The European Union as an international actor from an Interactionist Role Theory perspective

Lessons from the crisis in Ukraine
Abstract

This thesis aims to answer *how the EU’s role as an international actor was constructed after the Russian occupation of Crimea*, by utilising an interactionist role theory analytical framework. In doing so it makes a theoretical contribution to the framework by connecting it to concepts found useful in earlier actorness research. The empirical contribution is made by tracing the role-making process that followed Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014. The framework proved useful when analysing how EU actorness was constructed in the role-making process. The analysis shows that though the EU had the capacity to participate actively and deliberately in the role-making process and thus had actorness, it was unable to assert itself in its preferred role as “peacemaker” between Ukraine and Russia. Instead, it played the role of “supporter of a Europeanising Ukraine”.


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List of acronyms and abbreviations

AA – Association Agreement
CFSP – Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSDP – Common Security and Defence Policy
DCFTA – Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
DPR – Donetsk People’s Republic
EEAS – European External Action Service
ENP – European Neighbourhood Policy
EUAM – European Union Advisory Mission
FAC – Foreign Affairs Council
HR/VP - High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission
LPR – Luhansk People’s Republic
MH17 – Malaysia Airlines 17
OSCE – Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
1. Introduction

In late February 2014 “little green men” appeared in Crimea, Ukraine. Armed and efficient, they took over strategic points and infrastructure. Though they claimed to be local volunteers, it soon became clear that they were Russian military personnel, and before anybody had the time to react Crimea was under Russian occupation, and parts of eastern Ukraine, the Donbass, a warzone. Ever since, the European Union (EU) has struggled to handle this new situation in its immediate neighbourhood. Although not the only case of Russian aggression towards an EU neighbour in the post-soviet era (there is notably the 2008 war in Georgia), the open violence and disregard for orderly and multilateral international relations challenged both the EU’s view of itself and how others understand it as an international actor.

The Ukrainian crisis, together with events such as the Arab spring, forced the EU to react and re-evaluate its role as a neighbour and international actor. Since 2015, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) has been overhauled, new security policy initiatives launched, and the new European Commission (2019a) calls itself “geopolitical”. The events in Ukraine were part of what led the EU to consider it necessary to develop what the former president of the Commission Jean-Claude Juncker called Weltpolitikfähigkeit, “the capacity to play a role, as a Union, in shaping global affairs” (Juncker 2018: 5). By highlighting this capacity, or perhaps its absence, Ukraine is a good case for understanding how the EU is perceived as an international actor.

The EU lacks some of the traits of the traditional international actors, states, yet it is more than an international organisation. Scholars have used the term actorness to understand how the EU functions at the global level, without viewing the EU as a sui generis entity impossible to compare with other political systems. However, since “actorness measures the degree to which an entity qualifies as an international actor […] the lack of a universally accepted definition of the latter complicates a universally acceptable definition of the former (Drieskens 2017: 1537, emphasis in original). Therefore, the scholarly debate on how one should understand actorness in general and EU actorness in particular is still ongoing after almost half a century.

To analyse EU actorness in the wake of the Russian annexation of Crimea, this thesis will use an interactionist role theory approach developed by Stephan Klose (2018) who conceptualises
actorness as “an entity’s capacity to re-imagine and realize roles for its ‘self’ in (specific contexts of) international affairs”. This capacity, in turn, emerges in the interplay of resources, creative action, and role expectations (Klose 2018: 1145). This take on actorness is interesting since it: (1) allows us to analyse the social process in which the EU was constructed as an actor in the context of Ukraine; (2) acknowledges both internal and external factors to the EU; and (3) may travel between contexts. Hence, this framework should make it possible to trace how EU actorness plays out in the role-making process that followed Russia’s occupation of Crimea. In doing so, this thesis follows a constructivist logic and is more interested in the process in which the EU was constructed as an actor than in setting up objective criteria for measuring actorness. This does not equal a denial of material facts, only that the focus here will be on how these are intersubjectively given meaning when interpreted.

However, in Klose’s framework the relationship between role expectations, resources, and creative action and aspects identified as relevant for EU actorness in earlier research is not explicitly mapped out. This makes it hard to follow the interactive process and is hampering operationalisation of the framework. A remaining problem is how to distinguish if an entity is actively and deliberately participating in the role making process in a certain context or not. Thus, as a theoretical contribution, this thesis will strengthen and systematise Klose’s three-step analytical framework by explicitly connecting it to earlier conceptualisations of actorness. The goal is not a generalisable mechanism in a positivist sense, but “analytical generality”, as elaborated on in the methodology section.

The empirical contribution of this thesis will be to apply the analytical framework developed to analyse the role-making process that was initiated with the Russian occupation of Crimea: How this challenged the EU’s role in Ukraine and made it reimagine its role, how this role was realised in interaction with other actors, and what implications this had for the EU and its more general role of neighbour as indicated by the revision of the ENP. This thesis thus aims to understand how the EU was constructed as an actor in its neighbourhood by following one specific process, the role-making process centred around the Russian intervention in Ukraine. In doing so, it also aims to further develop and strengthen the interactionist analytical framework proposed by Klose. The emphasis will be on the EU’s capabilities and actions and the EU’s attempts to establish itself as an actor, that is, attempts to imagine and realise a role for itself in the context in question, and whether this lead to (the
for the EU) desired outcome. The main question to be answered is how was the EU’s role as an international actor constructed after the Russian occupation of Crimea?

In the next section the conceptual history of actorness and elements of actorness important for the analysis will be presented. Then, role theory and Klose’s take on actorness will be explained, related to the previous literature, and put into a strengthened version of Klose’s three-step analytical framework. In the fourth section, the methodology and material of the analysis will be discussed. In the fifth section, the analytical framework will be applied on the case of EU’s role in Ukraine after the Russian occupation of Crimea. The sixth section will discuss the analytical framework and the EU actorness in light of the analysis. Lastly, the seventh section will present the main conclusions and make suggestions for future research.
2. Literature review: Earlier conceptualisations of actorness

In this section, the evolution of actorness research will be reviewed. The section ends with a presentation of common themes in earlier conceptualisations of actorness and aspects of them identified as relevant for the following analysis.

2.1 From actor capability to actorness

Research on actorness started in the 1970s, where notably Sjöstedt (1977), presents a definition of actor capability that has been widely cited since. According to Sjöstedt, for an object to be an actor it must be autonomous: possible to separate it from its external environment and having a minimum of internal cohesion (Ibid: 15). He defines actor capability as “a measure of the autonomous unit’s capacity to behave actively and deliberately in relation to other actors in the international system” (Ibid: 16). This capacity, in turn, has three necessary conditions. The entity must have the ability to formulate goals and to mobilise resources, make decisions under both normal circumstances and in crisis, and have instruments and tools that it might use externally (Ibid: 75).

2.1.1 The second wave

Sjöstedt’s definition has since influenced many conceptualisations of actorness, but it was only in the late 1990s that the term became more central for scholars in a second wave of actorness research (Drieskens 2017: 1536). One example of this is Jupille and Caporaso (1998: 214), who see the EU as a “neither full-blown polity nor a system of sovereign states, which displays varying degrees of ‘actorhood’ across issues and time”. They present four criteria – recognition, authority, autonomy, and cohesion – that are “observable, continuously variable, and abstract from any particular institutional form” to assess actorness, clearly aiming for a framework useful beyond the EU (Ibid: 214). Jupille and Caporaso (Ibid: 220) state that their four criteria are interrelated and “form a coherent ensemble, depending on one another for full meaning”. Their conceptualisation has, however, been criticised for having overlapping criteria and being too complex (Groen & Niemann 2013: 309; Niemann & Bretherton 2013: 266).

A second conceptualisation of actorness was presented by Bretherton and Vogler (2006) in 1999, later revised in a second edition. They take a constructivist approach to EU actorness, seeing the EU as “a multiperspectival polity whose construction reflects both the
experimentation of policy entrepreneurs and the opportunities afforded by the changing structures of the international system” (Bretherton & Vogler 2006: 35-36). Viewing the EU as a sui generis entity they reject comparison with other actors as unproductive (Ibid: 35). In contrast to Sjöstedt, Bretherton and Vogler views capability as a factor contributing to actorness rather than determining it. The two most important dimensions of capability are “ability to formulate and develop policies” (of which the central aspect is coherence) and “availability and capacity to utilise policy instruments” (Bretherton & Vogler 2013: 381). They also consider how external factors contribute to the construction of EU actorness and add presence and opportunity as external dimensions alongside (internal) capability (Bretherton & Vogler 2006: 24).

2.1.2 The effectiveness turn
In the 2010s, a third wave of actorness research became more focused on the relationship between EU actorness and effectiveness (Drieskens 2017: 1539; Klose 2018: 1148). Moving away from the internal aspects of EU actorness, research on effectiveness aims to connect EU actorness to its impact on the international arena (da Conceição-Heldt & Meunier 2014; Niemann & Bretherton 2013). While Bretherton and Vogler (2013) developed their framework to encompass this effectiveness turn, Jupille and Caporaso’s framework was adapted by Groen and Niemann (2013). They created their own parsimonious version of it by dropping the recognition and authority criteria (Ibid: 310). For them actorness and effectiveness, understood as goal-attainment, are two separate concepts: Actorness, “the capacity to behave actively and deliberately” needs to be translated to effectiveness, “the impact EU action has on outcomes”, through what they call opportunity structure, “the external context of events and ideas that enables or constrains EU action” (Ibid: 311).

2.1.3 Critique of actorness research
The focus on the internal workings of the EU at the expense of external factors has been a common critique, often coming from scholars of actorness themselves. For example, Rhinard and Sjöstedt (2019: 10) argues that “focus on the internal has come at the expense of understanding external dynamics, and an updated, generalized model for actorness has yet to emerge”. Another critique is found in Gehring et al. (2013: 850), who notes that there is no “elaborated theory of the precise role” of the sets of indicators for identifying actorness, that the relationship between criteria is largely ignored. Thirdly, despite all efforts, actorness research has not been able to reach consensus on a common definition of actorness, let alone
produce a single generalisable theory on the EU as an international actor. Nevertheless, Drieskens (2017: 1542, emphasis removed) notes that using the actorness concept has potential since it “encourages the inclusion of systematic variables into the analysis” and “suggests a comparative perspective of the EU’s international persona”.

2.2 Elements of actorness in earlier conceptualisations

As shown above, the literature on actorness is a maze of similar but not identical conceptualisations, elements, criteria, and dimensions. A couple of central themes are nevertheless common for the different authors’ definitions (cf. Rhinard & Sjöstedt 2019: 7-8). As will be clearer when the interactionist role theory approach and its analytical framework are presented, concepts from earlier research and their operationalisations will remain useful when analysing EU actorness as constructed in a role-making process. In the following subsections common themes in the earlier literature relevant for the analysis below are presented.

2.2.1 Cohesion

Firstly, the conceptualisations presented above use coherence or cohesion to stress the importance of coordination when formulating preferences and carrying out policies (Bretherton and Vogler 2013: 382; Groen & Niemann 2013: 310; Jupille & Caporaso 1998: 214; Sjöstedt 1977: 15). As da Conceição-Heldt and Meunier (2014: 963) points out, cohesion and coherence are closely related but still different concepts, where cohesion denotes “reduction of regional and social disparities” – in the context of the EU primarily between the member states – and coherence is “structural harmonization” between institutions including, but not limited to, member states. This distinction is not reflected most conceptualisations. Here cohesion will be used, since that is what Klose uses. Cohesion will be divided into three parts following the conceptualisation by Groen and Niemann (2013: 10): Preference cohesion, the extent to which “the Member States share common basic preferences and goals” in a certain context; Procedural-tactical cohesion, “the EU’s ability to overcome diverging preferences and solve disagreements”, including both policy-making rules and tactics for reaching agreement; and output cohesion, identical to Jupille and Caporaso’s output cohesion, the extent to which the “member states succeed in formulating policies, regardless of the level of substantive and procedural agreement” (Jupille & Caporaso 1998: 220). Separating
cohesion into three dimensions makes it possible to analyse not only what actors are cohesive but also how cohesion is built in a role-making process.

