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EU Sanctions Against Russia: Domestic Influence of Poland and Hungary



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Abstract

This research investigates the continuity of European Union (EU) sanctions against Russia in the aftermath of the 2014 Crimea annexation, highlighting the diversity of member state attitudes towards Russia. The research question that will be answered is: How does the interaction between domestic- and EU-level, within both conciliatory and hardline member states, influence the continuity of EU sanctions against Russia? Putnam's two-level game theory is employed, providing a framework to analyze the interaction between domestic political considerations and international negotiations. This study formulates two hypotheses: Hypothesis 1 posits that dissatisfaction with a larger sanction package among hardline states facilitates agreement in the European Council, and Hypothesis 2 suggests that satisfaction with a larger sanction package among conciliatory states similarly facilitates agreement. A qualitative comparative analysis between Hungary and Poland tests these hypotheses. It utilizes national policy papers, position tracing through secondary literature, and public opinion polls to examine the rationale behind each country's approach, the satisfaction among political leaders, public opinion, and business elites on the EU sanction package against Russia. The analysis finds evidence in support of both hypotheses, demonstrating the ways in which the domestic public can influence negotiations within the European Council, particularly concerning sanctions against Russia.

1. Introduction

In the spring of 2014, the international community witnessed a significant geopolitical upheaval marked by Russia's annexation of Crimea and the subsequent destabilization of eastern Ukraine. The events surrounding these developments elicited profound reactions globally. These reactions had grave implications for the established norms of international relations. In response to this confrontation, the European Union (EU) imposed economic sanctions through the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Despite an initial united response within the European Council, the inherent political diversity of member states' attitudes towards Russia became apparent soon after (Siddi 2017).

These responses can be put on a policy spectrum ranging from members taking a conciliatory, an in-between approach, or a hardline approach. This spectrum goes from preferring no sanction against Russia to a full embargo. Countries like Slovenia, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Greece, Austria, and Hungary take the conciliatory approach (Webber 2019). The in-between countries are France and Germany. These were previously the E3 countries, adding the UK to this list before the referendum (Webber 2019). Member states taking a hardline approach are Poland, Romania, the Baltic nations, and the Nordic countries. Each countries approach is rooted in political, economic, and historical considerations (Webber 2019).

Russia has sought to fracture public opinion within EU member states in an attempt to exploit the apparent division, aiming to impede the extension of sanctions and undermine broader EU foreign policy goals (Karolewski and Davis-Cross 2017). The actions they undertook varied from bolstering connections with EU countries, to disseminating misinformation ahead of elections, and imposing retaliatory measures, such as a food embargo, adversely affecting economically fragile EU nations (Orenstein and Kelemen 2017). Some

member states were dissatisfied with the sanction package and later on with the countermeasures imposed by the EU, as they saw the political and economic cost it had (Giumelli 2017). This gave an unlikely outlook on the continuation of a unified front on the imposed sanction regime. Nonetheless, for six years the sanction package remained the same. This begs the question of how the EU was capable of maintaining its sanction package amidst opposing views within the EU political landscape. More concretely, the research question that will be answered is: How does the interaction between domestic- and EU-level, within both conciliatory and hardline member states, influence the continuity of EU sanctions against Russia?

The two-level game framework coined by Putnam (1988) will be utilized to answer this question. This theory will be implemented in the context of the EU sanction decision-making process. Within this framework, it considers the interaction between, Level I, the international level which includes the European Council, consisting of heads of states of EU member states, and Level II, the domestic public. Three variables are considered to understand the policy positions: (I) the position of national political leaders of the governing party, (II) public opinion, and (III) business elites. The main contention is that when parts of the domestic public in a hardline state are unsatisfied with a bigger sanction package against Russia it facilitates agreement in the European Council. This is also argued the other way around, that when parts of the domestic public is satisfied with a bigger sanction package in a country taking a conciliatory approach it facilitates agreement in the European Council.

The existing literature on sanctions and EU negotiations primarily focuses on the process leading to the imposition of sanctions in 2014. Limited attention has been given to understanding the endurance of consensus in the years following. While significant emphasis is placed on the roles of major EU member states like Germany, France, and the UK in shaping EU foreign policy (Pond 2015; Corzet 2020; Hayashi 2019), there remains a gap in

comprehensively explaining how consensus is maintained regarding the continuation of sanctions against Russia. Narratives mainly highlight the leadership of Germany in initiating sanctions and often overlook the intricate dynamics involved in sustaining consensus over time and fall short to adequately address the positions of other member states. Moreover, existing research tends to overlook the nuanced interactions between domestic-level considerations and EU-level negotiations, particularly within states adopting either a conciliatory or hardline approach towards sanctions. Consequently, this research adds to the need for a deeper exploration into the interplay between domestic and EU-level dynamics, considering the involvement of various stakeholders such as political figures, public opinion, and business elites. By addressing this research gap, this study contributes to the debate in the literature by offering insights into how the interaction between domestic and EU-level factors influences the continuity of EU sanctions against Russia, thereby advancing our understanding of EU foreign policy decision-making processes.

This paper is structured as follows. First, I review the literature focusing on EU sanctions against Russia. This is followed by an explanation of the two-level game framework, and how this is used in this paper. Next, I will analyze Level I and trace the negotiation stance of Poland and Hungary at the EU-level. Then I will analyze Level II, and cover the gathered data on the two case studies, which both comprise of an analysis of the stance of political leaders of the governing parties, public opinion and business elites. This will be done with qualitative research methods, which include reviewing policy notes and EU briefings, tracing of negotiation positions through secondary data, and the analysis of opinion polls. Subsequently there will be a discussion of the analysis, which show that the findings support the hypotheses. Both Hungary and Poland display a shift in sanction negotiation position. Poland from hardline towards conciliatory and Hungary from conciliatory towards hardline. In

both cases this shift can be partly attributed to the influence of the domestic public, in particular business elites.

2. Literature Review

In examining the multifaceted landscape surrounding the sanctions imposed in response to Russia's annexation of Crimea and the destabilization of eastern Ukraine, several focal points have garnered scholarly attention. Notably, the economic and political ramifications of these sanctions on Russia have been scrutinized extensively (Goud-Davies 2020; Moret et al. 2016). Further, the consequential result of Russian countersanctions against EU imports has been a subject of focused investigation (Hedberg 2018). A critical lens has also been applied to assessing the costs incurred upon EU member states as a result of the sanctions (Moret and Shagina 2017). Additionally, scholarly exploration has delved into the motivations guiding countries in the imposition of sanctions on Russia (Sjursen and Rosén 2017).

