



DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE  
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# THE EUROPEAN UNION'S FOREIGN POLICY IDENTITY

A case study of EU enlargement to the  
Western Balkans

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## Abstract

Key EU actors' discourse in relation to other external actors in the EU enlargement process of the Western Balkans is analysed. The analysis is undertaken in order to gain insights into the EU's current foreign policy identity. Debate over the EU's external identity has intensified since the introduction of its Global Strategy for the Foreign and Security Policy. Recent literature has focused on the narrative changes in the EU's identity linked with this strategy, and the often-conflicting and ambiguous implications these narrative changes have had for the EU's external identity. The aim is to address the question of how the EU's identity can be conceptualised today. A poststructuralist approach, which argues that foreign policy identity is constructed through relations, is deployed. An analytical framework with six categories of otherness was developed to analyse key EU actors' discourse in relation to external actors in the Western Balkans. The analysis revealed that the discourse has strong references to self-interest and an emphasis on security and defence, which is in line with the EU's priorities, as elaborated in its 2016 strategy. It can be concluded, therefore, that in the context analysed, the EU portrays itself as a pragmatic actor focused on its self-interests.

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# 1. Introduction

The European Union's (EU) identity in its external relations, its foreign policy identity, has been subject to debate since its inception. The debate has been driven by the notion that the EU would become a new type of actor, neither a state nor an international organisation, but rather a polity in its own right (Sjursen, 2006a).

As early as 1973, the nine member states of the European Community prepared a declaration to guide the Community in its external relations. This declaration highlighted shared values, such as democracy, rule of law, social justice, and human rights (Declaration on European Identity, 1973). This self-image, although contested (Sjursen, 2006b; Hyde-Price, 2006), has been associated with an ambition to promote these values and norms internationally, even labelling the EU as a normative actor (Manners, 2002; Barbé & Morillas, 2019).

Over the last decade, there has been growing uncertainty over the roles and actions of global actors, and consequently a more complex geopolitical climate; the politics of power and influence amongst global actors have intensified. Combined with a more turbulent neighbourhood, this has led to an increasingly challenging environment for the EU to act within. In addition, internal challenges such as the global financial crisis, the Brexit process, the so-called migrant crisis, and the rise of right-wing populism have created what has been described as a 'loss of direction' within the EU (Dinan, et al., 2017; Flockhart, 2020).

In response to these challenges, in 2016, the EU introduced the Global Strategy for the Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union (EUGS), to guide the EU in its external relations. The EUGS indicated a shift in the EU's aspirations, proposing a more pragmatic approach to deal with the reality of today's world, moving away from the focus on values in external relations (EU Global Strategy, 2016).

With the introduction of the EUGS, the debate over the EU's external identity has intensified. Recent literature has focused on the narrative changes in the EU's identity linked with the publication of the EUGS, and the often-conflicting and ambiguous implications these narrative changes have had for the EU's external identity (Juncos, 2017; Pischikova & Piras, 2017; Smith, 2017; Barbé & Morillas, 2019; Youngs, 2020). It has even been suggested that the EUGS mirrors a crisis of identity in the EU's foreign policy (Nitoiu & Sus, 2019).

In light of this debate, the question arises as to how the EU's identity can be conceptualised today; is the EU still portraying itself as an actor with a focus on its values, or has a more pragmatic self-understanding emerged?

Thus, the aim of this thesis is to examine how the EU discursively constructs its identity after the introduction of the EUGS. Following a poststructuralist approach, which argues that identities are

discursively constructed through relations, this thesis examines how the EU portrays itself, in relation to its external environment and the actors within it. By examining how the EU views itself, vis-à-vis other actors, an understanding of the EU's discursively-constructed identity can be reached.

In examining how the EU portrays itself since the introduction of the EUGS, the enlargement process to the Western Balkans has been chosen as a case study. This process has been slow: 18 years after the EU committed itself to the Western Balkan's accession, only Croatia has joined. Shifts in the global geopolitical balance of power, coupled with the perceived lack of commitment by the EU to the enlargement process, have seen external actors, such as Russia, China, Turkey, and the Gulf States, become more influential in the region (Bieber & Tzifakis, 2019). The United States (US) has also had an active presence in the region, following the break-up of the former Yugoslav Republic and the ensuing wars in 1990s (European Parliament, 2017).

The current enlargement process, therefore, provides a unique case to examine how the EU portrays itself and other actors: through its discourse, in an area where the EU faces several different actors, but also in the context of a more geopolitical environment, where competition to dominate, or control a geographic area, is apparent.

This thesis is structured as follows. *Chapter 2* provides a brief overview of the case chosen for this study. *Chapter 3* discusses prior literature on EU identity. In *Chapter 4*, the general theoretical approach, the theory of 'Othering' and the analytical framework is presented. In *Chapter 5*, the specified aim and research questions are stated. *Chapter 6* presents the research design and methodological tools applied to gather and analyse the empirical data. In *Chapter 7*, the results and analysis are presented, followed by *Chapter 8* which concludes the thesis.

## 2. Background – the external actors in the Western Balkans

This section provides background for the case chosen for this study. A brief overview of the external actors and their presence in the region is essential to provide an understanding of the case.

The Western Balkan countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia – were identified as potential candidates for EU membership during the Thessaloniki European Council Summit in June 2003. Apart from Kosovo, all of these countries have subsequently formally applied for EU membership.<sup>1</sup> The accession negotiations with Montenegro and Serbia started in 2012 and 2014, respectively. In March 2020, the EU agreed to begin accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia. North Macedonia's accession process is, however, blocked by Bulgaria since November 2020. Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo are still considered potential candidates (European Commission, 2021a). The EU is, however, not the only external actor with an interest in the region.

Russia's presence in the Western Balkans has received widespread attention in recent years, even though Russia's presence in the region is not a new phenomenon. Russia has well-developed historical, cultural, and religious ties with the Slavic and Orthodox populations in the region, dating back to the 18th and 19th centuries (Chrzová, et al., 2019). While the Russian economic presence is comparably limited – Russia's total trade with the region is 4% compared to EU's 70% – it is concentrated on a few strategic sectors (European Commission, 2020a). Russia is dominant in the energy sector, where Gazprom is the main gas supplier to most Western Balkan countries, leaving them vulnerable to Russian pressure (Center for the Study of Democracy, 2018; Bechev, 2015, p. 2).

In addition, many analysts highlight the risks with Russia's willingness to distort the geopolitical balance in the region, describing the Russian threat as a form of covert and alternative warfare that should not be underestimated (Rrustemi, et al., 2019). Analysts emphasise how Russian influence in the region is most visible through its interference in domestic politics and that economic relations are often exaggerated and used for political gains. This promotes the perception that Russia is a crucial strategic partner, with a view to undermining the trust in Western institutions (Rrustemi, et al., 2019; Bechev, 2020). Furthermore, Russian propaganda focuses on the growing disappointment with the EU over of the slow accession process (Panagiotou, 2021).

Not all analyses, however, depicts the Russian influence as a threat to the region. Russia does not offer a viable alternative to EU membership and does not expect the region to join the Collective Security Treaty Organisation or the Eurasian Economic Union as an alternative to the EU (Bieber & Tzifakis,

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<sup>1</sup> Kosovo's declaration of independence from Serbia was enacted in 2008. Independence has not been recognised by Serbia, or five out of the 27 EU member states.

2019). Although Russia has an interest in strengthening its position in the region, it cannot be described as a key player: Russia is not one of the most important actors in the region (Panagiotou, 2021).

In contrast, China's past interaction with the Balkan region is historically limited to the communist regimes of Albania and Yugoslavia. China's current presence is relatively recent and has been stressed as mainly based on economic motives, with limited political influence. China's main interest appears to be the geostrategic position of the region and to facilitate the transport of Chinese manufactured products from the Greek port of Piraeus throughout Europe (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V., 2018). Nevertheless, over the last year, China has also undertaken diplomatic campaigns in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, donating vaccines and medical material, and ensuring the accompanying media campaigns display a strong image of solidarity with the region (Mardell, 2021).

While China's main focus is on the improvement of the region's internal connectivity, future EU membership is, in this regard, positively recognised (Bieber & Tzifakis, 2019). All Western Balkan states, with the exception of Kosovo, which is not recognised by China, participate in the '17 + 1' platform, which was set up in 2012. Cooperation under this initiative, launched as part of China's Belt and Road Initiative comprises multilateral and bilateral partnerships, focusing on infrastructure and advanced technologies projects (Markovic Khaze & Wang, 2021).

Although investment in these countries by China is seen as an advantage for the economic development of the region, many analysts underline that the countries are not bound by the EU regulatory framework. Labour and environmental laws, and public procurement rules, can be circumvented. Chinese loans are often intergovernmental agreements, with no political or human rights conditionalities, and do not foresee public tenders, but rather are tied to a Chinese contractor. Typically, the loans have long maturities (20 years or more) at relatively low interest rates (around 2%) (Tonchev, 2017; Chrzová, et al., 2019). However, the amount of Chinese Foreign Direct Investment in the Western Balkans is negligible compared with the investments from the EU (Bieber & Tzifakis, 2020).

Turkey has strong historical and cultural ties with parts of the region, dating back to the Ottoman Empire. Since the Turkish Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in the early 2000s, Turkey has used a 'soft power' approach to the Western Balkans. Several government-established institutions are present in the region, focused on the reconstruction of Islamic infrastructure, such as mosques and educational facilities, although Turkey's overall influence varies greatly between countries (Chrzová, et al., 2019; Öztürk & Akgönül, 2020). In terms of economic trade, Turkey's presence is small, representing just 6% of total trade with the region (European Commission, 2020a).