2.2.2 Autonomy

Secondly, the ability to autonomously formulate policy and use policy instruments is considered an essential part of actorness (Bretherton & Vogler 2013: 381; Jupille & Caporaso 1998: 214; Groen & Niemann 2013: 310; Sjöstedt 1977: 15). The importance of differentiating between (coordinated) member state action and EU action is emphasised by Gehring et al. (2013: 850). Drawing on sociological theory on corporate action they argue that the EU must have a minimum of autonomy in goal formation and control over governance resources to be capable of acting separately from its member states (Ibid: 852-853). Again, this resonates well with Groen and Niemann’s conceptualisation. They see autonomy as containing two elements: “the EU’s (agent) ability to influence policy goals and to have a genuine input in the decision-making process” (Groen & Niemann 2013: 315); and the EU’s discretion, “the degree of freedom of action for the agent to accomplish” the goals set by the principals (the member states) (Ibid 2013: 310).

Bretherton and Vogler’s (2013: 381) “availability and capacity to utilise policy instruments” also implies autonomy. They map out the different kinds of instruments the EU may use with discretion thematically: (1) Political instruments, that is diplomacy, where EU has its own diplomatic corps, the European External Action Service (EEAS); (2) Economic instruments, especially granting access to the internal market; and (3), military instruments (Ibid: 385-386). Even though the EU lacks the military capacity of states, during the last 20 years the EU has acquired a number of military resources and used them in several missions. The EU can take on coordinating roles and provide a framework for command and control of both (limited) military and civilian missions within the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) (Karlborg 2013).

Whereas Groen and Niemann’s autonomy enables us to analyse what resources and actions can be seen as the EU’s own, Bretherton and Vogler’s different policy instruments makes a systematic and comprehensive analysis easier.
2.2.3 External aspects of actorness

Thirdly, most of the conceptualisations include an external dimension. This category seems to be both the one that is given less consideration (except by Bretherton and Vogler), and where the different conceptualisations differ the most. Since the interactionist role theory approach puts more emphasis on the external dimensions of actorness and on how the EU is perceived by itself and others, it nevertheless covers an important aspect of the analysis. External elements are most visible in Bretherton and Vogler’s conceptualisation where both presence and opportunity (see below) are factors external to the EU, but also in Jupille and Caporaso’s (1998: 214) recognition, the “acceptance of and interaction with the entity by others”. Groen and Niemann (2013: 311) have opportunity structure outside their definition of actorness and see it as a mediating layer between actorness and effectiveness.

Bretherton and Vogler’s conceptualisation of actorness has two external components. The first is presence, “the ability of an actor, by virtue of its existence, to exert influence beyond its borders” (Bretherton & Vogler 2013: 376). This is not a type of “purposive external action” but “the ability to shape the perceptions, expectations and behaviour of others”, that is, structural power (Ibid: 377). Whereas capability is the EU’s capacity to use access to the internal market when negotiating a certain trade agreement (economic policy instrument), presence is what makes the other part wanting that access in the first place. Hence, other actors’ perceptions of EU success are important for its presence, and, secondly, what is otherwise internal policy (for example creation of the single market) may unintentionally prompt responses from affected third parties (countermeasures to protect exports), that in turn may necessitate purposeful action from the EU (initiation of trade negotiations) (Ibid: 377).

Their second external factor is opportunity, “the external context of ideas and events that enable or constrain action” (Bretherton & Vogler 2013: 378). This is not a static background but rather a “dynamic process where ideas are interpreted and events accorded meaning” (Bretherton & Vogler 2006: 25). What is shaping the context are the shared understandings of actors (including the EU) in social interaction. These understandings cannot be completely separated from material conditions but should be seen as interpretations. The external environment in which the EU acts will thus affect what kind of instruments the EU finds appropriate to use and the effectiveness of them. Changes in the external context might then change the actorness of the EU by enabling or restricting EU action, affecting capability, or
the EU’s presence by affecting the perception of the EU, when perceived in relation to other international actors.

Since they emphasise external factors and thus have developed concepts relevant for the analysis of the external dimension of EU actorness, Bretherton and Vogler’s *opportunity* and *presence* will be used to include the international structure and external factors from the context in the analysis.
3. The Interactionist role theory approach

In this section Klose’s interactionist role theory approach to actorness will be presented. First, it will briefly present Klose’s conceptualisation of actorness, before giving some background to the role theory behind Klose’s approach, and outlining the EU’s role in the context of Ukraine before the Russian annexation of Crimea. The third subsection will discuss how Klose’s actorness relates to the earlier conceptualisations presented above. Lastly, the analytical framework used in the analysis will be presented.

3.1 Klose’s definition of actorness

One recent attempt to reconceptualise actorness is presented by Klose (2018). Agreeing with the critique outlined in 2.1.3 above, he argues that although research on EU actorness “has identified multiple elements, which shape the emergence of actorness […] it has not yet developed a theoretical framework through which the interaction between those elements can be systematically understood and investigated” (Ibid: 1144, emphasis in original). The “relative significance of – and interaction between – presumed determinants” of EU actorness is underdeveloped and research has not found “a coherent theorization of the social process, which underlies the EU’s emergence as an international actor” (Ibid: 1146). In short, actorness research has presented several criteria for measuring actor capacity, but no framework for analysing the social process in which actorness emerges.

Klose’s solution for bridging the gap between the specific elements of actorness presented in previous research and a desired theoretical framework for understanding the whole process of actorness, is to use Interactionist Role Theory and conceptualise actorness as “an entity’s capacity to re-imagine and realize roles for its ‘self’ in (specific contexts of) international affairs” (Klose 2018: 1145). This capacity, in turn, “emerges in the interplay of (social and material) resources, creative action and (domestic and external) role expectations” (Ibid: 1145). Armed with this conceptualisation, Klose proposes a three-step analytical framework for following role-making processes and analysing actorness in specific contexts of international relations. It is this definition of actorness and analytical framework (presented below) that the analysis below will be based on.
3.2 Introducing Role theory

Role theory is not new to the study of European politics and the EU (see for example Aggestam & Johansson 2017; Beneš & Harnisch 2015; Bengtsson & Elgström 2012; Elgström & Smith 2006; Michalski & Pan 2017), and it has been used in foreign policy analysis and international relations especially to study the interaction between agent and structure (Breuning 2011: 16; Harnisch 2011b: 7). The concept role is borrowed from sociology and applied to international actors. It can be understood as “social positions (as well as a socially recognized category of actors) that are constituted by alter and ego expectations regarding the purpose of an actor in an organized group” (Harnisch 2011b: 8). In short, roles are sets of expectations held both by the actor in question (henceforth internal role expectations) and other actors (external role expectations) on an entity’s purpose and actions. These role expectations can be studied as how actors “perceive the appropriate foreign policy behaviour of a specific role actor” (Aggestam 2006: 19). It is possible for an actor to have several roles at the same time (Breuning 2011: 32-33). These roles may be issue-specific, or what has been called a generalised role (Bengtsson & Elgström 2012: 95) or a role-set (Aggestam 2006: 21), a meta-role spanning over several issues and manifesting itself as a specific role in a certain context. There are always potential conflicts within and between roles or role sets, since role expectations of different actors and units do not usually match (Harnisch 2011b: 8). In the analysis below I will name roles, for example “mediator and peacemaker”. These names are not taken from predefined categories of roles or ideal types, but labels that aim to conveniently summarise the role described.

Specifically, Klose draws on interactionist role theory which builds on the works of George Herbert Mead and emphasises how roles are, firstly, created in the interaction between actors and, secondly, include both historically informed internal and external expectations (Harnisch 2011a: 38). Important is its “idea that international actors experience and express themselves […] drawing on two intertwined aspects of agency: ‘me’ and ‘I’” (Klose 2018: 1147). The self has two constituent parts. The first is the Me, an “actor’s capacity to see its ‘self’ through the eyes of others” (Ibid: 1147, emphasis in original). Seeing one’s self through the eyes of others is also referred to as role-taking. The I is the other part of the self, that acts out a role (Harnisch 2011a: 39). It is the “ability to generate creative and spontaneous impulses in reaction to ‘me’” (Klose 2018: 1147). The construction of the self can thus be seen as a dialogue between the Me (which includes internalised external role expectations) and the I in
In the context of the EU this I-Me dialogue is thought to be taking place between the member states and the EU institutions (Klose 2018: 1148).

There are two kinds of others that inform the roles the me might take. Significant others are other actors that the entity has direct contact with. For example, in the bilateral relation between the EU and Ukraine, the EU might ask itself what is appropriate for its role from a Ukrainian perspective. Generalised others are “abstract reference point[s]” for types or categories of actors (Harnisch 2011b: 11). This might for example be an actor asking itself what is appropriate for its role taking in the expectations on it as a NATO member or as a state in general.

In most situations this construction process of the self is routinised, both parts of the self act according to the norms and expectations within the context. However, in problematic situations, “moments of uncertainty, which take an actor out of established routines”, the I acts before the Me “as if” it has taken on a new role (Klose 2018: 1147). In situations where old routines do not lead to the anticipated results anymore, the I acts before the Me and attempts to take on a new role. This creates a new course of action while the Me “grasps the impulse’s social significance as it anticipates the reactions of others” (Ibid: 1147). This is role-making, a learning process where the actor develops a new understanding of its role in an international context and starts acting accordingly. In doing so, it also imagines counter- and commensurate-roles for actors around it. To realise and stabilise its own role, an actor needs others to accept it. The actor therefore tries to make other actors take these counter-roles, a process called alter-casting (Harnisch 2011b: 12-13; Harnisch 2012: 54-55; Klose 2018: 1147).

3.2.1 The EU’s roles before Crimea

What role did the EU see itself as playing in our context then? What established routines did the Russian annexation of Crimea unsettle? The EU has been seen as a Normative power, which means that it was founded “on a normative basis […] and that this predisposes it to act in a normative way” (Manners 2002: 252). According to this view, “the most important factor shaping the international role of the EU is not what it does or what it says, but what it is” (Ibid: 252). The core values of the EU can be found in the treaties: peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law, and respect for human rights (Ibid: 242). Although this view of the EU has been criticised, especially as the CSDP has been developed (see for example Aggestam 2008;
Sjursen 2006), it has nevertheless been seen as a generalised role of the EU (Bengtsson & Elgström 2012: 94-96) or a facet of a broader EU identity containing several roles (Bretherton & Vogler 2006: 42-44). In this normative power generalised role, the EU is expected to both spread these core values and act in ways compatible with them. As will be shown in the analysis, the EU emphasised its core values to explain and justify its roles in its neighbourhood and in Ukraine.

The EU’s view of its regional role in the neighbourhood is outlined in the ENP, “an obvious illustration of how EU role conception is expressed and translated into regional policy” (Bengtsson & Elgström 2012: 98). It was established in 2003 (European Commission 2003) and reviewed 2011 in the aftermath of the so-called Arab spring (European Commission 2011). How this regional role played out in Ukraine, according to the EU, can be seen in the implementation reports that were published yearly until 2015. The “normative power generalised role” of the EU seems to be highly present in the regional role envisioned in the revised ENP since its first aim is to build “deep and sustainable democracy” in the ENP countries (Ibid: 3). The EU should do so by linking levels of support to reforms in the ENP countries, engaging more actively with civil society, and closer security cooperation, especially in solving protracted conflicts. The other main aims of the ENP were to support economic development, strengthen regional cooperation, and provide instruments able to deliver on these objectives (Ibid: 2).