Within the field of European studies, scholarly research has extensively documented the predominant role played by the European Union's three major member states – France, Germany, and the United Kingdom – in shaping the trajectory of EU foreign policy (Hill 2011). Their influence, particularly in employing sanctions as a foreign policy instrument, reached its height amid the nuclear crisis involving Iran, a period during which it became formalized within the framework of the E3 format (Kienzle and Tabrizi 2020). The E3 is an informal arrangement for foreign and security cooperation, which can be viewed as more of a working practice than an institutionalized arrangement. The E3 therefore becomes a diplomatic force creating the blueprint for the European agenda on the global political field (Whitman, 2020).

The UK played a pivotal role in instigating sanctions against Russia in 2014, but its influence waned after the adverse outcome of the June 2016 EU membership referendum

(Nitoiu 2018). Subsequently, Germany assumed a more central role in leading the sanctions regime, employing mini-lateral frameworks (Helwig 2019). According to Szabo (2014), German Chancellor Angela Merkel became increasingly vital in mediating Western policy towards Russia. Forsberg (2016) contends that Germany, under Merkel's leadership, embraced both the economic costs of sanctions on Russia and a concurrent pursuit of cooperation and dialogue. This leadership role is seen by Nitoiu (2016) as a continuation of Berlin's post-Cold War Ostpolitik in the context of the Ukraine crisis, aligning with Siddi's (2018) perspective on Germany's longstanding pursuit for influence.

Furthermore, how the interaction between domestic- and EU-level, within both conciliatory and hardline member states, influence the continuity of EU sanctions against Russia becomes important considering that dealings with sanctions against Russia stand out as one of the most contentious subjects in EU foreign policy (Siddi 2017). Especially, considering the indications that E3 member states didn't impose their preferences on smaller states to reach a consensus adds an interesting dimension, as they merely proceeded without reaching a full consensus (Szép 2019).

Existing research has predominantly concentrated on the process to the imposition of sanctions in 2014, exploring the mechanisms behind the initial consensus-building (Sjursen and Rosén 2017; Szép 2019). However, there is a notable lack of attention given to the endurance of consensus in the subsequent years following 2014. Despite the prominent role of German leadership in the initiation of sanctions against Russia, accounts emphasizing Germany's contribution do not fully clarify how consensus endured regarding these measures. Additionally, such narratives tend to overlook the positions of other member states. While Germany, France, and the UK hold influential positions in shaping EU foreign policy, a more in-depth exploration is required to comprehend their effectiveness in securing support from states that may initially be hesitant.

This paper aims to bridge the research gap by investigating how the interaction between domestic and EU-level dynamics, within both conciliatory and hardline member states, influences the continuity of EU sanctions against Russia. Therefore, this paper will consider the research question: How does the interaction between domestic- and EU-level, within both conciliatory and hardline member states, influence the continuity of EU sanctions against Russia?

3. Theoretical Framework

Scholarly discussions regarding EU sanction policy often emphasize either domestic or international perspectives (Hoffmann and Książczaková 2021; König-Archibugi 2004). However, in this examination of the factors influencing the extension of EU sanctions on Russia the interconnection between domestic and international dimensions is considered. The contention is that the continuous imposition of EU sanctions on Russia is shaped by the structural limitations and motivations encountered by political figureheads in member states. To comprehend the decision-making process within the European Council concerning sanctions renewal, it is imperative to theorize and empirically assess the interplay between domestic and international considerations.

This paper will use the two-level theoretical framework coined by Putnam. This theory can be understood in the following way, when applied to the decision-making process of sanctions within the EU. There are negotiations which can be separated into two clusters (Putnam 1988). Level I is at the EU level, in which political leaders bargain and negotiate in the European Council. Within this level it is assumed that all leaders follow their own interests, and they are free to alter their preferences within the constraints of their own national interest (Szép 2019). Level II is at the domestic level, in which domestic groups evaluate the

provisional agreements made on Level I and either reject or accept these provisions. In the context of this paper, the domestic group comprises of the national political leader of the governing parties, public opinion, and business elites. At the domestic level there is a high possibility of a wide range of concerns. As such, the negotiator will arrive at the negotiation table with a range of possible outcomes that can be approved by the domestic group. This range of potential agreements in Level II is called a ‘win-set’. The level of which domestic groups endorse sanctions delineates the win-sets, shaping the distribution of gains among the involved parties during the negotiation phase. This process can sometimes be zero-sum. When domestic preferences of member states are misaligned, agreements at Level I cannot satisfy all domestic preferences. Agreements occur when the win-sets of states overlap. The likelihood of reaching an agreement increases with the expansion of a political leader's win-set.

It can be understood that each member state can be put on a policy spectrum. Their position on this spectrum is shaped by the dynamics between the domestic political leaders, public opinion, and business elites. The policy spectrum ranges from, on one side, preferring no sanctions at all, to preferring a full sanction package. This full sanction package includes arms embargoes, travel bans, asset freezes, financial restrictions, trade restrictions and diplomatic restrictions (Giumelli, Hoffmann and Książczaková 2021). Thus, creating a policy spectrum consisting of the conciliatory approach, in-between approach, and hardline approach on which member states are placed. Countries like Italy, Hungary and Spain opt for a conciliatory approach, while France and Germany can be considered to take the in-between approach, and countries like Poland or the Baltics to take a hardline approach (Webber 2019). The main goal is to create a consensus amongst both sides of the policy spectrum, from both the conciliatory and hardline approaches. Opting for no sanctions or a full embargo would only satisfy one side of the policy spectrum, which is unfavorable. However, by following the two-

level game theory it can be posed that by expanding the win-set on both sides of the spectrum an agreement can more easily be reached.

Putnam's (1988) two-level game framework will be employed, as will the frameworks expectations be applied to analyze European Council negotiations on sanctions. While the two-level game framework has been previously utilized in various sanctions studies, its prior application focused mainly on the domestic political landscape of the target country (Fürrutter 2019; Morgan and Schwebach 1995).

Various scholars have argued that this two-level theory should be expanded upon to understand EU policy, by including vertical and horizontal relations, cross- and intra-institutionally, as well as allowing for the understanding of reoccurring interactions (König-Archibugi 2004; Mansfield, Milner, and Rosendorff 2002). However, this article sides with scholars as Forwood (2001) and Hertog (2008), who argue that expanding the original two-level theory adds a complexity that cannot be compressively answered as the scope will become too broad. As seen in previous studies, adding to the theory and expanding it will not necessarily increase the chances of creating a more concrete answer in all cases (Forwood 2001; Hertog 2008). Therefore, this paper will follow the original formulation of Putnam's two-level theoretical framework, as it is deemed preferable to analyze and comprehend the intergovernmental features within the sanction decision-making process.

