DISSERTATION

THE FOREIGN POLICY AMBITIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: A RELATIONAL THEORETICAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

THE FOREIGN POLICY AMBITIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: A RELATIONAL THEORETICAL APPROACH

What drives the European Union (EU) to develop leadership ambitions in some issue domains, such as climate change governance, but not in others? In this dissertation, I approach this question by focusing on the relational dynamics that constitute the EU. By situating my dissertation in the ontological premises of relationalism in International Relations as part of the "relational turn" in the discipline, I develop a theoretical approach and framework to capture and study the historical relational dynamics of power that make up the EU and exert driving effects for the foreign policy ambitions it sets for itself on the global stage. To demonstrate the value and applicability of my theoretical framework, I employ the case of the EU's leadership ambitions in the domain of global climate change governance. I identify two categories of relations that, separately and jointly, exert determining influence for its ambitions in this domain: 1) relations in the transatlantic space between the United States and the European project that developed during and since the inception of the latter; and 2) relations between the EU member states on the East-West axis that have long historical roots on the continent. The temporal range of the study encompasses the period from 1990 to 2015. I analyze the theorized relational dynamics and my argument in two empirical chapters that focus on each one of the relational categories separately and on subsequent parts of the temporal range. In the analysis of the first category, I employ qualitative counterfactual analysis to trace the transatlantic leadership transition between the United States and the EU that began in the 1990s and culminated with the American announcement

of withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001. Complemented by three shadow cases that represent different temporal and issue-domain foci, the counterfactual analysis reveals that the EU would not have been likely to develop and pursue its leadership ambitions in the same manner that it did had the United States not withdrawn from the Kyoto Protocol.

The analysis of the second category shifts the focus to the internal EU policy environment and the EU's foreign policy-making process by exploring the existence and extent of the theorized historical relational power dynamics among Eastern and Western EU member states in the expression of their national positions during the public deliberations in the Environment Council configuration of the Council of the EU through qualitative content analysis. The period at focus here is 2014-2015 for the purposes of capturing the dynamics prior to the Paris Agreement in 2015 and following the accession of all Central and Eastern European member states. Their positions are compared to the level of EU ambition expressed in the proposals under discussion at the given Council deliberation. The findings in this empirical chapter suggest that there is a clear alignment of Western interests with the ambitions of the EU, while the interests of Eastern member states are more rarely matched in the proposals, especially in the initial drafts, indicating that existing relational asymmetries along the East-West axis are present in and exert an effect on the EU's ambition-setting and climate foreign policy-making processes.

This dissertation makes an important contribution to the study of the EU and its ambitions as an actor on the global stage and to the growing literature of relational approaches in the discipline of International Relations.

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and pursue new heights in my career even if they appeared out of reach in the beginning. I know that in Peter I have a lifelong mentor.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Contribution of My Dissertation

The European Union (EU) prides itself as being a leader in the global climate regime with its unmatched "comprehensive and ambitious legislative framework on climate action," working hard and succeeding at decreasing its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions at home while actively engaging others on the international stage through outreach and cooperation and by being the leading global climate finance donor (European Commission 2019). It is also aiming to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 – an ambitious goal enshrined in the European Green Deal of 2019 and the European Climate Law. Overall, the EU is considered a leader in the global climate regime.

But why does the EU develop and pursue leadership ambitions in some issue domains, like climate change governance, but does not do so in others, like security and defense?[1] This is the main research question of my dissertation, and I develop a theoretical framework using a relational theoretical approach to International Relations (IR) to address it. By placing relations at the center of analysis, I explore various relational dynamics that have played a formative role for the EU as an entity and its subsequent ambitions. Specifically, I examine how the theorized relational

[1] I use these two specific issue domains here as an illustration of my research puzzle because both of them have grown in global importance to be considered issues of "high politics." For example, Oberthür and Roche Kelly (2008) make the argument that for the past three decades, climate change "has taken centre stage in European and international politics" as it "represents one of the most serious threats to international security and the well-being of human kind" (p. 35; citing the Fourth Assessment Report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2007). Climate change has also taken a primary position among NATO's strategic interests (see https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_91048.htm and https://climatesecurity101.org/chronology/). Furthermore, climate policy has taken a distinguished importance for the EU because since the early 2000s, it has become a key driver for European integration and also because it is directly linked to issues of energy security for the EU, among other reasons (Oberthür and Roche Kelly 2008, 43).

dynamics in my framework have affected the ambition formation of the EU as an entity on the global stage.

The EU and its preceding configurations (what I will collectively refer to as “the European project” for simplifying reasons in the rest of the dissertation) have had a solid presence on the global stage for several decades, emerging as a prominent and, in some domains, leading actor in global politics. It has developed policies and strategies that are typically reserved for states and has grown to consist of a vast web of institutions and treaties that serve as the engine of the complex European machine. Nevertheless, the EU is unlike any other actor in world politics, prompting the development of a rich body of literature studying the nature and type of actorness of this *sui generis* entity. A question that is less frequently asked, however, regards the origins and drivers of the various ambitions the EU sets for itself. An area where the EU has established a reputation as a leader is the domain of climate change governance. Starting in the 1990s, the EU has overtaken the United States (US) as the driving force for climate change action on the global stage (Kelemen and Vogel 2010), visible through the incorporation of climate change in its complex foreign policy (Schunz 2019) and its presence in international climate negotiations. However, in security and defense, for instance, the EU has not sought to pursue leadership and has instead continued to rely primarily on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as an external security guarantor.

In the specific case of the EU’s climate leadership ambitions, I argue that the answer to this dissertation’s primary research question requires attention to both the EU’s external environment and the internal relations of the EU. Namely, the EU’s subordinate relations with the US, combined with the relational dynamics of the East-West divide within the EU, exert a consequential effect for determining the EU’s level of ambition on the world stage in the domain of climate change.

All facets of the EU and its previous institutional configurations – including policy-making, processes, institutions, and foreign policy, among many others – have been studied over the decades by scholarship within the discipline of European Studies (ES). Standing in between Area Studies and a distinct field of study, ES offers a specialized focus on the European project by combining empirical description, the "quasi-legalistic discourse of policymaking," and the importing of theoretical traditions, primarily from IR (Jørgensen 2015a, 7-8). In terms of the ES approaches to EU foreign policy, there has been a "pronounced lack of theory-informed research" (Jørgensen 2015a, 8).

A similar critique has been made towards the growing literature on EU actorness (discussed in more detail in Chapter 2), which has been characterized as piecemeal and lacking theoretical and conceptual consensus, as well as innovation (Rogers 2009, 832) and terminological clarity (Smith 2005). Drieskens (2017) stresses that the lack of academic consensus on how the EU should be studied as an actor contributes to a conceptual fog and a lack of clear criteria that characterizes the EU actorness debate, which has yet to be overcome. Furthermore, the study of the European Union's foreign policy (EUFP) more broadly, particularly within ES, has been criticized for its extensive focus on internal and institutional factors while not taking into detailed consideration historical and systemic legacies and changes, such as the legacy of pre-integration European power politics, the shifts ensued by World War II, or the legacies of colonialism that were a reality during the formation and early years of the European project (Jørgensen 2015a; also citing Sjöstedt 1977, 4). The relational theoretical approach I develop in this dissertation seeks to address both shortcomings. First, I develop and offer a theoretical approach to understanding the sources of EU ambitions. Second, I incorporate a focus on historical relational dynamics of power and their legacies for the development of the EU, its foreign policy, and its ambitions on the global stage.

International Relations theory also has a long tradition of studying the EU in its various configurations and institutional makeup. Each IR approach brings its own mix of ontological and epistemological commitments and has tried to understand different aspects of EU politics and policies within the prism of these commitments, sometimes resulting in the impression that the EU is a kind of "misshapen monster" in international politics (McConaughey et al. 2018). The foreign policy and international behavior of the EU has also been difficult to theorize due to its unique nature, leaving IR scholars rejecting the EU as a state-in-anarchy actor but also as one that does not fit any of the categories of new actors in IR (Tonra 2009, 5-7). The images of the foreign, the domestic, and the international take on different dimensions and thus have unclear boundaries, making the study of EU foreign policy an even bigger challenge (Jørgensen 2015a, 8).

With my relational approach, I move away from the individualism-holism dualism in IR theory (Wendt 1999), or the actor-exclusive and structure-exclusive views of IR for the EU and instead put the emphasis mainly on relations and relationships *among* actors to be the center of analysis. I look at the web of relations without giving analytical primacy to the actors themselves, the international system's structure, various institutions, or norms and ideas. To this end, my dissertation is a contribution to the growing literature on relational theoretical approaches in IR and European Studies (e.g., see Jackson and Nexon 2019; Lovato and Maurer 2022).

I am defending this dissertation in the year that the theme of the International Studies Association's (ISA) Annual Convention is "Putting Relationality at the Centre of International Studies" – an acknowledgment of the growing prominence of the large variety of relational approaches to the study of global phenomena. What is more, some relational approaches in IR transcend the western centrism of the discipline as they present an avenue for "worldling" the discipline by including myriad of non-western and even non-human-centric ways of knowing (see

Trownsell et al. 2019). My dissertation does not make any claims to transcend the western-centric biases of the discipline, but it does break away from many of the substantialist commitments of mainstream approaches to IR.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will provide a brief overview of the foreign policy of the EU as a primary focal point for my dissertation, as well as how the EU itself has been studied in IR. I will then move onto discussing my ontological starting points in the dissertation and how it is a part of the "relational turn" in IR. Finally, I will conclude by providing an overview of the dissertation and listing some caveats and limitations of it.

Foreign Policy of the European Union

My dissertation focuses extensively on the foreign policy of the European Union (EUFP), and especially on its climate foreign policy (Schunz 2019) and the climate foreign policy ambitions the EU sets for itself. EUFP is complex, multifaceted, multi-method, and multilevel, encompassing the security-oriented frameworks of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defense Policies (CSDP), as well as the EU's external action and the external dimensions of EU internal policies; involving two different methods of policy-making (intergovernmental and Community methods); and spanning the national, supranational, and international levels (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022, 11). The EU's external action includes various EU policies, including trade, humanitarian aid, economic relations with third countries, and sanctions and international agreements, among others; while the external elements of internal policies cover policies in the domains of the environment, energy, and migration, to name a few (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022, 12-13). Thus, EUFP equates to more than the sum on foreign policies of the member states and does not extend to foreign policy of European countries who are not members of the EU. In terms of purpose, EUFP "is directed at the external environment with

the objective of influencing that environment and the behavior of other actors within it, in order to pursue interests, values, and goals (Keukeleire and Delreux 2014, 1).

In this dissertation, I understand the EU's climate foreign policy (CFP) (as an extenuation of environmental foreign policy) to be part of EUFP. In the mid-2010s, the EU was referred to as "the most comprehensive regional environmental protection regime in the world" (Axelrod and Schreurs 2014, 168). By then, the EU had been clearly demonstrating not only an intention to make significant progress in the domain of environmental protection, but also an inclination to exert influence in global environmental politics (Schunz 2019). CFP is part of the external elements of internal policies, and EFP more broadly has been defined as "the interplay between (1) domestic forces, institutions and actors involved in environmental decision-making and the implementation of environmental policies, and (2) international forces, institutions and actors" (Harris 2009, 11). In the domain of climate change, the EU has intentionally adopted various internal climate policies to have effects beyond the EU's territory, such as the Emissions Trading System (ETS) (Schunz 2019, 345).

Both EUFP and CFP – including definitions, elements, and policy-making processes – are discussed in significant detail across the chapters in this dissertation, so an additional overview will not be provided here. EUFP has gained substantial scholarly interest over the past three decades, and studies on all the different parts of it abound in European Studies and have garnered the interest of IR scholars as well. Similarly, the EU's global leadership in global climate change governance has also gained substantial scholarly attention in the past two decades.

The EU in International Relations

A review of the study of the EU through the lens of IR theories reveals a rich literature. Each one of the mainstream theoretical paradigms in the discipline approaches the EU through its own ontological and epistemological lenses and contributes to the vast scholarly repository of studies on the EU. I will use the brief overview below to demonstrate a few main examples of how the EU has been studied within IR and explain the added value of my relational theoretical approach.

Realism – At their ontological and epistemological core, realist theories begin with the recognition of the primacy of states in an anarchical system who behave as rational, utility maximizing actors (see Dunne et al. 2013). As a result, realist approaches to European politics, foreign policy, and integration operate within an intergovernmentalist perspective, focusing on the interests of the (most powerful) states within the rules of the international system, and highlight the significance of material interests for their behavior (Pollack 2012). Overall, the realist literature on internal EU politics is not very rich and can be characterized as providing only a "minimal realism" approach (Pollack 2012, 9). In his seminal work on realist theory, Kenneth Waltz (1979) considers the European project to be not more than a byproduct of the bipolar international system and superpower rivalry, benefitting from the security guarantees of the United States (pp. 70-71). More recently, realist scholarship has also focused on the systemic dynamics during the formative years of the European project, arguing that the power imbalance created in the continent by the Soviet Union required a balancing project of the massive proportions of European integration to balance it (Rosato 2011a; 2011b). Nevertheless, neorealism has been critiqued for its massive failure to theorize the emergence of the European project and the evolving process of European integration and rather perceives them as anomalies (Collard-Wexler 2006).

When looking at the EU's foreign, security, and defense policies, realists also operate within the realm of material interests (e.g., Hyde-Price 2008). In fact, traditionally, realist approaches to EUFP focus on the bloc's efforts in security and defense with a pronounced emphasis on CFSP and CSDP. Realist approaches have also failed in their predictions for the future of the EU after the end of the Cold War (Mearsheimer 1990; Kissinger 1994), relying on the core neorealist assumptions about the behavior of states in the international system that broke away from its bipolar structure and thus eliminated the need for American security guarantees in Europe. In the post-Cold War era, neo-realists have tended to view the EU's external behavior as a balancing effort within the transatlantic relationship (Reichwein 2015, 101; see Art 2004; Pape 2005; Paul 2005). A debate has emerged regarding the proper understanding of these efforts with some rejecting the notion that the EU has been engaging in balancing against the US and further the argument for bandwagoning behavior with the US instead (Schmidt 2006/07; Cladi and Locatelli 2012; 2013; 2016). Focusing exclusively on the security and defense aspects of EU foreign policy, others have tried to clarify the added value of domestic-level factors as intervening variables to explain the behavior of the EU and its member states through a neoclassical realist perspective (Dyson 2016).

What becomes apparent is that realist approaches to the EU focus primarily on matters of security and defense, or what they consider "high politics," and seek to fit the EU within their ontological and epistemological commitments. This leaves little room for approaching the main research question of my dissertation and explain the variation in foreign policy ambitions and in issue domains aside from security and defense. Furthermore, focusing on systemic factors (neorealism) and domestic constraints (neoclassical realism) for its foreign policy pose limits to the analysis by obscuring the role of historical relational dynamics, for instance.

Liberalism – Liberal IR theoretical approaches have made an abounding and significant contribution to the study of the EU, its integration, and its actions on a global level. Unlike realist approaches, liberal theories go beyond issues of EU security and defense to include trade, economic relations, integration, and others. Similarly to realism, however, the liberal approaches maintain an actor-centric ontological commitment in both their weak and strong variants when it comes to studying the EU. Namely, weak liberal approaches examine the mitigating effects of institutions for the conditions of anarchy and challenge the primacy of security interests (in favor of economic interests and interdependence), while strong variants argue for more fundamental changes in international relations, including strong institutions and interdependence (Beach 2015, 86-87), and through the use of norms by one actor to influence the behavior of another actor (see Schimmelfennig 2001).

Two of the most prominent liberal approaches to the study of the EU are liberal intergovernmentalism (LI) and principal-agent theories. Moravcsik's (1993; 1998) LI gained prominence in European integration theory and he places the weight for state preference formation onto domestic politics within the state and the processes involved in the domestic political arena. In the context of European integration, the (powerful) states form their preferences through a combination of powerful domestic groups' interests and depending on their relative power and bargaining position in the international system. States pursue integration when it serves their national interests, and supranational institutions play a limited role, mainly facilitating cooperation rather than supplanting national sovereignty. In terms of EU actorness and the possibility of the EU to act as a unitary actor on the global stage, LI accept this proposition due to its theoretical commitments to member state primacy and focus on state power as the driving factors for any EU politics and policies, including EU foreign policy (Beach 2015, 92)

Principal-agent approaches, driven by the ontological commitments of rational choice institutionalism, have also gained prominence in EU studies and integration. They center on principal-agent dynamics among EU member states and EU institutions and focus on issues such as delegation, information asymmetry, oversight, discretion, and conflicts of interest (see Beach 2008; Delreux and Adriaensen 2019). Like LI and other liberal approaches to the EU, the ontological and epistemological commitments here are actor-centrism and rational decision-making.

Social Constructivism – Since the "governance shift" in the 1990s, constructivist approaches have become prevalent both in the wider discipline of IR, as well as in studying the EU. For EU politics, they focus on the complex interplay between ideas, identities, and institutions in shaping the EU's role in the international system. By focusing on the social construction of reality, these scholars contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics driving European integration and external relations (see Checkel 2006).

From a constructivist perspective, EU foreign policy is defined by two main factors: 1) a shared understanding of the EU's role and identity among member states (elites and public) and 2) a shared understanding of what values and norms the EU should exert and promote globally and regionally (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022, 352). In addition, in this perspective the purpose of EU foreign policy is to transform identities and shape ideas of other entities, thus placing factors like interests, power, and institutional configurations in a secondary position of importance (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022, 353). Moreover, norms and identity have been understood as variables in EU foreign policy (Aydn- Düzgit 2015). They have been studied as reasons for the Eastern enlargement (Fierke and Wiener 1999; Schimmelfennig 2001, cited in Aydn- Düzgit 2015) and also as a driver for the development of the EU as a promoter of democracy and human rights (Sedelmeier 2005,

cited in Aydn- Düzgit 2015). Social-constructivist approaches have also been prevalent in the debate of EU actorness, with Ian Manners (2000; 2002) making one of the most famous definitions of the EU as a normative power. This paints the EU as possessing "the ability to shape conceptions of 'normal' in international relations" (Manners 2000, 239). Several other scholars have focused on specific concepts like legitimacy, authority, and recognition, to name a few, to understand and define EU actorness (Lütz et al. 2021). Another group of scholars have focused on exploring how EU policies and institutions shape the identities and practices of member states and non-member countries alike through a process of Europeanization (e.g., Risse et al. 2001). Some of the main foci here include how EU norms, rules, and policies influence domestic politics, institutions, and policy-making processes in member states and candidate countries. Lastly, both social constructivists and more critical constructivist approaches have paid attention to the role of discourse and rhetoric in shaping EU policies and practices by investigating how political narratives, discursive constructions, and rhetorical strategies influence public opinion, decision-making processes, and the construction of European identities (Checkel 2006).

My dissertation offers a different theoretical approach to studying the EU as an entity in global politics and its foreign policy ambitions. It is not to say that the myriad of existing approaches from IR and ES do not provide significant – and even groundbreaking – contributions to the study of the EU. Doing so would be dismissive and even ignorant. Instead, my purpose with this dissertation is to propose an alternative approach that, through its basic analytical commitments, allows for the inclusion of variables (relations) that have remained largely understudied and for a valuable contribution to the scholarly understanding of the EU within ES and IR by moving away from common substantialist commitments. I shift the focus away from the structure of the international system and the actions of states within it, away from an exclusive

focus on institutions and interdependencies, and away from ideas and norms. Instead, I propose an emphasis on the complex web of relations that make up the EU as a mechanism to study its ambitions on the global stage.

What Does It Mean to Focus on Relations: Foundational Ontological Commitments

For several years now, the discipline of IR has been undergoing a "relational turn" (Kavalski 2018; Kurki 2022), and I situate my dissertation within it. This turn has featured a large variety of approaches and attempts to move beyond the traditional ontological, epistemological, and methodological commitments in mainstream IR. Kurki (2022) identifies a grand paradox in the discipline of IR in that although it includes the word *relations* in its name, it has largely failed to thoroughly think through and actually engage with what it means to think relationally (p.821). As such, the turn largely represents a challenge to traditional IR's actor-centrism and structure-centrism and its binary, self vs. other, atomist understandings of the world (Kurki 2022). For instance, one group of scholars pursue deep relationality through ontological decentering by bringing in insights from different geocultural traditions (e.g., Ling 2014; Trownsell et al. 2021); others move beyond anthropocentric understandings of IR and challenge the exclusion of the non-human world from the traditional understanding of politics (e.g., Youatt 2020; Trownsell et al. 2021); and yet others establish a dialogue between the natural and social sciences by engaging with "relational cosmology" (Kurki 2022). These groups of scholars align within what Trownsell et al. (2019) call "deep relationalism."

In addition to deep relationalism, a big group of Anglophone relational scholarship is also part of the relational turn that does not necessarily directly challenge the Western-centrism of IR. The processual relationalism developed by Jackson and Nexon (1999) is part of the so-called Anglophone relational approaches in IR that stem from Western sociological traditions as a

challenge to mainstream American IR. Jackson and Nexon do an excellent job of taking stock of the developments within Anglophone relationalism in IR in their 2019 article by providing an overview of some of the leading relational approaches in the discipline – from network analysis through practice theory to pragmatism. There, they also explicitly distinguish between Anglophone and Sinophone approaches, which represents another group of relational thinking about world politics that has its roots in Chinese and Confucian traditions (e.g., Qin 2016). Furthermore, Sinophone relationalists have criticized Jackson and Nexon's relational approach for being excessively Eurocentric and thus exclusionary of non-Western understandings of relations which results in an overall failure to overcome the individualistic rationality that is inherent in mainstream – substantialist – IR (Qin 2016, 34).

