal, “Association Agreement”, 8.

103 Official Journal, “Association Agreement”, 9.

104 NA, “Ukraine ratifies EU association agreement”, *Deutsche Welle* (2014).

opportunity for the EU to expand and manage a new neighbourhood. This has led to the development of the ENP, which is a policy that allows the EU to strengthen its power and security by enhancing its ability to control the region. As Dimitar Bechev said, the ENP was designed as 'power projection' and 'gate-keeping'¹⁰⁵. Milieu shaping reasons were also important. As the EU acquired new borders, it had the strategic interest to have them stable and peaceful¹⁰⁶. As stated in the European Security Strategy, "it is in our interest that the countries in our borders are well-governed"¹⁰⁷. This was achieved chiefly through the AA by providing a secure institutional and legal framework to Ukraine as well as through an extension of the EU's influence on the country. As Stefan Ganzle claims, the EU "became increasingly aware of the fact that this policy may potentially yield results in reinforcing state capabilities in the neighbourhood as well as contributing to conflict prevention"¹⁰⁸. Hence, in neoclassical realist terms, the ENP can be considered as a case of expansionism, in which a stronger unit (in this case the EU in economic terms) took advantage of its larger material capabilities to further enlarge its share of power and promote its wider materialistic self-interests. And although it did not really cement the EU's regional hegemony, by drawing a former Soviet and eastern European country within its orbit, the ENP constitutes a further step toward the consolidation of its regional economic prominence.

Russian and Ukraine response

As argued in the previous section, by responding to systemic stimulus the ENP has strengthened the EU's power. This argument is further reinforced when analysing Russia's response to it. For Russia, in fact, this area represented vital military, economic and societal interests¹⁰⁹. More specifically, Russia was concerned about the economic consequences of the implementation of the DFCTA between the EU and Ukraine as well as by the extension of the EU's influence over eastern Europe¹¹⁰. Russia's fears and concerns in relation to DFCTA is highlighted by the former prime minister of Russia Dimitri Medvedev's who believed that the AA risks to "push out commodities to the troika market, risks of re-export, risks of commodity dumping, resulting from the possible

105 Dimitar Bechev, "Of Power and Powerlessness: the EU and its neighbours", *Comparative European Politics* (2011).

106 Schumacher, "The European Neighbourhood Policy".

107 Council of the European Union, "European Security Strategy. A Secure Europe in a Better World", (2009) 16.

108 Stefan Ganzle, "The European Neighbourhood Policy: a Strategy for Security in Europe?", in *The Changing Politics of European Security* ed. Stefan Ganzle and Allen G. Sens (2007) 123.

109 Dmitri Trenin, "Russia's spheres of Interest, not influence", *The Washington Quarterly* (2009).

110 Cadier, "Eastern Partnership vs Eurasian Union?"

lifting of import duties on some European products”¹¹¹. In other words, Russia feared that through the DFCTA, the EU could push its good into the Russian market via Ukraine. Hence, this threat by the EU to Russia's economic interests marks an important difference to the Cold War-period when military considerations were more important than economic competitiveness¹¹². Furthermore, Russia was also concerned about the regulative/aspects of the AA. By signing this accord, Ukraine would have aligned more closely with the EU regulations, which in turn, would have created technical problems for Russia when trading with Ukraine¹¹³. Finally, Moscow was also concerned about a future EU and NATO membership of Ukraine¹¹⁴. Although the ENP does not entail membership accession, as explained in the previous chapter, it increases the chance for Ukraine to join the EU and NATO, adding to the economic concerns, a military dimension, too.

Derived from the fear of the economic consequences the ENP has on Russia, Moscow viewed this policy as a way for the EU to extend its influence into its own territory¹¹⁵. This is echoed by Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, who claims that the Eastern Partnership represents “an attempt to extend the EU's sphere of influence”¹¹⁶. This is also supported by David Cadier's observation, who argues that Moscow 'disapproves' and regards the EU's policy as a threat to its geopolitical interest¹¹⁷. While various EU diplomats have rejected this interpretation of the EU's foreign policy, these statements might have made only to conceal the true intentions and ambitions behind the ENP¹¹⁸. Besides, as illustrated in the previous chapter and in spite of the idealistic argument of the EU, the ENP does possess an intrinsic element of power which Russia clearly perceived.

In fact, Moscow tried to push back against this EU's expansionist policy. Indeed, it is important to underline that despite the relative lack of economic resources in comparison to that of the EU, Moscow has several tools at its disposal to exert power and influence. One being its ability to make quicker decisions in times of crisis. This is made possible because of its highly centralised political system which allows more efficient decision-making, as compared to the overly bureaucratic and

111 The Russian Government, “Meeting of the Russian-Ukrainian Interstate Commission's Committee for Economic Cooperation”, (2013) n/a.

112 Waltz, “Structural Realism after the Cold War”.

113 Nitoiu, “Toward Conflict or Cooperation?”; Russian Government, “Prime Minister Simitri Medvedev speaks in an interview with Reuters”, (2013).