As discussed before, each member state at the negotiation table has a win-set, a range of policy provisions that are considered satisfactory. As logic would follow, a consensus is reached when win-sets of the opposing sides of the spectrum overlap. These win-sets overlap when the sets of the conciliatory and hardline approach countries are expanded towards the middle. A way in which this can potentially be done is that when a country taking a hardline approach has a domestic public group (for instance a political leader, public opinion, or business elites) pursuing a smaller sanction package against Russia. Another way in which this

can potentially be reached is when a conciliatory member state has a part of the domestic public (for instance a political leader, public opinion, or business elites) which is content with a larger sanction package against Russia. When this logic is placed on a policy spectrum, win-sets of countries of both approaches will expand towards the middle and thus will more likely overlap. This will be researched and analyzed.

In the context of international sanctions and diplomatic negotiations, the roles of domestic actors such as political leaders or the governing party, public opinion, and business elites are pivotal in shaping national stances. Political leaders of governing parties act as primary decision-makers who mediate between external pressures and internal interests. While they do consider public opinion and the interests of business elites, they also possess independent preferences and strategic goals that influence their decisions (Webber 2019). Public opinion provides a barometer of societal support or dissent for certain policies, compelling leaders to align with popular sentiment to maintain political legitimacy and support. However, due to the inherent complexity of international relations, public opinion is just one of the many factors in decision-making. Business elites wield significant influence due to their economic power and impact on the national economy. Their preferences often reflect concerns over economic stability and growth, which political leaders must consider to avoid economic backlash and loss of business support (Webber 2019). Thus, the interaction among these actors creates a dynamic environment where political leaders balance independent preferences with the influential voices of the public and business sectors to formulate coherent and strategic policy decisions.

Following the reasoning explained in the previous paragraphs, two hypotheses are tested:

Hypothesis 1: When a part of the domestic public (consisting of public leaders, public opinion, and business elites) is critical of a bigger sanction package against Russia in a state taking a hardline approach, it facilitates agreement in the European Council.

Hypothesis 2: When a part of the domestic public (consisting of public leaders, public opinion, and business elites) is supportive of a bigger sanction package against Russia in a state taking a conciliatory approach, it facilitates agreement in the European Council.

These hypotheses are significant as they aim to shed light on a more nuanced interplay between domestic and international factors influencing EU sanction policy towards Russia. The following paragraph will discuss the employed methodology to empirically test these two hypotheses.

4. Methodology

This research employs the qualitative method of a comparative analysis between the two chosen case studies of the countries Poland and Hungary. The process of choosing two countries was based on several factors. The first factor considered the analysis of the hypotheses, which needs one country taking a conciliatory approach and one taking a hardline approach. The two countries need diverging sanction policy approaches. In this research I look at Poland, which is the hardline state, and Hungary, which is the conciliatory state. Second, despite their different approaches, the two countries need to have several commonalities. Economy size was taken into consideration, as it indicates the relative economic power within the EU, influencing the effectiveness and impact of sanction policies. They are both middle-

sized countries within the EU. Furthermore, they are both post-communist countries with historical ties to the USSR, and both share geographic proximity to Russia.

Three criteria will be examined to confirm or reject the hypotheses. The first criterium is the satisfaction or dissatisfaction among political leaders in Hungary and Poland regarding the EU sanction package against Russia, primarily focusing on developments between 2014-2016. This will be assessed through tracing party positions of governing parties through secondary literature. The governing party of Poland during 2014-2015 (considering the timeframe of this research) is PO, with prime minister Bronisław Komorowski, and PiS during 2015-2016 with prime minister Andrzej Duda. The governing party of Hungary is Fidesz, led by Victor Orbán. The second criterium to confirm or reject the hypotheses is the stance of public opinion in Hungary and Poland on the EU sanction package against Russia. The polls that will be drawn on for the analysis of Poland were published by Pew Research Centre. This report investigated public opinion in Ukraine, Russia, and eight NATO member countries, among which Poland is one. The findings are derived from 11,116 interviews with adults aged 18 and older, conducted through both face-to-face and telephone interviews between April 6 and May 15, 2015. For the analysis of Hungary, there will be drawn from opinion polls published by GLOBSEC. Between June 23 and July 7, 2016, a public opinion survey was conducted in Hungary. The survey aimed to gather data from a representative sample of the adult population through face-to-face interviews. A total of 1,102 respondents, all aged 18 years and older, participated in the survey, providing valuable insights into public sentiment during that period. The final criterium is that of the stance of business elites in Poland and Hungary. Business elites were selected for their critical role in shaping economic policies and their significant impact on government decisions, particularly those concerning sanctions with direct economic consequences. The analysis focuses on tracing the stances of businesses, financial

stakeholders and analysts in key sectors such as energy, agriculture, manufacturing, and finance, of both Poland and Hungary.

To analyze Level I, there will be looked at the sanction timeline and the evolving stances of Poland and Hungary throughout the sanctioning process. By systematically comparing the negotiation positions of these two countries at different stages of the sanction regime—identified as the Threat Stage, Episode 1, Episode 2, and Episode 3—the study aims to highlight shifts in their stances. Secondary sources such as academic articles, policy reports, and expert analyses will be utilized to contextualize the political dynamics and strategic considerations of Poland and Hungary.

The positive or negative interaction between the two levels will either confirm or deny the hypotheses. If the large part of the domestic public (which are the public leaders, public opinion, and business elites) is dissatisfied with a bigger sanction package against Russia in a state taking a hardline approach, it facilitates agreement in the European Council. Conversely, if the large part of the domestic public (which are the public leaders, public opinion, and business elites) is satisfied with a bigger sanction package against Russia in a state taking a conciliatory approach, it facilitates agreement in the European Council. Therefore, if the Polish domestic public shifts on the spectrum from hardline, more towards the middle, and if Hungary's domestic public shifts on the spectrum from conciliatory, more towards the middle, there is a bigger overlapping win-set for both parties.

5. Level I

In this section, the aim is to delve into the intricacies of the European Council's sanction negotiations, examining the timeline of sanctions, and elucidating the stance adopted by Poland and Hungary throughout the process. Subsequently, in Level II, we will explore the dynamics

between the governing party, public opinion, and business elites, aiming to understand their interactions and how they interact with the negotiation positions observed in Level I.