In addition, various critical approaches within IR have also applied relational thinking to theorizing global politics. Some constructivist scholarship is considered to fall within the parameters of relational approaches. Deep relationalist scholars, however, draw a line between relationality and constructivism by stating that there is a major difference between claiming that reality is socially constructed and stating that "relations constitute reality or … multiple realities" (Trownsell et al. 2019). Furthermore, they challenge many constructivists' focus only on some types of relations that "constitute agents/structures" and simultaneously "leaves intact the ontological independence of the structures" (Trownsell et al. 2019). On the other hand, although they do not negate the connection between relationalism and constructivism, Jackson and Nexon (2019) emphasize the importance of not entirely and solely associating the two (p.582). While the combination of practice theory and relationalism is seen by some as the "next generation of constructivist scholarship" (McCourt 2016, cited in Jackson and Nexon 2019, 582), Jackson and Nexon (2019) point out that "not all practice-theoretic and relational scholarship fits comfortably

under the rubric of constructivism" (p.582), and many relationalists do not consider themselves constructivists at all. This arises from the fact that relationalism is a family of social theories and approaches, while constructivism in this context is a paradigm in IR – and thus elements of relationalism run through constructivist approaches to global political phenomena but are not one and the same (p.583). Furthermore, Patrick T. Jackson criticizes the substantialist bias embedded in early IR norm constructivist scholarship in its treatment of norms as self-sufficient entities with causal agency, as social facts that are not much different ontologically from the explanations offered by rational models and theories (Jackson and Nexon 2023).

Furthermore, some feminist and postcolonial scholarship has also developed relational understandings in their approaches to global phenomena in that they emphasize the social construction of a global order based on gendered and racist understandings of self and other, respectively. However, they have not been explicitly labeled relational approaches per se (Klasche and Poopuu 2023, 2). More recently, Benjamin Klasche and Birgit Poopuu (2023) build on these critical IR approaches, especially feminism and postcolonialism, and apply the premises of relational theorizing to develop a critical relationalism approach that takes into consideration the ethics and politics of prioritizing certain relations. As such, they highlight the significance of emphasizing gendered and colonial relations as relations of power.

Marxist scholarship has also had deeply interwoven relational characteristics in its approach to world politics. In his seminal work from 1997, Emirbayer deems Marx "a profoundly relational thinker," visible, for instance, through his formulations of alienation and the relations of capital and labor (p.290). In Marx's view, "the working class is defined by its qualitative location within a social relation that simultaneously defines the capitalist class," indicating that classes are the result of social relations (Wright 1979, 6-7; cited in Emirbayer 1997 290). Bertell Ollman

(1976; 2015) adopts the vocabulary of external and internal relations to indicate a dichotomy in social understanding between "things" and "relations". Similarly, Erik Olin Wright (2016) distinguishes between gradational and relational ontologies when discussing economic inequalities as resulting either from the individual attributes and actions of persons in the case of the former or from the built-in structure of social positions (cited in Stevis 2022, 610). More recently, within the field of environmental labor and justice, Dimitris Stevis (2022) argues for a relational approach to environmental labor studies based on the assumption that "actors are mutually constituted within social divisions of labour" that usually represent uneven historical relations and thus "so is the mutual constitution of the involved actors or social forces" (p.611). This focus on historical relations and the embedded asymmetry of power within them is similar to what I emphasize in my theoretical approach in my dissertation although I move beyond economic relations and relations of production.

Despite the general relational tendencies in some Marxist and historical materialist work, Emirbayer (1997) is simultaneously quick to point out the various substantialist commitments in Marx's work, including the fact that he reifies class interests and "his assumption that actors within the same class category… will act in similar ways even when differentially situated within flows of transactions or 'relational settings'" (p.290, citing Somers 1994). Other relational sociologists also criticize Marxism for reducing social relations to not more than an expression of the "material infrastructure of society" (Donati 2011, 76).

In addition to the concept of asymmetrical historical relations, the theoretical approach I develop in this dissertation (extensively discussed in Chapter 2) also borrows some concepts from the World Systems Theoretical (WST) approach. Immanuel Wallerstein viewed the world-system as a "multicultural territorial division of labor" based on the relations of production established by

the world economy (Wallerstein 1974, 347) that translate to core-periphery relations between two interdependent regions, identifiable with the imperialist domination of the West as the core which focuses on capital-intensive production, and regions of the world dominated by the West as the periphery that focuses on labor-intensive production (Goldfrank 2000). This system is based on relations of domination and subordination that continue to reproduce themselves and to asymmetrically serve the interests of the core. The relations of power in WST, however, have a structural character as they occur between "self-subsistent" "structures" and "social systems" and are thus based on the assumption that "it is durable, coherent entities that constitute the legitimate starting points of all social inquiry" (Emirbayer 1997, 285). Unlike WST, then, my approach is not focused exclusively on relations of production and the global and regional division of labor, nor is it concentrated entirely on a structural understanding of world politics and power relations but rather gives primacy to historical asymmetrical relations of power that despite their historical embeddedness are dynamic and changeable and do not emerge as a result of – and are not exclusively determined by - the structure of the international system. These relations - and not the international system itself - is what exerts the causal action in my theoretical approach. The unique contribution of my theoretical approach is the focus on the asymmetrical relational power dynamics and the embedded relations of domination and subordination as the explanatory factors. That is, it is the nature of the theorized relations themselves that exert the theorized effect, not the system in which they exist or the actors among which they operate.

A relational perspective like the one I am developing in my dissertation offers a novel approach to studying the formation of ambitions in EU foreign policy. It offers avenues for the exploration of phenomena that more traditional approaches in IR and ES could not tackle or reach due to their various ontological and epistemological commitments as discussed above. In addition,

through this approach I seek to avoid the complex debate regarding the EU's "proper" identity (e.g., normative power, ethical power, or something else), or regarding what elements of the EU's actorness must take analytical primacy to properly understand the EU's international presence (e.g., its legitimacy, its cohesion, etc.). Instead, I seek to examine the role of various relational dynamics for the formation of the EU's foreign policy ambitions that exert a driving effect for its ambitions as an actor in global politics. I emphasize the importance of relational power dynamics and how their legacies persist for this process. Furthermore, while some conventional and critical IR approaches focus on reality being socially constructed, it is different from starting with the assumption that "relations constitute reality," thus assuming a different ontological starting point (Trownsell et al. 2019).

In developing my theoretical approach, I drew on the scholarly works describing the differences between substantialism and relationalism. Following the publication of Mustafa Emirbayer's "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology" in 1997 in which he identifies the ontological commitments of "substantialism" and relationalism" to be the most significant division within the sociological theory at the time, Patrick T. Jackson and Daniel Nexon sought to bring the discussion to the discipline of International Relations in their pioneering work "Relations Before States" in 1999.[2] Relationalism is a family of theories, akin to individualism or structuralism, that cuts through the various IR paradigms (Jackson and Nexon 2019, 582-583). The factor that puts these various theoretical approaches under the same umbrella of relationalism is the ontological and epistemological commitment of "the theoretical and analytical significance of connections, ties, transactions and other kinds of relations among entities" that "give rise to *both* actors and the

[2] Jackson and Nexon (1999) discuss the main ontological commitments and divisions between substantialism and relationalism and develop their approach of processual relationalism to study global politics within the discipline of International Relations.

environment in which they find themselves" (Jackson and Nexon 2019, 583). It is broadly situated "between actor-centric and structural-holistic approaches," focusing on processes and mechanisms (p.584). In terms of fundamental ontological commitments, relationalism puts relations at the center of analysis in contrast to substantialism where actors and units take center stage. Thus, relational approaches place the analytical starting point at the relations between entities rather than on an entity itself "with characteristics that explain its behavior" or on some "essential structure with characteristics that establish the parametric constraints within which entities behave" (p.585).

Substantialism negates the possibility that anything else but entities can be a unit of analysis, making them the "ontological priors" for all substantialist theorizing (Kavalski 2016, 552). In contrast, by making relations the units of analysis, relationalism adds immense value to the study of International Relations by opening the door for temporal variation in the behavior of entities; i.e., actors' emergence and subsequent actions occurs "in and through relations," and their behavior and roles are expected to differ temporally and spatially (Kavalski 2016, 552). Relational approaches have the power to overcome dyadic, static, and spatial understandings and commitments of substantialist IR by offering dynamic perspectives encompassing the intricacies and complexity of relations on all levels of analysis and interaction (Kavalski 2016, 558). Thus, a major difference between relationalism and substantialism lies in their intrinsically different understanding of the link between entities and relations. While relational approaches tend to assume relations as "constitutive" to entities and their actions, non-relational approaches view relations as something that entities engage in among themselves and other entities (Selg and Ventsel 2020, 3).

It is important to note here that the strong ontological commitments of relationalism and substantialism represent ideal types at the two ends of a broad spectrum of approaches to studying

phenomena in IR (see Jackson and Nexon 1999; 2023). As such, the majority of work with various relational commitments falls along this spectrum as long as it maintains to perceiving relations as deserving to be the unit of analysis. Just as a complete blind ontological commitment to substantialist premises would close the door to various approaches and variables in the exploration of phenomena in global politics, so will a similar complete commitment to relational ontology. Thus, in a large portion of relational work, the two foci are not mutually exclusive, but prioritizing one limits the attention given to the other (Nordin et al. 2019). Jackson and Nexon (1999), in fact, state that "[s]ocial scientists should never be so bold as to claim they know what reality *is"* and thus incorporating "substantialist and relationalist assumptions to varying degrees" is expected (p.292) for the purposes of moving from pure ontological commitments to applicable theory generation and empirical work. With this in mind, I position myself along the spectrum as well, although closer to the relational end than the substantialist side. My ontological starting points in this dissertation move away from the primacy of actors and units and instead place relations between entities to be constitutive of the entities themselves and their ambitions and behavior on the international stage.

Finally, it is important to mention that approaches that fall under the Anglophone relational family of theories are characterized by methodological pluralism as there are no methodological constraints that define them (Jackson and Nexon 2019). Regardless of the approaches they undertake to test their hypotheses and establish causal inference, they are united by the analytical commitment of the primacy of relations and social ties. I employ a combination of qualitative methods to test the plausibility of my theory and arguments in the empirical chapters of my dissertation, which will be introduced next.

Overview of the Dissertation: Research Strategy and Dissertation Plan

This dissertation is comprised of three related but separate journal article manuscripts that appear here as Chapters 2, 3, and 4. The first one develops a theoretical framework for studying EU ambitions through a relational approach and focuses on the EU's climate foreign policy as an illustrative case. The second article focuses on one of the identified relevant categories of relations and explores the transatlantic relationship between the US and the European project with a focus on the EU's climate governance and the leadership transition that occurred between them. It employs a qualitative methodological approach by developing a qualitative counterfactual analysis complemented by the discussion of three shadow cases. The third article explores the second identified category of relations – internal EU relations among the member states on an east-west axis. This article focuses on the EU's policy-making and ambition-setting process and examines the part in the process where national interests are expressed and heard directly – during the public deliberations in the Council of the European Union. I employ qualitative content analysis of publicly available video data from these deliberations that is transformed into text format.

I employ a sequential timeline for this study. The two sets of relations that I identify as drivers for ambitions in my framework act in an intertwined fashion to influence the ambitions formation of the EU's foreign policy in climate change but there is also an important temporal sequence that will be followed in order to capture the impact of the identified relational dynamics. I will first focus on and explore the Transatlantic dimension on my framework through the following strategy: first, I will discuss the role that the US relations with the budding European project and the states involved in it following the end of WWII played for the creation, establishment, and development of the European project; then, I will focus on the transatlantic leadership transition period in climate change governance in the 1990s and early 2000s. Afterwards, I will include a qualitative counterfactual analysis by focusing on a scenario where

the US maintained its leadership and did not announce its decision to withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001 following the election of the George W. Bush Administration. To demonstrate the plausibility of this case, I will conclude with a brief discussion of three shadow cases, including two that are within the same thematic area but are separated from the main case temporally, and one representing an issue area where the US did maintain its global leadership – security and defense. By doing this, I seek to examine alternative instances where the leadership dynamics played out in a different way to help further illuminate the effects of the relational dynamics in the transatlantic space.

Afterwards, I will shift the focus onto the internal relational dimension of my framework. The emphasis here will be on how the accession of CEE states to the EU in 2004, 2007, and 2013 affected (if at all) the EU's climate change leadership ambitions. To achieve this, I will focus on the period immediately before the Paris Agreement of 2015. The goal here is to examine which member states' interests are promoted and whose are not: do all member states hold the same interests and if not, are all interests taken under equal consideration and are all of them addressed to an equal extent in the formation of a common EU ambition? I look at public debates from the Council of the EU, and specifically the Environment Council configuration (ENV). I examine all of the ENV public debates in the period 2014-2015 and conduct qualitative content analysis to test my argument using NVivo. These public debates represent the point in the EU policy- and foreign policy-making process where the national preferences of the member states are clearly and directly expressed.

As mentioned earlier, throughout the dissertation I use the term "European project" to indicate the various configurations preceding the establishment of the European Union with the Treaty on European Union (also known as the Maastricht Treaty) in 1993. Throughout its

existence, the European project's membership makeup has changed significantly with new states acceding and leaving the Project (in the case of Great Britain).[3] The two empirical chapters of my dissertation focus on two specific time periods that have different membership configurations as they are separated temporally. The chapter focusing on the transatlantic leadership transition focuses on the establishment of the global climate regime through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol, thus encompassing the 1990s and the first two years of the new millennium (2000 and 2001).[4] The second empirical chapter focuses on the inter-member state dynamics in the period 2014-2015.[5]

The relational approach that I pursue reveals a universe of potential relations that come into play for the formation of foreign policy ambitions by the EU. These relations operate and potentially transcend the different levels of analysis, and various studies that have undertaken relational approaches have focused on them. For instance, scholars who examine the dynamics in diplomacy and diplomatic exchanges often pursue an analysis of individual relations within and without different institutions, networks, and settings. Another focus might require the examination of the domestic circumstances in the political systems and cultures of the various member states, leading to the decisions and directions associated with the EU and all related matters. At the same time, intra-and inter-institutional dynamics could be the primary focus, as well as the specific

[3] For a timeline of the membership of the European project since its inception, please see: https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/eu-countries_en.

[4] The member states of the EU in this time period include: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, The United Kingdom, as well as Austria, Finland, and Sweden who joined in 1995.

[5] In addition to the 15 member states listed in the previous footnote, the member states in this time period include the countries from Central and Eastern Europe who joined the Union in 2004, 2007, and 2013, including: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

characteristics of individual representatives, leaders, and policymakers involved in the process of EU supranational ambitions formation. Additionally, relations pertaining to capital flow, interests, and a focus on private-sector dynamics deeply intertwined in the workings of the EU could draw another direction for analysis on the questions at hand. Yet another avenue of exploration could include activists, NGOs, and grassroots social movements within the EU member states and the influence they have had on the CFP ambitions formation of the EU (see Little 2020; Jordan et al. 2022).

However, in the interest of maintaining the feasibility of this project, I pursue an analysis focused on the relations of states and (in) the EU as an entity (an independent actor) that, while not a sovereign state, completes some essential functions that are usually reserved only for sovereign states, including the formation of foreign policy (Palmer and Morgan 2006). Future research that adopts a relational approach to the drivers of CFP ambitions of the EU could explore other directions of the universe of relations that play a potential role in this process.

Caveats and Limitations

In this dissertation, I focus on two specific categories of relational dynamics as I explore relations between states and/in the EU as a homogenous unit. While I do not assume the EU to be a state, I view it as an entity that acts as a unit in some instances of global politics, including – centrally for my dissertation – in global climate governance. Thus, here I understand the EU to be a unified actor with the ability to set policies within its jurisdictional confines, to establish a presence on the international stage as a distinguishable unit among other state and non-state actors, and to exert influence in international negotiations. The web of relations that makes up and constitutes the EU which I theorize here can and should certainly expand to a plethora of non-state actors with a temporal reach spanning over eight decades. Other relational dynamics among states

could also be explored in more depth depending on the issue and time period at focus as well as the researcher's goals and inclinations. Thus, an important assumption I make here is that this web of relations is indeed extremely vast – if not limitless. The theoretical approach I develop in this dissertation is intended to serve as a heuristic device to allow the researcher to explore various relational dynamics from this limitless web of relations.

Second, I focus on two categories of relations and demonstrate empirically how they have affected the EU's climate foreign policy ambitions in the two empirical chapters respectively. I establish that these are only two categories of relations out of a vast web of relations that make up and comprise the EU since the beginning of the European project. While I ground my choice in rigorous preliminary research (see Chapters 1, 2, and 3), the reader might find additional categories of relations – on the state level and below or beyond it – that deserve attention.

Another important caveat that needs to be made with regards to the leadership of the EU in terms of its climate foreign policy concerns the parameters of its role and ambitions. That is, the EU climate change leadership should be defined within the parameters of liberal environmentalism as it has been the leading paradigm for the EU's approaches to environmental issues (Musch and De Ville 2019). Liberal environmentalism has been defined as the established global approach to environmental issues that predicates "international environmental protection on the promotion and maintenance of a liberal economic order" (Bernstein 2002, 1). This paradigm, or norm complex, rests on the neoliberal principles consistent with the Washington Consensus and positions market-based approaches and economic instruments as the direct path to achieving environmental solutions (Bernstein 2001; Musch and De Ville 2019, 6). Liberal environmentalism took global prevalence as the modus operandi of global environmental governance by the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (also known commonly as the "Earth Summit")

and was further reaffirmed as such during the Kyoto Protocol negotiations. It replaced the earlier dominant paradigms of environmental protection, prevalent in the 1970s, and further crystalized the subsequent shift to Sustainable Development in the 1980s that took global hold via the World Commission on Environment and Development and the Brundtland Report. The ultimate success by liberal environmentalism over any previous and competing approaches to global environmental issues was delivered by its successful entrenchment into the already recognized basis of the normative social structure, promoting the specific goals and values of neoliberalism and framing environmental problems in a manner that makes them fit within this paradigm (Bernstein 2002, 2-11).

This caveat is important because this leading paradigm in global environmental governance is the paradigm within which the EU exercises its climate leadership. That is, the EU is not trying to implement a new competing norm complex to global environmental governance but seeks to achieve its foreign policy goals within the existing boundaries. The EU is not seeking to disrupt the international order that came to be through US global leadership. While the US did not play the active leading role in the establishment of liberal environmentalism as the modus operandi, it did emerge from and within the global (neo)liberal order and its institutions that the United States, through the historical developments within the transatlantic relations, played a key role in establishing. In fact, as many critics have warned, liberal environmentalism is often seen to serve the interests of the wealthy Western states at the expense of the less affluent states and the environment itself (see Bäckstrand and Lövbrand 2019; Hadden 2015). Thus, it can be said that liberal environmentalism was born within the intricacies of transatlantic relations and perpetuated by other European relations with third countries. The leadership that the EU is pursuing and the policies it has been implementing do not seek to significantly disrupt the established western

liberal international political and economic order, but it is rather designed to exist within it. Thus, the essence of the EU climate change leadership is threefold: 1) it exists and is being pursued as a result of a long complex intertwined relational dynamics, 2) it exists within the established parameters that have been molded within and through these relational dynamics, and 3), it came to be only after the US took a step back from the leadership position in global environmental governance. The EU is not inventing the wheel by pursuing some form of revolutionary leadership; rather, its ambitions are defined by the intricate relational dynamics within which the EU came to existence and continued to develop and evolve in.

Conclusion

In this introductory chapter, my goal has been to situate my dissertation within the wider literatures of IR and ES, and specifically within the study of EU foreign policy and how the EU has been studied in IR. From this starting point, I clarify the underlying ontological commitments of my dissertation by situating myself in the "Relational turn" in IR and clarifying what the added value of the theoretical approach and framework that I discuss at length in Chapter 2 will be.

While the details of the theoretical framework developed in this dissertation are applied to the case of the EU's climate change leadership ambitions to demonstrate the empirical employability of my theoretical framework, the framework is designed to apply to other issue areas as well. An application to the trade and development aid domains, for instance, should include a heavy focus on one particular category of relations, among others: European relations with former colonies. The idea is that while different categories of relations should be explored depending on the issue area, the framework remains the same nevertheless: EU ambitions in and behind its foreign policy should be explored through a relational perspective as these relations have a constitutive force. The generalizability potential of this framework goes beyond the EU as well

and can be applied as an additional layer to the explanation of the foreign-policy ambitions formation of other states and entities on the international arena.

CHAPTER 2. THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: A RELATIONAL THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The EU has had a solid presence on the international stage for decades, emerging as a prominent and, in some domains, leading actor in global politics. For instance, the EU's leadership ambitions in climate change governance are difficult to deny. Various perspectives on the EU's global presence and actorness have been explored in the rich literature of European Studies and International Relations. Neither the EU as an actor nor its foreign policy, however, have fit well into the mainstream accounts of IR as many of the traditional approaches in the discipline – from realism to liberalism and causal constructivism –can at times leave the impression that the EU is a kind of a "misshapen monster" in international politics due to their state-in-anarchy ontological commitments (McConaughey et al. 2018). Nevertheless, this perceived *sui generis* nature of the EU has made this a pertinent avenue for exploration. Through the years, a rich body of literature has developed to improve the theorizing and understanding of the identity of the EU as an international actor. François Duchêne (1972; 1973) first envisioned the European project to embody a civilian power Europe, representing the bloc's economic power instead of traditional military power. This image has been challenged by others who discuss the need to militarize the EU because reliance on economic power alone was seen as insufficient, so a transition to military power Europe was considered necessary (Bull 1982). The debate progressed by envisioning the EU to embody other special characteristics that defined its actorness on the international stage, such as the idea of normative power Europe (Manners 2002; Sjursen 2006), ethical power Europe

(Aggestam 2008), transformative power Europe (Börzel and Risse 2009), and market power Europe (Damro 2012), to name but a few.

