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## **The EU River With Multiple Streams: What factors are responsible for EU foreign policy reform in the aftermath of illegal annexations?**

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### **Citation**

Ilbeygi, A. (2023). *The EU River With Multiple Streams: What factors are responsible for EU foreign policy reform in the aftermath of illegal annexations?*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3655750>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



**Universiteit  
Leiden**

Governance and Global Affairs

# **The EU River With Multiple Streams**

What factors are responsible for EU foreign policy reform in the aftermath of illegal annexations?

**Leiden University**

Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs

Master's thesis for the MSc Public Administration: International and European Governance (IEG)

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Capstone: Epistemic Communities and Foreign Policy

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**Date of Submission:** 9 June 2023

Word count excluding references: 20.206

## **Acknowledgements**

One of the main reasons for me to pursue the masters **Public Administration International and European Governance** would have to be to dive deeper into the complexity of European policymaking. Yes, particularly European, considering my broad background in European Studies and a desire to further specialize into the, for me still, unknown. A year later, the time had come to write a final thesis applying new skills and insights that I still lacked after my bachelors, but fortunately obtained through the masters. Still having the desire to research European policymaking, I selected the capstone Epistemic Communities and Foreign Policy.

Despite having a rocky start due to not knowing what exactly I wanted to pick as a research topic within this broad dimension and limited time span, I thought I managed to write something decent with the excellent supervision of Dr. Vasileios Karakasis, who advised me to construct my thesis based on Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework. Little did I know this masters consumed significant energy much needed for the thesis, resulting in a chaotic mind and a thesis not delivered on time. However, the feeling of defeat transformed into a determination to write a decent thesis and to make use of the second opportunity, in which I succeeded. A heartfelt thanks to Dr. Karakasis for his supervision and remaining of help despite the fact his capstone was not even active during the second semester. And to the ones around me: family and friends, thank you for bearing with me throughout this journey.

With this thesis, my 'educational career' (in terms of bachelors/master's degrees) has come to an end, and the doors of applying newly obtained skills and knowledge to the real world have opened.

## **Abstract**

This thesis sought to explore factors resulting in EU foreign policy reform through Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework. Using the literature on EU foreign policy change and the EU's sanctions policy as a fundamental basis, the expectations were that framing in a particular way would result in EU foreign policy reform, that policy entrepreneurs contributed to EU foreign policy reform, and that think tanks and swings of European mood contributed to EU foreign policy reform. Within this thesis, the imposition of sanctions against Russia represents the policy reform and window of opportunity through which policy reform can be realized. The cases of the annexations of Crimea and four Ukrainian regions were selected. To identify the factors at play, European news outlets, EU policy documents and meeting results, think tank reports and opinion polls have been consulted. The results revealed that policy entrepreneurs within the policy stream were responsible for the imposition of sanctions, despite continuous expression of dissatisfaction and use of the window of opportunity by think tanks. The discoveries within this thesis offer insights into the significant influence of factors found in the Multiple Streams Framework, contributing to existing literature on policymaking and opening avenues for further research.

## **Keywords**

EU foreign policy; Factors; Policy reform; Multiple Streams Framework; Three streams, Annexation; Sanctions; Framing; Policy entrepreneur; Political discourse; Think tanks; Russia; Crimea; Ukraine

## Table of contents

<b>1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	9
2.1.1 European Union Foreign Policy .....	9
2.1.2 The European Union and the implementation of sanctions .....	12
<b>2.2 KINGDON’S MULTIPLE STREAMS FRAMEWORK .....</b>	13
2.2.1 The opening of a window of opportunity .....	14
2.2.2 The three streams.....	16
2.2.3 The problem stream.....	16
2.2.4 The policy stream .....	18
2.2.5 The politics stream .....	19
2.2.6 Policy entrepreneurs .....	20
<b>3. RESEARCH DESIGN .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>3.1 CASE SELECTION .....</b>	21
<b>3.2 METHODS.....</b>	23
<b>3.3 DATA COLLECTION.....</b>	24
3.3.1 The case of Crimea.....	24
3.3.2 The case of the Ukrainian regions .....	29
<b>3.4 UNIT OF ANALYSIS .....</b>	32
<b>3.5 OPERATIONALIZATION.....</b>	33
3.5.1 Dependent variable: EU foreign policy reform .....	33
3.5.2 Independent variable: Factors.....	34
<b>3.6 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY.....</b>	35
<b>4. RESULTS .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>4.1 THE CASE OF CRIMEA .....</b>	36
4.1.1 Problem stream.....	36
4.1.2 Policy stream .....	39
4.1.3 Politics stream .....	42
<b>4.2 THE CASE OF THE UKRAINIAN REGIONS .....</b>	47
4.2.1 Problem stream.....	47
4.2.2 Policy stream .....	49
4.2.3 Politics stream .....	51
<b>5. ANALYSIS.....</b>	<b>55</b>

<b>5.1 KINGDON’S THEORY APPLIED TO CRIMEA.</b> .....	55
5.1.1 E1: Problem stream .....	56
5.1.2 E2: Policy stream.....	57
5.1.3 E3 Politics stream.....	58
<b>5.2 KINGDON’S THEORY APPLIED TO THE UKRAINIAN REGIONS.</b> .....	59
5.2.1 E1 Problem stream .....	60
5.2.2 E2 Policy stream.....	61
5.2.3 E3 Politics stream.....	62
<b>5.3 OVERALL ANALYSIS: CRIMEA VS. UKRAINE</b> .....	63
5.3.1 Perception of the problem .....	63
5.3.2 Policy entrepreneurs .....	64
5.3.3 Think tanks, the public and a window of opportunity .....	66
5.3.4 The answer to the research question.....	67
<b>6. CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>69</b>
<b>6.1 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY</b> .....	70
<b>6.2 OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH</b> .....	72
<b>7. REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>73</b>

## Abbreviations

**EU:** European Union

**CFSP:** Common Foreign and Security Policy

**MSF:** Multiple Streams Framework

**UN:** United Nations

**ENP:** European Neighborhood Policy

**ZOiS:** Center for East European and International Studies (Zentrum für Osteuropa- und internationale Studien)

**CEPS:** Centre for European Policy Studies

**E:** Expectation

## 1. Introduction

It is widely known that the European Union possesses a complex sanctions policy. Currently, there are more than 30 EU and UN sanctions regimes transposed on countries all over the world. Examples are the sanctions imposed on Syria in light of the war, and the sanctions on Iran as a response to their nuclear program (EEAS, 2021). Imposing financial sanctions in a suitable way is significantly crucial to ensure the objectives of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) are met. But most importantly, they are extremely relevant to assist in the prevention of terrorism financing. The EU considers the use of financial sanctions as a requirement for the public as well as the private sectors. In this context, a specific responsibility is assigned to financial institutions due to their significant involvement in financial transfers and transactions, which in turn are impacted by the Regulations (EEAS, 2021).

The process leading up to the implementation of sanctions is complex due to the involvement of numerous factors (EEAS, 2021), which is no different than policymaking in general. The High Representative provides a contribution to the development of the CFSP by proposing new policy or reform of existing policy, but besides him or her there are numerous other actors involved that all contribute to the ultimate stage of policy implementation. Therefore, the question remains what (f)actors are important when it comes to this decision of policy reform and how could they be explained, especially during times of crises wherein effective and rapid action is urgent (Hannah et al. 2022). Existing literature covers a significant amount of material on EU foreign policy in general and the various actors involved. It, however, neglects to contribute to the field due to the lack of research regarding other aspects than only the actors involved, such as the window of opportunity and the problem perception. This is the motive for this thesis to seek to answer the research question **“What factors are responsible for EU foreign policy reform in the aftermath of illegal annexations?”**

## The EU River With Multiple Streams: The Case of Crimea and mainland Ukraine

The policy reform under examination is the multiple rounds of sanctions the EU imposed against Russia in the period of 2014-2022. Even though sanctions are considered more of a policy tool rather than an actual policy, they have been treated as a policy reform in this research due to a number of reasons. Firstly, the process prior to the implementation of sanctions is similar to regular policy implementation (European Commission, nd-c). In other words, the proposal undergoes the same steps in the policy cycle as an actual policy proposal and can therefore be considered a policy as well. Secondly, the European Commission proposes the implementation of sanctions together with the High Representative through joint proposals. Furthermore, the European Commission (nd-c) states explicitly that after the sanctions are accepted based on a unanimous decision, they become “applicable EU law” (para.3).

Lastly, in 2022, the Council adopted the decision to make the violation of sanctions enforceable by adding it to the list of all the EU crimes under the Treaty of the Functioning of the EU (European Commission, nd-c). It is for the abovementioned reasons that this thesis views the implementation of sanctions as a policy reform rather than a policy tool, as they are equally enforceable as regular policy and are viewed by the European Commission as policy, and thus law. Therefore, this thesis examined the factors contributing to the decision to impose multiple rounds of sanctions against Russia.

The policy reform has been examined under the magnifying glass of Kingdon’s Multiple Streams Framework (MSF). This model was designed by John W. Kingdon in 1984 with the purpose of analyzing public policymaking. The framework is tailor-made to examine the complexity of policymaking and therefore represents a strong theory to analyze the EU sanctions policy with. The cases that have been used are **the annexation of Crimea in 2014** and **the annexation of the Ukrainian regions Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia in 2022**. They represent two crises and served as two ideal cases to define the



severity of the problem, the political discourse following the events and the opinions of non-state actors.

The policy reform has been viewed as a window of opportunity. This is an important concept within the MSF, which represents a limited period of time in which policy entrepreneurs or policy advocates have the opportunity to push for their interest and influence policymaking (Tarkkala & Snell, 2022; Kingdon, 1984). The continuous rounds of sanctions against Russia have been viewed as a window of opportunity, as the most influential European think tanks are not in favor of the EU's sanctions policy towards Russia. Through one of the streams, their role has also been examined, illustrating whether they made use of the window of opportunity.

This thesis seeks to provide a valuable contribution to the field of public policymaking by examining the factors that were responsible for the transposition of multiple rounds of sanctions against Russia after two annexations of Ukrainian territory in the period 2014 until 2022. It did so by using the concepts of **factors** and **EU foreign policy reform** as the independent and dependent variable. The results that have been found may open doors for further research regarding EU policymaking with the use of various other theories besides Kingdon's MSF.

The structure of the rest of the thesis is as follows: **Section 2** displays the **Theoretical framework**, upon which the expectations are built. It covers existing literature on EU foreign policy, and explains the theory utilized for the analysis of the results. **Section 3** outlines the **Research design**, in which the case selection, research method and operationalization are laid out. **Section 4** outlines the **Results**, in which the data for each case and each stream is presented. **Section 5** is the **Analysis**, wherein the expectations have been scrutinized in light of the collected results and the research question is answered. **Section 6** consists of the **Conclusion**, closing this thesis. Lastly, **section 7** contains the **references** used for this thesis.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

This section consists of two subsections, a literature review (2.1) and a theory section (2.2). The literature review is also divided into two parts. The first part commences with an overview of existing research on the EU's foreign policy and EU foreign policy reform. It strives to provide a summary of the findings and insights of scholars in order to identify gaps or areas requiring further exploration.

The second part of the literature review dives deeper into existing research on the EU's sanction policy. Following the literature review, the theory, starting at **section 2.2**, focuses on an introduction to Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework, which functions as the theoretical framework guiding this thesis. An overview of the theory with its corresponding concepts is outlined and provides a theoretical basis for the comprehension of the factors responsible for EU foreign policy reform.

### **2.1 Literature review**

#### **2.1.1 European Union Foreign Policy**

When it comes to EU foreign policy, lots of significant research has been conducted by numerous scholars specialized in policymaking. Ikani (2021), for instance, has written a book about European foreign policy change and dedicated a chapter to the 2014/2015 Crimea crisis. The author describes the planned Ukrainian signing of the Association Agreement (AA) and the Deep Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) as a critical juncture regarding Europe's relations with the countries in Eastern Europe. Both these agreements were considered key elements of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and had a significant

contribution to agenda setting and policy reforms (Ikani, 2021). However, neither European policymakers nor Germany felt the urge to reform the ENP at the beginning of the crisis (Härtel, 2019). Thus, the crisis was initially viewed as just an incident and the ENP was framed as an important agreement to implement cooperative socioeconomic policy changes. It never had the intention to undermine Russia as the area was not considered an arena of competition (Ikani, 2021; Härtel, 2019).

It was only after the annexation of Crimea that EU policymakers realized this crisis called for a policy reform (Karlovic et al. 2021 ; Ikani, 2021) and more critics started to voice their dissatisfaction with the current neighborhood strategy and the imposition of sanctions against Russia (Härtel, 2019), presumably due to the problem perception of the crisis becoming more significant. The direct result was European institutions focusing more on change instead of the status quo. Voltolini et al. (2021) confirm that framing an event as an actual crisis and thus perceiving it as a problem indeed contributes to agenda setting. A similar scenario could also be identified during the 2008 financial and debt crisis in the Eurozone, where Germany and France pushed for a policy reform regarding an international financial transaction tax (Overhaus & Kempin, 2014). In this case, the crisis followed after existing tensions between Member States, increasing the problem perception and a growing urge of reforming existing policy (Overhaus & Kempin, 2014).

