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From principles to pragmatism? Ontological insecurity and the EU's sanctions regime against Russia

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Declaration

I, Erlend Bern Aaser, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature.....

Date.....

Acknowledgement

Writing a thesis is a process filled with doubt, challenges, and progression. Although it has not been a walk in the park, it has been an intellectual challenge. For that, it has certainly been worth it. And as I did not see this coming five years ago, this thesis represents a personal achievement.

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Abstract

In 2014, the relationship between the European Union (EU) and Russia turned from cooperation to conflict. The backdrop of this stalemate was the Russian annexation of Crimea, which the EU responded to by implementing sanctions. While both scholars and politicians doubted that the EU would be able to implement such restrictive measures, a normalization of relations has yet to establish. This thesis sets out to examine how this policy can be understood as a security concern and how it has been made possible through discursive framing. Embedded in this inquiry is an interest in how we can understand the EU as a global actor in 2017. These questions guide this thesis and its objective of providing a more comprehensive understanding of the sanctions policy. Arguing that sanctions is about more than physical deterrence, ontological security theory is applied as the theoretical framework. To examine how we can understand ontological security concerns as an integral part of the sanctions policy, a discourse analysis is undertaken of the official EU response in 2014. Within the sanctions discourse, a principled and a pragmatic representation is observed. These representations open for different interpretations of both the Self and the Other, and thus make possible different policies towards Russia. In 2014, the principled representation attained dominance within the discourse. While the pragmatic representation remained to be sub-ordinate within the discourse in 2014, it has gained legitimacy as the sanctions policy struggled to materialize as a political success. Symbolic of this, is the release of the new European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) which argues towards a more geopolitical EU. As such, a more pragmatic approach to relations with Russia has gained legitimacy since 2014. But, a discursive leap from principles to pragmatism is not unproblematic. As this analysis will argue, questions of time cannot be separated from ontological security concerns.

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1. Introduction

It has been over three years since the Russian annexation of Crimea, and the relationship between the European Union (EU) and Russia is still dominated by harsh rhetoric and a suspended partnership. Becoming an integral part of this new normal, the sanctions implemented by the EU in 2014 still dominates the political stalemate between the polities. How can we understand these sanctions, and what do they tell us about the EU and its self-image as a post-sovereign power (Cebeci, 2012)? These questions will guide this thesis, as it intends to rethink our understanding of the EU's sanctions' regime, and how the EU as an anxious power struggles to balance between principles and pragmatism in its external relations. Following Sjöberg & Horowitz, this thesis builds on an approach to foreign policy as an expressive practice (2013, p. 107). Moreover, an understanding of security as something more than the strive for physical survival, portrays the sanctions in a rather different way than what is reflected in the current literature. With this approach, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of the substance beneath the sanctions policy.

As the sanctions imposed on Russia in 2014 is representing a significant cost for the EU, how should we understand this policy? Thus, is the EU sticking to its principles without thinking strategically about the situation? (Haukkala, 2016, p. 662). According to Matlary (2016, p.54), time will work to Russia's advantage as memory tends to be short in international politics. But, this approach struggles to capture the broader social and political dynamic which the substance of this policy is embedded within. Moreover, it struggles to comprehend the sources of tension within the debate. As it is broadly acknowledged that sanctions rarely work, the EU's sanctions regime can rather be conceptualized as a strive towards manifesting a certain ontological security for the EU. While the EU in the official discourse is represented as a unified and principled actor, conflicting positions within the sanctions debate is testament to how the EU's actorness is more insecure than portrayed. Following Steele (2008), Zarakol (2010) and Mälksoo (2016), the sanctions policy is embedded within an understanding of international politics as a strive for ontological security. Through undertaking a discourse analysis of the EU's legitimation of the sanctions regime, this thesis will conceptualize the sources of the EU's struggle to balance between principles and pragmatism. Moreover, this is done by approaching the EU as a rather anxious power which is struggling to define its role as a global actor (Mälksoo, 2016). Engaging in a discussion over whether the EU is a normative or geopolitical actor, an analysis of the sanctions discourse between 2014 and 2016

underscores how the EU struggles to embrace pragmatism as it conflicts with the principled “Self”.

1.1 Research questions

In this section, the research questions guiding this thesis will be presented and justified. As mentioned above, the EU's sanctions regime has developed into one of the main obstacles for dialogue and cooperation with Russia. And, while the relationship between Russia and the EU have remained a source of broad debate within International Relations (IR)¹, sanctions have not enlightened much scholarly attention *per se*. As such, the approach to sanctions in the literature have become embedded within the debate over whether EU-Relations should be understood primarily as geopolitical or normative contention. But, questions have also been put forward to what the sanctions really represent. As described in the introduction, Matlary argues that the sanctions will soon be lifted as memory tends to be short in international politics (2016 p. 54). In other words, a pragmatic logic of *realpolitik* will eventually make the costs too high to bear. Moreover, as the sanctions are still in place three years after implementation the EU has become criticized for a lack of strategy when maintaining their principles (Haukkala, 2016). How is it then that the sanctions are important for the EU, and to what extent can we understand this policy as a security concern? To comprehend the substance of this policy, we need to change the questions we ask, and reflect around the theoretical premises for our conceptualization of international relations. These quarrels will guide this thesis, and the research questions that structure its discussion.

As the theoretical departure of this study is an interest in how actors create meaning to their actions, the first research question will address the discursive legitimation of the sanctions policy. With an objective of understanding how the EU as a global actor gives meaning to the sanctions policy, the narratives where meaning is created becomes our focus (Steele, 2008, p. 11). Moreover, this enables a discussion on how the sanctions are constructed as a case where the security of the political community is at stake, and where certain policies must be implemented. While security is often understood within mainstream IR as a linear and static condition, this study understands the meaning attached to security as context dependent. Moreover, studying identity as a discursive practice, guides this paper towards how the EU

¹ International Relations (IR) is here referred to as an academic field of study, while international relations ascribe to the global web of relations between political actors as such.

creates meaning, authority, and legitimacy of its policy towards Russia. As such, an emphasis is put on how the EU has legitimized the sanctions policy, and how discursive framing has made this policy possible. The first research question then asks: How has the EU legitimized and made possible the sanctions regime towards Russia post-Crimea?

The second research question is embedded within a theoretical inquiry of the relationship between identity and foreign policy. As such, it rests on the claim that questions regarding identities must always take precedence over questions regarding interests (Ringmar, 1996, p. 53). Moreover, ontological security theory is applied as this study's theoretical framework. Ontological security theory argue that we cannot understand an actor's security concerns, without understanding how it gives meaning to its self-identity (Steele, 2008). States, and other political communities, are not only motivated by their physical security, as they seek to create a stable narrative about the "Self" and its role in the world. Thus, states perform actions in order to underwrite their notions of who they are (Zarakol, 2010, p. 3). The EU sanctions regime is with that embedded into a debate over the ontological security concerns of political communities, and how the EUs internal debate over the sanctions is symbolic of a certain ontological insecurity. As such, the question is asked to how the sanctions play a role in the ontological security of the EU. The second research question then asks: How can we understand the sanctions policy as a case of ontological security seeking?

In the third, and final research question, I will focus on the EUs role in international politics and ask: What kind of actor is the EU? Is it a normative or a geopolitical actor? Contributing to a better understanding of what kind of actor the EU is, remains central to this study from start to finish. Therefore, the two first research questions described above are embedded into a larger discussion of how we can understand the EU as a foreign policy actor. As this is the case, all research questions are primarily dealt with together. But, some space is in the last chapter for a more explicit discussion over what the sanctions policy can tell us about how we can understand the EU as a global actor in 2017. This is relevant, because the sanctions debate does not only concern a question over this specific policy, it also concerns a question over what kind of actor the EU should be. The third research question then asks: What can the sanctions policy tell us about the EU as a global actor?

With that, the research questions guiding this thesis are the following:

- How has the EU legitimized and made possible the sanctions regime towards Russia post-Crimea?
- How can we understand the sanctions policy as a case of ontological security seeking?
- What can the sanctions policy tell us about the EU as a global actor?

1.2 Outline of the thesis

This thesis is divided into nine chapters. The second chapter moves straight into the overarching topic of this thesis, which is sanctions. A discussion of the current literature's conceptualization of the EU's sanctions regime is provided, considering the broader theoretical debate over what sanctions are understood to be "a case of" in international politics. The third chapter of this thesis introduces the reader to the theoretical approach of ontological security theory. It will outline the theoretical framework, and how ontological security theory can broaden our understanding of the sanctions policy through making use of discourse analysis. Chapter four consists of a reflection over the methodological foundation of this study, and discourse theory as an analytical tool. Here, the choices made for the empirical part of this study is discussed, justified and made transparent. Then in chapter five, the historical context of EU-Russia relations is outlined. This chapter is included to set the context of the analysis and the broader political dynamic in which EU-Russia relations is taking place. Chapter six and seven represents the analysis of the sanctions policy. Here the EU's official sanctions discourse is analysed, where focus will be on the discursive legitimation of the policy and how ontological security concerns is an integral part of the EU's debate over the sanctions. This section of the thesis intends to broaden our understanding of the competing positions within the EU, and the political logics they rest upon. The analysis of the sanctions discourse in 2014, is followed by a discussion of how the EU's position has developed throughout 2015 and 2016. Here, the new European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) from 2016 is central to the discussion as it represents a benchmark document. As such, the analysis seeks to provide an answer to how the EU's conception of the sanctions policy and its self-identity has developed over time. In chapter eight, some space is left for a discussion on what the sanctions policy can tell us about the EU as a global actor, and what the EUGS can imply for the future of EU-Russia relations. Then, in the concluding chapter, some reflections are provided of the main arguments furthered in this thesis. But before we get there, a discussion of sanctions in international relations will follow in the chapter ahead.

2. Sanctions in international relations

The decision of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich to reject an Association Agreement (AA) with the EU in November 2013, was followed by large demonstrations in Kiev (Rieker & Gjerde, 2016, p. 8). In February 2014, these tensions escalated into a full-blown political crisis when Yanukovich fled to Russia, with the result of a more pro-EU government taking control of power in Kiev. Russian President Vladimir Putin described this as a coup and stepped up the rhetoric with criticism of western involvement in Ukraine's domestic affairs (Allison, 2014). Nationalists, neo-Nazis and Russophobes were accused by Putin of representing the real instigators of the protests in Kiev (Presidential Executive Office, 2014). By March 2014, the situation on the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea escalated and a civil war erupted in eastern Ukraine. Russian military forces entered Crimea early in 2014, and on the 18th of March the illegal annexation of the peninsula was formalized. In the following months, Russia stepped up their support for separatist movements in eastern Ukraine. While both European and Russian politicians doubted the EU's ability to agree on a cohesive response to this escalation (Sjursen & Rosen 2017; Rieker & Gjerde 2016), the result was the implementation of an extensive sanctions regime. Since implementation in March 2014, the sanctions regime has become more comprehensive and it has been agreed upon every six months in the European Council. While the EU have imposed sanctions on Russia before, the extensiveness of today's sanctions regime and that it remains in place three years later, represents an anomaly (Forsberg & Haukkala, 2016, p. 41).

2.1 What sanctions?

For sanctions to be adopted by the EU, unanimous consent is required in The Council of the European Union. It is in the Council where these decisions are formally made, but this legislative body implements policies based on the guidelines set by the European Council². Moreover, sanctions as a foreign policy tool is part of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). As to the sanctions' regime against Russia, it consists of a three-staged approach of diplomatic, targeted and sectoral sanctions (Fischer, 2015). While sanctions earlier were implemented without considering how they impacted the general population, the sanctions implemented post-Crimea reflect a broader international development of targeting

² The Council of the European Union is one of two legislative bodies in the EU, where national ministers have decision-making authority. The European Council compose of national heads of state, and here the overall direction of the EU is agreed upon.

the responsible elite. As such, the sanctions target specific individuals attached to both political and economic power structures in Russia. On the 6th of March, the EU decided to suspend bilateral talks with Russia (European Council, 2017). With that, diplomatic sanctions were implemented. As the situation on Crimea escalated, the sanctions were moved from the diplomatic space, to the political and economic elite. On the 17th of March, after a referendum on the future status of Crimea took place, assets freeze and travel bans were introduced. These individual-oriented sanctions, were made more extensive as the months passed. The next big round of sanctions was implemented in the end of July, when sanctions against specific economic sectors were introduced (European Council, 2017). The escalation of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, and the downing of MH17-Airlines over Ukrainian territory, represented the backdrop of these sanctions. As such, the sanctions implemented against Russia had attained a diplomatic, individual and sectoral dimension. In March 2015, the EU decided to link the lifting of the sanctions regime to the Minsk agreements³. Russia responded to these wide-ranging measures by adopting a set of counter-sanctions in August 2014, which primarily targeted a ban of European agricultural products (Matlary, 2016, p. 51). As such, both the EUs own set of sanctions and Russia's response, would have a negative impact on the economic situation in Europe. While the impact of this policy is dependent on several different factors, it has been estimated to cost Europe up to €100bn (Sharkov, 2015).

2.2 Why sanctioning Russia?

While the causes of the conflict in Ukraine and the EU's role has received much scholarly attention, the sanctions regime *per se* have not become center of attention. Although this is the case, two main approaches to the sanctions' regime can be observed after a reading of the literature. The first approach concerns the importance of norms, and how the agreement between the EUs member states came about. Sjursen & Rosen's argument is that the sanctions' regime should be understood as a case where norms trumped interests (2017). Drawing on a deliberate perspective in their analyses, it is argued that the substantive argument which made sanctions possible was normative convergence between the member states on the importance of international law. This is claimed to be the decisive factor that triggered the agreement and this is said to demonstrate how this was not about security

³ The Minsk agreements are two separate peace plans for a resolution of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Minsk 1 was signed in September 2014, while Minsk 2 was agreed on in February 2015.

concerns (Sjursen & Rosen, 2017). As this study looks at why an agreement came about, and not the substance of the policy as such, it has a rather different approach than this thesis. With that in mind though, it is still of both analytical and theoretical relevance.

The other, and more recurrent argument in the literature, is rooted within the logic of rational-choice. Here, the sanctions are conceptualized as a deterrent foreign policy tool. According to Fischer (2015), the rationale of the sanctions is pressuring the political stakeholders in Russia towards revising their cost-benefit calculations for their policies in Ukraine. Through imposing a wide range of sanctions, the hope is that the Russian regime will be pressured to reevaluate the annexation of Crimea and their support for separatists in eastern Ukraine (Rutland, 2014, p. 6). Furthermore, the substance of the sanctions is here connected to the idea that it counters the establishment of a precedence for future Russian aggression on the continent. With this premise, studies have been done to calculate the economic consequences of the sanctions' regime (Havlik 2014; Mark Davis 2016). But these studies can be criticized for an overtly deterministic approach to the relationship between graphs and policy change. Even though sanctions may have a significant impact on the Russian economy, these facts don't tell us whether the sanctions are working (Gaddy & Ickes, 2014). And even though studies can show to a tangible economic impact, it can hardly be claimed that these policies isolate Russia as a pariah state within the global economy.

2.3 The sanctions paradox

The sanctions regime has so far failed to yield significant results, as the Russian regime remains firm on the annexation of Crimea and the support for separatists in eastern Ukraine. With that backdrop, Haukkala describes the EUs sanctions' regime both as a source of strength and weakness (2016, p. 661). Since the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine the EU has fared better than expected in handling the crisis, as tough sanctions have been adopted while maintaining internal unity (Haukkala, 2016, p. 661). In other words, the internal unity has proven itself surprisingly resilient. But the sanctions' regime could also be understood as re-affirming central weaknesses of the EUs approach to its external relations. The sanctions have not prevented Russia from achieving its objectives, as Crimea is "done and dusted" and Russia is not responding to demands in the Minsk agreements (Haukkala, 2016, p.661). As such, it demonstrates the EUs lack of influence towards what it regards to be "normal" behavior in international politics. Moreover, this lack of success should come as no surprise

for policymakers or the broader public, as the literature on sanctions agrees to that they very rarely work as intended (Romanova, 2016, p.775). How rational are sanctions if they rarely work?