The question regarding the EU's identity on the global stage has sparked the interest of generations of scholars in European Studies, International Relations, and Comparative Politics, among others, spanning back decades. A question that is less frequently asked, however, regards the origins of the ambitions of the EU. That is, what has driven the EU's ambitions through the years as a global actor? Additionally, why is that the EU's ambitions vary across issue areas? For instance, why is the EU pursuing leadership in climate change governance but not in other domains, such as security and defense, for instance?

In this dissertation, I seek to explore why has the EU developed certain ambitions on the global stage and not something entirely different by proposing an alternative theoretical approach through the lens of relationalsim. With that, I ask both what has enabled the EU to develop its ambitions, and also what has constrained it from developing entirely different ambitions (e.g., an ambition to be a geopolitical player or a leading security actor). Thus, I shift the focus of analysis on the *drivers* behind the ambitions that the EU sets for itself. I argue that the existing approaches to studying the nature of the EU as a consequential actor on the international stage with specific ambitions can offer only limited understanding on the matter due to various substantialist ontological and epistemological constraints – namely an actor-centric understanding of the world. I propose a way to overcome these limitations by making *relations* the primary focus of analysis, thus avoiding the states-in-anarchy commitments of some mainstream approaches to IR. I argue that at the core of the question regarding the drivers behind EU ambitions lies a complex web of relations that have – since the inception of the European project – constituted the EU in particular ways into what we see today, the different iterations we have observed over the past eight decades,

and the ambitions it sets for itself on the global stage. This web of relations deserves close and detailed attention, which is what my dissertation proposes – a theoretical framework to examine these consequential relations and study how they have affected the EU's ambitions. As such, I do not seek to directly contribute to the ongoing debate on EU actorness as I am not proposing a new theoretical approach to understanding what type of actor the EU is but rather what drives it to set its foreign policy ambitions.

An emphasis on historical relational dynamics reveals a complex web of interactions that have had, and continue to have, constitutive effects on entities and their ambitions and behavior. I propose a theoretical framework that illustrates the constitutive power of relations for the EU itself and its ambitions on the global stage. I focus on the area of the bloc's climate foreign policy ambitions as an illustrative case due to the extensive pursuit of global leadership by the EU in this domain, but this framework is designed to be applied as a heuristic device to a variety of other issue and temporal domains as well. A relational approach here is necessary to examine the various historical dynamics because it puts relations at the center of analysis, unlike the more mainstream, substantialist approaches in IR where the focus is on actors and their actions and interactions that have systemic effects.

Shifting the focus to the complex web of relations that constitute the EU allows us to examine the power dynamics at play that enable and constrain the EU in the formation of its ambitions. This web of relations is vast and potentially limitless. Thus, I focus on two categories of relations within this complex web, and I will demonstrate the consequential effects they have for the EU's climate ambition formation process in global politics. Different relational categories will come to the forefront depending on the issue at focus, akin to a classic View Master stereoscope device. For instance, focusing on EU trade and development policy might require a

look into the relational dynamics between the EU and Global South states, as well as individual member states' colonial legacies and neocolonial arrangements (e.g., Sicking 2004; Odijie 2022). Similarly, an exclusive focus on the EU's security and defense cannot avoid bringing to the fore relations with the US and relations with and within NATO.

In selecting the two most consequential categories in my study of the EU's climate foreign policy ambitions formation, I examined the history of the environmental and climate change movements and the EU's record in global climate governance leadership, as well as the EU member states' interests, preferences, and historical legacies when it comes to climate change policies and politics. Relations with the United States and relations between member states on an east-west axis revealed themselves to be two categories to hold significant consequence in the matter. For instance, there is an agreement in the literature that the EU has indeed pursued climate leadership over the past two decades, and that a shift in leadership between the US and the EU occurred in the 1990s and early 2000s, culminating with the American 2001 withdrawal announcement from the Kyoto Protocol (Kelemen and Vogel 2010). In addition, the vast body of literature, complemented by findings from the Decision-making in the European Union dataset (DEU III) reveals that climate issues hold high salience points for national representatives in the Council of the EU and are high issues of contestation for member states on the east-west axis (Arregui and Perarnaud 2022; see also Thomson et al. 2012), which is in line with the existing research of internal EU divisions among the member states (e.g., Lessenski 2019; Oroschakoff 2019; Wurzel et al. 2019).

Thus, in this article, I develop a relational theoretical approach which I apply to a theoretical framework to understanding the EU's ambition formation and use the EU's leadership in climate change governance as an illustrative case to demonstrate the theoretical framework in

action. As mentioned above, my intention for this framework is that it will be applicable to any issue area in which the EU exhibits foreign policy ambitions with a different configuration of relational categories. Thus, this theoretical framework is akin to a stereoscope device, and I illustrate the usefulness of it through a selection of applicable "reels" in the face of the EU's climate foreign policy ambitions case.

In the remainder of the chapter, I first present and discuss some of the key concepts for my theoretical framework followed by a discussion of the case of the EU's climate foreign policy and leadership ambitions. Then, I move to developing my theoretical framework before presenting some concluding remarks.

Core Concepts

The Foreign Policy of the EU: Complexity and Uniqueness

What is EU foreign policy? Stephen Keukeleire and Tom Delreux (2022) define it as encompassing not only reactions "to international crises and conflicts in relation to other international conflicts," but also "structuring the behavior and mindset of other actors in international politics" (p.11). In addition, they construct it as: 1) multidimensional in that it consists of four main components – the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), external action, and external dimensions of internal policies; 2) multimethod, reflecting the two main policy-making methods in the EU – the intergovernmental and Community methods; and 3) multilevel, represented in the intertwinement of the national and supranational levels in the foreign policy-making process that occurs in the international context (pp.12-18). Similarly, others characterize EUFP to include the "totality of the EU's external relations, combining political, economic, humanitarian and, more recently, also military

instruments" (Tonra and Christiansen 2004, 2). The EU has made tremendous progress towards speaking with a single voice on numerous issues through coordination in its foreign policy not only through advancements in integration, but also as a result of external factors and changes in the international system through the years (Tonra and Christiansen 2004, 2).

Aside from a field of practice, EUFP is also a field of study. The study of EUFP has not been a simple or uniform endeavor. Rather, it has progressed significantly since its inception in the early 1950s. While initially the focus was on studying individual member states' foreign policy and attention was specifically paid to the powerful European states, the field has grown to encompass a rich abundance of approaches, foci, and research agendas. Jørgensen (2015b) identifies several key characteristics and deficits of the field of study of EUFP that have developed over the decades, including predominance of descriptive rather than theory-informed studies, which has resulted in a deficit in methodology, as well as a presentism emphasis rather than long-term historical accounts, among others (p.16). There is also a predominant focus on agent-oriented approaches rather than studies examining structural and system effects on EUFP. Furthermore, IR theorists have not been extensively intrigued by the study of EUFP in the same manner as they have been interested in other aspects of EU politics (Jørgensen 2015b).

Neither the EU nor its foreign policy have fit well into the mainstream accounts of IR. The foreign policy and international behavior of the EU is difficult to theorize due to its unique nature, leaving IR scholars rejecting the EU as a state-in-anarchy actor but also as one that does not fit any of the categories of new actors in IR (Tonra 2009, 5-7). The images of the foreign, the domestic, and the international take on different dimensions and thus have unclear boundaries, making the study of EU foreign policy an even bigger challenge (Jørgensen 2015a, 8).

As a result, a rich literature is developing that examines different approaches to the study of EU foreign policy. They differ in what drives the actors: i.e., actors as "role players rather than as rational utility maximizers", and the latter, unlike the former, does not assume the primacy of actors in the agent-structure debate as they are mutually constituted (Tonra 2009, 11). A critique to predominant ES approaches to EU foreign policy is that they have tended to be reductionist in the sense that they focus mainly on internal factors within the EU and the member states rather than the myriad external influences stemming from the global environment and the international system (Jørgensen 2015a). Factors such as the European colonial past and relations with former colonies during and after the anti-colonial movement, as well as systemic influences from different geopolitical configurations in the international system tend to be underrepresented in ES scholarship. The study of EU Foreign Policy has not been led by a common research agenda as it encompasses three tangential fields of study: International Relations, Foreign Policy Studies, and European Studies. It has been the focus primarily of the last one, and it encompasses at least five specific subject areas: 1) relations with international organizations and third states; 2) policy analysis; 3) the politics involved in foreign policy-making; 4) the inter- and intra-institutional dynamics with the EU; and 5) the various actors in European foreign policy (Jørgensen 2015b, 15). Thus, the historical-relational connotations, both external and internal, involved in EU foreign policy, have largely not been explored. Overall, the study of EUFP has been characterized as being more descriptive rather than analytical with a focus on specific policies, institutions, or cases and as less frequently engaging in theory building (Jørgensen 2015a, 13).

A research trajectory that has risen to prominence over several decades has been the focus on the actorness of the EU as part of the study of its foreign policy. The concept of actorness for the EU has been characterized as a "heuristic device for the study of external European action"

and moves the discussion of EU foreign policy beyond the focus on actors, structures, and processes (Lütz et al. 2021, 1). The EU actorness debate arose in the 1970s with the recognition of the United Nations (UN) as an actor in the international system by the International Court of Justice, thus pointing the attention to the European Commission's role in global affairs as a supranational entity (see Cosgrove and Twitchett 1970). Since then, the debate has evolved significantly, encompassing a diverse array of foci, theoretical approaches, and ontological commitments to the study of the EU. It has been characterized as a rather polarized debate (Howorth 2010), including scholars who perceive the potential for the emergence of a powerful international actor in the face of the EU (e.g., Haseler 2004; Leonard 2005, cited in Howorth 2010) on the one hand, and another group of scholars who do not perceive the EU as a unified actor on the global stage and thus its actorness is nothing more than a coincidence (e.g., Allen and Smith 2007; Menon 2008, cited in Howorth 2010). There is also a third camp which conceptualized the EU's ability to exert influence on the international stage to be marginal and through its normative powers (e.g., Telò, 2006; Laïdi, 2008, cited in Howorth 2010).

Considered through another lens, the EU actorness debate has encompassed different dimensional and conceptual foci. In fact, the debate on EU actorness has a long-standing tradition within the study of the EU, spanning various theoretical approaches (e.g., Gilpin 2001; Damro 2012) at the intersection of internal and external dimensions of actorness (Jupile and Caporaso 1998; Bretherton and Vogler 1999; Klose 2018) and conceptual foci (see Delreux 2014; Kratochwil et al. 2011; Niemann and Bretherton 2013). Attention has also been paid extensively to the identity of the EU as an actor in global politics, and the EU has thus been envisioned as a civilian power (Duchêne 1972; 1973), normative power (Manners 2002), transformative power (Börzel and Risse 2009), market power (Damro 2012), and even as an "inadvertent great power" in the case of the

EU's approach towards Ukraine vis-à-vis Russia prior to the 2022 full-scale invasion (Gehring et al. 2017), to name only a few. A sizable body of literature, comprising of mostly constructivist approaches, focus on the concepts of legitimacy (Bretherton and Vogler 2006; Čmakalová and Rolenc 2012), cohesion (Jupile and Caporaso 1998), capacity, authority, and autonomy. Others have focused on the EU as a diplomatic actor by examining the diplomatic interactions it engages in (Maurer 2022). Several scholars have called for shifting the focus away from defining the EU's actorness to focusing on results, or on the effectiveness of its external actions (Niemman and Bretherton 2013; da Conceição-Heldt and Meunier 2014). The issue of purpose of the EU as a global actor has also grasped scholarly attention, with a seemingly unresolvable dichotomy between a state-centric understanding of "national" purpose and the sui generis nature of the EU. A state-centric view begins with the understanding that the defined national interests represent the collective majority vision of its citizens, but in the case of the EU it is more difficult to make this clear connection due to its supranational sui generis nature where we observe different national interests of the member states (Simão 2022). Often, scholars who focus on purpose when discussing EU actorness make a normative argument regarding the need for a grand strategy development by the EU (see Barrinha 2016).

Following this brief overview of the nature and study of EUFP, I turn towards discussing a few other core concepts for the theoretical framework I develop in this chapter.

Climate Foreign Policy of the EU

Another key concept for my theoretical framework is the EU's climate foreign policy as expressed in its global climate leadership ambitions. Simon Schunz (2019) discusses climate foreign policy (CFP) as an aspect of the EU's environmental foreign policy (EFP), which is identified as a necessity for any actor who seeks to navigate the complexity of global

environmental problems and governance. The EU's environmental and climate change-related *ambitions* for global leadership, then, are visible in its CFP and inform the EU's CFP *behavior*. Schunz (2019) identifies two distinct periods for EU CFP behavior, separated by the disappointing outcomes for EU climate change leadership during the 2009 Copenhagen summit. Prior to 2009, the EU's CFP had relied primarily on a handful of tools, including the active promotion of its own internal model via persuasion (p.352). Afterwards, the EU's CFP approach expanded, as evidenced by the EU's behavior in the negotiations leading up to the Paris Summit of 2015, to include several institutional rearrangements in the formulation of the CFP, along with the addition of economic incentives to its persuasion and diplomatic efforts, and coalition-building with developing countries offering issue linkages and economic incentives as carrots rather than relying only on explaining the reasoning behind and promises of its own internal climate policies (Schunz 2019, 352-353; see also Bäckstrand and Elgström 2013; Oberthür and Groen 2017). Nevertheless, leading by example remained a central part of the EU's CFP and its climate leadership.

Power and Asymmetrical Power Dynamics

Power is one of the most central concepts in International Relations and simultaneously one of the most contested (Mattern 2008). A brief look at the various theoretical approaches in IR would reveal power to take a prime position in various scholarship endeavors. For instance, no attempt to understand the premises of realism is possible without a discussion of power. In fact, power is broadly understood as the currency of the realist international system, necessary to buy security and any other relevant goods (Mastanduno et al. 1989, 462). Additionally, in mainstream IR, power asymmetry is defined in terms of material resources and military and economic capabilities among independent self-standing entities. There, we start with two (or more) states who clearly exhibit these asymmetries in their relations, and one of them has the upper hand in

influencing the relationship and the other state, as well as the ability to constrain the choices, actions, and preferences of the weaker state (van Criekinge 2009; Womack 2015).

One of the important debates in IR looks at the distinction between power-as-capability and power-as-relation (Lovato and Maurer 2022). While the first one features the understanding of power in terms of material and non-material resources as sources of state power (e.g. – military, economic capabilities, culture, and ideology as per Nye 1990), the other one considers power as "contingent upon the social relations among actors" (Lovato and Maurer 2022, 1996). For instance, one phenomenon that has been explored through such a relational understanding of power is international negotiations.

Discussions of power and, more importantly, "relational" power, can also be considered through a deeper ontological commitments' perspective. Using the metalanguage developed by relational sociologists (i.e., Dewey and Bentley 1949; Emirbayer 1997), Peeter Selg (2018) situates the vast literature of approaching the concept of power and power relations within their classifications of self-action, inter-action, and trans-action. Self-action approaches perceive power to be a resource or property of the self-acting entity, be it an agent or a structure. Steven Lukes's "third face" of power is one of the approaches that fall into this category as he discusses how the bias of the system is perpetuated by the self-acting, powerful actor A and keeps the actor B powerless (Selg 2018, 544). In the inter-action approaches to power, some relational aspects of interactions between actors are taken into account, but nevertheless the actors themselves remain unchanged and are not constituted by these relations (Selg 2018, 545-548). Bachrach and Baratz (1963) in their critique of Dahl's self-action approach to power focus on the interaction between actors and the mechanism for actor A's ability to change the behavior of actor B. Finally, trans-action approaches to power do not take substances and actors as given and pre-determined but

rather understand them as constituted by relations (Emirbayer 1997). Drawing on Margaret Somers (1994) and Michel Foucault (1978), among others, power is not understood as a structure or institution but rather "the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (Foucault 1978, 93), or what happens within a "relational setting" that is a "patterned matrix of institutional relationships among cultural, economic, social, and political practices" (Somers 1994, 72; cited in Selg 2018, 548). As such, power is thus understood to exist "when it is put into action" and not as a self-standing phenomenon (Foucault 1982, 788). The focus in trans-actional approaches falls on "the relational field of force in which power is configured and in which one aspect of this configuration is the social relations in which agency is constituted" (Clegg 1989, 207) rather than relations that occur between pre-existing, independent entities.

In this dissertation, I propose a relational framing of power asymmetry by taking into consideration the formative relations between the parties and the way these power dynamics have informed the identity of the EU and the ambitions it sets for itself rather than simply material power arrangements between two unchanging self-acting or inter-acting entities. For the purposes of application in this chapter, I focus on 1) the formation of the EU and its ambitions in terms of relations with the US, and 2) the effects of the persistent asymmetrical dynamics within the East-West divide within the EU on its foreign policy ambition-setting process. Within these historically embedded relations is where the power asymmetries lie. I seek to demonstrate that in the case of the EU's climate foreign policy, they manifest in the drivers of the EU's ambitions for global leadership. Furthermore, in line with more trans-actional understandings, I begin with the assumption that the theorized relational dynamics are not unidirectional but rather bi- (or multi-) directional (Selg 2018). That is, these relational dynamics exert constitutive effects on all involved entities, but focusing on all possible such effects would extend beyond the scope of this

dissertation. Thus, while I focus exclusively on their effects on the EU and its foreign policy ambitions, the effects of these relational dynamics on the US and individual member states could be studied separately in future research. This is in contrast to other understandings of power where a uni-directional arrow can easily be drawn from the position of Actor A to Actor B.

The relationship between the US and Western Europe since 1945 during the Cold War has been characterized as one of domination and subordination in that Western Europe recognized the authority of the US as these states became part of the American sphere of influence and took an important part in the American-led liberal order (Lake 2009, 2). Specifically, these are hierarchical relational dynamics built on voluntary consent rather than coercion. This stems from the role the US has played in the formation of the idea for and the European project itself and its subsequent development within the parameters of the post-war global arrangements. Thus, with its very creation, the European project was built within specific power asymmetries with the US – it was not a project that developed independently and subsequently gained the support or diplomatic relation with the US – the relations with the US played a key role in its establishment.

Simultaneously, the European project was strictly a Western European project in its inception. It was developed among states, many of whom were contemporary or former empires, devastated from the war, and welcoming (for the most part) the US help through the Marshall Plan and the idea of the European Coal and Steel Community, and accepting the terms of an emerging US-led sphere of influence in opposition to the common enemy to the east – the USSR and its satellites in Central and Eastern Europe. It was only 40 years after the establishment of the European project that states in the CEE were even considered for membership. What is more, the Western and the CEE member states have contrasting experiences when it comes to domination and subordination in terms of imperial legacies. That is, while the historical experience for many

of the Western member states is one of imperial and colonial powers, which in some cases even extended throughout the early years of the European project, the majority of the CEE share a common experience of subordination to former imperial powers, most recently the Soviet Union. The European project as it exists today represents a coin with two sides of imperial legacies – one of domination and one of subordination. As such, these contrasting legacies have constituted not only different experiences with the European project, but inevitable asymmetrical power dynamics among the Western and CEE states, including within the EU itself.

Ambitions

What does an *ambition* entail? I conceptualize foreign policy ambition to include desired goals and objectives in an entity's interactions with states and international organizations. These goals often include the assurance of national security and economic prosperity but can also extend to the expansion of global influence and addressing global issues like climate change. In addition, it includes a desire to structure "the behavior and mindset of other actors in international politics" (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022, 11). EU foreign policy, then, refers to "the entirety of activities developed by the EU and directed towards the external environment" (Delreux and Keukeleire 2016, 1473; Keukeleire and Delreux 2014), encompassing the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), external action, and the external dimensions of internal policies, like climate change and environmental policies (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022).

Thus, I conceptualize *ambition* as a dynamic concept with changing and evolving relational properties.[6] These properties are driven by the complex web of relations that define the EU. It is

[6] This relational formulation was developed with the advice of Prof. Patrick Thaddeus Jackson during our meeting at ISA 2023 in Montreal, Canada.

impossible to include the entire universe of relations that shape and form the EU within this project, so the focus is on specific properties that I include in my definition of "foreign policy ambition." The formation of foreign policy ambitions is not a static process; it also does not represent a set preference that does not change; rather, it is a dynamic process within which the EU's vision and objectives get reinstantiated. The formation of an ambition does not always (or often) translate into action and, thus, behavior. This is especially the case with the EU where the decision-making process involves a high degree of complexity, bureaucracy, and necessity for coherence, sometimes resulting in an "effectiveness deficit" (Schunz 2019). Thus, ambition is prior to and can be separate from behavior.

The foreign policy ambition formation process involves continuous and dynamic interactions among actors within the EU. In a broad sketch, this process involves several formative parts, including EU institutions (the European Council, the Council of the European Union, the European Commission, and the European Parliament and their specific temporally different powers and institutional characteristics throughout the development of the European project) and the EU member states (national governments). In the case of the climate change domain, the EU exerts leadership ambitions as visible in the rhetoric coming from its various institutions, its actions in international negotiations including diplomacy and persuasion – referred to as directional leadership (Oberthür and Roche Kelly 2008) - and its internal policies as its leadership is also frequently classified as "leading by example" (Schunz 2019). Ambition then gives way to but still drives other aspects of leadership, including effectiveness and strategies for success, among others, which are not within the scope of the framework I develop here. These aspects rely extensively on different institutional procedures, processes, and treaties that have been institutionalized. Instead,

my focus is on the goals that the EU strives to pursue and what the sources for them are rather than their actual pursuit and its effectiveness.