Although Turkey officially supports the European integration of the region, it also pursues an independent 'neo-Ottoman' foreign policy, with the aim of creating its own area of interest (Öztürk & Akgönül, 2020). For many years, Turkey was considered a stabilising force in the region, but today, in many respects, it is seen as a competitor and its intentions are not always clear, especially considering

the increasingly authoritarian tendencies of President Erdogan (Chrzová, et al., 2019; Bieber & Tzifakis, 2019).

The Gulf States, primarily Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Kuwait, have had a relatively limited presence in the region historically. Their most visible role was during and after the wars in Bosnia between 1992-1995, and Kosovo 1999, when the countries sought support from Muslim countries. The Gulf States, with Saudi Arabia in the lead, provided finance for weapons (Chrzová, et al., 2019). After the wars, the Gulf States were actively involved in the construction of mosques, schools and the spread of the Wahabi interpretation of Islam, which had not previously been part of the Balkan tradition. This strict interpretation of Islam has prompted links with Al Qaeda and the Islamic State. Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo have one of the highest proportions in Europe of 'foreign fighters', citizens travelling to Syria to fight (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V., 2018). More recently, the Gulf States' presence also includes economic investments, particularly in the areas of tourism, construction, agriculture, aviation, and military technology. The Gulf States' presence has been compared to China's presence, with the region seen as a possible gateway to the EU market. As with China, however, the lack of transparency related to trade and procurement, and the possible circumvention of laws, also increases the region's vulnerability to corruption (Chrzová, et al., 2019).

The US is a considerable, albeit declining, influence in the region. Its influence and presence vary amongst the individual countries, from a strong presence in Kosovo, to a more modest role in Serbia. After the break-up of the former Yugoslav Republic, US-led military action and diplomacy helped end the 1992-1995 Bosnian war, and thereafter, the armed conflict in Kosovo in 1999. US peacekeeping troops stayed in Bosnia and Herzegovina until 2004, and are still deployed in Kosovo as part of NATO's Kosovo Force mission (European Parliament, 2017). The US supports the progress of these countries, including Kosovo, towards EU membership. In addition, the US exerts a great deal of influence through its government programmes, notably through USAID. The EU and the US share the same goals in the region and the more recent influences of other actors, in particular Russia, has been recognised by the US as a destabilising factor for the region (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V., 2018).

### 3. Literature review

This chapter reviews previous research conducted with regards to EU identity. The chapter begins with a discussion on how the EU's identity can be conceptualised in order to deduce a theoretical definition of foreign policy identity. This is followed by a review of previous literature on the distinctive nature of the EU's identity in the international sphere. The focus of the section is on the current debate of how the EU's identity is conceptualised. The chapter ends with a discussion that summarises these reviews and identifies the contribution of this thesis.

#### 3.1 Conceptualising the EU's identity

The EU's identity is not only the object of intense theoretical debate, grounded in conflicting ontological stances, but is also an elusive concept. EU identity can be considered from a top-down perspective; how identities are constructed and formed by political elites, the mass media, and institutions. It can also be assessed from a bottom-up approach, which measures the beliefs and behaviour of European citizens (Kuhn, 2019; Saurugger & Thatcher, 2019). Given the variety of descriptions and approaches, various interpretations of EU identity exist. According to Favell (2005, p. 1113), the description of identity may include *“simply different possible ways of measuring knowledge of Europe, participation in Europe, opinions about Europe, perceptions of Europe, etc”*.

Given this elusive nature and the variety of interpretation, the very concept of the EU having a separate identity has been questioned (White, 2016). Other scholars argue that the EU has its own identity, albeit linked with European national identities (Liebert, 2016). In the same vein, Johansson-Nogués (2008, pp. 7-8) suggests that *“a collective such as the EU may have an “identity”, separable albeit not separate, from its member states even if it is not a full-fledged political community”*. Others argue that the EU is a polity in its own right and claim that the EU has its own identity, though without transforming itself into a nation-state (Whitman, 1998). Diez (2005) builds on this idea and emphasises that the question is not whether the EU is an actor in its own right, but rather what type of actor it is.

Building on the notion that the EU is an actor in its own right, how can its identity be conceptualised? As this thesis focuses on the EU's external relations, it is the EU's identity in its external relations, its so-called foreign policy identity, that needs to be understood. The nature of the operations of the EU that are explicitly targeted beyond its borders can be characterised as its 'international identity' or foreign policy identity. This identity is created through its foreign policy, both in terms of the instruments that are available to articulate policy, and through elements of the EU that defines its *sui generis* nature (Duke & Vanhoonacker, 2017). Risse (2012, p. 88) defines EU foreign policy identity as *“those parts of the identity constructions of political entities referring to their relationships to the outside world ... they signify what is special about the community and how one can differentiate it from*

*other communities*”. The international identity of the EU can, thus, be understood as shaping the broad directions of the EU’s foreign policy. It does not influence every action by the entity, nor can help explain slight variations in negotiating positions on specific policy matters, but rather guides the foreign policy’s general orientation (Hyde-Price, 2004; Risse, 2012).

The EU’s foreign policy has specific institutional characteristics, influenced by a strong intergovernmental element. In foreign policy, the EU’s ultimate decision-making body is the European Council. The European Council, which comprises heads of state or government of the 27 EU member states, the European Council President and the President of the Commission, defines the EU’s overall political direction and priorities (European Council, 2021a). The guidelines for the foreign and security policy set by the European Council are defined and implemented by the Council of the EU. The Council of the EU is the institution that represents member states’ governments. The Council of the EU together with the European Commission (*hereafter, the Commission*) ensure the unity, consistency and effectiveness of the EU’s external action (Council of European Union, 2021). Even though the EU’s foreign policy has a strong intergovernmental component, the Declaration on European Identity highlighted that in their common policy in relation to third countries, EU member states wished to be recognised by the international community as a single entity; and thereby, expressing the aspiration to conduct a common foreign policy (Declaration on European Identity, 1973).

### **3.2 The formation of the EU’s identity**

Much of the relevant research on identity view the EU as an actor in its own right and assert that the foreign policy of the EU displays distinctive characteristics due to the EU’s internal constitution. Already in the 1970s, Duchéne (1972) theorised that the EU is a civilian power, a non-military power, focused on the promotion of democratic values. At the beginning of the millennium, EU identity was intensely debated. Much of this debate focused on the theory of the EU as a normative power, as argued by Manners (2002). The idea that the EU is a normative power is based on the core norms outlined in the declarations, treaties, policies and criteria of the EU. Five core norms were highlighted by Manners (2002); peace, liberty, democracy, the rule of law and human rights. A further four minor norms; social solidarity, anti-discrimination, sustainable development and good governance were also included in what was described as the EU’s normative identity. The idea that the EU is a normative actor led to an increased focus on EU identity. The ensuing academic debate offered alternative concepts as to whether EU foreign policy is based on normative ideals or ethical considerations, market power or driven by self-interest, and how these assumptions shape the EU’s identity (Manners, 2002; Hyde-Price, 2006; Sjursen, 2006b; Aggestam, 2008; Damro, 2012).

Although the debate around the nature of the EU’s identity offered many descriptions, the EU continued to discursively construct itself as guided by values, including those values that were articulated as the

European identity by the nine member states of the European Community in the 1970s: democracy, rule of law, social justice and human rights (Duke & Vanhoonacker, 2017). These values were expanded over the years to also include fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity and the principles of equality (Treaty on European Union, 1993). The values were also the backbone of the EU's external relations over many years, as espoused through the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS) (ESS, 2003). As argued, the EU's self-image also had strong transformative ambitions. The ESS stated that the EU should build security and good governance in its neighbourhood, promote effective multilateralism and foster regionalism, effectively exporting its internal model to transform others in its own image (Barbé & Morillas, 2019).

The debate over the EU's identity has, more recently, deepened. Over the last decade, the EU has faced several internal challenges: the global financial crisis, the Brexit process, the so-called migrant crisis, and the rise of right-wing populism. These challenges have provided changing contexts in which the EU's identity is formed. Externally, global uncertainty as a result of a more geopolitical climate and increased power politics, by *inter alia*, China and Russia, has led to an increasingly challenging environment for the EU to act within (Howorth, 2016; Dinan, et al., 2017; Flockhart, 2020). These crises have even been labelled as existential, multidimensional, and unprecedented (EU Global Strategy, 2016; Juncker, 2016; Dinan, et al., 2017). In response to the changing reality, the EU published the Global Strategy for the Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union (EUGS) in 2016, to guide the EU in its external relations, and to supplant the 2003 ESS (EU Global Strategy, 2016).

The more recent literature on EU identity, therefore, focuses on the narrative changes in the EU's identity. These are linked to the publication of the EUGS, and the often-conflicting and ambiguous implications these narrative changes have had for the EU's external identity (Juncos, 2017; Pischikova & Piras, 2017; Smith, 2017; Barbé & Morillas, 2019; Youngs, 2020).

While the new strategy states that the EU's ambition is to be "*an influential actor on the world stage*" (EEAS, 2018), Pischikova and Piras (2017) emphasise that it avoids any variations on the civilian or normative power concept that previously framed the EU's foreign policy identity. Instead, the EUGS conveys that the normative aspirations no longer effectively represent the EU's self-image. As Tocci (2020) highlights, the EUGS proposes a more pragmatic approach to deal with the reality of today's world, moving away from the focus on values in external relations. Instead, the EUGS focuses on principled pragmatism and resilience, and the strategy outlines an approach with more focus on the EU's self-interest, while downscaling the transformative ambitions of the EU's foreign policy. As emphasised by Dijkstra, (2016, p. 370) "*the times of norms, values and democracy-promotion are over*".

Arguably, the EUGS demonstrates a new self-understanding of the EU's role in the world, reflecting a greater maturity on foreign policy (Pischikova & Piras, 2017). This new self-understanding is a product

of recent events which have reduced the EU's normative self-confidence considerably (Mälksoo, 2016). Through the EUGS, the EU aims to find its role in the world and the EUGS is "*narrating the EU into existence as a security actor*" (Mälksoo, 2016, p. 374). In the same vein, Biscop (2016, p. 2) claims that the EUGS represents a return to realpolitik, albeit with "*European characteristics*". This narrative shift, however, with a stronger focus on self-interests, is according to Youngs (2020), just a reflection that the EU's self-image is moving towards the reality of its external actions.