Matlary concurs with this critique, when she argues that the political impact has been the very opposite of the intended aim (2016, p. 54). Sakwa also pinpoints this as he states that “While the impact of sanctions in the end turned out to be quite severe, there is no evidence that they achieved the desired effect. In fact, sanctions only impeded the path of dialogue and the emergence of mutually satisfactory outcomes” (2014, p. 189) The critique her thus address the divergence between the stated political objectives and the observable political outcomes. Deterrence, a frequently cited argument when imposing sanctions (Hufbauer et al. 2007, p. 6), therefore seems inadequate when addressing what these sanctions are all about. These analyses of the sanctions regime point us towards what can be understood as a great paradox, namely that the sanctions might as well be understood as impeding the EU’s agency rather than demonstrating its strength. While proving to be resilient as a coherent Union, the sanctions and its conditioning upon Minsk, locks the EU into a quite minimal space politically. Moreover, it tears upon on the European economy. As such, the sanctions can be understood as a paradox which not have been adequately addressed by the current literature. The critique voiced against the EU above should be seen in light of a prevalent argument when it comes to the justification of sanctions, namely the “demonstration of resolve”. In these case, sanctions are understood to be imposed because the cost of inaction is greater than the cost of implementation (Hufbauer, Schott, Elliott & Oegg, 2007, p. 5). Then the question becomes, how are we to understand what the cost of inaction is about? And, what security needs can sanctions fulfill for a political community?

2.4 Sanctions as constructing the Self

Although this thesis questions the premise of current literature on sanctions, it also situates itself within the debate. The reviewed literature on the EUs sanctions regime towards Russia concurs with dominant views on motivations behind sanctions in general. The literature on sanctions mainly emphasize three motives of implementation: to change the behavior of the target state, to limit the target state’s behavior, or to send the target state a message (Veebel & Markus, 2015, p. 168). The explanation focusing on deterrence concerning the EUs sanctions’ regime, can be placed within the two first motives outlined above. Sjursen & Rosen’s

argument about norms and international commitments, can to some extent be placed within the third motive of sending the target state or the broader international community a message.

Understanding sanctions as being about sending the target state a message, can be characterized as a normative commitment. In Sjursen & Rosen's framework, the emphasis is on the EUs commitment to the normative framework of international law (2017). Thus, the focus is not necessarily on the EU, as it is about the EUs commitment to the norms of supporting the other actor's (Ukraine) right to sovereignty and self-determination. This approach contributes to a broader understanding of state motivation in international politics. Not only do states and other political communities engage in political struggles against what they view as a threat of their immediate survival, they also react against what is perceived as a threat to the fabric of international order. But, as will be argued throughout this thesis, this is based on specific views of power and security. We should rather shift or focus from the Other, and towards the Self.

Instead of understanding the sanctions as being about sending the other a message, it could be understood as the need to maintain a credible and stable image of the Self. As such, the concerns of the Self are placed in the spotlight, not the Other. A focus on sanctions as "demonstration of resolve" captures some of this dynamic (Hufbauer et al., 2007, p.5). The expression of sanctions is here closely connected to credibility and legitimacy, instead of supporting or influencing external actors. Moreover, the cost of inaction is said to be greater than the cost of implementation. This conceptualization of what sanctions can be a case of takes the quarrel a step further, but it does not provide us with any broader understanding of what dynamics are in play when the fear of inaction trumps material costs. As will be argued throughout this paper, even though sanctions-as-a-message is a welcoming addition to a rather instrumentally-oriented literature, it does not address a reconceptualization of foreign policy and security *per se*.

Through critically questioning our approach to foreign policy, we can illuminate how the substance behind sanctions is about more than sending a message. While foreign policy is often approached as material or symbolic, it could also be seen as expressive (Sjoberg & Horowitz, 2013, p. 107). Approaching the sanctions with this view on foreign policy, the policies adopted are important because they serve to express and re-affirm a distinct self-identity (Sjoberg & Horowitz, 2013, p. 108). To understand why the expression of something

is important for the political community involved, we can turn to ontological security theory. Sjørnsen & Rosen's account argue that a focus on norms shows how the sanctions are not about security, but rather a normative and moral commitment. This thesis, on the other hand, seeks to challenge this approach to security and place the ontological security of the political community in the spotlight.

With that basis, we can approach the sanctions policy in an original fashion. While former studies on sanctions and ontological security theory is not the starting point of this thesis, it certainly shares the same underpinning idea of approaching security in international relations. Sjöberg & Horowitz's study is the only one to have approached sanctions through the lens of ontological security theory (2013). Although their study methodologically separates itself by seeking to draw broader generalizations through making use of game theory, their approach is based on similar puzzles that guide the inquiry of this thesis. As they argue, if it is common knowledge that sanctions do not usually obtain concessions, then the assumption that actors would use them to obtain concessions should be questioned (Sjöberg & Horowitz, 2013). Moreover, this conceptualization of foreign policy is connected to an understanding of foreign policy as an expressive practice. If we approach the study of foreign policy as *expressive*, we can ask the question of what it is that the sender is expressing when they implement the sanctions regime (Sjöberg & Horowitz, 2013). Moreover, why is the cost of inaction expressed as greater than the cost of implementation? And, how is the fear of inaction expressed as a security concern?

These are questions which this thesis intends to provide a more comprehensive answer to. Because, while the EU's sanctions policy is often labelled a source of strength for the EU, it can also be said to impede the EU's agency and its political leverage. As such, it is a double-edged sword. But if we understand security as something more than the strive for physical survival, we can understand how the sanctions fulfil certain needs for the EU as a political community. Therefore, ontological security theory is chosen as the theoretical undertaking of this topic. Ontological security theory can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the substance of the sanctions policy, and what security needs such a policy is integral to. Moreover, it can help us gain an understanding of why it becomes difficult to back down on the sanctions, although they do not materialize as a political success. As such, we can get a better grip on the sources of tension within the EU. With that, we now turn to a discussion over the theoretical framework of this study.

3. Ontological security in international relations

In this chapter, the objective is to present and discuss the theoretical framework. Although a brief preview to this approach has been outlined in the section above, a more thorough presentation is needed. As such, this chapter will outline the theoretical perspective which lays the foundation for the forthcoming analysis of the EUs sanctions policy. As ontological security theory builds on earlier work on identity in international relations, a brief introduction will contextualize this literature. The rest of the chapter will be devoted to a discussion around how this theory can further our understanding of the sanctions policy. Moreover, it will discuss how ontological security theory can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the competing positions within the sanctions discourse.

3.1 Between the Self and the Other

In the 1990s, work on identity in international relations gained prominence. This work was situated within the paradigm of constructivism, which emphasized the importance of ideas to the study of state motivations. Wendt's landmark article "Anarchy is what states make of it" brought identity into the mainstream of the discipline, as it was argued that identities are the basis of interests (Wendt, 1992). Wendt famously supported his argument through re-conceptualizing anarchy, as material factors only attain meaning relationally, and not exogenous to interaction. Ideas are then important because they provide meaning to the material world, and thus constructs our perception of that same world. Ringmar furthered the same argument, that we should not study material factors in a vacuum, but how meaning is given to these material factors (Ringmar, 1996). While Wendt's article brought constructivism legitimacy in the discipline, it has been criticized for treating the state and the concept of identity as a "black box" (Weldes, 1996, p. 280). Instead of studying identities as a rather static phenomenon, scholars started turning to language where identities are both created and contested. As such, it was argued that to understand identity we need to study the discursive representations it builds on (Weldes, 1996, p. 280).

The post-structural turn in International relations has taken this work on identity and foreign policy a step further. This approach to identity sets it apart from earlier work as it argues that identity is not something states or other collectives have independently of the discursive practices mobilized in the legitimation of foreign policy (Hansen, 2006, p. 1). Here, policies are understood to be dependent on representations of the threat, or crisis, that they seek to

address (Hansen, 2006, p. 6). Another dimension that characterizes the post-structural approach to foreign policy analysis, is the importance of the Other for the study of the Self. As Hansen argues, foreign policy discourse always articulates a Self and a series of Others (2006). Only through the Other, can the Self know who it is, and how it views its interests. The Other is said to be constitutive of the Self. The importance of external actors has thus become a dominant concern for studies of identity in IR over the past decades. As Steele argues, to the extent that the issue of self-identity has been a focus of IR theory, it is through the self/other nexus (2008, p. 30). This thesis on the other hand, will place the Self at the center of attention. Approaching the EU's sanctions regime through the perspective of ontological security theory, it is argued that political communities pursue social actions to serve self-identity needs (Steele, 2008, p. 2). This approach is chosen because it provides a more comprehensive definition of security and state motivations. Moreover, it enables us to observe the ontological insecurity within the EU as it struggles to position itself between a normative and a geopolitical logic.

3.2 Ontological security theory

Embedded within research on identity in international relations, ontological security theory seeks to re-conceptualize our understanding of security and state motivations. Moreover, focus is drawn away from the Other, and towards the Self. While the concept of ontological security was first developed in psychology, Giddens brought it into the study of sociology (Ejdus, 2017). Even though scholars have been working on it in relation to IR since the post-cold war period, it is first in the past decade we have witnessed a broader legitimization of this distinct approach to international relations. This is reflected in how the usage of the theory has developed over time. While the first generation of scholarship brought the concept into the field, the second generation has emphasized theory building and empirical case studies (Ejdus, 2017). Zarakol has even described the assumption that states care about ontological security as unproblematic within the academic community (2010, p. 3). Symbolic of this broader development is the devotion of a special issue to this topic in a recent edition of the journal *Cooperation and Conflict* (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2017).

Ontological security theory argues that we should study state policies as active attempts to underwrite, and narrate, what it is as a political community (Innes & Steele, 2014, p. 17). Moreover, while daily security is about the physical threats to an actor's survival, ontological

security is about the general question of the political (Huysmans, 1998, p.242). Maintaining a coherent narrative of the political community is very much political, as it concerns repressing ambiguity and maintaining legitimacy of who the political community represents. One of its main contributions to IR concerns its challenge to a traditional conceptualization of security, as focus is drawn away from the traditional concepts of territory, governance, and survival. This reflects a criticism of studies in IR that assume states have one all-encompassing goal which is defining for their interests and thus their political calculations – survival in the international anarchy (Steele, 2008, p. 2).

Ontological security on the other hand, is concerned with *security-as-being*, not *security-as-survival*. Ontological security is here understood as security of the self, the subjective sense of who one is, which enables agency and motivates state action (Mitzen, 2006, p. 344). As such, this division (being/survival) is not only what makes this approach distinct, but it's also vital for getting to terms with what ontological security is re-conceptualizing (Mälksoo, 2015). This dichotomy is essentially about analytically separating between the security of the “body” (territory, people, institutions) and the security of the “idea” (biographical narrative of the state, historical memory, recognition) (Mälksoo, 2015, p.224). This enables a broader understanding of what counts as security in international politics and what broader dynamic political tensions are embedded in. Ontological security is thus about having a consistent sense of Self, and states perform actions to underwrite their notions of who they are (Zarakol, 2010, p. 3). State behavior, policies, are then considered as a series of active attempts to underwrite, and narrate, a sense of what it is as a political community (Innes & Steele, 2014, p. 17). Being pioneers of bringing ontological security into the field of IR, both Mitzen, Steele, and Zarakol all argue that states pursue policies which serve self-identity needs even in instances where it may compromise their physical security.

Importantly, this vision of the self should not be understood as fixed, or stable. Politics is a constant struggle over power, and this struggle takes places over defining *who* we are. While prior work on ontological security can be criticized for not placing the tension over the Self in the spotlight, this has become integral to more recent studies. Whereas the striving for a coherent Self may be common, it is precisely because the Self is not essential or unproblematic that we see ontological insecurity (Steele, 2017, p. 72). As such, undertaking the EUs sanctions policy with ontological security theory, enables an analysis of the tensions within the EUs “actorness”. Here lays the important change of focus on security as something

steadfast and static, to security as embedded within a social process. As Berenskoetter argue, “the ontological structure of the Self must be understood as a process of *coming into* being, a process whereby the Self comes to know itself by disclosing the world and itself within it” (2014, p. 268). As security is part of a process of shaping and constructing the Self, states pursue policies to sustain and produce a specific story of the Self, in reaction to events that challenge the ontology (idea) of the political community. And it is precisely because the Self is contested, that we see this dynamic.

Moreover, actors are challenged by certain situations in their environment as those situations threaten their self-identities (Steele, 2008, p. 49). This is how we can better understand how certain policies manifest as a security need, although it is not necessarily in their interest (material) to do so. Following this logic, if states avoided these actions their sense of self-identity would be radically disrupted (Steele, 2008, p. 2). This can produce what Steele labels shame, which is when actors feel anxiety about the ability of their narrative to reflect how they see themselves (2008, p. 54-55). Ontological security is thus at its core about how political communities maintain legitimacy over *who* it is, especially when met with challenges to the historical narrative of the self. Moreover, and important for this study, there is always tension within the political community on what the “Self” is. Embracing this broader definition of security, we can study how the EU perceive the sanctions to fulfill more security needs than the strive for physical deterrence. And as such, maintaining a certain narrative about the political community is very much an integral part of what defines security in international politics.

3.3 Internal or external source?

Work on ontological security theory has broadened our understanding of both what has been perceived as empirical puzzles, and reconfigurations of central concepts in IR. While ontological security scholars agree on the importance of broadening the debate from security-as-survival towards security-as-being, they disagree on the source (Ejdus, 2017, p. 5). The central question of the debate is, “are interactions and the international environment the main source of ontological anxiety for a state, or are the insecure interactions merely a consequence of the state’s own uncertainty about its own identity?” (Zarakol, 2010, p. 6). Mitzen has been the frontrunner of thinking about ontological security theory as dependent on the Other. In a benchmark study, Mitzen reconceptualized the concept of the security dilemma (Mitzen,

2006). While the security dilemma is traditionally understood within a materialistic framework, Mitzen takes a more social approach to the concept. According to Mitzen, protracted conflicts are difficult to solve, not only because of distrust and uncertainty, but because established routines create ontological security. As conflicts become part of the “self” of states, they become important for defining who the actors are. The paradox then becomes that states may prefer conflict over cooperation, because only through conflict do they know who they are (Mitzen, 2006, p. 361).

Opposed to this conceptualization, Steele has criticized Mitzen for overstating the role of the Other (Steele, 2008, p. 59). While Steele concurs that an actor must make sense of the social world to ensure ontological security, this does not mean that the actor is dependent upon that social world. While the Other should not be neglected, this criticism is to the view that the Self always must be understood as constituted by something external. The Other is not unimportant, but the Self should be our primary concern. While Mitzen emphasizes the external environment in her analysis, Steele then concentrates on the self. The methodological focus is then shifted from the study of interaction, to the study of the narratives emanating from the state about the self (Zarakol 2010: 7). A premise of this methodological shift, is that the ontological structure of a community is not sustained by actions or policies *per se*, but through a narrative which renders actions meaningful in time and space (Berenskoetter, 2014, p. 270). Security for states are about more than physical existence, as it is about protecting a specific idea of the political community. And the constitution and contestation of this idea, takes place through narratives.

As a compromise, Zarakol favors a middle-ground (2010). Anxiety about the political community’s ontological security is primarily about securing the idea of the Self, but one cannot altogether dismiss the broader social context from this process. The importance of the Other must be understood contextually, and not as never/always the main aspect of the analytical framework. In Zarakol’s study the international context is significant, because the ontological insecurity of Turkey and Japan is situated within their struggles for belonging between East and West (Zarakol, 2010, p. 3). Ontological security theory here broadens our understanding of “apologies” in international relations. Turkey and Japan’s unwillingness of admitting to historical crimes have remained a puzzle to analysts, as there are significant material incentives in play. As rhetoric is not always taken seriously as an analytical perspective in IR, this case requires a reconfiguration of our understanding of security. If

apologies are just examples of cheap talk on morals, why are Turkey and Japan so reluctant to take the final step forward? (Zarakol, 2010, p. 5). Part of an answer to this, is that the rhetorical step involves a leap of identity. Admitting to past crimes against humanity, would require a reconsideration of their self-identity. Turkey and Japan's development into Western states, makes it difficult to accept a representation as un-civilized. Although an apology could further their integration as western states, it conflicts with the ontological insecurity of the political community.