"Leadership ambitions" is a multifaceted concept. I understand leadership ambition for the purposes of this dissertation to have a twofold meaning. First is to indicate a desire to influence the thinking, perceptions, and behaviors of other actors, as well as achieving specific objectives on the global stage that involve the buy-in and commitment of others. The leadership ambition at focus here is the ambition the EU developed and exerted of saving the Kyoto Protocol after the US withdrawal announcement and taking on the role of herding the other parties to the Protocol in the absence of the US in 2001. Although many of the other countries were outraged by the American decision, the survival of the Protocol and the climate regime itself were in jeopardy, and it was the EU that stepped up and ensured the survival and implementation of the Kyoto Protocol (see Bäckstrand and Elgström 2013; Walker and Biedenkopf 2018). Second, an important aspect of the EU's climate foreign policy ambitions is its leadership by example, indicating that in formulating its ambitions, it also seeks to match them at the domestic level by implementing corresponding legislation at the EU level. These two facets of ambition are observable separately and jointly in the two empirical chapters that focus on the EU's external and internal environment respectively. Specifically, while Chapter 3 focuses on the significance of the relational dynamics in the transatlantic space for the EU's climate leadership ambitions, particularly in the early era of the global climate regime, Chapter 4 examines the effects of relational dynamics among EU member states as they are represented in the foreign policy-making process at the EU level.

The relational character of the concept here requires a focus on the existing relational dynamics at the time of study. I illustrate this statement through the empirical example used in this chapter – the climate change regime and the EU's leadership in it. In the accounts of first-hand

observers at the various negotiations in the 1990s and the vast academic literature on the topic, the two actors that tend to come up overwhelmingly and most frequently when the notion of leadership is brought up are the US and the EU. The academic literature has provided an extensive account on the domestic developments within the two actors to explain their positions and performance in the international climate negotiations (e.g., see Andersen and Agrawala 2002; Damro et al. 2008; Oberthür and Roche Kelly 2008). However, while extensive, these accounts are heavily actor-centric and do not take into consideration the dynamics *between* the two actors in the relational realm. Many note that a leadership vacuum in the international climate change domain was becoming visible in the early 1990s because the US was failing to take a strong climate policy position which the EU tried to take advantage of and use it as "stepping stone to stand forth as a strong and unified block in the world scene" (Andersen and Agrawala 2002, 45). These dynamics persisted throughout the 1990s with the US holding firmly onto its goals within the climate regime and achieving important success during the Kyoto Protocol negotiations in 1997 and the EU aiming for more progressive commitments within the negotiations, although often without much success. The key turning point that solidified the EU's leadership ambition and position was the announcement of the US withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol in early 2001 followed by immense efforts by the EU to ensure the survival of the Kyoto Protocol through diplomacy and strategic compromises.

Simultaneously, the internal relational dynamics among the EU member states also play an important role for the leadership ambitions the EU sets for itself in the climate change domain. The EU prides itself on having achieved a status of a global climate leader with its progressive policies and high ambitions, yet a large part of its member states – namely, the Central and Eastern European member states – have been considered climate laggards (e.g., see Braun 2014). This

paradox reveals the underexplored importance of the relational dynamics *among* member states and how they manifest in the EU's policy-making process to maintain the EU's climate leadership ambitions. Both the EU's foreign climate policy and its domestic climate policies are key parts of the EU's international climate leadership (Oberthür and Roche Kelly 2008, 37) and thus play important roles in the formation of its leadership ambitions.

Application: The European Union's Ambition for Leadership in Global Climate Change Governance

What does it mean to be a "leader"? A rich literature exists on the matter both in a general and EU context. Different types of leadership have been identified, including structural, directional, and entrepreneurial (also referred to as ideas-based, intellectual, or instrumental) (Young 1991; Underdal 1994). They have also paid attention to the requirements for leadership to be effective, including capability, capacity, legitimacy (Young 1991; Underdal 1994; Elgström 2007), and performance (Parker and Karlsson 2010), to name a few. Oberthür and Dupont (2021) argue that a state or entity can be considered a leader on the global stage of climate governance if "it is more ambitious than others in the pursuit of the common good" (p.1097).

The EU started emerging as an environmental leader on the global stage in the 1990s, trading places with the US as it retreated from its more prominent role since the 1960s and 1970s. From adamantly supporting multilateral environmental agreements to organizing key conferences, like the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment and leading negotiations for the ozone regime prior to the establishment of the Montreal Protocol in 1987, the US assumed the role of a global environmental leader (Kelemen and Vogel 2010, 428). The American trajectory towards the abandonment of leadership started to become visible in 1989 through the adoption of the Basel Convention on Hazardous Waste and Disposal and continued to manifest in the 1990s to culminate

in the withdrawal announcement from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001. Additionally, the European project and some member states assumed the role of agenda-setters on several occasions at that time, such as by proposing greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets against 1990 levels by 2010 for the Kyoto Protocol negotiations, thus setting the tone and expectations for the other participants (Schreurs and Tiberghien 2007, 20). The EU's growing international role was accompanied by environmentally oriented domestic politics in some member states and intensifying environmental interests in Europe (Kelemen 2010). By the time of the Kyoto Protocol's ratification in 2004, the EU had already gained a recognized leadership position in climate diplomacy, making it an important influence for the successful ratification (Bretherton and Vogler 2013, 376), especially with its performance at the Marrakesh Accords in 2001. At that time, the US had largely withdrawn from climate change multilateralism, and the EU was actively pursuing a goal of maintaining its leadership in this domain. The EU pursued leadership not in competition with the US, but rather after the US had started to withdraw from its global leadership. The EU has been identified to "clearly [aspire] to be the global standard bearer on climate change by laying out bold unilateral goals, vigorously supporting the Kyoto Protocol and pushing hard for an ambitious past-2012 successor agreement" (Parker and Kalrsson 2010, 924), which has further resulted in its leadership with the 2015 Paris Agreement and subsequent Green Deal.

As an objective that was first articulated by the European Council in 1988 (see European Council 1988), the EU proceeded to earn a reputation of a "frontrunner" (Damro 2006) and a "global leader" (Kelemen 2010) in climate change governance (cited in Delreux 2014, 1017). The EU's leadership has usually taken the shape of "leadership by example," involving "the diffusion of internal policies as a 'model'" (Schunz 2019, 348), combined with efforts in diplomacy and persuasion (Oberthür and Roche Kelly 2008). This ambition for leadership has been argued to

represent the efforts of a group of ten pioneering (Western) member states: Germany, the UK, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden, and France; alongside support and initiative from the European Commission and the European Parliament (Schreurs and Tiberghien 2007). In terms of intergovernmental dynamics, when it comes to the decision-making process on determining the EU's common position on international environmental negotiations, such as for the Kyoto Protocol, it is often the case that is it largely steered by a select small number of Western member states who actively take the lead (Delreux 2014, 1027). At the same time, climate policies and ambitions have been one of the most contested domains by CEE member states who in general do not share the same aspirations as their Western counterparts due to concerns and perceptions that progressive climate action and ambitions threaten their national economic interests.

The existing literature on the EU's climate leadership begins with the assumption that the EU pursued leadership after the US abandoned this role in the 1990s and 2000s. My proposed theoretical framework shines light into the relational dynamics of the leadership transition to argue that the transition occurred only after the US had started withdrawing from its leadership role. In the event of a non-US withdrawal from environmental leadership, the EU's ambitions in this domain and its own leadership would have looked differently. That is, these are the effects of the theorized relational dynamics on the EU's leadership ambitions. My framework thus allows for the examination of relational dynamics and the role that the EU's historic relations with the US and subsequently with its CEE member states have played in its formation of ambitious climate foreign policy.

The EU's Climate Leadership: Alternative Explanations

Several attempts to explain the EU's pursuit of climate leadership have been developed over the years. The EU's commitment to the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol in light of the US's withdrawal sparked the interest of scholars. In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the United States took on a central leading role in international efforts to address environmental issues and concerns, while the European project and its member states were often perceived as laggards who sometimes would even try to block certain initiatives (Kelemen and Vogel 2010). However, a visible shift in leadership started occurring in the 1990s, culminating with the 2001 US withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol. The alternative explanations developed to explain this switch cannot be fully discarded as they shed some light on various aspects of the EU's approach to climate politics, but they are rather narrow and fail to capture the constitutive effects of the plethora of relational dynamics that play a role in the process as well.

Kelemen and Vogel (2010) provide a rich overview of alternative attempts to explain the transatlantic transition of environmental leadership. One group of studies highlighted by them relies on the theory of postmaterialist values and the associated expected high national support for environmental protection and international agreements on the matter (Roberts 1996; Recchia 2002). Nevertheless, they point out that this theory does not hold for the transatlantic leadership transition because it should have been expected for the US to maintain its leadership and prevent the EU from gaining prevalence due to higher growth both in wealth and in postmaterial values in the 1980s and 1990s in the US compared to the EU (pp.433-434). Another group concentrated on the growing gap at the time between the US and the EU in terms of support for multilateralism. At the time, the US was seen to be growing more unilateral while the EU was embracing multilateralalism, thus making the US more averse to treaties that can be perceived as threatening to its sovereignty (Ikenberry 2003; Kagan 2003; cited in Kelemen and Vogel 2010). Kelemen and

Vogel (2010) point out that the shortcoming of this assumption is that the US would have pursued its environmental leadership through unilateral means which it did not do to a large extent, thus surrendering its global environmental leadership. In turn, they build on another group that focuses on environmental stringency in domestic standards (Vogel 2003; Vig and Faure 2004) to expand their assumptions to the international level and show how domestic shifts (i.e., presence and influence of environmentalists and environmental groups) influence these entities' international positions and ambitions. They call this explanation a regulatory politics approach and argue that regulatory politics in the US aligned with the US's leadership when it comes to international environmental agreements in the 1970s and 1980s which was not the case within Europe, but this began to switch in the 1990s (p.437). While this explanation builds a plausible account of the leadership switch, it does not account for the effects of the relational dynamics but assumes these events occurred in isolation and in a situation of coincidence from one another.

Focusing exclusively on the Kyoto Protocol, four hypotheses regarding the commitment of Annex 1 countries and the EU to it are discussed thoroughly by Hovi et al. (2003). The first explanation entertains the idea of benefits outweighing the costs incurred initially by the implementation of the Kyoto agreement, while the second one involves the belief in leadership by example as a mode of successful climate governance. A third explanation considers the path dependency that was established by the increased institutionalization efforts in the EU specifically in the 1990s. That is, the three driving institutions behind the EU's climate policy in the 1990s (the European Commission, the Council of ministers, and the European Parliament), together with the competing national interests of member states, as well as other actors with vested interests, such as industry actors, pressure groups, and businesses, to name a few, went through a highly complex process that brought forward the EU climate regulation and interests during that period (see

Ringius 1997; European Climate Change Program 2001). The path dependency developed during this complicated institutionalization process would have been difficult to reverse. The last hypothesis they examine is an inherent desire for the pursuit of leadership on behalf of the EU as an effort to present itself as an actor with foreign policy in global politics. That is, the EU was seeking a way to pursue this, and the US withdrawal presented it with the perfect opportunity. The EU was going through major changes and integration in the 1990s, and the pursuit of a unified foreign policy was a crucial piece of the puzzle. Climate change governance could thus be seen as the issue area where the EU could easily pursue a global leadership given the problem's global dimension and importance. Overall, Hovi et al. (2003) do not find much support for the first two explanations, while they do find limited support for the path dependency explanation. However, neither of them explores in depth the reasons behind the ambition. It does hint, however, that the EU was able to fully and openly pursue its leadership ambition only after the US withdrew for its prime spot in global environmental politics, thus referring to the underlying relational dynamics between the two entities.

Another explanation for the EU leadership in climate change is the perception of climate policy as a driving force for European integration over the past thirty years. The substantial institutionalization process involved in the establishment of the EU climate policies, combined with the global dimensions of the problem of climate change made it a strong candidate for an issue area to push European integration forward in the 21st century (Oberthür and Roche Kelly 2008). In addition, Oberthür and Roche Kelly (2008) argue that the geopolitics of energy (in)security have played an important role for the climate policy agenda of the EU given the political and economic concerns associated with Europe's high energy imports dependence. Thus, decreasing this dependence requires increased attention to climate change policies and alternative

energy sources. Furthermore, similarly to one of the competing explanations discussed by Kelemen and Vogel (2010), they note that another explanation for the EU's strive for leadership in climate change stems from its core commitment to multilateralism in international politics and global governance. That is, the nature of the issue of climate change and the global-scale approach that it requires makes it a prime candidate for the EU to pursue global leadership in. As noted above, this thesis provides only a partial explanation that does not take into account the complex relational dynamics within the transatlantic space.

The relational theoretical framework that I develop in my dissertation and present in the next section seeks to promote an alternative approach to understanding the reasons behind the EU's climate leadership ambitions and the transatlantic leadership switch by focusing on two of the most consequential relational dynamics that constitute the EU and its ambitions in the climate domain. That is, why has the EU been pursuing leadership ambitions in this issue area and not in others, such as security and defense, for instance? Do the theorized relational dynamics below hold explanatory merit, and to what extent?

Theoretical Background – Added Value of a Relational Approach

What is the added value of taking a relational approach? A perspective drawing on sociological relationalism and paying special attention to historical relational dynamics of power offers a novel approach to the formation of ambitions in EU foreign policy as it presents avenues for the exploration of phenomena that more traditional approaches in IR and ES could not tackle or reach due to their various ontological and epistemological constraints. I develop my theoretical approach within the realm of causal relationalism, positioned along the spectrum of the pure ontological and methodological commitments of causal substantialism (where the majority of mainstream IR can be categorized) and interpretative relationalism (deep relationality) (Jackson

and Heo 2022).[7] Relationalism is a family of theories, akin to individualism or structuralism, that cuts through the various IR paradigms (Jackson and Nexon 2019, 582-583). It is broadly situated "between actor-centric and structural-holistic approaches," focusing on processes and mechanisms with the goal to "give rise to both actors and the environments in which they find themselves" (p.584). The best way to grasp the essence of relational thinking is to define it against its opposite ideal type in the face of substantialism (Emirbayer 1997; Jackson and Nexon 1999). That is, unlike relationalism, substantialism negates the possibility that anything else but entities can be a unit of analysis, making them the "ontological priors" for all substantialist theorizing (Kavalski 2016, 552). By making relations the units of analysis, relationalism adds immense value to the study of international relations by opening the door for temporal variation in the behavior of entities; i.e., actors' emergence and subsequent actions occur "*in* and *through* relations," and their behavior and roles are expected to differ temporally and spatially (Kavalski 2016, 552). Relational approaches have the power to overcome dyadic, static, and spatial understandings and commitments of substantialist IR by offering dynamic perspectives encompassing the intricacies and complexity of relations on all levels of analysis and interaction (Kavalski 2016, 558). Thus, a major difference between relationalism and substantialism lies in their intrinsically different understanding of the link between entities and relations. While relational approaches tend to assume relations as "constitutive" to entities and their actions, non-relational approaches view relations as something that entities engage in among themselves and other entities (Selg and Ventsel 2020, 3). Furthermore, relational theorizing efforts in the social sciences and, particularly, IR, do not

[7] Jackson and Heo (2022) envision the relationalism-substantialism dichotomy as a 2-by-2 table based on the various approaches' theoretical (scientific ontology) and methodological (philosophical ontology) commitments. They define scientific ontology as "a specification of what kinds of things exist in the world and how those things exist" and philosophical ontology as "a specification of the ways that observers are "hooked up" to the world-in particular, and what kinds of explanatory interests or purposes they are intending to advance with their scholarly work" (p.163).

predicate a particular paradigmatic commitment, a doctrine, or a method. Rather, it implies "a set of analyses that begin with relations rather than the putative essences of constitutively autonomous actors" (Nordin et al. 2019, 571).

Most importantly for my theoretical approach and framework, I concur that social actors in global politics (e.g., states) "do not emerge in isolation, but must be understood within the larger relational structures in which they are embedded" (Kristinsson 2022, 77). As such, the EU itself, as well as its foreign policy ambitions, cannot be understood only by zooming into the policy-making process, its institutions and treaties, or the interests of specific member states, which has been the common approach to studying the EU's foreign policy. Rather, a look at the historical relational dynamics that have been present throughout the formation and development of the EU offers a new perspective to help understand different enabling and constraining factors for the process of ambition formation. These relational dynamics are not static but can rather change and evolve over time, and the web of relations that make up a given entity and comprises of its relations with other entities in a global perspective affect the ambitions and behavior of the entity.

By focusing on the primacy of relations in examining the ambitions formation of the EU's foreign policy, I seek to contribute to the growing literature of relational approaches to the study of the EU. For instance, groundbreaking research is being done on political networks in the EU (Huhe et al. 2018; Wonka and Haunss 2020; Bunea et al. 2022; Knoke et al. 2021), migration flows within the EU (Windzio et al. 2021), and decentering EU foreign policy (Fisher Onar and Nicolaïdis 2013; Keukeleire and Lecocq 2018), among others.

Theoretical Approach and Framework

My purpose in this dissertation is to develop and present an alternative theoretical approach to studying foreign policy ambitions – particularly in the case of the EU - that relies on the ontological and epistemological commitments of relationalism and thus departs from the more traditional substantialism-derived approaches to studying this phenomenon in both IR and ES. I begin from the assumption that relational dynamics is a largely understudied factor of foreign policy ambition formation, and I seek to propose a theoretical framework to study it. The unit of analysis is the relations themselves, and it is the particular nature of these relations and the way they have developed historically that influences EU foreign policy ambition, thus the causal action is found "in the transactional space 'between' actors" (Jackson and Nexon 2019, 594). I begin from this ontological and epistemological starting point to engage in a theory-generating exercise to explain what the drivers for the ambitions are that the EU sets for itself in different issue domains. I point the attention to the webs of relations that the EU is embedded in and focus on the power dynamics within these relations as explanatory factors in this framework. These relational power dynamics, separately and jointly, exert influence on the ambitions the EU sets for itself. This is a theoretical framework that emphasizes these relational dynamics as explanatory factors and does not set limits or strict expectations with regards to methodology and methods used to test the plausibility of this argument.

The European Union, as it exists today and during its development from the conception of the idea of the European project, is a product of a myriad of factors from all three levels of analysis. A relational staring point allows for the exploration of specific categories of factors that have had constitutive roles for the formation of the EU and its foreign policy ambitions. A commitment to relationalism presupposes the assumption of the primacy of relations to the analysis of entities and their actions as agents or decisions within particular structural confines. The idea here is that

relations and networks "position actors in ways that shape behavior, relative power," etc. (Jackson and Nexon 2013, 559). I develop a framework that provides an encompassing account of an intricate and complex web of relations that, together and intertwined, offers a valuable contribution to the understanding of EU foreign policy ambitions.

I theorize the following model of explanation with regards to the EU's climate leadership ambition as an illustration case (see Figure 1). I identify two categories of relations to have substantial effects on the formation of this ambition: (1) relations in the transatlantic space between the US and the European project; and (2) relations among EU member states along the East-West axis. First, the European project's relations with the US in the transatlantic space continued to play a key driving role for the ambitions the EU has set for itself through the years (e.g., see Cowles and Egan 2012). The European project became genuinely possible in a world where the Transatlantic relations experienced a dramatic shift. During the Second World War, the efforts against the Axis powers became highly dependent on full US military support. After the war, the US devised the Marshall Plan to help Western Europe get back on its feet while ensuring the prevention of Soviet influence in Western Europe (Dinan 2004; Carolan 2008). These relational dynamics have had a persistent influence on the development of the European project through the years and continue to do so today (e.g., see Cowles and Egan 2012). As such, my theoretical framework allows for an argument to be made that from the very beginning, the European project has been involved in a specific type of asymmetrical relationship with the US that influenced the parameters of the ambitions that the European project set for itself, thus indicating the shaping and constraining effect of these relations. That is, the relational dynamics in the transatlantic space have developed in an environment of dependence – a European dependence on the US. These relational dynamics exerted specific effects on both entities, but for the purposes of this project the

focus is entirely on the EU. As noted, these relations were asymmetrical and played a constitutive role for the formation of the EU and although they evolved over time, they continued to constrain and enable the European project in certain ways.

The EU formed a leadership ambition in the global climate change domain only after the US started showing signs of withdrawal from such ambitions in the environmental domain in the 1990s and early 2000s (Kelemen and Vogel 2010). It is thus worth exploring the connection between the relational dynamics that had developed in the transatlantic space between these two entities and the leadership transition that occurred in the climate change domain. Based on the assumptions I make in my theoretical framework, I argue that the relational dynamics that had developed in the transatlantic space between the US and the European project since its inception enabled the EU to pursue leadership ambitions in the global climate regime in the same way that it was constraining it before the waning of US leadership in the 1990s. That is, the asymmetrical relations of power that had formed in the transatlantic space since the 1940s exerted a constraining influence on the ambitions that the European project would develop for itself. Thus, in the domain of climate change, a counterfactual claim can be set up that if the US did not abandon its environmental leadership in the 1990s and early 2000s, the EU would not have directly challenged the US for it, and any formulation of leadership for the EU would have looked differently from the observable reality.