Ikani (2021) presents that another contribution to this ultimate foreign policy reform was the introduction of a new cabinet of EU Commissioners taking office with Jean Claude Juncker as the EC President, who had the ambition to introduce new plans and projects leading to a change in the ENP (Ikani, 2021; Carp & Schumacher, 2015). The book does unfortunately lack a detailed description on what the motives of this new cabinet were to overthrow the existing foreign policy. Juncos (2015) examined how the EU intervened in Bosnia until 2001. The EU

continued to intervene mainly through civilian measures while deliberately avoiding military actions. However, a lack of strategy regarding the Balkans got in the way of the EU's role in the crisis. Despite being fully committed to providing support regarding reconstruction and stabilization in the short term, it was not clear what would become of the EU's relationship with the war-torn region in the long term, as an agreement among policymakers was still lacking (Juncos, 2015). Nevertheless, the EU's Bosnia policy was in for a challenge as the Kosovo War erupted and shocked all the Member States and Brussels. This resulted in a reform of strategies and policy instruments and the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement (Juncos, 2015). The EU would be responsible for aiding Bosnia in rebuilding and be committed to providing humanitarian aid and economic assistance (Juncos, 2015). Juncos' research demonstrates a critical juncture, namely the Kosovo War, that was responsible for a foreign policy reform and therefore arguably corresponds to Ikani's research, who discovered in her research that the annexation of Crimea was the critical juncture that resulted in policy reform.

Voltolini (2015) investigated non-state actors influencing European foreign policy, putting the focus on new frames and arguing that European foreign policy changes are caused by the policy entrepreneurs interacting. Using the case of the relationship between the EU and Israel, she found results that an NGO named the MATTIN Group was a key player in the generation of a new legal frame that has shaped the composition of the bilateral relations between the EU and Israel nowadays. Instead of adopting a political frame and focusing on maintaining stable relations with Israel established from the Oslo paradigm, a new paradigm has been introduced whereby the EU now focuses on legal conditions and how to implement its policies (Voltolini, 2015). Leading up to this new paradigm, the MATTIN Group took on the role of frame entrepreneur and deconstructed the previous frame. This resulted in a matter of cognitive uncertainty enabling the MATTIN Group to present concrete evidence to the EU and ultimately establishing a new frame (Voltolini, 2015).

### 2.1.2 The European Union and the implementation of sanctions

When the CFSP was introduced in the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992, the EU obtained the ability to impose sanctions (Karacasulu & Karakir, 2014). Regarding cooperation, implementing sanctions is one of the EU's hard policy tools aimed at changing behavior and penalizing non-compliance with association agreements between the EU and third countries. Not respecting or not complying with certain crucial parts of an agreement, for instance the rule of law or fundamental human rights, are considered non-compliance. (Kuijper et al. 2013).

Karacasulu and Karakir (2014) have studied the motives of the European Union for the implementation of sanctions using the case of Iran. They conclude that normative motives do play a significant role in this matter, which Härtel (2019) also confirmed. These normative motives entailed the safeguarding and enforcement of specific norms and values by promoting human rights and fostering development in the non-member states through the conditionality principle (Youngs, 2004). Between 1980 and 2004, the EU imposed sanctions on countries mainly for normative goals (Kreutz, 2005).

Giumelli and Ivan (2013) mentioned that the EU has five motives for imposing sanctions: **Conflict prevention, democracy and human rights defense, combatting terrorism, prevention of the proliferation of WMD's and institutional rebuilding.** In the case of Iran, the sanctions were, among other things, aimed at freezing European investment in Iranian oil and gas (Patterson, 2013) and were imposed due to Iran's nuclear activities, which could arguably fall under either combatting terrorism or the prevention of the proliferation of WMD's. Karacasulu and Karakir (2014) conclude that the adoption of sanctions will be used more by the United Nations and the EU in the future. Economic crises in the last ten years have caused the EU to use more sanctions to address issues such as terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, as the authors have found out in the case of Iran. Thus, these sanctions were not

imposed with regards to a political transformation, but it was meant for Iran to stop its nuclear program and activities (Karacusulu & Karakir, 2014).

The features of sanctions have changed significantly, and they are therefore no longer fully targeted, temporary and actually preventative (Miadzvetskya & Challet, 2022). EU sanctions have an unlimited duration, and the effects are as good as non-reversible. Sanctions are used as a means of punishment and are considered a 'normal' policy instrument within EU foreign policy, which labels them as a response to any form of wrongdoing such as threats to EU security and international crises (Miadzvetskya & Challet, 2022). The research by Miadzvetskaya and Challet (2022) contrasts the research of Karacusulu and Karakir (2014). The latter authors found results that in the case of Iran, the sanctions were in fact targeted in order to stop the country from pursuing its nuclear program, while the former authors state that EU sanctions have ceased to be targeted over the years. They, however, fail to justify how and why the sanctions are no longer targeted, considering they are still being imposed in order to change behavior. This leaves a gap and strengthens the research of Karacusulu and Karakir for the time being. However, the authors do agree with the fact that the EU adopts sanctions when security is at stake.

## **2.2 Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework**

The scholars referred to above have researched EU foreign policy substantially and it has become evident that prior to actually implementing sanctions, a multi-faceted process with numerous different actors precedes (EEAS, 2021). This makes the policymaking process highly complex, as the layers involved consist of institutional, regional, state, or local levels (Gornitzka et al. 2005). The Council is in charge of examining every decision to implement, renew or remove sanctions. Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) serves as an ideal

model to examine the diversity of the factors that shape the adoption of sanctions. This model was designed by John W. Kingdon in 1984, primarily to study challenges within public policy in the United States. It has also been applied to examine global issues such as health, transport etc. (Mhazo & Maponga, 2021).

The literature on the EU's sanctions policy introduces sanctions as a first purpose and illustrates that they are aimed at altering the policies of the sanction target as a second purpose. This can be identified in the research by Miadzvetskaya and Challet (2022), who shed light on the EU implementing sanctions on Iran in response to their nuclear program. The use of Kingdon's MSF provides a better understanding of the policymaking process and the perception of a certain issue in need of policymaking. Due to the detailed explanation of the three streams and the notion that they define policymaking, the framework demonstrates great potential for the deciphering of the complexity of the EU's sanctions policy. Therefore, the reform of EU foreign policy will be examined through the lens of Kingdon's MSF.

### **2.2.1 The opening of a window of opportunity**

For this research, the implementation of sanctions as a policy reform represents a window of opportunity. The dependent variable is considered as such due to the fact that this policy reform paved the way for policy entrepreneurs or policy advocates to take advantage of the opportunity and push for their interests. Looking at policy systems, it is likely that windows open. These windows are opportunities for policy entrepreneurs to take action and only stay open for a brief period of time. Problem conceptions, proposals and political forces are presented by state and non-state participants (Kingdon, 1984). However, it is important to note that not all problems make it onto the agenda or receive sufficient attention and support for policy entrepreneurs to advocate for them, which results in these items not being considered at all (Kingdon, 1984).

According to Kingdon (1984), a change in the politics stream causes a window to open. This can be the result of various factors such as administration change (Ikani, 2021), swings of national mood or the emergence of a new problem that catches government officials' attention. It can also occur that a problem becomes urgent, which generates an opportunity for policy advocates or policy entrepreneurs to present their solutions to this very problem. Focusing events work the same way (Riddervold & Bosilca, 2021). Kingdon (1984) highlights the importance of policy advocates having their proposals and solutions ready and available when a window of opportunity opens. He uses the example of an airplane crash, which can serve as a window of opportunity for policy advocates that advocate for aviation safety. If the policy advocates make use of this event to present their proposals, the crash represents a window of opportunity to achieve policy change (Kingdon, 1984). Kingdon (1984) states that within the policy stream, proposals, solutions and alternatives are always floating around. They are constantly being discussed, revised and refined, awaiting problems to be attached to (Kingdon, 1984).

The proposals and alternatives that are continuously in the policy stream have the potential to rise to the top of the government agenda when an urgent problem occurs. These proposals can serve as ready solutions to address the problem at hand (Kingdon, 1984). It requires only a swing of national mood or the introduction of a new administration for a proposal to get elevated on the agenda and a window to get opened with a favorable timing (Kingdon, 1984). As mentioned earlier, for this research, the dependent variable, i.e. the implementation of sanctions against Russia as a policy reform, represents a window of opportunity. Leading up to this perspective, the activity in the politics stream for both cases has been monitored to determine whether a window of opportunity is indeed used.



### **2.2.2 The three streams**

According to Kingdon's MSF, public policy consists of three types of streams that together play a significant role in public policymaking: The **problem** stream, the **policy** stream and the **politics** stream. This subsection will begin with a bit of background information on each of the streams and then proceed on to the concept of **policy entrepreneurs**.

### **2.2.3 The problem stream**

The problem stream explains that problems are being perceived as public matters that require government action. Kingdon (1984) mentions that problems often require a bit of a push to attract the attention of people within and outside of the government, as they are often not that obvious. Cairney and Jones (2013) also highlight that the majority of the problems never make it onto the agenda unless there is a compelling push. This push could be triggered by, for instance, a focusing event, such as a crisis, a symbol catching on (Kingdon, 1984 ; Lancaster et al. 2017), or an individual policymaker advocating for specific items on the agenda based on personal experience referred to as a discretionary window (Howlett et al. 2020). Thus, a significant event needs to occur in order for a less important agenda item to further move up on the political agenda. Very often, this event involves a crisis of the kind that policymakers could not ignore at all (Kingdon, 1984). This suggests that before the problem becomes visible enough to require government action, conditions need to worsen to crisis proportions, and this is also the point where the three streams come together (Kingdon, 1984 ; Walhart, 2013).

While focusing events such as crises and disasters are powerful indicators for an issue to move up on the political agenda, they rarely succeed on their own and therefore require the company of something else (Kingdon, 1984). Kingdon (1984) highlights the significance of pre-existing problem perception in people's minds. When people acknowledge the presence of a problem, it reinforces the recognition of the problem needing government attention. This notion is

exemplified by a study conducted on hurricane Katrina. Farley et al. (2017) explored whether hurricane Katrina was framed as enough of a crisis so that it was capable of opening a window of opportunity for policy reform on its own. The findings reveal that it was not. The lack of a pre-existing problem perception, coupled with the dominant frame of the American market fundamentalists among the public, impeded the acceptance of the problem perception advocated by ecological economists (Farley et al. 2017). Furthermore, a second focusing event (closely) following the first one can also enhance the perception of a problem (Kingdon, 1984). In fact, sometimes the only way for a focusing event to raise awareness for the problem at hand is to be accompanied by a second one (Kingdon, 1984). The reason behind this is that a second focusing event lends credibility to the problem significance. It cannot be easily dismissed as a coincidence and shoved under the rug, unlike the first focusing event (Kingdon, 1984).

Kingdon (1984) also highlights the influential role of the media. The media serves as a powerful tool in drawing attention to specific events and influencing the public perception of these events as problems in need of government attention (Kingdon, 1984). Scholars have indeed concluded that media coverage excels in directing public attention towards government issues. Knaggård (2015) conducted an interesting study on the problem stream and examined what events occur that make agenda setting possible. She discovered that a so called “problem broker” (p.451) is responsible for framing the problem in a way that policymakers acknowledge it. She concludes that the problem broker could be the media, an individual or a group of actors (Knaggård, 2015). For this research, the problem stream has been examined by comparing the different frames European news outlets have adopted following the annexation of Crimea and the Ukrainian regions. This will be further elaborated on under **section 3.3 Data collection**

#### **2.2.4 The policy stream**

The policy stream is described by Kingdon (1984) as the continuous analyses of problems and their potential solutions, as well as political discourse surrounding these problems (Giese, 2020). Kingdon (1984) emphasized that ideas and proposals are not confined solely to government circles, but are also present within communities of specialists comprising of researchers, analysts, academics, policymakers and other political actors (Kingdon, 1984 ; Stanifer & Hahn, 2020). Specialists involved in policymaking, whether working for the Congress, budget offices or working as consultants, share a common focus on specific policy areas and their associated problems (Kingdon, 1984). Their expertise, ideas and proposals contribute to the process of policymaking. In addition, these specialists engage in political discourse often triggered by political events, creating a network wherein ideas are discussed (Kingdon, 1984). Kingdon (1984) compares this process of generating ideas within a community to molecules floating around in a “primeval soup” (p.19), and clarifies that as much as there are numerous ideas possible, there are also numerous molecules present.

An example of a case wherein ideas and strategies in the policy stream are placed under a magnifying glass is the study by Taghizadeh et al. Taghizadeh et al. (2021) utilized the MSF as a means to investigate the problem of child obesity in Iran. Their research presents solutions generated in the policy stream consisting of education on physical activity and nutrition, the improvement of health care, and the use of labels on produced food. They, however, fail to provide insights into the political discourse prior to the generation of the solutions, which could have contributed to a clearer picture of the policy stream and shed light on the complexity of generating solutions to a problem. Within this research, the policy stream outlines the political interaction between EU policymakers, most importantly the advocacy for policy reform by the policy entrepreneurs, and documents regarding the implementation of policy reform. This will be further elaborated on under **section 3.3 Data collection**

### **2.2.5 The politics stream**

The politics stream is determined by events like ‘swings of national mood’ (Kingdon, 1984 p.148), government/administration changes, election outcomes and interest/ pressure groups’ campaigning activities (Mhazo & Maponga, 2021; Kingdon, 1984). Any development or activity in the politics stream plays a crucial role in determining which agenda topics receive prominence and attention, while previous topics may become less of a priority (Kingdon, 1984). Kingdon (1984) sheds light on the impact of administration changes in shaping the government agenda. He names the example of the Reagan administration, illustrating how the introduction of a new administration can lead to the addition of new agenda topics that were previously deemed impossible and the elimination of other agenda items, aligning with Howlett et al. (2020) concept of discretionary window.