The rhetorical significance of speaking out, and the security concerns embedded in this process, will be in focus in the forthcoming analysis of the EU's sanctions regime. Moreover, it will follow Zarakol's middle-ground approach. Although the EU's ontological security concerns are not necessarily dependent on the external environment, it cannot be disregarded from the analytical framework. The sanctions policy takes place within a security environment where Russia remains a central actor, and the EU's policies cannot be separated from this broader dynamic. In other words, this process does not take place within a vacuum. Both the Self and the Other are therefore integral parts to this study, when considering the broader narrative process of ontological security. Moreover, it is of interest for this study how Zarakol understands the dynamic of apologies as embedded in Turkey and Japan's identity as between "western" and "not-western". As this thesis will argue, the EU can also be approached as struggling with ontological insecurity about its role in global politics. Although it seeks to narrate its role as relying on a normative logic, it also makes use of more geopolitical foreign policy strategies. While Turkey and Japan is in-between "east" and "west", the EU can be also described as having an unsettled "Self". As the EU balances between normative and geopolitical logics, it struggles with an identity-in-the-making (Kazharski & Makarychev, 2015). Moreover, although the EU has constructed its legitimacy upon representing a post-sovereign power (2012, p.568), it engages in geopolitical struggles. As such, the EU should rather be approached as struggling to position itself between a post-sovereign and a sovereign actorness, relying on normative and geopolitical logics. This insecurity around what kind of actor the EU should be, will be more elaborated upon in the chapter on EU-Russia relations. This is of interest for this analysis, because although the EU seeks to repress ambiguity around its post-sovereign actorness, the sanctions policy represents a coercive tool and the new European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) represents a push towards a more explicit sovereign logic from within.

3.4 Capturing the EUs anxiety

Bringing ontological security theory into an analysis of the EUs “actorness”, Mälksoo’s recent study of the EUs security strategies provides both theoretical and empirical insight for this study of the sanctions policy. To understand how we can apply ontological security as what Leander calls our “thinking tools” (2008), we must change the type of questions we ask when studying EU foreign policy. The debate on the EU as an international actor, is often mirrored by a definition of the Union as less of an actor to be recognized.

Instead of asking the typical “how efficient?” questions, we can undertake how the EUs ontological security concerns are embedded in the broader discourse. In Mälksoo’s study (2016), the EUs security strategies from 2003 (ESS) and 2016 (EUGS) are approached as representing central narratives where the EU constructs the Self. Moreover, these strategies appear as important narratives of re-affirming the EU’s will to survive, as well as to maintain its position as a relevant and legitimate global actor (Mälksoo, 2016, p.376). Security strategies can thus be studied as being part of the actors “biography”, and these strategies are more than just a formal practice. Within these narratives, the EU is outlining its conception of the Self as a security actor of a distinctive kind, with particular commitments in the world (Mälksoo, 2016, p.376). Thus, there is power within these representations as it writes the EUs self-identity and legitimacy based on certain views of the Self and the Other. These are subsequently connected to certain priorities and responsibilities, which enables certain policies as natural and subsequently possible. Security strategies thus represents exercises in ordering the world by establishing knowledge claims about “how the world works” and attempts to keep the uncertainty of the community’s ontology repressed (Mälksoo, 2016, p.376). These strategies are as such seen as part of producing a distinct Self, not reflecting something given. And this political practice serves to fulfill certain security needs for the political community at hand.

Applying ontological security theory as our thinking tools, can then highlight both the EUs identity-building aspirations and its ontological security concerns (Mälksoo, 2016, p. 377). Moreover, this approach can help us understand security as a process rather than something steadfast. Taking this approach into our analyses of the EUs sanctions’ regime towards Russia, we can illuminate how ontological security concerns are balanced when met with resistance and doubt. With an identity-in-the-making, the sanctions represent an arena for expressing a certain idea about *who* the EU is. Moreover, to understand this dimension we

cannot approach the EU as either normative or geopolitical. We should rather embrace the hybrid actorness of the EU. Central to this hybrid actorness, is how the EU's self-identity as a foreign policy actor is constantly questioned on two fronts. Either it concerns the contradictions of its "normative power" image, or it is the lack of its more traditional capabilities and independence as a global actor. This insecurity has ridden it since its inception, as it is struggling to define its role in the world. Mälksoo captures this dynamic well, when emphasizing how one must look far to find another international actor so obsessed about its global outreach and security identity as the EU (Mälksoo, 2016, p. 374). This "obsession" should as such not be seen as a mere PR-gimmick, but rather as integral to a process of managing a certain ontological insecurity.

With ontological security theory guiding this thesis as its analytical undertaking, three focal points stand out. First, we can approach the sanctions policy with a more comprehensive understanding of security in international politics. The self-identity of states, and other political communities, are important to consider when approaching their policies analytically. This does not imply that ontological security concerns are all-encompassing, but that it remains an integral part of the dynamic within the political community and its debate over how it should relate to the outside world. Second, we must embrace the fluid character of the Self, and not understand self-identity as something static. Then, we can study how tension within a political community is part of a struggle over defining the Self. Although it is in the interest of states to present a coherent and essential narrative about themselves, it is particularly because the Self is not unproblematic that we see ontological insecurity (Steele, 2017, p. 72). Third, ontological insecurity is more prevalent for actors with a more unsettled identity. As this thesis will demonstrate, the EU's balancing between principles and pragmatism shows to the EU's ontological insecurity in-between a post-sovereign and a sovereign actorness. As will be argued, this tension is an integral part of the sanctions debate.

4. Methodology and discourse theory

This chapter intends to clarify the methodological foundation of the thesis and its theoretical undertaking of the sanctions policy. The methodological section will be approached as embedded within a discussion of the theoretical framework of this study, as these have a logical connection. As a discourse analysis is integral to this thesis and the premises of its findings, it remains necessary to provide a section on discourse theory. Furthermore, transparency of the empirical material selected and the reading of the texts involved, will be discussed in this chapter.

4.1 Methodology

How do we rigorously approach our theoretical tools and the research questions in methodological terms? All research involves a set of assumptions about how we can study the world, and what knowledge we can generate about it. This thesis is based on an interpretivist approach to social science, and the study of international relations as such. Moreover, the methodological premise of a study should resonate with the theoretical approach taken. To understand the ontological security process, Steele argues that we should lend ourself to an interpretivist approach (2008, p.6). This approach to social science, argue that facts and observations cannot be separated from subjective interpretation. Thus, it does not lend itself easily to analytical tools which study the world as a given, with a definitive answer of how the world *really looks like*. Contrary to this, interpretivism assumes that human beings attach meaning to their actions, and that human actions are based on the meaning individuals attach to different phenomena (Bryman, 2012, p.30). In epistemological terms, this study therefore embraces an interpretative approach to what knowledge we can generate about international political processes. Embracing an interpretivist epistemology, focus then becomes on understanding how a certain social reality is produced and made possible, not why A led to B in strict causal terms. As such, the knowledge we generate about the world is based on subjective interpretations, not objective facts. With that premise, this study will contribute with an *interpretation* of the ontological security process and the sanctions discourse.

Following an interpretivist approach, the ontological position here reflects a view on the impossibility of separating the ideational and the material dimension. As meaning is created and challenged through language, we must study the discourse in which this meaning is constructed (Steele, 2008, p.11). Questions of ontology is concerned with the study of being,

and how we study social subjects and objects. Following a social constructivist ontology, reality is not understood to just exist out there, as it is rather socially constructed by how individuals give meaning to that “reality”. Moreover, that construction takes place through narratives, embedded within a broader discourse (Steele, 2008, p.10). As such, the *being* of the political community under study, can be observed through studying the narratives where meaning is created. Assuming that all states understand their interests in linear terms, and that these interests are given, disregard how meaning is constructed through a discursive struggle over identity. Therefore, we must study where this meaning is created and challenged, which is within language (Steele, 2008, p.11). This approach follows logically from the theoretical undertaking of this study, as ontological security theory understands security as a *social process*. This social process, of both construction and contestation, can be observed through an analysis of discursive struggle.

These methodological foundations, should be discussed in connection to the theoretical premises of this study. States, and other political communities, act upon the world based on their understanding of who they are. In other words, we cannot understand the interests of states as linear, or universal, as it is connected to how meaning is created to the subjects and objects within it. As actors construct their own identity through narratives, it gives meaning to the actions it performs. And in methodological terms, this self-identity of the community, is constructed and made possible through discourse (Steele, 2008, p.10). States talk about themselves by producing narratives about *who* they are, and *why* they are doing what they are doing. The foundation is then that only through speaking about an event does it acquire meaning (Steele, 2008, p.10). As such, the idea of the self must be performed, because it does not exist outside of these narratives. By studying narratives then, we can make clear how communities attach meaning to their policies, and how they contribute to a construction of the “self”. This does not imply that “anything goes”, i.e. that the agency of the actor is unlimited. But it means that foreign policy relies upon representations of identity (Hansen, 2006, p.1), and that a construction of identity simultaneously enables and constrains the ability of states to pursue certain actions, and not others (Steele, 2008, p.10). Interests and outcomes are not given, they are contested.

With an interpretive focus on the creation of meaning through narratives, and that ontological security can be studied within language, discourse analysis is applied as the analytical tool of this thesis (Steele, 2008, p.11). By making use of discourse analysis as our methodological

tool, we can observe the political and normative nature of the ontological security process (Steele, 2008, p.17). Moreover, it enables several steps for an analysis of ontological security concerns. Through making use of discourse analysis of the official narratives we can better understand *what* is understood as an ontological security threat, *why* those threats must be dealt with, and *which* policies should be implemented to confront these threats (Steele, 2008, p.12) The aim of the study is then to “not only lay bare the content of the actor’s narrative about the Self, but also how the discourses in play constitute certain types of action” (Steele, 2008, p.10). Moreover, we should strive towards illuminating the tension and the struggle over a policy, which is subsequently part of a battle over defining what type of actor the political community should be.

As such, discourse analysis provides us with the primary tool for understanding the relationship between ontological security concerns and foreign policy. Yet, this does not imply that a causal relationship is sought to be uncovered. As this thesis place itself within the interpretivist camp, a skepticism towards causality is prevalent. The objective of this study then becomes an emphasis on *understanding* instead of *explanation* (Steele, 2008, p.28). An interpretation of action becomes the main concern of the study, not the explanation of action in strict causal terms. Moreover, a more critical perspective of power relations is made possible. The sanctions discourse is approached with a critical mind, as the ones undertaking the policies enacts themselves with legitimacy to impose exceptional actions, while simultaneously portraying themselves as having a natural and ethical responsibility to do so (Hansen, 2006, p.31).

4.2 Discourse theory

Before moving on to a section on the empirical material chosen for the discourse analysis, some reflections on discourse theory is included. Discourse theory challenge our understanding of an objective and observable reality, as it views our knowledge and understanding of reality as constituted through language. Discourse is here understood as the representational practices through which meaning is generated (Neumann & Dunn, 2016, p. 2). With this construction of meaning comes power, as discourses should be understood as frames of meaning and lenses of interpretation, rather than objective historical truths (Hansen, 2006, p.7). This does not imply that the material world is a mere construction, but rather that our understanding of that material world is dependent on how we attach meaning to it through

discourse. Physical objects exist, but they only gain meaning through knowledge claims framed within a discourse (Jørgensen & Philips, 2002, p.9). Rejecting the view of identity as something static and objectively given, we should instead understand identity as the result of a discursive process (Jørgensen & Philips, 2002, p.34).

While there exist numerous approaches to discourse theory, they all agree that language is not a natural reflection of certain worldviews, but rather play an active role in creating and changing them (Jørgensen & Philips, 2002). But the text itself should not be understood as the object of study. According to Neumann & Dunn discourse analysis is about using the text as a vehicle for understanding social, political, and cultural phenomena (2016, p. 3). As Wæver argues, it is not what the text says that is of importance, but *how* the text argues (2004, p.41). One must study how texts are engaged in reproducing or challenging a certain perception of reality. Discourse then becomes a form of social action, that plays a part in producing the social world and our understanding of different aspects of that world (Jørgensen & Philips, 2002, p.5).

The objective of discourse analysis is then to show how certain representations of reality is created, sustained, and challenged. This does not mean that anything goes, or that discourse is disconnected from power relations. A critical perspective on what is viewed as given means a critical approach to relations of power, and the relationship between knowledge and power. Knowledge is created through social interaction in which we construct common-sense truths, and compete about what is true and false. As such, discourse analysis puts struggles over power at the top of the agenda (Torfing, 2005, p.23). As Milliken argue, discourses should be studied as a social practice that work to define and enable, and to silence and exclude (1999, p.229). Moreover, we should not study language as a transparent tool for the registration of data, but rather a field of social and political practice (Hansen, 2006, p.16). This implies that discourse matter for practice, and how policies are made possible. Discourse matters for practice, as it both enables and constrains what is perceived as possible and legitimate action. As Diez argue, discourse informs policy as it works both to provide meaning on which one can build, and as setting the limits of what is considered a meaningful and legitimate policy (2013, p.2). Power is here then viewed as constitutive of the subjects and objects within actor's social world. Thus, power can be conceptualized as "productive" as through discourse a certain social reality is produced (Barnett & Duvall, 2005). As such, we should be aware of the power integral to discursive representations and always question the normative

assumptions embedded within these representations (Diez, 2013, p. 9). Discourse analysis can then contribute with a focus on how ontological security concerns are embedded into power relations, and how the process of defining the “Self” is an integral part of arguing towards particular policies.

4.3 Text selection and delineation

In all research of social science, the process must follow certain systematic and transparent steps. As such, the research must maintain a degree of logical consistency between the research question proposed, and the data collected to answer them. This implies not only that we answer our research questions, but that our conclusions follow reasonably from evidence and logical argumentation (Jackson, 2011, p.22). Jackson labels this aspect the internal validity of social research (Jackson, 2011, p.22). Furthermore, how we ask our questions and what we make use of to answer them, should follow our assumptions about how we can generate knowledge about the world we study. In the context of this thesis, the methodological foundation has already been laid out. Thus, the next step is to delimit and specify the texts that will be part of the discourse under study. To investigate closely how the sanctions regime can be understood by making use of ontological security theory, we must focus on the discourse where this policy is constituted and ontological security concerns are expressed.

As “official foreign policy discourse is the discourse through which state action is legitimized” (Hansen, 2006, p.53), the primary focus of this analysis will be official EU foreign policy discourse. This decision has been made based on the focus of this study concentrating on the EUs construction of its role as a foreign policy actor. The EU as a political community remains the focus of attention here, and how it creates meaning to the sanctions policy. The discourse analysis will consist of what Hansen labels “model 1” discourse, which is official foreign policy discourse (2006, p.53). This discourse is widely recognized as significant to study, because it centers on political leaders with official authority to sanction the foreign policies pursued (Hansen, 2006, p.53). Through studying the official discourse surrounding the sanctions’ regime, we can illuminate how the EU as a political community create meaning of the Self and the Other when legitimizing the sanctions. How are the Self and the Other constructed in this discourse, and how are the sanctions connected to the construction of certain ontological security concerns? These are questions

that will guide the analyses, as every political community must legitimize its policies and create meaning of their actions.

As this analysis is approached through ontological security theory, this has remained central when approaching the texts. Through approaching foreign policy as expressive, the analysis seeks to categorize how ontological security concerns are expressed in the discourse.

Following Steele, the analysis is approached as studying *what* is understood as an ontological security threat, *why* those threats must be dealt with, and *which* policies should be implemented to confront these threats (Steele, 2008, p.12). Furthermore, as the Self is not static or uncontested, the analysis approaches the debate over the sanctions as a political struggle over the defining the self-identity of the political community. To study how this policy has been made possible through discursive framing, certain other steps have been included. Following Hansen (2006), certain steps have guided the categorization and mapping of the discourse. The texts have been studied as processes of linking and differentiation (Hansen, 2006, p.37). In other words, one must look for how in the discourse boundaries and similarities are drawn between the Self and the Other. The discourse analysis which follows in the next chapter, has been approached with these steps. First, the texts selected have undergone a broad reading. This is to have an open mind when first reading into the discourse. Then, the texts have undergone a more thorough reading where the main representations have been categorized. Then, the texts have been analysed thoroughly with the objective of categorizing to what extent the meaning constructed around the representations of the sanctions policy is constructed as ontological security concerns. Moreover, in focus has been how boundaries and similarities are drawn between the Self and the Other. While we can never escape the subjective interpretation of an analysis of texts, a systematic undertaking of the texts does strengthen the credibility of the interpretations. Transparency around these texts and the analysis of them, is provided to make the interpretations in the analysis chapter as transparent as possible.