114 John Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault”, *Foreign Affairs* (2014).

115 Nitoiu, “Toward Conflict or Cooperation?”.

116 Valentina Pop, “EU Expanding its sphere of influence, Russia says”, *Eurbserver* (2009) n/a.

117 Cadier, “Eastern Partnership vs Eurasian Union?”.

118 Webmaster, “Lavrov: EU expands sphere of influence”, *Barents Observer* (2009); In relation to lies in politics, see John Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie*, 2010.

intergovernmental processes found in the EU. Secondly, Russia also has a powerful military, especially nuclear power. With 6500 warheads, Russia is the country with the highest number of nuclear weapons in the world, vastly outnumbering the only two nuclear European countries, France and UK, which put together count for only 500 warheads¹¹⁹. As a further advantage, Russia is the only nation, alongside the USA and China, to possess a nuclear triad. Namely, the possibility to strike opponents using either land, sea and air-based launching systems. Regarding conventional forces, while straightforward comparisons between the expenditure on such forces by Russia and the EU cannot be made due to the controversy on Russian official spending, according to most defence literature, Russia enjoys a clear advantage in this aspect¹²⁰. For instance, it has the most number of troops and weapons, when compared to other powers in Europe. However, according to most of the defence literature, it is safe to state that Russia has kept a clear advantage, at least in terms of number of troops and weapons, over any other power in the European continent but the USA¹²¹. In addition, considering that 30 % of EU crude oil imports come from Russia, in addition to 40 % of natural gas and 42 % of solid fuel (mostly coal), Moscow retains an important degree of influence in the continent as the EU is overly reliant on it for its energy consumption¹²². Besides, if one were to perceive Russia as still facing the negative consequences of the dissolution of the USSR in the early 1990s to 2000s, by the end of the 2000s, Moscow has transformed into a stronger and more efficient political unity, and thus it is capable of pushing back against the EU's eastward expansion.

The counter-policy pursued by Russia consisted of primarily the development of a political and economic union with former Soviet states, which is similar to the intentions of the EU albeit to a smaller extent in economic and demographic terms¹²³. Although discussions about this project date back to the collapse of the USSR, it was only in 2012 with the establishment of the Common Eurasian Space (CES), that a single market has been developed. By covering more than 180 millions of people and five countries, namely Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia, the CES contains an important geopolitical significance¹²⁴. It is, in fact, part of a wider attempt by Moscow to recreate to some extent and in a different form, the former Soviet space. As

119 Shannon N. Kile and M. Kristensen, "World Nuclear Forces", *SIPRI* (2019).

120 Michael Kofman and Richard Connolly, "Why Russian military expenditure is much higher than commonly understood (as is China's)", *War on the Rocks* (2019) - According to this article official statistics of Russian military expenditure hide the real extent of Russian military power as they do not take into consideration the change of currency and the fact that Russian government buys most of its weapons from internal suppliers. Hence, estimates calculate Russian spending to be up to three times as high as it is now.

121 Scott Boston et al., "Assessing the Conventional Force Imbalance in Europe", *RAND* (2017) ; Gustav Gressel, "Russia's quiet military revolution, and what it means for Europe", *ECFR* (2015).

122 Eurostat, "From where do we import energy and how dependent are we?", (2018) – This data is from 2018, but the variations in the last years have not been determinant.

123 Cadier, "Eastern Partnership vs Eurasian Union?"

124 In 2015 the CES acquired a stronger political status and became the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

Putin stated the CES is meant to be “powerful supranational association capable of becoming one of the poles in the modern world”¹²⁵. In neoclassical realist terms, the CES can be seen as an attempt to power and security maximisation, as well as milieu shaping in the neighbourhood. Hence, various attempts have been made to exert diplomatic pressure on Ukraine, so that it can be part of the union and thus allowing Moscow to extend its power and influence. Indeed, Ukraine has always played an important role in Russia's calculations of power. According to Zbigniew Brzezinski, the political scientist and former National Security Advisor of the USA, “Russia can be either an empire or a democracy, but it cannot be both...Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be an empire, but with Ukraine suborned and then subordinated, Russia automatically becomes an empire”¹²⁶. Although both parties had repeatedly stressed that their proposals to Ukraine did not preclude the country to have deals with the other, in reality Kiev had to choose between the CES and the DFCTA. This is because of the existence of a conflict in regulations between the two free trade areas as well as because of the potential negative consequences of DFCTA on the Russian economy. Therefore, because of these structural reasons, the EU and Russia gradually entered into a zero-sum game for power and security over Ukraine¹²⁷.

However, Ukraine should not be considered uniquely as a puppet within the EU-Russia competition, but as an important actor who indirectly contributed in fomenting this rivalry. And although its position in the international system does not allow it to become a great power, it found a way to protect its national interests nonetheless. In terms of structural capabilities, because of its structural problems with economic growth and corruption, Ukraine’s economy was only worth \$179,817 billion in 2008¹²⁸. Even if measured militarily, Ukraine scores lower compared to Russia and any Western European country. Besides, it is economically too dependent on Moscow, putting it in a disadvantage position vis-à-vis Russia. Because of all these structural limitations and its geographical proximity to Russia, Ukraine exploited the EU to adopt an economic and political balancing policy against Russia. This strategy pro-EU has been pursued since the end of the Cold War and it was applied in relation to the AA as well. Ukraine persistently pushed the EU to have this agreement in order to increase its economic growth, diversify its trade and geopolitical relations and thus to enhance its relative position with Russia¹²⁹. For Ukraine the AA was considered as an important tool to boost its economic growth and power and reduce its dependence on Russian

125 Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the European Union, “Article by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin” (2011) n/a.