The swings of national mood refer to the voices of the public regarding a certain problem. Kingdon (1984) emphasizes that voices of the public play an essential role in shaping policy discussions and decisions. Individuals working both inside and outside government closely monitor the national mood and are attuned to alterations of public opinion (Kingdon, 1984). While national mood is often manifested through public opinion, Kingdon (1984) notes that it can also be discerned through other channels, such as interest groups. These groups represent specific sectors or causes and provide valuable insights into sentiments and preferences of particular constituencies. Government actors and policymakers can gather information about the national mood by engaging with interest groups, reading newspapers, attending meetings etc. (Kingdon, 1984).

It is, however, important to note that interest group activity does not necessarily affect agenda topics. They can exert their influence by pushing for positive outcomes, such as persuading policymakers to take new courses of action, but also for negative outcomes such as blocking a

certain decision (Kingdon, 1984). In order to shed light on the politics stream and determine the level of activity, information was derived from think tank reports and surveys conducted and will be further elaborated on under **section 3.3 Data collection**.

### **2.2.6 Policy entrepreneurs**

The role of policy entrepreneurs is present within Kingdon's MSF. Policy entrepreneurs are actors that make use of opportunities and events that create windows of opportunity (Kingdon, 1984), which enable them to advance their policy proposals and push them onto or further up the government agenda ((Mhazo & Maponga, 2021). Policy entrepreneurs actively wait for the occurrence of a problem or the opening of a window of opportunity to present their solutions (Kingdon, 1984). The success of a policy entrepreneur depends on a number of factors: resources, being able to reach crucial decision- makers and the strategies they use for their entrepreneurial behavior (Jones et al. 2015).

### 3. Research design

In light of the literature and the research conducted by scholars in the field, as well as utilizing Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework as the model to analyze EU foreign policy reform, the research question "**What factors are responsible for EU foreign policy reform in the aftermath of illegal annexations?**" has been formulated. This section aims to illustrate the method employed to provide an answer to the research question within the context of two cases whereby a focusing event occurred.

#### 3.1 Case selection

Prior to actively searching for cases to apply Kingdon's MSF to, a total of four selection criteria were established to narrow down the range of potential cases. First, it was of the utmost importance to select a case wherein a focusing event, such as a crisis or other unforeseen event, had occurred with the potential of examining its political impact with the help of the MSF. Given that the MSF explains the interconnectedness of the three streams having an impact on policymaking, a second essential criterion was the presence of data regarding all three of the streams. Given the fact that this thesis focuses on European foreign policy, a third hard criterion was to select a focusing event that had occurred on the European continent. The fourth and last criterion was the data availability of specifically European media outlets to be able to provide different frames.

In this context, two specific cases met the selected criteria and have therefore been chosen to apply the MSF to, namely **the annexation of Crimea in 2014** and **the annexation of the four Ukrainian regions Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia in 2022** (hereinafter "the annexation of the Ukrainian regions"). They were selected due to several reasons. Firstly, the

annexation of Crimea marked a significant turning point for the relationship between the EU, Russia and Ukraine. This perspective is also acknowledged by Ikani (2021), providing a further justification for its selection as a case. Secondly, at the time of writing, only a few months had passed since the annexation of the Ukrainian regions, which made it a very recent and therefore intriguing case to use for the analysis.

Furthermore, extensive media coverage of both annexations by European news outlets provided valuable sources of data to use for the problem stream. The media's attention to these cases ensured that there was sufficient data to identify the different frames of the problem at hand. In addition, both annexations have demonstrated significant activity in the politics stream. This enabled the identification of the influence of non-state actors on policy reform. The selection of two cases instead of one enabled to facilitate a comparative analysis. The contrast between the two annexation cases allowed for the identification of potential differences and similarities between them. Through this comparative analysis, it was possible to determine whether the two cases presented different factors influencing EU foreign policy reform. By applying the Multiple Streams Framework, a total of six expectations (E) could be drawn, with three expectations tailored for each case:

### Case 1 Crimea

- **E1 for the problem stream:** The focusing event was framed as a problem and provided a contribution to the adoption of sanctions against as EU foreign policy reform.
- **E2 for the policy stream:** The political discourse between policy entrepreneurs contributed to the adoption of sanctions against Russia as EU foreign policy reform.
- **E3 for the politics stream:** The influence of think tanks and swings of European mood contributed to the adoption of sanctions against Russia as EU foreign policy reform.

## Case 2 Ukrainian regions

- **E1 for the problem stream:** The focusing event was framed as a problem and provided a contribution to the adoption of sanctions against as EU foreign policy reform.
- **E2 for the policy stream:** The political discourse between policy entrepreneurs contributed to the adoption of sanctions against Russia as EU foreign policy reform.
- **E3 for the politics stream:** The influence of think tanks and swings of European mood contributed to the adoption of sanctions against Russia as EU foreign policy reform.

### **3.2 Methods**

This thesis employs a qualitative research approach in order to identify the factors found in Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework that exert an influence on EU foreign policy reform. A case study has been conducted to provide a thorough analysis of the factors at play in the EU's decision-making process. This design predominantly relied on desk research, encompassing the collection and analysis of both primary and secondary sources.

The aforementioned approach had been chosen on the grounds of the nature of the research question, which necessitated an in-depth analysis of various sources, such as news outlets, the EU policy archives and reports published by Europe's most influential think tanks. While the ideal scenario would have included data collection through interviews with relevant actors, limitations in terms of personal circumstances and time rendered field research unfeasible. Section **3.3 Data collection** outlines the detailed process of collecting data.



### **3.3 Data collection**

Below a detailed description of the data collection process for each case and each stream is outlined. The sources consulted are outlined per stream, beginning with the case of Crimea. For this thesis, the focus of the problem stream was placed on the examination of the frames that were adopted by European news outlets. The policy stream focused on the thorough examination of policy documents, results from EU meetings and statements made by EU actors. Lastly, for the politics stream, think tank reports, surveys and opinion polls were thoroughly analyzed to measure the influence of non-state actors.

#### **3.3.1 The case of Crimea**

##### **3.3.1.1 Problem stream**

Commencing with **the Guardian** and its correspondent Shaun Walker, his expertise in writing pieces about Central and Eastern Europe was the main motive for including this source (Walker & Traynor, 2014). Walker has even written a book on Russia's resurgence under President Putin (The Guardian, 2022a). The data collection processes then proceeded with newspaper Politico (Politico, 2014). Since it is a reliable and factual newspaper publishing information on EU political affairs with a low bias score (Ad Fontes Media, 2019), it was seen as a quality source to cite for the problem stream.

Furthermore, a Dutch news outlet called **NOS** is consulted (NOS, 2014). This news outlet is one of the most popular news outlets in the Netherlands and belongs to the Dutch government (Rijksoverheid, 2016). It is considered a so-called duty broadcaster, meaning that they have the task to provide independent news as stated in the Dutch media law (Mediawet) and therefore publishes opinion-free and factual news items (Rijksoverheid, 2016). Even though, European newspapers are the main news outlets used in this research, with the nationality of the

researcher of this thesis being Dutch, it was deemed interesting to display the frame of a national news outlet. Moving on to **BBC News**, John Simpson, a BBC correspondent, has spent his entire work career corresponding for the BBC and has even written several books (Simpson, 2014). He even went to war zones in, for instance Afghanistan and Syria, to report (The Guardian, 2022). Due to this expertise and year-long experience working for the BBC, his article is used in the problem stream (The Guardian, 2022b).

The frame adopted by **Euractiv** is an interesting one. It is utilized as this was the only news article that adopted a frame wherein action is taken, contributing to the notion that several news outlets use multiple frames. What makes Euractiv a reliable and credible source is the fact that the news outlet is a collaboration between independent professionals that specialize in, for instance, journalism, European policy issues, information science etc. (Europa.nu, nd). Both Euractiv (Euractiv & Reuters, 2014) and **Euronews** (Taylor, 2014) have been utilized as they happened to be the only news outlets that published items with a clear tone visible in them, which ultimately hinted at a particular frame.

### **3.3.1.2 Policy stream**

Given that the policy stream comprises the political discourse, proposals and solutions surrounding a problem, policy documents, results from EU meetings, statements by EU actors and policy updates have been analyzed thoroughly. Following the annexation, a special emergency meeting had been called for during which the **High Representative Herman van Rompuy** and **the EU heads of state or government** expressed their condemnation on the Russian annexation (van Rompuy, 2014; European Council 2014b). As van Rompuy held the position of High Representative during this period, it was of the utmost importance to display his statements. This source was also relevant to highlight the first round of sanctions that had been transposed on Russia.

Although not formally considered a policy reform, the decision of the Western countries to cease their G8 collaboration with Russia was relevant to mention, as it can be perceived as a severe measure being taken in response to the annexation (Borger & Watt, 2014). For the sake of the policy stream, it was of the utmost importance to provide results on as much political discourse as possible. This article written by Julian Borger and Nicholas Watt has been cited as the authors attended the G8 summit in the Hague, wherein the G8 took the decision to suspend Russia and continue as the G7. This meant that they were able to do a coverage on the ground.

Furthermore, it was of the utmost importance to explain the actions of **former UK Prime Minister Cameron, and former foreign secretary William Hague, the Council of Europe Ministers' Deputies and Giuseppe Conte**, as they could be labeled as policy entrepreneurs according to Kingdon's MSF (Pawlak, 2014; Council of Europe Ministers' Deputies, 2014; Pullella & Guarascio, 2018). In this thesis, policy entrepreneurs Cameron and Hague were presented as the first ones to push for policy reform, namely with the third round of sanctions (European Council 2014c) after the EU imposed the first and second one during the emergency meeting (European Council, 2014b). Fortunately, most of the information could be found on the website of the European institutions. The European Council (2014, 2022) was cited as the website is transparent, which makes it possible to look up past meetings and the ultimate decisions taken. This way, it was possible to demonstrate the various meetings between EU actors, which was essential for the policy stream.

As a source to support the matter about Cameron and Hague pushing for sanctions, an article from Justyna Pawlak for Reuters has been used (Pawlak, 2014). Pawlak is an expert in, inter alia, central and eastern European matters (World Economic Forum, nd). Her article for Reuters has been cited due to her presence at an EU meeting in Athens where the UK pushed for

sanctions against Russia, and she also managed to ask Hague on his stance towards sanctions. Lastly, an article by Borger, Lewis and Mason has been cited to demonstrate the success of the policy entrepreneurs, which is valuable to include in the policy stream. (Borger et al. 2014).

### **3.3.1.3 Politics stream**

In order to measure activity in the politics stream, reports from three influential European think tanks have been utilized first to highlight the resistance against sanctions. The first report presented was by **the Carnegie Europe**, whose author is Andrei Kolesnikov (Kolesnikov, 2015). Kolesnikov is an expert researcher on Russian domestic politics (Carnegie Europe, nd-a) and this report therefore provided a thorough and credible analysis on the limited impact of sanctions. The second think tank report consulted was from the **Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS)**, written by Steven Blockmans. This report was of particular interest given the use of explicit language, such as the term “cowardice”. This choice of words emphasized the dissatisfaction with the policy reform, which was essential for determining the use of the window of opportunity.

According to the **2020 Global Go To Think Tank Index**, which is the result of a survey conducted among scholars, policymakers etc. the CEPS, Bruegel and the Carnegie Europe are rated three of the top non-US think tanks (McGann, 2021). The author of the report by **Bruegel**, the third think tank whose reports have been consulted, Georg Zachmann, has been employed at Bruegel since 2009 and holds a specialization in energy and climate policy (Bruegel, 2023). Zachmann reported on the limited effects of sanctions and holds knowledge on how to effectively target Russia using their gas export. His expertise was therefore of value to this research. In order to shed light on potential swings of European mood, interviews and surveys have been conducted to determine general public’s perspectives of the annexation of Crimea. An interview conducted by **Lucian Kim** incorporated in the results to reveal the opinions of

the Crimean inhabitants (Kim, 2018). This interview was utilized for the politics stream as Kim travelled to Crimea four years after the annexation with the purpose of interviewing a Crimean local, who was bold enough to express his dissatisfaction with the situation (Kim, 2018) . By adding this interview, an interesting narrative was created. Moreover, Kim's expertise on Russia and the former Soviet countries ensures the credibility of his interview (Kim, 2012). With the bigger part of his career dedicated to analyzing and reporting on Russia and the former Soviet Union (Kim, 2012), his insights provided a valuable contribution to the politics stream.

Furthermore, data was derived from a survey conducted by the **Center for East European and International Studies (ZOiS)**. ZOiS is a German research institute specialized in researching Eastern Europe, while adding value to contributing to public discourse and the generation of new perspectives (ZOiS, nd). With this backdrop in mind, the data from the survey was perceived as valuable to this research.