At the same time, the nature of the East-West relational dynamics among the EU member states has also enabled the EU to pursue leadership in the climate change domain. There is a long history of division on the European continent along the East-West axis, derived from opposing experiences with imperialism among most Western and Eastern European states (Behr 2007) and a resulting division among those who set the "standards of civilization" for international society

and those who remained outside of this club that eventually evolved into a distinction between a (Western) European "core" who followed a liberal democratic model and principles and an Eastern European "other" who did not and needed to be socialized within them during the EU accession process (Stivachtis 2008). Thus, the East-West relations embody very different dynamics and experiences with historical domination and subordination. They are akin to the two sides of the same coin as they have had generally very different experiences with subordination and domination, manifested in their experience as colonial and imperial powers (West) and subordination to various powerful actors (East), generally speaking, such as the Ottomans, the Germans, and, very importantly, the Soviets. (Epstein and Jacoby 2014; Walsch 2018). These historical relational dynamics of subordination have had a constitutive role on the region, and the stark differences in the way the European states experienced subordination and domination continues to play an important role in their experiences with EU membership as it has shaped the relations between West and East within the EU.

The EU developed initially as a union of Western European states. Later on, with the largest EU expansion to the East in the 2000s, the nature of the EU changed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Despite the promise of the EU acquis for equality and the enjoyment of full membership rights, historical East-West relational dynamics on the European continent persisted (see Nicolaïdis and Fisher Onar 2015). These asymmetrical relations of power remain and manifest themselves in EU institutions, leadership, supranational decision making, and the established expectations of action (see Drounau 2019; Anghel 2020; Busse et al. 2020). The proposition is, then, that, most often than not, the EU sets its foreign policy ambitions because the relational power asymmetries on the East-West axis allow for the interests of the West to take prevalence when setting these ambitions. These relational dynamics also manifest in the EU ambitions for

leadership in its climate change foreign policy as this leadership ambition is largely a Western EU driven goal (see Börzel 2002; Wurzel and Connelly 2011). These relational dynamics will be explored further to help understand their complex nature in the EU and support the selection of the East-West divide over other possible divisions commonly discussed in the literature of European fault lines (e.g., North-South; creditor-debtor states; etc.) in Chapter 4.

The relational dynamics in the East-West divide are very pronounced in the climate change domain, which presents a paradox simultaneously because the EU has held a steady reputation as a global leader in climate governance. Thus, the persistence of this divide and its effects for EU actorness remain understudied. Overall, the two categories of relational dynamics identified as central for the application to the leadership ambitions of the EU in its climate foreign policy are built on asymmetrical relations of power that exert effects on the EU and the ambitions it sets for itself.

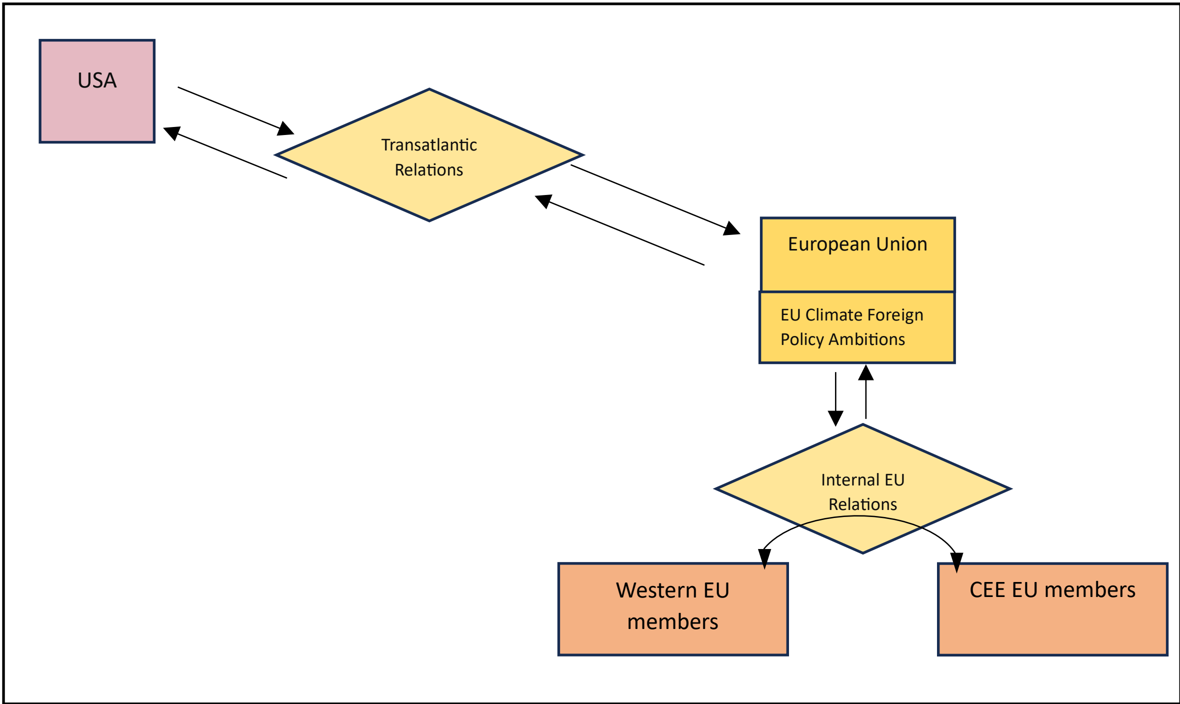

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework Causal Model: EU Climate Change Governance Domain

This theoretical framework represents a form of a stereoscope device that helps illuminate the effects of various categories of relational dynamics that come together to interplay and constitute the EU's ambitions in various issue domains and across different temporal planes. The two questions guiding it are 1) what has enabled the EU to form its ambitions and overall become the entity it is, and 2) what has constrained it from developing entirely different ambitions? Placing relations at the center of analysis formulates the argument that behind the EU's ambitions lies a complex web of relations that have – since the inception of the European project – constituted the EU in particular ways into its various formulations over the past seven decades and the specific ambitions it sets for itself. This framework is designed to facilitate the examination of the effects these relational dynamics exert on the EU and its ambitions. These are relations of power that have been embedded and evolved historically. This web of relations is potentially limitless, and different relational dynamics come to the forefront depending on temporal and issue domain foci. Through the metaphor of the stereoscope device, this theoretical framework can be adjusted to focus on different categories of consequential relations depending on the issue domain and time period in focus, thus revealing the constitutive effects of historical relational dynamics for the EU as an entity and its foreign policy ambitions.

The arrows in Figure 1 represent the theorized relations – the unit of analysis – in this theoretical framework. They represent asymmetrical power dynamics that exert influence on the ambitions the EU sets for itself in the foreign policy domain. Thus, they have both constraining and enabling properties. The roots of these asymmetrical power dynamics are historically embedded and can be traced by examining the developments within these relations through time, which is an exercise I thoroughly engage in over the next two chapters.

To illustrate the applicability and merit of this theoretical framework, I conducted an extensive review of the literature to identify two of the most consequential categories of relations for the domain of climate change ambitions.[8] To reiterate, they include *Relations in the Transatlantic Space* with the United States and *internal EU relations* among member states along the East-West axis as represented in EU institutions and decision making. Their constitutive character is influenced by the particular historical developments of these relations and the effects they have had on the formation of the EU as an entity and the ambitions it sets for itself in its foreign policy. These two categories of relations encompass dynamics of subordination and domination and illuminate contrasting aspects of the European experience with imperialism and colonialism.

Overall, using the theoretical framework illustrated in Figure 1, I argue that it is the intricacies of the Transatlantic and internal European relational categories combined that have exerted a shaping influence on the EU's foreign policy ambitions to climate change. It is not a binary focus on two separate sets of relations, but rather the complexity of these historical dynamics that has influenced and continues to influence the EU and its ambitions. These relations are not static as they have emerged and evolved in a temporal context. The transatlantic relationship has been one characterized by shifts in power/domination, informed by the European states' complex webs of relations among themselves and others states and the United States' relations with other countries as well.[9] Simultaneously, the theorized intra-European relations have

[8] The extensive review of the literature related to these two categories of relations is presented in the corresponding chapters for each.

[9] It is important to note here that I perceive the Transatlantic relations category to be bidirectional; that is, as it has a constitutive effect on the EU, it has also had effects on the US as well. This second direction is outside the scope of my project and thus will not be explored here. This dynamic can be identified, mapped, and explored in further research using the ontological and epistemological commitments that inform this theoretical framework.

ebbed and flowed through time and continue to do so today. Thus, there is a strong element of continuity and change that is expected. That is, while this theoretical framework is applied to the specific case of EU climate foreign policy ambitions in the period from 1990 to 2015[10] and produces specific results through the execution of the research design, I suspect that the result might be different if alternative time periods are taken into focus as the theorized relations continue to change and new case studies are added. This dynamism and broader encompassing of the complex relational dynamics offers a significant added value of my approach to the drivers behind the EU's ambition in foreign policy.

Conclusion

My purpose in this chapter has been to generate and outline the theoretical framework that I apply to empirically evaluate my argument in the next two chapters of my dissertation. I also situate my approach within the existing scholarship on the matter of EU climate leadership ambitions by exploring and clarifying several core concepts for my theoretical approach. Furthermore, I distinguish the added value of my theoretical commitments compared to existing substantialism-informed approaches to understanding the EU's leadership ambitions in the domain of climate change.

To illustrate the applicability of my theoretical framework, I identify and briefly discuss two categories of relations that I find to have significant effects on the EU's foreign policy ambitions in the climate change domain. In accordance with the design of my theoretical framework, however, the same two categories might not exert the same significant effects for the

Simultaneously, the relational dynamics among Eastern and Western member states are affected by their membership in the EU, and these dynamics can also be examined further in future research.

[10] This specific temporal range is discussed and justified in detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

EU's ambitions in other issue domains that would rather require an emphasis on other relational categories. An extensive review of the pertinent literature and data for the particular issue and temporal domain would reveal the relational categories that ought to be emphasized. Thus, this is indeed the purpose of the relational theoretical framework proposed in this chapter: to serve as a stereoscope device to studying various aspects (temporal and issue) of the EU and its ambitions.

The relational theoretical approach I develop here opens the door to studying the EU by emphasizing the relational dynamics that constitute it and exert influence on its ambitions and behavior. These relational dynamics can be explored on every level of analysis and using various methodological approaches since the growing universe of relational approaches in IR is not constrained by any particular methodological commitments (Jackson and Nexon 2019). Furthermore, the theoretical framework can also be applied beyond the EU context as its usefulness as a heuristic stereoscope device would transcend the regional focus of my dissertation.

CHAPTER 3. TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON THE CLIMATE LEADERSHIP AMBITIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Introduction

There are countless different ways to characterize the past seven decades of world history, but one element of it is undeniable – the unprecedented absence of great power war in Europe. The end of the Second World War (WWII) in Europe in 1945 marked the beginning of a new era of peace, cooperation, and relative stability for the European continent of previously unknown dimensions. Despite the uncertainty of the Cold War, the continuous integration of Europe under the supranational structure of the European project proceeded steadily through the decades. An unquestionable role in this development was played by the United States who contributed in two important ways. First, the US maintained a significant military presence on the European continent following the end of WWII and established itself as a "beached superpower" in Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union by remaining a peacetime forward-deployed power (Harris and Marinova 2022). This forward presence allowed European leaders to be preoccupied with questions of integration and increased cooperation rather than bare balance of power questions in the Cold War era, as well as to squander any concerns about a nationalistic backsliding in the heart of Europe following German reunification at the end of the Cold War (Art 1996). Second, the United States' Marshall Plan played a determining role in Western Europe's war recovery in economic, political, and social terms in the years after the end of the war. Additionally, the post-WWII global order looked unequivocally different from the pre-war years, and the United States emerged as its architect, especially after its display of nuclear power in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Within these developments, the relations within the transatlantic space between the US and the European project developed in particular ways to relational dynamics of dependence. Overall, the

transatlantic relationship has been classified as the "most powerful, the most comprehensive and the strategically most important relationship in the world" (Burghardt 2006, 3). Furthermore, the relations in the transatlantic space between the US and the European project have been identified as "the backbone of any EU foreign policy strategy" thus directly hinting at the constitutive effects of the relations on the EU's global ambitions (Burghardt 2006, 5).

During this 80-year time period, specific relational dynamics developed in the Transatlantic space that have constituted and shaped the EU (and the US) into the various temporal configurations of the actors we see today. What is more, these relational dynamics have had an effect on the ambitions the EU sets for itself. Specifically, I argue that these relational dynamics have pushed the EU to set the scope of its ambition in accordance with the actions and ambitions of the US, at least in some issue domains. A couple of examples of such domains are those of climate change governance and security and defense. Namely, the EU pursued its leadership ambitions in the former only after the US showed signs of abandoning its leadership position while the EU has avoided the pursuit of significant ambition in the latter in general. In this chapter, I seek to explore these premises by focusing primarily on the EU's climate leadership ambitions and the leadership switch in the transatlantic space, followed by a brief discussion of security and defense as a shadow case with a potential for future research.

In this chapter, I seek to approach the historical relationship between the US and the European project from a different perspective than the more traditional actor-centric understandings of the matter by focusing on the primacy of relations rather than the primacy of actors. Building on the premises of sociological relationalism (Jackson and Nexon 1999; 2019), I shift the attention towards the constitutive effects of the historical relations that have developed between and shaped the two entities. I argue that an avenue for exploration that deserves attention

for the EU's leadership ambitions in the domain of climate change lies in the relational dynamics in the transatlantic space that have developed historically between the European project and the US. The European project was constituted within the specific nature of the transatlantic relations that played both an enabling and constraining effect on the EU's identity and ambitions it pursued. As such, I argue that the EU would not have pursued the same leadership ambitions in the early 2000s if the US did not withdraw from Kyoto and surrender its previous leadership position. Thus, the historical relational dynamics that developed in the Transatlantic space at and after the end of WWII exerted a constraining effect on the EU. These relational dynamics, as the term itself indicates, are not static; that is, the identified relations in the transatlantic space have undergone changes through the years, indicating natural shifts for both the European project and the US. Nevertheless, these relations, especially in the formative years of the European project, had a constitutive effect for the European project in that it would not directly challenge the US for leadership in any issue domain where the US had already been exerting primacy. It is not that the US itself constrains or enables the EU to set certain ambitions, but rather the relational dynamics that had developed between them in the transatlantic space that exert this causal effect. This chapter focuses on an issue domain where we have observed a clear leadership transition in the transatlantic space from the US to the EU and thus it will be used as a case study to trace the causal effects of the identified relational dynamics.

Overall, I argue that the specific relational dynamics between the European project and the United States have been a deciding factor in the way the European project has developed over the years. Specifically, I hypothesize that the asymmetrical relational dynamics between the EU and the US have played a significant role in the formation of the EU's ambitions on the global stage. That is, the ambitions that the EU sets for itself as an international entity are to a large extent

influenced by the intricate transatlantic relational power dynamics. Using the counterfactual analysis work by Kimberly Marten (2017) as an inspiration for my methodological approach, I test this hypothesis by developing a qualitative counterfactual analysis of the case of the global climate change governance leadership transition between the US and the EU that began in the 1990s and culminated with Washington's announcement of withdrawal from the Kyoto Agreement in 2001.

The chapter is organized in the following manner. First, I begin with an overview of the inception of the European project and the details of the relational dynamics that formed in the transatlantic space at that time. Then, I shift my focus to the transition in environmental leadership before diving into the methodology to set up the counterfactual analysis. Finally, I conclude with a brief discussion of three shadow cases – two within the same issue domain but separated temporally from the case of the US withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol and one case focusing on a different issue domain where the US did not abandon its leadership after the end of the Cold War – the case of security and defense – to further strengthen the conclusions from the counterfactual analysis.

The Nascence of the European Project and the Transatlantic Relationship

The transatlantic relations between the US and Europe extend far back in a historical perspective, spanning centuries and built on common cultural and historical roots and often envisioned through familial metaphors of relations characterized as parental and those of close relatives (Burghardt 2006, 5). These relations evolved and shifted through the decades and centuries but the general characteristics of the relations (namely, closeness and familiality) remained. Nevertheless, the power dynamics of the relations in the transatlantic space shifted dramatically following WWII with a marked dominance of the US in the relationship within which the idea of the European project was conceived and executed. This shift of power within the

transatlantic relational dynamics has defined the existence of the European project and, subsequently, has influenced the ambitions it has set for itself in various issue and temporal domains.

The end of WWII marked a new era for the world in which Europe was significantly reshaped from its pre-war structure and image. It was a time in which the United States demonstrated military superiority and was embarking on a conflict with its former ally in the face of the Soviet Union that required swift action to demarcate and guard spheres of influence. Post-war Europe was a crucial theater for the interests of the United States and the Soviet Union which was accompanied by an inevitable change in the transatlantic relations. Through political and monetary efforts and demands, the United States exerted powerful influence over the reconstruction of Europe that underlined the creation and development of the European project in its endeavor to secure its interests in Europe and the world against the spread of Soviet influence. The relational dynamics in the transatlantic space were significantly affected by the strategic vision of US foreign policy and thus played a constitutive effect for the vision for European integration and expansion, compelling European foreign policy to focus extensively on inclusive enlargement (Nicolaïdis and Fisher Onar 2015, 121). By providing for the basic security needs of Western European states against the communist threat from the east, the Transatlantic relationship also carved an opportunity for them to allocate significant financial attention to non-security domains, thus shaping the essence of the European project and the actor that the EU is today.

The United States committed to and invested in European recovery after the war in the pursuit of a strategic interest of high concern – the prevention of the spread of communism and further Soviet grasp of the European continent in the early days of the Cold War (Dinan 2004; Carolan 2008). The American commitment became clear in 1947 through two major

developments: the Truman Doctrine and its promise for assistance necessary for the European recovery; and the announcement of the Marshall Plan. This aid, of course, came with several conditions, one of which is central for the historical development of the European project. Namely, the United States required the creation of a smart distribution plan for the aid in hopes to prevent individual national requests, risking lack of success, succumbing to poverty and, ultimately, communism (Kundnani 2018). Specifically, they wanted the development of a federal structure (Carolan 2008; Gillingham 2003). This specific condition was clearly communicated to the French leaders with the imposition of a deadline for the delivery of such a plan in May 1950, with the Schuman Proposal eventually announced on May 9, 1950. The European project thus emerged within asymmetrical power relations in the transatlantic space and an "uneasy dependence on a superpower" as the US came out of the war as an "economic, political and military powerhouse" while Europe was facing immense economic challenges and struggling to maintain overseas colonial territories (Cowles and Egan 2012, 4). The European project emerged in a crucial period where Western Europe was relying extensively on the US for its economic recovery and military security which inevitably paved the way for the future development of the European project and its continuous dependence on and attachment to the US.

Throughout the decades of the Cold War, the United States continued to see the strategic importance of a unified Western Europe. Geir Lundestad (1998) argues that there are at least five distinguishable reasons for the United States' encouragement and support for the European project since the beginning. Aside from the plan for long-term European self-sufficiency and preferably less dependence on the US, the US also found in this path a way to contain the rising power and ambitions of the Soviet Union, and to keep Germany contained in the West. Additionally, two distinct economic reasons are outlined as well: European integration was seen as a route for a more

economically efficient Europe, and it was believed by US policymakers that following the American model of an internal barrier-free large domestic market was a sound strategy for economic cooperation across the Atlantic. Furthermore, with the ratification failure of the European Defense Community in 1954, US efforts to encourage Western European defense self-reliance remained unsuccessful and instead the European reliance on US conventional military and nuclear strength increased (Cowles and Egan 2012, 5).

A shift in these relational dynamics occurred in the 1960s with the EEC's stabilization after the Berlin Wall went up, and with the French apprehension of US influence on European integration efforts. US enthusiasm towards a collaborative US-EEC economic relationship and support towards further European integration somewhat stifled at the time (Kundnani 2018). In the 1970s, Henry Kissinger, President Nixon's security adviser, expressed concerns that the long-standing vision that the US had for a close transatlantic relationship with an integrated Europe, strongly supported by the US, under American leadership was not shared across the Atlantic (Lundestad 1998, 102). Economic challenges, including the Bretton Woods system failure and the Middle East oil crisis caused further strains in the relations, but the importance and overall pattern of the relational dynamics in the transatlantic space persisted. This remained true through the 1980s and 1990s as major global geopolitical and economic changes ensued, coupled with the further integration of the European project into the European Union and the initial uncertainty about the role of NATO after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Nevertheless, the myriad shifts in the relations did not change the fact that the relations in the transatlantic space have played a very important role not only for the creation of a supranational structure in Europe, but for its continuous integration, growth, and security. The continued forward deployed status of the United States following the end of the Cold War undoubtedly brought

significant advantages to the development and integration of the EU. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the immanent collapse of the Soviet Union brought the realization that Germany will be reunified, which sparked anxieties about a return to nationalism in the heart of Europe. On the other hand, Germany was itself uneasy about its neighbors' nationalistic backsliding fears (Art 1996). These tensions were exacerbated by the potential retreat of the US from the continent, leaving an uncomfortable dose of uncertainty on the table of Western European leaders. The United States' continued presence in Europe played a key role in alleviating these tensions and allowed the European Union to continue on its road to increased unification without worrying about internal security competition or external threats.