The timeline of the EU sanction regime can be distinguished in four blocks: I. Threat Stage (23 Feb-15 Mar 2014); II. Episode 1 (16 Mar-15 Jul 2014); III. Episode 2 (16 Jul 14-10 Mar 2015); and IV. Episode 3 (11 Mar 15-6 Oct 2016). See *Annex 1* for a full overview of the sanction timeline. During the Threat Phase the sanctions primarily focused on individual sanctions of diplomatic nature, the suspension of political negotiation with Russia, and the retraction of support in international organizations (Moret et al. 2016). The purpose of this sanction package was to force Russia to handle the Crimea crisis in accordance with international norms (Biersteker 2016). Poland responded positively to this first round of sanctions, while Hungary remained apprehensive to agree with the sanction package (Durackay 2023). During the First Episode, the individual sanctions remained, and on top of that travel bans and asset freezes were instated. At this point, Poland and Hungary adopted the same negotiation position as they had during the Threat Stage. During the Second Episode, individual sanctions significantly increased, and sectoral sanctions were instated, among which the most relevant were agriculture, manufacturing, and energy (Moret et al.). To show Russia that the EU was prepared to incur financial costs in order to uphold international standards, sectoral sanctions were implemented as part of a broader sanction package. However, in this negotiation stage Poland became critical of the sanctions, voicing concerns of the possibilities of high constraints it could place on the domestic market (Portela et al. 2021). Hungary continued to oppose the sanction package in negotiations, although at this point, narratives about Hungary supporting Russia were becoming more prevalent from Fidesz (Durackay 2023). The Third Episode consisted of individual sanctions, which were extended and expanded. Furthermore, the sectoral sanctions were increased as a heavier sanction package with the aim to coerce Russia to agree to the Minsk II Agreement which calls for instant ceasefire and withdrawal for

Crimea and Eastern-Ukraine. Poland backed this political agenda and their negotiation stance reflected this (Siddi 2017). However, Hungary slightly shifted their position at the negotiation table. From first showing hard criticism, the Hungarian delegation showed flexibility towards the sanction package enlargement to show political alignment. Hungary shifted from opposing to supporting sanctions to express their disapproval of Russia's actions in Ukraine. This strategic move was aimed at maintaining strong ties with the EU, ensuring economic stability, and securing political support (Biersteker 2016).

Russia had retaliated in response to these sanctions in the form of countermeasures, which are of diplomatic and economic nature (Moret et al. 2016). Since March 2014, Russia has prohibited EU officials from entering the country with a visa. Additionally, since August 2014, certain imports of food, agricultural products, and raw materials from nations which have implemented economic penalties against Russian citizens or entities are prohibited. Furthermore, Gazprom also cut back on gas supplies to many EU nations, notably Poland (a 20% reduction in supplies was followed by a 45% drop) and Slovakia (an 8% reduction in supplies) (Rettman 2014).

Russia was the third-largest trading partner of the EU (8.4% of total trade) when sanctions were first placed in early 2014. In turn, the EU was Russia's largest trading partner (approximately 48% of total Russian foreign trade) and its most significant investor (75% of foreign direct investment) (Targeted Sanctions Consortium Database 2014). About one-third of the hydrocarbon demands of the EU are met by Russia, which also has a tightly connected financial industry with the block. At about 9% of all European agricultural product exports, it also constitutes the continent's second-largest market (De Galbert 2015). With a total value of EUR 103 billion in 2014, other important exports from the EU to Russia include electrical items, automobiles, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and machinery (Moret et al. 2016).

The European economy seems robust to the negative effects of decreased trade with Russia brought on by a combination of international sanctions and Russian countermeasures, even though some EU member states and sectors are believed to have been damaged worse than others (Szczepański 2015). Nevertheless, given the wide range in exposure to the Russian market of different geographical regions, international policy-makers have been faced with a dilemma of how to avoid unduly uneven economic costs to different sanctioning countries (Szczepański 2015).

The analysis of Level I reveals notable shifts in the stances of Poland and Hungary during the European Council sanction negotiation episodes against Russia. The subsequent section will analyze Level II, focusing on domestic public stances, including the governing party, public opinion, and business elites. Understanding these domestic factors is crucial as they provide insights into the internal pressures and motivations that influenced the negotiation positions observed in Level I.

6. Level II

6.a. Case Study: Poland

Governing Party

To better understand the stance on sanctions against Russia of Polish political leaders, we first need to analyze what the main political discourse in Polish domestic politics entails. Subsequently, this analysis will delve into the political leadership and party stances of Poland's main parties regarding relations with Russia after the Crimean Annexation of 2014. Civic Platform (PO) held office from 2014-2015 and Law and Justice (PiS) held office from 2015-2016 (within the timeframe of this research). It explores the contrasting approaches of these

parties, highlighting PiS's assertive position against the sanctions and PO's more cooperative approach towards Russia despite existing tensions and geopolitical challenges.

The Polish government's proactive advocacy for sanctions against Russia, along with its consistent efforts to extend the existing measures, reflects an overarching trend in Polish national politics (Siddi 2017). Russia's actions towards Ukraine reinforced Poland's historically rooted perception of its largest neighbor as an undemocratic, aggressive, and oppressive nation that warrants economic isolation by the international community. The sanction package is viewed as a crucial component of a broader strategy aimed at securing Poland's Eastern border, which is identified as the nation's primary foreign policy objective (Siddi 2017). This commitment underscores Poland's broader national stance towards enhancing regional security and safeguarding territorial integrity amid evolving geopolitical challenges. This approach exemplifies the commitment within Polish national politics to implement foreign policy initiatives aligned with objectives related to national security and regional stability. Particularly noteworthy was Poland's emphasis on advancing its national interests within the EU framework. This highlights the foreign policy approaches backed PO, as they sought to balance engagement with Russia while upholding broader EU objectives (Portela et al. 2021).

PO pursued a pragmatic strategy towards Russia during its governance from 2007 to 2015, as they navigated through persistent tensions and challenges. Despite disagreements with Russian foreign politics, particularly concerning energy policies such as the Nord Stream pipeline, and geopolitical events like the Russian-Georgian war, PO actively sought opportunities for engagement with Russia on technical and operational matters (Siddi 2017). This approach reflected PO's commitment to maintaining open lines of communication and fostering mutual understanding. PO aimed to promote constructive relations with Russia while navigating complex geopolitical dynamics within the European context, by emphasizing dialogue and cooperation (Korhon, Simola and Solanko 2018). This is also reflected in the

negotiation stance during the Threat Stage and Episode 1 of the sanction negotiations, as they were in line with the smaller sanction package including individual diplomatic sanctions.

However, following the autumn 2015 election victory of PiS, any prospects for reconciliation with Russia were effectively abandoned, which reflects the stance of agreement with the enlarged sanction package of Episode 2 during the negotiation process. The new government indicated a significant shift in Polish foreign policy encapsulated by the slogan “Poland rising from its knees” (Portela et al. 2021). It symbolized a commitment to pursue a more assertive foreign policy aimed at defending Polish national interests, coupled with a nationalist narrative. In reference to the Minsk agreements between Russia and Ukraine and Germany’s role in the process, Polish Foreign Minister Witold Waszczykowski expressed concerns about a perceived alliance forming between Russia and Germany that marginalized Poland's interests (Portela et al. 2021). This rhetoric highlighted a growing sentiment within Poland of being sidelined in European diplomacy, prompting a recalibration towards a more assertive and independent foreign policy approach.