A second source that provided data on public opinion is an opinion poll by **Infratest Dimap**. Infratest Dimap is a valued German research institute cooperating with the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) (DIW, 2006), a leading German economic research institute (IFW Kiel Institute for the World Economy, nd). Therefore, their data has been incorporated in the politics stream. Their astonishing survey results were of value to mention in the politics stream, as it provided the means for generating an interesting contrast with the results from ZOiS. A justification for the German attitudes towards the annexation was found in an article written by **Rick Noack** in the Washington Post. At the time of the survey, Noack was a Washington Post correspondent based in Berlin. This made him a valuable source of information to use, considering he was located on the ground where the survey was being conducted.

### 3.3.2 The case of the Ukrainian regions

#### 3.3.2.1 Problem stream

Serving as the first and only news outlet that framed the annexation of the Ukrainian regions as a significant threat to the European bloc looking at the word choice, **Euronews** was selected as an important source to present the type of framing. Unfortunately, the background of the author could not be verified. However, considering the importance of presenting different frames for the sake of this research, this source had been utilized notwithstanding (Euronews, 2022). **The Guardian** served as a suitable source (Sauer & Harding, 2022) taking into account that authors Piotr Sauer and Luke Harding are dedicated and experienced reporters on the matter of Russian affairs (The Guardian, nd). Their expertise in the field rendered their article a valuable addition to the problem stream.

**Euractiv**, a credible source known for the publication of high-quality factual news (Europa.nu, nd), was used to demonstrate another frame (Brzozowski, 2022). Alexandra Brzozowski is Euractiv's loyal Europe and Defense reporter and focuses on reporting on European security defense (Euractiv, nd). She is a particular regional expert in the Eastern Partnership with Ukraine (Euractiv, nd), which makes her article a credible and valuable source of information. Shifting to **Politico** (Gijs, 2022), it is remarkable that this news outlet did not publish any news items after the annexation of the Ukrainian regions, but did so right before. Although the expertise of Camille Gijs, the author of the article, in writing on Russian or European affairs remains unknown, the way the article framed the annexation was deemed relevant to present yet another frame.

Lastly, the news article by **BBC News** was chosen to shed light on a significantly different frame compared to the abovementioned news outlets (Maishman & Williams, 2022). Shedding

light on the difference in framing by the popular European news outlets served as a crucial aspect for the problem stream, given that this stream determines the urge of the problem.

### **3.3.2.2 Policy stream**

**Peter Stano** is the EU's lead spokesperson for foreign affairs and has therefore been utilized as a source to provide evidence for Josep Borrell's intentions for a different strategy towards Russia (Stano, 2021). The inclusion of this statement by Borrell aimed to highlight existing concerns regarding Russia prior to the annexation. In order to elucidate the political discourse and political developments following the annexation, **the European Council** has been predominantly referenced for the reason that it provides comprehensive information on past and upcoming meetings and newly implemented policies (European Council, 2022a ; European Council, 2022b ; European Council, 2022c).

The article by **Baczynska, Siebold and Strauss** has been cited solely to refer to the meetings where the EU decided upon the eighth round of sanctions and not for the purpose of providing further information (Baczynska et al. 2022). On the other hand, **EUreporter** has been consulted to highlight Roberta Metsola's policy entrepreneurship (EUreporter, 2022). EUreporter is a reliable and credible EU news medium covering EU news since 2002, and regularly conducts exclusive interviews with EU policymakers and other political actors (European Commission, nd-b). The piece by **Suzana Anghel** was consulted as she was present at the meeting wherein the EU leaders decided upon implementing the policies pushed for by Metsola, providing a real-time report on the proceedings (Anghel, 2022).

The opposition of think tanks towards the imposition of sanctions against Russia has been highlighted throughout this thesis. However, despite their dissatisfaction with this policy reform, **High Representative Borrell** announced the imposition of a tenth round of sanctions on Russia in February 2023 (Borrell, 2023). The press statement by Borrell regarding this new

round of sanctions has been included in the results as it presents an interesting response to the think tank's advocacy, highlighting that they did not succeed in persuading policymakers from refraining from this policy reform, despite their efforts.

### **3.3.2.3 Politics stream**

A survey conducted by **Yougov Cambridge Center for Public Opinion Research**, a British bureau for market analyses, named the Yougov Globalism Project has been utilized to demonstrate the opinions of citizens of 25 countries regarding the imposition of sanctions against Russia. (Henley, 2022). This survey is used as it is an annual survey conducted among 25 countries and focuses on the globalization of attitudes of citizens (YouGov, nd). Furthermore, a survey by **the Eurobarometer** has been utilized to shed light on the opinions of European citizens regarding the EU's sanctions policy towards Russia (Eurobarometer, 2022). As previously emphasized, the inclusion of data on citizen attitudes was crucial in order to identify potential swings of European mood. The Eurobarometer polls, conducted by the European Commission (European Union, nd), directly inquire citizen's opinions on EU-related matters, thereby providing valuable insights for the politics stream (European Union, nd).

Regarding think tanks, the reports by the same three think tanks have been outlined as with the case of Crimea. The same motives regarding their high influence as mentioned earlier apply to this case. It is worth mentioning that the authors of the reports are in possession of high expertise in the field. Given that Judy Dempsey from **Carnegie Europe** is known for providing insightful analysis and her past as Eastern European correspondent (Carnegie Europe, nd-b), her expertise regarding Eastern European matters is undisputed. And while all the authors that contributed to the report by **Bruegel** possess significant expertise regarding Eastern Europe, Benjamin Hilgenstock was in particular a valuable author given his expertise on sanctions against Russia and how the Russian economy is impacted by them (Centre for Economic Policy



Research, 2023). Lastly, Alcidi, Shamsfakhr and Postica from the **CEPS** have enriched this thesis with their expertise on international economic and EU governance (CEPS, 2009 ; CEPS, 2020 ; CEPS, 2021), rendering their report on the non-effectiveness of sanctions against Russia suitable and informative.

### **3.4 Unit of analysis**

Given the selection of two annexation and their placement under the magnifying glass of Kingdon's MSF, the units of analysis are found in the three streams. The problem stream was scrutinized through the analysis of European media outlets to identify the different frames. The policy has been thoroughly researched analyzing policy documents, statements made by heads of state or government, legal documents, and the discourse among EU actors and policymakers. Lastly, the politics stream had been explored through the examination of reports from Europe's most influential think tanks and surveys presenting national and European mood.

### **3.5 Operationalization**

For this research, two variables were specified. The independent variable represented **the factors** responsible for EU foreign policy reform identified through the three streams of Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework. The dependent variable represented **EU foreign policy reform**, a direct consequence of the interplay between the factors of the three streams. **Table 1** illustrates the variables of the research method along with its corresponding indicators.

#### **3.5.1 Dependent variable: EU foreign policy reform**

The Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union (CFSP) is the EU's foreign policy designed to uphold and strengthen international peace and security while conforming with the UN Charter (European Commission, nd-a). The budget of the CFSP is allocated by the European Commission to facilitate a rapid and suitable response to "unforeseen geopolitical events (para.3), such as crises and conflicts (European Commission, nd-a). Given that the dependent variable of this thesis is **EU foreign policy reform**, it is important to differentiate between the terms "policy change" and "policy reform" (Cerna, 2013).

Bennett and Howlett (1992) define policy change as minor or incremental shifts within an already existing policy. Policy reform usually represents a drastic policy change (Berman, 1995) and demonstrates a "process of improving the performance of existing systems and of assuring their efficient and equitable response to future changes" (p.27). For the sake of this research, the concept of policy reform has been utilized as a basis to shed light on the continuous rounds of sanctions imposed on Russia. The sanctions represent the policy reform in this research, as they are not minor changes or incremental shifts, but are indeed aimed at assuring an efficient response to Russia, which is in line with Berman's (1995) definition.

### 3.5.2 Independent variable: Factors

The **factors** that contribute to policy reform, as identified through Kingdon’s MSF, are represented as the independent variable of this thesis. As emphasized earlier, public policymaking is a complex process involving multiple stakeholders and dimensions engaged in an interplay, such as the influence of think tanks, interest groups, new scientific findings, companies advocating etc. (Gittell et al. 2012). Different strategies are employed, such as lobbying or public advocacy with the purpose of promoting their interests (Gittell et al. 2012). Within policymaking, the political process that precedes rarely produces perfect policies. (Gittell et al. 2012). The factors influencing the reform of EU foreign policy have been identified in **section 4 Results** through the three types of streams. **Table 1** below illustrates a detailed operationalization of the dependent and the independent variable with identified indicators for each stream.

**Table 1** - Operationalization of the concepts

<b>Stream</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Result</b>
<b>Independent variable: Factors responsible for EU policy reform</b>		
<i>Problem Stream</i>	Framing of the focusing event	The way the focusing event was framed by the media
<i>Policy Stream</i>	Political discourse	EU meetings that have been held following the focusing event
	The influence of policy entrepreneurs	Political actors that have pushed for policy reform
<i>Politics Stream</i>	The thoughts of think tanks	Think tank reports on the EU foreign policy reform
<b>Dependent variable: EU foreign policy reform</b>		
<i>Policy Stream</i>	Policy reform	Introduction of sanctions
<i>Politics Stream</i>	The voices of the public	Opinions of the public with regards to the EU's foreign policy reform

### **3.6 Reliability and validity**

As described under section **3.1 Case selection**, the cases selected are two annexations that both involve Ukrainian territory and have been signed by Putin, whose relationship with the European Union has always been more or less unstable. There was an eight-year time difference between the two annexations. Given that the annexations thus occurred some time ago, stability reliability was ensured as different measurement moments are likely to produce identical results, provided that the same indicators are utilized. In order to ensure construct validity, the indicators that have been generated during the operationalization are based on Kingdon's knowledge of the streams. Results have been added to further narrow them down and better clarify the outcome.

Under **section 3.4 Unit of Analysis**, the components that have been examined are laid out. These are European news outlets, EU policy proposals, statements made by EU leaders, reports by think tanks and voices of the public. Interobserver reliability has been ensured due to the fact that the measurement tool, i.e. Kingdon's MSF, is a solid tool with fixed components ensuring that an identical outcome would be produced if the same cases are measured by other researchers, again provided that the same indicators are utilized. According to Kingdon (1984), the streams should contain all components necessary for achieving agenda setting, as the three of them are generated to explain agenda setting and policy reform.

## 4. Results

In this chapter, the annexation cases will be presented through the lens of the three streams of Kingdon's MSF. Within every stream, the findings that belong to that particular stream will be explained in the form of a narrative. Under the **problem** stream, the framing by various European news outlets is demonstrated. Under the **policy** stream, the EU's political discourse, measures, new policies and other actions have been laid out. Ultimately, under the **politics** stream, reports by influential European think tanks and opinions of the public are outlined.

### 4.1 The case of Crimea

#### 4.1.1 Problem stream

Russia had formally annexed the peninsula of Crimea in March 2014 (European Union External Action, 2021). Since the annexation, several European news outlets have reported on this matter presenting various frames. Starting with an article published by **The Guardian**, the authors present an overview of Vladimir Putin's stance on the annexation (Walker & Traynor, 2014). Following the declaration of annexation, Putin held an hour-long speech in the Kremlin with an angry tone, expressing his belief that the West had been acting hypocritically and cheated on Russia "*again and again with decisions taken behind our back*" (Walker & Traynor para. 3). The idea that the occurrences in Crimea are an effect of Russian aggression had been ridiculed by Putin, as he mentioned that no shots were fired and there have been no victims (Walker & Traynor, 2014). The Guardian utilized a story-telling frame, focused on Vladimir Putin's attitudes and highlighted his viewpoint as central to the story. The frame centered on Putin presenting his justifications for the annexation, thereby downplaying European attitudes towards his speech.

## The EU River With Multiple Streams: The Case of Crimea and mainland Ukraine

Shifting to EU newspaper **Politico**, a different frame is employed. The article highlights that Russia had annexed Crimea without pulling a gun and that the newly formed government in Ukraine's capital Kiev was deemed too weak to effectively respond to Russia's actions (Politico, 2014). Russia was ordered to withdraw its troops by then US president Barack Obama. The article continues with Ukrainian president Oleksandr Turchynov increasing tensions by announcing late at night that Ukrainian troops should be prepared for the threat of Russian aggression (Politico, 2014). Despite Obama's orders for Russia to withdraw the troops from the base in Crimea, Putin ignored his warnings, raising the stakes in this conflict over the future of Ukraine (Politico, 2014). One can argue that Politico also employed a story-telling frame by revealing a narrative that resembles a dialogue between the former US president and the Russian president, while failing to mention the opinion of the EU. The frame is arguably more aimed at conveying the escalating tensions regarding the annexation of Crimea.

Dutch news outlet **NOS** (2014) published a short article and appeared to adopt a frame wherein it focused on the annexation of Crimea from a legal perspective, mentioning that the Kremlin had signed a law proposal annexing Crimea as part of the Russian Federation and that Crimea is inseparably connected to it. It appeared that some constitutional adjustments were necessary in order to complete the annexation (NOS, 2014). The confirmation of the annexation by the Duma, which is the Russian parliament, had yet to be made (NOS, 2014). However, this was seen as a mere formality, indicating that it was expected to be approved without significant obstacles (NOS, 2014).