On the other hand, some argue that this articulated move from normative aspirations is merely a change of rhetoric, but in reality "*(the EU) remains tied to the old liberal scripts*" (Juncos, 2017, p. 2). By introducing concepts such as principled pragmatism and resilience, the EU tries to manage the recognised complexity and uncertainty in the world. While the EUGS has adjusted the language and portrays the EU as a more pragmatic actor, the values that the EU seeks to promote, through its external actions, is still evident (Juncos, 2017). Wagner and Anholt (2016) and Tocci (2020) argue that the EUGS, with its focus on resilience, is not in contradiction to previous key concepts, such as democracy, good governance, and the rule of law. In addition, Wagner and Anholt (2016) raise the question as to why the need was felt to introduce a new concept. The introduction of resilience and principled pragmatism might instead generate confusion and tensions between the discourse that emphasises transformation and adaptability, and the norms and values that are still promoted through the EUGS (Joseph & Juncos, 2019). Pischikova and Piras (2017) go so far as to state that the EUGS reflects a vulnerable EU facing an identity crisis.

### **3.3 Discussion: research gaps and the contributions of this study**

There is a large amount of research on the identity of the EU in its external relations. What emerges, however, from more recent debate in the literature is how the narrative has changed, in response to the internal and external challenges facing the EU. This has resulted in ambiguity around the EU's identity and how it can be conceptualised. How can the EU's identity in its foreign relations be conceptualised since the introduction of the EUGS? Has the introduction of the EUGS changed the EU's narrative self-image, to portray itself as a more pragmatic actor? Or is the EU still portraying itself as an actor focusing on its values and norms?

The EU's identity formation in the current context provides, therefore, an interesting subject to analyse. This thesis aims to shed light on how the EU's foreign policy identity can be conceptualised, since the introduction of the EUGS in 2016. The thesis, thus, contributes to the wider theoretical debate on the EU's international identity formation, by focusing on one particular area of external action: the Western Balkans.

## **4. Theoretical approach**

This chapter outlines the theoretical foundations of this thesis and proposes an analytical framework for the empirical analysis. It highlights the essential assumptions of the theory of Othering, taking a poststructuralist approach: identities are discursively constructed through relations. The chapter comprises three sections. The first section briefly introduces foreign policy identity formation from various theoretical perspectives, and outlines the reasons for selecting the poststructuralist approach. The second section focuses on the theory of Othering. The final section summarises the discussion and outlines an analytical framework to analyse the EU's discourse in relation to the external actors in the Western Balkans.

### **4.1 Foreign policy identity formation from different theoretical perspectives**

The aim of this thesis is to examine how the EU discursively constructs its identity after the introduction of the EUGS, in relation to the external actors in the Western Balkans. There are various concepts in the study of international relations. These different theoretical perspectives offer various approaches to describe, explain and understand international relations (Spindler & Schieder, 2014). How foreign policy identity is represented and shaped differs also with various ontological assumptions. From a realist stance, identities are given prior to, and independent of, interaction. Constructivists, on the other hand view identities, to a certain extent, as relational (Bucher & Jasper, 2017). In the constructivist framework there exists however, a difference between conventional and critical constructivism, in the degree to which relational aspects influence the formation of identities (Aiolfi, 2015).

In the poststructuralist approach, identity is formed through discourse. Discourse is performed through both differentiation and linkage with other actors, and thus, the formation of identity is always relational (Hansen, 2006; Aydın-Düzgit, 2015). As Hansen (2006, p. 21) states, in poststructuralism, foreign policy identity is regarded entirely as a discursive practice. Therefore, the poststructuralist framework provides a relevant research approach to investigate how identities are formed through relations with others. Foreign policy identity is, hence, conceptualised according to the poststructuralist agenda: the representation of identity is understood as always being relational.

### **4.2 The process of Othering**

Building on the assumption that identity is relational, EU's foreign policy identity can be examined through its relations with Others. Neumann (1999) argues that identity can be described by examining how relations between the Self, and multiple significant Others, are articulated and the various forms this representation, or Othering, may take. The understanding, and the view of the Self, is always related

to views of the Other. As Diez (2004, p. 321) states: an identity which is not constructed against an Other is unthinkable; *“It would make no sense to say, for instance, “I am European” if this did not imply a difference from being “Asian”, “African” or “American””*.

Relevant literature, taking a relational approach to identity, emphasise that the EU forms its identity against Others that are distinctively different from the EU’s own self-image. According to Campbell (1998), the articulation of threats from the outside is an essential component to establish a foreign policy identity. Neumann (1999) in his study of historical representations of Turkey and Russia in the EU’s discourse concludes that the EU portrays the outside as a danger or threat. In a related fashion, Rogers (2009) argues that the EU constructs its interior as balanced and peaceful, as opposed to the troubled exterior, focusing the discourse on several geopolitical competitors to create difference. Through this differentiation, the EU has been able to reinforce what the EU stands for, its identity, and to consolidate European values (Neumann & Welsh, 1991).

However, it has also been argued that Othering can take place along multiple dimensions (Rumelili, 2004). The Othering process must not necessarily be constructed through juxtaposition to radically different or threatening Others: there are various degrees of otherness. While the process of Othering involves representations of the Self and the Other as different, this difference must not be entirely negative. As highlighted by Schmitt (cited in Neumann 1996 p. 147), *“(the public enemy) ... does not have to be morally evil, he does not have to be aesthetically ugly, he does not have to appear as an economic competitor, and it can ... even be advantageous to have business dealings with him. He is nevertheless the Other”*. Difference can, thus, be described with more positive content, leading the Self to be constructed through its relationships with friends as well and not merely opponents (Gibbins, 2012). However, positioning oneself as neutral, or refusing to take a position at all, is extremely rare (Reinke de Buitrago, 2012).

The process of Othering can be temporal or spatial. Temporal Othering, referring to the Self’s own past, involves a self-reflective process. The past is not only critically examined but the Self also draws a dividing line between the Self that existed before, and the Self that realised its mistakes from the past (Wæver, 1998). According to Wæver (1998, p. 90) the Other of Europe is nothing more than *“its own past which should not be allowed to become its future”*. Spatial Othering, on the other hand, has a geographic or territorial focus. Diez (2004) argues that the EU’s discourse has shifted from a temporal Othering to a more geographic-focused Othering since the early 2000s. The US, Russia, and more recently also the Middle East, are commonly viewed as instrumental in European identity constructions (Leek & Morozov, 2018). Spatial Othering is, according to Diez (2004), more exclusive and hostile than Otherings with a mainly temporal dimension. There is a strand of scholars, however, who argue that it is theoretically inconceivable for Othering to be exclusively spatial or temporal and, therefore, all Othering has spatial and temporal aspects (Rumelili, 2004; Prozorov, 2011).

The process of Othering occurs through the juxtaposition of the Self against the Other, providing a contrast between the two, such as order/disorder, strong/weak, rational/irrational, and stability/anarchy, or by linking more positive notions to affirm identity. Hansen (2006) gives the construction of the Balkans as an example of identity formation through difference. By discursively linking the Balkans as violent, irrational, and underdeveloped, it can be compared to the controlled, rational, and developed European identity. Building on this theoretical perspective, scholars focusing on the formation of the EU identity emphasise that this interaction is shaped by the inclusive/exclusive nature of the identity the EU itself claims in relation to Others. Exclusive identities such as 'European' can reinforce the EU's geographic borders. As only European states can become members of the EU, questions of where Europe ends have, therefore, been fundamental to constructing an EU identity (Rumelili, 2004; Tonra, 2010). Inclusive identities, on the other hand, focus on values, such as the values outlined in the Treaty of the European Union: respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights (Treaty on European Union, 1993). Through the emphasis on these values, a difference or similarity, can be inferred from Others, who are either adhering to the same values or not, whereby the EU can reinforce these values as its identity (Rumelili, 2004).

For empirical analyses on identity formation, Hansen (2006) emphasises the importance of developing an analytical framework which allows not only the Self to be identified against a threatening Other, but also allows for degrees of otherness to be distinguished. The various degrees of Othering based on differentiation has been summarised by Diez (2005) in four categories: the Other as an existential threat; the Other as inferior; the Other as violating universal principles; and the Other as different. These four categories form the basis of the analytical framework deployed in this study. These categories portray the Other as different with negative connotations, albeit with nuances. To also allow a more positive Othering to be accounted for in the analysis, two further categories are included in the analytical framework. These two additional categories describe the Other with a more positive connotation. The Other as friendly, and the Other as superior are, thus, included as the fifth and sixth category in the analytical framework, as proposed by Gibbins (2012) and Macmillan (2013). These six strategies of Othering, outlined below, will form the basis of the empirical analysis of the EU's discourse in the enlargement context.

*The Other as an existential threat:* in this representation, issues are perceived as a security threat. The Other is described as an existential threat, which in turn, can legitimise extraordinary measures, such as war (Diez, 2005). To imply that the Other is an existential threat and, thereafter, not address it, can have serious political consequences. The issue must be rearticulated in such a manner that the issue is no longer a threat that needs to be avoided (Hansen, 2006). The representation of the Other as an existential threat needs not to be limited to issues related traditionally to the military sector: it can also be used in reference to political and societal concerns. Examples of this include 'drug consumption', 'AIDS', or

‘Japan’s economic strength’ but the main conceptualisation is that the issue is a threat and stressed as a matter that demands action (Aydın-Düzgit, 2013).