126 NA, “Playing east against west”, *The Economist* (2013) n/a.

127 Nitoiu, “Toward Conflict or Cooperation?”, 120.

128 The World Bank, “GDP European Union, Russian Federation, Ukraine, USA”, 1965-2015.

129 Rilka Dragneva and Katarina Wolczuk, *Ukraine between the EU and Russia: The Integration Challenge* (2015).

economy¹³⁰.

The economic benefits that Ukraine may enjoy by aligning itself with AA have been highlighted in various studies. For instance several studies had shown how the AA would have added 11.8 percent to Ukraine's GDP, while the CES would have reduced it by 3.7 percent. Above all, this data are the results of the impact of Ukrainian exports, which to the EU would amount to 46.1 percent, while to the countries of the CES only to 17.9 percent. This comes by no surprise as the EU market is bigger, more sophisticated and better regulated than that of the CES, accused of being "smaller, technologically backward, less competitive"¹³¹. Besides, the necessity to sign the AA for Ukraine is attested also by its Strategic Defence Bulletin which defines the foreign policy priority of the country as well as ensuring its national security¹³².

However, while this long-term strategy of balancing against Russia proved to be relatively successful since the end of the Cold War, it failed in 2013. In fact, in the summer of 2013, scholars such as Nitoiu and Haukkala, noted that Russia had exerted more diplomatic pressure on Ukraine, as it attempted to defend its sphere of interest from "unwanted Western encroachments", in the light of its perceived threat of the AA on its national and security interest¹³³. In particular, Moscow started to increase its pressure on Kiev before the EaP summit in 2013, where it was supposed to sign the Agreement¹³⁴.

This Russian pressure came under a combination of diplomatic talks and aggressive actions. The president of Russia himself, Vladimir Putin, intervened and had talks with Viktor Yanukovich in order to sway him from signing the AA and join the CES. For instance, he warned that if Ukraine concluded the Association Agreement with the EU, "the Customs Union countries must think about safeguards"¹³⁵. Similarly, Russia's First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov told Ukraine's Prime Minister Mykola Azarov that "Russia would be forced to limit its imports from Ukraine to defend its domestic production"¹³⁶. In addition to verbal threats and diplomatic pressures, Moscow started a trade war against Ukraine. In July, the Russian government pulled important export quotas from two

130 Anders Aslund, "Ukraine's Choice: European Association Agreement or European Union", *Peterson Institute for International Economics* (2013).

131 Aslund, "Ukraine's Choice", 5.

132 Embassy of Ukraine to the Hellenic Republic, "Press-Release on approval of the Strategic Defence Bulletin on Ukraine", (2013).

133 Haukkala, "The European Union as a Regional Normative Hegemon", 34.

134 Nitoiu, "Toward Conflict or Cooperation?".

135 Aslund, "Ukraine's Choice", 9.

136 Aslund, "Ukraine's Choice", 9.

big Ukrainian steel pipe producers, Interpipe and the Industrial Union of Donbass. Moreover, 40 large Ukrainian companies were labelled as 'risky' subjecting them to extra checks, while imports of chocolate from the biggest Ukrainian producer, Roshen, were blocked. This trade war escalated in August 2013, when all producers from Ukraine were labelled as 'high risk', which had the collateral effect of barring most Ukrainian imports¹³⁷. Eventually, on 21 November 2013, one week before the EaP summit in Vilnius when Kiev was supposed to sign the AA, Ukraine decided to give up to Russian pressure and not to sign the AA. It cited security concerns and the necessity to preserve trade relations with Russia. Conversely, it signed a trade deal with Moscow¹³⁸. The chief reason for this change of policy was based upon a rational calculation according to which it was not in Ukraine's interest to sign the AA if this was to jeopardize the security relationship with Russia.

As a result, considering the historical importance that Russia and Ukraine gave to the ENP, this chapter confirms the argument stated in the previous chapter. Namely, the EU's foreign policy to Ukraine contained a crucial geopolitical element which triggered the aggressive Russian reaction and it convinced Ukraine to promote it for the purpose of counter-balance Russia's power. If the ENP was constituted only by idealistic notions, Russia would have likely not pushed back. Nor Ukraine would have encouraged its application.

137 Aslund, "Ukraine's Choice".

138 Cadier, "Eastern Partnership vs Eurasian Union?"; this trade deal did not entail a participation in the CES.

3)The domestic variables of the EU

The strategic culture

As explained in the first chapter, one's strategic culture is composed by its beliefs, ideologies and world views. In relation to the EU, these are represented by liberal-democratic values and more precisely by the following norms and values: peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law and human rights¹³⁹. These principles, in fact, have been internalised by the EU as the result of specific historical circumstances which have led to the triumph of liberal-democratic values after World War II and especially after the Cold War¹⁴⁰. Therefore, as part of the wider USA-led liberal international order, together with the USA, the EU undertook a foreign policy aimed at exporting globally the liberal ideology. This was possible because of the universal value of liberalism and because the unipolarity of the 90s and 2000s provided the systemic incentives to the USA and the EU¹⁴¹. As Mearsheimer says when discussing the liberal international order “the aim is to create a world order consisting exclusively of liberal democracies that are economically engaged with each other and bound together by sets of common rules”¹⁴². Hence, by incorporating them in its treaties, since the 90s the EU became an explicit and formal supporter of democratic promotion¹⁴³.