Of course, the transatlantic relationship is nowhere close to being unidimensional or purporting simple unidirectional trends of domination and subordination. In fact, it is quite complex and complicated. This is evidenced by its ebbs and flows through the decades and myriad of issues and situations. However, what remains constant within the transatlantic relations is the US influence on the nascence of the European project and its development through both ideological and monetary contributions and demands, as well as the American primacy in a world order in which the EU is dependent on the US for its basic security assurance. What is more, this dependence and security within the Transatlantic relations shaped the EU and its development into the actor it is today as it was able to export its security needs and concerns while focusing on other, social issues. This relational dependence has affected the EU's ambitions in various issue domains as it has precluded the EU from developing ambitions that would either jeopardize US interests and ambitions or directly compete with the US for primacy. It is not that the US itself constrains or enables the EU to set certain ambitions, but rather the relational dynamics that had developed between them in the transatlantic space that exert this causal effect. A review of the Cold War

history of the transatlantic relations reveals just that – there were myriad ebbs and flows in the relations but the general relational pattern of dependence and asymmetry remained.[11] This is clearly visible in the transatlantic leadership transition in the domain of global climate governance.

The Transatlantic Transition of Environmental Leadership

The United States established itself as a leader in global environmental politics in the 1970s and 1980s through its powerful influence and presence in the early years of the international environmental regime (Vogler and Bretherton 2006, 1). From an organizer of the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment to a crucial leader in the negotiations preceding the 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, the US demonstrated clear primacy in this domain while European states and the European project itself were trailing behind (Kelemen and Vogel 2010, 428). The US was considered a pioneer in the early days of environmental legislation and a promoter for the need and usefulness of global environmental regimes (Falkner 2005, 585). In fact, the US would frequently call out European countries for being laggards in environmental legislation and action in the 1970s and 1980s (Falkner 2005, 585). This started to slowly change, however, as a transatlantic transition of leadership on the environmental front became noticeable in the 1990s, solidified with the US's withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001. The US was reluctant to take the lead and later ratify major international environmental agreements that came out of major UN conferences in the 1990s, most notably the Kyoto Protocol of 1997. At the same time, the EU was demonstrating growing leadership ambitions and clearly took over this role in 2001 after the US announced its withdrawal from Kyoto as visible in its actions before and during the Bonn and Marrakesh climate talks.

[11] For a detailed historical overview of the transatlantic relationship see Cowles and Egan (2012).

The EU started developing leadership ambitions in the domain of global climate change politics in the 1990s while the US was showing signs of decline, and the EU clearly pursued and assumed a leadership position and was recognized by others as a leader in this domain immediately following the American withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001. That is, as the US was showing signs of abandonment of its leadership position in the global climate domain, the EU expressed clear ambitions to fill in this vacuum. Thus, I argue that the EU pursued leadership ambitions only after the US started exhibiting signs of stepping down from this position. While a variety of angles have been considered in attempts to explain this leadership transition, I propose an alternative explanation by looking at the relational dynamics in the transatlantic space that have acted as constraints and enablers for EU ambitions.

As discussed in Chapter 2, various explanations have been put forth in attempts to understand the transatlantic transition of leadership, looking at the different degrees of support for multilateralism across the Atlantic in the 1990s (Ikenberry 2003; Kagan 2003), domestic policies and standards (Vig and Faure 2004), or shifts in regulatory politics that aligned differently with leadership ambitions (Kelemen and Vogel 2010), among others. Others have focused extensively on the type of leadership that the EU exerts in the domain of climate change (Gupta and Grubb 2000; Vogler 1999; Gupta and Ringius 2001; Schreurs and Tiberghien 2007; Oberthür and Dupont 2021) without diving deep into the specific reasons behind it. What most of them have in common is their situating within mainstream (substantialist) understandings of the phenomenon and the EU itself and do not consider the causal effects of relations between the two entities. Indeed, the relational approach to the transatlantic transition of leadership in the environmental (particularly climate change) domain developed here is the added value of this chapter. What is more, however, I do not argue against the value and validity of the existing alternative approaches to explaining

the transatlantic leadership transition. Rather, I argue that they do not provide a complete explanation as they do not capture the underlying relational dynamics in the transatlantic space. My approach seeks to add this additional relational element and thus provide a valuable contribution to the existing explanations on the matter and a more comprehensive explanatory picture of the phenomenon.

European countries demonstrated early ambition in 1992 during the negotiations for the establishment of the UNFCCC, where they pushed forward the idea for setting emissions targets at 1990s levels by the end of the millennium. This goal was not set to have legal status in the final treaty, although it is still listed in there as an aspiration, because the demands and desires of other influential actors, most notably the US, prevailed (Walker and Biedenkopf 2018, 35; Bäckstrand and Elgström 2013; Oberthür 2011b). Concessions to the desires of the US were necessary during the Kyoto negotiations as well in order for the EU to achieve the inclusion of the 1990s levels emissions goal in the text (Walker and Biedenkopf 2018, 35). Notably, while the EU and some of its member states advocated for a more progressive agenda, the US "drove the thinking on the specific elements of the negotiations," thus influencing "the key architectural elements in the Kyoto Protocol" (Lacasta et al. 2002, 407; also Oberthür and Roche Kelly 2008). In these cases, some leadership ambitions and behavior are visible, but nevertheless the EU was still facing constraints in the outcome of the negotiations. At that time the US was already exhibiting "a palpable lack of interest in environmental governance" which, in combination with difficulties in reaching consensus on various issues within the global climate regime, opened the door to the EU to begin "lay[ing] claim to a leadership role" although not too successfully yet (Vogler and Stephan 2007, 398).

Nevertheless, the EU's ambitions to assure survival and the successful implementation of the global climate regime became clearly visible and distinguishable only after the US withdrawal announcement from the Kyoto Protocol following the Bush Administration's decision in 2001. The EU swiftly filled the leadership vacuum left in the multilateral climate governance space, especially before and during the Bonn and Marrakesh Accords in 2001 (Walker and Biedenkopf 2018, 35). As argued by Walker and Biedenkopf (2018), a look at the historical development of EU climate leadership since the 1990s demonstrates that relations in the transatlantic space hold a determining effect on the EU in terms of its influence as a leader. That is, the US withdrawal in 2001 allowed the EU to take the reins and put its ambitions into action, leading many to view it as the unequivocal savior of the Kyoto Protocol (Bäckstrand and Elgström 2013; Walker and Biedenkopf 2018). At the same time, when the US made some strides back into the multilateral climate governance arena in 2009 after President Obama took office, the EU suffered a serious setback during COP 15 in Copenhagen, leading some to question the sustainability of an EU climate leadership (Walker and Biedenkopf 2018 38; see also Backstrand and Elgstrom 2013). At Copenhagen, the EU was left out of the final negotiations that took place between BASIC countries (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China) and the US (Walker and Biedenkopf 2018, 36; also Oberthür 2011b). Nevertheless, the US's initial withdrawal in 2001 was a key turning point for the EU and its solidification of leadership ambitions in that despite the setback of the 2009 COP, the EU was quickly able to recover and adjust, leading it to take firm hold of the process leading up to the Paris Agreement alongside the US in 2015. Thus, the relational dynamics between the EU and the US in the climate change domain had shifted significantly once the US surrendered its global leadership position in 2001, and the EU had already freely built and expressed its ambitions.

Thus, the US's reentry during the early months of the Obama administration did not result in toned down ambitions by the EU.

An important turning point not only for the EU's leadership in climate change governance, but also for the development of the global climate regime, was the EU's actions during the climate talks in Bonn and COP 7 in Marrakesh in July and November 2001, respectively. Following the withdrawal announcement by the United States in early 2001, the George Bush Administration had declared the Kyoto Protocol dead (Kluger 2001). After taking office in January 2001, Bush immediately made his views on Kyoto and the response to climate change clear. In March, President Bush drafted a letter to Republican Senators in the US Congress Jesse Helms, Larry E. Craig, Pat Roberts, and Chuck Hagel[12] in which he expressed his opposition to the Kyoto Protocol given its exemption from compliance of major polluters (80 percent), specifically China and India, stating that this condition will have clear negative economic impacts for the United States. In addition, he expressed his view on the emissions regulations for US power plants and that the government should not impose "mandatory emissions reductions for carbon dioxide, which is not a 'pollutant' under the Clean Air Act" (Bush 2001). To conclude, Bush specified that his Administration held a vision for addressing climate change via "science, technologies, market-

[12] Chuck Hagel is one of the senators who sponsored the Byrd-Hagel Senate Resolution (along with senator Robert C. Byrd), which passed unanimously (95-0) on July 25, 1997. The Resolution came as a direct response to the Kyoto Agreement and its potential infringement upon US economic interests. The Resolution outlined America's conditions for becoming a signatory to any international agreement under the UNFCCC aimed at addressing the climate crisis. The text of the Resolution specifies that "the United States should not be a signatory to any protocol to, or other agreement regarding, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change of 1992, at negotiations in Kyoto in December 1997 or thereafter which would: (1) mandate new commitments to limit or reduce greenhouse gas emissions for the Annex 1 Parties, unless the protocol or other agreement also mandates new specific scheduled commitments to limit or reduce greenhouse gas emissions for Developing Country Parties within the same compliance period; or (2) result in serious harm to the U.S. economy." See S.Res.98 - 105th Congress (1997-1998): A resolution expressing the sense of the Senate regarding the conditions for the United States becoming a signatory to any international agreement on greenhouse gas emissions under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (1997, July 25). https://www.congress.gov/bill/105th-congress/senate-resolution/98.

based systems, and innovative options for addressing concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere" (Bush 2001).

What the retreat of the US from an involved leadership position in the multilateral climate change regime during the Bush Administration did was to enable the EU's vision for global climate change leadership to continue and gain further prominence and legitimacy. Apart from the domestic structural and political constraints that led the US to pursue certain interests and push for smaller-scale international negotiations, the general suspicion of the existing scientific evidence on the matter and pursuit of alternative technological solutions that would not hurt domestic industrial interests, the US virtually removed itself from the accepted global forum for climate change efforts. It cannot be denied that climate change gained prominence in the US in the 2000s, and the US developed some domestic environmental regulations that could be considered cutting edge or even a form of leadership (Weiner 2004), but Washington nevertheless withdrew from its position as a global leader that was prevalent since the 1960s (Kelemen and Vogel 2010).

I am not promoting the argument that the EU did not start exhibiting leadership ambitions before the US's 2001 withdrawal from Kyoto as the existing literature has clearly demonstrated otherwise. Instead, I seek to demonstrate that the EU started exhibiting leadership ambitions in the 1990s *while* clear indications that the US was stepping back from any leadership ambitions were becoming visible. Nevertheless, the EU clearly demonstrated its leadership ambitions in the 2001 negotiations for the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol *after* President Bush announced the American withdrawal from the Agreement. As such, the withdrawal can serve as a useful counterfactual to demonstrate the causal effects of the theorized relational dynamics in the transatlantic space. That is, in the case that the US did not abandon its leadership position in the domain of environmental politics (and by extension, climate politics), the relational dynamics that

had developed in the transatlantic space would have 1) constrained the EU from pursuing the leadership ambitions it demonstrated in 2001 in direct competition with the US; and 2) any EU leadership ambitions and subsequent behavior in global climate governance would have looked differently from what has been observed in reality.

Empirical Strategy: Qualitative Counterfactual Analysis

The causal inference I seek to make here is that the EU's level of leadership ambition on climate change governance that we have observed since the 1990s but especially since 2001 is influenced by the US's retreat from its previous leadership position, exemplified in its withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol. The reason for this lies in the relational dynamics in the transatlantic space that can be traced through the formation and consequent development of the European project. As demonstrated above, the US has played a significant role in the development of this supranational project. Thus, the nature of the transatlantic relations is such that it imposes constraints and limitations on the ambitions that the EU sets and pursues for itself. That is, for the EU to pursue leadership ambition in an issue area where the US already takes up the leadership spot, it would mean that the EU would have to actively challenge the US's leadership position – the type of leadership as well. However, the relational dynamics that exist between the two entities influence the EU's ability to do so. So, had the US not withdrawn from its leadership position, and especially from the Kyoto Agreement and, hence, surrendered its leadership position in global climate change governance, the EU would not have developed, quantitatively and qualitatively, the same leadership ambitions we have observed over the past two decades. By developing this counterfactual analysis, I seek to trace and test whether this claim has merit. To achieve this, I carefully evaluate the events in the period surrounding the Kyoto Agreement, around when the US announced its withdrawal from it in 2001, including a description of the leadership vacuum that

was created, the anxieties related to the fate of the Kyoto Agreement, and the actions of the EU following the withdrawal, specifically as manifested during the Marrakesh Accords.

What would have happened if the US did not give up its leadership in global environmental governance? Is this even remotely plausible? The starting assumption is that the EU is constrained in its ambitions by the US due to their relational dynamics. Thus, the question asked in this counterfactual analysis is: would the specific relational dynamics between the US and the EU have constrained the EU from pursuing climate change leadership concurrently with the US had the US not withdrawn from the Kyoto Protocol and, consequently, from a position of global environmental leadership?

I rely on a mixture of primary and secondary sources for the analysis. The primary sources include reports from the Earth Negotiations Bulletin (ENB) (see Bäckstrand and Elgström 2013), which is the UN reporting service on negotiations related to the environment and development[13] as well as UNFCCC documents and other US government documents and archival materials. The ENB reports include summaries and daily reporting coverage of the various COPs within the UNFCCC. Reports of participant observations of attendees at some of the COPs are included in the analysis as primary sources as well. Primacy in the analysis is also given to secondary sources, including news reports, policy and event analysis and commentaries following the various COPs, and academic literature.

Counterfactual Analysis as a Method in International Relations

Qualitative counterfactual analysis as a methodological approach to answering important questions in International Relations and establishing causality has continued to grow in usage and

[13] Information about the ENB and their archives of reports and summaries are available here: https://enb.iisd.org/.

gain attention. The literature on the usefulness of the approach and the criteria of what a "good" counterfactual analysis must entail has expanded as well, allowing researchers to follow a roadmap to guide them in their endeavors to build a methodologically robust counterfactual study. These developments came after early criticisms and suspicions of the rigor of counterfactual analysis as a method in the social sciences, or what E.H. Carr (1964) called nothing more than a "parlour game" (p.97). Others expressed similar sentiments, referring to counterfactuals as entertaining "after dinner history" (Ferguson 1999, 15), or issuing concerns that a focus on "fictional questions" could lead researchers down a "methodological rathole" and result in a return to "ancient metaphysical conundrums" (Fischer 1971, 18; cited in Levy 2008, 628). Nevertheless, others have established the value and necessity of counterfactual analysis in the social sciences and have emphasized that the manner in which a counterfactual analysis is constructed and conducted is what allows researchers to avoid engaging in a "monstruous incursion of science into the world of history" (Oakeshott 1966, 128-129) and instead create a methodologically sound analysis of social scientific phenomena (Fearon 1991; Levy 2008; Wenzlhuemer 2009; Moravcsik 2014; Mahoney and Barrenenchea 2019). There is indeed a growing number of examples in the literature of robust counterfactual analysis approaches to phenomena in International Relations, such as the edited volume on counterfactual analysis on World War I and the end of the Cold War by Gary Goertz and Jack Levy (2007), Frank Harvey's (2012) work on the causes for the Iraq War, and Kimberly Marten's (2017) analysis of the post-Cold War expansion of NATO and its effects on Russia's relations with the West, to name but only a few.

A counterfactual can be defined as a "subjunctive conditional in which the antecedent is known or supposed for purposes of argument to be false" (Tetlock and Belkin 1996, 4). It includes the imagining of a scenario that did not in fact occur, but that would have changed the series of

events in an important way. While such an exercise can open the door for the construction of self-serving counterfactuals or "counterfactuals of convenience" (Morello 2002, 62-85), social scientists, including in the disciplines of History and Political Science, have developed sophisticated examples of sound methodological work, following a set of criteria discussed below. In fact, social scientists have identified the need for appreciation and usefulness of counterfactual analysis for the explanation of events. For instance, Max Weber (1949) specifies that "in order to penetrate to the real causal interrelationships, we construct unreal ones" (p.185-186), while Bruce Bueno de Mesquita (1996) claims that counterfactuals are indispensable for the understanding of actual events because in order to do that, one needs to understand "what did not happen but might have happened under other circumstances" (p.229; cited in Levy 2015, 380).

What, then, are the criteria for goodness of a counterfactual analysis? Scholars in the field highlight the importance of establishing criteria for "good" counterfactual analysis to respond to common criticisms of the method (Hansel and Oppermann 2014). Some of them are briefly discussed below.

Minimal rewrite rule - For a counterfactual to be plausible, it has to envision a world that is "identical to the real world in all theoretically relevant respects but one, in order to explore the consequences of that difference" (Levy 2008, 634). At the same time, it also applies to the essential enabling counterfactuals (Mahoney and Barrenechea 2019, 317). For example, would the US have withdrawn from the Kyoto Protocol in the event of an Al Gore presidency? But more importantly, was a Gore victory really possible?

Clarify the conditions and plausibility of the antecedent – The antecedent before the counterfactual claims should be carefully clarified, followed by the factuals leading to the consequent. That is, were there clear signs that the US was in the process of abandoning its

leadership position in the 1990s, and what might have happened in the Kyoto process negotiations during and after 2001 if the US was holding onto its leadership position?

Identify the tipping point/ point of no return – This specific point in history made it so that the scenario that actually occurred (reality) became the only possible alternative (Marten 2017), or a premise identified by Tetlock and Parker (2006) through their reference of probability theory's "Polya Urn Game."[14] In the counterfactual analysis for this chapter, this tipping point is the Bush Administration's commitment to and ultimate withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol, marking the end of the US global environmental and climate leadership that somehow persisted before that despite the specificities in the US political structure and differences in plans and actions of the US executive and legislative branches. That is, in the event of a Gore presidency, the persistent tensions between the US Congress and President on the topic of US participation in the global multilateral climate regime most likely would have continued, but the US would have maintained a relative position of leadership. As a result of this, the EU would have continued to develop higher levels of ambition for combatting climate change, but it would have developed in a different, more subtle way. I make the argument that this would have been driven by the relational dynamics between the US and the EU in which the EU would not develop a concurrent leadership ambition that would directly challenge the US on that front.

Focusing exclusively on the tipping point, however, creates the risk of committing the "fallacy of focusing on the last out." Frank Gavin (2015) warns about this pitfall in which analysts conducting counterfactual analysis concentrate on the details right before the event in question happens. Specifically, Gavin compares it to focusing on the last inning of a baseball game as a

[14] This game demonstrates that after a series of actions involving the removal and replacement of blue and red marbles, one of the two colors becomes dominant, thus "transforming the improbable into the inevitable" (p.20; cited in Marten 2017, 139).

reason for a loss or victory without taking into consideration the entire game or circumstances surrounding the teams. While identifying the tipping point is, of course, a central aspect of a good counterfactual analysis, Gavin emphasizes the need to expand one's analysis further back in time and scope in order to capture a larger breath of the specific case. I address this in my analysis below by focusing on the development of the policy approaches to climate change of both the United States and the EU.

Counterfactual Analysis: What if the US Did Not Withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol?

Minimal Rewrite

To understand the dynamics that accompanied the transatlantic leadership transition in 2001, a question that should be asked is whether the US would have refrained from withdrawing from the Kyoto Protocol if George Bush did not win the election in November 2000. But how plausible was a non-George Bush presidency? The 2000 election has gained notoriety as one of the most contested and closest presidential elections in US history, and an Al Gore presidency was indeed very possible. A question that garnered scholarly attention afterwards was whether Gore lost because of Green Party candidate Ralph Nader, who might have taken important environmental votes away from Gore. What the studies find is that while Nader certainly took away some of the votes that would have gone to Gore, they did not play a decisive role in the final turnout of events. Herron and Lewis (2007) demonstrate that the majority of the voters who casted their votes for Nader were closer to the Democratic Party center, and that 40% of his voters in Florida, the key state in this election, would have otherwise voted for Bush instead in a scenario where Nader did not run for president. The additional 60%, however, would most likely have indeed voted for Gore. Thus, a reallocation of a few votes in Florida would have been the key, making a Gore presidency a plausible alternative.

To begin to envision what an Al Gore presidency might have looked like for the United States' participation in the Kyoto Protocol and for a potential EU leadership role, a brief evaluation of Vice President Gore's track record both domestically and internationally is necessary. Gore had a hard time balancing environmental interests and the interests of business, especially as he found himself on the verge of a presidential campaign fully realizing that he would need both to succeed (Berke 1997; King 1997). This became painfully obvious during his short and controversial attendance of COP 3 in Kyoto in 1997 which at the time appeared to have aggravated both environmentalists, who felt a sense of betrayal from the Vice President's actions, and the industry interest groups who would be most affected from the Kyoto pledges (Moore 1997). Gore's concerns with his political career clearly took prevalence during his presidential campaign in 2000 when his platform included far less emphasis on environmental issues than one might have expected (Kelemen and Vogel 2010, 441). Gore made climate change the centerpiece of his political campaign as a candidate in the 1988 Democratic primary election and failed to garner the needed support. With this decision, Gore lost the candidacy, but in hindsight was a pioneer on this political front as his platform even preceded the formation of the UNFCCC regime by four years. Most environmental organizations in the US supported Al Gore during his 2000 campaign, although Gore's chances were affected by the candidacy of third-party candidate Ralph Nader from the Association of State Green Parties (ASGP) (Bosso 2005). Nader appeared as an environmental alternative to Gore as many left-leaning environmentalists saw Gore's agenda and Democratic Party track record as insufficient in truly addressing environmental concerns (Bosso 2005, 128). Nevertheless, Gore's environmental track record and his clear public stance on environmental issues and climate change more specifically allow the acceptance of the plausibility of the scenario

that if he won the presidential election in 2000, the US would not have withdrawn from the Kyoto process and its leadership position in the climate change regime in 2001.