*The Other as inferior:* this portrayal is a weaker version of Othering, the Self is simply constructed as superior to the Other. To the extent that the Other is seen as undermining the standards of the Self, this strategy resembles the first strategy (Diez, 2005). Diez (2005) gives the example of Orientalism, as coined by Said (1978), to illustrate this representation. The Other is portrayed as exotic and feted, but at the same time, looked down upon. Discourse portraying the Other as inferior has also been highlighted in the relationship between the EU and Russia, where the notion of Europe is portrayed as superior and Russia as inferior (Neumann, 1999).

*The Other as violating universal principles:* this representation is a stronger variation of the second strategy. In this representation, the standards of the Self are not seen as superior, but are of universal validity. The Other should, therefore, be convinced or otherwise brought to accept the principles of the Self (Diez, 2005). The Self focuses on strategies to defend its principles and values in response to violators of these rights. Although not an explicit threat, the Other may pose a threat for the implementation of a particular worldview according to the Self (Hornát, 2019). The values in focus are those that are considered appropriate given the entity’s conception of itself and of what it represents. For this study, the focus is on the previously-stated EU values: respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights (Treaty on European Union, 1993).

*The Other as different:* the fourth strategy of Othering differs from the previous three in that it does not place an obvious value-judgement on the Other. The Other is represented neither as inferior nor as a threat, but merely as different (Diez, 2005). However, as elaborated above, a view of the Other as simply different, without a value judgement, is, owing to human psychology, difficult and empirically not well supported (Reinke de Buitrago, 2012).

*The Other as superior:* in this category, the Other is seen as superior to the Self. The difference is described with a positive connotation, admiration, or recognition of certain achievements (Macmillan, 2013).

*The Other as friendly:* this representation involves a process of strongly linking the Self to the Other. There is clear association with the Self, such as references of cultural and historical similarity, solidarity, and partnership. There can also be the existence of a common Other, that binds a friendly Other to the Self (Gibbins, 2012).

An important aspect of the Self-Other relationship is that it is not a fixed or static relationship: it is of a dynamic nature. This follows logically from its relational nature and in response to new situations, events, and crises. Geographical proximity additionally impacts the process of Othering and may even motivate and strengthen Othering, when linked with other factors (Reinke de Buitrago, 2012). The

Other might be regarded as a threat at a certain time, inferior or friendly at a separate time, or even unnoticed at a different stage (Gibbins, 2012). The categories are therefore, not mutually exclusive.

### 4.3 Analytical framework

Summarising the above discussion, the EU’s conceptualisation of Others can be analysed through the means by which the EU juxtaposes, or links itself, to Others in its external environment. This juxtaposition or linking can provide an insight into what labels the EU attaches to Others and to itself, forming the identity of the EU. As previous research has demonstrated, the juxtaposition or linking can take place along multiple dimensions; six degrees of otherness were outlined in the previous section. Table 1 outlines and summaries these six categories and the process of differentiation or linking that exists in each category. This framework will guide the empirical analysis and the next chapter specifies the aim and research questions.

*Table 1: The six categories of Others*

| Other                            | Characteristics  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 1 Existential threat             | Process of strong differentiation and juxtaposition.   |
| 2 Inferior                       | Process of mild differentiation. Non-threatening discourse with a focus on the superiority of the Self.  |
| 3 Violating universal principles | Process of mild differentiation. Non-threatening discourse with a focus on highlighting the Other as not following the Self’s principles and values. |
| 4 Different                      | No differentiation, the Other is merely recognised as existing, but no value judgement is cast.  |
| 5 Superior                       | Process of mild linking, the Other is seen as superior to the Self.  |
| 6 Friendly                       | Process of strong linking, the Other is portrayed with clear association to the Self.  |

## 5. Aim and research questions

The aim of this thesis is to examine how the EU portrays itself. The study does not take a comparative approach; the intention instead is to examine how the EU portrays itself since the introduction of the EUGS. As highlighted by previous research, the introduction of the EUGS has resulted in ambiguity around the EU's identity and how it can be conceptualised.<sup>2</sup>

Following a poststructuralist approach, where identity formation is always relational, the way in which the EU portrays Others can provide an understanding of its discursively-constructed identity. Drawing on the six categories of otherness identified in Chapter 4, section 4.3 of this thesis, and the various degrees of differentiation or linking, the EU's self-image will be analysed in relation to external actors – for the purposes of this study, the US, Russia, China, Turkey, and the Gulf States – in respect to the Western Balkan region. The six categories will guide the analysis to examine how the EU views itself, vis-à-vis these actors, and the format this portrayal takes, which in turn can help to understand the EU's own narratively-constructed current identity.

More specifically, this thesis asks to what extent the EU conceptualises the external actors in the Western Balkans as:

- a) an existential threat?
- b) inferior?
- c) violating universal principles?
- d) different?
- e) superior?
- f) friendly?

By evaluating these categories in the discourse to be analysed, the aim of identifying the discursively-constructed identity of the EU can be deduced. In the following chapter, the methods for carrying out this analysis are discussed.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Chapter 3, section 3.2. of this thesis

## 6. Research design

This chapter outlines the methodological framework employed in this thesis. The empirical analysis aims to answer the question of how external actors are portrayed in the discourse of the EU, taking a poststructuralist, relational approach. A qualitative approach, in which the official discourse of the EU is analysed through a content analysis method, is deployed. Qualitative studies are suitable to gain a deeper understanding of special cases and to answer ‘how’ questions and, thus, for this study, is the most appropriate methodology (Lune & Berg, 2017; Gray, 2018). The first section of this chapter outlines the design of the study, a case study of the current enlargement process of the Western Balkans. The second section discusses the method. The third and fourth sections outline the selection of the data and the data collection process, respectively. Finally, the fifth section defines the limitations of the study.

### 6.1 Case study design

Gerring (2006, p. 17) suggests that the term ‘case study’ is “*a definitional morass*”, as it can be defined and understood in many ways. It is possible, however, to identify some of the more commonly agreed upon principles. Definitions, as such, explain case studies as an attempt to systematically investigate one setting, a single subject event, or a set of related events, with the specific aim to describe and explain these phenomena (Lune & Berg, 2017). Hagan (2006, p.170, cited in Lune and Berg, 2017) defines case studies as “*in-depth qualitative studies of one or few illustrative cases*”. This definition effectively captures that case studies are intended to provide a level of detail and understanding of how the subject operates, or functions, in a particular context. However, it also implies that the case is illustrative of something larger, and that results can to some extent be generalised (Lune & Berg, 2017).

The generalisation aspect is one of main shortcomings of the case study approach; i.e., it is not possible to empirically generalise the results due to the specificity of the case itself (Gray, 2018). This thesis does not seek to overcome this issue. The research is not primarily undertaken because it represents other cases, but rather because of the uniqueness of the case. How the EU’s current identity can be conceptualised in the Western Balkans might be specific to just this area. The EU, through the enlargement process, has a vested interest in the region and this might affect how the EU portrays itself in this particular context. In other contexts, with different level of commitment and interests, the EU might portray itself as a different type of actor. However, the theoretical framework developed for this thesis, with the six categories of otherness, is tested through the empirical analysis. The ensuing results can also generate insight into the suitability of this analytical framework. Therefore, the thesis does not seek to generalise the empirical results, while not excluding that the analysis can generate theoretical findings that can be applicable to other cases.

The Western Balkan region is a distinctive case. The EU accession process has been slow: it has been 18 years since the EU committed to the region. The slow process, coupled with shifts in the global geopolitical balance of power, has created a space for actors, such as Russia, China, Turkey, and the Gulf States to strengthen their presence in the region (Bieber & Tzifakis, 2020). In addition, the US has had an active presence in the region since the wars in the 1990s. There are a wide range of interpretations concerning the level, scope, and impact of these actors' involvement, and the region has been referred to as at risk of becoming a 'chessboard' for geopolitical struggles (Mogherini, 2017a). Therefore, the region represents a unique opportunity to analyse EU identity formation in relation to other actors, in a spatially limited area.

## **6.2 Method**

To answer the research questions, a deductive approach was employed. The six categories of otherness formed the basis of the content analysis, and set the overall categories within which the communication was coded. The empirical analysis was carried out in several steps. First, an initial reading of the texts, to gain familiarity with the content in general, was conducted. After this, an analytical reading, using the analytical framework, was completed and the data was coded accordingly. In most texts, the section referring to the Other/Others was limited to a couple of sentences. While coding the data, subgroups of the overarching categories became apparent and the material was further divided into these subgroups. The sub-categories are, thus, derived from the data and were modified during the coding, in line with the methodology described in Lune and Berg (2017) and Maguire and Delahunt (2017).

The categories in the analytical framework are not mutually exclusive, as outlined in Chapter 4 of the thesis. The discourse concerning one specific Other can, for example, be portrayed as a threat by one EU actor yet portrayed as friendly by a different EU actor. In addition, in some texts, more than one category was apparent. For example, in the same text, an Other might be both described as a threat and as an inferior. These cases were coded accordingly.

A decision was taken, through interpretation, as to which items to put into the same category. The interpretation of the data is drawn from personal insights, but is also based on previous research within the field of study. As discussed in Drisko and Maschi (2015), the same content might, therefore, be coded differently by different researchers, and to ensure reliability in the analysis, the categories are further outlined and explained in Chapter 7. The analysis is based on the most representative samples of the data in the categories.

Notwithstanding the qualitative nature of this analysis, weightings of each category were included. By doing so, the most prominent discourse could be distinguished. Three weighting classifications were used: 1) dominant, to indicate the most prominent themes; 2) frequent, to indicate themes commonly

recurring; and 3) present, to indicate themes that occur. In addition, cases that were problematic to categorise are also discussed in the analysis.