The main texts of analysis consist of statements, speeches and remarks made by official representatives of the EU. Thus, the authorities which represent the EU on a day-to-day basis is in focus here. All texts are chosen after a screening of relevant material at the webpages of

the relevant institutions⁴. Furthermore, only texts that is part of a discussion over EUs relations with Russia, have been chosen for the analysis after a broader screening of available material in the online archives. For this thesis, the representatives from the EU are defined and limited to: The President of the European Council, The President of the European Commission, and The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Statements made from The European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy will also be included, as Ukraine's relationship to the EU is part of the European Neighborhood Policy. Statements from these are justified on the basis that they represent authority on positions regarding EU foreign policy and that their texts are widely distributed. It is important to note that several individuals have had these positions since early 2014, and there will therefore be some overlap regarding who is referred to in the analysis as holding these different positions from 2014 to 2016. Although the selection of these authorities limits the analysis' possibility of detecting discursive stability, official foreign policy discourse must situate itself within the broader discursive debate and legitimize its discourse while drawing on a broader set of representations (Hansen, 2006, p.74). Furthermore, it enables a deep and thorough analysis of how the EU creates meaning to its policies, and the broader political struggle which is an integral part of this political space.

The next step to be made is the time-frame of the texts under analysis. As this study is based on several research questions that focus on the legitimation of EU foreign policy regarding the sanctions' regime towards Russia, the texts are chosen that represents the period when this policy was implemented. As the first sanctions were implemented in March 2014, this is the starting point of the temporal delimitation of this study. Texts from March to November 2014 have been chosen as the texts under analysis, as the sanctions were made more and more comprehensive within this time-period. Thus, external pressure and mobilization peaked at this time-frame in 2014, and the discursive pressure was most prevalent within this period. Moreover, all the representatives under study were replaced by new individuals in either November or December that same year.

⁴ The sites screened for relevant material, are the official webpages of the European Council (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/home/>), the European Commission (https://ec.europa.eu/commission/index_en), and the European External Action Service (https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en).

Concerning numbers, 23 texts from this period have been selected for analysis. These 23 texts thereby represent the official EU discourse under study in this paper⁵. Although there could always be more texts included, this selection represents a good amount of depth and diversity. Press statements and remarks by EU representatives after meetings in the European Council and the Foreign Affairs Council, represents a significant part of these texts. Other texts include speeches and remarks at political and public events, for instance in the European Parliament and the European Council. In concrete numbers, 7 texts are included by President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy. Furthermore, 7 texts by President of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, have been chosen. In addition to these, 4 texts by the High Representative of Foreign Affairs, Catherine Ashton, are included. Included, is also 3 texts by the European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy, Stefan Füle. The texts chosen enable a thorough analyses of a period with high political intensity and discursive pressure. As the purpose of discourse analysis is interpretation of what ideas actors lay to rest for their understanding of the world, not statistical significance, this enables an analysis of the discourse in 2014 (Hansen, 2006, p.78). Although one could always include more texts in an analysis of discourse, diversity of authority within the EU have been included to strengthen the premises of the conclusions.

As 2014 represented the year where discursive pressure peaked, this year will remain up front as our main concern. But, an analysis of how the broader debate over the sanctions have developed into 2015 and 2016 is included, to study how this policy has been contested over time and what this can tell us about the broader ontological security process. Undertaking a more specified discourse analysis of the years of 2015 and 2016 has been under consideration. Instead of taking this approach, an analysis of the broader debate over the sanctions has been chosen to provide a better picture of how this policy and the dominant representation within the discourse has become contested over time. As such, while this approach has its limitations, it also has its strengths. Moreover, a specific focus on the EU's discourse could have been extended to more focus on the debate within the member states. But, when taken into consideration the time and length of this thesis, a more thorough analysis of the EU's internal dialogue has been considered most appropriate. Choices will always have to be made, but it remains important to reflect on what these choices imply for the conclusions drawn.

⁵ These texts can all be accessed through a separate section in the reference list for this thesis. There, online links to all 23 texts are included.

5. EU-Russia relations

Before we turn to an analysis of the sanctions discourse, the broader political context of EU-Russia relations will be presented in this chapter. This chapter is included to contextualize the history of EU-Russia relations in the post-Cold war era. Moreover, it is included to set the broader context in which the sanctions policy is occurring within. As such, the section will focus on a discussion of what it is that shape the relationship between the EU and Russia, and how the EU can be conceptualised as a rather anxious power. As the current tension between the EU and Russia is not taking place within a vacuum, this section will provide important background context for the forthcoming analysis.

5.1 Conflicts in the near abroad

EU-Russia relations have taken many twists and turns since it gradually developed in the post-WWII era. As the relationship shifted between cooperation and conflict, both Russia and the EU underwent significant changes to their institutionalisation as political entities (Forsberg & Haukkala, 2016, p.2). These changes have in turn affected the dynamics of the relationship. The European Union has not only changed name from the European Community, but it has also seen significant changes in the institutionalisation and visibility of its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Russia on the other hand, has developed from being part of the Soviet Union, which impacted the current formation of the state identity and political institutionalisation of the Russian state. These changes have in turn impacted the policy orientation of the polities, as they both suffer from identities-in-the-making (Kazharski & Makarychev, 2015, p.329).

Although there were signs of divisions on certain issues in the immediate post-cold war years, the signing of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in 1994 symbolized faith in a new era of cooperation on the continent (Forsberg & Haukkala, 2016, p. 17). While the PCA primarily institutionalized an economic arrangement, the strong role of norms and values was prevalent (Forsberg & Haukkala, 2016, p. 17). But, this level of recognition and cooperation between the polities developed for the worse as we entered the new millennium. While EU-Russia relations in the 1990s was “marked by great expectations”, this changed with the new millennium. At the end of the Yeltsin era, Russian policymakers aspired to join the EU and sparred with it as a negotiating partner in the Kosovo crisis (Maass, 2017). This contrasted with the end of Putin’s second term as president, where the polities were locked in a

geopolitical confrontation over the eastern neighbourhood and Russian dissatisfaction with the EU's ideological push into the neighbourhood (Maass, 2017).

While Russia today increasingly conflates NATO and the EU as geopolitical actors (Allison, 2014, p.1269) this was not the case in the late 1990s with conflicts in both Kosovo and Chechnya occurring. NATO and the USA were represented as strategic threats, while the EU represented a more acceptable diplomatic channel to the West (Maass, 2017, p.2). Moreover, in the beginning of the new millennium EU-enlargement of countries from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) caused stir for the partnership (Maass, 2017, p.57). This enlargement would lead to both geopolitical and normative tension, and a divide between “new” and “old” bloc positions towards Russia. The belief that the EU sought to promote its normative and geopolitical influence in the post-soviet area gained more prominence with the Orange revolution in Ukraine, 2004. The presidential election in Ukraine turned into a narrative-contest concerning whether Ukraine belonged in east or west. In the resolution of this conflict, the EU came to play a dominant role which culminated in the victory of pro-EU candidate Yushchenko. This intervention was characterised by Russia as “destructive interference in Ukraine”, and it began to view the EU as a hostile power seeking to draw Ukraine closer into its strategic sphere of influence (Maass, 2017, p.103).

Not long after the Orange revolution, another military conflict caused stir in EU-Russia relations. Russia's relations with the West were in 2008 challenged by its war in Georgia (Forsberg & Haukkala, 2016, p.32). Although criticism and harsh rhetoric dominated, EU leaders quickly returned to their belief that constructive engagement was the way forward with Russia. But the war in Georgia would prove to have long-term consequences for the relationship, as it accelerated the EU's plans to enhance integration with Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova within the European Eastern Partnership (EaP) framework (Maass, 2017, p.150). While business-as-usual triumphed within the EU after most conflicts in the post-cold war era, this did not prove to be the case with the conflict in Ukraine in 2014.

The eruption of the Ukraine-crisis in 2013, proved to be a “point of no return” for the EU (Maass, 2017, p.164). As in 2004, the internal conflict concerned corruption, abuse of power, and whether Ukraine should develop stronger ties with Russia or the EU. What started with President Yanukovich's decision to reject an Association Agreement (AA) with the EU,

culminated with the annexation of Crimea. As the situation in Ukraine escalated and became militarized, the Union took a firm stance. Although the deliberation on sanctions between the member states reflected internal division, the implementation of such an extensive sanction regime was unprecedented in the history of EU-Russia relations. While many people expected the EU's imposition of sanctions and a principled approach towards Russia to be half-hearted and short-lived, it rather proved to represent a "new normal" (Forsberg & Haukkala, 2016, p. 41). As such, the year of 2014 represented exceptional politics.

5.2 Geopolitical or normative tension?

As the brief historical review of EU-Russia relations underline, the relationship can be characterized as a pendulum between cooperation and conflict (Averre, 2005). While in the early 1990's the strategic partnership was institutionalized, the Ukraine-crisis in 2014 manifested a broader crisis in the relationship. Although both EU and Russian officials have stressed the common interests and values of the polities, both actors have gradually accused each other of a zero-sum approach to cooperation (Nitoiu, 2016, p. 1). As such, the dominant analyses of the relationship have focused on why the relationship has led to conflict, not cooperation. One part of the literature highlight the geopolitical dimension, and particularly the struggle for control over the eastern neighborhood (Gotz 2015; Mearsheimer 2014). Here, international politics is understood as a zero-sum game where the anarchic structure makes resources scarce, and distrust and insecurity inescapable. The EU's association agreements with countries under former Soviet influence, and the Russian creation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), is understood to be symbolic of an established geopolitical competition over the neighborhood. This dynamic is argued to have become more prevalent as the EU have put more resources into its neighborhood-policies, and as Russia have developed its material strength and foreign policy ambitions under President Putin. Thus, a changing balance of power and the geographical context, is understood to make cooperation difficult.

Another part of the literature is concerned with the ideational dimension, as a normative divide has created significant obstacles for a sincere partnership establishing (Haukkala 2010; Casier 2013; Tsygankov 2016). In these terms, Haukkala argue that the partnership between the polities failed to establish because of the EU's exclusive claim to normative hegemony in its relationship with the broader post-soviet neighborhood (2010). Moreover, the European

Neighborhood Policy (ENP) has been met with skepticism in Russia, as it is viewed as an instrumental strategy disguised by normative rhetoric (Haukkala, 2008, p.45). In these analysis, the EU and Russia are understood as acting according to inherently different worldviews. As such, cooperation is said to have failed to establish because of a lack of normative commonality. While the EU is understood to promote universal values and post-sovereign arrangements, Russia represents a traditional sovereign actor that rests on the rationale of state sovereignty, geopolitics, and a zero-sum logic. Thereby, a binary of modernity is constructed between the polities (Klinke, 2012).

5.3 Europe, Russia and identity

The view of the EU and Russia as representing polities with established and divergent interests, are challenged by scholars working on identity. Neumann has demonstrated how Europe historically has played the role as a constitutive Other for Russia (2016). In the discourse on Russia's international position and the strive for representing a "great power", Europe plays a central role. Thus, the debate on Russia's international status is both in negative and positive respects centred around a debate on Russia's position in Europe. As Makarychev demonstrates, Europe might be perceived as a challenge to Russia, but the Russian identity is nevertheless constructed through communication with and reference to Europe (2014, p. 23). Europe as an idea thus remain central to the construction of the Russian Self. This is also to some extent the case when it comes to different representations of the European Self, as Russia historically has been represented as qualitatively different from Europe (Neumann, 1999). While representations of Russia have developed from being "barbaric" towards being an "apprentice" of European political and economic institutions, it remains as something qualitatively different from the rest of Europe (Neumann, 1999). This affects the possibilities of envisaging Russia as part of "Europe", and as a trusted partner of the EU.

Relevant to this thesis, is how studies on the EUs identity have emphasized the importance of Europe's turbulent history. Although the EU has increasingly come to rely on cultural and geographical Otherings, it is still the European past which remains the dominant Other (Diez, 2004). As such, the EU "Self" has primarily been constructed by reference to Europe's own past. According to Wæver, "Europe's Other is Europe's own past which should not be allowed to become its future" (1996, p.122). But as this analysis of the discourse surrounding

the sanctions regime and the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) will show, the EU's Self is increasingly constituted by reference to Russia as representing something qualitatively different. This discourse has developed over time with the disagreements over the eastern neighborhood, where both the EU and Russia have been trying to proclaim its moral and political superiority, while labeling the Other as an unreliable partner (Dias, 2013, p. 267).

Taking the analyses of self/other relations a step further, the interaction between Russia and the EU in the eastern neighborhood can be described as an area where attempts are made to stabilize these identities (Kazharski & Makarychev, 2015). The neighborhood thus represents a geographical space where the polities' identities are both sought stabilized and questioned. As such, the "near abroad" does not only play the function of strategic territory, as it represents a space where the boundaries of the Self are questioned (Kazharski & Makarychev, 2016, p. 330). In other words, while the scholarly discourse on EU-Russia relations is dominated by characterizations of the polities as representing strictly different actors, they can also be understood in their similarity. While Russia has increasingly engaged in a normative rivalry with the EU in the post-soviet space, the EU has come to adapt to methods of *realpolitik*, which conflicts with its self-identity as a normative power (Kazharski & Makarychev, 2016, p. 329). Nitoiu even argues that the EU has abandoned its normative approach, as it is increasingly engaging in a geopolitical competition with Russia (Nitoiu, 2016).

As such, both Russia and the EU can be described as deeply divided political subjects' incapable of speaking with a coherent voice (Makarychev, 2014, p. 22). Instead of conceptualizing their policies based on them representing actors with static identities, we should approach them as balancing between different models of governance (Kazharski & Makarychev, 2016). While Russia is often understood as operating on a *modus operandi* of geopolitics in the neighborhood, it has increasingly engaged in a normative competition with the EU. The EU has on the other hand been facing quite the opposite challenge when engaging in closer cooperation with the post-soviet space through the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). This impacted the EU's strategy in the area, as it ended up in a *de facto* geopolitical competition with Russia.

5.4 The EU: an anxious power

As the past section argue, it is not necessarily helpful to draw a straight line between the EU as relying on either a normative or geopolitical logic. How then, should we understand the EU as a foreign policy actor? And, why does this matter for an analysis of the sanctions policy? Unlike NATO which was established as a security provider, the EU has grown into the role of one (Mälksoo, 2016, p.375). One way to capture the peculiar construction of the EU as a security provider, is to understand it as struggling with anxiety around its actorness. We should thus embrace the “hybrid” quality of the EUs actorness in our analysis. The academic debate over how the EU should be categorized as a foreign policy actor captures some of this uncertainty plaguing the Union. The literature is divided on how to approach the EU as a global actor. For the more upbeat, the EU is a normative, post-sovereign power (Mälksoo, 2016, p.375). Here, the EU is understood to have a unique ability to define “normal” behavior in international politics. It is said to represent a “force for good”, in a world ridden by geopolitical actors (Manners, 2002). For others, the EU represents a “tragic actor” which lacks the organizational and material resources necessary to play a significant role in global politics (Mälksoo, 2016, p. 375). These narratives depict the EU as a weak actor, as it struggles to manifest an autonomous foreign policy (Toje 2010; Hill 1993). Moreover, the “normative power” image is just viewed as an instrumental disguise. As such, the EU is said to represent a weak geopolitical actor, hiding behind normative rhetoric.