Recently, amid the renewed pragmatic engagement in bilateral relations between several EU countries and Russia, Poland expressed intentions to revive its bilateral relationship with Russia. This shift from opposing Russia to opening communication channels is also evident in Episode 3 of the EU sanction negotiation process. During this period, Poland’s stance shifted towards a more nuanced position, showing reluctance to expand and extend all aspects of the sanction package. However, Polish Foreign Minister Waszczykowski maintains that there has been no reciprocity or readiness for dialogue from the Russian side, placing the responsibility for rapprochement squarely on Russia. Consequently, the foreign policy stance of the current government appears to be caught between a declared readiness for cooperation and a deep reluctance in practice.

Public opinion polls

Public sentiment in Poland during the period after Russia’s annexation of Crimea, and the subsequent involvement in Eastern Ukraine (2014-2016) may have influenced the country's foreign policy stance towards Russia. The following opinion polls reflect widespread disapproval of Russia's actions and strong support for punitive measures in form of economic sanctions (Simmons et al. 2015). The Polish public, deeply wary of Russia's intentions, argue in favor of exerting indirect pressure on policymakers to take a resolute stance within the EU framework.

As seen in *Figure 1* below, Poles are concerned about Russia’s role in foreign politics in light of their aggression against Ukraine.

Figure 1. Poland Takes a Tougher Line on Russia			
	Poland	NATO countries	Diff
	%	%	
Russia is a major military threat to neighboring countries	70	49	-21
Russia is to blame for violence in eastern Ukraine	57	37	-20
Unfavorable view of Russia	80	67	-13
Increase economic sanctions on Russia	49	25	-24
Support for NATO sending arms to the Ukrainian gov't	50	40	-10
Support for Ukraine becoming a NATO member	59	57	-2
Support for Western countries providing economic aid to Ukraine	77	68	-9

Source: Source: Spring 2015 Global Attitudes survey. Q12d, Q27, Q47, Q48a-b, d & Q50.

Within Poland, 70% consider Russia to be a major threat to neighboring countries, which is a stark contrast to the median of 49% of the other seven countries surveyed. Another notable statistic is that 80% view Russia as unfavorable, which is a remarkably high percentage that underscores a significant level of distrust (Simmons et al. 2015). Poles, in comparison to their NATO counterparts, demonstrate a higher tendency to attribute blame to Russia for the crisis and harbor a less favorable perception of the former Cold War superpower. Perhaps this

perceived anxiety about Russia fuels their stance on supporting NATO with sending arms to Ukraine, which 50% do, and support Western countries that provide economic aid to Ukraine. This is supported by 77% of the interviewed people (Simmons et al. 2015). Additionally, among the Poles, 49% are of the opinion that there should be an increase of economic sanctions against Russia, whilst the other NATO countries are at a much lower 25%. Historically, Poles have demonstrated stronger favorability towards increasing sanctions compared to other NATO countries (Fagan et al. 2023). This sentiment continued to gain traction in the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea; as currently, more than half of the respondents express a desire to increase sanctions (Simmons et al. 2015).

Furthermore, when asked how much of a military threat, if at all, Russia is to its neighboring countries, aside from Ukraine, Poland stands out in the polls. This can be seen in *figure 2*. Many NATO member states harbor widespread public concern regarding Russia's perceived military threat to neighboring countries beyond Ukraine. Seventy percent of Poles express that Russia represents a major military threat, while 19 perceive Russia as a minor threat and 4% view Russia as no threat at all. Those with who align their ideology with the ruling right-wing populist party Law and Justice (PiS) have a higher likelihood of perceiving Russia as a major threat compared to those with an unfavorable view of the party (Simmons et al. 2015).

Figure 2. How much of a military threat, if at all, Is Russia to its neighboring countries, aside from Ukraine?			
	Major threat	Minor threat	Not a threat
Poland	70%	19%	4%
UK	53	36	7
France	51	40	8
Spain	49	38	10
Italy	44	34	15
Germany	38	48	13
Source: Spring 2015 Global Attitudes survey. Q27.			

In sum, this analysis highlights the impact the annexation had of public sentiment on Poland's foreign policy stance towards Russia during the period after the Annexation of Crimea. The overwhelming perception among Polish respondents that Russia posed a substantial threat to neighboring countries, coupled with strong support for increased EU sanctions against Russia, underscores the depth of public concern and mistrust towards Russia's actions. These sentiments also reflect the negotiation stance during the EU sanction negotiation process during, primarily during the Threat Stage, the First Episode, and Second Episode.

Business Elites

Concerns regarding sanctions on Russia have been expressed by the business elite in Poland. Despite the imposition of sanctions, Russia remained a significant export destination for Poland between 2014-2016. They accounted for approximately 2.7% of total Polish exports valued at around USD 6 billion 2015, making it the seventh largest market for Polish exports. The structure of Polish exports to Russia is diverse, with the top three product categories (medicaments, vehicle parts, and cosmetics) collectively representing less than 10% of total exports to Russia (UN 2019). However, Polish exporters continue to be broadly exposed to the Russian market, with a notable decline of nearly USD 3 billion in export value since the imposition of sanctions (UN 2019). Additionally, Russia is a key supplier to Poland, ranking as the third largest exporter to Poland in 2015 with a 5.1% share of Polish imports, valued at USD 11.5 billion (UN 2019). The majority of Russian exports to Poland consist of fossil fuels, constituting approximately 77% of their value (UN 2019). This reliance on Russian energy imports and the interconnectedness of the Polish and Russian economies imposes structural constraints on Poland's ability to pursue aggressive sanction policies. Interviewed officials highlight the exposure of Polish exporters to the Russian market, the importance of energy

imports from Russia, and lobbying efforts by Polish business associations as factors contributing to the moderation of Poland's stance on sanctions against Russia (Siddi 2017).

As a result, the declining performance of the Russian market prompted Polish companies to shift their export focus towards alternative markets. This was marked by decreased exports of industrial goods and machinery, a devalued ruble, and reduced consumer demand (Siddi 2017). The agricultural sector strongly opposed sanctions, as they are heavily reliant on the Russian market and adversely affected by Russia's food embargo. Furthermore, Poland is known as one of the largest exporters of apples globally, and subsequently faced significant repercussions due to Russia's status as a major importer in this industry (Skrzypczyńska, and Stępień 2020). The countersanctions imposed by Russia were perceived by Polish agricultural stakeholders as a direct response to Western sanctions on Russia, leading the Polish Fruit Union to urge Warsaw to reconsider its foreign policy approach. The Fruit Union had been actively lobbying the government prior to the sanctions to influence the adoption of a confrontational stance towards Russia. The Ministry of Economy, led by Deputy Prime Minister Piechociński, advocated for Brussels to provide compensation to Polish farmers and promoted Polish agricultural exports through government initiatives (Korhon, Simola and Solanko 2018).