### **6.3 The data: speeches and statements by key EU institutions**

Discourse play a central role in identity construction in the poststructuralist research agenda. Hansen (2006) suggests three criteria for choosing texts to analyse the articulation of identity: the degree of formal authority; the extent to which the text is read and attended to; and that the text has clear articulations of identity. With regards to the criterion of formal authority, Carta and Morin (2014) suggest identifying those institutions within the EU foreign policy system of governance that are able to speak on behalf of the EU. The empirical focus of the thesis is on the Western Balkan region and the construction of the EU identity in the enlargement process. Therefore, EU institutions that have a formal role in the enlargement process, and through their communication speak on behalf of the EU, have been chosen: the EU Commission, the European Council and the European Parliament. In addition, the European External Action Service (EEAS) has also been selected. Although the EEAS has no formal role in the enlargement process, it represents the EU in its foreign policy. Consequently, it has a high degree of formal authority to speak on behalf of the EU in its external relations, including the enlargement process.

Following the criterion of high political authority, the following institutions have been chosen:

#### The European Commission

The Commission manages the enlargement process on behalf of the EU. Despite the lack of formal power, the Commission has considerable influence over the enlargement process. The Commission carries out the assessments and produces yearly progress reports, prepares the EU enlargement strategy, is responsible for the aid programmes that support the countries in their reforms, and advises the member states on enlargement decisions (European Commission, 2021b).

#### European Council/Council of the EU

The European Council consists of the heads of state or government of all EU countries, the European Council President, and the Commission President. The European Council President represents the EU to the outside world, alongside the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, who is responsible for implementing the Common Foreign Security Policy (European Council, 2021a). Within the enlargement process, the General Affairs Council (GAC) establishes and supervises the EU enlargement process and accession negotiations. The GAC determines whether the candidate country meets all the necessary criteria to become an official candidate for EU membership, when formal membership negotiations can be opened, and when the candidate country can join the EU. All

decisions taken at the GAC to evaluate progress made by candidate countries require unanimous agreement between all the EU member states (European Council, 2021b).

### The European Parliament

The Parliament expresses its positions on enlargement in the form of annual resolutions, responding to the Commission’s latest annual country reports (European Parliament, 2021a). The President of the European Parliament represents the European Parliament vis-à-vis the outside world and in its relations with the other EU institutions (European Parliament, 2021b).

### European External Action Service

The EEAS is the EU’s diplomatic service. It manages diplomatic relations and strategic partnerships with non-EU countries. It also supports the EU’s foreign affairs chief, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, in implementing the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (EEAS, 2021).

Within these institutions the following key actors have been chosen:

*Table 2: The EU actors chosen for the study*

| <b>Institution/Body</b>                | <b>Actors entitled to speak</b>   |
|--|---|
| European Commission                    | President of the Commission<br>Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement |
| European Council/<br>Council of the EU | President of the European Council   |
| European External Action<br>Service    | High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security<br>Policy   |
| European Parliament                    | President of the European Parliament  |

While accepting that there are contrasting, and sometimes competing, views within these institutions (Fabbrini, 2019), for the purpose of this thesis, they are considered as actors who articulate the EU’s identity in the context of the current enlargement process with respect to the Western Balkans. In line with Aydin-Düzgüt (2014), by selecting actors within the different EU institutions, triangulation of the data sources was attempted to ensure validity. It is also worth noting that in respect to the time period of the analysis, each of these positions has undergone a change in the personnel. The President of the Commission, the Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, and the High Representative of

the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy all serve a 5-year term (EEAS, 2021; European Commission, 2021c). The President of the European Parliament and the President of the European Council each serve a 2.5-year term (European Council, 2021c; European Parliament, 2021b).

Consideration was also given to the inclusion of communications by the heads of states and foreign ministers from the member states. Member states have a role in the enlargement process, as part of the European Council and the Council of the European Union. It was decided, however, to exclude them, as the member states' narrative on the external actors often reflect their countries' stance on the external actors, and not the EU's. Therefore, only the communications of the President of the European Council, who speaks on behalf of the EU in his role, were included. The European Parliament is an additional EU institution where consideration was given to the inclusion of the communications by the rapporteurs for all candidate and potential candidate countries, yet the question arose as to whether or not they fully represent the EU in their narrative. Thus, only the European Parliament President's communications were included in data selected.

After identifying the actors that meet Hansen's (2006) criterion for articulating identity, texts that meet the second and third criterion –the extent to which the text is read and attended to, and have clear articulations of identity– were selected. Several sources were considered, however, political speeches, statements, and interviews meet Hansen's second and third criteria by articulating identities and reaching a wide audience. According to Hansen (2006, pp. 73-78), policy texts, on the other hand, generally lack explicit expression of identity as they are the product of negotiations between several actors. Therefore, from the selected institutions, speeches, official statements, and interviews were selected as the primary texts for analysis. Remarks or replies to questions following the speeches and statements were also included. Following Hansen's (2006) suggestion that official policy documents lack explicit identity constructions, documents, such as the annual reports assessing the implementation of fundamental reforms in the Western Balkan, were not included. A reading of these annual progress reports also revealed they do not contain reference to other actors.

## **6.4 The data collection**

In line with the methodology described in Lune and Berg, (2017, pp. 38-39) the study follows a purposive, judgemental, sampling strategy: the documents were chosen according to their suitability in answering the research questions. The documents were chosen within the parameters outlined in the section above. In addition, the documents were selected from within the time period of July 2016 to March 2021; that is from the introduction of the EUGS until the period in which this analysis was undertaken. To collect the data, speeches, remarks and statements of the (current and former) President of the Commission, the Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the President of the European Council, and the President of the

European Parliament, were identified. These documents are available through the websites of the Commission, the European Council and the European Parliament. Given the large number of documents available for the selected EU actors, a search filter was applied. The appropriate choice was taken to be the ‘Balkans’, as at times the Western Balkans is simply referred to as the Balkans, and this filter criterion captures both variations. All documents that contained a reference to the Balkans were read. The documents that contained reference to the US, Russia, China, Turkey or the Gulf States were compiled for analysis.

In addition, texts were selected that contained reference to the external actors implicitly, such as reference to ‘other actors’. Furthermore, in some texts, the external actors were neither explicitly nor implicitly referenced, but the EU was compared with unknown Others, such as *“the EU is by far the biggest investor, the biggest donor and the biggest trading partner for the whole region”* (Tusk, 2019). According to Hansen (2006), the relationship between the Self and the Other might not be explicitly stated with differentiation or links in all texts. A particular discourse may become established to such extent that texts no longer need to make a detailed construction of the Self, or the Other. Instead it is implied, and, therefore, such texts were also included in the analysis. Within the selected data, few official speeches contained reference to the external actors in the Western Balkans. Statements or replies to questions following the Foreign Affairs Councils, or Summits, referenced the external actors more often.

In addition to the above texts, published interviews were included. The interviews were not available through the EU institutions’ websites, they were identified through web searches. A combination of search words, such as the name of the relevant EU actor, Balkans and interview, e.g. ‘Hahn’ + ‘Balkans’+ ‘interview’, were applied. All interviews, published in reputable periodicals and podcasts, that contained reference to the external actors and quotes from the EU actors, were included. Articles with no direct quotes by the EU actors were not included, as it is the EU actors’ discourse that is the focus of the analysis and not the journalists’ framing of the external actors. Interviews published in a virtual form were transcribed and saved in an electronic format. One quote from former EU Commissioner Hahn’s Twitter account was also included. His Twitter account is an official Commission account and the quote was also referenced in an article about the external actors. No other quotes from social media have been included.

All texts with a reference to the external actors identified through the above searches, within the time frame of the study – the introduction of the EUGS up to March 2021 – were included. The total number of texts analysed was 42, detailed in Appendix 1. There was a wide dispersion between the various EU actors in terms of number of texts identified with a reference to the external actors. The former Commission, led by President Juncker, referenced the external actors more frequently than the current Commission. This might be explained by the circumstances faced by the current Commission, in office since December 2019, in particular the Brexit negotiations and the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover,

not unexpectedly, the Commissioners for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, through their discourse, have more frequently highlighted the external actors present in the region. No discourse referencing the Others was identified for a select few of the actors. The number of texts for each of the identified key actors are detailed in Appendix 2.

## **6.5 The limitations of the study**

As outlined above, the study is spatially limited to the Western Balkans and the EU's discourse with reference to the external actors in the region: the US, Russia, China, Turkey, and the Gulf States. In addition, the study is limited to the adoption of the EUGS, June 2016 to March 2021.

## 7. Results and analysis

To gain a better understanding of how the EU portrays itself after the introduction of the EUGS, the EU's discourse in relation to the external actors in the Western Balkans– the US, Russia, China, Turkey and the Gulf States – has been analysed. The collected data was analysed deploying the analytical framework with the six categories of Others. The results of the analysis are outlined in this chapter. Firstly, the four categories of otherness that could be detected in the discourse are outlined. Thereafter, the categories that were not detected in the discourse, and other issues that arose during the analysis, are discussed. The chapter concludes with an interpretation of the results.

### 7.1 Representation of the Other as an existential threat

In this representation, issues are turned into a security threat. The threat must not be limited to issues related traditionally to the military sector: it can also be used in reference to political and societal concerns (Aydın-Düzgit, 2013). The overarching threat narrative, identified in the selected discourse, portrays the Others as a threat to the progress of the Western Balkan's accession to the EU. Full EU membership for the Western Balkans is in the EU's own political, security, and economic interest. As highlighted in the enlargement strategy in 2020, "*in times of increasing global challenges and divisions, it remains more than ever a geostrategic investment in a stable, strong and united Europe*" (European Commission, 2020b). In this context, risks jeopardising the progress of the enlargement to the Western Balkans can be considered a threat to the EU.

The threat of the Others to the EU enlargement process is frequently, in the analysed discourse, framed as the Others attempt to present alternatives to EU membership. The Others attempt to derail the progress of the six countries' accession to the EU, by offering other options than EU membership. In 2017, the former High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (*hereafter, the HR/VP*) Mogherini claimed:

*The concern is there and it is significant. Moscow's presumable goal is to loosen the region's connection to the EU and present Russia as an alternative to a dissolving union* (Mogherini, 2017b).