Bengtsson and Elgström (2012: 98, emphasis removed) describe the EU’s view of its role in the Eastern neighbourhood as “normative superior, potent leader”. They conclude that all eastern neighbours except Belarus, “readily recognize both the great power status of the EU, and the attractiveness of its normative agenda”, and that Ukraine had the closest relationship with the EU of these countries (Ibid: 99). The protests that erupted in late 2013 when Russian pressure made the Ukrainian government reject the EU’s offer of an Association Agreement (AA) could be seen as a sign of this acceptance of this EU role. This normative leader role in the eastern neighbourhood made Russia, on the other hand, see it as a “competitive actor with a clearly normative agenda that contradicts Russian key interests”, perceiving the EU as playing the role of a “normatively aggressive actor” (Ibid: 101, emphasis removed).
3.3 From role theory to actorness

It is from the view of the actor as a role-maker and -taker Klose’s definition of actorness as *an entity’s capacity to imagine and realise roles for its “self” in specific contexts of international affairs* stems. From this perspective role-taking and -casting capabilities are what determines who is an actor on the international arena. This capability, according to Klose (2018: 1148), is dependent on the interplay of three elements: *internal and external role expectations, creative action*, and social and material *resources*. Though both internal and external role expectations are sets of expectations of appropriate behaviour, below they will be separated into two categories to make it easier to distinguish between how the domestic level and the external context contribute to the construction of the EU as an actor.

Klose’s attempt to move past the disadvantages of earlier conceptualisations of actorness is interesting in several aspects. Looking back at the critique of previous actorness research, Klose’s conceptualisation is not exclusively focused on an actor’s internal workings and can also “travel” beyond the EU. The same definition could be used on both state and non-state actors. Moreover, it encompasses the full process of actorness, from how actorness emerges to its impact on the context. All-in-all it is a new take on a decades-old problem that seem to overcome several of the shortcomings of previous attempts.

However, even though there is a clearly stated conceptualisation of actorness, its relationship to effectiveness is ambiguous: Does the “imagine and realising roles” mean that an actor must be successful in its attempts to take on a role it has imagined for itself in order to be an actor? The answer must be no, the definition must encompass unsuccessful actors as well as successful, or effective, ones. Instead I will interpret imagining and realising roles as actively trying to take on a role in a certain context. How can we then distinguish between an actor with high capability to imagine and realise roles for itself in a context and one with low capability to do the same, if the degree to which the imagined role is realised is not a useful criterion? This might seem less of a problem following the constructivist notion that actorness is something that is created in interaction: any amount of participation in the role-making process is enough since it implies actorness.

The problem, then, becomes how to distinguish between if an entity is actively and deliberately participating in the role making process in a certain context or not. When talking
about states this can be quite straightforward, but a more general conceptualisation is needed here: How can we distinguish between EU actorness and coordinated member state action? Well, without expectations on its own role in the context, an entity can hardly be said to be (re-)imagining a role. In a compound actor such as the EU this includes cohesion (value, procedural-tactical, or outcome) on what that role might look like. The entity must interact with the context in order to realise its role, and thus others will have expectations on its role as well. These expectations will depend on both how others see what the entity already is (presence) and on how they interpret its actions and the context (opportunity). Moreover, in acting out its role, the entity must have access to resources to deploy as it sees appropriate. It must thus be autonomous in relation to any principals: it needs to have resources of its own and the ability to decide how to play its role. This last criterion also connects to the third part of Klose’s actorness conceptualisation, creative action.

As we can see, elements from earlier conceptualisations of actorness remains relevant for evaluating actorness in Klose’s model, something he is aware of (Klose 2018: 1148-1149). However, while emphasising that actorness is constructed in the interplay of role expectations, resources, and creative action he gives little advice on how to study these and how they can be used to assess an entity’s actorness, except from in how they connect to earlier actorness research. Therefore, it is a problem that Klose gradually loses contact with the specific aspects of actorness that has been proven useful in previous research. It is problematic for two reasons: Firstly, aspects proven relevant in previous research might be overlooked if it is not stated explicitly how they are – or are not – connected to the new interactionist role theory conceptualisation of actorness. Secondly, it is not clear how Klose’ interplaying elements, from which actorness emerges, can be used to evaluate this actorness: It becomes difficult to systematically evaluate an entity’s capability to imagine and realise roles for itself, given its role expectations, resources, and creativity.

To overcome these weaknesses the next section will lay out the interactionist role theory analytical framework Klose proposes, and explicitly link it to the concepts presented in 2.2 above. Taking the previously discussed elements of cohesion, autonomy, presence, and opportunity into account, it will examine how these connect to Klose’s internal and external role expectations, resources, and creative action as these interact throughout role-making process in the three steps of the analytical framework.
3.4 The interactionist role theory three step analytical framework

3.4.1 The elements of interactionist role theory actorness

In Klose’s framework, *internal role expectations* are created by “individual constituent units seeking to convince each other of supporting specific EU roles” (Klose 2018: 1148). In other words, the member states and EU institutions negotiate what role the EU should aspire to take in a specific context. *Cohesion* has been identified as a relevant concept for this process (Ibid: 1148). Internal agreement on an appropriate role for the EU and what resources and actions are appropriate for that role will affect its ability to mobilise resources and finding ways of using them effectively. Cohesion will also shape the expectations of others on the EU’s roles. For example, more cohesion might make other actors expect the EU to take more forceful action and play a more active role. Hence, cohesion should affect the role-making process through internal role expectations.

As discussed above, the ability to cast others into counter-roles is crucial for realising it. This alter-casting capability is according to Klose (2018: 1149) dependent on *social and material resources* (including knowledge, experience, economic and military capabilities) and capacity to find new ways of using them more efficiently, *creative action*. These two elements interact in that available resources determines what actions can be made, and actions might exhaust, create, or shift the relative importance of resources. They also interplay with role expectations, as both internal and external actors will take available resources and ability to use them into account when imagining roles. For example, the EU’s relative lack of military instruments and historical inexperience in using them make it harder to imagining it in the role of an aggressor or invader. This does not mean that the member states lack military power but underlines that one must isolate EU resources and creative action from that of the member states. Here, the concept of *autonomy* from previous actorness research should be useful. If, on the one hand, EU decisions make member states use their resources in the role-making process, then those resources or the action taken could be seen as belonging to the EU. If, on the other hand, member states dictate the objectives but do not specify how the EU should accomplish them, and the EU may choose to use whatever resources and take the actions it deems necessary, then again it is EU resources and actions we see. Bretherton and Vogler’s three categories of policy instruments – economic, political, and military – will be used the systematise the analysis.
The ability to alter-cast is also dependent on a fourth element, *external role expectations*, since whether others view an actor’s aspired role as preferable to status quo or not will make the alter-casting process easier or harder (Klose 2018: 1149). How preferable others view an entity’s aspired role will be related to how they view its current role. For example, if others view the EU as a market they need access to, they might want to change their role in accordance with the EU, expecting to keep or gain market access. This means that *presence* has an impact on external role expectations. The international context will also inform role expectations, an entity would for example be expected to behave differently in multi- and bilateral settings. Thus, *opportunity* is also a part in forming external role expectations. These expectations, in turn, interact with internal role expectations as an entity views itself through others: Internal actors consider what is expected and appropriate for an actor when imagining a role. In the same way, an entity will consider what resources and actions others see as appropriate for the role it wants to take, and the structure of the international space and other actors will affect actorness since it will either enable or constraint an entity’s actions.

### 3.4.2 Operationalising the interactionist role theory framework

It is in the interplay of the four elements taken from Klose’s conceptualisation that actorness emerges. As explained above, in my conceptualisation, elements taken from earlier research has an indirect effect on the actorness-process, through Klose’s four elements. Although they should not be seen as necessary criteria for actorness, keeping them in mind will help us understand the EU’s capability to actively and deliberately contribute to the process in which its actorness emerges. That is, they help us identify which internal role expectations can be seen as the EU’s, which resources and actions can be seen as the EU’s, and how external role expectations connect both to others’ ideas of what the EU is and the context.

Operationalising the presented framework is to a large extent about finding ways the EU and its others express role expectations, what they believe to be appropriate role behaviour. What the EU expects of its role in a certain context should be possible to find in the input representatives of the constituent units gives in the process leading up to the EU adapting a aspirational role, and then, if there is cohesion around a role to aspire to, in official EU documents and statements regarding the context. Similarly, external role expectations should be possible to find in the EU’s significant others’ official documents and statements regarding the EU. Questions to ask to identify role expectations are: (1) what objectives are appropriate for the EU in the context, (2) what resources are appropriate for the EU to use in the context,
Klose separates the analysis of the interactive process into three steps, which will be further explained in the following subsections.

3.4.2.1 Step 1: Analysing the EU’s imagination of a role in response to a problematic situation

The first step is to analyse an entity’s imagination of a role for itself in response to a problematic situation. When confronted with a situation where established routines are challenged, the constituent units of the entity, and external actors outside of it, tries to exert their own expectations of the its role (Klose 2018: 1149). Hence, the first step is the analysis process where the EU formulates a role that it will aspire to take in the context, the answer to the question “what role did the EU want?”. Two parts of this process are necessary for the analysis in the two subsequent steps: Firstly, what role “won” and becomes the role the following steps will focus on? Secondly, since this is primarily an internal process, how cohesive was the EU in this choice? During this step the analysis would thus aim to (1) identify roles that constituent units imagine for the EU; (2) assess how compatible the imagined roles were. If they were compatible at the outset of the process we can speak of (high) value cohesion; if there were several competing roles, and tactics and procedures were used to overcome any differences we speak of (high) procedural-tactical cohesion; and when or if there was agreement on a role, and all actors were in agreement regardless of value and procedural-tactical cohesion we speak of (high) outcome cohesion. Since decisions on the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) are taken unanimously in the Council, any role grounded in Council conclusions would show on cohesion among the constituent units directly involved in the deciding an EU role, the member states, at least in the form of a lowest common denominator.
Table 1: Operationalisation Step 1 – What role did the EU want?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>What role(s) did the constituent units imagine for the EU?</th>
<th>Was there agreement on a role for the EU in the context?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>a. What objectives were appropriate for the EU in the context?</td>
<td>a. Which role?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. How should others perceive the EU in the context?</td>
<td>b. How cohesive were the constituent units around this role?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. What roles should significant others take in the context?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. What resources would be appropriate for the EU to use in the alter-casting process?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e. What actions would be appropriate for the EU to take in the alter-casting process?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3.4.2.2 Step 2: Analysing the EU’s attempts to realise its aspired role in social interaction with others

The second step analyses an entity’s attempts to realise the aspired role in interaction with others (Klose 2018: 1150). To do that, one must analyse how the entity attempts to “cast significant others into specific counter- or commensurate roles through the creative use and mobilization of social and material resources” and the others’ attempts to do the same (Ibid: 1150). Concretely, this means investigating how the EU and others acted in a specific context: What instruments were available, which of them were deployed, and how they were applied.

When looking at the EU’s resources and how it uses them, autonomy, separating the EU from the member states, will be a central aspect. When a transaction between the EU and an other occurs, one should therefore ask (1) if an EU institution took the decision or gave genuine input in the decision-making process, (2) if an EU institution acted out the decision on behalf of the member states, and (3) if it could decide for itself how to do so. If the answer to either question (1) or (3) is yes, the action and the resources mobilised to carry it out will be regarded as autonomous. However, since the European Council and the Council of the European Union (the Council) are EU institutions but consist of the executive branches of the member states, in most cases they are the collective of member states. Thus, when these bodies decide under decision rules where every member state has a veto (which is the norm for the CFSP) that something should be carried out by the member states, or lay out very detailed instructions for how EU institutions should act, this can hardly be seen as EU action.