Setting Up the Antecedent: The Specificities of US Politics and Global Climate Leadership, Kyoto, and an Al Gore Presidency

The antecedent for my analysis is the developments in the US before the 2001 withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol, and the potential for the US to maintain its climate leadership and not withdraw from Kyoto (in the case of a Gore presidency). The argument, then, is that if the US did not withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001, the EU would not have been able to pursue the level of leadership ambition necessary to achieve uncontested leadership in climate change governance in 2001.

Global warming started gaining traction as a significant global challenge in the 1980s as domestic and international efforts emerged and culminated in the formation of the UN climate regime in 1992: the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. In the United States, despite the overall reluctance of the Reagan Administration to make space for climate in the political spotlight, the subsequent Bush-Quayle and Clinton-Gore administrations pursued a more prominent international position and attempted to reflect this domestically in the face of policies and tangible initiatives. During his presidential campaign preceding the 1988 elections, Republican candidate George H.W. Bush proclaimed himself to be an environmentally focused president if elected, envisioning a leadership role for the US in the efforts to address the "greenhouse effect" (Bush 1988). Bush took this position in an effort to distinguish himself from his predecessor – Ronald Reagan - whose environmental record was rather controversial (Vig 1994; Duffy 2003). After him, President Bill Clinton and his Vice President, Al Gore, pursued rhetoric and actions corresponding to their commitment to combating climate change and building

an international climate change regime. Nevertheless, the ambitions of the executive branch were met with a plethora of obstacles and resistance from Congress, reflecting the constraining nature of the American political macro- and microstructure and the heavy influence of interest groups and lobbying in the US policy-making process (Agrawala and Andersen 1999; Kraft and Vig 2022). The division of power between the President and Congress, together with internal power politics and catering to individual district and constituent interests and the role of financial contributions by affected interests play a decisive role not only on the policies adopted by Congress, but also on the type and amount of influence that the US portrays internationally within the climate regime (Agrawala and Andersen 1999).

The distinctive structure of the US federal political system clearly differentiates and designates the powers of Congress and the president in a manner that has an important impact on the US global presence when it comes to environmental politics. When it comes to environmental policy, Norman Vig (2022) outlines the key powers that the president possesses that stem from the president's roles as chief executive, chief diplomat, and commander in chief. The role of chief diplomat has a key significance for the US global presence and actions when it comes to the climate regime, and this is why White House leadership is crucial for the role the US assumes. Additionally, the US president has the power to shape the political agenda and general direction of the administration via speeches and press conferences, which Vig (2022) calls "contextual" powers. The president also has a repertoire of "unilateral" powers, such as exerting direct policy influence through the imposition of vetoes on congressional legislation and by issuing executive orders, directives, and proclamations, and executive agreements (p.89; see also Mayer 2009).

However, the separation of powers outlined by the US Constitution mandates that the president does not have the ability to govern alone. In fact, the office holder is restricted by

Congress which determines the budgets of the executive agencies, impacts the political agenda through legislative and oversight hearings, introduces legislation, and can refuse to pass legislation supported by the President (Kraft 2022, 114). The Senate also has the power to approve and suggest staffing appointments in important environmental agencies and deny the ratification of treaties that the President has signed. Nevertheless, Congress is constrained by its own specific structure in that the achievement of consensus is quite difficult, and policy compromise typically reflects the representatives' local constituency interests (Kraft 2022, 115-116). These specific characteristics of the separation of power in the US federal government and their effects on US domestic environmental policy and international presence can be traced through the decades to demonstrate the significance of the George W. Bush electoral victory in 2000 for the leadership shift in the global climate regime.

In the 1960s and 1970s, environmental issues were gaining the attention of the American public and federal government, and a myriad of keynote policies and regulations were adopted during the period. In fact, the 1970s became to be known as the "environmental decade" as President Richard Nixon signed the National Environmental Policy Act on January 1, 1970 (Kepner 2016). The 1970s was also a period in which Congress initiated more environmental legislation than the president, representing the legislature's strong commitment to environmental policy and regulation (Kraft and Vig 2022, 16). Despite some ups and downs in the public's attention to these issues and a growing consideration for the effects of environmental policies and regulations on economic development, this trend generally continued through the 1980s and early 1990s. During the White House tenure of George H.W. Bush, who declared himself the "environmental president" during his first election campaign, the environment maintained a position on the political agenda. With the appointments of environmental leaders to key agency

positions, including World Wildlife Fund president William Reilly to the EPA, gathering bipartisan support for the Clean Air Act Amendments in 1990, and the proposal of innovative systems for dealing with acid rain, President Bush's record on the environment was not inconsiderable. His rhetoric shifted, however, during his second reelection campaign during which he lost to Democratic candidate Bill Clinton and his environmentally focused vice president. Overall, this period of nearly 25 years was characterized by considerable bipartisan support in Congress and the Presidency, with the notable exception of Ronald Reagan and his avid anti-environmentalism (Vig and Kraft 2022). At the same time, the US was acting as a leading party on the global stage on a variety of environmental issues, most notably the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Pollution (1979) and the international regime on the protection of the ozone in the face of the Montreal Protocol (Whitesides 2020).

A significant shift, however, occurred in the mid- to late-1990s, beginning in Congress and ultimately extending to the Presidency after the electoral victory of George W. Bush. The Republican Party took control of both houses in the US Congress from 1995 to 1997 for the first time in 40 years, instilling a long-lasting opposition to environmental policies that became a norm for subsequent Congresses (Kraft 2022). The Republican Party ran a campaign of strong opposition to the powers of the federal government and sought to limit its role, including in governmental regulations. With regards to environmental policy, they relied on work and rhetoric from conservative and pro-business think tanks which have been openly opposing environmentalism and the work of environmentalists for years (Kraft 2022, 120; also Layzer 2012). In order to achieve its anti-environmental agenda, the Republican-controlled Congress during that period relied on a slow and incremental strategy for regulatory reform, which featured "a subtler and far less visible exercise of Congress's appropriations and oversight powers" in order to undermine the

pro-environmental efforts of the Clinton administration (Kraft 2022, 120). After George W. Bush took office in 2001, there was not much need for congressional involvement in this way as the Bush administration took up the baton and pursued its own agenda catering to industry and business interests, coupled with increased US oil and natural gas developments on public lands (Kraft and Vig 2022, 5; see also Kraft and Kamieniecki 2007).

The Bush administration's withdrawal from Kyoto came from a conviction that the agreement was "fatally flawed," but it also reflected an overall retreat from international treaties and obligations (Vig 2022). It also represented a broader commitment to weaken existing domestic environmental policies and regulations, and Bush and his vice president, Dick Cheney, used the extensions of their powers to shape their anti-environmental and pro-industry agenda. Furthermore, during his presidential election campaign, Bush addressed carbon dioxide emissions and pledged to regulate the emissions from power plants but reversed his position on the matter in the letter he sent to Senators Hagel, Helms, Craig, and Roberts on March 13, 2001 (Dessai 2001, 5). Nevertheless, in the letter he indicated his concern for climate change but stated – as he had previously done – that he did not believe that the Kyoto Protocol is a good thing for the efforts to address climate change (Bush 2001).

This overview of the political developments within the US federal government reveals two important points. First, it becomes visible that the partisan shifts in the US Congress in the 1990s brought about important changes to the legislative views and approaches to environmental policy, with industry and business interests taking heavy prevalence in the agenda setting and decision-making processes. This is particularly exemplified in the strategy shift in Congress in the mid- and late-1990s towards incremental changes and regulatory reform of environmental agencies. However, this anti-environmental agenda by Congress was exponentially fortified by the

assumption of office by the George W. Bush administration in 2001. The second important point revealed here is that, as already established, the impression of a relatively powerless executive branch in the face of the US president and presidential administration is not an accurate depiction of the situation. In fact, the US president holds important powers when it comes to environmental regulation and policy, including the role of chief diplomat, chief executive, and the numerous contextual and unilateral powers held by the post. Thus, despite the legislative constraints imposed on the Clinton Administration with regards to the global climate regime, such as the Byrd-Hagel Resolution, the president and vice president were still able to exert important influence on the Kyoto negotiations, upholding a leadership position for the United States that it had established for itself on the global stage in the environmental domain. In addition, Clinton was still able to constrain the regulatory efforts by the Republican Congress to a certain degree, which changed swiftly after Bush assumed office and the anti-environmental agenda was embraced.

The developments of the climate change policy debate in the US, on both the domestic and international stages during the 1990s and 2000s, gradually revealed the general trends of the American leadership approach and vision for global climate change governance (see Bäckstrand and Elgström 2013, 1372). They reflected a sense of denial and disbelief in the scientific evidence for the existence and impacts of climate change among both the US public and Congress and high consideration for US economic interests, visible in the US's preference and insistence for voluntary, non-binding actions (Oberthür 2011a), emission reductions that can be measured, reported, and verified (Christoff 2010), and the inclusion of all emitters, not just the developed countries (Bäckstrand and Elgström 2013, 1372). In addition, the US had shown preferences for approaching the climate change issue through smaller international fora, mainly bilateral and regional initiatives on a voluntary principle, often referred to as "minilateral solutions" (Christoff

2010, 649), such as the Major Economies Forum or the Asia Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate (APP). As a result, the US climate foreign policy following President Bush's withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol was seen as "unilateralist and obstructionist" (Falkner 2005, 586), led by an Administration that shared an overall suspicion of the existence and true impacts of the climate change phenomenon (Kahn 2003). It is important to note that despite taking on leadership in environmental issues in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, environmental issues have never occupied a primary spot in the US's efforts to build the international order in the post-war period, unlike security, trade, and monetary policy (Falkner 2005, 586).

Point of No Return

As identified above, the tipping point or point of no return in this case is the Bush administration's withdrawal announcement from the Kyoto Protocol in March 2001. Despite the specificities of the US political structure and tensions between the presidential administrations and Congress, US leadership – albeit waning - in the climate domain had endured until that point. These tensions could have thus been expected to persist under a Gore presidency, nevertheless maintaining the American leadership role in the global climate regime. Washington's withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol was seen on the international stage not only as an abdication of leadership, but as jeopardizing the global effort to fight climate change as a "rogue state" on the matter (Falkner 2005, 585). It revealed the striking reality of the American domestic political structure and its volatility for a responsible and steady global leadership. What is more, it revealed the clear prevalence of national economic interests and competitiveness over a concern for the issue of climate change and its global impacts (Falkner 2005).

Immediately after the inauguration of George Bush in 2001, the US position on the Kyoto Protocol shifted dramatically and drastically. The White House announcement of the American

withdrawal of the Protocol in March 2001 was deemed "Kyoto's death warrant" by the Administration and US media (Borger 2001). It also caused international outrage as the US withdrawal not only represented the exit of the largest emitter at the time, but it also made the requirements to put the treaty into force very difficult to achieve (Vrolijk 2002, 3). Without the US - the Party accounting for over a quarter of the global emissions at the time - the Protocol had to be ratified by the EU, Russia, Japan, and a small Party coalition in order to enter into force (Dessai 2001, 3).

The details of the Kyoto negotiations and the subsequent US withdrawal had been creating a leadership vacuum on the global climate governance stage that was swiftly filled in by the EU, clearly demonstrated in its actions in 2001.

Overview of the EU's Leadership Actions

The EU underwent important institutional development both internally and externally in the domain of environmental policy throughout its existence that ultimately made it possible for the EU to pursue leadership ambitions and behavior.[15] Internal institutionalization developments in the 1970s and 1980s, such as the first Environmental Action Programme (EAP) in 1973, the establishment of Directorate General (DG) XI (later to become DG Environment) by the Commission in 1981, and the incorporation of environmental policy into the primary EU legislation through the Single European Act in 1986, laid the groundwork for the EU's environmental policy-making, actorness, and its international ambitions and behavior (Damro et al. 2008). In the 1990s, climate change took a more central stage for the EU's environmental policy-making through the creation of the European Environmental Agency in 1990 and the

[15] For a more detailed overview see Damro et al. (2008).

important inclusion of EU competence on environmental agreements in the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, giving the EU "competence to conclude [binding] international environmental agreements" and an objective that EU policy should also promote "measures at international level to deal with regional or worldwide problems" (Sbragia 1998, 290; cited in Damro et al. 2008, 183). In 1986, the European Parliament requested the development of a common climate change policy, and in 1990, the European Council adopted a resolution demanding the adoption of GHG emissions reduction at the UN level (Wurzel et al. 2017, 4).

Simultaneously, the internal institutionalization undergone by the EU was complemented by important external developments that allowed the EU to gain international presence, including gaining external legal competence through recognition by international negotiating forums and third-party negotiators in international environmental negotiations (Damro et al. 2008, 184). In 1974, the EU was granted permanent observer status in the UN General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, and in 1979 the EU obtained the status of a Regional Economic Integration Organization (REIO), allowing it to participate in international environmental negotiations (Damro et al. 2008, 184). Furthermore, the EU was able to sign and ratify the Kyoto Protocol thanks to the UNFCCC Article 22 which stipulates that the Convention is "subject to ratification, acceptance, approval or accession by States and by regional economic integration organizations" (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change 1992, 17).

The EU as a unit started showing high ambitions in climate change governance compared to the other industrialized countries during the establishment of the UNFCCC in 1992 as signs of the waning US environmental leadership started becoming visible. The EU was advocating for establishing legally binding targets of aiming for keeping greenhouse gas emissions at 1990 levels by 2000 rather than a non-legally binding goal which, in contrast, was the desire of the US and

which prevailed in the final agreement (Bäckstrand and Elgström 2013). Nonetheless, the EU was making steady strides in its internal policies towards its first European Climate Change Program in 2000. In fact, the vision of the EU for a climate change governance order in the 1990s and beyond has been quite distinguishable from the American one (Vogler and Bretherton 2006). Unlike the US and its suspicion of the UN regime, the EU has always been committed to multilateralism, scientific evidence, and the principles of sustainable development and precaution (van Schaik and Schunz 2012; Smith and Elgström 2012). Additionally, the EU has maintained its insistence on strong compliance mechanisms and clear, scientifically driven, and legally binding targets and timetables (Bäckstrand and Elgström 2013, 1371). Given all these developments, it is argued that at the time of the US withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001, the EU was the only other global political entity who had the capacity to take on this role (Vig and Faure 2004).

Tensions between the US and the EU stemming from their competing visions for the final agreement persisted during the negotiations on the Kyoto Protocol. In the US domestic sphere, Congress was making it abundantly clear that it would most likely not support the ratification of any ambitious agreement, and the US was thus pushing for significantly less stringent measures. The EU played an important role for the determination of targets in the final version of the Protocol, but it was the US that had a decisive part "in shaping the institutional approach to implementation, notably with emissions trading" (International Institute for Sustainable Development 1997, 15). Due to some internal tensions among EU negotiators, the US expressed its perception of the EU strategy at COP 3 to be one where "[t]hey were having more fun being green than in being practical," as a result of which "[w]e [i.e., the US] had to convince everyone else" (International Institute for Sustainable Development 1997, 15).

Following the agreement on the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, a lot more work needed to be done and issues to be clarified before any strides forward could be made. The following year, at COP 4 in Buenos Aires, any remaining ambiguities needed to be clarified and set the road for the Kyoto mechanisms. The Parties could not come to an agreement, so they deferred the decisions to COP 6 two years later, which took place in The Hague in November 2000 and was also more or less considered a failure. There were too many important outstanding unresolved issues, and major disagreements between the Umbrella Group, the EU, and the G77/China, combined with unsuccessful leadership style on behalf of the COP 6 President (Dutch environmental minister Jan Pronk) pushed back their resolution to a meeting in Bonn in the summer of 2001 preceding COP 7 in Marrakesh in October/November.[16] Specifically, clashes between the positions of the EU and the US (as well as the Umbrella Group more broadly on some issues) were blamed for this outcome in the media. For instance, one of the main issues of contestation was that of sinks, and while the EU pushed for "limited sink activities and no sinks in the [Clean Development Mechanism]," the US insisted on the "full use of the [Kyoto] Protocol's sinks provisions," a position followed by Canada and Japan (Dessai 2001, 4). Compliance was another critical issue of disagreement where the EU advocated for a stronger compliance system while the Umbrella Group pushed for a weaker option (Dessai 2001, 4). Overall, the EU was blamed by some for the failure of COP 6 due to "its

[16] In the UNFCCC and the negotiations during and after Kyoto, several major Party groups played important roles for the outcomes of the negotiations. The G77 and China (representing the Global South) was one of them, and another key one was the so-called Umbrella Group, consisting of fully industrialized Annex I and II states that were not part of the EU. The members initially included Japan, the US, Canada, Australia, Norway, and New Zealand, later to be joined by others, including Russia and Ukraine. The Umbrella Group tended to oppose high GHG emissions reduction targets during the Kyoto process. The reasoning behind the naming of the group is due to their negotiating position that ought to protect them from the EU's proposition that "assumed the joint reduction of greenhouse gases emissions by the European Union as a whole, instead of fulfilling individual commitments by all member states" (Gnas 2014, 24).

inability to respond quickly during negotiations because of the need to get agreements from its fifteen member states first" (Vrolijk 2002, 3).

The Transatlantic Leadership Transition: The 2001 Bonn and The Marrakesh Accords

The US announcement of withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol in March 2001 threatened the survival of the global climate regime. As a result, the immediate reaction by EU institutions was overwhelmingly in support of pursuing global leadership on the Protocol. The Environmental Council configuration almost immediately reached an agreement that the EU should seek ratification, which was approved by the European Council and supported by the European Parliament and led to the EU's ratification of the Kyoto Protocol in May 2002 (Wurzel et al. 2017, 6).

Before that, the Bonn meeting of the Parties in July 2001 on which the tabled discussion on the various outstanding issues of COP 6 had to resume, turned out to be perceived as "the European renaissance" as the EU distinguishably "assumed international leadership" following the US withdrawal (Vrolijk 2002, 4). Prior to Bonn, on March 23, the White House received a letter from the EU stating that "a global strategy to tackle climate change is an integral part of relations with the United States," and urged the US to find "political courage" to agree to any deal that would be negotiated in Bonn during the summer, which was followed by further transatlantic communication and diplomatic endeavors, making it "a disputed area of transatlantic global foreign policy" (Dessai 2002, 6). The US made it very clear that it would not reconsider its stance on the matter and its distrust in the Kyoto Protocol, so the EU responded by expressing willingness to renegotiate parts of the Protocol to make concessions to the US, but also by pledging to pursue the successful ratification and implementation of the Protocol regardless of the US withdrawal (Dessai 2002, 6; also citing BBC News 2001). The EU sent political delegations to Washington

and to some of the other main Parties for negotiation purposes. Prior to the EU representatives' meetings in Washington, it was made clear by European leaders that "they will chart their own course if they cannot gain the United States' cooperation" (Pianin 2001b). The meeting with the Bush administration was indeed not productive as it refused to reconsider its abandonment of the Protocol despite the pleas and efforts by the EU delegation (Pianin 2001b). In March and April 2001, an EU diplomatic delegation made visits to Russia, Iran (who was at the top of the G77 group at the time), China (BBC News 2001), as well as Japan to assure the continued support of key Parties to the Protocol (International Institute for Sustainable Development 2001, 2-3).

In the weeks leading up to Bonn, the Bush Administration continued to stand firmly behind its position on Kyoto, and even released a new energy plan relying heavily on fossil fuels that would cause an increase in GHG emissions rather than a decrease (Sanger and Kahn 2001), which was condemned by the EU (CNN 2001). In June 2001, the EU and the US met at their summit in Gothenburg, Sweden and confirmed their opposing positions and views of Kyoto with the EU making a pledge to ratify the Protocol despite the US withdrawal. Nevertheless, the EU was worried that other key Parties might follow Washington's lead and lose faith and support for the Protocol, so they decided to send European delegations to states to follow the EU in ratifying the Protocol (Oakley 2001). In the days leading up to the Bonn talks, the US announced that it would not provide alternative offers to the planned agenda, and that it "would not block the Europeans from attempting to negotiate with the Japanese and others on an agreement that includes mandatory targets" (Pianin 2001a).

The lack of US leadership (including negative leadership in terms of dissuading other Parties from supporting Kyoto) allowed the EU to hold the reins steady at Bonn as it was very possible that a failure at Bonn could indicate the end of the Kyoto Protocol. The EU went into the

talks knowing that compromises and concessions needed to be made, especially to the remaining Parties of the Umbrella Group, particularly Australia, Japan, Canada, and Russia. One of the most contentious issues at the talks pertained to the Kyoto compliance mechanisms, and while the EU continued supporting a stricter compliance system, some in the Umbrella Group – especially Japan – did not. In fact, Japan viewed it as a dealbreaker, so the EU compromised, and a decision was reached to postpone the legally binding compliance system adoption until the Protocol enters into force (Dessai 2001, 9). Overall, the outcome of Bonn was considered to be "both a victory for Europe, showing leadership on the climate issue, and a victory for multilateralism" (Vrolijk 2002, 4). The sentiment expressed by the European Environment Commissioner – Margot Wallstrom - coming out of Bonn was one of a changed "balance of power between the US and the EU," confirmed further by one US observer that the US decision to withdraw from the Protocol and the results from Bonn were "a major foreign policy defeat for President Bush" (International Institute for Sustainable Development 2001, 14). The Bonn Agreement was a political agreement, but some outstanding technical issues remained to be decided upon in Marrakesh in October/November 2001.