These norms and values have been promoted internationally primarily through its economic clout. In fact, attracted by the immense opportunities of profit and economic growth that the biggest market in the world can offer, many countries seek access into it. However, it is precisely because of the size of the EU, i.e. being the bigger partner, that allows it of setting terms of negotiation and force other parties to accept the EU's conditions and regulations. In other words, the EU has great leverage over other nation states, and it has historically exploited this aspect in order to further its own idealistic and materialistic interests¹⁴⁴. Indeed, it does not come as a surprise that the EU prefers to have bilateral trade negotiations instead of multilateral ones, so it can fully exert this economic power on smaller economies.

This ideational aspect of the EU's foreign policy combined with its economic advantage has also

139 Manners, “Normative Power Europe”.

140 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992).

141 John Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion* (2018).

142 John Mearsheimer, “Bound to Fail: The Rise and the Fall of the Liberal International Order”, *International Security* (2019) 14.

143 Manners, “Normative Power Europe”.

144 Chad Damro, “Market Power Europe”, *Journal of European Public Policy* (2012).

influenced the formation of ENP, which Hiski Hukkala described as “an attempt at (re)injecting the Union’s normative agenda and the application of conditionality more strongly to relations with non-candidate countries”¹⁴⁵. The official documents of the ENP and EaP support this argument. The ENP official strategy states how “it aims at upholding and promoting these values”¹⁴⁶. Similarly, the EaP purports to “advance the cause of democracy”¹⁴⁷. Hence, this promotion has occurred primarily through the clause of conditionality present within the AA, which is based on the assumption that its full implementation rests on Ukraine's alignment with the European values and norms¹⁴⁸. As stated in the AA, this agreement is based on “the common values on which the European Union is built – namely democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law, while its full application “will depend on progress in the implementation of this Agreement as well as Ukraine's track record in ensuring respect for common values, and progress in achieving convergence with the EU in political, economic and legal areas”¹⁴⁹.

Yet, the externalisation of these norms and values should not be regarded only as an idealistic foreign policy totally disjointed from the material interests. On the contrary, the EU regards the spreading of democratic values as an additional factor that allows it to shape and stabilize the region. Indeed, the EU recognized that stark differences in political institutions had caused continuous hurdles in the constantly growing EU-Ukraine relations. According to the European Security Strategy of 2003 : “It is in the European interest that countries on our own borders are well-governed. Neighbours who are engaged in violent conflict, weak states where organized crime flourishes, dysfunctional societies or exploding population growth on its borders all pose problems for Europe”¹⁵⁰. Similarly, Martin Nilsson and Daniel Silander claim that “by building partnerships with neighbouring states that included the promotion of democracy to each targeted state, neighbouring Europe would become stable and prosperous, thus securing the EU’s eastern and southern borders”¹⁵¹. Therefore, to have like-minded democratic countries more aligned to Brussels than Moscow was considered to provide a more stable and secure neighbourhood¹⁵².

However, given Ukraine's lower standard in terms of democracy and human rights compared to the

145 Hukkala, “The European Union as a regional normative hegemony”, 1611.

146 Commission, “European Neighbourhood Policy”, 12.

147 Council of the European Union, “Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit”, (2009) 11.

148 Sandra Lavaenex and Frank Schimmelfenning, “EU democracy promotion in the neighbourhood: from leverage to convergence?”, *Democratisation* (2011).

149 Union, “Association Agreement”, 4.

150 Council, “European Security Strategy”, 36.

151 Martin Nilsson and Daniel Silander, “Democracy and Security in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood? Assessing the ENP in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine”, *Democracy and Security* (2016) 49.

152 Smith, “The underpinning realpolitik of the EU's policies toward Ukraine”.

rest of Europe, the application of these common values were a serious obstacle in the signing of the AA. In particular, the EU was very concerned about Ukraine's judicial situation, especially when in 2010 Yanukovich rose to power and the former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko was incarcerated¹⁵³. For the EU, this was a case of 'political persecution' and 'selective justice', proving how compromised Ukrainian democratic institutions were¹⁵⁴. As a result, the EU emphasised that “unless improvements were made to enhance the quality of democracy and rule of law in Ukraine and opposition representatives were freed and allowed to run in 2012 parliamentary elections, the document (the AA) would not be initiated”¹⁵⁵. Despite the EU’s strong warnings, the Yanukovich government neglected the importance of these values to the EU, and have subsequently failed to implement the requested reforms. On the contrary, the situation worsened as shortly after the EaP summit in October 2011 in Warsaw, Tymoshenko was sentenced for seven years in prison. The EU strongly condemned this sentence and this exemplifies the great obstacle that exists in the signing of the AA. In fact, although the technical preparations of AA were concluded by EU and Ukraine's representatives, during the 2011 Warsaw meeting the EU decided to postpone the signing of the AA to the EaP Summit in Vilnius in 2013¹⁵⁶. The EU officially stated that for the Agreement to be ratified Ukraine needs “to implement the necessary reforms and strengthen democratic values, human rights and the rule of law”¹⁵⁷. That is, during this space of time, Ukraine was expected to implement judicial reforms so the EU could accept to sign the AA.