Although Russia does not offer a viable alternative to EU membership (Bieber & Tzifakis, 2019), Russia's influence is nonetheless recognised as a threat by the EU to the accession progress of the region. The Others are, in this regard, repeatedly described by the EU as a destabilising force in the region. Former EU Council President Tusk, albeit not referring to any specific Others, stressed after a European Council meeting in 2017:

*In the evening, we discussed the tense situation in the Western Balkans. It was clear to all that forces inside and outside are working vigorously to destabilise the region (Tusk, 2017a).*

Portraying the Others as a threat that could destabilise the region, and hinder the progress of the enlargement process, reinforces the EU's identity. By juxtaposition, the EU is considered a stable, reliable force but also as having a positive transformative role in the region. The EU can, through the enlargement process, offer stability to the region. The EU also portrays itself as the only actor in the region with this aim. Borrell, the current HR/VP, emphasised in an interview:

*If we don't stabilise the Balkans, it's going to be very difficult to be considered a geopolitical power. Because nobody else will do it — only the Europeans (Borrell, 2020a).*

Another aspect of the threat narrative is the EU's representation of the Others as a threat to the stability of the EU neighbourhood. This second strand of narrative, detected in the discourse, does not relate to the stability that the accession of the Western Balkans would bring, but rather the stability of the region while still outside the EU. As former European Parliament President Tajani stated "*the stability of the Balkans is also Europe's stability*" (Tajani, 2019). The discourse in this category, where the Others are illustrated as a threat to the EU's internal security, follows the objective of the EU as stated in the EUGS (2016, p. 7): "*our security at home depends on peace beyond our borders*". Former Commission President Juncker highlighted this threat when he stated in the 2018 State of the Union speech:

*We must find unity when it comes to the Western Balkans, once and for all. Should we not, our immediate neighbourhood will be shaped by others (Juncker, 2018).*

The EU, in this regard, portrays the region as exposed to global tensions and Mogherini, following a Foreign Affairs Council, claimed that:

*The Balkans can easily become one of the chessboards where the big power game can be played (Mogherini, 2017a).*

By describing the region as unstable and that Others can further destabilise the region and subsequently threaten the internal security of the EU, the narrative provides the EU with an opportunity to depict itself as a stable force providing stability to the region, and as a result, stability to the EU.

Russia and China are the only two countries specifically referred to as a threat, albeit with differences in how that threat is constructed. While Russia is portrayed as a destabilising force, China is portrayed as a challenge. Hahn, the former Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, described the threat of China as a test to the EU:

*I think we should be aware about the strategic concept by China and react in an adequate manner. I think this will be one of the great challenges of Europe (Hahn, 2018a).*

Discursively framing Russia's and China's presence in the region differently can be interpreted as a reflection of the overall relationship the EU has with the two countries. Russia's presence in the Western Balkans has been described as *"by and large a function of its relations with the U.S. and Europe"* (Bechev, 2020, p. 188). The EU-Russia relationship is, simply put, strained since the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Russia is also highlighted as a source of concern to the security of the EU in the EUGS (2016, p. 33). While the Commission considers China a *"systemic rival promoting alternate forms of governance"* (European Commission, 2019), more recently, EU Council President Michel stressed that although the EU does not have the *"same values, political systems, or approach to multilateralism, engaging and cooperating with China is both an opportunity and necessity"* (Michael, 2020).

The different approaches the EU has to the two countries is also reflected in how the Other is constructed in the EU's discourse, and consequently, how the EU's self-image is constructed, vis-à-vis the two Others. Portraying Russia as a destabilising force and, thus, as a threat to the stability of the region and the internal security of the EU, the EU portrays itself as a stable influence with a focus on its own security. As highlighted by Mälksoo (2016), the EU is, by outlining the threats in the world, narrating itself into the role of a security actor. The Russian threat is also highlighted as something that needs to be addressed. Tusk (2017a) emphasised, when discussing Russia as a destabilising force: *"this is why leaders reaffirmed their unequivocal support for the Western Balkans, and its European perspective."*

China is portrayed as a threat, but not as a threat to the stability of the region. The threat of China is instead portrayed as undermining the EU's reform-orientated approach in the region. In the discourse analysed, concerns are raised about those Western Balkan countries that are borrowing heavily from China to pay for infrastructure, and the ensuing risk of long-term damage to their fragile economies. This description does not juxtapose the EU's role as a security actor with respect to China, in same sense as the threat of Russia does. The EU's self-image is instead portrayed, through the difference with China, as an actor with positive transformative ambitions for the region.

## **7.2 Representation of the Other as inferior**

In portraying the Other as inferior, the Self is simply constructed as superior to the Other. In the data collected, the representation of the EU as superior to the Others was the dominant form of Othering. Two categories of discourse where the EU portrays itself as superior were identified: the EU as economically, or materially superior; and the EU as morally superior, focusing on specific traits of the EU.

The discourse constructing the Others as economically inferior is direct and in most cases also includes statistical data to illustrate the superiority of the EU. The Others are also clearly defined in this discourse. Tusk remarked after his meeting with Prime Minister of Albania, Edi Rama, in 2019:

*Already now, the EU is by far the biggest investor, the biggest donor and the biggest trading partner for the whole region. This is also true for Albania. As an example: 78% of Albania's exports go to the European Union. 78%! To compare: only 3% of Albania's exports go to China. With your Western Balkan neighbours, on a clear 2nd place, with 14% of your exports. But compare again 78% of the EU, China 3%. Turkey 1%. And Russia 0% (Tusk, 2019).*

The discourse in this category is pragmatic; the EU clearly stresses that it is the most prominent actor in the region, in terms of economic influence. This portrayal is, however, fact based, the EU is the biggest trading partner of the region (European Commission, 2020c). As highlighted by Damro (2012), the economic weight of the EU gives it credibility and relevance in international affairs, and the EU by portraying itself as economically superior to the Others, reinforces its own economic weight.

In the second strand of discourse identified in this category, the Others are portrayed as morally inferior to the EU. In this representation, certain characteristics of the EU are portrayed as superior. This is not to be confused with the Others portrayed as violating the EU's values. The moral superiority discourse is focused on the idea that the EU is a force of good in the region, and not on specific values representing the EU. Mogherini stated after a Foreign Affairs Council in 2017:

*no other power in the world that has so much impact for good on the Western Balkans, and that is the European Union (Mogherini, 2017c).*

Exactly what Mogherini refers to as 'good' is difficult to ascertain with certainty, but the rhetoric juxtaposes the positive image of the EU onto the Others, who are asserted to have no positive impact on the region. Mogherini has also in the same vein referred to the region as "*the part of the world where only us can really make difference*" (Mogherini, 2017d).

Much of the discourse in this category focuses on the EU's dependability as a partner. The fact that the EU is reliable is very prominent in the discourse. Tusk stated to the European Parliament:

*The message to our friends is clear: the European Union is and will continue to be the most reliable partner for the entire region (Tusk, 2018a).*

Another aspect of the EU's superiority also prevalent in the discourse is that the EU is the most reasonable partner:

*Europeans might not be the fastest ones, might seem to demand more than the others, but probably at the end of the day we are by far the fairest partners (Hahn, 2019a).*

The EU not only portrays itself as superior, but also suggests that the Others are inferior. In her first State of the Union Address, President von der Leyen stated:

*Indeed, the future of the whole region lies in the EU. We share the same history, we share the same destiny. The Western Balkans are part of Europe – and not just a stopover on the Silk Road* (von der Leyen, 2020).

Depicting China as solely interested in the geostrategic position of the region, the EU confirms its role as an actor who cares about the citizens and acts in the best interest of the region. This is particularly evident in Tusk's statement, in a published letter to the members of the European Council ahead of their informal dinner in conjunction with the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia:

*I am convinced that the EU is the only partner that cares genuinely about the stability of the entire region and a prosperous future for its peoples – as opposed to treating it as a geopolitical game of chess, in which the people are pawns* (Tusk, 2018b).

These binary constructions, where the EU is differentiated to Others with a strong negative representation, is a very clear formulation of the EU and its portrayed self-image. The EU, by portraying itself as dependable and honest, with a sincere interest in the region, compares itself to the Others that are depicted as untrustworthy, dishonest, insincere, or as not having a genuine interest in the prosperity of the region and its people. This discourse strengthens the EU's self-image as a force of good in the region.

### **7.3 Representation of the Other as violating universal principles**

In this category, the standards of the Self are not seen as superior, rather of universal validity (Diez, 2005). For this study, the focus is on the previously-stated EU's values: respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights (Treaty on European Union, 1993). Discourse portraying the Others as violating the values and principles of the EU is present, yet scarce in the data analysed. Only former EU commissioner Hahn has referred to the EU's values in relation to the Others in the region. Hahn remarked in 2019:

*Competitors like Russia, China and Turkey are already there with a political agenda that is not compatible with EU values and standards* (Hahn, 2019b).

Referring to the Others as competitors is also an illustration of the EU's view that while the Others are not an explicit threat, they may pose a risk for the implementation of a particular vision according to the Self (Hornát, 2019). Part of the EU's enlargement strategy is conditionality, requirements that the candidate countries must meet in order to become EU members. These requirements, the Copenhagen criteria, outline the values that candidate countries need to adhere to, in addition to economic and legislative criteria (Copenhagen criteria, 1993). These are the same values as stated in the Treaty of the European Union (1993). The Others are, thus, portrayed in this category as not following the same

values and principles the EU has set for the region as part of the accession process. Hahn illustrated this when discussing China's approach in the region:

*This is exactly the case with this famous highway in Montenegro. And also this is a kind of pattern, or let's say business model, by the Chinese to offer attractive or more or less attractive loans and if you cannot serve them, it's turned into capital (Hahn, 2018a).*

The infrastructure project referred to is a motorway built by a Chinese company and financed with Chinese loans. The EU has raised concerns over the project's lack of transparency, human rights and environmental protection, in addition to the project's economic feasibility and its effects on the state debt of Montenegro. While the EU demands standards and adherence to the stated values, the Chinese involvement has no such conditionalities (Sošić, 2021). This differentiation provides the EU with an opportunity to reinforce its values and principles as part of its identity.