The Polish government faced a challenging situation leading the anti-Russia coalition within the EU while managing domestic discontent stemming from economic losses. Efforts were made by the government in 2014 and 2015 to mitigate the impact of both EU and Russian sanctions on the Polish economy. These actions aimed to address domestic concerns and maintain support for sanctions, acknowledging that without such measures, the internal pressures and costs would have been too significant for the government to sustain its stance on sanctions effectively (Korhon, Simola and Solanko 2018).

Therefore, close economic relations between Poland and Russia, particularly in the agricultural sector, along with significant losses experienced by fruit producers, limited Poland's ability to push for more severe sanctions. These internal dynamics prevented Poland from advocating for stricter measures despite rhetoric suggesting dissatisfaction with the current sanctions' effectiveness. As a result, domestic constraints contribute to consensus-building within the European Council, broadening Poland's range of acceptable outcomes and aligning it more closely with moderate member states especially during the Second and Third Episode of EU sanction negotiations.

6.b. Case Study: Hungary

Governing Party

This section explores the political leadership and party stances of Hungary's governing party, Fidesz, regarding relations with Russia following the Crimean Annexation of 2014. Fidesz opposed the EU sanctions against Russia and this analysis focuses on contextualizing the approach and perspectives Fidesz took towards Russia's actions and the resulting EU sanctions during this critical period between 2014-2016.

Following Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014, the foreign policies and priorities of Fidesz regarding Ukraine and Russia diverged significantly. Fidesz had consistently endorsed Ukraine's accession to the EU and the Eastern Partnership initiative. Additionally, they also advocated for the rights and cultural autonomy of the Transcarpathian Hungarian minority. They also expressed concerns about perceived "undemocratic" tendencies during Ukraine's democratic transitions. Consequently, when the Hungarian government urged respect for the linguistic rights of the Hungarian minority under Petro Poroshenko's leadership, it was misinterpreted as an assault on Ukrainian sovereignty (Feledy 2015).

However, the position of the Orbán government remained somewhat ambiguous within the period of 2014-2016. For instance, Fidesz criticized the EU for not taking a clear stance on the Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 incident in Ukraine. Nonetheless, during this speech he avoided mentioning Russia (Ámon and András 2015). On a different note, Hungary's decision to indefinitely suspend gas flow to Ukraine in September 2014 was clearly a move against Kyiv, which was influenced by pressure from Gazprom (Juhász et al. 2015). Therefore, despite supporting the EU's common foreign policy towards Russia, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán opposed European sanctions against Russia. He argued them to be detrimental to Hungarian interests, and he also expressed openness to Eurasian economic cooperation. Additionally, President Putin's visit to Budapest in February 2015 signaled an anti-Ukrainian stance and violated the informal policy of European Union member states regarding high-level meetings with Russian leaders (Feledy 2015).

During the Threat Stage, Episode One and Episode Two, Prime Minister Orbán repeatedly expressed his opposition to imposing another round of sanctions against Russia (Szakacs 2014). He contended that the individual diplomatic sanctions implemented during the Threat Stage, along with the additional travel bans introduced in the First Episode, were excessive from the outset. This reluctance to impose, extend, and expand the sanction regime can be largely attributed to Hungary's significant dependence on Russian gas, which accounts for 80% of the nation's supply. Despite this opposition to EU sanctions, Hungary took precautionary measures as part of a broader European Union effort, such as connecting its gas network with Slovakia to enhance supply security in a region heavily reliant on Russian imports (Szakacs 2014).

During Episode Three of the negotiation rounds, Hungary continued to express clear opposition to the EU sanction package. However, despite this opposition, the Hungarian delegation ultimately voted in favor of every sanction package proposed. In Episode Three, the

resistance was notably less pronounced (Euronews 2016). The Hungarian delegation reiterated their objections to an automatic extension of EU sanctions against Russia. András Deák, an expert from the Institute of World Economics, notes that although the Hungarian delegation vocally criticized the sanction package, they perceived political and economic benefits in its approval, which ultimately justified their support (Euronews 2016).

Public opinion polls

Public opinion in Hungary after Russia's annexation of Crimea and its involvement in eastern Ukraine (2014-2016) played a pivotal role in shaping the country's diplomatic responses within the European Union framework. This period was marked by diverse perspectives and nuanced sentiments regarding Russia's actions and the broader regional implications. Despite a general sense of concern over regional stability, opinions varied significantly based on political affiliations and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Starting off, when asked whether Hungarians feel more aligned with Russia or with Europe, the majority of the interviewed people state they're somewhere in between. This can be seen in *figure 3*. 53% vote somewhere in between, 39% feel they are part of the West, and 5% state to belong to the East (Milo et al. 2017). When asked why and how they voted, most state that this is due to their wish to preserve sovereignty and have the “best of both worlds”, that it is due to geographical location, and that it is due to the complicated history of Hungary.

Figure 3. Do you feel more aligned with the West (Europe), somewhere in between, or with the East (Russia)?			
	Part of the West	Somewhere in between	Part of the East
Hungary	39%	53%	5%
Poland	45%	35%	3%
Source: GLOBSEC 2016			

Additionally, in an earlier public opinion poll by GLOBSEC from 2014, a significant 79% of

Hungarians expressed their support for maintaining Hungary's membership within the European Union in the event of a referendum, contrasting starkly with the mere 14% who favored leaving the bloc (Milo and Klingová 2016). However, despite this strong indication of support for EU membership, the current survey of 2016 revealed a more nuanced perspective among Hungarians: only 37% held a favorable view of the EU, while 45% remained neutral, and 18% expressed negativity towards the union. Notably, critics of the EU were predominantly found among supporters of Jobbik, while the majority of voters aligned with other parliamentary parties endorsed Hungary's EU membership as beneficial (Milo and Klingová 2016).

Supporters of Fidesz seem receptive to the government's pro-Russian stance. 60% view the recently approved Russian-financed Paks project positively. In contrast, opposition voters show less enthusiasm, with only around 20% expressing support for the deal. The respondents were also asked what their sympathy was towards foreign leaders. With the question of their stance towards Vladimir Putin, 44% of the interviewed Hungarians voted to have sympathized with Putin in the aftermath of the Crimean Annexation. Furthermore, based on the 2016 GLOBSEC Trends survey, Hungarian public sentiment largely favors the West, as indicated by the multipolarity index which was derived from six questions pertaining to NATO, Russia, and the U.S. However, there is considerable proportion of undecided respondents, comprising of 36% of the respondents. This underscores a degree of instability in the prevailing attitudes.