As this step focuses more on the external dimension, how opportunity and presence affect external role expectations will be a second area to investigate. What others were relevant in
the context, how did they act, what actions and instruments did they see as appropriate for the EU’s aspired role, and into what counter-roles did they try to alter-cast the EU?

| Table 2: Operationalisation Step 2 – How did the EU and its significant others act in the context? |
|---|---|
| 1. How did the EU act in the context? | 2. How did significant others act in the context? |
| a. What EU resources were deployed? | a. What roles did they see as appropriate for themselves? |
| b. How were they applied? | b. What roles did they see as appropriate for the EU? |
| c. How autonomous was the EU’s actions? | c. Which resources and actions did significant others see as appropriate for themselves? |
| d. Where there unused available resources? | d. Which resources and actions did significant others see as appropriate for the EU? |

3.4.2.3 Step 3: Analysing the implications of the role-making process

In the last step, the implications of the role-making process for the entity’s “self”, for others, and for the social structure in the specific context is analysed. How successful was the entity in alter-casting others into roles compatible with its own aspired role, asserting itself as an international actor in the specific context (Klose 2018: 1150)? What has changed in role expectations and resources for the actors involved? Did they come up with any new ways of using resources? This is related to efficiency as well, as one part of this step would be to assess to what extent the EU managed to take on the role imagined for itself. Here, how cohesion, autonomy, presence, and opportunity are related to how successful the EU was is an important question.

| Table 3: Operationalisation Step 3 – What were the implications of the role-making process? |
|---|---|
| 1. How successful was the EU in alter-casting its significant others (and thus in making its own role) in the context? | 2. What were the consequences of the role-making process for the EU? |
| a. How do cohesion, autonomy, opportunity, and presence relate to success in the context? | a. What has changed regarding role expectations resources and how they are deployed? |
4. Methodology

In order to trace how the EU was constructed as an actor following the problematic situation of the Russian occupation of Crimea this thesis will closely examine the role-making process that followed. Although some scholars hold that “good” process tracing should depart from pre-defined causal mechanisms and hypotheses that are either confirmed or rejected during the study (Bennett & Checkel 2015; Schimmelfennig 2015), more interpretative process tracing where the studied elements are treated as mutually constitutive rather than mechanically causal variables is another fruitful way of conducting research (Guzzini 2012; Pouliot 2015; Vennesson 2008: 224). For Pouliot (2015: 237), good process tracing acknowledges both that “social causality is to be established locally” and that “no social relationships are so unique as to foreclose the possibility of theorization and categorization”. This means that causality is always context-bound, and stems from the meaning actors attribute to events and actions. Pouliot exemplifies with military exercises: For allies they might mean an opportunity to strengthen cooperation, or a signal that one part is ready to stand up for the other. For a rival, they might be perceived as a threat and signal hostility. An action produces different causal effects in different contexts, depending on how they are interpreted (Ibid: 242). At the same time, some generalisation is possible “by abstracting [social] practices away from specific contexts” (Ibid: 251). The goal is not generalisation in a positivist sense, but “analytical generality”, for which validity rests on that it holds true across empirical cases, but in its usefulness to explain them (Ibid: 252). Hence, though this thesis starts with the aim of casting light on the specific case and does not claim any generalisable results in how role-making processes play out regarding cause and effect, the analytical framework it utilises and aims to improve should be able to travel to other contexts and cases of role-making processes following problematic situations (see also Falleti & Lynch; Guzzini 2012: especially 262-264).

As seen in the chapters above the constructivist or interpretivist point of departure for this study does not mean that it is free from theory and a priori conceptualisations. What it means is that these should be seen as “[i]ntial research expectations […] treated as educated provisional inferences that will be considered and explored, rather than as formal hypotheses that will be ‘tested’” (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012: 53). In other words, the research process has been iterative, the empirical findings used to inform conceptualisations and the analytical framework, and I will return to the framework in section 6. One thing that needs to
be theoretically determined and delimited is the case (Venesson 2008: 227). Thinking of a
case as a “phenomenon, or an event, chosen, conceptualized and analysed empirically as a
manifestation of a broader class phenomena or events” (Ibid: 226), there are some
considerations regarding picking Ukraine as a case of role-making processes following
problematic situations that need to be explicitly stated.

First, categorising Russian aggression in Ukraine as a problematic situation where the EU’s
routinised role in that context was challenged should be justified. Problematic situations are
cases where the EU’s routines for handling relations did not prove sufficient, where it had to
look beyond its usual behaviour. Klose, for example, studied the process of how China’s rise
as a global power forced the EU to rethink its role in East Asia, as external and internal actors
all changed their expectations on appropriate EU behaviour. I will look at how the EU had to
abandon its normal relations with Ukraine and Russia after the Crimean crisis. The general
problem when identifying cases that challenge EU roles is that one cannot assume that the EU
successfully took a new role in the context as a result. For Klose’s theory to be applicable on
the Crimean case, the justification must lie in the problematic situation’s challenge of the
routinised role, not that the role changed. That the Council held extraordinary meetings
dedicated to Crimea in its foreign affairs configuration (FAC) and between the heads of state
or government early in the process indicates that the EU could not handle the issue within its
established routines. Russian and Ukrainian expectations on the EU also changed with the
new militarised situation, and internal actors stated that “focus of our engagement with Russia
must be the situation in Ukraine, rather than other normal business” (Prime Minister’s Office,
10 Downing Street 2014) and “we have to respond through emergency measures” (European
Commission 2014c). Thus, there was a shift in both external and internal role expectations
that, as will be shown below, forced the EU to respond spontaneously to the unfolding events.

Secondly, even though the focus of this analysis is the construction-process of the EU as an
actor, and such a process is continuously ongoing, for practical reasons there needs to be a
delimitation in time and space. The starting point for the part of the role-making process
studied will be the last week of February 2014 when the problematic situation occured. The
analysis will continue to the launch of the revised ENP in November 2015 (European
Commission 2015b). Although not an endpoint for the process where the EU is constructed as
an international actor, it may serve as an endpoint for the process of spontaneous action and
an indication of a new period of established routines. The revised ENP can thus be seen as a
formal end to the role-making process where the EU explains the role it aspires to take in its neighbourhood. Another time-related problem is that the analyses separates constant process into three separate steps. Though the role-making process is continuously ongoing and restarting, this simplification is necessary to reduce the complexity of the process.

Thirdly, there is the question of on which level to conduct the study. Since the actors in the analytical framework are seen as consisting of sub-actors (Member states and institutions in the case of the EU) and these in turn of sub-sub-actors all the way down to the individual level, a choice of how “micro” to go needs to be made. The main interest here is the EU as an actor, and thus only the first level of internal actors will be considered (member states and the central institutions, particularly the Commission). For the EU’s significant others internal actors will not be systematically analysed, due to the vastness of that task and the language barrier.

Lastly, one needs to consider what actors can be considered significant others in the context. Significant others are actors that the EU has direct contact with and from whose perspective the EU sees itself in in the role-making process. What actors that might be is then an empirical question, but as we shall see below the two most relevant actors for the purpose of this study are Russia and Ukraine (though the United States (US) also takes part in the altercasting process).

On a practical level, the study will focus on textual analysis. By posing the analytical questions from the operationalisation above to a wide range of open sources (which are described below) it aims to uncover how the involved actors viewed the EU and its roles in the context. The basis of this study will thus be a careful reading of a select number of texts. This means searching for patterns in how the role of the EU is described throughout the three-step analytical framework: How the concepts found in the analytical framework – resources, creative action, external and internal role expectations – are treated, and how the different actors relate these to each other and to the EU. When doing this it is important to interpret the actions from the point in time they were taken and see where in the process they fit and what that says about the EU as an actor at that stage, and not only to describe how different actors in retrospect fit them into their narrative of the EU as an actor.
4.1 Material

The main sources are official documents, speeches, and statements that, in line with Michalski and Pan (2017: 612), “are treated as officially sanctioned statements on the international roles of [...] the EU”. They are not about what policymakers really think of the EU’s and others’ roles in the context or generally, but are chosen for “their function as stylized expressions of role-perceptions and role positions commonly used in diplomatic contexts directed at other states and the wider public” (Ibid: 612). Though this limits the analysis – the EU’s role behind closed doors might be different to the one communicated to the rest of the world – it is precisely in this kind of material the public construction of the EU as an actor should emerge. The analysis thus covers how the actors communicated roles to the rest of the world, and not necessarily the roles players within the entities actually thought they had. As a general principle I have aimed to use sources as close in time and place to the events covered as possible, preferably taken from the actor itself. Potential bias of sources should always be considered, the EU might for example want to be perceived as cohesive, Russia as acting in accordance with international law etc. Since the analysis is centred around how the actors want events to be perceived, the bias in itself is part of the analysis and sources useful despite it.

To capture how the EU articulates its role and acts to alter-cast others, policy documents concerning EU relations with Ukraine, Russia, and its neighbourhood (mainly from the ENP framework) and press releases and conclusions from the FAC and the European Council will be analysed. Although other configurations may handle issues relevant for EU-Ukrainian relations these are the two main EU bodies for CFSP decision-making. During the timeframe 44 relevant meetings were held, including extraordinary ones, informal dinners of the Heads of State or Government, an EU-Ukraine summit, and an Eastern Partnership summit.

Statements and speeches of EU officials given in connection to meetings and main events will also be part of the analysis. Corresponding material from the EU’s significant others in the context is included to capture external role expectations. Governmental websites and media accounts of events are the main sources. The limitation to material in English is less problematic since its purpose is to communicate actors’ views to the rest of the world, again being examples of stylised expressions of role perceptions and expectations. Approximately
190 statements, speeches and news items found on official websites or shared by official social media accounts have been analysed.

Regarding internal role expectations, the focus here will be on the participants in the FAC and European Council meetings from the three main players when it comes to external relations: Germany, France and the United Kingdom (UK). Participants in the meetings often give statements to the press in connection to them or publish releases on their respective webpages. If the material suggest that other member states played an especially significant role during a part of the role-making process this will be taken into account, but the position of all 28 member states cannot be traced throughout the whole process within the scope of this study.

Depending on how the websites of the different actors and institutions function, I have either searched for material around dates where it could be expected to have been published (around summits, main events, etc.) or for key words (Ukraine, meetings, names of actors etc.), or a combination of both. Sometimes documents and statements refer to other relevant sources and a “snowball” kind of logic has thus partly been applied, where one piece of material points to the next. One possible bias in the selection of the material is if statements has been systematically unpublished or removed. Media reports and secondary sources have been used to verify that statements have not been overlooked and contextualise them. Another way to incorporate statements that are removed from websites and to get around that older versions of websites are no longer available has been to search social media, where they are sometimes still accessible.
5. Analysis

In this section, the analysis will be conducted following the three-step analytical framework presented above. The first two subsections will end with summaries of main findings, while the third will aim to sum up the whole process and its implications.

5.1 Step 1: The EU’s imagination of a role in response to the Russian occupation of Crimea

In this section the process in which the constituent units of the EU formulate a role for the union will be mapped out. In a first stage, the events in Ukraine and Crimea that was the problematic situation will be described. Then the initial reactions of the UK, France, Germany, and the Commission and what they saw as appropriate responses will be examined. In a third stage, how these expectations came together in a role for the EU will be analysed.

In November 2013 the Ukrainian government decided to suspend talks on closer economic association with the EU, opting for closer cooperation with Russia instead. Popular protests erupted against this decision in many parts of Ukraine, with the centre at Maidan Nezalezhnosti, Independence Square, in Kiev. The demonstrations became known as Euromaidan, and continued with increasing violence, culminating in clashes with dozens killed on 18-20 February 2015. Two days later president Viktor Yanukovych fled the capital, to later resurface in Russia on 28 February. Simultaneously, the events in Crimea had started to unfold. Armed militia had taken control of the Crimean parliament the day before, and on the 28th armed men seized airports and set up roadblocks, separating the peninsula from the rest of Ukraine. On 1 March Russia had de facto occupied Crimea, and as Ukraine put its forces on high alert and called on NATO for help, president of Russia Vladimir Putin got the formal approval to use military force in Ukraine from the Russian parliament (Baczynska et al. 2014).