Nonetheless, when in 2014, soon after the Ukrainian crisis and the Russian seizure of Crimea, the AA was signed by both sides, many of the required political and juridical reforms were not actually implemented¹⁵⁸. The only possible exception was the release of Yulia Tymoshenko, which could be interpreted as a political move initiated by a different faction inside Ukraine's political establishment rather than a step toward political and judiciary reforms. In fact, given the recent pro-European rallies, the civil war and Russian military seizure of Crimea, in 2014 the EU was pressurised by these external factors to have the AA signed regardless of Ukraine's democratic performance. The risk would have been to lose Ukraine if the momentum was not seized. As sociologist Slawomir Sierakowski claims: “The European Union believed less in the chances of

153 Federiga Bindi and Irina Angelescu, *The Foreign Policy of the European Union: Assessing Europe's Role in the World*, (2012).

154 Gunta Pastore, “The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement prior to the Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit”, *Journal of European Studies* (2014).

155 Bindi, *The Foreign Policy of the European Union*”, 140.

156 Pastore, “The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement”.

157 Official Journal of the European Union, “Negotiations on the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement”, (2011) 51.

158 Gustav Gressel, “Keeping up appearances: How Europe is supporting Ukraine's transformation”, *ECFR* (2016).

democracy in Ukraine than the United States did in Iraq”¹⁵⁹. Therefore, because the AA was too important for the EU, these European norms were finally subordinated to the material interest of the EU¹⁶⁰. As a result, this behaviour of the EU strengthens the notion put forward by this thesis, according to which the ENP toward Ukraine is first and foremost a realist-oriented policy. At the same time it undermines the mainstream academic view of an EU acting uniquely as a liberal and idealistic entity. In IR terms, it can then be argued that the logic of consequences were more important than the logic of appropriateness¹⁶¹.

Role and perceptions of the member states

The second internal variable is the role of members and how their perceptions have influenced the ENP. Even though they all agreed on its necessity and common goal, as attested by their ratification in 2017, because of their difference in geographical position, historical experience and material capabilities, some members states were more involved than others. In particular, Poland, the eastern Europeans, the Baltics and to some extent the Nordic countries, considered Ukraine a crucial country for Europe and as such it was necessary to actively engage toward it. The reasons were twofold. Firstly, due to their geographical location, the aforementioned states would benefit more than the others in forming a free trade deal with Ukraine. Secondly, given the fact that Ukraine is their close neighbour, they had a stronger interest in having a secure and stable neighbourhood compared to more distant countries like Spain, which did not share the same borders¹⁶². This is highlighted by the joint declaration made by the Visegrad Group, which asserts their “deep interest” in “fostering peace, stability and economic prosperity” in eastern Europe¹⁶³. Similarly, another statement produced by this group of countries and Sweden proclaims that “the participants declare joint interest in further enhancing mutual cooperation with the aim to promote EU-Ukraine relations and to realize concrete projects of regional development... The V4 and Sweden countries are convinced further enhancing and deepening the cooperation with the eastern ENP partners will bring additional benefit to the EU as a whole. The Visegrad countries and Sweden consider the ENP

159 Slawomir Sierakowski, “Europe needs Ukraine”, *New York Times* (2013) n/a.

160 Smith, “The underpinning realpolitik of the EU's policies toward Ukraine”.

161 Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organised Hypocrisy* (1999).

162 Pastore, “The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement”; The Visegrad Group is a formal 'alliance' of countries bound by some similar historical, cultural, geographical and political features. Members of this group are Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Czech Republic.

163 Visegrad Group, “Joint Political Statement of the Visegrad Group on the Strengthening of the European Neighbourhood Policy”, (2007) n/a.

as an important tool to promote European integration of Ukraine.”¹⁶⁴ Moreover, these countries were all very aware of the potential danger represented by a resurgent and powerful Russia, of which they “were very critical”, as Peter Kratochvil put it¹⁶⁵. Thus, since they had a higher perception of the level of threat in relation to Russia, they constantly tried to draw Ukraine in the EU's sphere of interest and have good relation with their eastern neighbourhood¹⁶⁶. It was extremely important not to isolate Ukraine as this would have risked the country to fall under Russia's influence¹⁶⁷. All in all, huge disparities in material resources, geographical proximity and negative historical memories bound all these countries together in the attempt to balance against the power of Russia. The ENP thus represented a useful instrument to be exploited for this purpose.

However, despite having this common interest and view on Ukraine and Russia, these countries also had their divergence on a number of issues¹⁶⁸. The first dividing line was between the Nordic countries and the member states of central-eastern Europe on Ukraine's democratic reforms. Because of their stronger democratic input, the Nordic countries were staunch defenders of the principle of conditionality and they were not willing to compromise the respect of the common European values for the AA. Conversely, the central-eastern European member states were more flexible, as they prioritised the material benefits coming from the AA over the full incorporation of the liberal-democratic values of the EU. They even went as far as proposing for Ukraine (and other eastern European countries) to join the EU. This perspective was ultimately rejected by the rest of the member states as they considered it to be too ambitious and complex at that moment¹⁶⁹.