Instead of approaching the EU as either or, we should embrace the EU as an actor which struggles with anxiety about its actorness on two fronts. This first dimension concerns the EUs status anxiety. As mentioned earlier, the EU is often teased about its lack of traditional actorness. While it is the rhetoric of representing a post-sovereign power that legitimizes the EU as a foreign policy actor, it simultaneously suffers from status anxiety about its place among the traditional security providers (Mälksoo, 2016, p. 382). Thus, it is rid by anxiety of not being recognized as a powerful actor in sovereign terms. Recently, this growing concern was expressed in the new European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) where the EU’s ability to fulfil its role as a “soft power” is increasingly doubted upon (European Union, 2016). Moreover, the EUs lack of political influence towards a resolution to the conflict in Ukraine, is said to be symbolic of the limited influence of a soft-power approach to the post-soviet space (Nitoiu, 2016, p.10). A dilemma then arises to whether the development of joint military resources and a more explicit geopolitical logic would serve to enable and increase the credibility and influence of the EU vis-à-vis Russia. But at the same time, this is not easily

reconciled with the EUs legitimacy, and member states are still divided on turning the EU into a militarized actor.

A second aspect of the EUs anxiety concerns the disputed status of its self-proclaimed normative power identity. Manners famously argued that the EU is different to pre-existing political forms, and this difference pre-disposes it to act as a “normative power” (Manners, 2002, p.242). While other states within the system acts according to more sovereign logics of geopolitical competition and military power, the EU is said to be different. Not only does the EU follow a normative approach to international politics, but it is said to be uniquely disposed to do so. Thereby, the EU is constructed as a rather post-sovereign power. Moreover, as Headley argue the normative power concept is not limited to the academic debate, but rather an integrated part of the self-understanding of many policymakers (2015, p.297). Although this self-image of the EU is very much engrained in policymakers’ self-perceptions, it is disputed on several fronts. In contrast to its self-understanding, the EU is not necessarily seen as a normative power by the outside world. The colonial past of Europe, and the perception of an instrumental use of a normative discourse, makes it into more of a “negative normative power” (Larsen, 2014, p.905). And while the EU do place norms on top of the agenda, it also acts according to strategic and material interests at the expense of human rights and democracy promotion (Diez, 2013, p.197). Moreover, the idea of the EU as a normative power is being challenged by populist parties within the EU, and the ongoing Brexit process shows how the EU as a model for governance is being challenged at a whole different level from within. Simultaneously, Russia’s military involvement in Ukraine has challenged the EUs ability to define what is “normal” behaviour in international politics (Headley, 2015). In other terms, the EUs distinct “Self” is rid by controversy, tension, and resistance.

Instead of explicitly engaging in the debate on whether the EU represents a force for good or something too weak to be recognized, we can study its actions as about managing different levels of anxiety. As the post-sovereign and sovereign EU is not easily separated, we should rather approach the EU as an actor which struggles with a degree of ontological insecurity. As will be argued in the forthcoming analysis, this insecurity that confronts the EU is important to consider when analysing the conflictual positions within the debate over the sanctions policy. Although the construction of the EU as a post-sovereign power is prevalent within the sanctions discourse, the EU is increasingly embracing a more sovereign logic.

6. Sanctions: from 2014 to 2016

The rest of this thesis is devoted to an analysis of the EUs sanctions discourse, and as such it represents a central part for answering the research questions. The following analysis has two main objectives. The first is to analyse the EUs discourse over the sanctions policy in the year of 2014. The second is to analyse how the debate over this policy has developed since 2014, to study how the dominant political position came under increased pressure in the following years. Through studying the EUs internal debate over the sanctions policy, this analysis intends to broaden our understanding of the sources of tension within the Union. To understand this dynamic in a comprehensive manner, the debate over the sanctions is presented year by year. Only then can we understand how ontological security concerns are part of a contested political process which develops over time. While the year of 2014 remains the main locus of this analysis, space is devoted to a discussion of how the debate over the sanctions developed into 2015 and 2016. Through studying how the EUs position towards the sanctions policy has developed over time, we can get a better grip on the dominant and sub-ordinate positions within the discourse. Moreover, it can provide us with an insight into where the EU is heading with its sanctions policy in 2017. While certain ideas about the political community remain more uncontested than others, a rather different EU is argued towards in 2017 than in the year of 2014.

Approaching the sanctions discourse with ontological security theory, the political logics competing for dominance within the discourse are embedded into a broader understanding of how the sanctions policy represents a struggle over defining the EUs Self. And, as the analysis will show, we will gain a better understanding of how ontological security concerns makes it difficult to establish a pragmatic partnership as the year's pass. Moreover, this approach will underline how the EUs actorness is dragged between two camps, and how this dynamic is an integral part of the conflictual positions within the debate. The EUs ontological insecurity in-between a post-sovereign and a sovereign actorness, is central to the sanctions debate.

In terms of structure, the analysis which follows in this chapter will be divided into three sub-chapters. The analysis is presented as a chronological timeline of the sanctions regime, and the development of the EUs position over the years of 2014, 2015 and 2016. Reflections are also made upon where we now stand in 2017. First, a thorough analysis of the EUs discourse

in 2014 is presented. As 2014 represented an exceptional year, the main part of the analysis is devoted to this year. Then, focus will be on how this policy in 2015 was both challenged and became part of a routine. At last, the more pressuring year of 2016 is elaborated upon, as this year was filled with extensive tension concerning the future of the sanctions. As mentioned, this approach is chosen so that we can understand ontological security concerns as a process. As it is a social process, we should study how it is defined and contested within a political space over a certain time-period. When approaching the discourse in this manner, we can observe both stability and disjuncture within the debate. Furthermore, we can study to what extent ontological security concerns are an integral part of the EUs sanctions debate. As such, the analysis seeks to discuss how the EU spoke out loud about the sanctions in 2014, and how this policy has developed with the release of the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) in June 2016. A central concern for this study then becomes what broader political logic dominated the sanctions discourse in 2014, and where the EU is heading as we now in 2017 are three years into this political stalemate.

Following Neumann, the analysis will look for how the discourse contains a dominant representation of reality and one or more alternative representations (Neumann, 2008 p.70). As the analysis progress, two main representations will be presented and discussed. These representations open for different interpretations of both the Self and the Other, and thus makes possible different policies towards Russia. Studying the EUs discourse then becomes important, as it has consequences for which policy can be pursued over time. As the review of EU-Russia relations in the post-cold war era demonstrated, the EUs emphasis on values in its relations with Russia has fluctuated between pragmatic foreign policy goals and normative considerations (Maass, 2017, p.191). There has as such been a recurrent division within the EU, between what this thesis will label the principled and the pragmatic position. While these divisions are not as visible in “peacetime”, they become increasingly clear and prevalent within the discourse in times of tension. As for the categorization of the discourse, the analysis has therefore approached the texts with an expectation to uncover a principled and a pragmatic representation.

With that clarification, the next section in this chapter will now outline and discuss how several key authorities within EU institutions spoke about the sanctions in 2014. Central ideas within these representations will here be in focus, as the substance of the sanctions is our main concern. Moreover, focus will be on how we can understand ontological security

concerns to be an integral part of the sanctions policy. Following a thorough discussion of the discourse in 2014, the next sections will elaborate upon how this discourse has developed and become challenged throughout 2015 and 2016. The analysis is concluded with a discussion over what this can tell us about the EU as an actor, as well as to where we stand in 2017.

7. 2014: exceptional politics

The year of 2014 represented a significant shift on the European continent, where borders were tampered with and order and predictability for European security was put to the test. In ontological security terms, this represented a critical situation for the EU as a self-proclaimed guarantor of peace and stability. Moreover, the resilience and credibility of the EU as a global actor, came under substantial amounts of pressure. As such, 2014 was an exceptional year. Approaching ontological security as a social process, a critical situation occurs when a threat to the self-identity of the political community is expressed (Steele, 2008, p.12). Studying the discourse of EU officials, we can understand how the legitimization of the sanctions policy in 2014 was closely linked to an idea of it representing an ontological threat. Thus, the situation is interpreted by the EU as a threat to the Self, and what it as a political community stands for. How were then the EU to react, and why does this matter for the EUs status as a security provider? As will be elaborated upon, 2014 represented an exceptional year as the Ukraine-crisis took center stage within both the broader public and political spotlight in Europe. And as such, the sanctions had to be extensively justified and legitimized in this critical period. This came with pressure for the EU, as it had to decide on a political reaction. But how was this reaction to be crafted, and what could this tell us about how the EU strikes a balance between principles and pragmatism?

While the EU do articulate an objective of deterrence when it comes to the function of the sanctions (Van Rompuy, 2014b), its meaning and legitimacy is closely connected to a representation about the EU as a distinct global power. More explicitly, a post-sovereign power. While other actors in the international system struggle to stick to their principles in times of crisis, the EU is said to have what it takes. The EUs authority is thus constructed upon a distinct moral authority. This represents the dominant position within the discourse, which will be referred to as the principled position. As such, the legitimacy of the sanctions was in 2014 discursively linked to an idea of the EU as representing something special in a rather anarchic world. In other words, a representation of the EU as a post-sovereign power is

what the sanctions build their legitimacy on. This does not mean that there exists no tension within the discourse, but it rather demonstrates the hierarchical positions within the discourse in 2014, and how this made possible a certain understanding and legitimacy of imposing sanctions towards Russia.

In focus for this analysis, is then how particular qualities are ascribed to the Self and the Other. Moreover, focus is on how we can understand ontological security concerns as an integral part of the discourse and the broader political dynamic under study. This is discussed through presenting how this policy was spoken about in 2014 by key authorities within the EU. After the representations within the official discourse is presented and analysed, the findings will be discussed. As such, we now first turn to an analysis of the EUs discourse over the sanctions policy in 2014.

Ashton's statements

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, held the position until 1. November 2014 when she was replaced by Federica Mogherini. In this section, the more dominant and recurrent ideas that are prevalent within Ashton's statements will be presented and analysed. Although the material analysed from Ashton is less extensive than from Van Rompuy and Barroso, certain dominant ideas are observed within the texts.

Russia's alternative world order

Within Ashton's statements, a certain representation of the situation in Ukraine is dominant. Moreover, this representation builds on certain ideas about both the EU and Russia as political entities. According to Ashton, the conflict in Ukraine turned into an international crisis because of Russia's promotion of an alternative world order, challenging a western world order where international law and multilateralism represents the normal. As Russia is ascribed the role as a revisionist power, it is said to promote an alternative order where coercion and militarization sets precedence as legitimate political behaviour. Furthermore, the crisis in Ukraine is said to represent a crisis for international law as a normative framework of interaction. The day before Crimea was formally incorporated into the Russian federation on the 17th of March, Ashton described the situation in her remarks after an extraordinary meeting in the Foreign Affairs Council:

We recall that deployment of Russian forces is a violation of Russia's international commitments. Let me stress that the EU does not and cannot recognize the outcome of a referendum under these circumstances (Ashton 2014a).

The situation in Ukraine, is said to represent a crisis of international norms of engagement, as Russia is neglecting its international commitments. As such, the conflict is elevated from the domestic, to the international level. Moreover, the situation is then said to represent a broader challenge to a system based on international law. This is the situation Ashton argues that the EU must react against. Furthermore, Russia's unilateral actions cannot be neglected as it calls into question a security architecture supported by the EU. Ashton emphasised this argument in the European Parliament on the 3rd of April 2014:

Beyond their immediate repercussions, the events of these last weeks remind us that peace and stability in Europe could be more fragile than we all would hope. Unilateral action can call into question four decades of confidence building and developing shared principles in Europe (Ashton 2014b).

International norms, as the foundation of an ordered relations between states, has been challenged by Russia. The EU must react to this challenge, and ensure that the international system does not turn into a full-fledged anarchy. While the EU promotes a multilateral approach to relations between states, Russian foreign policy is driven by unilateral national interests and there is a danger of this establishing as a precedence of state behaviour. As a protector of an international order based on common rules of engagement, the EU has certain commitments to live up to. Furthermore, an emphasis is put on the illegality of the referendum in Crimea. While Russia promoted the argument that this was about the Crimean people's right to self-determination and independence, the EU has sought to demonstrate how the referendum in Crimea must be seen as a "so-called referendum". Disavowing the Russian claim as a protector of international law and democracy, is thus observed within the discourse. As Ashton stated it in her remarks, on the 12th of May after a meeting in the Foreign Affairs Council:

We were very clear as well in our position regarding the so-called "referenda": The EU will not recognise any illegitimate and illegal "referenda" (Ashton 2014d).

Emphasising how the situation in Crimea did not represent a case of international law and democracy, Ashton argues that the situation rather represented the opposite. The referendum in Crimea was a referendum in theory, but in fact it represented quite the opposite of the free will of the people. Not recognizing this referendum, and Russia's claim to international law and democracy, remains a necessity for the EU, according to Ashton. Inaction could thus represent an implicit recognition, and the EU as an authority of peace and stability on the continent, cannot allow this to happen.

The EUs credibility

As discussed, an emphasis on the EUs international commitments are recurrent within several of Ashton's statements. Furthermore, these commitments are connected in the discourse to the importance of living up to them in practice. This remains significant, because how the EU lives up to its self-image, will have an impact on both the internal and external perception of the Union. According to Ashton, the credibility of the EU as a global actor relies on a strong and principled response towards Russia. After describing how Russia's unilateral actions in Ukraine puts the post-Cold war model of cooperation based on shared principles at stake, she emphasises how this represents a challenge to the EUs credibility as a foreign policy actor. Thus, the credibility of the Self is put into question. In a speech at the Annual Conference of the European Defence Agency on the 27th of March 2014, Ashton stated that:

We need to take time and reflect on what this means for the EU: what we can do to prevent such situations, how we can best respond to them and how we organise and equip ourselves in a rapidly changing strategic and geopolitical environment. Ultimately, this is about the role of the EU on the world stage, and about its readiness and ability to act as a security provider (Ashton 2014c).

Showing resilience, is here connected to the legitimacy of the EU as a global actor, as its credibility is put into question with the Ukraine-crisis. The necessity of reacting, and not keeping quiet, concerns the importance of maintaining a certain credibility of *who* and *what* the EU represents. As such, Ashton emphasise that the EU represents a global actor which supports an international order based on common normative rules of engagement. The EU, as a bulwark of liberal norms and values, has certain commitments as a security provider. Following these commitments is not only necessary for the physical security of Europe as a continent, but also to preserve the status and credibility of the EUs status as a resilient,

political community. Ashton thus furthers the idea that the EU must be strong and principled when faced with situations that challenge the EU's credibility in the international community. Moreover, this is connected to a representation of the EU's international commitments to a law-based framework of engagement.

Van Rompuy's statements

Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, held the position until 1. December 2014 when he was replaced by Donald Tusk. As President of the institutional body where heads of state and government agree on the overall direction of the EU, Van Rompuy remained a central authority on the EU's position. Within Van Rompuy's statements, we can observe several of the same ideas as within Ashton's statements. Although, within his statements there is a more direct and explicit emphasis on the EU's responsibility as a distinct international actor. Moreover, a sub-ordinate pragmatic representation is also observed within the discourse.

The EU's special responsibility

Recurrent within Van Rompuy's discourse on the sanctions in 2014, is an underlying idea of the EU as a global actor with a particularly endowed responsibility. In several of the statements where the sanctions policy is spoken about, Van Rompuy emphasizes that the EU has a "special responsibility" for peace and order on the continent. A certain uniqueness is thus ascribed to the Union's legitimacy on the global arena, and specifically to the sanctions policy being enacted through the EU as a political community. As the situation in Crimea became more and more tense in the first week of March, and Russian military troops were observed on the peninsula, pressure built up on the international community to react. After an extraordinary meeting of EU heads of state and government on the 6th of March 2014, Van Rompuy stated that:

Let me conclude by saying that today all leaders affirmed that as European Union, we have a special responsibility for peace, stability and prosperity on our continent, and we are ready to take that responsibility. Acts of aggression cannot be without consequences (Van Rompuy 2014a).

The EU as a distinct global actor, and the special responsibility which this brings, was also emphasised by Van Rompuy on the 20th of March in the European Council. At this day, he stated that:

The European Union has a special responsibility for peace and stability in Europe, and we are acting accordingly, in line with European values and interests. We stand by Ukraine and its people. We support their right to choose their own future (Van Rompuy 2014b).