5.1.1 First reactions

When what was happening on the ground in Ukraine started to become clear, an emergency FAC meeting was called on 3 March to discuss the developments. Before that, president of the Commission José Manuel Barroso had already on the 28th expressed in a phone call to Ukrainian prime minister Arseniy Yatseniuk that “tensions” in Crimea should be addressed “through political dialogue in the framework of the country’s unity and territorial integrity”
(European Commission 2014f). On the same day the foreign ministers of France, Germany, and Poland issued a joint declaration where they urged Ukraine to reach out to southern and eastern regions and linguistic minorities, and “all parties in Ukraine” to respect the country’s sovereignty and territorial integrity (France in the United Kingdom 2014). Over the days leading up to the FAC during which the Russian involvement became apparent, the member states and the Commission formulated positions on how to deal with the situation, and on what role the EU should have.

In the UK, foreign secretary William Hague condemned “acts of aggression against Ukraine”, summoned the Russian ambassador to convey “deep concerns”, promised financial and technical assistance, and spoke of the “need for international diplomatic action” (Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2014b). A spokesperson for Prime minister David Cameron stated that “the focus on our engagement in Russia must be the situation in Ukraine, rather than other normal business” and that “[a] stable Ukraine is in the interest of everyone” (Prime Minister’s Office 2014). Before the FAC, minister for Europe David Lidington said that “Russia’s intervention is a flagrant violation of [its] international commitments”, hoping that there would be unity in calling on Russia to withdraw and in that there should be a “cost” if not (Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2014a).

German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier stated on 1 March that “in my view, it is necessary for us Europeans to come together quickly to agree on a common position of the European Union” (Auswärtiges Amt 2014a, my translation), and the day after he urged “the responsible” to refrain from “taking further steps, that can only be understood as provocation” (Auswärtiges Amt 2014b, my translation). On his way into the 3 March FAC he said that Russia’s “military activities are totally unacceptable” and that Ukraine should respect minorities rights in eastern Ukraine (Council of the European Union 2014h). He further called for a concrete action and proposed a fact-finding mission by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) (ibid.).

French Foreign minister Laurent Fabius condemned Russian military escalation, called for the suspension of Russia from the G8, and promised economic support to Ukraine. On the direct question if France would consider sending aircraft carriers to the Black sea he said no, but that economic and political measures would be taken (France Diplomatie 2014).
EU officials reacted similarly to the representatives of the member states. For example, in a statement the head of the EEAS, HR/VP1 Catherine Ashton, called on Russia not to use military means and reminded of international agreements on troop placement in the area (EEAS 2014b). President Barroso spoke of the need for a “common response” and stated that the Commission was “preparing a package of support” and that “difficulties” in Ukraine required a response “through emergency measures” (European Commission 2014j).

The internal role expectations formulated by the three big member states the UK, Germany, and France, show a number of similarities. Firstly, on their objectives, they all emphasised the need for de-escalation and respect for the sovereignty of Ukraine. Secondly, they were all keen on the EU, and the “west” more generally, being perceived by others as united and made efforts to coordinate a common response from the outset (see for example France in the United Kingdom 2014; Prime Minister’s Office 2014). Thirdly, on appropriate roles for the EU’s significant others, they all mention that Ukrainian reforms should include the whole country and protect the rights of minorities. This is related to the parliamentary decision to abolish the 2012 language law that gave regional and local authorities the right to officially use minority languages, i.e. Russian, on their territory. The revocation was vetoed by the acting president (European commission 2015a: 8). Though a revocation of the law would probably have been seen as problematic in itself, the strong emphasis on the matter is better understood as a response to Russia arguing that the new Ukrainian government did not respect minority rights and to present itself as their defender against an oppressive Ukrainian state (see for example MFA Russia 2014e; 2014g). Regarding Russia, they all spoke of it as having violated its international commitments or international law and urged it to stop using force and acting aggressively. Fourthly, regarding appropriate resources and actions in the response to the situation, they all mainly spoke about diplomatic means vis-à-vis Russia and financial and technical support for Ukraine. Lack of compliance from the Russian side should come at a cost, but there was little mention on what kind of cost. Military aid to Ukraine was either not mentioned or ruled out. On the other hand, they emphasised exactly the kind of economic and financial resources the EU has, ruling out military means that are entirely in the hands of the member states and seen as better co-ordinated by NATO. All these similar traits points towards value cohesion among the analysed constituent units.

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1 High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission
5.1.2 Towards an EU role

Considering the value cohesion among the three biggest member states, the conclusions from the FAC on 3 March are not surprising. They condemned Russian aggression as in breach of international law and commitments. The EU’s view of appropriate Russian behaviour is clear: the withdrawal of troops and return to normal bi- and multilateral relations with Ukraine in respect of international law (Council of the European Union 2014f). The expectations on Ukraine are also clear, the conclusions “commends the measured response so far” and continue to remind of the need for reforms and elections and the inclusion of the whole country, including minorities (Ibid: 7). The appropriate actions and resources for the EU to steer the Russian and Ukrainian counterparts in this desired direction are outlined in paragraphs 4, 6, and 7. Towards Russia they are in the form of costs if it does not adapt its behaviour. These costs are mainly diplomatic – Suspension of the G8 summits and of bilateral talks between the EU and Russia on visa matters and a New Agreement on closer relations – and potentially economic in the form of targeted restrictive measures (Ibid.). For Ukraine, it is all about carrots in the form of financial and technical support, but also renewed promises of an AA including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), and visa liberalisation based on the EU’s presence as an attractive economic partner. Lastly, the Council tasked the HR/VP Ashton with continuing talks with all sides, explicitly giving the EEAS a role in the process.

A series of meetings in Paris on 5 March where the foreign ministers of the US, UK, France, Ukraine, and Russia participated did not result in direct contacts between the Russian and Ukrainian sides. On 6 March the leadership in Crimea decided that the region should join Russia and announced a referendum in that regard, while OSCE monitors was prevented from entering the province (Baczynska et al. 2014). On the same day the conclusions of the 3 March FAC were confirmed at an extraordinary meeting of the heads of state and government of the member states, where they met with prime minister Yatseniuk and discussed the EU’s response towards Russia and Ukraine. Despite the lack of Russian compliance, the UK, France, and especially Germany was reported as being cautious about calling for sanctions before the meeting (Traynor 2014), but still held that further non-compliance from the Russian side should have consequences. Other member states in central Europe, the Nordics, and the Baltics were more outspoken (Council of the European Union 2014a; 2014i; MFA Poland 2014).
All in all, in their statement from the 6 March summit, the heads of state and government “endorsed” the conclusions of the earlier FAC and condemned “the unprovoked violation of Ukrainian sovereignty” by Russia (European Council 2014e: 1). The objective was the “[t]he solution to the crisis […] found through negotiations between the Governments of Ukraine and Russia […] including through potential multilateral mechanisms” and the EU should consider using resources and actions “such as travel bans, assets freezes and the cancellation of the EU-Russia summit” if Russia did not sit down with Ukraine at the negotiation table and produced “results within a limited timeframe” (Ibid: 2). Further destabilisation of Ukraine would lead to “additional and far reaching consequences for relations in a broad range of economic areas” (Ibid: 2). They stated that the EU “has a special responsibility for peace, stability and prosperity in Europe”, and “will pursue these objectives using all available channels” (Ibid: 2). At the same time, regarding the roles of its significant others, there was willingness to continue normal relations with Russia, but that “it would be a matter of great regret” if Russia failed to work in the direction of a “relationship based on mutual interest and respect of international obligations”, putting it on Russia to change behaviour (Ibid: 2).

Regarding Ukraine the EU again commended its “measured reaction”, encouraged it to make sure that minorities rights were respected, continued to offer an AA/DCFTA, and confirmed the assistance package (European Commission 2014c) unveiled by the Commission the day before (European Council 2014e: 2). In addition to earlier conclusions a paragraph on energy security was added, and one stating the aim to further develop the union’s relationship with the region by signing AAs with Georgia and Moldova.

5.1.2.1 Summary: What role(s) did the constituent units imagine for the EU?

From these early reactions and meetings, the general outlines of a role for the EU and corresponding counter and commensurate roles for Ukraine and Russia can be extracted. The role the main internal actors imagined for the union was that of what can be called a “mediator” or “peacemaker”. It was expected to work towards the objective of an ordered, rule-based international milieu, with emphasise on dialogue, de-escalation, and respect for international commitments. Others should perceive it as taking its “special responsibility” and living up to its own commitments. It should try to alter-cast its significant others: Ukraine into a role of a “European liberal democracy” with respect for EU core values. Russia should be made to abandon its role as “aggressor and violator of commitments”, and to take up a role of “friendly neighbour” in an international environment where relations are ordered, rule-based, and multilateral, and where negotiations are norm and military intervention is not.
Appropriate resources and actions for these ends towards Ukraine would be financial and technical support on the one hand, and access to the internal market and visa liberalisation on the other. For Russia, the EU should use diplomatic and to some extent economic resources.

5.1.2.2 Summary: Was there agreement on a role for the EU in the context?
Given that there was agreement on FAC conclusions and a statement from the heads of state or government in an area where decisions are taken unanimously, we can speak of EU output cohesion regarding the role. Since there was value cohesion among the examined constituent units, this is not a surprise. However, that they agreed on what became the EU’s aspired role and coordinated their actions also means that any alternative roles, and what procedures and tactics where used to persuade disagreeing member states, lie outside the scope of this thesis. The analysis thus shows value cohesion among the examined constituent units, output cohesion among all constituent units, and does not cover procedural-tactical cohesion.

5.2 Step 2: The EU’s attempts to realise its role in interaction with Russia and Ukraine
In this section, the role-making process in which the EU tries to assert itself in the role as a mediator in the Ukraine-Russian conflict will be analysed. First it will cover the main events in Ukraine, then it will examine what resources the EU had and how it used them, if it did so autonomously from the member states, and how its significant others, Ukraine and Russia, acted throughout the process.

5.2.1 Main events on the ground
The Russian response to the EU threat of additional measures was not compliance. In Crimea, a referendum on declaring independence and thereafter seeking accession to Russia was announced on 11 March, something the Russian foreign ministry described as “absolutely within its rights” and stated that Russia “would fully respect the results of the free will of the Crimean people” (MFA Russia 2014c). There was no sign of withdrawal of troops, Russian forces gradually took over more infrastructure and military facilities on the peninsula (although Ukrainian forces remained in their bases until 23 March) (Vasovic & Baczynska 2014). The referendum, where an overwhelming majority voted for independence, was held on the 16th. The Venice Commission (2014: 6) later declared it both technically illegal and not being “in line with European democratic standards”. Russia recognised Crimea as a
“sovereign and independent state” the next day, and a treaty of accession was signed 18 March and ratified by the Russian Federal Assembly on the 21st (TASS 2014c).

A new phase of the conflict in Ukraine began in early April, when pro-Russian protesters occupied government buildings in the east. The increasing violence was addressed at the FAC meetings on 14-15 April, where the conclusions condemned actions “by armed individuals”, called for an end to “attempts at destabilising Ukraine”, and for “all parties to engage in a dialogue in view of a peaceful solution” (Council of the European Union 2014g: 13). An increasingly chaotic and violent situation followed where parts of the two provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk (the Donbass), came under separatist control. To calm the tensions and de-escalate, the EU, Russia, the US, and Ukraine met in Geneva in April. The outcome was the Geneva Statement on the 17th, where they in a jointly called for all sides to refrain from violence, the disarmament of all “illegal armed groups” and vacation of occupied spaces in eastern Ukraine (EEAS 2014c). Furthermore, amnesty was to be given to protestors not guilty of capital crimes and the OSCE was to assist in its implementation. The statement did not lead to any improvements on the ground, and instead the Donbass separatists held their own referendums on independence and accession to Russia on 11 May, followed by declarations of independence for the Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) and the Luhansk People’s Republic (LPR).