In historical perspective, these divisions were most visible at the EaP meeting in November 2011 in Warsaw which was meant to sign the AA. In fact, because of the lack of judicial reforms in Ukraine, in addition to the incarceration of former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko, most of the member states showed some degree of reluctance in signing the AA. In particular, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and the Netherlands were of the opinion that the release of Tymoshenko was paramount¹⁷⁰. Contrastingly, central-eastern countries, above all Poland, the Czech Republic,

164 Visegrad Group, “Joint statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group Countries, Sweden and Ukraine”, (2008) n/a.

165 Petr Kratochvil, “New EU members and the ENP: different agendas, different strategies”, *Intereconomics* (2007) 191.

166 Amelia Hadfield, “EU Member States and the European Neighbourhood Policy”, in *The Routledge Handbook on the European Neighbourhood Policy* ed. Tobias Schumacher et al. (2017).

167 Pastore, “The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement”.

168 Agnieszka K. Cianciara, “The Union for the Mediterranean and the Eastern Partnership: perspectives from Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary”, *Report of the Institute of Public Affairs* (2009).

169 Petr Kratochvil, “New EU members and the ENP”.

170 Pastore, “The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement”.

Lithuania and Slovakia pushed for the signing of the AA despite these shortcomings in Ukraine's political structure. More ambiguous was the position of the main EU countries, Germany, France and the UK, who kept a low profile. Eventually, this impasse was unlocked by the leading and mediating role of Germany, which was pressurized by Poland to act on this matter¹⁷¹. Hence, the compromise between the member states confirmed the formal commitment by the EU to sign the AA on the condition that “Ukrainian authorities demonstrate determined action and tangible progress, possibly by the time of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius in November 2013”¹⁷². Besides, this compromise illustrates Polish interest and influence in relation to Ukraine as well as the leading/mediator role of Germany within the EU. As the German foreign minister Guido Westerwelle proclaimed “Poland and Germany are natural partners in this endeavour” as “we share “a strategic interest in signing the negotiated agreement now”. At the same time he also “encouraged the Ukrainian leaders to clear the remaining stumbling blocks on the road to a successful Vilnius summit”¹⁷³. In fact, while previously to this meeting Berlin could keep a low profile, now it was compelled to act to keep the unity among the member states. Hence, because of its material preponderance in relation to the other EU member states, Germany together with Poland acquired a leading role as the main supporters of the AA¹⁷⁴.

The case of Poland

As mentioned earlier, Poland had a crucial role within the ENP toward Ukraine. It was the main country behind the development of the EaP as it convinced Sweden to support the proposal and present it together to the EU's council. And even before joining the EU, it submitted the idea to create an 'eastern dimension of the EU' primarily to draw Ukraine closer to the Union¹⁷⁵. As Petr Kratchovil asserts “Poland still remains the country with the most vested interests in the eastern neighbourhood both politically and economically, and its leading role in the region is unlikely to change”¹⁷⁶. Besides, Poland exploited its geopolitical weight in central-eastern Europe to lead this group of central-eastern European countries bound by similar historical experiences and

171 Pastore, “The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement”.

172 European Commission, “Signature of Association Agreement with the EU will depend on Ukraine's Performance”, (2013) n/a.

173 German Federal Foreign Office, “Speech by Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle”, (2013) n/a.

174 Pastore, “The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement”.

175 Artur Adamczyk, “The Role of Poland in the Creation Process of the Eastern Partnership”, *Yearbook of Polish European Studies* (2010).

176 Petr Kratochvil, “New EU members and the ENP”, 193.

geopolitical situations in making the implementation of the AA a priority of the EU¹⁷⁷. As Olaf Orsica asserts, “Poland has a sense of a 'community of destinies' with central-eastern nations”¹⁷⁸.

Poland's approach toward Ukraine was driven by two main reasons. The first derives from the realist-based need to shape its milieu for the purpose of having a stable and secure region. In fact, Poland and Ukraine share a border as well as having important trade and political links. Stability in Ukraine would decrease the chance of civil war, organized crime and refugees while opening new perspectives for Polish exporters and investors¹⁷⁹. The second motive stems from the perception of Russia as a potential threat for which Poland has an “historic intransigence”¹⁸⁰. As the balance of threat assumes, this is caused first and foremost by geopolitics as well as by the disparities in resources between the two countries. Russia, in fact, has far greater economic, demographic, military and energetic resources than Poland¹⁸¹. Besides, given Poland's geographical proximity to Russia, this imbalance of power increases the threat perception by Warsaw. Secondly, an important role has been played also by historical memories and negative Polish perception of Russian actions. Polish history is replete of wars with Russia and for decades Poland has been subjected to Russian rule. According to Andrzej Szeptycki “Polish political elites fear the revival of the Russian imperialism”¹⁸². A series of political proclamations and actions by Russia corroborate this sentiment. For instance, Russia's claim to protect its citizens wherever they are, including eastern Poland, resembled very much historical precedents of the 18th century when Poland was invaded by Russia for similar reasons¹⁸³. In a similar fashion, Poland has perceived several Russian actions as aggressive, further increasing Polish need to balance against Moscow. This perception originates mainly from Russian's military intervention in 2008 in Georgia which was interpreted to “restore or expand its regional hegemony through blackmail and other interference in domestic affairs”¹⁸⁴. Hence, according to the Polish foreign minister Moscow represented the greatest challenge for Poland as it attempted to restore Russia's world power¹⁸⁵.