Looking at **BBC News**, a whole other frame could be identified. This frame is focused on the smoothness and the secrecy of the annexation. The author of the article describes it as very smooth and the annexation could even be considered "the smoothest invasion of modern times and it was over before the outside world realized it had even started" (Simpson, 2014 para.1).

The bigger part of February 2014 consisted of the silent deployment of thousands of soldiers into the Russian-Crimean bases, which contributed to the overall success of the operation (Simpson, 2014). The first signs of the annexation were the installation of Russian checkpoints at two main road crossings connecting Crimea and mainland Ukraine (Simpson, 2014). It appears that this BBC News author ‘praises’ Russia for carrying out this operation so smoothly and secretly, further reinforcing the narrative of an unsuspected operation that nobody noticed until it actually happened. There is no sign of a negative frame within this item.

**Euractiv** published a news item in collaboration with **Reuters**, adopting a rather different frame than the previously mentioned ones. The frame focused on NATO’s response to the annexation and emphasizes the immediate action taken. According to the article, NATO ceased all cooperation with Russia immediately after the annexation of Crimea (Euractiv & Reuters, 2014). The alliance ordered military commanders to come up with measures aimed at making its defenses stronger and reassuring of other Eastern European countries (Euractiv & Reuters, 2014). All the 28 foreign ministers attended a meeting in which former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen made a statement that business as usual with Russia is over (Euractiv & Reuters, 2014). Thus, the frame adopted by Euractiv and Reuters arguably portrays NATO as the savior or protector, considering the ‘no time to lose’ tone suggesting a sense of urgency and highlighting the perceived importance of taking immediate action.

**Euronews** presented a frame that includes both positive and negative aspects of the annexation. The article namely mentions that Crimean residents were satisfied with joining Russia and highlights positive outcomes brought along by the annexation (Taylor, 2014). However, the article is hinting at a bias by contradicting the positive opinions of the locals and mentioning limited freedom of speech, a ban on the organization of rallies and other restrictions (Taylor, 2014), subtly implying that a problem may indeed exist.

#### 4.1.2 Policy stream

Following the annexation of Crimea, the EU responded with strong condemnation of Russia's actions (van Rompuy, 2014). Former president of the European Council and High Representative Herman van Rompuy delivered a speech immediately after the annexation of Crimea. He emphasized that the annexation constituted a severe violation of Ukrainian sovereignty, urging Russia to withdraw its troops and grant immediate access to international monitors (van Rompuy, 2014). In addition to the speech by van Rompuy, EU deputy ministers held an extraordinary meeting and issued statements expressing the condemnation of Russia's actions (European Council, 2014b). They stated that they, first and foremost stand with Ukraine and reiterate their solidarity. Some other statements were (Council of Europe, 2014):

- that the referendum held on Crimea severely violated Ukrainian law.
- that Russia was urged to engage in a dialogue with the Ukrainian government to find common ground on the crisis and refrain from any type of action that could increase tensions.
- that the Secretary General's initiatives to aid Ukraine with establishing democratic institutions and the protection of human rights should be supported.

During the extraordinary meeting, the EU ministers reached consensus on a first set of sanctions against Russia, which encompassed travel bans and asset freezes (European Council, 2014a). Also, in response to the annexation of Crimea, Japan and other western countries convened in the Hague and arrived at the decision to stop their G8 collaboration with Russia after 16 years (Borger & Watt, 2014). Moreover, they threatened to impose heavy sanctions in case Russia undertook further military actions in the region (Borger & Watt, 2014). This move was meant to isolate Russia, and marked the first time the group convened as the G7 since Russia joined in 1998 (Borger & Watt, 2014). The leaders of the G7 issued a joint statement in which they clarified to not attend the G8 summit that was planned in Sochi in June 2014.



## The EU River With Multiple Streams: The Case of Crimea and mainland Ukraine

Instead, they opted for a meeting in Brussels without Russia, considering they also boycotted a G8 meeting supposed to take place in April 2014 in Moscow (Borger & Watt, 2014). They issued a joined statement explaining that Russia's actions did not meet the standard of the '*shared beliefs and shared responsibilities*' which enabled the G8 to be formed in the first place (Borger & Watt, 2014 para. 4).

Subsequent to the EU ministers' extraordinary meeting, another meeting of foreign ministers took place in March 2014 (Pawlak, 2014). During this meeting, former British Foreign Secretary William Hague and former UK Prime Minister David Cameron urged the EU to prepare heavy economic sanctions against Russia (Pawlak, 2014). Their argument was supported by the fact that a significant number of Russian soldiers remained stationed along Ukraine's eastern border, with only a few having withdrawn (Pawlak, 2014). Hague emphasized that real de-escalation by Russia had yet to come (Pawlak, 2014). Therefore, it was deemed crucial that the European Union would ensure a strong response and should not hesitate to prepare a third round of sanctions, which would include trade and economic measures (Pawlak, 2014).

Hague emphasized Cameron's determination to push for the strongest set of sanctions against Russia (Watt, 2014), after a second round of sanctions was introduced shortly after the first one (European Council & Council of the European Union, 2014). During a European Union Summit in April 2014, Cameron and Hague would push for a third stage of economic and financial sanctions, viewing this as an initial step in addressing the problem (Borger et al. 2014). Another special EU meeting was convened in July 2014, with the purpose of further discussing Crimea and determining the necessity of additional sanctions (European Council, 2014c). During this meeting, it became evident that the efforts of Hague and Cameron had yielded policy reform, as the EU ministers reached consensus on imposing the third round of

sanctions on July 29, 2014 (Borger et al. 2014). These sanctions represented the most extensive measures against Russia since the Cold War and aimed to target banks owned by the state, implement an arms embargo and restrict the export of equipment for Russia's oil industry (Gozi, 2014) In a joint statement, Van Rompuy and former president of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso warned that an illegal annexation and destabilization of a neighboring country are not to be accepted in Europe in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Borger et al. 2014). An EU official highlighted that the most important sanction agreed on by the ministers was the denial of access from European capital markets to Russia's state-owned banks (Borger et al. 2014). This sanction prohibited Europeans from buying financial instruments in Russian banks if the maturity exceeded the 90 day- limit (Borger et al. 2014).

Briefly shifting away from sanctions, the Council of Europe Ministers' Deputies pushed for the protection of minorities in Crimea by means of a so-called ad hoc report (Council of Europe Ministers' Deputies, 2014). Meetings were conducted with the representatives of all minority groups in Crimea, revealing that the degree of minority rights implementation remained unchanged in 2014. Most concern existed among the Crimean Tatars, considering their lives were at stake due their boycott of the referendum on the annexation of Crimea (Council of Europe Ministers' Deputies, 2014). The deputies called for international monitoring of the minority rights on the ground and for the Law on Occupied Territories to not penalize Crimean inhabitants compelled to collaborate with the authorities, further emphasizing their concerns had to be taken into consideration (Council of Europe Ministers' Deputies, 2014).

Building upon the previous discussions surrounding the EU's response to the annexation. Of Crimea and the subsequent imposition of sanctions, it is noteworthy that former Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte pushed for de-escalation of the EU-Russia matter in 2018 (Pullella & Guarascio, 2018). Instead of supporting the renewal of sanctions against Russia every six

months since the introduction in 2014, he urged the EU to be careful. Sanctions would harm Italy's export activities to Russia (Pullella & Guarascio, 2018). Conte intended to push for this matter at a meeting with the EU leaders whereby he would take the floor (Pullella & Guarascio, 2018). However, despite Conte's efforts, the EU opted to continue its course of action and renewed the sanctions against Russia the way it has always done, with the latest renewal occurring in June 2022 (Borrell, 2022).

#### **4.1.3 Politics stream**

In spite of the European Union agreeing on imposing heavy sanctions on Russia in response to the annexation of Crimea, European think tanks have criticized the effectiveness of this course of action (Kolesnikov, 2015 ; Blockmans, 2014 ; Zachmann, 2014). One such think tank, the Carnegie Europe, conducted research on the efficacy of sanctions against Russia. The think tank published this research one year after the annexation of Crimea. Authored by Andrei Kolesnikov (2015), the report challenges the West's prevailing assumptions underlying the utilization of sanctions. According to the report, the West tends to automatically assume that sustained pressure on Russia would cause Putin's regime to fall apart (Kolesnikov, 2015).

It is believed that the economic impact of sanctions will destabilize Russia's economy, prompting both the elite and the citizens to turn against the Kremlin (Kolesnikov, 2015). In addition, it is assumed that military pressure can galvanize ordinary Russian citizens into forming an anti-war movement, forcing Putin to reconsider his ambitions to expand territory. The desired outcome envisioned would be a scenario wherein the Kremlin is forced to undergo a major policy reform and perhaps transitions to democracy (Kolesnikov, 2015). However, Kolesnikov (2015) emphasizes that these assumptions are fundamentally flawed.

According to Kolesnikov (2015), EU policymakers fail to comprehend that this approach will not result in a torn apart regime. Kolesnikov highlights the findings of opinion polls that reveal

a different perspective of Russian citizens. The polls revealed that Russian citizens view the imposed sanctions on Russia as directed to them directly and not at Putin. Furthermore, a poll conducted by the Levada Center, an independent NGO in Russia, revealed that in January 2015 69% of the Russians were in favor of the Kremlin's policy towards Ukraine (Kolesnikov, 2015). Taking these factors into consideration, it becomes apparent that Putin has capitalized on the pressure of the West as a means to garner Russian support, especially from the middle class who owe their wealth to the high oil prices and the economic improvement (Kolesnikov, 2015).

Carnegie Europe is not the only think tank addressing the ineffectiveness of sanctions. The Center for European Policy Studies (CEPS) turned it up a notch and wonders when the EU "is able to overcome its cowardice" (Blockmans, 2014 p.2). After the third stage of sanctions, no new sanctions had been imposed. Instead, the EU opted for the blacklisting of individuals who belong to or benefit from the Russian elite (Blockmans, 2014). Blockmans (2014) states that this is "too little, too late" (p.2) and that the EU is incapable of effectively combatting Russia. Blockmans (2014) emphasized the need for the EU to leverage its status as a significant international actor and suggests that the EU should commence with a thorough review of its strategies, interests and challenges.

He also suggests an update and upgrade of the European Security Strategy adopted in 2003 by the next High Representative. A new upgrade should be formulated in order to align with today's changing world and the EU's position in it (Blockmans, 2014). However, merely developing strategies is not enough to salvage EU foreign policy. Therefore, the policy space between the EU Member States and the EU institution is in need of optimization (Blockmans, 2014). This could be achieved if the next High Representative were to initiate collective action and ensure a better used EU toolbox (Blockmans, 2014). Georg Zachmann (2014) from Bruegel

## The EU River With Multiple Streams: The Case of Crimea and mainland Ukraine

also presents a critical stance on the transposition of sanctions against Russia. In his analysis, Zachmann gets straight to the point and emphasizes that sanctions are not a viable solution, as the situation already arrived at a point of no return (Zachmann, 2014). He argues that when countries transpose sanctions on one another, it results in a cessation of cooperation leading to losses for both sides. The political game of sanctions depends on the value both sides place on the issue at hand (Zachmann, 2014). In the case of Russia, Zachmann highlights that the EU may be in an advantageous position, as the sanctions appear to impact Russia more than they harm the EU. However, he points out that in reality Russia appears to place a higher value on unifying with Crimea than being on good terms with the EU (Zachmann, 2014).

Additionally, Zachmann emphasized that the repercussions of sanctions extend beyond Russia, as Southern European countries have substantial trade ties with Russia (Zachmann, 2014). In essence, Zachman's analysis challenges the effectiveness of sanctions and suggests that the EU leaders should consider the extent to which they wish to continue with the transposition of sanctions. He emphasizes that the effectiveness of sanctions does not lie in the level of damage the sanctioned party could suffer from, but rather in how much harm the sanctioner is willing to tolerate (Zachmann, 2014). Zachmann therefore recommends the EU should shift its focus on targeting Russia on the very sensitive matter of gas imports, as that would send a forceful message while minimizing long-term consequences (Zachmann, 2014).

It appears that Europe's most influential think tanks have been criticizing the EU's actions in cases of a crisis. But public opinion also plays a crucial role in the politics stream. The Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOiS), a German research institute, conducted a survey in 2017 among Crimean residents with the purpose of gathering insights on the status quo. The key takeaways were that:

## The EU River With Multiple Streams: The Case of Crimea and mainland Ukraine

- Crimeans severely distrust the regional institutions.
- Crimean Tatars, an ethnic minority, are more skeptical of the Russian regime than of the Ukrainian regime.
- unlike Crimean Tatars, Crimeans are not interested in Ukraine becoming a member of the EU.
- the majority of the Crimean residents would vote for a Russian annexation again if there were to be a future referendum.
- the majority of the Crimeans trust the Russian institutions (ZOiS, 2017).