Violence continued to escalate, and Russia became more directly involved in its support of the separatists, including the use of Russian troops in Ukraine (Robinson 2016:512-514). On 17 July Malaysia Airlines 17 (MH17) was shot down in an incident that subsequent investigations would blame on separatists using Russian-made equipment (BBC News 2016). The 298 crew and passengers were all killed, among them 202 EU citizens, the majority from the Netherlands. As the violence surged new efforts were made to initiate a peace process. The so-called Normandy Format, consisting of Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany, took over negotiations, and talks held within the Trilateral Contact Group (Ukraine, Russia and OSCE), resulted in the Minsk I Protocol on 5 September 2014 (Lehne 2015: 7-8). It was also signed by the leaders of DPR and LPR. The protocol consisted of 12 points that included an immediate ceasefire, the decentralisation of powers in Ukraine, and local elections in Donbass (UN Peacemaker 2014). The protocol was followed by a memorandum on 19 September on its implementation (OSCE 2014). The ceasefire was, however, not respected. Though there was a temporary reduction of violence, the fighting soon escalated again with battles at
Donetsk airport and around Debaltsevo (Robinson 2016: 514). The worsening situation on the ground led to another set of negotiations in the Normandy format, resulting in the Minsk II Protocol on 11 February 2015. Minsk II’s 13 articles meant a new ceasefire from 15 February, withdrawal of heavy weapons, self-government and local elections in Donbass, and return of control of the area to Ukraine (Financial Times 2015). Though the ceasefire was not respected, it nonetheless led to a much-reduced level of violence and a relative stabilisation of the situation on the ground throughout the rest analysed timeframe (Robinson 2016: 515-517).

5.2.2 How did the EU act in the process?

5.2.2.1 Economic instruments

As a first response to the events outlined above, at the FAC of 17 March, the Council decided on restrictive measures against persons threatening Ukraine’s “territorial, integrity, sovereignty and independence” (Council of the European Union 2014c). The restrictive measures targeted individuals, Crimean leaders and Russians involved in the intervention, by assets freezes and travel bans (Official Journal of the European Union 2014b). In parallel, the Commission moved to opening the internal market to Ukraine by unilaterally removing tariffs (European Commission 2014a). Before the end of March, the political parts of the AA were signed by the heads of state or government and the Commission had launched a first aid package of macro financial assistance. These three types of actions, restrictive measures targeting individuals, financial assistance to Ukraine, and access to the internal market were subsequently used throughout the process by the EU. One major step was the signing of an AA including an DCFTA on 27 June 2014, the AA started to apply provisionally on 1 November 2014, and the DCFTA on 1 January 2016.

Lack of de-escalation and the official annexation of Crimea also led to further sanctions in the form of an imports ban on Crimean goods, as decided during the 23 June FAC meeting (Council of the European Union 2014b). A new set of targeted measures was introduced following the European Council on 17 July, extending them to encompass entities and not only individuals. EU money was stopped from going to Russia, as the European Investment Bank and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development were told to suspend

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2 Restrictive measures targeting individuals were continuously extended during the analysed timeframe and additions to the list of targeted individuals were made on several occasions (Council of European Union 2019b).
3 Three Macro-Financial Assistance packages for a total of 2.8bn EUR, of which 2.2bn were paid out, were introduced within the analysed timeframe (European Commission 2019b).
financing of Russian public projects, and European investments in Crimea were restricted (European Council 2014b).

A last economic instrument used was broader economic sanctions towards Russia. The downing of MH17 in July 2014 seems to have been what finally brought the EU to take the step it had threatened with since the first week of the crisis. Although the statement by Barroso and van Rompuy accompanying the sanctions states that “illegal annexation of territory and deliberate destabilisation of a neighbouring sovereign country cannot be accepted in 21st century Europe”, it follows by saying that “when the violence created spirals out of control […] the situation requires urgent and determined response. The European Union will fulfil its obligations to protect and ensure the security of its citizens” (European Council 2014d: 1). The sanctions was introduced on 29 July and covered four areas: State-owned banks and financial institutions, an arms embargo, embargo on dual use goods and technology for military use, and an exports ban on equipment used for oil exploration and production (Council of the European Union 2014d). The financial sanctions were extended on 12 September 2014 (Official Journal of the European Union 2014c), and a third package was prepared in January 2015 but not introduced as Minsk II was signed (Christie 2016: 59). Instead, the sanctions were tied to the “complete implementation” of the Minsk II agreement (European Council 2015: 4). The sanctions were continuously extended throughout the analysed timeframe.

As shown above the EU used a wide range of the economic instruments available to alter-cast Ukraine and Russia into roles compatible with the one EU had imagined for itself. The creative use of these in relation to Ukraine seem fairly straight forward: The strong financial support to Ukraine fits well into the role of a peacemaker. It both encouraged Ukraine to keep on a path towards the EU and for it to continue with its, by the EU repeatedly praised, “measured response” towards Russia (see for example Council of the European Union 2014e; European Council 2014a; 2014e).

Actions in response to the Russian refusal to take on an appropriate role were taken with more hesitation. This could be consistent with the EU’s role that emphasised de-escalation over confrontation: gradually introducing restrictive measures targeting individuals, rather than the Russian state, while threatening with more severe sanctions, kept hope for a negotiated solution. It also made it possible to point to Russia as isolating itself and rejecting negotiated
solutions (European Council 2014c). Furthermore, more creativity was needed for the punitive measures: Targeted sanctions are in themselves nothing unusual for the EU, the goal being to direct them towards leaders responsible for the behaviour it seeks to modify (Portela 2013: 430). Without large direct payments and state aid to Russia to withdraw, restrictive measures were the only other way of punishing Russia economically, but in the aftermath of the sovereign debt crisis some members states were more reliant on Russian trade and investment than others. The reliance on energy imports from Russia is another contributing factor (Malek 2013). Uniting around a more confrontative mode of action that could force Russia to the negotiating table or directing sanctions towards the very highest officials such as President Putin himself, would have been harder since it meant a disruption of business as usual. Hence, targeting of individuals was also a way to ensure a cohesive response, albeit as a lowest common denominator (Christie 2016: 54). However, a point was reached where it was not possible to only respond with targeting individuals, leading to a gradual escalation, and moving EU policy away from its usual “triad” of suspending bilateral talks, visa bans and arms embargos, and asset freezes (Portela 2016: 921).

The domain of economic instruments is an area where the EU institutions have a relatively high autonomy as trade and tariffs are EU competencies, and many of the financial instruments used falls under the ENP. Both the financial assistance packages and the unilateral removal of tariffs were proposed by the Commission (European Commission 2014g). Though AAs and DCFTAs are decided upon by the Council, it is the Commission that negotiates on the EU’s behalf, meaning that the EU had substantial input in the process, although it had to consider the interests of all member states in order for them to sign and ratify the agreement. It is therefore possible to say that the EU acted with autonomy when wielding economic instruments used as carrots to encourage what it saw as appropriate Ukrainian behaviour. The sticks directed at Russia, the targeted measures and economic sanctions, are less clear-cut. Though they are presented as EU sanctions it was the council who decided on sanctions under decision-rules where all members have a veto, and they are implemented on member state level. However, it was the Commission and the EEAS that prepared the technical and legal aspects of the decision, and thus had some influence on the policy-making process, according to Christie (2016: 54) it was even “the main driver in the process of designing sanctions that could gain the broad acceptance that was required”, pointing towards EU autonomy, but on a lower level than for the supporting measures.
5.2.2.2 Diplomatic efforts

From the very beginning of the process the EU actively used its diplomatic instruments. EU officials visited Ukraine and had direct contact with Ukrainian counterparts, an early example being the delegation led by Commissioner for Enlargement and ENP Štefan Füle in March 2014 (European Commission 2014b). The signing of the political parts of the AA on 21 March 2014 and the remaining parts on 27 June the same year are strong indicators of the political will in both the EU and Ukraine for close political ties. Van Rompuy stated that signing the political parts of the AA showed the EU’s “steadfast support for the course the people of Ukraine have courageously pursued” (European Council 2014d). The goals of the political dialogue listed in the AA were heavily tilted towards promoting security and stability (Official Journal of the European Union 2014a: article 4). The first EU-Ukraine summit under the new AA was held on 27 April 2015 in Kiev, where Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko met with president of the European Council Donald Tusk and president of the Commission Juncker.

Among the first actions the EU directed towards Russia was to, together with the G7 countries, cancel the G8 meeting in Sochi, and later to suspend Russia from the format altogether (European Commission 2014i). It also suspended negotiations on the New Agreement meant to replace the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) from 1997, and on visa arrangements (European Council 2014e: 2). On March 21, 2014 the European Council cancelled the next EU-Russia summit and noted “that Member States will not hold bilateral regular summits for the time being” (European Council 2014a: 13). Although contacts between high-level EU and Russian officials still occurred during the period (see HR/VP Ashton involvement in the peace process below; European Commission 2014d; 2014e), contacts and formal dialogue in many areas, though not all (one notable exemption being energy) halted as a consequence of the Crimea crisis and remained so throughout the analysed timeframe (EEAS 2019).

In parallel to the bilateral diplomatic responses, the EU also participated in the attempts to initiate a peace process. On 17 April 2014 in Geneva, the EU (represented by HR/VP Ashton) negotiated an agreement with the US, Ukraine, and Russia (EEAS 2014b: 1). HR/VP Ashton and commissioners Füle and De Bucht represented the Union during talks in Minsk in August 2014 (EEAS 2014d), presidents Barroso and van Rompuy in Milan in October 2014, and new HR/VP Federica Mogherini met Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov in early February

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2015 (EEAS 2015b). However, even though the EU supported the peace process and was engaged in the talks before both Minsk I and II, it was not part of the Contact Group, where Russia, Ukraine, the OSCE, and representatives for the DPR and LPR negotiated, nor was it part of the Normandy Format formed by the member states France and Germany together with Russia and Ukraine. Even though the member states had been involved from the start of the process (as underlined in section 5.1 above) they took on a more direct role in peace negotiations as the process went on, and after Geneva the EU was not at the table when they were finalised.

As shown above the EU used a variety of the available diplomatic instruments in the alter-cast process. The use of diplomatic sanctions towards Russia and the frequent and increasing contacts with Ukraine are not too surprising and can in themselves hardly be called *creative actions*, they were to be expected considering the Russian non-compliance and Ukrainian willingness to approach the EU. Letting HR/VP Ashton and the EEAS take on a big role in the peace negotiations early on could be seen as a way of emphasising EU unity, but the member states always had bilateral contacts with Russia, and they eventually came to take over the process themselves. Another example of showing a united front through the use of the EU is the letter from President Barroso to President Putin on behalf of the EU and the member states on 17 April 2014 (European Commission 2014d). Putin had sent a letter to several but not all member states (and some third countries), but the answer came from the Commission and talks exclusively about EU-Russian-Ukrainian relations. The letter also invited further contacts through the responsible commissioner, to negotiate on the EU’s behalf.

The EU acted *autonomously* when using diplomatic instruments in many ways. EU officials represented the union on many occasions and on many levels throughout the period, acting or negotiating on the behalf of the whole EU. HR/VP Ashton took part in peace negotiations and the EU, not the member states, was a part of the Geneva Statement. The AA was negotiated by the Commission, though the member states are all signatories of the final agreement. Just as with the economic sanctions the case for EU autonomy when sanctioning Russian behaviour is weaker: Halting talks with Russia, cancelling and suspending meetings and summits, were decisions taken by the member states in the council with little flexibility in how to implement the decisions. The shift from the EU having a place at the negotiating table
to the bigger member states taking over as mediators was also a step from EU to member state action, and a blow for the EU peacemaker role.