Hahn (2018a) also described China in the same interview as an actor that bases their involvement in the region on a "combination of capitalism and political dictatorship", juxtaposing the EU's role as a democratic actor. Moreover, the EU portrays itself as having a duty of care to ensure that EU values are implemented in the region:

*It would be unwise and almost negligent to leave behind a vacuum that other international actors, whose values do not agree with ours, make use of (Hahn, 2018b).*

## **7.4 Representation of the Other as friendly**

Discourse in this category is strongly linked with the Other, where the Other is portrayed with a clear association to the Self. Only the US is referenced as a friendly Other in the discourse analysed, apart from one instance where China is also depicted as a supportive friend by Várhelyi (2020a). He discussed China's role during the COVID-19 pandemic and the support it provided to the Western Balkan countries. The discourse portraying the Other as friendly is present, yet rare in the data analysed. Nevertheless, two strands of discourse were evident in this category: the Other as being supportive of the EU and the Other as cooperating with the EU.

Apart from the instance referred to above, discourse depicting the Other as supportive specifically portrays the US as supportive of the EU's role in the region. After the break-up of the Yugoslav Republic and the ensuing wars in the 1990s, the US had a prominent role in the region. This role has, however, diminished over the years (European Parliament, 2017). The EU's discourse in this category underlines that the EU has taken over the role from the US in maintaining the stability of the region. Hahn commented in an interview:

*Today, the United States is very supportive of the European Union on and in the region. I think that they are quite happy that we are nowadays in the lead in the region (Hahn, 2019c).*

Thus, by linking itself to another actor, whose aim is the same as the EU's – the stability and progress of the region, and its eventual accession to EU membership – the EU reinforces its own, similar, role in the region.

The second strand of discourse refers to the Other as cooperative. The discourse describes how the EU, together with the friendly Other, will work jointly to support reconciliation and improve governance, to build resilience, and implement key reforms to make EU integration possible. It is also highlighted that there should be no competition among the partners. Várhelyi stated in 2020:

*We are also ready to work with our American friends towards economic development and reconciliation in the region. It is crucial that we work together, to achieve results through joint efforts* (Várhelyi, 2020b).

Thus, the Other is portrayed as supportive and as cooperative of the EU's role in the region. The Other is constructed to share the European perspective of the region. This cements the EU's self-proclaimed role in the region: to ensure stability and to integrate the region in to the EU.

## **7.5 Representation of the Other as different, as superior and other issues**

All of the analysed discourse that contain references to the Others could be categorised using the analytical framework with the six categories of otherness. Two categories, however, were not identified in the discourse analysed: a description of the Other as superior and as different. The lack of discourse that portrays the Other as Superior, or as a model for the EU to aspire to, is perhaps not unexpected. The EU's role in the Western Balkans is to support the restructuring of the countries to meet the EU membership criteria. Portraying another actor as superior, in this context, would undoubtedly question the EU's role and influence in the region. The absence of a description of the Other as different is in line with prior research. Previous empirical studies suggest that it is difficult to acknowledge an Other without casting any value judgement, positive or negative, on that Other (Reinke de Buitrago, 2012). It should also be mentioned that in some instances, it was difficult to determine which category sentences should be coded to. In particular, this applied to discourse with reference to the Other as violating EU values. In some sentences, the Other was portrayed as violating EU values, but also as a threat. Notwithstanding that the categories are not mutually exclusive, the discourse in this regard was coded as violating EU rules. As an example, Hahn stated that:

*If I were nervous, it would be China, not Russia. But they also try to, so to say, import their way of life, a combination of capitalism and political dictatorship. Be aware of this* (Hahn, 2018a).

Although this narrative depicts China as a threat, it is one that comes from the violation of EU values, and hence, in this analysis, is treated as a violation of EU values.

Furthermore, in the analysed data, the Others – the US, China, Russia, Turkey and the Gulf States – as identified through previous literature, are specifically referenced in the EU’s discourse. China and Russia are mentioned frequently. The US, Turkey and Saudi Arabia are highlighted as Others in the discourse as well. No other countries were identified as specific Others in the discourse analysed.

The categories and the subgroups, as well as definitions and examples of the coding, are outlined in Table 3, below.

Table 3: Categories and subgroups of the analysed data

| Category                              | Definition   | Subcategory                      | Definition  | Example   | Weight   |
|---------------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|---|---|--|
| <b>Existential threat</b>             | Process of strong differentiation and juxtaposition  | Threat to accession process      | Threats specific to the accession of the region to the EU                 | “Moscow’s presumable goal is to loosen the region’s connection to the EU” (Mogherini, 2017b)  | Frequent occurrence in the material analysed     |
|                                       |  | Threat to the security of the EU | Threats with a focus on the internal stability of the EU                  | “our immediate neighbourhood will be shaped by others” (Juncker, 2018)  |  |
| <b>Inferior</b>                       | Process of mild differentiation. Non-threatening discourse with a focus on the superiority of the Self.        | Economically inferior            | Focus on the superiority of the EU in economic terms                      | “Total trade, 73% is with the EU. Twelve times bigger than China. 15 times more than Russia” (Tusk, 2018c)  | Dominant representation in the material analysed |
|                                       |  | Morally inferior                 | Focus on specific characteristics that describe the superiority of the EU | “the European Union is and will continue to be the most reliable partner for the entire region.” (Tusk, 2018a)  |  |
| <b>Violating universal principles</b> | Mild differentiation. Non-threatening discourse, highlighting the Other as not following principles and values |                                  | Focus on the Other not having the same values and standards as the EU     | “Competitors like Russia, China and Turkey are already there with a political agenda that is not compatible with EU values and standards” (Hahn, 2019b) | Present, yet rare, in the material analysed      |
| <b>Different</b>                      | No differentiation, the Other is merely recognised as existing, but with no value judgement.                   |                                  |   | Not identified in the discourse analysed  |  |
| <b>Superior</b>                       | Process of linking, the Other is seen as superior to the Self.   |                                  |   | Not identified in the discourse analysed  |  |
| <b>Friendly</b>                       | Process of strong linking, the Other is portrayed with clear association to the Self                           | Supportive Other                 | Focus on the support the Other gives to the EU                            | “Today, the United States is very supportive of the European Union on and in the region” (Hahn, 2019c)  | Present, yet rare, in the material analysed      |
|                                       |  | Cooperative Other                | Focus on cooperation with the Other                                       | “we are also ready to work with our American friends towards economic development and reconciliation in the region” (Várhelyi, 2020b)                   |  |

## 7.6 Interpretation of the results

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how the EU portrays itself since the introduction of the EUGS. To gain an insight into the discursive portrayal of the EU, its discourse in relation to the external actors – the US, Russia, China, Turkey, and the Gulf States – in the Western Balkan region, has been analysed. By deploying the analytical framework with six categories of otherness, four categories of Others could be detected in the EU's discourse in the Western Balkans.

How can the results of the analysis be interpreted in regard to the current construction of the EU's foreign policy identity? Does the EU's narrative self-image in relation to the Others portray a pragmatic actor, or does it portray the EU as an actor focused on its values and norms?

The dominant form of Othering uncovered in this analysis, the Others as inferior, highlights that the EU strives to be the main actor in the region, in line with its proclaimed interests there; that is, EU enlargement is “*a geostrategic investment in a stable, strong and united Europe*” (European Commission, 2020b). Economic superiority emerges frequently from the analysis, and although it is a fact-based reflection, stressing its economic weight follows the aim expressed in the EUGS: the EU will pursue its priorities by using its economic power (EU Global Strategy, 2016). This can be contrasted with the focus in the 2003 EES (2003, p. 35) where it is stated that the EU needs to “*extend the benefits of economic cooperation to our neighbours*”, expressing a more inclusive approach. Thus, by portraying itself as economically superior to the Others, the EU can be considered a pragmatic actor.

The second strand of discourse identified in the data analysed, where the EU portrays itself as morally superior and Others as morally inferior, provides a further understanding of the construction of the EU's identity. The rhetoric of the EU portraying itself as a ‘force of good’ has been highlighted in previous research as a way to frame the EU's involvement in neighbouring countries. The EU's position has been narratively framed as superior while trying to create stable states, securing its own geographical space, and ultimately acting in its own self-interest (Barbé & Johansson-Nogués, 2008). The discursively-constructed superiority legitimises the EU's own actions, justifying its role in its own community, whilst trying to exert influence over Others (Risse, 2012; Carta, 2014).

The narrative of the Others as inferior is, in the analysed discourse, also indicative of the EU acting in its self-interest, trying to cement its role in the region. The external actors have had an impact on the region and on the accession process. Some Western Balkan governments have, in part, fostered ties with the external actors. On a political level, the external actors can play a role for those that oppose certain EU initiatives and support activities for those in pursuit of political self-interests. Economically, funds are made available, without the strict reform conditions attached to equivalent EU funds (Bieber & Tzifakis, 2020). Although the countries are still committed to EU accession, progress to meet the EU membership criteria has stalled and in some cases has even declined over the last few years (Kmezić, 2020). The region has recently dropped in the rankings of the Freedom House's democracy index and,

since 2020, all six countries have been categorised as ‘hybrid regimes’, instead of democracies (Freedom House, 2021). Although a majority of citizens in the region support their countries’ accession to the EU, 26% of respondents in the latest Balkan Barometer believe that EU membership will never happen (Balkan Barometer, 2020). Some public opinion surveys have also revealed that Russia and China are falsely believed to be the most important economic partners (IRI, 2020). Thus, the EU’s discourse depicting the Others as inferior can also, in this context, be interpreted as the EU trying to strengthen its own image in the region, compared to the Others, fulfilling its own interest of having a stable region that can eventually be integrated into the EU.