Reflected in these statements, is an idea of the EU as representing a distinct international actor. The EU is here said to represent the peaceful development of a European continent from violence to peace, and thus it embodies a natural authority to react. This historical authority endows the EU with a special responsibility and legitimacy to ensure that the international system does not turn into chaos. Furthermore, this responsibility rests with the idea that the EU has some moral/ethical qualities which sets it apart from the rest of the international community. This idea is recurrent in the official discourse on the sanctions' regime, and it reflects what Hansen labels the construction of "ethical identity" (2006, p.45). This construction of the EU's identity in ethical terms, implies a powerful discursive move where the foreign policy issue at hand is moved out of the strategic/selfish national interests, and located within the higher moral good (Hansen, 2006, p.45). Thus, the deterrent strategy of sanctions as a coercive tool, is grounded upon a distinctive ethical responsibility. As such, the power within such a coercive foreign policy tool, is constructed as a necessity. The EU is "forced" to react this way, and as such a coercive tool is moralized on the grounds of the EU sticking to its values when they are put to the test. As the EU represents a post-sovereign power, it is endowed with a special responsibility to react. Van Rompuy made clear the EU's principled commitments in a speech for the Foreign Policy and United Nations Association of Austria, on the 8th of April:

We are ready to stand up for our values, also at a price (Van Rompuy 2014c).

Civilizational choice

The emphasis of a moral and ethical responsibility, is connected within Van Rompuy's statements to a civilizational discourse where the boundary of the political Self is drawn at the border of Russia. The moral dimension of the sanctions discourse is central for the construction of the Self, as it is connected to a broader civilizational discourse of "developed"

and “undeveloped” political communities. Van Rompuy explicitly addressed this aspect when he argued that the situation in Ukraine represented a case where:

The majority of the people of Ukraine made a decisive choice in favour of our European values. It was a civilizational choice. They refused to live any longer in the Yanukovych era of lies, bribes, manipulation, blackmail and poverty (Van Rompuy 2014a).

This emphasis of the Ukraine-crisis representing a civilizational battle, was also proclaimed by Van Rompuy on the 8th of April 2014. The crisis in Ukraine is here said to have developed because of the EU's Association Agreement (AA), and the Ukrainian people's wish to join a European civilization:

On 21 March, we signed the political parts of the Association Agreement with Ukraine. It was a strong way to recognize the aspirations of the people of Ukraine to live in a country governed by values, by democracy, and the rule of law, where all citizens – and not just the few – have a stake in national prosperity. We recognize the popular yearning for a decent life as a nation, for a European way of life (Van Rompuy 2014c).

With these statements, the construction of Europe as an idea and the EU as the bearer of this idea, is connected to a civilizational discourse. The boundary of Europe as an idea can in theory be anywhere, but here it is drawn on the borders of Ukraine, where the European civilization ends in both spatial and ethical terms. The civilizational boundary thus starts at the border of Russia. Simultaneously, Ukraine is thought of as an intrinsic part for Europe, as it embraced values which the EU represents. Thereby, the domestic struggle for political power and ideology within Ukraine, is given meaning as it is portrayed as primarily a battle over freedom to join the EU and the European civilization. Thus, the EU has a responsibility to act, as it is portrayed as the natural bearer of this civilization. The sanctions are then important as an expression of *who* the EU should be, not solely the territorial integrity of Ukraine as a European nation.

Common interests

Within Van Rompuy's statements, a certain dominant political logic is prevalent. This logic rests on certain ideas about the EU as a rather post-sovereign power in a world rid by geopolitical actors. As such, the EU is said to have a special responsibility for maintaining a world order where multilateralism, international law and democracy remain the cornerstone

for interaction. Furthermore, this actorness comes with certain self-identity commitments as the EU must live up to its own idea of who it is. The dominance of this position is prevalent within the discourse, but this does not mean that there is not tension or alternative representations within Van Rompuy's statements. A more pragmatic and sub-ordinate representation is observed within the discourse, as the EU and Russia is said to have important common interests. Here, the EU is said to remain interested in cooperating with Russia when their interests overlap, but that the development in 2014 make this impossible. As Van Rompuy stated it in a speech on the 8th of April:

As a matter of fact, after what happened in Crimea, we must rethink the EU-Russia relationship. We invested a lot of good relations with Russia the last decade (by supporting its WTO membership; the Partnership for Modernisation). We were ready to engage on a New Agreement. Unfortunately, Russia has other objectives and tries to restore a foregone world. But the past will never come back (Van Rompuy 2014c).

As such, there exists a significant degree of interdependence between the EU and Russia in both economic and political terms. The economic dimension is in focus in this statement, as Van Rompuy conceptualize the "good relations" with Russia through the frame of Russia's integration into global economic structures of development. Supporting Russia's entrance into global institutions and modernization domestically, the EU has worked hard to get Russia on the "right path". Thus, the EU supports the role of Russia as an apprentice of integration to global institutions. But, while this position remains part of the discourse, it remains as a sub-ordinate representation embedded into a dominant principled position. As such, the dominance of the principled position makes it difficult to envision a pragmatic relationship to Russia.

Barroso's statements

Jose Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, held the position until 1. November 2014 when he was replaced by Jean-Claude Juncker. As President of the EUs executive supranational body, Barroso was central to the legitimation of the sanctions policy. Within Barroso's statements, we can observe some of the same overarching ideas as with the other representatives. Russia is here understood to promote an alternative world order, and the sanctions policy is expressive of the EUs principled approach to international politics.

Two clashing logics

The EU's role as a rather special actor, is prevalent within Barroso's statements. Furthermore, this is tied up discursively to an idea of the EU and Russia as representing two qualitatively different political communities. Thus, the Self and the Other are ascribed as representing divergent political rationales. When arguing for the necessity of sanctioning Russian behaviour in Ukraine, Barroso stated on the 12th of March 2014 that:

The page of last century's history should not be turned and not re-written. I believe in a European continent where the rule of law prevails over the rule of force, where sovereignty is shared and not limited, where the logic of cooperation replaces the logic of confrontation (Barroso 2014a).

While the EU is said to be a bearer of cooperation and freedom, Russia is challenging this world order. In other words, we can say that this corresponds to the construction of a divide between soft and hard power. While the EU relies on a power of attraction and universal values, Russia is said to rely on coercion and power politics. This post-sovereign/sovereign representation is strongly established within the discourse of EU-Russia relations. As Klinke has demonstrated in earlier studies of EU-Russia relations, the EU has traditionally constructed itself as a morally superior actor (Klinke 2012: 934). This drawing of a boundary between the EU and Russia, is also metaphorically expressed in historical terms: while the EU represents the future, Russia is said to represent the past. As Barroso described the situation at the Yalta European Strategy Conference, in Kiev on the 12th of September 2014:

In just one year Ukraine has lived through many key events. History was "fast-forwarded" with a popular uprising, people standing up for what they believed was right and just. But, history also "rewound" through Russia's actions which clearly do not belong to this century and should be buried in the history books (Barroso 2014c).

As the ideas within Barroso's statements outline, the EU is laying bare the meaning of the sanctions based on a view of the Self as a unique actor. Its actorness is defined by it representing something better, a "softer" kind of power. Furthermore, this actorness is said to rest on the EU representing the future of Europe and civilized interaction between political communities. Although the sanctions are said to represent a coercive foreign policy tool, this coercive dimension is legitimized by the good intentions of a "moral" Union. By that, it is constructing its agency, and thereby legitimacy, based on the idea that it represents something

of a “good” power in a world rid by “bad” powers. Instead of representing a modern and sovereign actor, the EU represents a post-sovereign and post-modern actor. Russia is here ascribed the role as a geopolitical actor, for which it is just “normal” to use hard power in its interaction with other states. Russia thereby only understands the language of dominance and coercion, and the EU as being on the “right side” of history, cannot let this pass in silence.

The EU as morally bankrupt?

Furthermore, the situation in Ukraine is described by Barroso as a battle between the “past” and the “future” of politics. Ukraine here represents the future, but Russia as a revisionist power intends to disrupt this leap forward for Ukraine as a European nation. Moreover, the EU as an incarnation of a successful peaceful leap forward, has an obligation to speak out and react. But this reaction is not only said to represent a threat to “physical” Europe, but also to “ontological” Europe, as Barroso said it on the 21st of September 2014:

We had to show our support for Ukraine, and we did. We make no apologies for the decision to respect the democratic right of a third country to seek a closer relationship with the European Union. We would have been morally bankrupt if we had refused this request of the Ukrainian people. And we had to present Russia with the consequences of its behaviour (Barroso 2014b).

Thus, as the EU is said to represent a distinct international actor, it must stand by its principles. As it represents a morally superior actor, the idea of the EU would be threatened in the face of apathy. Action then becomes more important than inaction, in the face on an expulsion of the ontological status of the EU as a political community. The sanctions are then understood to be important not only as a deterrent tool targeting a threatening Other, but rather a threat to the self-identity of post-sovereign Europe, as a bulwark of liberalism. This representation of the EUs self-identity commitments does not lend itself to any ambiguity about who the EU *is*, and what commitments it *has*. Any position advocating a different approach towards Russia, is not only unwise as physical security is concerned, but it is morally problematic. It thus represents a dilemma between morality and immorality. If “we” don’t react, “we” are not Europe. The principled representation thus implicates an emphasis on repressing ambiguity of what the EU *is*, and as a political exercise in stabilizing a peculiar construction of the Union’s self-identity. The self is then securitized, as its existence depends

on this continued representation of the EU as something different, and a simultaneous dichotomy between morality and amorality is constructed in relation to Russia as the Other.

Common interests

As discussed, certain recurrent ideas about the Self and the Other are observed within Barroso's statements. The EU is portrayed as a post-sovereign actor, which supports political, not military solutions (Barroso 2014c). As such, the EU is a purveyor of cooperation between states based on individual freedom, international law, and democracy. Furthermore, this is embedded into a construction of the EU as the "future", while Russia represents the "past". Constructed as a distinct post-sovereign power, the EU has a particular moral responsibility to react against Russian behaviour in Ukraine. If the EU does not live up to this responsibility, the Self will be contested. How can the EU live up to its moral Self, if it does not speak out? The self-identity of the EU thus obliges it to follow up to certain commitments, which makes the principled position constructed as a necessity. While this remains the dominant representation within Barroso's statements, a pragmatic position is also observed. In a joint statement on the 29th of July after the European Council decided to add additional sanctions against Russia, Barroso and Van Rompuy emphasised the inescapable interdependence between the EU and Russia:

The Russian federation and the European Union have important common interests. We will both benefit from open and frank dialogue, from increased cooperation and exchanges. But we cannot pursue this important positive agenda when Crimea is illegally annexed, when the Russian Federation supports armed revolt in Eastern Ukraine, when the violence unleashed kills innocent civilians (Van Rompuy & Barroso 2014a).

Taking a pragmatic position towards Russia, is argued to be a responsible position for the EU. But this position must be based on certain ground rules of engagement, which has been challenged by Russia in the exceptional year of 2014. Thus, the EU constructed in this discourse, cannot lend itself easily to pragmatism when the principled self is questioned. Moreover, it cannot have a pragmatic relationship with Russia anno 2014. While a certain pragmatism is part of the discourse, its embeddedness in a dominant principled position makes it difficult to argue for a pragmatic cooperation with Russia as an economic partner and geographical neighbour.

Füle's statements

Stefan Füle, European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, held the position until 1. November when he was replaced by Johannes Hahn. As an authority on the EU's external relations, Füle remains of interest for this study of the discourse over the sanctions policy. Although the textual material is not as extensive as with the representatives above, several of the same ideas are prevalent. Similar ideas about the EU as a distinct actor is central within the statements, as well as a sub-ordinate pragmatic representation.

This is not only about Crimea

The situation in Crimea, is articulated as a broader threat to European stability within Füle's statements. As such, the crisis is constructed as something which affects the international community and not just Ukraine as one sovereign country within a larger international space. The Russian breach of international law, demands a reaction from the EU as it represents a challenge to a world order supported by the EU. As Füle stated it in a speech in the European Parliament on the 12th of March 2014:

But it is not only about Crimea, this is the most serious challenge to the Helsinki process we have seen so far. And that is why what is going on in Crimea is happening much more closer to us than many of us, many of you are ready to accept (Füle 2014a).

Thus, as Russia is understood to have presented the broader international community with an alternative world order, where international law remains for selective engagement, the EU has a responsibility to act. Furthermore, this is necessary because the EU as a plus-sum actor is facing a zero-sum actor in Moscow. While Russia has promoted a political strategy of coercion and exclusivity in the eastern neighbourhood, the EU has sought to promote freedom, democracy, and prosperity through voluntary engagement. After proclaiming that the EU has sought to clarify for Russia that it will gain from increased EU involvement in the region, Füle stated it in a speech in the European Parliament on the 16th of April 2014 that:

Yet we are facing at the moment the most serious crisis in Europe since the end of the World War II. We are witnessing economic coercion, threats and a covert action to instigate protests and instability, which are meant to dissuade the Ukrainian people from taking up new opportunities, but also meant to dissuade us from defending their freedom of choice, to

convince us to drop our policies, values and principles, and accept the logic of the spheres of influence (Füle 2014b).

As emphasised in this statement, it is Russia which bears the responsibility of the situation in Ukraine developing into a violent political conflict. The Ukrainian people decided to demand freedom through their engagement with the EU, and this was sabotaged by Russia as a geopolitical and militarized actor. Furthermore, the EU's actorness embodies it with certain self-identity commitments when faced with this critical situation. Inaction would mean leaving central principles of the Self behind. As such, inaction would mean a challenge to the EU's ontological security. The crisis challenges Europe's borders and a system based on multilateralism, but it also represents a principled challenge. Especially when faced with a significant Other, speaking out about who the EU is, becomes a security concern.

Politics in the 21st century

Within Füle's statements, a certain dominant political logic can be observed. The situation in Ukraine is understood as a case of Russian aggression, where the neighbourhood policy of the EU is put into question. While the EU has presented a "soft" approach towards the countries in the region, Russia has come to rely on a "hard" approach to political and economic cooperation. These different logics, created a situation where conflict erupted. Furthermore, this situation represents a challenge to the credibility and legitimacy of the EU's security identity. The EU must stand up to its principled self. As Füle described the situation in a speech at an International Expert Conference on the Eastern Partnership in Prague on the 25th of April 2014:

The people of Ukraine, its independence and sovereignty should not become victims of geopolitical zero-sum games. This is not how politics is conducted in the 21st century. This is not why the Eastern Partnership was established. We will always support and stand by those who are subject to undue pressures (Füle 2014c).

Abiding with and living up to its principles, is emphasised by Füle as representing a security concern. Furthermore, the EU is said to represent an actor which sets the standard for how politics are to be conducted in modern life. Russia on the other hand, represents the dangerous "past" of unilateral action and coercive geopolitics. Faced with a challenge to its foreign policy identity as a post-sovereign power, the EU must live up to its self-identity

commitments. Inaction would mean accepting a political logic of a different century. As Füle said it in his speech on the 25th of April, inaction would mean accepting the logic of spheres of influence (Füle 2014c). Thus, the political reaction of the EU is connected to certain ontological security concerns, not solely a strive towards physical security. As such, the importance of sticking to the EUs principles remains a concern for the principled self as an idea. Maintaining a certain vision of the Self, thus becomes a security concern which gives meaning to political practice. Furthermore, in the face of Russia as a significant Other this balance between pragmatism and principles turns into a complicated political exercise.

Common interests

As argued, certain recurrent ideas about the Self and the Other is observed within Füle's statements. Furthermore, these ideas about who the EU and Russia represents as political actors, is connected to certain self-identity commitments of which the sanctions policy builds its legitimacy on. Especially prevalent within Füle's statements, is the necessity of not only speaking out, but also through political practice, showing resilience as a post-sovereign power. Reacting towards Russia becomes not only a concern for allowing precedence for future breaches of international law, but also for accepting a Self not in line with the EUs historical narrative. Standing by its normative principles, and speaking out loud about them, becomes an ontological security concern. Proving to the outside world, but mostly to the Self, that one sticks to one's ontological status as a political community, is integral to the EUs interests. This is a dimension which is difficult to leave out when speaking out loud about *who* the EU is, and *why* it is acting as it is. But although the principled position is dominant within the discourse, a more pragmatic position is visible on a sub-ordinate level. Here, the interdependence of the EU and Russia as geographical neighbours and political and economic partners, is central. As Füle stated it on the 16th of April in a plenary session in the European Parliament:

It is in our common interest to avoid violence and bloodshed on the European continent, which could spiral out of control. It is in our common interest to jointly work towards an establishment of a common area of prosperity, stability and democracy on the European continent. Yet, such an area can only be established on the basis of the Helsinki OSCE principles and in line with international law (Füle 2014b).