5.2.2.3 Military resources

At the 14-15 April FAC, the Council, on top of further restrictive measures, tasked the EEAS with deploying an expert mission on crisis management to support Ukraine. In response to the escalating violence in eastern Ukraine, it should examine “all options”, including a CSDP mission (Council of the European Union 2014g: 14). The European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM) Ukraine was introduced at the 23 June FAC to assist in civilian security sector reform (Council of the European Union 2014b) and began operations on 1 December 2014 (EUAM Ukraine 2019). It got increased resources in June 2015 and remained in place throughout the analysed timeframe (EEAS 2015a). Military instruments available within the CSDP remained unused by the EU throughout the analysed timeframe. Throughout the timeframe the EU also gave support to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine through funding and access to satellite images under the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (European Commission 2016b).

That the EU did not make use of military resources in its response to the events in Ukraine seem to fit well with a mediator role and the views of the analysed constituent units. That it nevertheless managed to deploy CSDP resources in Ukraine can be seen as creative action since resources in a category generally inappropriate for the role became available. That CSDP instruments were only used for civilian missions and to support the OSCE underlines the lack of appropriate military resources for the EU to use in contexts where determined others have military capabilities. What it could do was to give limited support to Ukraine in a way that was not directly pointed towards Russia.

The use of military force remains firmly in the hands of the member states, whose unanimous approval is necessary for troops under EU command to be deployed, but other CSDP responses such as military assistance and competence building were unused as well. This can be contrasted with the response of both the US and several member states that gave direct military aid, non-lethal equipment, and provided training for Ukrainian forces (Mills 2015; Welt 2019: 30-32). The low autonomy of the EU within the CSDP combined with lack of member state consensus on the use of military instruments left any military response to the individual member state. Even in civilian missions such as EUAM Ukraine, member state
control over resources and mandate gives the EU little room for autonomous action even though it was technically in charge of the mission.

5.2.2.4 Summary: How did the EU act in the process
Throughout the process the EU used primarily economic and diplomatic resources. Regarding Ukraine, it used diplomatic encouragement and incentives such as closer political ties and economic carrots in the form of both market access and financial assistance. Towards Russia, it initially used diplomatic sanctions, and later used increasingly severe economic sanctions to punish inappropriate behaviour. Its military resources remained largely unused, under the CSDP only civilian resources were deployed. Though the analysis has shown little evidence of creative action, as in the EU developing completely new ways of utilising its resources, in how it acted, it nonetheless adapted the resources it had to fit within the limits of its aspired role. Especially in the diplomatic and economic fields the EU seem to have acted autonomously either as decisionmaker, by giving substantial input to the policy-making process, or as implementor. Relations seem to have stabilised in the autumn of 2014, and even more so after Minsk II. This gradually made EU behaviour more routinised again, making EU support to an unstable Ukraine and sanctions against Russia the new normal.

5.2.3 How did significant others act in the context?
This section will focus on how the EU’s significant others acted in the process, and on their view of their own and the EU’s roles. It will primarily focus on direct interaction between the others and the EU and not on the interaction between the two.

5.2.3.1 Russia’s roles and actions
Russia had its own idea of an appropriate role for it to play in its relations with Ukraine and the EU. A common theme in official Russian rhetoric on its annexation of Crimea was that it was the defender, and the EU, or the West in general, the aggressors. During the first days of the crisis Russian officials talked about “deprivation of the rights of minorities” (MFA Russia 2014e), blamed Kiev for sending “armed people” to destabilise Crimea (MFA Russia 2014d), accused the Ukrainian regime of “having actually announced a war against the Russian language and everything associated with Russia” and “allies of the west” of “being open neo-Nazis, who destroy orthodox temples and synagogues” (MFA Russia 2014g). Russia was “aware of its responsibility for the lives of its compatriots and nationals in Ukraine and reserves the right to defend these people” (MFA Russia 2014h) and claimed to be “receiving
many requests to protect peaceful civilians” (MFA Russia 2014f). On April 17 2014 President Putin in his yearly public QA session stated that “first and foremost we wanted to support the residents of Crimea, but we also followed certain logic: If we don’t do anything, Ukraine will be drawn into NATO sometime in the future” (President of Russia 2014b). Russia thus claimed to be acting to defend both ethnic Russians in Ukraine against a fascist coup, and itself from western expansion. According to this logic, using armed forces (resources) to “defend” (action) Russian-speaking minorities and geopolitical interests in Crimea was appropriate behaviour for Russia.

Russian officials repeatedly stressed that they saw sanctions towards itself and its citizens as inappropriate responses to the crisis, calling them “counter-productive” (MFA Russia 2014b) and “a flagrant violation of human rights” and “beyond reason” (President of Russia 2014b), promising retaliatory sanctions (MFA Russia 2014a). Such countersanctions were set up in the form of a travel ban for several EU policymakers (BBC News 2014) and an import ban on agri-food products (Fritz et al. 2017). The Russian view of appropriate EU roles has two parts, corresponding to the differences it saw for the future of Crimea and Donbass: First, in relation to the Russian annexation of Crimea, the EU should accept it as legal under international law and in line with democratic principles (MFA Russia 2014c; President of Russia 2014a); Secondly, regarding the Donbass, the EU should treat it as an internal Ukrainian affair and work with Russia towards an solution where (Russian-speaking) minorities’ rights are respected and eastern regions have autonomous status within Ukraine. Relations with Russia should continue as usual and it should not be seen as isolating itself (TASS 2014a). Ukraine, as the rest of the Eastern Partnership countries, should not be forced into, nor tempted with, closer cooperation with the EU or NATO but remain close to Russia (President of Russia 2014a; TASS 2014b). Throughout the analysed timeframe Russia denied having troops in (eastern) Ukraine, arguing that post-referendum Crimea was a part of Russia and Russian military presence there normal (see for example Robinson 2016 for a discussion on actual Russian military presence in Donbass).

5.2.3.2 Ukraine’s roles and actions

If Russia was acting in Crimea and Donbass, Ukraine was, just as the EU, mainly reacting. The interim government in Kiev after Yanukovych’s departure found itself in a desperate position without effective control of its own territory, a dire financial situation, and immediately having to handle the Russian intervention in Crimea. Looking at the official
rhetoric following these events, Russia was portrayed as a provocateur and violator of international norms (CMU 2014b; 2014d), and as the events in Donbass became increasingly violent an aggressor and supporter of terrorists (CMU 2014c; 2014e; 2014f; 2014h). Ukraine itself on the other hand was portrayed as a victim of Russian aggression and as a European country. The combination of the need for EU financial support, and that the protests that brought the new government to power were pro-European, led to a focus on Ukraine as European, with the long-term objective of joining the EU (CMU 2014g; Poroshenko 2014). Ukraine claimed that its initial response to Russian aggression was peaceful, as it meant that it had not responded to provocations in Crimea with military force, and prioritised peace in Donbass above all (CMU 2014a). As the conflict progressed this was replaced by a more militarised rhetoric and emphasis on building military capability (CMU 2014h; MFA Ukraine 2015).

As the new Ukrainian government had few other possibilities of financial aid, something it was in great need of, it expected the EU to provide it with economic support (CMU 2014d; gov.ua 2014a) and to finalise an AA with market access and visa free travel (CMU 2014i; gov.ua 2014b). President Petro Poroshenko laid out Ukrainian long-term expectations in his speech at the signing of the AA, stating that “we […] expect that the EU will make everything to support our sovereign choice and protect Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity”, declaring that for Ukraine the AA was a first step towards EU membership, and urged the EU to acknowledge the same thing (Poroshenko 2015). To alter-cast the EU into a “supporter of a Europeanising Ukraine” role, the new Ukrainian government acted to tie itself closer to the EU through the ENP. Signing the AA meant that the EU pledged itself to closer cooperation and support as long as Ukraine launched reforms aiming to strengthen democratic principles and market economy (Official Journal of the European Union 2014a: Articles 2-3), something the Ukrainian leadership was committed to anyway. Thus, Ukraine acted by both signing and ratifying the AA as well as starting to implement the reforms associated with it (European Commission 2015a; 2016a). The preamble of the AA, which despite being non-binding references “common values and could be perceived as a ‘scene-setter’” (EEAS 2014a), acknowledges the European identity of Ukraine and “welcomes its European Choice” (Official Journal of the European Union 2014a: 161/3). Through the ENP Ukraine also had and sought direct contact with the EU institutions. Ukraine therefore interacted more directly with the EU than Russia did. It was interested in building a relationship with the EU and not only with its member states.
5.2.3.3 Summary: How did significant others act in the context

Russia saw “defender” (of Russian-speaking minorities and its own geopolitical interests) as an appropriate role for itself to take, Ukraine saw itself as a “victim and European state”. The Russian side wanted to alter-cast the EU into the appropriate EU-role of “respectful neighbour”, the Ukrainian as a “supporter”. Russia saw use of military resources appropriate for itself in Ukraine and used diplomatic and economic resources to make the EU accept this. Ukraine saw it as appropriate to tie itself closer to the EU through diplomatic resources to gain economic resources for resisting Russian aggression. Russia saw application of resources with the aim of tying Ukraine closer to itself as inappropriate action for the EU, preferring business-as-usual contacts, whereas Ukraine saw financial and political support as appropriate.

The roles that the EU’s significant others aspired to and the counter- and commensurate roles they saw as appropriate for the EU speaks both to the EU’s presence and the opportunities of the context. The EU’s presence meant that Ukraine had an alternative to Russia that it could approach for support, and that Russia had to make the EU accept a Russian Crimea. While it is easy to see the EU’s aspired role as first and foremost a counter-role to Russian aggression, opportunity also meant an opening for the EU to imagine a constructive role that incorporated deeper integration of Ukraine within the ENP, something that the EU exploited. Contradictory external role expectations, supporting Ukraine versus respecting Russia’s claimed interests, made it next to impossible for the EU to take a role that both significant others would accept.

5.3 Step 3: Implications of the role-making process

In this section the outcome of the role-making process will be summarised before analysing how successful the EU was in influencing the role-making process and what implications the process had for the EU and its roles.

In the context, the Minsk II agreement was not implemented during the analysed timeframe, and a working ceasefire not established. Crimea effectively remained part of Russia, and Donbass a Russian-supported autonomous region within Ukraine. This situation was not recognised as legitimate by the outside world, including the EU. While the EU still expected Russia to stop destabilising Ukraine, Russia expected the EU to lift sanctions and accept
Crimea as Russian and Ukraine as in its sphere of interest (Council of the European Union 2015; Sputnik News 2015). As of December 2019, the EU sanctions remains, and Minsk II has still not been implemented (Council of the European Union 2019a). The role that the EU played at the end of the process can be labelled as “supporter of a European Ukraine”, both in the sense of actually giving support to Ukraine and of being seen as siding with Ukraine, rather than that of a “mediator”.

5.3.1 How successful was the EU in alter-casting its significant others?

In the role-making process that started with Russia’s intervention in Crimea, the EU’s constituent units agreed on a “mediator” role for the EU. In the alter-casting process that followed, Ukraine’s preferred role as a “European victim” of Russian aggression and the role the EU would have liked it to take, a “European liberal democracy”, was quite compatible, something the closer relationship between the two during the analysed timeframe confirms. During the process Ukraine played a role very similar to what the EU saw as appropriate for it, and the alter-casting can therefore be seen as successful. However, though the EU used the resources available to it within the limits of its aspired role, it could not alter-cast Russia in the role the EU saw as appropriate for it, from the “aggressor” to a “neighbour in a multilateral, rule-based environment”. Neither did Russia convince the EU to abandon its supportive role vis-à-vis Ukraine or accept a Russian Crimea.