One year later in 2018, Moscow correspondent Lucian Kim travelled to Crimea and conducted a firsthand investigation to observe the conditions and way of life under Russian authority. His findings align with the survey conducted by ZOiS. Kim (2018) discovered that the majority of the Crimeans expressed satisfaction with the annexation. Even critics admitted that the presence of Russians in Crimea had resulted in tangible improvements such as improved roads, schools and hospitals due to Putin's investments (Kim, 2018). However, this came at the expense of the political freedom Crimeans used to enjoy when they were still part of Ukraine (Kim, 2018). According to Kim's (2018) interviews, his conversation with a representative of the Crimean Tatars revealed that the contrary of satisfaction was true. The representative revealed that many Crimeans lived in fear, as expressing a critical viewpoint against Putin was answered with consequences (Kim, 2018). This entailed that only those who genuinely support Putin feel comfortable with openly expressing their opinions, while Crimean Tatars faced persecution due to remaining loyal to Ukraine (Kim, 2018) despite the Ukrainian government neglecting the region (ZOiS, 2017).

## The EU River With Multiple Streams: The Case of Crimea and mainland Ukraine

A striking outcome came from an unexpected side. An opinion poll among a thousand Germans conducted by research institute Infratest Dimap revealed that nearly 40% of the German population accepted the annexation of Crimea, sparking quite the debate in Germany (Noack, 2014). The question pending was: Was Germany becoming Russia's closest Western ally after celebrating 25 years of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Soviet era? The truth was that the situation was more complex than that. While 43% of the respondents did not feel an immediate threat by Russian foreign policy, it should be noted that this did not imply they deemed the annexation justified (Noack, 2014)

In contrast to the abovementioned poll, a survey conducted two months prior showed results that 80% of the Germans blame Putin for the escalation of the conflict (Noack, 2014). The first poll thus presents a contrasting perspective, indicating that the German respondents desire Putin to cease his actions in Ukraine (Noack, 2014). However, the respondents have also answered to wish that the West would compromise and formally accept the annexation of Crimea (Noack, 2014). While the results may be perceived as astonishing, it may be attributed to Germany's heavy dependence on Russian oil and the presence of many German business active on Russian territory (Noack, 2014). Any escapade or negative opinion could make them a potential victim of Russian vengeance, which aligned with German former foreign minister Frank- Walter Steinmeier's preference for diplomacy over threat (Noack, 2014).

## 4.2 The case of the Ukrainian regions

### 4.2.1 Problem stream

On 30 September 2022, President Putin signed treaties formalizing the illegal annexation of the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk (the Donbas region), Kherson and Zaporizhzhia (Sauer and Harding, 2022). In contrast to the wars prior to the annexation of Crimea, the war in Ukraine has had a significant impact on Europe, causing the EU Member States to take measures including the postponement of a Belgian nuclear phase-out (Dougall et al. 2022).

The annexation of Ukrainian territory had profound implications for the ongoing war, leading to significant escalation (Dougall et al. 2022). **Euronews**, among other European news outlets, extensively covered the war and the annexation, providing detailed information of Putin's celebration and his speech at the Kremlin and Red Square (Euronews, 2022). The news outlet also highlights Putin's fury and accusation of the West being responsible for the escalation of the conflicts (Euronews, 2022). In addition, Euronews (2022) emphasized the war has already cost the lives of thousands of people, using words and phrases such as "accused" and phrases like "*killed and wounded tens of thousands of people*" (para.7). This framing by Euronews appears to portray the annexation as President Putin being the Russian villain, while he strives to harm Europe and celebrates when harm is inflicted.

According to **The Guardian**, President Putin signed accession treaties that officialized the annexation of the Ukrainian regions, constituting the largest annexation in Europe since WW2 (Sauer & Harding, 2022). The article highlights the use of fake referendums' and 'nuclear threats' (Sauer & Harding, 2022), which would align with the frame used by Euronews. However, the authors also emphasize the response of the EU, the UN and the US, including the imposition of sanctions and condemnation of the annexation through voting rounds. This



## The EU River With Multiple Streams: The Case of Crimea and mainland Ukraine

indicates that The Guardian may have used the same frame as Euronews, but adding that the EU jumps to immediate action in response.

Remarkably enough, **Euractiv** provided insights into Putin's speech wherein he announced the annexation, claiming that the West had been interested in weakening Russia since the demise of the Soviet Union (Brzozowski, 2022). The news item also quoted Putin stating that the citizens of the Ukrainian regions have become Russian citizens forever (Brzozowski, 2022). It can be argued that Euractiv frames Putin as the central figure in the conflict, portraying him as the one being harmed. However, the news item also uses language that could be interpreted as ridiculing Putin, using terms such as 'sham referendums' and 'staged signing ceremony' (Brzozowski, 2022). The measures the EU has taken, such as the imposition of sanctions, appear at the end of the article. Overall, the frame of the article can be described as depicting Putin as acting inappropriately and therefore getting toned down by the EU.

News outlet **Politico** had not published an article after the annexation, but already reported prior to the annexation stating that Russia was preparing to annex the regions after holding sham referenda (Gijs, 2022). The article highlights that the Russian authorities conducted "self-styled" referenda in an attempt to legitimize the annexation (Gijs, 2022 para. 4), adding that Ukrainian voters were held at gunpoint (Gijs, 2022). The article concludes with mentioning the EU's statement about the Kremlin facing severe consequences for escalating the conflict further (Gijs, 2022). Politico's frame suggests that the annexation was not only illegal, but also involved fraudulent referenda and the threatening of voters, with that presenting an overall condemning tone.

Lastly, **BBC News** also commences its article by highlighting that Putin signed documents formalizing the annexation of the Ukrainian regions (Maishman & Williams, 2022). However, the authors quickly shift the focus to Ukraine's military success in recapturing villages in the

Donbas region (Maishman & Williams, 2022). It then proceeds with Putin's announcement regarding the annexation, but nuances it again by emphasizing the ground reality that Ukraine is successfully fighting back in the south and the east (Maishman & Williams, 2022). The authors continue this writing style throughout the article, which can be interpreted as either reassurance about Ukraine's resilience in the face of the conflict or as implying that Russia's actions are pointless and unlikely to succeed.

### **4.2.2 Policy stream**

Already in 2021, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell pushed for a different strategy regarding Russia. He emphasized the need for the EU to simultaneously push back and constrain Russia, while also engage it in political dialogue (Stano, 2021). In June 2021, Borrell presented the Joint Communication on the EU's relations with Russia (Borrell, 2021). The strategy outlined elements such as a more credible sanctions regime alongside a more open stance towards political discourse with Russia (Borrell, 2021), as past aggression by Russia urged the EU to be more cautious (von der Leyen, 2021). However, given Russia's invasion in Ukraine in 2022, it became evident that this desired strategy was no longer applicable and more stringent policy reforms against Russia followed.

As a first response to the annexation of the Ukrainian regions, the EU along with the Member States stated officially to strongly condemn Russia's actions and to unite in their support for Ukraine (European Council, 2022b). The EU made it clear that the illegal referenda held by Russia and the falsified results that have come about would never be recognized (European Council, 2022c), emphasizing that the use of force and coercion to achieve border change are not accepted in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (European Council, 2022b). Since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, both the European Council and Council of the European Union have held regular meetings to address the war. EU leaders ordered Russia to immediately cease all

military operations and withdraw their troops from Ukraine (European Council, 2022b). These statements reflect the EU's firm stance against the annexation and its commitment to upholding international norms and principles.

Shortly after the annexation, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen pushed for an eighth package of sanctions to be imposed on Russia during a two-day meeting of European leaders (Baczynska et al. 2022). She eventually succeeded as the European Commission announced the imposition of this eighth round of sanctions shortly after (European Commission, 2022). The fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh round of sanctions had already been imposed in response to Russia's invasion in Ukraine that started in February 2022 (European Commission, 2022). The eighth round included measures such as trade restrictions, an expansion of the list of blacklisted Russian individuals and an oil price cap (European Council, 2022a). Additional sanctions included an extended list of restricted items that would enhance Russian technology and military, a prohibition on EU citizens fulfilling functions at governing bodies, a ban on crypto-asset wallets etc. (European Council, 2022a). The aim of these sanctions was the coercion of the Russian economy and government, the weakening of the military and holding Putin accountable for escalating the conflict (European Council, 2022a).

During a meeting held on 20 and 21 October 2022, EU leaders gathered to discuss the ongoing military aggression against Ukraine (EUreporter, 2022). The meeting commenced with the usual address by European Parliament's president Roberta Metsola, wherein she emphasized that Europe is being defended by Ukraine and stressed the importance of justice as a means to achieve real peace (EUreporter, 2022). Furthermore, she confirmed that the European Union would provide political, financial and humanitarian support to Ukraine and pushed for providing military support to Ukraine (EUreporter, 2022). According to Metsola, Ukrainians required the means to defend themselves and their country. Considering that the war entered a

new and more dangerous phase they would “*need the heavy armor that will allow them to push back*” (EUReporter, 2022 para.3). During the last regular EU meeting of 2022, Metsola pushed for even more lethal sanctions, in which she succeeded (Anghel, 2022). The EU leaders reached an agreement and on 16 December 2022 a ninth round of sanctions was imposed on Russia in another attempt to curb its aggression (Anghel, 2022). This round of sanctions included a ban on the export of drone engines, bank transactions involving the Russian Regional Development Bank, a suspension on broadcasting licenses etc. (European Council and Council of the European Union, 2022).

Then in February 2023, Borrell announced a tenth round of sanctions against Russia as it marked the one-year anniversary of the war (Borrell, 2023). The sanctions are targeted at an additional 100 individuals that played a role in the aggression against Ukraine. Furthermore, additional restrictive measures on media and the banking sector have been applied (Borrell, 2023). Since the adoption of the tenth round of sanctions, there have been recent developments regarding the sanctions. The Wagner Group, a violent Russian military organization playing a role in the war (BBC News, 2023), and RIA FAN, a Russian propagandic press agency (European Council & Council of the European Union, 2023), were added to the list of sanctioned individuals involved in the war (European Council & Council of the European Union, 2023). Given that the war in Ukraine is still ongoing, it is highly likely that more policies and measures will follow.

#### **4.2.3 Politics stream**

Several surveys were conducted among Ukrainians and other European citizens to capture their opinions on the annexation of the Ukrainian regions. One notable survey was conducted by the YouGov-Cambridge Globalism Project in 25 large countries, focusing on the satisfaction with

the EU's policy towards Russia (Henley, 2022). The results revealed that the respondents strongly support the EU's tough and expanding measures against Russia (Henley, 2022).

However, the survey yielded a surprising outcome. While respondents generally expressed satisfaction with the EU's actions, there were significant percentages of respondents in multiple Western countries who showed sympathy towards Russia (Henley, 2022). The polling took place between 24 August and 22 September 2022 and revealed that ten out of thirteen western countries expressed support for the sanctions (Henley, 2022). However, it is noteworthy that 43% of the French and German respondents did not favor the sanctions against Russia (Henley, 2022). Although specific reasons behind their stance were not mentioned, a possible explanation could be related to the European energy shortages. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, for instance, rejected calls to fully ban oil and gas from Russia due to concerns about Europe's reliance on Russia as an energy supplier (von der Burchard & Sugue, 2022). This may suggest that Europe's heavy dependence on Russian gas plays a significant role in the dissatisfaction with sanctions, though this must be further investigated to generate a definitive explanation.

According to a survey conducted by the Eurobarometer among European citizens, the majority of the respondents expressed support for the EU's sanctions policy against Russia (Eurobarometer, 2022). Eight in ten respondents expressed support, with 55% fully supporting and 25% having the tendency to support sanctions against Russia (Eurobarometer, 2022). However, some think tanks hold a more cautious view regarding the effectiveness of sanctions. Carnegie Europe, for instance, highlights that while sanctions may have a negative impact on Russia's economy and may put pressure on Putin, they are unlikely to result in a resolution of the conflict (Dempsey, 2022). It does not matter how lethal the sanctions may be, Putin shows no signs of ceasing the war in Ukraine in the near future (Dempsey, 2022).

## The EU River With Multiple Streams: The Case of Crimea and mainland Ukraine

Bruegel highlighted the flaws identified in the EU's sanctions policy and strong elements in Russia's defense. Demertzis et al. (2022) argue that Russia's strongest defense point could be found in the Central Bank of Russia, the designer and executor of Fortress Russia. This is a policy that strives to protect Russia's financial system consisting of a 640-billion-euro reserve (Woods, 2022). Despite significant harm inflicted on the Russian economy and central bank assets, the bank managed to maintain a considerable foreign currency reserve through effective management and system recovery (Demertzis et al. 2022).

In spite of the restrictions on Russian banks, particularly the loss of access to the SWIFT system for financial transfers, it appears alternative channels are still available to ensure their operational cash flow (Demertzis et al. 2022). They enable Russian banks to maintain their interactions with the global financial system. Thus, although the banks have faced challenges, the overall financial system remained intact, avoiding an economic collapse thanks to the Central Bank of Russia (Demertzis et al. 2022). Moreover, while certain sanctions targeted Russia's business activities, the effectiveness is limited due to Russia's relatively low dependence on imports compared to other advanced economies. The sanctions have been successful in the restriction of Russia's access to the most critical imports, such as manufacturing parts, but the overall impact is constrained by the structure of the economy (Demertzis et al. 2022).