In summary, the sentiments among Hungarians reflect a nuanced attitude towards Russia, with a gradual shift in perspective from a pro-EU stance towards a more neutral or pro-Russia orientation. As Hungarians prioritize maintaining stability and safeguarding their interests, this inclination towards Russia suggests a reluctance to endorse significant sanction measures against the country. Instead, there appears to be a preference for diplomatic engagement and pragmatic diplomacy in managing relations with Russia.

Business elites

The intersection between business elites and political leaders in Hungary is significant, as business lobbyists are closely linked with various political parties like Fidesz or MSZP (Ámon and András 2015). These elites include prominent figures from the energy, finance, and manufacturing sectors. Notably, in Hungary the line between business elites and political leaders is often blurred, primarily due to the close intertwining of business interests with political agendas (Ámon and András 2015).

In a speech prime Minister Orbán highlighted the discourse on Hungary's "Eastern Opening" (Végh 2015). The "Eastern Opening" ideology underscores the belief that diversifying economic relations beyond Western partners is crucial for Hungary's economic growth. This is argued to be in response to the Western economic decline, as perceived by Orbán. Consequently, there has been a tendency to align with the government's stance on fostering ties with Russia and other non-Western actors (Végh 2015). Business circles in the energy and manufacturing sector have advocated for closer economic ties with Russia. This inclination stems from strategic economic interests and commercial partnerships that benefit Hungarian businesses.

The Paks-2 nuclear power plant deal signed between Hungary and Russia is one example that sheds light on the relationship between business elites and political agendas in context of this "Eastern Opening" (Végh 2015). This agreement between Hungary and Russia encapsulates a significant strategic initiative aimed at growing Hungary's energy infrastructure and reducing dependence on external energy sources. This project involves the construction of two new reactors at Hungary's existing Paks Nuclear Power Plant. What this deal symbolizes is a substantial investment in the country's nuclear energy sector and proponents of the Paks-2

deal within Hungarian business circles emphasize its potential economic benefits. The benefits they reiterate include the creation of jobs, technology transfer, and the expansion of domestic industries related to nuclear energy (Végh 2015). From their perspective, the project represents a crucial step towards achieving energy security and self-sufficiency within the electricity sector.

However, on the other side, the Paks-2 project attracted much controversy. One of the primary concerns raised by critics is the project's potential to deepen Hungary's reliance on Russian resources. Paks-2 is being financed in large part by a loan from the Russian government. This raised questions about Hungary's long-term economic and strategic dependency on its Eastern neighbor. Economic policymakers and analysts scrutinized this particular dependency as they considered the broader geopolitical tensions between Russia and Western countries, especially in the aftermath of Russia's annexation of Crimea (Ámon and András 2015).

Despite these initial reservations, business interest groups eventually did agree to the EU sanctions against Russia. This had several reasons. First, they noted that compliance with EU sanctions was crucial for maintaining Hungary's diplomatic position within the European Union (Feledy 2015). As a member state of the European Union, Hungary is obligated to adhere to EU policies and decisions, and thus must follow those related to foreign policy and sanctions regimes. Furthermore, they stated that they valued the importance of upholding international norms and agreements. This was especially so in direct response to Russia's actions in Crimea and the subsequent unrest in eastern Ukraine (Feledy 2015). Additionally, the business community in Hungary has shown to consider the potential repercussions of defying EU sanctions, which could have led to diplomatic tensions, economic penalties, or reputational damage (Feledy 2015). For Hungarian business elites, the decision to align with EU sanctions

against Russia was thus a pragmatic decision aimed at balancing economic interests with broader geopolitical imperatives within the European context.

Business elites ultimately agreed to comply with the EU sanctions against Russia. This is a part of their broader strategy to navigate complex economic and political dynamics both domestically and internationally. Their decision reflected a pragmatic approach that prioritized Hungary's diplomatic relations within the EU while acknowledging the importance of upholding international norms and agreements amidst evolving geopolitical challenges in the aftermath of Russia's annexation of Crimea. As a result, in the case of Hungary, economic constraints contribute to consensus-building within the European Council, as it broadened Hungary's win-set and aligning their policy more closely with moderate member states.

7. Discussion

The analysis examined the dynamics that have shaped the continuation of the EU sanctions package against Russia from 2014 to 2016 and aims at clarifying the ways in which different degrees of domestic support or resistance to sanctions, involving public leaders, public opinion, and business elites, influence European Council decision-making. It did so by focusing on the interactions between domestic and EU decision-making processes, in line with the two-level game analysis put forth by Putnam. The central research question addressed in this study is: How does the interaction between domestic and EU-level dynamics, within both conciliatory and hardline member states, influence the continuity of EU sanctions against Russia? In line with the two hypotheses a few conclusions can be drawn from the analysis, which are summarized in *figure 4* and will be discussed further.

Figure 4 Stance on sanction package for Russia among domestic factions in Poland and Hungary (2014-2016)

	Type	Leadership	Public Opinion	Business elites
Poland	Hardline	Supportive	Supportive	Critical
Hungary	Conciliatory	Critical	Critical	Supportive

Poland is a hardline state, meaning that on Level I negotiations they are supportive of sanctions against Russia. Hypothesis 1 poses that if a domestic faction is critical of sanctions it facilitates negotiations at the European Council level. As expected, there are factions supportive of the sanction package in the aftermath of Russia’s annexation of Crimea. However, the business elites show a high level of criticism against the sanction package of negotiation Episode Two and had reservations about expanding it. The needs of these factions of the domestic public had to be considered during sanction negotiations. Given that a hardline member state consisted of groups of the domestic public which were to some level critical of sanction, meant that the win-set was broadened. This shifted Poland on the policy spectrum from a strong hardline member state more toward the middle.

Hungary is a conciliatory state, which indicates that at European Council level negotiations they usually take a critical stance against the sanction package and are against expanding it. According to the hypotheses, domestic support for sanctions against Russia can facilitate European Council level negotiations. Analyzing the data reveals that certain segments of the domestic public were critical of the different stages of the sanction package between 2014-2016, as anticipated. However, business elites show considerable levels of support for the sanction package during Episode Three of the sanction negotiation period. The perspectives of the domestic factions had to be considered at European Council level negotiations, meaning that the win-set was broadened. The conciliatory member state, usually critical of the sanction package, now shifted more toward the middle to facilitate the different voices of the domestic public.