The EU thus had mixed success in taking its aspired role in the context. Though it was able to play the part it ascribed to itself vi-à-vis Ukraine, it could not fulfil the full role as “peacemaker”, because of its failure to alter-cast Russia into a commensurate role.

5.3.1.1 How do cohesion, autonomy, opportunity, and presence relate to EU success?

EU failed to play its preferred role despite there being cohesion and autonomy regarding political and economic resources. Cohesion and autonomy were also higher in role expectations and actions relating to Ukraine than regarding Russia. As Ukraine but not Russia was alter-cast there is a possible link between cohesion, autonomy and successful EU role-making. However, the link gets blurred as we include external and structural factors. EU presence from a Russian perspective was as a competitor of influence over the common neighbourhood. For Ukraine, it was as one of few options to seek closer ties with after the Russian intervention in Crimea. Russian external role expectations on the EU to refrain from tying Ukraine closer to itself did not create a favourable opportunity for the EU to take on a
role as an impartial mediator, as it continued to see Russia as the aggressor, and Ukraine as free to choose closer ties with the west if it wished, regardless of Russian interests. Hence, both the internal factors affecting EU internal role expectations, resources and creative action, and factors on a structural level seem to have been favourable for parts of the aspired role versus Ukraine, and unfavourable parts versus Russia. As both the international structure and actor-internal factors worked the same way in our case, it is hard to evaluate how they relate to (lack of) success in the alter-casting process. It is not possible to say that more favourable conditions in one of the elements taken from earlier research would have meant successful alter-casting.

5.3.2 What were the consequences of the role-making process for the EU?

For the EU, the failure to make Russia take a commensurate role and therefore to establish its own preferred role had implications for the role it saw as appropriate for itself in the context. Although the Ukrainian case is only one of several processes that made the EU re-evaluate its role in its whole neighbourhood, it was a contributing factor. One of the reasons for launching a review of the ENP in March 2015 stated by the Commission (2015c: 2) was that “[t]oday’s neighbourhood is less stable”, and that “challenges to a number of Eastern Partnership countries”, explicitly mentioning Ukraine, “have been caused by an increasingly assertive Russian foreign policy, which has also resulted in exacerbating divisions between Russia and the EU”.

In the revised ENP a greater emphasis was put on common security issues, “[t]he EU's own stability is built on democracy, human rights and the rule of law and economic openness and the new ENP will take stabilisation as its main political priority in this mandate” (European Commission 2015b: 2). Stability as a goal is not new in the ENP but has mainly been associated with economic stability and good governance (cf. European Commission 2003: 6), but in relation to Ukraine it was also used in a different manner. The events in Crimea were not only contrary to international law but also “a major threat to the stability of the borders in Europe” (European Commission 2014h). The first chapter is called “Stabilising the Neighbourhood” and lays out how the new ENP should stabilise neighbours both economically and security-wise. It should “seek to offer ways to strengthen the resilience of the EU’s partners in the face of external pressures and their ability to make their own sovereign choices” (European Commission 2015b: 4). A subsection of the review is dedicated to “The Security Dimension” (Ibid: 14). This section includes – besides cooperation on anti-
terrorism, organised crime, and cybercrime – support for security reforms, “cooperation and dealing with protracted conflicts” within the CSDP, and building neighbours’ crisis management and response capabilities (European Commission 2015b: 14). Whereas the top priority of the 2011 review of the ENP was to “provide greater support to partners engaged in building deep democracy” spelling out a democracy building role for the EU (European Commission 2011: 2), and though promoting the EU’s core values remains a major part of the ENP, the 2015 review envisioned a new stabiliser role, both economically and regarding security (European Commission 2015b).

In the context of the Ukraine, the 2015 version of the ENP lies closer to how the EU acted during the process outlined in step II than the 2011 version. As the response to the problematic situation turned into new routinised role, the EU found itself not primarily providing long-term support to a domestic democratisation process and civil society but scrambling support for the existence of a sovereign Ukraine. As an indicator of this reprioritisation, five out of the seven objectives of the political dialogue in the EU-Ukraine AA are centred around security and stability, one on territorial integrity, and only one on promotion of core EU values, even though the ENP framework officially still emphasised democracy-building over stabilisation (Official Journal of the European Union 2014a: Article 4). As the EU’s role in Ukraine diverged from the role foreseen in the 2011 revision of the ENP and preceded the 2015 revision, one major implication of the role-making process in Ukraine was the contribution it made to the re-formulation of the union’s preferred regional role. These changed internal role expectations, did not primarily change what resources were available, instead how they were deployed was reprioritised: from building deep democracy and engaging civil society towards stabilising neighbours’ economies and borders.
6. Discussion

In this section, the analytical framework and how it proved useful will be summarised. Then, the EU’s actorness in the analysed context will be discussed from an interactionist role theory perspective.

6.1 Returning to the analytical framework

In Step I of the framework, how cohesion around a set of internal role expectations is reached was the crucial aspect for the capacity to reimagine roles for a compound actor such as the EU. In our case, value cohesion among the most important constituent units translated into outcome cohesion. Exactly how this process played out was, however, not covered. The reviewed material did not allow for the black box of Council negotiations to be opened. Further analysis should therefore aim to dig deeper into the role-imagining process to capture interaction between the four elements already in Step I of the framework, including how the constituent units considered their assessment of the union’s available resources and capacity for creative action when formulating their expectations, and how significant others interfered with this process (external role expectations). Nevertheless, since we found cohesion among the constituent units of the EU around a role, the framework proved useful in identifying internal role expectations.

Although the framework did not return to cohesion during the alter-casting process in Step II, it is important to note that cohesion can be seen as a constant and parallel process on the actor-level, as it is constantly questioned by both constituent units and external actors. That the EU was able to maintain sanctions and continue to support Ukraine throughout the analysed timeframe meant that the member states were able to uphold cohesion around the course of action in our case. However, had a constituent unit questioned the EU’s role to the degree that it had vetoed an extension of sanctions for example, it would had meant a shift in internal role expectations which should affect the role-making process.

Similarly to how cohesion strengthened the analysis in step I, autonomy helped Step II identify which of the resources deployed in the alter-casting process belonged to the EU, and how the EU used them creatively. This ensured that what was analysed was the EU’s contribution to the process. Presence made it possible to see how this interacted with external role expectations by enabling us to analyse how the EU’s existence, resources and previous
actions made its significant others see certain roles for it appropriate, and how this in turn created opportunities for the EU to exploit, and made some roles easier to realise than others. If actoriness emerges from the process in which the elements internal role expectations, external role expectations, resources, and creative action of entities on the international arena interact, then in our case cohesion, autonomy, presence, and opportunity can be seen as parallel processes on the intra-actor and structural levels that helped us understand changes in the four main elements over time. This adds additional layers of interaction to the interactionist model, where the main process interacts with parallel processes in a multi-layered meta-process (cf. Falleti & Lynch 2009:1156-1158; Guzzini 2012: 256).

Though the result of connecting the older elements to the interactionist role theory model is not parsimonious, the analytical framework made it possible to analyse how capacity to imagine and realise roles is dependent on both internal and external context-bound factors in a social process. Though it does not suggest that any problematic situation might start a new role-making process, nor how the analysed elements interact in a given context, it may be used to examine if a role-making process was initiated and how it played out. It should thus be possible for it to “travel” to other contexts, and especially helpful when analysing actoriness of compound actors such as the EU.

6.2 Assessing EU actoriness in Ukraine

Going back to our definition of actoriness, “an entity’s capacity to re-imagine and realize roles for its ‘self’ in (specific contexts of) international affairs”, it is now possible to evaluate the EU’s actoriness in the Ukrainian context. Although the EU did not manage to assert itself in its preferred role, the member states managed to cohesively formulate internal role expectations expressing a new role to aspire for in the context, showing EU capacity to reimagine a role in response to the problematic situation. Though the level of autonomy of the EU’s actions varied across its available instruments, it independently, and to some extent creatively, used a wide range of the resources it had to its disposal. The EU’s presence in the context made it necessary for Russia and Ukraine to formulate external role expectations, which in turn created an opportunity that both enabled and restricted its actions. In short, the EU participated actively and deliberately in the role-making process and influenced the “supporter of a Europeanising Ukraine” role it had at the end of the process and should be considered as having actoriness in the specific context.
The internal role expectations discovered in Step I were biased towards (non-military) support for Ukraine: Differences in member state relations with Russia made it easier for them to be cohesive around a supporter role than a more confrontative one. It was also a role where the EU had appropriate resources to deploy autonomously. From the beginning external role expectations from Ukraine were for the EU to support it in its sovereign choice to choose closer economic ties to the EU rather than Russia. Russian external role expectations were to acknowledge that Ukraine was within the Russian sphere of interest. While the EU’s intention was to combine the supporter role with brokering a peace deal and making Russia re-join a rule-based world order, both Ukraine and Russia saw Ukraine as choosing Europe over Russia, and the EU as supporting this move. The strong Russian role expectations incompatible with the EU’s, combined with the limitations regarding resources and actions the EU set for itself in the alter-casting process show us why the EU did not achieve its preferred mediator role.

That the analysis suggests that change in the EU’s preferred regional role followed that in the specific context hints at a connection between the roles the EU take vis-à-vis significant and generalised others. That the actual role played (supporter) versus a specific neighbour (Ukraine) is related to the more abstract role played versus generalised others (neighbours in general) is to be expected. But this indicates that the analytical framework can also be applied on several parallel role-making processes. This might tell us more about how specific problematic situations are related to the EU’s perception of its regional and generalised roles and how these are then constructed through the individual role-making processes from a bottom-up perspective, moving beyond EU actorness in specific context towards a comprehensive analysis of EU general actorness.
7. Conclusions

This thesis has aimed to answer how the EU’s role as an international actor was constructed after the Russian occupation of Crimea, by utilising an interactionist role theory analytical framework. In doing so it first had to strengthen a framework proposed by Klose by connecting it to traditional actorness research. The resulting framework proved useful to analyse how EU actorness was constructed in the role-making process that followed on Russia’s annexation of Crimea and should be possible to transfer to other similar role-making processes initiated by a problematic situation. The analysis showed that the EU had the capacity to participate actively and deliberately in the role-making process but was unable to assert itself in its preferred role as a “mediator and peacemaker” between Ukraine and Russia. Instead, it played the role of “supporter of a Europeanising Ukraine”.

Although role theory was used to inform actorness research, the usefulness of this mix suggests that actorness may strengthen role theory as well. While role theory can help actorness scholars capture the interactive and social aspects of the process in which actorness is constructed, actorness research can help role theorist analyse who can play a role, how and when compound actors can be seen as participating in role-making processes, and how internal role expectations are formed.

While the internal EU role-formulation process and the relationship between specific and generalised roles were highlighted as possible areas for future research above, a third way is to encompass the whole context of a role-making process. By applying the framework to the significant others as well as the main object of research simultaneously, the interaction between both the actors and the four elements should become even clearer.

Finally, looking beyond the case of Ukraine, the EU’s role change and reformulation of its aspired regional role have wider implications for its relations with other neighbours. Although supporting eastern neighbours has always been part of the ENP, the analysis indicated a re-prioritisation from economic to security stabilisation. As Russian control over parts of Ukraine becomes the new normal, Ukraine becomes more like Georgia and Moldova, which also have frozen conflicts with de facto independent regions supported by Russia, and on the surface there are many reasons to believe that the “supporter of Europeanising neighbour role” could be applicable to EU relations with them as well. In contrast, neither internal nor
external role expectations would point to this being an appropriate role vis-à-vis neighbours with closer ties to Russia such as Belarus or Armenia, especially regarding security cooperation and stabilisation. The EU playing one coherent Eastern neighbourhood role in the near future thus seem less likely than before, as long as EU and Russia continue to see each other as aggressive powers in the common neighbourhood.
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