For these reasons, since the end of the Cold War Poland has joined the Transatlantic Alliance, i.e. NATO and the EU, in order to balancing against Russian. Poland's relationship with NATO and the

177 Agnieszka K. Cianciara, “The Union for the Mediterranean and the Eastern Partnership”.

178 Olaf Orsica, “In search of a new role: Poland in Euro-Atlantic relations”, *Defence Studies* (2002) 25.

179 Andrzej Szeptycki, “Poland-Ukraine relations”, *Revista UNISCI* (2016).

180 Hadfield, “EU member states”, 218.

181 Central Intelligence Agency, “The World Factbook. Poland”, 2020; Central Intelligence Agency, “The World Factbook. Russia”, 2020.

182 Szeptycki, “Poland-Ukraine relations”, 64.

183 Orsica, “In search of a new role”.

184 Larsen, *NATO's Democratic Retrenchment*, 87.

185 Transcript: Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski Talks to Council, *Atlantic Council* (2008) n/a.

EU are similar, as it exploits both alliances to further its interests and strengthen its power at the regional level. Thus, for Poland, the ENP serves the purpose to create a buffer, stable and friendly state while at the same time “weakening Russia”¹⁸⁶. In fact, Ukraine was recognized by the Polish foreign minister to be “a swing country for the balance of power on the Eurasian landmass”¹⁸⁷. Thence, Poland has exploited the economic and normative power of the EU to shift the distribution of power to its favour and to the detriment of Russia. The usefulness of the EU was constituted by the fact that, as the foreign minister of Poland said, it is “the largest economy on Earth, and when the Commission negotiates on our behalf, the Commission can be much more effective than individual European countries on their own.”¹⁸⁸ Therefore, in order to disincentive Russia from becoming once again an aggressive great power that could pose a threat to Poland's security, Warsaw used the EU to gain a relative advantage over Russia and create a safe buffer zone between the two¹⁸⁹.

However, it is also important to emphasise that to Poland, European ideas and values were also important. Polish statesmen had clearly expressed that the signing of the AA was dependent on Ukraine's reforms. As the Polish foreign minister said “if Ukraine does not do what it is supposed to do, there will be no signing”¹⁹⁰. At the same time, the Polish government was less hawkish and more open than other EU member states. In fact, from Poland's perspective it was not wise to press Ukraine too much on this issue, as it could have alienated it from the EU and pushed it closer to Russia, and thus creating more instability and unpredictability¹⁹¹. Hence, a balanced approach between maintaining the AA's material interests and upholding values and norms was needed. A clear example is represented by the European football championship held in Ukraine in 2012, in which the Polish president Bronisław Komorowski was the only EU leader who went to Kiev to watch the final match in company of Yanukovich¹⁹². This signifies Poland's attempt to draw Ukraine closer itself, fearing that the later will move closer to Russia.

All in all, similarly to other central-eastern European countries, Poland operated a policy of balancing against Russia by using a multilateral framework such as that of the EU. In this way, despite being a regional mid-size country, it played an important role in the deliverance of the ENP