Furthermore, despite being excluded from a significant number of import markets, Russia managed to find alternative markets to fulfil many of its needs (Demertzis et al. 2022). Bruegel's analysis reveals that the sanctions has been even less successful when it comes to Russian exports. Even though several countries boycotted Russian goods, the flow of essential supplies remained uninterrupted (Demertzis et al. 2022). In addition, the inflationary pressures in Europe have actually benefited Russia due to a significant increase in export income. Bruegel

## The EU River With Multiple Streams: The Case of Crimea and mainland Ukraine

estimated that Russia's export income has risen by more than 40% due to skyrocketing prices, and it is likely to remain this high (Demertzis et al. 2022). This is primarily driven by Russia's leverage in the natural gas sector, which, as mentioned earlier, continues to be in high demand in Europe and has not been targeted by sanctions, unlike coal and oil (Demertzis et al. 2022).

The CEPS shares a similar viewpoint with Bruegel, suggesting that the impact of sanctions on the Russian economy is not as significant as initially anticipated (Alcidi et al. 2023). Russia's monetary balance remains in a substantial surplus, and monetary resources continue to flow into the country. According to Alcidi et al. (2023), one major reason for the limited impact of sanctions is their lack of global adoption. While the EU restricted trade activities with Russia, countries such as China, India, Turkey and Belarus have actually advanced their trade relations with Russia, undermining the effect of European sanctions (Alcidi et al. 2023 ; Medunic, 2023).

Furthermore, Russia is on a quest for ways to reduce its dependence on the US dollar (Alcidi et al. 2023). It appears that the Chinese yuan serves as a substitute for the US dollar, which in turn weakens the effect of American sanctions (Alcidi et al. 2023). Building upon the insights provided by the abovementioned think tanks, it appears that Borrell echoes their findings and has grown to realize that additional sanctions may not yield the desired outcome. He namely made a striking confession in March 2023 and stated that the EU is running out of options to impose sanctions on, thereby suggesting that military and financial aid are only measures left to take (Brzozowski, 2023).

## 5. Analysis

The research question of this thesis was “**What factors are responsible for EU foreign policy reform in the aftermath of illegal annexations?**” With the help of Kingdon’s Multiple Streams Framework, it was possible to draw six expectations for two cases. These expectations assist in identifying what factors in EU foreign policymaking resulted in the imposition of sanctions as policy reform, which enabled the generation of an ultimate answer for the research question.

In this section, the data has been placed under the magnifying glass of Kingdon’s MSF. The Analysis is split into two sections. The first section focuses on each case individually, analyzing each stream and addressing the corresponding expectations. It commences with examination of the case of Crimea and proceeds with the case of the Ukrainian regions immediately after. The second section presents an overall analysis wherein the two cases will be compared using Kingdon’s MSF.

### 5.1 Kingdon’s theory applied to Crimea.

- **E1 for the problem stream:** The focusing event was framed as a problem and provided a contribution to the adoption of sanctions against as EU foreign policy reform.
- **E2 for the policy stream:** The political discourse between policy entrepreneurs contributed to the adoption of sanctions against Russia as EU foreign policy reform.
- **E3 for the politics stream:** The influence of think tanks and swings of European mood contributed to the adoption of sanctions against Russia as EU foreign policy reform.



### 5.1.1 E1: Problem stream

The annexation of Crimea in 2014 seemed to be a more serious and concerning matter than anything else that occurred before. However, despite the seriousness and concerning nature of the annexation, it did not appear that the media framed it as an actual crisis in urgent need of government intervention or policy reform. For instance, Politico mostly highlighted Putin's anger towards the West (Politico, 2014), Euractiv focused more on NATO jumping to action by ceasing cooperation with Russia (Euractiv & Reuters, 2014), and BBC News even appeared to praise Russia for running the annexation so 'smoothly' (Simpson, 2014). Euronews as the only news outlet did imply that the Crimean residents may be in danger due to their limited freedom of speech and several other restrictions imposed by the Russian authorities (Taylor, 2014). Euractiv addresses NATO's concern about Eastern European countries, but it appears that the measures NATO took mostly had the purpose of reassurance for Eastern European countries (Euractiv & Reuters, 2014). The data suggests that European news outlets mostly adopted storytelling frames that simply reported on the events without implying a direct threat looming over the EU.

It is interesting that Euractiv, being an EU newspaper that typically covers policymaking (Europa Nu, n.d.), did not frame the annexation as an actual problem. If anything, all the action taken by the EU (elaborated on under **5.1.2 E2 Policy stream**), especially the G8 ceasing their collaboration with Russia and continuing as the G7 (Borger & Watt, 2014), appears to be driven more by moral principles, i.e. standing with Crimea and support them, rather than by the perception of a threat to the bloc. Therefore, it may be argued that **E1 The focusing event was framed as a problem and provided a contribution to the adoption of sanctions against as EU foreign policy reform** can be disconfirmed, as European media never framed the annexation as a threatening development for Europe. Therefore, no direct evidence was found to support that the policy reform was a direct consequence of adopting a particular frame.

### **5.1.2 E2: Policy stream**

Even though the framing by the media most likely did not raise concerns about the annexation, the EU's increasing concern for Putin's unpredictability could be identified in the policy stream. This was evident through the strong condemnation of Russia's actions by then president of the European Council Herman van Rompuy, immediately after the annexation (van Rompuy, 2014). What followed were numerous instances of political discourse in the form of meetings and the ultimate implementation of a hard policy reform on Russia, namely the first round of sanctions (European Council, 2014a).

One could argue that in the policy stream, former UK Prime Minister David Cameron and former Foreign Secretary William Hague were two policy entrepreneurs playing a significant role in pushing for the implementation of the third round of sanctions and getting the majority of actors on board. Examining Kingdon's statements about the policy stream, who argues that solutions to problems are constantly circling around in the policy stream, it can be argued that sanctions represent an example of a solution always floating around in the policy stream awaiting a problem to be connected to. In this case, the problem at hand was the annexation of Crimea, and the EU imposed multiple rounds of sanctions against Russia as a response to the problem. As the Russian economy has been sanctioned continuously, one can argue that the imposition of every round of sanctions was floating around in the policy stream waiting for Russia to make another move.

A third policy entrepreneur could arguably be former Italian Prime Minister Conte, who pushed for de-escalation of the conflict (Pullella & Guarascio, 2018), but unfortunately did not succeed in achieving his desired outcome, as rounds of sanctions and renewals kept following. The Deputies of the Council of Europe Ministers, with their ad hoc report on the protection of minorities in Crimea (Council of Europe Ministers' Deputies, 2014), could also be considered

policy entrepreneurs. It was clear that they did not succeed in achieving their desired outcome yet in 2018, as correspondent Kim interviewed a Crimean Tatar who did not feel at ease in Crimea (Kim, 2018). It is, however, unclear whether the desired policy outcomes, such as the implementation of new laws regarding Crimean minorities in Ukraine, were achieved in the end. Kingdon (1984) states that policy entrepreneurs make use of politically advantageous developments, which is exactly what Hague and Cameron did by waiting for the European Union Summit to push for the third round of sanctions (Borger et al. 2014). Thus, they represent the policy entrepreneurs that were successful in achieving policy reform. Therefore, one can argue that **E2 The political discourse between policy entrepreneurs contributed to the adoption of sanctions against Russia as EU foreign policy reform can be confirmed.**

### **5.1.3 E3 Politics stream**

Despite the EU's preference for implementing sanctions as a means to induce behavioral change, it is interesting to mention the high resistance to their effectiveness. The European Union's most influential think tanks have conducted research and concluded that sanctions are hardly effective when it comes to Russia. Already the year following the annexation, Carnegie Europe published a report discovering that EU policymakers lack understanding of the Russian regime and often view sanctions as the golden solution (Kolesnikov, 2015). The CEPS takes it up a notch by stating that the EU is a "coward" for only continuing to blacklist individuals belonging to the Russian elite or playing a role in the annexation (Blockmans, 2014). Interestingly, not one think tank mentioned under **Results** section **4.1.3 Politics stream** has found results that the EU's sanction policy is actually doing what it is aimed to do, namely crippling Russia's economy.

What is even more striking, is the lack of consideration by EU policymakers to the recommendations of think tanks regarding more effective foreign policies towards Russia.

Despite the think tanks continuously emphasizing the lack of effectiveness of the sanctions, EU policymakers have continued this course of action, with the last renewal taking place in 2022 (Borrell, 2022). Furthermore, no data could be found on the opinions of European citizens. While one survey captured the opinions of Crimeans, it remains challenging to ascertain their true opinions regarding the Russian annexation, given the limitations of freedom of speech and the potential persecution faced by minorities. It can therefore be argued that **E3 The influence of think tanks and swings of European mood contributed to the adoption of sanctions against Russia as EU foreign policy reform** can be disconfirmed. The opposite is in fact true, as think tanks are in fact the ones expressing their discontent on sanctions, and no data was found on swings of European mood regarding the imposition of sanctions.

## **5.2 Kingdon's theory applied to the Ukrainian regions.**

- **E1 for the problem stream:** The focusing event was framed as a problem and provided a contribution to the adoption of sanctions against as EU foreign policy reform.
- **E2 for the policy stream:** The political discourse between policy entrepreneurs contributed to the adoption of sanctions against Russia as EU foreign policy reform.
- **E3 for the politics stream:** The influence of think tanks and swings of European mood contributed to the adoption of sanctions against Russia as EU foreign policy reform.

### **5.2.1 E1 Problem stream**

A remarkable difference in framing can be identified with this annexation. Results illustrated that Euronews, for instance, framed the problem as Putin being the antagonist while highlighting his capacity for destruction at will (Euronews, 2022). Especially with the use of the particular phrase “killed and wounded tens of thousands of people”, Euronews utilizes a loud voice and alarming frame. The Guardian utilizes particular words such as ‘fake referendums’ and ‘nuclear threats’ which implies that an actual problem exists (Sauer & Harding, 2022).

In addition to the word use of the news outlets, the structure of the articles is noteworthy. Taking a glance at The Guardian, Politico and BBC News, it can be argued that the three news outlets have a similar lay out. The three of them namely commenced with framing the annexation as a problem, but conclude their story with a positive tone. Both the Guardian and Politico highlighted the EU taking suitable action in response (Sauer & Harding, 2022 ; Gijs, 2022), while BBC News focused on Ukraine successfully recapturing villages and fighting back against the Russian aggression (Maishman & Williams, 2022). It can thus be argued that these three news outlets do acknowledge the problem at hand, but make efforts to counterbalance it through a reassuring tone by emphasizing the positive elements at the very end. The article written by BBC news indicates an even more remarkable element. The authors consistently contradict negative phrases, such as mentioning Putin’s ceremonial announcement of the annexation, with positive ones such as highlighting that Ukraine was already succeeding in fighting back in the east and the south.

However, despite the confirmation about the framing being more alarming within this case, no definitive claim can be made whether it provided a contribution to EU foreign policy reform. The war in Ukraine constituted the main problem that was already ongoing prior to the

annexation, rendering the annexation of the Ukrainian regions a subproblem. Considering this backdrop, one may argue that **E1** for case 2 **The focusing event was framed as a problem and provided a contribution to the adoption of sanctions against as EU foreign policy reform** can be neither confirmed nor disconfirmed within this research. The European news outlets collectively imply the presence of a problem: Russia's capability of causing problems at its discretion, thereby triggering the EU to intervene to prevent President Putin from further escalation. However, the claim of an actual contribution to policy reform is in need of further examination.

### **5.2.2 E2 Policy stream**

Results have indicated that the policy stream was hectic after the annexation of the Ukrainian regions, which occurred eight years after the annexation of Crimea. Even a year before the war in Ukraine started, which is a year and a half before Putin annexed the regions, Josep Borrell emphasized the importance of revising EU strategy towards Russia, which arguably suggests that the EU was aware of Russia's unpredictability (Stano, 2021). The EU's concerns were more than valid, as Russia indeed made another aggressive move by invading Ukraine and formally annexing four Ukrainian regions. Following the annexation, numerous meetings involving EU policymakers and other actors have taken place in order to discuss the course of action forward. It is striking that this case demonstrated such a clear contrast compared to Crimea, as the most important EU actors have stepped forward and pushed for their own desired outcomes. An explanation for this could be the ongoing war prior to the annexation, or this annexation being the second one on European territory (Kingdon, 1984).

Within this context, one can argue that two individuals stood out as policy entrepreneurs, namely European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen and European Parliament chief Roberta Metsola. Von der Leyen played a prominent role by advocating for the initial policy

reform. Metsola stood out for her continued support for the transposition of sanctions (EUReporter, 2022). Following the annexation, von der Leyen pushed for an eight package of sanctions (Baczysnka et al. 2022) and succeeded in achieving this, as they were introduced shortly after (European Commission, 2022). Metsola in turn succeeded in advocating for military support for Ukraine and yet another round of biting sanctions on Russia (Anghel, 2022). Considering the above, it can be argued that **E2 The political discourse between policy entrepreneurs contributed to the adoption of sanctions against Russia as EU foreign policy reform can be confirmed.**

### 5.2.3 E3 Politics stream

From the results found, one can draw the conclusion that the political stream surrounding the case of the Ukrainian regions exhibited a higher level of activity than with the case of Crimea. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that no results could be retrieved regarding surveys conducted among European citizens to gather data on their perspectives concerning the annexation of Crimea. However, multiple surveys had been conducted after the annexation of the Ukrainian regions, shedding light on public opinion regarding the events. What is striking as well, is that the majority of the European citizens appear to support EU foreign policy as is. The survey results have demonstrated a prevailing feeling of satisfaction with the support rendered to Ukraine and the sanctions against Russia (Eurobarometer, 2022 ; Henley, 2022). So far, results indicated that that think tanks emerged as the only actors expressing dissatisfaction with the EU's sanctions policy. Some think tanks have even researched alternative courses of action most likely generating a better outcome than continuing with the current sanction policy.