The Others as a threat is frequent in the analysed discourse. This is mainly depicted as a threat to the enlargement process of the region to the EU, thereby threatening the EU’s political, security, and economic interest in enlargement. Another aspect of the Others constructed as a threat, as discovered in the analysis, is the portrayal of the Other as a threat to the EU neighbourhood, and consequently, a threat to the EU’s internal stability. Both threat narratives reinforce the EU’s own self-image as a reliable, stable force in the region, striving for the region’s security, but also to safeguard the EU’s internal security. This is in line with the EUGS, where there is a strong focus on Europe’s own security; the security of the EU itself is the first listed priority (EU Global Strategy, 2016, p. 9). Thus, through this narrative, the EU portrays itself as a pragmatic actor, focused on its self-interests.

Two main Others are depicted as a threat to the EU in the data analysed: Russia and China. The EU’s depiction of these two Others supports the EU’s self-image as an actor who focuses on its security but also highlights the EU as an actor with a pragmatic approach. The threat of Russia is depicted as destabilising and warrants the EU to take action to protect the stability of the region and, by extension, the EU’s internal security. China’s threat is constructed differently than that of Russia. Instead of being portrayed as a destabilising force in the region, China is portrayed as undermining the EU’s reform-orientated approach. Hahn, (2018a) stressed that the EU needs to “*react in an adequate manner*” to the challenge of China, which underlines the EU’s pragmatic approach towards China. Since 2020, China has been the EU’s biggest trading partner (Eurostat, 2021).

The categories of the Other as violating universal values and the Other as friendly was present in the EU discourse, yet this form of Othering was rarely used in the analysed discourse. As argued by Rumelili (2004), framing the Others as violating the EU’s values strengthens its own identity as one built on values. However, from the analysed discourse, only one reference is made to democracy, creating a contrast to China’s dictatorship. No other values, such as respect for human dignity, freedom, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, are specifically referenced. Thus, the lack of focus on values is indicative of a pragmatic actor.

Describing the Other as friendly is scarce in the analysed data. It is mainly the US who is constructed as the friendly Other, who shares the EU’s goal for the region, thereby strengthening the EU’s own,

comparable, role in the region. The Other as superior and the Other as different were not present in the discourse analysed.

To summarise, the analysed discourse has strong references to self-interest and an emphasis on security and defence, which is in line with the EU's priorities in the 2016 EUGS. As Tocci (2020) highlights, the EUGS proposes a more pragmatic approach to deal with the reality of today's world and this is evident in the analysed discourse. Further, the EUGS outlines an approach with more focus on the EU's self-interest, while downscaling the transformative ambitions of the EU's foreign policy (Biscop, 2016; Dijkstra, 2016; Mälksoo, 2016; Pischikova & Piras, 2017). This is evident in the EU's narrative self-portrayal in the analysed data. Although other scholars have stressed that the values are still evident in the EU's discourse (Wagner & Anholt, 2016; Juncos, 2017; Tocci, 2020), in this study, they are not apparent. This is also contrary to Manners' (2002) suggestion that the EU is a normative actor. In relation to the Others, in the context analysed, the EU portrays itself as a pragmatic actor, focused on its self-interests and which rarely highlights its values.

## 8. Conclusion

In this thesis, key EU actors' discourse in relation to external actors in the EU enlargement process of the Western Balkans has been analysed. The analysis was undertaken in order to gain a better understanding of the EU's current foreign policy identity. How the EU conceptualises Others, can, according to poststructuralist theory, allow insights to be gained into the construction of the EU's identity in its foreign relations. The analysis revealed that, in relation to the external actors in the Western Balkans, the EU portrays itself as a pragmatic actor focused on its self-interests, much in line with the 2016 EUGS.

Does this mean that the EU, in all its discourse, has portrayed itself as a pragmatic actor since the introduction of the EUGS? Probably not, as prior studies have reached the conclusion that the EU's discourse towards other actors, such as the six accession countries in the Western Balkans, has a stronger focus on values (Vukasović & Matić, 2019). This raises the question as to when the EU portrays itself as a pragmatic actor and when the EU depicts itself as an actor focusing on its values and principles? Does the EU's self-portrayal depend on who the Other is? Future studies could take a comparative approach to analyse how the EU frames its identity depending on the Other/Others.

The thesis deployed an analytical framework with six categories of otherness. This follows the suggestion by Hansen (2006), that it is imperative to develop an analytical framework which allows not only for the Self to be identified against a threatening Other, but also to allow for degrees of otherness to be distinguished. Building on Diez's, (2005), four categories of Others – the Other as a threat, as inferior, as violating universal principles, and as different – two more categories were added. The two additional categories – the Other as superior and as friendly – provided for a more positive Othering, as suggested by Gibbins (2012) and Macmillan (2013), to be included in the analysis. The analytical framework proved to be suitable, and all the discourse referring to Others in the data analysed could be categorised using the framework. In addition, the framework was further refined to include subgroups that became apparent during the analysis. Two categories, however, were not detected in the analysed discourse.

As highlighted by previous research, there are also instances of temporal Othering in the EU's discourse: where the EU refers to its own past and a difference exists between the Self that existed before and the Self that realised its mistakes from the past (Wæver, 1998). Temporal Othering was also evident when reading the selected texts to identify passages that contain reference to Others. The EU is portrayed as stable and secure because it has overcome "*the hatred of the past for the sake of a common future and to bring stability and reconciliation*" (Tusk, 2017b). Therefore, consideration could be given in future research to also include a further category in the analytical framework, the Other as the Self's past. This Othering could also bring insights into the construction of the EU's identity.

Differences in how Others are discursively framed among the EU actors identity-building discourse is another aspect that became evident in the analysis. Hahn, the former Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, and Tusk, the former EU Council President, outline the threat of the Others more frequently than the other EU actors. Hahn is, in this regard, also more outspoken and the only actor analysed who describes China's role in the region as a threat. Tusk's discourse also contains personal references, drawing on his experience growing up in Poland before EU membership:

*Beyond trade and investments, I am convinced that the EU is the best hope for a better future for your citizens. I say this because this is my own experience, as a Pole. For too many years geopolitics was against us. But today in the EU, we can cherish our national identity while at the same time being part of a bigger community in which we can all prosper* (Tusk, 2018d).

This can be compared to the current Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, Várhelyi, who has a much softer approach and rarely portrays Others as a threat. It is, however, difficult to conclude from the data analysed if there is trend in how the various EU actors differ in their discourse. According to Johansson-Nogués and Jonasson (2011), contact with the Other does not necessarily trigger a uniform response from the Self. There are diverse interpretations of what role the EU should play, and different EU actors do not necessarily share the same reference when articulating EU identity (Carta & Morin, 2014). This opens up also the possibility of further studies. Can differences between the various EU institutions and actors be identified, and which discourse is the most representative of the collective Self, as a whole?

Another interesting aspect of this topic is how much the influence of the external actors impact the EU's work. From the analysis, it is evident that the activities and influence of the other actors in the region are recognised by the EU. There is also evidence that it has affected the EU's work. In President von der Leyen's mission letter to Várhelyi, the current Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, the steps that should guide the enlargement process were outlined, with an emphasis that *"the external influence in the region has been growing significantly"* (von der Leyen, 2019). Furthermore, the current Commission unveiled a revised enlargement strategy in 2020, with the inclusion that the candidate countries should also be evaluated on their ability to tackle malign third-country influences (European Commission, 2020d). As acknowledged by Orav, the EU's ambassador to Montenegro, *"the influence of third parties does not bring anybody into the EU. At the same time, due to this influence, I believe that the EU has become so active in the area"* (Orav, 2018).

To conclude, the aim of the thesis was to shed light on how the EU's foreign policy identity can be conceptualised, since the introduction of the EUGS in 2016. Does the EU's narrative self-image in relation to the Others portray a pragmatic actor, or does it portray the EU as an actor focused on its values and norms?

The analysis revealed that, in relation to the external actors in the Western Balkans, the analysed discourse has strong references to self-interest and an emphasis on security and defence, which is in line with the EU's priorities in the 2016 EUGS. Therefore, the thesis concludes that in the context analysed, the EU portrays itself as a pragmatic actor focused on its self-interests.

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# Appendix 1

## Texts analysed

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## Appendix 2

Table A.1: Number of texts identified per EU actor

| <b>Institution-Body</b>                        | <b>Title</b>   | <b>Name</b>          | <b>Mandate period</b> | <b>Number of texts</b> |
|--|--|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| European Commission                            | President of the European Commission                                     | Jean-Claude Juncker  | 2014-2019             | 1                      |
| European Commission                            | President of the European Commission                                     | Ursula von der Leyen | 2019-                 | 1                      |
| European Commission                            | Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement                           | Johannes Hahn        | 2014-2019             | 8                      |
| European Commission                            | Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement                           | Olivér Várhelyi      | 2019-                 | 7                      |
| European External Action Service               | High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy | Federica Mogherini   | 2014-2019             | 6                      |
| European External Action Service               | High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy | Josep Borell         | 2019-                 | 4                      |
| European Council/Council of the European Union | President of the European Council  | Donald Tusk          | 2014-2019             | 12                     |
| European Council/Council of the European Union | President of the European Council  | Charles Michael      | 2019-                 | 0                      |
| European Parliament                            | President of the European Parliament                                     | Martin Schulz        | 2012-2017             | 0                      |
| European Parliament                            | President of the European Parliament                                     | Antonio Tajani       | 2017-2019             | 3                      |
| European Parliament                            | President of the European Parliament                                     | David Sassoli        | 2019-                 | 0                      |