186 Szeptycki, “Poland-Ukraine relations”, 64.

187 Transcript: Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski Talks to Council, *Atlantic Council* (2008) n/a.

188 Transcript: Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski Talks to Council, *Atlantic Council* (2008) n/a.

189 Transcript: Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski Talks to Council, *Atlantic Council* (2008) n/a.

190 Julia Potocka, “Poland warns EU-Ukraine bilateral agreement 'clearly' at risk”, *Euractiv* (2013).

191 Bindi, *The Foreign Policy of the European Union*.

192 NA, “EU ponders losing Ukraine to Russia”, *Euractiv* (2012).

and the AA, which were in its fundamental national interest as a way to have a stable and secure neighbourhood. An interest motivated by a fear of Russia, caused in turn by several factors, such as a gap in resources, geographical proximity, negative historical memory and an adverse perception of Russian intentions. Thence, by pressing for its application due to their realist-based interests and considering the minor importance they assigned to the respect of European values, they further strengthened it. At the same time, this thesis does not consider the role of the member states as pivotal in the deliverance of the ENP and the signing of the AA. These were developed not only by the member states but through the agency of a multiplicity of EU actors. Besides and more importantly the ENP is a foreign policy originated from an external systemic input. It was a common EU-wide interest. These countries pushed forward and have accelerated the process, but they did not alter its fundamental and intrinsic external input.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this neoclassical realist perspective demonstrates how the ENP is primarily the result of systemic inputs and materialistic self-interests. The analysis of the international system shows that geopolitical changes in Europe and a profound alteration in the distribution of power among the various political units of the continent, led to the formulation of the ENP. In neoclassical realist terms and with regard to the specific case of Ukraine, this foreign policy can also be conceptualised as an expansionist behaviour. In fact, the ENP and in particular the AA, were set to increase the EU's relative power within the international system, shape its milieu and consolidate its regional economic hegemony. This is further corroborated when considering the role of Russia and Ukraine since both actors comprehended the importance of the ENP in terms of relative power. Russia sought to push back against the EU's expansionist foreign policy for the country considered it as an instrument to weaken Russia's interests. Conversely, Ukraine tried to use the ENP to diminish its dependence on Russia and improve its international status. When considering the internal factors of the EU, namely the strategic culture and the member states' role, the realist underpinnings of the ENP are further reinforced. As we have seen, the EU's materialistic interests were not trumped by the inclusion of liberal-democratic values as a pre-condition to sign the AA. At the same time, the role of central-eastern European countries, above all Poland, demonstrate how for some countries the ENP was motivated mainly by the realist necessity to have a secured neighbourhood and indirectly weaken Russia's relative power in the region. As a result, this thesis asserts that from a theoretical viewpoint the ENP toward Ukraine was primarily, although not exclusively, a realist-based policy characterised by an intrinsic element of power and security maximisation. Hence, the Ukraine's civil war and the geopolitical clash between the West and Russia are also an indirect results of the EU's foreign policy.

Consequently, this argument might give rise to potential further research on this topic. As this thesis suggests a realist-oriented behaviour by the EU, subsequent academic research can investigate other historical case studies in order to shed new light on this aspect of the EU. In addition to the common concepts of normative and civilian power, a better understanding of the EU's realist dimension would be beneficial in academic and social terms. It would contribute to a more holistic comprehension of what type of power the EU is and how it behaves in the international stage. It could also help EU's policy makers to formulate a more balanced and conscious foreign policy. Besides, in relation to this specific case study, a more extensive use of neoclassical realism and historical research could result in a more comprehensive perspective of the ENP toward Ukraine. Above all, the analysis of the internal variables could show the complexity and intricacies of this

foreign policy instrument. Such an approach would provide historical accuracy and a strong theoretical element. Finally, this thesis illustrates how even smaller political units have an important historical agency. This field of inquiry has seen a recent interest from the academic community. For instance, Laurien Crump and Susanna Erlandsson in 2020 have edited an historical volume where they consider mainly the role of secondary mid-size countries during the Cold War¹⁹³. Therefore additional academic investigations could focus on how smaller European countries, such as the Baltics, exploit multilateral institutions like the EU and the regional balance of power to their advantage.

193 Crump, Laurien and Susanna Erlandsson, *Margins for Manoeuvre in Cold War Europe: The Influence of Smaller Powers* (2020).

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PLAGIARISM RULES AWARENESS STATEMENT

Fraud and Plagiarism

Scientific integrity is the foundation of academic life. Utrecht University considers any form of scientific deception to be an extremely serious infraction. Utrecht University therefore expects every student to be aware of, and to abide by, the norms and values regarding scientific integrity.

The most important forms of deception that affect this integrity are fraud and plagiarism. Plagiarism is the copying of another person's work without proper acknowledgement, and it is a form of fraud. The following is a detailed explanation of what is considered to be fraud and plagiarism, with a few concrete examples. Please note that this is not a comprehensive list!

If fraud or plagiarism is detected, the study programme's Examination Committee may decide to impose sanctions. The most serious sanction that the committee can impose is to submit a request to the Executive Board of the University to expel the student from the study programme.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the copying of another person's documents, ideas or lines of thought and presenting it as one's own work. You must always accurately indicate from whom you obtained ideas and insights, and you must constantly be aware of the difference between citing, paraphrasing and plagiarising. Students and staff must be very careful in citing sources; this concerns not only printed sources, but also information obtained from the Internet.

The following issues will always be considered to be plagiarism:

- cutting and pasting text from digital sources, such as an encyclopaedia or digital periodicals, without quotation marks and footnotes;
- cutting and pasting text from the Internet without quotation marks and footnotes;
- copying printed materials, such as books, magazines or encyclopaedias, without quotation marks or footnotes;
- including a translation of one of the sources named above without quotation marks or footnotes;
- paraphrasing (parts of) the texts listed above without proper references: paraphrasing must be marked as such, by expressly mentioning the original author in the text or in a footnote, so that you do not give the impression that it is your own idea;
- copying sound, video or test materials from others without references, and presenting it as one's own work;
- submitting work done previously by the student without reference to the original paper, and presenting it as original work done in the context of the course, without the express permission of the course lecturer;
- copying the work of another student and presenting it as one's own work. If this is done with the consent of the other student, then he or she is also complicit in the plagiarism;
- when one of the authors of a group paper commits plagiarism, then the other co-authors are also complicit in plagiarism if they could or should have known that the person was committing plagiarism;
- submitting papers acquired from a commercial institution, such as an Internet site with summaries or papers, that were written by another person, whether or not that other person received payment for the work.

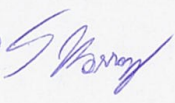
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The Education and Examination Regulations (Article 5.15) describe the formal procedure in case of suspicion of fraud and/or plagiarism, and the sanctions that can be imposed.

Ignorance of these rules is not an excuse. Each individual is responsible for their own behaviour. Utrecht University assumes that each student or staff member knows what fraud and plagiarism



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