Despite the most influential European think tanks' efforts to convince the European Union to alter its course of action, Josep Borrell announced a tenth round of sanctions in February 2023,

as this month marked the one-year anniversary of the Russian invasion in Ukraine (Borrell, 2023). The same month, the CEPS published a report highlighting the limited impact of sanctions compared to initial expectations (Alcidi et al. 2023). Then in March 2023, Borrell admitted that there is not much left for the EU to impose sanctions on, thereby asserting that for now the only way forward is to assist Ukraine with military and financial support (Brzozowski, 2023).

The timing between the published report and the confession made by Borrell is remarkable, which suggests a potential influence exerted by the think tanks. It may well be the case that think tanks played a part in persuading Borrell to reconsider the effectiveness of the sanctions as a viable approach moving forward. However, the collected data does not provide enough evidence to for this claim to supported, and discourse among the EU and think tanks may still be ongoing. Therefore, **E3 The influence of think tanks and swings of European mood contributed to the adoption of sanctions against Russia as EU foreign policy reform can neither be confirmed nor disconfirmed** as more data will be necessary.

## **5.3 Overall analysis: Crimea vs. Ukraine**

### **5.3.1 Perception of the problem**

In his theory, Kingdon (1984) stated that problems are often in need of a push, such as a focusing event, to capture the attention of government actors or non-government actors. The theory also outlines that if conditions are not worsened to crisis proportions, the problem may not be sufficiently visible for the government to recognize it as a problem. These statements can be applied to both annexation cases, as they were perceived as two focusing events or crises that subsequently became priorities on the government agenda. This aligns with Juncos' (2015)



findings about the Kosovo war being perceived as a critical juncture resulting in policy reform. However, a disparity between the two cases exists, as one annexation was perceived more of a problem than the other. From this point forward, the remarkable difference between the two cases will be scrutinized and elaborated on.

Kingdon's (1984) assertion that focusing events may not be powerful enough on their own are applicable to these two cases, as the annexation of Crimea arguably appeared to contain fewer active streams compared to the annexation of the Ukrainian regions. This may be the case due to the annexation of Crimea being the first European annexation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, resulting in the issue presumably not preoccupying the minds of governments and society beforehand. Therefore, European media did not feel the urge to frame it as an actual problem for Europe, aligning with Ikani's (2021) argument that the annexation of Crimea was framed as an incident not meant to be raising concerns. In contrast, the second annexation was framed as an actual problem. Moreover, the annexation of the Ukrainian regions had an added advantage: namely that it unfolded during a war. As a result, the problem of the war in Ukraine already represented a salient topic on the government agenda and within the minds of the public. One could therefore safely draw the argument that the annexation of the Ukrainian regions served as the second focusing event, necessitating heightened awareness regarding Russia's aggression, as it entailed yet another case of annexation by Putin that could not be disregarded.

### **5.3.2 Policy entrepreneurs**

Examining both cases, the conclusion can be drawn that the policy streams demonstrated an equal amount of political discourse. Nonetheless, the policy stream for the Ukrainian regions showed more drastic policy reform compared to the one for Crimea, whereby the transposition of sanctions appeared to be the primary policy reform. The continuous imposition of sanctions Russia aligns with the research conducted by Karacusulu and Karakir (2014), who explored

the motives underlying EU sanctions. In these cases, it would be human rights defense and arguably, combatting terrorism.

Moreover, prominent EU actors functioned as policy entrepreneurs in advocating for their desired policy interests. Kingdon (1984) highlights that policy entrepreneurs wait for politically advantageous developments before striking. In the case of Crimea, Hague and Cameron strategically chose to exert their influence during a European Union Summit (Borger et al. 2014), a gathering where most likely numerous significant actors would be present. In the case of the Ukrainian regions, von der Leyen seized the opportunity of a two-day meeting to push for the imposition of the eighth round of sanctions. Lastly, Metsola waited for a specific meeting where the EU would discuss the situation with Russia, before pushing for the ninth round of sanctions and military assistance to Ukraine (European Council & Council of the European Union, 2014). Thus, the three important political developments were the EU Summit and two meetings among EU leaders. The presence of these policy entrepreneurs and their influence corresponds with Voltolini's (2015) conclusion about policy entrepreneurs causing changes in EU foreign policy.

As mentioned earlier, the war in Ukraine had already been going on for more than six months prior to the annexation. It can be speculated that EU leaders stepped up as policy entrepreneurs due to dealing with the Russian invasion beforehand, with the annexation of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia being the last straw, as human rights and security had once again been violated. However, no results could be found to be able to support this claim. Conducting interviews with the relevant actors involved would be necessary to obtain a definitive answer and shed light on their motivations and perspectives.

### **5.3.3 Think tanks, the public and a window of opportunity**

As mentioned before, the politics stream for Ukraine demonstrated more activity compared to the one for Crimea. Kingdon (1984) rightfully stated that media coverage exerts a significant influence on shaping the mass public's opinion on government problems. The media had framed the annexation of the Ukrainian regions as a problem, making it highly likely that this influenced public perception and facilitated the generation of individual opinions, which ultimately provided means for the Eurobarometer to conduct surveys. As survey results have presented little to no dissatisfaction with the EU's current sanctions policy towards Russia (Eurobarometer, 2022), swings of European mood have not really occurred, suggesting that agenda setting was not necessary.

However, it is worth mentioning that think tanks expressed their dissatisfaction with the EU's sanction policy in both cases. The imposition of sanctions provided a window of opportunity for think tanks to advocate for their policy interests. Within both cases, numerous rounds of sanctions have been imposed, with the majority of them being present in the case of the Ukrainian regions. Thus, the think tanks have made use of numerous windows of opportunity. However, despite their research and publications, the EU leaders appeared to disregard their arguments and continued with the sanctions policy against Russia. A claim could be made that the think tanks were unable to effectively persuade EU policymakers to alter their course of action and refrain from using sanctions as a policy reform, despite their utilization of the window of opportunity. However, to be able to substantiate this claim and gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play, further research needs to be conducted. Conducting interviews with the relevant actors involved in the policymaking process would provide concrete evidence and insights into the reasons behind the reluctance to adopt the proposed policy reforms. By delving into the perspectives and rationales of key stakeholders, a more comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing policy outcomes can be achieved.

### 5.3.4 The answer to the research question

This thesis researched several factors that may have had an influence on policy reform, in particular during cases of annexation. It has done so with the help of Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework, a robust and tailormade model to utilize for the analysis of policymaking. The thesis utilized a number of indicators pertaining to both the independent and dependent variable. The theory demonstrates the diverse nature of the independent variable, consisting of the factors that are responsible for policymaking, such as a window of opportunity through which actors can influence EU foreign policy. The corresponding indicators were **framing, political discourse, the influence of policy entrepreneurs** and **the influence of think tanks**.

For both cases, this research has revealed the major influence of policy entrepreneurs as an important indicator in the policy stream. The influence of think tanks is generically evident in the politics stream, but unfortunately not within these cases due to their inability to achieve their desired policy reform despite the window of opportunity. Framing also proved an important indicator in the problem stream of both cases, as it may have had an effect on the politics stream. Had the annexation of Crimea been framed as a problem, public opinion may have mobilized resulting in the swings of European mood, which would align with the findings of Voltolini's (2015) on the generation of a new frame. Concerning the dependent variable, which pertains to EU foreign policy reform, one may draw the argument that policies in general could be sensitive to reform with the right amount of effort.

The indicators associated with the dependent variable were **policy reform** and **voices of the public**. Within both cases, policy reform materialized in the implementation of sanctions against Russia and the dependent variable presented itself as sensitive to reform, presumably due to those in power acting as policy entrepreneurs and thereby accelerating the process of policy reform. In light of the evidence gathered from conducting research on the two

annexation cases, the research question ‘**What factors are responsible for European foreign policy reform in the aftermath of illegal annexations?**’ can be answered. It can be argued that the most influential factor leading to EU foreign policy reform, i.e. the imposition of sanctions, is the impact of policy entrepreneurs, particularly those in positions of power. Their privileged position as president of EU institutions and national leader, together with the acknowledgement of an actual problem having occurred, enabled them to even accelerate policy reform by directly pushing for their interests. While Kingdon (1984) mentions that the politics stream holds significant power, this research highlights the dominance of the policy stream, particularly in the presence of influential policy entrepreneurs.

## 6. Conclusion

Unforeseen events such as international crises and conflicts may call for different approaches than anticipated before. This is no different when it comes to the CFSP, as every security threat to the European Union contains different characteristics and might need tailormade action. The results in this research have contributed to the already existing paradigm that policymaking is a complex process with lots of layers to pass before actually reaching policy implementation/reform. They also demonstrated the numerous actors, both state and non-state, that are involved in the entire process of policymaking. Fortunately, Kingdon's MSF is designed to better comprehend this process and hopefully provides opportunities for further research. Therefore, this thesis sought to provide an answer to the research question **“What factors are responsible for EU foreign policy reform in the aftermath of illegal annexations?”**

In order to generate a suitable answer to the research question, the annexation of Crimea and the annexation of the Ukrainian regions have been brought under the magnifying glass of Kingdon's MSF. The theory and existing literature provided enough means to draw a total of six expectations for two cases, three representing the three streams and a fourth one to represent the interplay between them. Said cases represented focusing events challenging the EU to take effective action. The theory enabled the generation of the important indicators “framing”, “policy reform,” “political discourse”, “policy entrepreneurs, “think tanks” and “voices of the public”. With the help of the indicators, it was possible to identify what factors played a role within the three streams. In addition to desk research, field research could have contributed positively to this thesis. It was, however, not possible to conduct given the time frame.

Examining Kingdon's theory, it was expected that the interplay between the problem, policy and politics stream would cause EU foreign policy reform. However, derived from the data collected from news outlets, the EU archives and findings from think tanks, an astonishing discovery was made. It appeared that in these cases the policy entrepreneurs in the policy stream were dominant and were able to implement their desired policy reform. Given their privileged position, obstacles to overcome were limited or non-existent. Furthermore, it appeared that the think tanks did not make use of the window of opportunity, namely advocating for a different policy reform than sanctions, presented to them.

### **6.1 Limitations of the study**

The data for this thesis was collected by solely conducting desk research. While the collected data was diverse in order to ensure internal validity while generating solid results, the absence of field research may have limited access to valuable data that could have been obtained through interviewing relevant actors. During the process of data collection, it became evident that particular crucial information was not accessible solely through desk research. Detailed data on how think tanks capitalized on the window of opportunity could not be found. This information would have provided even stronger evidence for this research, but did open doors for further research if combined with field research.

A second limitation pertains to the representativeness of the results. As mentioned under section **3.6 Reliability and validity**, this thesis examined two annexation cases that both occurred on Ukrainian territory and were instigated by the same individual, namely President Putin, despite a significant time gap between them. The relationship between Russia and the EU has always been turbulent and it may therefore have been the case that this particular matter influenced this research's outcome. Moreover, the focus is put solely on the EU's foreign

policy and particular its “defense” mechanism for Russia, implying that the application of Kingdon’s Multiple Streams Framework on other policy areas is likely to yield different results. This does, however, not invalidate the usefulness of this thesis’ findings as a guiding tool for researching other European policy areas or different types of threats.

A third limitation relates to the overall perception of the annexations, with overestimation of some expectations as a direct result. Existing literature pointed out that the annexation of Crimea marked a turning point in the EU’s policy towards Russia. This influenced positive expectations concerning the framing of the event as a problem. However, this desired problem perception of the annexation of Crimea by the EU did not materialize as anticipated. The same counts for the politics stream of both cases, as more results on swings of European mood were expected. A last limitation was also found in the politics stream. Data on the attitudes of Crimeans towards the annexation was collected, and except for the Crimean Tatars, the results mostly revealed satisfaction with the situation at hand. Due to limits in freedom of speech and fear of prosecution, this data was unfortunately not at its full potential to be considered reliable enough for the politics stream.



## **6.2 Opportunities for further research**

The data collection process revealed that the difference in problem perception in the problem stream plays a significant part in activity in the politics stream, in particular the opinions of the public that may cause swings of national mood according to Kingdon. Further research is, however, necessary to identify or disconfirm this potential causal relationship and to be able to provide a definitive answer. A recommendation could be to study if a paradigm shift has occurred causing a contrast in problem perception even prior to the annexation, considering the fact that the annexations have taken place on territory belonging to the same country.

Furthermore, as the European Union has been highly dependent on Russia in terms of gas import, the theory of historical institutionalism with its corresponding concept of path dependence could be used to research how EU decision-making is influenced by the complicated trade relationship with Russia. Lastly, as the war in Ukraine is still ongoing and other developments in either security or policymaking are likely to unfold, doors are opened to further investigate the role of the three streams in policymaking.

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