Although Russia and the EU have conflicting interests and political traditions, an interdependence exists between the polities which makes cooperation both possible and natural. Furthermore, as the polities are geographical neighbours and have extensive trade with each other, partnership and dialogue is in the interest for both the EU and Russia. As Füle argue above, closer cooperation and dialogue would serve the interest of both polities. But while this position has made cooperation and dialogue possible after several conflicts in the post-Cold war era, 2014 proven it difficult for the pragmatic position to win through. A pragmatic approach towards Russia would benefit the EU in both political and economic terms, but certain principles must remain the cornerstone of this cooperation. Moreover, both the self and the other is integral to the meaning given to this principled self. For a post-sovereign power, it becomes difficult to argue towards a normalisation with an actor which is said to rely on a political logic from a foregone century.

The principled Self

As the analysis of the discourse from 2014 show to, a certain political logic attained dominance within the EU in this exceptional year. Certain understandings of both the Self and the Other, are recurrent within the statements analysed from the EUs representatives. Following Maass study of conflictual positions within the EU (2017), this analysis observed a principled and a pragmatic position within the discourse. These positions are clearly expressive within the statements of Van Rompuy, Barroso and Füle. Within Ashton's statements, a pragmatic position is not observed to the same extent. Moreover, we can observe a hierarchy between the representations, where the principled position is dominant. Within this dominant representation, certain ideas are recurrent within the statements of all the representatives under study. As such, certain ideas are more naturalized within the discourse as a whole. This political logic is dominated by principled concerns, embedded within a discourse of the EU as a post-sovereign power. Moreover, ontological security concerns are explicitly expressed in the dominant representation, as the EU justifies how the cost of inaction is higher than the cost of implementation. Not only is the territorial security of the EU said to be under threat, but the integrity of the EU as a post-sovereign power is questioned. Moreover, not only is the normative framework of international law and multilateralism in need of protection, but the credibility of the EU as a foreign policy actor is threatened. The sanctions paradox, can thus be conceptualised as a principled paradox. As such, in the exceptional year of 2014 the principled position manifested itself as the dominant

representation of the EU's sanctions policy. The sanctions regime was legitimized as a case where principles could not be left behind, as they had to be spoken out loud and followed up in practice. Furthermore, this representation attained such dominance that it enabled the EU to construct the sanctions policy as a natural commitment.

Ontological security concerns are integral to this discourse and the dominant representation. Central to the principled representation, is that the EU's post-sovereign self must be spoken out loud and it must prove itself to be resilient in face of a challenge of this magnitude. In other words, one does not just leave the principles behind when they are under pressure. These concerns and the actorness and agency of the EU, is embedded within a discourse over references to the EU's post-sovereign actorness. The history of Europe, from war to peace, is embodied by the EU. This extraordinary achievement, makes the EU a natural defender of peaceful and ordered relations between states. Thus, a biographical narrative is built up within the discourse, which subsequently portrays specific self-identity commitments as both natural and legitimate. The question of how to balance between principles and pragmatism, becomes an ontological security concern. Simultaneously, there is not much room left for pragmatism. President Barroso expressed this concern explicitly, when he said that the EU would become morally bankrupt in the face of inaction (Barroso 2014b). Moreover, these concerns are expressed in the discourse within several of the statements. While Ashton emphasise that the EU's credibility is at stake, Füle argue that inaction would mean that the EU would leave its principles, values and policies behind. As such, taking action is about much more than protecting territory.

Moreover, the analysis illuminates how external actors cannot be disregarded from this process, as Russia's role as the geopolitical "Other" is prominent within the discourse. Furthermore, the construction of Russia's role as the (un)civilized "Other" is central to the construction of the EU as "moral Europe" and an ethical boundary between the polities. As such, what Klinke (2012) has labelled the construction of a moral binary between a post-modern (EU) and modern (Russia) is an integral part of the principled representation within the discourse.

Although the principled representation attained dominance in 2014, this representation is not unitary or streamlined as it consists of several layers. Furthermore, these layers show to tension on several fronts. And in terms of power, these tensions highlight to us how "soft

power is not necessarily so soft after all” (Mattern, 2005). The most explicit tension observed within the discourse, is between the principled and the pragmatic representation. These tensions are most clearly visible within the statements of Van Rompuy, Barroso, and Füle. As Maass study of EU-Russia relations clearly demonstrates, the pragmatic position has quickly come to set the tone for diplomatic relations in the past, even after tense conflicts in the eastern neighbourhood (2017). But in 2014, the principled position attained such a dominant position within the EU that “normalisation” became difficult to imagine. Although the pragmatic position remains to be sub-ordinate within the discourse, it is significant how it is prevalent within the representative’s statements. Moreover, it is rather quite often expressed in explicit terms. Within the discourse, we can observe how the representatives understand it as necessary to legitimize why it cannot pursue a pragmatic track. Thus, while the principled position was dominant in the exceptional year of 2014, the purveyors of the discourse also had to position themselves to a pragmatic position. One must articulate why one cannot pursue business-as-usual, and in 2014 the EU could not pursue this pragmatism as it conflicted with both the territorial and ontological security of the EU. Moreover, this boundary is constructed on both a geopolitical and ethical dimension. As such, pursuing pragmatism was said to threaten the EUs position as both a post-sovereign and powerful actor to rely on. 2014 thus represented an exceptional year, which manifested itself as the new normal, of which any rapprochement would have to position itself against.

Moreover, this principled position does not solely rest on principles, as sanctions represent a coercive foreign policy tool. Thus, the EU is pursuing power in its relationship with Russia. As Van Rompuy has been explicit about, sanctions are a foreign policy tool (Van Rompuy 2014b). As such, the EU is pursuing its objectives with a coercive foreign policy strategy. But in the eyes of the EU, this strategy is forced upon them as a post-sovereign power. The EU is said to have no choice, and it must simultaneously remain strong and reliable. As such, the post-sovereign and sovereign is not easily separated in political practice. In rhetoric, the EU represents a post-sovereign power, but in political practice it does not separate itself much from sovereign state practices. Soft power rhetoric serves to legitimize traditional power politics. Contradictions are thus prevalent within the sanctions discourse, although the EU seeks to repress this ambiguity through presenting itself as a coherent and principled ontological political community. It is exactly here where ontological security theory can bring tensions and contradictions within the EUs discourse upfront. Moreover, this insecure actorness of the EU comes more to the front as we study how the EUs position has developed

over the years. While the principled position attained dominance within the EU in 2014, the self is never essential or unproblematic (Steele, 2017, p.72). Over the course of the next years, tension built up within the EU as the sanctions struggled to reach its objectives.

7.1 2015: routine renewal

As 2014 represented a significant shift in the discourse between the EU and Russia, a principled representation became increasingly institutionalized as the dominant understanding of the EU's possible political paths. And as the political stalemate unfolded, a certain routine could be said to have kicked in. While 2014 was the year of massive pressure and mobilization, the next year would in practice come down to questions over the extension of the sanctions regime every six months. Tensions would come up front at certain periods, but the principled position would prove difficult to challenge. In ontological security terms, 2014 represented a period of significant pressure towards the proclamation of the EU as a post-sovereign and resilient power. Pressure in this case does not only imply a material reaction, but an expressive one. Staying quiet in Brussels proved to be difficult for the EU, as it saw it as necessary to “speak up” its responsibility as a distinct political actor. As the EU represents such a hybrid actor, with a diverse set of national interests, repressing ambiguity becomes part of the performative process of stabilizing a distinct idea of the self. Although the EU portrays its political position and self-identity as rather stable and uncontested, there will always exist tension and struggle within the discourse. Moreover, certain events put more pressure on this insecurity than others. So, while the exceptional became increasingly routinized in 2014, this did not mean that political tension was absent. It rather meant that the constructed boundary of the discourse made an alternative way out of the sanctions increasingly difficult to speak towards.

As the exceptional became increasingly institutionalised as routine, it would prove difficult to challenge the sanctions policy in 2015. The vision of the EU's self was embedded within a dominant principled position, which any representation had to be discursively defined against. This impacted the thinkable and possible positions to take towards Russia, that would be in line with the EU's self-proclaimed, post-sovereign actorness. Controversy over a leaked paper crafted by High Representative Federica Mogherini in January 2015, illustrated the difficulty of challenging the dominant, principled position. Challenging this position would prove controversial, as it spoke about a re-vision of the EU's Self. At stake here, was *who* the EU

should be and how strong it would prove to be when put under pressure. The issues paper distributed by Mogherini to member state representatives, argued for a more “proactive approach” towards Russia, considering the dominating sanctions policy (European External Action Service, 2015). As such, Mogherini was rather explicit that the sanctions did not alone represent a recipe for success. The loud protests voiced against this paper became apparent, as Mogherini was accused of promoting a return to business-as-usual (Oliver, Olearchyk & Foy, 2015). This was despite how the issues paper explicitly stated that it did not advocate for a return to “normal”. The controversy also reflected the difficulty for the EU to manoeuvre in its relationship with Russia, since implementation of sanctions increased tensions between the polities in 2014. Debating how to politically relate to Russia, has become a problem on several occasions, as Russia is supposed to come to the EU, not the other way around (Oliver et al., 2015). Therefore, debating the EUs position would prove controversial within the political community, as it questioned the EU as both a post-sovereign power and a coherent actor to rely on.

The paper and the controversy which followed it, was further politicized a week later by the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk. As such, tension within the EU entered the spotlight for full in January 2015. Although not targeting the issue paper explicitly, in a post on twitter Tusk labelled the debate over the sanctions as “appeasement” politics (Macdonald, 2015). Furthermore, he stated that it was “Time to step up our policy based on cold facts, not illusions” (Macdonald, 2015). This demonstrative response, and the promotion of the principled position as the only one embedded in “reality”, was made even more explicit in March that year. In an interview with The Guardian, Tusk argued that a debate over the sanctions would weaken the EU as a united front, and legitimize a dangerous conception of political realities (Traynor, 2015). According to Tusk, EU leaders promoting a re-think towards Russia were furthering “appeasement” politics, and those ideas were rid by “naivety” or “hypocrisy” (Traynor, 2015). The interview with Tusk, demonstrated how certain ideas about Russia, and the EU, were increasingly naturalized within the discourse. Moreover, this rhetorical exchange showed how it was difficult to further any public debate over the sanctions policy. In Tusk’s view, an opening up of the sanctions debate was said to represent a danger for the EU. As such, the continuation of the sanctions was said to be a necessity if the EU is to remain both strong and principled in its external relations. This dynamic shows to how it became increasingly difficult to debate the sanctions, as the EU was said to have no accountability of what is legitimized as an ethical foreign policy. Remaining principled is thus

said to represent a fundamental security concern, although this principled position does rest on a coercive foreign policy tool. The post-sovereign and the sovereign is not easily separated, and in times of tension this hybridity of the EUs actorness becomes more visible.

As this tension within the discourse underscore, the EU is not a coherent entity. Although the boundary of the discourse would prove difficult to challenge, these different views reflects how the EUs position towards the sanctions are not a given. While Mogherini takes a more pragmatic approach, Tusk positions himself very much within the principled camp. As such, one representative seeks to challenge the boundary of the dominant position while the other intends to draw the boundary of the EUs possible policy at the principled self. The tension and struggle within the EU that ended in a rather public exchange in early 2015, would not become as pressuring as 2015 moved along. While disagreements certainly were there on several fronts within the broader political community, the sanctions were agreed upon in the European Council without much uncertainty. In other terms, a sense of routine kicked in. As such, the exceptional year of 2014 went into a state of routine renewal throughout 2015.

7.2 2016: the beginning of a change?

Two years after the implementation of an extensive sanctions regime, 2016 would put tension within the EU more up front than ever before. Both within the EU and its powerful member states, voices arguing for a more pragmatic approach towards Russia provoked attention. While critical voices towards the principled approach to sanctions early on were concentrated in less powerful member states, these voices were gaining prominence in the EU-powerhouses of France and Germany. In April 2016, the lower house of Parliament in France adopted a resolution calling for the EU to lift its sanctions against Russia (Vincour, 2016). Although this resolution was more symbolic than substantial (as it was not legally binding), it remains significant that such a resolution is put forward and adopted in one of the most powerful member states. Things have also begun to move within the German political elite, as Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier publicly criticized both NATO and EU policies towards Russia in June 2016 (Nienaber, 2016). At the locus of Steinmeier's critique, was how the current policy towards Russia caught the EU up in a deadlock. The German Foreign Minister stated that the sanctions policy, and its conditioning upon Minsk 2, narrowed the space for political thinking. Thus, a gradual phasing out of the sanctions were promoted by Foreign Minister Steinmeier (Nienaber, 2016). As such, Steinmeier pointed to a paradox of

the principled approach: namely that it to some extent limits the EUs political leverage and room for alternative positioning. This statement had clout, as unequivocal German support for the sanctions in 2014 remained one of the most important cornerstones for a united and principled position. While a principled position still dominates both the German and French position towards the sanctions regime, this symbolizes an increased prominence and acceptance of pragmatism in relations with Russia.

Furthermore, and more important to this study, this position is also being push forward within the EU. While the reactions were harsh when Mogherini distributed the issues paper in early 2015, the new European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) is arguing for a more pragmatic approach to the EUs external relations (European Union, 2016). As the sanctions discourse in 2014, the EUGS represents a central narrative which is part of a broader discourse where the EUs security identity is constructed. It also remains important for an understanding of where the sanctions policy stands in 2016, and how it has developed within the EU since 2014. As Mälksoo argue, the EUs security strategies can be conceived of as part of the Union's autobiographies, outlining its conception of the Self as a security actor with certain commitments (2016, p.376). As such, the EUGS can be approached as an internal dialogue about who the EU is, and what kind of actor it should be in the years ahead. Within the EUGS, the story told about the Self is more explicitly pragmatic than ever before. The vision of the Self has developed, and this is legitimized in the foreword by High Representative Mogherini as a necessity in an "evolving reality" (European Union, 2016, p.4). Furthermore, an increased anxiety and scepticism of the EUs normative power is expressed. As the political leverage of the soft power approach to its external relations has been met with significant challenges, a "principled pragmatism" is argued as the way forward (European Union, 2016, p.8).

From sanctions to EUGS, we then see a clear discursive leap. Or, as critics of the post-sovereign power representation might say, a discursive lag. The tensions, or anxiety in ontological security terms, within the EUs security identity, are expressed in the EUGS. In the sanctions discourse, it was emphasised that the EU as opposed to Russia, supported political solutions. This was the EU "way of doing things". Thus, the EUs self-identity was constructed upon, and the sanctions regime was legitimized by, the EUs normative approach to a world rid by geopolitics and militarization. As the sanctions rests on a coercive foreign policy strategy, it should be questioned how post-sovereign this policy really is. As such,

there is already tension there. But, as the discourse in 2014 show to, these tensions are sought repressed by the EU. On the other hand, in the EUGS the situation is rather reversed. The EU is here rather explicit about embracing a more sovereign actorness. Here, the development of “hard power” capabilities are said to represent a necessity in an evolving reality (European Union, 2016). Moreover, these capabilities are said to represent a necessary addition to the EUs “soft power”. As it is narrated in the EUGS:

The European Union has always prided itself on its soft power – and it will keep doing so, because we are the best in this field. However, the idea that Europe is an exclusively “civilian power” does not do justice to an evolving reality (European Union, 2016, p. 4).