These deviations, in both hardline and conciliatory member states and within the political opposition and business elite faction, are necessary to facilitate negotiations at European Council level. If both countries remained completely supportive or critical on the domestic level, their win-set would not fluctuate and thereby not change inward on the spectrum. This change on the spectrum towards the middle is necessary for a continuation of the sanction package to accommodate an outcome that can be somewhat agreeable for all parties involved. By accommodating diverse domestic perspectives the countries were able to move inward on the spectrum between conciliatory and hardline states. Therefore, the findings support Hypotheses 1 and 2, highlighting the significance of domestic-level dynamics in influencing EU decision-making processes and ensuring the continuity of sanctions against Russia.

8. Conclusion

This study explored the dynamics which have influenced the continuity of EU sanctions against Russia in response to their annexation of Crimea. It used the two-level game theory to understand the interaction between the domestic- and EU-level on sanction negotiations. The central research question addressed how interactions within conciliatory and hardline member states shape EU sanctions policy. The analysis of Poland revealed that despite overall support for sanctions at the state level, as it is a hardline state, significant criticism arose from the political opposition and business elites. This disagreement broadened the win-set during negotiations, shifting Poland's position towards the middle of the spectrum between hardline and conciliatory. Conversely, the analysis shows that in Hungary, which a conciliatory state traditionally critical of sanctions, support from certain domestic factions facilitated European Council negotiations. This was also due to deviation for the political opposition and business

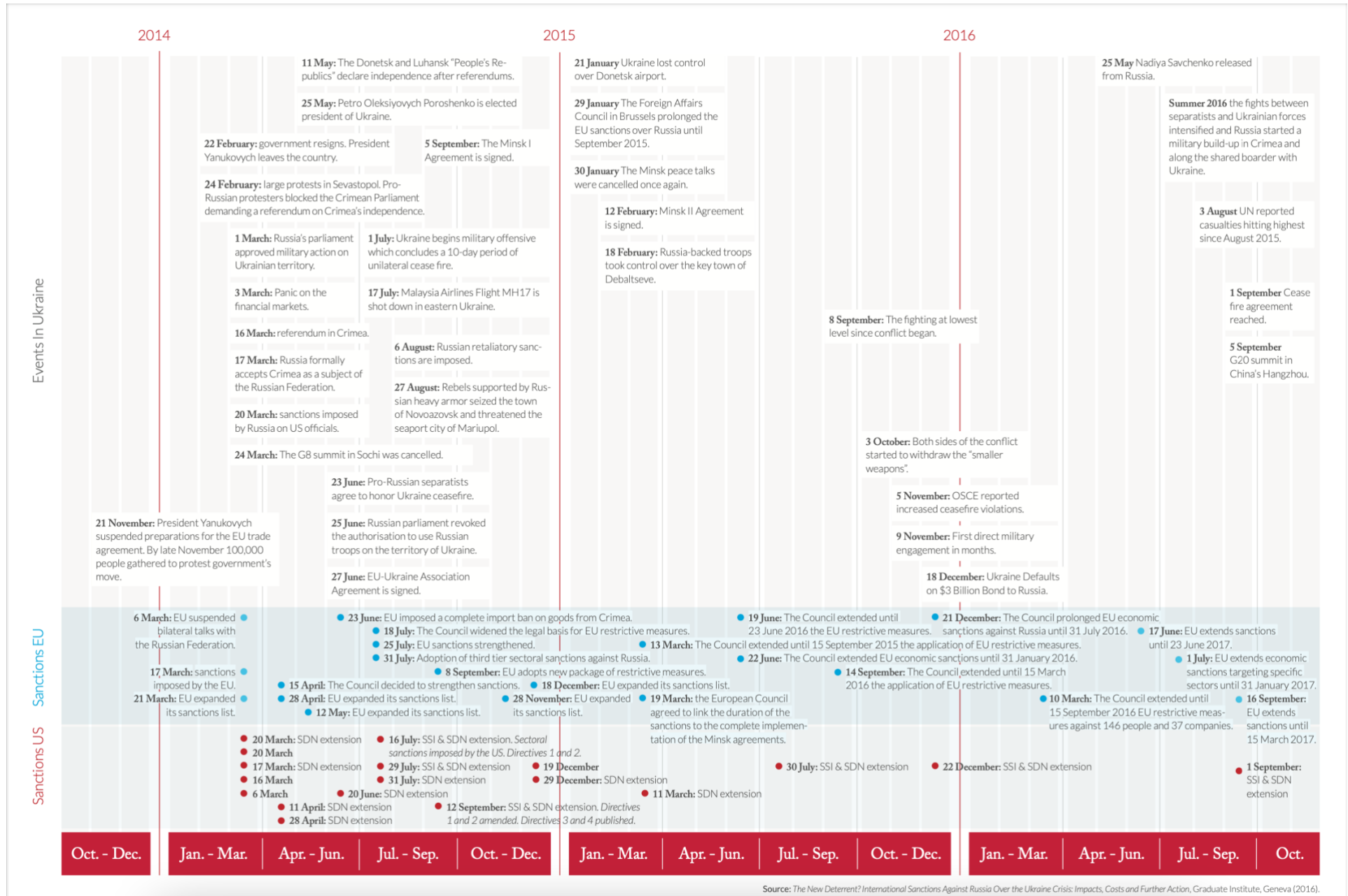
elites. This deviation from the status quo helped expand the win-set and move Hungary inward on the spectrum.

Notably, both case studies demonstrate that domestic-level deviations are essential in facilitating European Council negotiations, and continuity of the sanction regime. The deviation from the status quo of the business elites in both Poland and Hungary increased the win-set, allowing for more nuanced policy outcomes at the European Council level. This phenomenon underscores the importance of considering domestic perspectives in EU decision-making processes regarding sanctions against Russia. The deviations observed within conciliatory and hardline member states contributed to more inclusive negotiations and ultimately facilitated the continuity of EU sanctions against Russia.

There are several limitations to this study, which need to be acknowledged. First, this study may not capture the full range of the domestic public. Further research might include, civil society, interest groups, or media channels. Additionally, this study specifically focused on Poland and Hungary, but this limits the generalizability to the broader EU context. Future research could address these shortcomings by incorporating a broader scope of factors and conducting comparative analyses across diverse EU member states. This would enhance the robustness and applicability of findings in the realm of EU policy-making and foreign relations.

Nonetheless, the findings of this research add to the already existing debate regarding sanction negotiations at the national- and EU-level and can be used as a starting point for future research. Understanding the influence of domestic-level dynamics on EU decision-making processes regarding sanctions against Russia can inform more nuanced and effective policy approaches. The role of domestic factions, including political opposition and business elites, in shaping member states' positions underscores the complexity of EU consensus-building on sanctions issues.

Annex 1



Source: The New Deterrent? International Sanctions Against Russia Over the Ukraine Crisis: Impacts, Costs and Further Action, Graduate Institute, Geneva (2016).

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