The evolved security environment thus demands a re-vision of what kind of actor the EU should be. Moreover, as it is argued in the EUGS, this does not necessarily conflict with the EUs moral standing and its political, not militarized, approach to politics. It is emphasised that the development of “hard power” is necessary as a deterrent tool, not as an aggressive instrument (European Union, 2016, p.19). As such, the embrace of hard power capabilities is constructed as something which has do be done because of the changing environment, and this geopolitical leap is narrated as something the EU is “forced” to push forward. It thus represents a pragmatic step, which does not have to represent a conflict with the principles the Union embodies. This leap represents an increased accommodation, also in discursive terms, to the sovereign actorness of the EU. Earlier, it has been argued that the EU relies on a softer form of “othering” as it primarily relies on its own war-torn past (Wæver, 1996). This has been nuanced, and criticised, as the EU is said to rely increasingly on cultural and geographical “othering” (Diez, 2004). With these contributions, it is interesting to study the development of the discourse. When doing that, it is safe to say that the EUs “internal” and “external” dimensions do not separate themselves easily from each other in 2016. More explicitly, they are rather quite interconnected in the discourse. While the sanctions discourse seeks to repress ambiguity about the EU as an actor of “realpolitik”, the EUGS explicitly argue of the necessity for the EU of adapting to what is described as a new reality. Thus, the post-sovereign power is embracing an idea of representing a sovereign power, to solve its anxiety as a security provider.

This is of interest for our discussion of the sanctions debate. As the discourse in 2014, in the EUGS the position vis-à-vis Russia is spoken about in relation to the EUs principled self. The

values underlying the EU's legitimacy as a post-sovereign power, is spoken about as the foundation of any political position taken towards cooperation with Russia. But although an opening of more pragmatic relations can be interpreted from the new Global Strategy, this must be made possible discursively in relation to the EU's self-identity as a distinct global power. As such, Mogherini's attempt to open up for a re-vision of EU-Russia relations and the sanctions policy, involves delicate political manoeuvring. A delicate balance between principles and pragmatism must be constructed. In the EUGS, Russia is assigned the role as a "key strategic challenge" (European Union, 2016, p.33). A principled position is said to be of necessity to remain in the forefront, if the Union is to maintain its credibility as a global actor. As described in the EUGS, a consistent and united approach towards Russia is to "remain the cornerstone of EU policy towards Russia" (European Union, 2016, p.33). Furthermore, Russia is represented as a threat to order, peace, and freedom on the European continent. This makes business-as-usual with Russia difficult to attain.

But, a "principled pragmatism" would mean a EU which is not only more open for compromise, but also for supplementing a principled approach with an injection of *realpolitik*. Although not a walk in the park, this could also enable a change of course towards Russia. As the EUGS argue, idealistic aspirations cannot be detached from realistic assessments (European Union, 2016, p.8). Principles remain important, but the EU will have to pick its battles in consideration of the surrounding environment. In same terms as the sanctions discourse in 2014, the EUGS argue that Russia is an actor which the EU has interdependent, common interests with (European Union, 2016, p.33). As such, the EU will engage in dialogue and cooperation with Russia when their interests overlap. Moreover, this representation is more prominent, although sub-ordinated, within the EUGS. And it could be argued, this strive towards a "principled pragmatism" might pave the way for a change of course towards Russia. In 2016, the EU is then simultaneously arguing for more military deterrent capabilities as well as a pragmatic approach to its principles. The EUGS thus represents an argument towards a more geopolitical EU. This new long term strategy can be said to represent more geopolitics, less principles. And as could be envisioned, compromise becomes more natural when embracing a more pragmatic approach to principles. What is certain, is that the current development in the discourse might open for a rethink of EU-Russia relations if the broader political context changes sufficiently. Another certainty, is that ontological security concerns make this difficult, especially when facing Russia as the

“civilizational Other”. The recent normalization of diplomatic relations show to these dilemmas.

In April 2017, High Representative Mogherini travelled to Moscow for an official meeting with the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov (Herzenhorn, 2017). The meeting represented Mogherini’s first official political visit to Moscow since 2014, and with that signalled the increased normalisation of diplomatic relations. Simultaneously, Mogherini used the occasion to demonstrate that the EU would never accept the annexation of Crimea, and that the principled position stood firm (Herzenhorn, 2017). Thus, diplomatic normalization was not something unproblematic. While the meeting shows to a change of positioning, Mogherini used the occasion to demonstrate clearly how this did not imply recognition of Russia as a partner. Returning to business-as-usual is tempting, but the precedence set by the principled position in 2014 is not easy to speak oneself out of. While the restart of political dialogue at the highest political level shows to an increased normalisation, it also underlines how the EU is anxious to leave its post-sovereign self behind. As such, while the EU seeks to embrace pragmatism in its external relations, this is not easily crafted in resonance with the principled self.

8. Apology next?

As the development from 2014 to 2017 has shown, the EU’s actorness is not easily described as either normative or geopolitical. In other terms, it is neither post-sovereign nor sovereign. Instead, we should understand the EU as an increasingly insecure power. This fluid self of the EU dominates its actorness, and its dialogue over the sanctions policy. Moreover, although a pragmatic turn has become increasingly accepted, it struggles when faced with the principled self. As such, a certain ontological insecurity makes normalization challenging. Considering this, as a principled pragmatism is sought to guide the EU in its external relations ahead: can we envision a way out of the sanctions? Tensions between the polities have become part of not only a geopolitical struggle, but also of moral authority (Headley, 2015). This has proven it difficult for the EU to argue towards a full-scaled rapprochement as the years have passed. And although a sneaking pragmatism has established itself within the EU, Mogherini’s visit to Moscow in April underscored how a pragmatic turn struggles in the face of ontological insecurity. The “new normal” of the sanctions, have developed into a benchmark of strength and resilience for the EU. Moreover, it has established itself as a marker of the principled self.

With that discursive precedence from 2014, the EUGS signals an increased doubt within the EU on how it should approach its external relations and to how it can balance a principled self to an evolving reality.

Time plays a role here. As mentioned in the first chapter, Matlary argue that time may work to Russia's advantage as memory tends to be short in international politics (2016, p.54). As this analysis has shown, there is something to this argument. As argued in the analysis above, the year of 2014 represented an exceptional year for the EU and its principled self. In 2016, a more pragmatic turn was embraced by the EU on an authoritative level. Several high-level political visits are symbolic of this. In June 2016, President of the European Commission, Jean Claude Juncker, travelled to St. Petersburg to give a speech at the International Economic Forum (Juncker, 2016). It represented the first visit by the leader of an EU institution since the implementation of sanctions in 2014. The visit proved to be controversial within the EU, as several members of the European Parliament warned that the visit would only serve to strengthen Putin (Barigazzi & Palmeri, 2016). While Juncker emphasized the EU's principled position, his main message at the conference was the inescapable interdependence between the polities and the push for more dialogue (Barigazzi & Palmeri, 2016). Months later, the release of the new Global Strategy in June 2016 argued towards a "principled pragmatism" for the EU in its external relations. And as mentioned, in April 2017, High Representative Mogherini travelled to Moscow for a landmark political meeting.

Although memory might work in Russia's favor, this argument struggles to bring forward the tension and conflictual dynamic within the EU, as they are embracing a more pragmatic position. As this study has shown, these tensions are there within the discourse and they have developed over time. A linear timeline cannot elaborate upon the sources of these tensions, or the resulting development of the sanctions policy. If it was only time that mattered, the sanctions would have been long gone already. Balancing between principles and pragmatism, is a political process embedded within questions concerning the ontological security concerns of the political community. Arguing towards business-as-usual thus becomes not solely a question of time, but also of how one is to maintain the principled self when getting there. As such, it does not only represent a question of time, but of securing the self. International politics consist of finding a peculiar balance between principles and pragmatism, and these tensions are filled with ontological security concerns. Said differently, while the EU is

arguing itself towards a more explicit geopolitical actorness, getting there is complicated political exercise which is embedded in several dimensions of security concerns.

As this discussion progress, questions over the future of the sanctions policy is natural to address. As we have passed three years of sanctions, questions of a rapprochement become more and more pressing. Moreover, as the sanctions have not been successful, the pressure builds up on the EU's legitimacy for pursuing this policy. Simultaneously, there is no doubt that the Russian government would like to have these sanctions removed, as they do put pressure on the domestic economy. Re-envisioning Zarakol's emphasis on apologies in international politics, there could be said to exist a way out of the stalemate (Zarakol, 2010). Although not unproblematic, this aspect points us towards a possible solution for the current stalemate in EU-Russia relations – namely that an apology might be a way out.

While some might label this as naive or unrealistic, in rational terms it could be thought of as representing a win-win for both polities. Like the case of apologies for Turkey and Japan, there would be significant material incentives at play in reaching out a hand. As both the EU and Russia have imposed sanctions on the other, a resumption of trade and political dialogue could serve to be beneficiary in material terms. The question then becomes: do sanctions represent the only way forward in maintaining and supporting an international system based on common rules of engagement? As discussed in this paper, several scholars argue that the sanctions have rather turned into the main obstacle for dialogue between the polities. Moreover, although numerous European politicians argue that the sanctions are security enhancing, others argue the exact opposite. As the sanctions have become linked to specific demands (Minsk 2), it has been rejected by the Russian regime. Connecting a policy to concrete conditions might seem like a rational move, but it also tightens the room for thinking alternatively as time pass. What is the EU going to do, when Russia is not responding to the current framework of Minsk 2? More pressing is the question of how the is EU to define its role in a world where emerging powers are challenging the rules of a “western” world order?

The EU has made it difficult for itself to seek alternative approaches to its relations with Russia, as the sanctions have become embedded in a moral discourse, where backing down represents suffocating as a principled power. Of course, an alternative approach is not unproblematic as the principled support for international law as a system of order and stability could be further questioned. But this builds on the premise that sanctions are the only way to

maintain support for a multilateral and law-based international system. There is no obvious answer to this question. At the same time, an acceptance from Russia that they did wrong, but that Crimea remain incorporated in the Russian Federation, is a possibility. Although the EU rhetorically speaks about the sanctions as intertwined with the impossibility of accepting the annexation of Crimea, the most comprehensive sanctions are linked to Minsk 2 (which does not mention Crimea). Thus, maintaining a credible face of resilience for the post-sovereign EU, could be enough.

However, ontological security concerns do make the prospects of an apology challenging. As this analysis has sought to demonstrate, it is not just material concerns which impacts the EUs positioning. Both sanctions and apologies are intertwined in a dynamic of ontological security concerns. Haukkala's description of the EUs sanctions regime as a sort of stubborn and unstrategic policy, is of interest here (2016, p.662). In Haukkala's portrait of the sanctions, the continuation of the policy is understood as an unstrategic paradox. But as the current tension between the EU and Russia have become so central to the narratives of both polities domestically, an apology would not merely represent cheap talk, but also a leap of identity. And as have been discussed earlier in this paper, the competition between the EU and Russia has increasingly turned into a moral marker of identity (Headley, 2015). Thus, the discursive competition over the sanctions does not merely represent a struggle over physical security, but a struggle over maintaining a certain self-image. As such, accepting responsibility then becomes a self-identity commitment, not cheap political talk (Zarakol, 2010, p.8). With that perspective, the sanctions are embedded in a contestation over the Self.

Moreover, the development of a hostile discourse in Russia cannot be disregarded when discussing the future of the sanctions. Since 2014, views on the EU as a hostile and hypocritical actor has manifested itself within both political circles and broader public perceptions in Russia (Chaban, Elgström & Gulyaeva, 2017, p.495). From being narrated as "modern", "peaceful" and "strong" in 2012, this drastic change comes with consequences. For Russia, it is the EU who should say sorry for actively contributing to the fall of Yanukovich as Ukraine's democratically elected leader (Headley, 2015). As such, it is the EU who should apologize, not the other way around. With this understanding, ontological security demands make an apology, and even a U-turn of any kind, into a moral reconsideration of the self for both polities. How is a rapprochement crafted in such a circumstance? The sanctions can then be said to have become part of an "ontological security dilemma", as rapprochement in

rhetorical terms would be difficult to craft, without it representing a suffocation of purported principles. Although this makes an apology unlikely, it could serve to represent just what the EU needs to move forward with a pragmatic approach and re-establish business-as-usual. As Mogherini's alternative vision of the EUs principled pragmatism gains legitimacy, rapprochement becomes more and more realistic as time pass. But either how, any form of rapprochement would mean an implicit apology, and avoiding this framing of a future normalization is implicated in the ontological security concerns of the political community. It is difficult to go back to business as usual, without admitting having been wrong. Apologies are as such not easy to craft, but they do represent a way out.

At last, some words to reflect upon this whole discussion. The EU has the potential to play a constructive role in global affairs, but how this is to be done in 2017 is more uncertain. Remaining a strong supporter of international law and multilateralism can serve the interests of the many, not the few. But does this support rely on sanctions embedded in a moral discourse? As this analysis has shown, the EU does not seem to have an obvious answer to this question, although it does its best to repress that doubt. But the doubt is there, and it has grown since 2014. Moreover, that doubt is quite explicitly expressed in the EUGS. Questions over what position the EU should embrace in its external relations, is as such more than a trivial question of time. And as this study has shed light on, security is multifaceted in international politics. What is certain is that as the EU embraces a more pragmatic position in its external relations, the post-sovereign self is not easily left behind.

9. Conclusion

By studying the EUs sanctions' regime through the perspective of ontological security theory, this thesis has attempted to broaden our understanding of the substance of this policy. Moreover, this has been made possible by applying a discourse analysis to the official EU response. While prior studies on EU-Russia relations has furthered our understanding of competing positions within the EU (Maass, 2017), ontological security theory have made the sources of these tensions more comprehensible. Through undertaking a discourse analysis of the official EU response, the objective has been to understand how ontological security concerns are integral to this debate and how the EUs discursive framing has made possible a particular policy towards Russia. In this thesis, I have analysed how the EUs position have developed from 2014 to 2016. The analytical approach of ontological security was useful to

lay open how the sanctions are part of the struggle over defining the EU as a foreign policy actor. Moreover, it demonstrated how security concerns are not a static process, but rather one which develops over time. As such, the analysis has sought to demonstrate what kind of security concerns are integral to the tension within this debate. The sanctions have thus been conceptualized as an external policy with an internal purpose. While this analysis has argued that the Self is not necessarily dependent on the Other, the role of Russia in the discourse show to how it is necessary to integrate the broader social environment in an analysis of ontological security.

Through approaching the sanctions policy in a chronological fashion, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of how questions of time cannot be isolated from ontological security concerns. For the EU as a political community, moving on from principles to pragmatism does not take place in a vacuum. The year of 2014 represented a year for “exceptional politics”, as a principled position attained dominance within the discourse. The sanctions policy was constructed upon a particular ethical responsibility. Moreover, this responsibility was constructed upon the EUs actorness as a post-sovereign power. But as the sanctions policy struggled to reach its political objectives, a pragmatic position gained legitimacy and has come to increasingly challenge the principled position. Moreover, the release of the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) in June 2016, shows to a push towards a more geopolitical EU from within. As such, it has opened for a possible change of course towards Russia. But, as Mogherini’s visit to Moscow in April 2017 show to, even diplomatic normalization struggles in the face of ontological insecurity. Although pragmatism is argued to represent an integral part of the Union’s future external relations, it is not always easily reconciled with the principled Self. Arguing towards pragmatism is a process filled with tension and anxiety, not an unproblematic step forward.

To conclude this discussion, I would like to highlight two main objectives that have guided this study. First, undertaking this topic within the framework of ontological security theory can hopefully contribute to a better understanding of what sanctions are said to represent “a case of” in international politics. Although this thesis has focused on the case of the EUs sanctions policy, it does provide an analysis of how sanctions can be characterized as an external policy with an internal purpose. Moreover, security should be approached as more than the protection of territory and material objects. Second, throughout this thesis it has been emphasized how we should not understand the EUs actorness as either post-sovereign nor

sovereign. The EU should rather be understood as balancing between different models of governance, and this process is in continuous development. As such, there is a political struggle ongoing about the future actorness of the EU and this struggle has become more prevalent as the sanctions policy has failed to reach its objectives. To what extent a more geopolitical EU is to materialize or not, is certainly dependent on many factors. And to what extent this will impact EU-Russia relations, is not easy to predict. Yet, what is certain is that while the post-sovereign EU has always been rid by contradictions, an explicit embrace of a more sovereign actorness can create more questions of legitimacy than it solves.

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