In Marrakesh, the EU again had to make concessions, especially to countries in the Umbrella Group, including on provisions related to developing-country issues, the Kyoto mechanisms, sink issues, and compliance issues.[17] The trend of making concessions to the Umbrella Group continued here, too, and the outstanding issue of the compliance regime and the use of the Kyoto mechanisms eligibility criteria were overall weakened by the positions taken by Russia and Japan (Vrolijk 2002, 4-5). Attending observers of COP 7 noted that the Kyoto Protocol

[17] See COP 7 Documents available at https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/conferences/past-conferences/marrakech-climate-change-conference-october-2001/cop-7/cop-7-documents

was saved by the many necessary compromises that "resulted from pressure by several Umbrella Group countries (excl. the USA), whose ratification is crucial for the Kyoto Protocol to come into force, and the willingness of the European Union … to save the Kyoto Protocol" (Sprinz 2001, 1). Furthermore, this observer highlights in their notes that because the US withdrew as an active Party to the Protocol and did not present a proposed alternative to the Protocol at Marrakesh, "it was up to the EU to 'salvage' the Kyoto Protocol by making concessions in return for the international leadership role the EU has volunteered on the issue" (Sprinz 2001, 1-2). They also observed that, at Marrakesh, the EU "clearly played a more united role than before in global climate politics" thus "[s]olidifying its leadership role since early 2001" (i.e., the US announcement of withdrawal from Kyoto) and being able to "offer concessions to make ratification of the Kyoto Protocol possible" (Sprinz 2001, 3). In this vein, the observer states that since its withdrawal, "the world has learnt how *not* to miss US leadership on climate change" (Sprinz 2001, 3). Overall, the Kyoto Protocol, as a first-generation climate treaty of this caliber, albeit severely diluted at Bonn and Marrakesh (Athanasiou and Baer 2001), established the foundation and set the expectations for the future of multilateral approaches to addressing climate change within the UN framework.

This tracing of the development of the UN climate governance regime in the 1990s and early 2000s and the EU's involvement in it vis-à-vis the US reveals two important points. First, it reveals that the US, even throughout the Clinton administration, was showing signs of disinterest and abandonment of leadership ambitions within it. In fact, some have called the US's behavior within the UNFCCC a "half-hearted [effort] to move the Kyoto process forward" (Athanasiou and Baer 2001). President Bush's withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol and his administration's vision for an alternative approach to climate issues, their disdain for the Protocol, as well as their failure to propose a clear alternative to the Protocol in Bonn and Marrakesh created a leadership vacuum

that the EU swiftly filled in and successfully brought the Kyoto Protocol forward. Second, it is clear that the EU had expressed high ambition for tackling climate change with its progressive proposed targets at the different forums as well as through its internal developments, but it assumed a determined position to save the Kyoto Protocol and pursued influence over the other Parties to the Protocol in the period immediately after the American abdication. Thus, while we will never have the luxury of observing the real-world developments of a situation where the US did not withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001, given the outcomes of Kyoto, Buenos Aires, and The Hague, as well as the complex history of asymmetry of relations in the transatlantic space, an argument could be made that the EU would not have pursued such a bold leadership role defying the US in the period surrounding Bonn and Marrakesh in 2001 which ultimately led to the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol.

What If the US Did Not Withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001?

The overview presented above demonstrates the string of events that occurred after the US announcement of withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol and the international reaction to it. Without a doubt, the period from March 2001 to the adoption of the Marrakesh Accord in November 2001 was heavily influenced by the US decision. Even more importantly for the purposes of this chapter, the US decision played a deciding role for the ambition that the EU displayed in this period that ultimately led it to establish itself and be recognized as the leader in the climate negotiations in 2001. But what would have happened if the US did not withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001 but rather maintained its position of influence in the negotiations and stood firmly behind its objectives and demands at Bonn and Marrakesh? While we do not have the luxury of observing this scenario in history, we can draw some implications by looking at three different shadow cases.

The first two cases are temporally differentiated from the 2001 withdrawal, while the third one is thematically differentiated as it presents a different issue domain.

To make the counterfactual analysis even stronger and to further avoid the fallacy of focusing on the last out, the first two shadow cases below represent important moments in time for the global climate regime. The first shadow case occurs before the tipping point (i.e., the US withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol) and the other one occurs afterwards. Their temporal positioning before and after the leadership switch reveals specific dynamics between the US and the EU within the first three phases of the global climate change regime. The first phase includes the establishment of the regime and the adoption of the UNFCCC; the second phase concentrates of the drafting, establishing, and elaboration of the Kyoto Protocol in the period 1995-2001 (also inclusive of the US withdrawal); and the third phase occurs after the ratification of Kyoto and the agreement on a course of action for after the expiration of the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol in 2012.[18] As shadow cases, their goal is not to exactly match the structure and amount of detail presented in the flagship case above, but rather to clarify further the relational dynamics in the transatlantic space and the levels of leadership ambitions in both the EU and the US. The first shadow case examines the events leading up to the signing of the UNFCCC in 1990-1992 and the roles of the US and the EU during it, while the second one looks at COP 15 in Copenhagen in 2009 where the US is considered to have made a return to the global stage of climate governance after the Obama administration took office.

The third shadow case briefly discusses an issue area where the US did not give away its primacy on the global stage – security and defense. After the end of the Cold War, in the 1990s the

[18] This temporal designation is adopted from Daniel Bodansky (2010), "The Copenhagen Climate Change Conference: A Postmortem." *The American Journal of International Law* 104(2): 230-240.

US maintained its forward positioning in Europe and other parts of the world and NATO persisted despite questions about its continued need after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Shadow Case 1: The UNFCCC (1992)

American leadership in the domain of global environmental governance is visible in the events in the mid-to-late 1980s and early 1990s leading up to the adoption of the UNFCCC in 1992. In the mid-1980s, the United States was identified as one of the four key international actors on the international arena on issues related to climate change and climate research in addition to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), and the International Council on Scientific Unions (ICSU) (Agrawala 1998, 608). Scientific assessments done by US agencies at the time were shaping the assessments done in other countries and were leading the nascent international effort in this domain (Agrawala 1998, 608-609). By 1988, the US had pushed for the establishment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as an intergovernmental mechanism with the goal of gathering scientific evidence about climate change and informing policy and had lobbied to head a central working group within the IPCC (Bodansky 1993, 458). In May 1989, the US announced that it would support negotiations for a framework convention on climate change within the UN system (Bodansky 1993, 473). In 1990, Resolution 45/212 was adopted by the UN General Assembly to establish the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to lead the negotiations of a framework convention on climate change.[19]

The UNFCCC was adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also referred to as the Earth Summit, in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992.[20]

[19] Resolution 45/212 is available at: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/196769?ln=en&v=pdf.
[20] See the official UN web page for the Conference at: https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/rio1992.

The US was the first industrialized country (and fourth country overall) to ratify the Convention following a swift vote in the US Senate that gave its advice and consent soon after (Leggett 2013; US Congress 1992). The US ratified the UNFCCC on October 15, 1992, and was only behind Mauritius (September 4, 1992), the Seychelles (September 22, 1992), and the Marshall Islands (October 8, 1992).[21] The George H.W. Bush presidential administration at the time was still marked by his intent to continue the US environmental leadership. In his address to the UNCED in Rio in June 1992, President Bush (Bush 1992, 925-926) clearly expressed this intent:

> *Let's face it, there has been some criticism of the United States. But I must tell you, we come to Rio proud of what we have accomplished and committed to extending the record on American leadership on the environment. In the United States, we have the world's tightest air quality standards on cars and factories, the most advanced laws for protecting lands and waters, and the most open processes for public participation. Now for a simple truth: America's record on environmental protection is second to none. So I did not come here to apologize. We come to press on with deliberate purpose and forceful action. Such action will demonstrate our continuing commitment to leadership and to international cooperation on the environment.*

Nevertheless, at this time signs of a weakened leadership position in this domain on the global stage by the US were already becoming visible, as discussed earlier in the analysis. Compared to earlier trends in US global environmental leadership, some have even argued that the US "took a backseat" at the 1992 UNCED (Falkner 2005, 585). After 1990, there was a significant decline in large-scale environmental policy initiatives in the US and thus pursuing an ambitious climate and emissions reduction global position made less sense for US competitiveness interests (Kelemen and Vogel 2010, 432). Furthermore, despite its signature and quick ratification, the US did not translate this commitment to any significant policy changes at home (Kelemen and Vogel

[21] For a full list of signatories and dates of signature and ratification see: https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetailsIII.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=XXVII-7&chapter=27&Temp=mtdsg3&clang=_en.

2010, 447). At this time, the EU was starting to exhibit ambitious goals for international climate policy that differed from the US vision for the climate regime, which was visible at the UNFCCC negotiations. Despite a more ambitious rhetoric, the EU itself had not implemented "significant reduction measures" at the time of the negotiations, so it is considered by some to have played the role of a more "symbolic" leader (Wurzel et al. 2017, 6). Furthermore, the EU had not yet been granted full actor status in the UN climate negotiations at the time (Bäckstrand and Elgström 2013, 1375). Nevertheless, the UNFCCC is considered a result of a compromise between the US and the EU as while the EU was pushing for binding targets for GHG emissions, the US held its position against them and ultimately succeeded in achieving its goals (Bäckstrand and Elgström 2013, 1375; Oberthür and Roche Kelly 2008, 36).

Despite pursuing ambitious goals and targets in the UNFCCC negotiations and later during the Kyoto Protocol negotiations, the EU's impact on the final products has been classified as comparatively limited as they were decisively and heavily influenced by the US (Oberthür and Roche Kelly 2008, 36). There was a pronounced change in this trend after the US withdrawal in 2001 with visibly "more impressive" achievements of EU leadership (Oberthür and Roche Kelly 2008, 36).

Shadow Case 2: Copenhagen 2009 – A "Revival" of US Leadership

Some argue that the US returned to the global climate governance stage in 2009 with the election of President Obama in late 2008 (Parker and Karlsson 2018). In fact, one of Barack Obama's first promises as president-elect in November 2008 was to "mark a new chapter in America's leadership on climate change" (The White House – President Barack Obama).[22]

[22] A timeline of President Barack Obama's commitment to climate change during his presidency is available at the archived Obama White House webpage at: https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-record/climate/global.

Looking at this US leadership revival moment allows us a glimpse at a counterfactual situation where George Bush did not win the election and the US maintained a prominent position in the global climate regime. While there is no guarantee that an Al Gore administration would have pursued US leadership in Bonn and Marrakesh, the US would have at least attended these summits as a Party to the Protocol rather than as an observer.

By the time of COP 15 at Copenhagen and the American return to the stage, the EU had already established itself as a leader in this domain. Nevertheless, by 2009 the negotiation context in the global climate regime had shifted and become "much less favourable than before" for the EU, thus challenging its negotiation tactics (Bäckstrand and Elgström 2013, 1373-1374). What is more, COP 15 has been referred to as a "failure of EU global leadership" (Bäckstrand and Elgström 2013, 1378; see also Bäckstrand 2011). The COP featured a difficult negotiation context during the preparation meetings by the ad hoc working groups, the ministerial segment, and the head-of-state/government segment. It was becoming clear that a legal agreement was not going to be reached but rather a political one at best. Crucially, the EU was left out of the most critical part of the negotiations which was taken over by the US and the BASIC countries at the last stage of the negotiations. A breakthrough resulting in the Copenhagen Accord was achieved at this small meeting among President Obama and the heads of state/government of Brazil, India, China, and South Africa, and was announced by President Obama at a press conference (Bodansky 2010, 234). The swift manner in which President Obama reported on the agreement was criticized in addition to the Accord itself, with some delegates finding out about it from the Internet and media rather than through official UNFCCC documents. The agreement was also criticized for being reached in an undemocratic and undiplomatic manner due to the small number of delegations present at the particular meeting (International Institute for Sustainable Development 2009, 28). Other

delegates, in contrast, expressed the view that to "get a real deal" required the involvement of "the big boys" who do certain things in their own way, following certain procedures and tactics (International Institute for Sustainable Development 2009, 28).

So, while the EU was seen as a the savior of Kyoto in 2001, at COP 15 in Copenhagen Barack Obama had traveled from Washington to "salvage a deal" (The White House – President Barack Obama). The US headed to Copenhagen with specific ambitions in mind, including a commitment to reaching a strong agreement built on three specific objectives: commitment to action by all major emitters; a bottom-up approach with national emission reduction pledges (in contrast to Kyoto's top-down approach); non-binding emissions reduction; and compliance through transparency (Parker and Karlsson 2018, 523; citing United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change 2009, 106-108). The Copenhagen Accord as a result represented elements of the US vision for the global climate regime and was in contrast to the vision expressed by the EU in the Kyoto Protocol negotiations and in its visions for a post-2012 agreement (Parker and Karlsson 2018, 524). Furthermore, survey results from questionnaires distributed to delegates and attendees at various COPs for a study conducted by Parker and Karlsson (2018) show a clear switch in climate leadership perceptions of the US compared to the EU before and after the Obama administration took office in 2009. Parker and Karlsson's (2018) findings suggest that perceptions of attending delegates of EU leadership declined from 58% at COP 14 (2008) to 42% at COP 15 the following year, while the perceptions of US leadership increased from 19% at COP 14 to 47% at Copenhagen the following year (p.529).

What conclusions can be drawn from this shadow case? It shows how a return of the US to the climate regime negotiations with strong leadership ambitions challenged the EU's position, negotiation tactics, and the perceptions of others of the EU's leadership itself. What is more, the

Obama administration still faced the familiar roadblock at home in the opposition from Congress to any international climate agreement that threatens the economic competitiveness of the US, similar to what has been observed in the US political system since the 1990s (Bäckstrand and Elgström 2013, 1374). As such, one could imagine how the situation in 2001 might have been different if the US approached the negotiations in Bonn and Marrakesh with the same resolve to reach a deal instead of withdrawing from the climate change regime altogether. It does not mean that the EU diminished its leadership ambition in the face of a returning US, but rather that it was not as successful as it was in 2001 in achieving its goals and influencing other parties. My argument suggests that given the relational dynamics that had been established between the US and the EU historically, the EU would not have pursued the same kind of leadership ambitions or with the same resolve to salvage the Kyoto Protocol in 2001 had the US not withdrawn.

Shadow Case 3: Security and Defense

To further strengthen the analysis in this chapter, I move away from global climate politics in a spatial dimension towards another issue domain where the US has held onto a global leadership position since WWII but unlike environmental governance, it did not withdraw from its leadership position. The shadow case in focus here is the domain of security and defense, and it could be useful to further demonstrate a causal link between the Transatlantic relational dynamics and the ambitions of the EU. Security and defense is a case that demonstrates the persistent leadership of the United States, including its forward-deployed presence on the European continent after the end of the Cold War via NATO (Harris and Marinova 2022). It has also been a domain where the EU has not yet developed leadership ambitions to challenge or compete with the US primacy. Thus, in a case where the US chose to no longer remain forward deployed in Europe, does that mean that

the EU would have made serious strides towards becoming an influential (and ambitious) regional and, potentially global, actor on issues of security and defense?

The relational dynamics in the transatlantic space during the Cold War were built within an environment in which the US not only structured the Western European foreign, security, and defense policies, but also guaranteed European security through direct leadership over the West's military efforts (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022, 48). The relational dynamics of dependence that were established in the transatlantic space during this period constrained the scope and ability of the European project and its member states to formulate and pursue their own foreign, security, and defense policies (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022, 48). After the end of the Cold War, although American troop numbers were reduced in Europe, the US did not withdraw from Europe, and NATO maintained its position and importance despite the collapse of the Soviet Union (Nye 1995). In the changed geopolitical environment, the US remained the only state capable of exerting global leadership in this domain and acted as "the anchor of security in Europe" while playing a crucial role in bridging the divide between the former Warsaw Pact states and Western society (van Heuven 1994, 6). In the 1990s, the EU continued to look towards the US for security guarantees due to the security vacuum that emerged in Central and Eastern Europe following the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, as well as the violence in the Balkans, anxieties about the German reunification, and the uncertainty surrounding the internal and external changes that Russia was undergoing at the time (van Heuven 1994, 1).

Can we then envision a plausible scenario of a US withdrawal towards isolationism after the end of the Cold War, including the total withdrawal of troops from Europe and the dismantling of NATO? Evidence of the rebranding of NATO and the US foreign policy agenda at the time suggests that such a counterfactual would most likely violate the minimal rewrite of history rule

discussed earlier. First, as the Cold War was ending, state leaders within NATO were not ready to abandon and dismantle the Alliance as it had grown into a "community of like-minded states" over its existence (Daalder 1999, 6). Furthermore, NATO rebranded itself and justified its continuous existence by focusing both on the uncertainties of the new geopolitical environment, especially caused by the instability resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, and on striving to maintain a predictable status quo for the Alliance partners (Shea 2003). Second, the US identified its regional alliances and its forward deployed presence - despite the conscious reduction in numbers of deployed military personnel - in various regions around the world as crucial elements for its Defense Strategy published in 1993.[23] The Strategy identified the American continued presence in Europe to be "an essential part of the West's overall efforts to maintain stability" and the persistence and strengthening of NATO as the "channel for U.S. engagement and participation in larger European security affairs" while simultaneously encouraging European alliance partners to increase their contributions to NATO (p.19). The breakout of the war in Yugoslavia in the early 1990s demonstrated the continuous need for NATO and the Europeans' inability to handle crises of such caliber without the assistance of the US at the time (Cowles and Egan 2012, 15). By the end of the 1990s, NATO had firmly established itself as "a revitalized stalwart institution" while the EU, with the strong support of the US, was making efforts towards further security and defense integration as a way to also increase its burden sharing in the transatlantic alliance (Cowles and Egan 2012, 15).[24]

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[23] The *Defense Strategy for the 1990s: The Regional Defense Strategy* (Cheney 1993) is available at https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA268979.pdf.

[24] For example, some of the milestones include the Saint- Malo Declaration from 1998 that established the commitment to create a European Security and Defense Policy; the European Security and Defense Policy that was launched in 1999 at the Cologne European Council; the adoption of a European Security Strategy in 2003, followed by the creation of the European Defense Agency in 2004, to name a few early developments.

As such, it would be difficult to build a robust counterfactual analysis based on this premise. However, it would not be too far-fetched to imagine that European integration in the 1990s and beyond would have looked very differently with such a fundamental change in the transatlantic relational dynamics. Without the US leadership to guarantee European security and constrain European efforts for strong security and defense integration by making it unnecessary, an argument could comfortably be made that the security and defense architecture on the continent would most likely have developed differently over the past thirty years. At the same time, it would not be unreasonable to argue then that the relational dynamics of dependence between the US and the EU constrained the ambitions and efforts of the EU to pursue a focused and determined avenue towards strategic autonomy from the US, at least until the US starts showing clear intentions for withdrawal from Europe.

The resulting continuous dependence on NATO put the EU in a disadvantageous and even vulnerable position when it comes to assuring its own security and defense. In their counterfactual analysis reflecting the geopolitical reality before Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion in Ukraine, Meijer and Brooks (2021) demonstrate the challenges that would be facing the EU's attempts for achieving strategic military autonomy in the event of a complete US withdrawal from the continent. What is more, they base their counterfactual question on the understanding that the "strongest possible incentive" for the EU to pursue strategic autonomy is indeed a complete US withdrawal of conventional and nuclear forces from Europe (p.9). Nevertheless, they argue that such an opportunity for strategic autonomy would not be seizable because the EU would be impeded by two constraints: defense capacity shortfalls and "strategic cacophony," or the high levels of diversity among the member states in terms of national defense policies and threat perceptions (although important steps have been made to overcome this since 2022) (pp. 9-10).

This analysis demonstrates that in the event of an abrupt US withdrawal from Europe, the EU would likely find itself in a difficult predicament. Thus, the maintenance of stable relations with the US has been critical for the wellbeing of the Union at this point. Since the 2022 full-scale invasion and in light of uncertainty stemming from the upcoming 2024 US elections, however, the EU has made historic steps towards overcoming its strategic weaknesses in the security and defense domain.[25]

Prior to the 2022 Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, many grand strategy scholars and advisors in the US were making continuous pleas for a retreat from Europe and focusing US efforts on other world regions (Posen 2014; 2020). EU sentiments towards the US also cooled off during the Trump administration in the second half of the 2010s. The focus of US foreign policy shifted towards pivot to Asia during the Obama administration, and the Trump administration's outright hostility to the alliance with Europe brought concerns among EU policymakers regarding the stability and future of US-EU relations. Combined with the rising threat to the East in the face of Russia, EU leaders were forced to recenter their focus on strategic autonomy and diminished reliance on US security support (Tocci 2021). The case of security and defense could be further pursued as a useful alternative (or even comparative) case study for the effects of the relational dynamics in the transatlantic space in future research efforts.

Conclusion

[25] For a timeline of the developments in the domain of European security and defense at the EU level see https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/defence-security/defence-security-timeline/. For an overview of developments in the European defense industry since the 2022 full-scale invasion see Jason C. Moyer and Masa Ocvirk, 2024, "“Turbocharging” European Defense Production in Support of Ukraine," Wilson Center (March 6), https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/turbocharging-european-defense-production-support-ukraine; see also the European Defense Industrial Strategy (2024) at https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/document/download/643c4a00-0da9-4768-83cd-a5628f5c3063_en?filename=EDIS%20Joint%20Communication.pdf.

In this chapter, I make the argument that the relational dynamics in the transatlantic relationship between the US and the European project that have developed since the 1940s had an influence on the extent of leadership ambitions pursued by the EU in the global climate regime. Namely, the EU would not have pursued aggressive leadership ambitions in the global climate negotiations in 2001 with the goal to reach an agreement on the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol if the US had not announced its withdrawal from the Protocol and declared it dead. The qualitative counterfactual analysis presented above shows the events that transpired and actions taken by the EU following the US withdrawal to demonstrate a clear resolve on behalf of the EU to save the Kyoto Protocol, ratify it, and convince the other Parties to follow suit. In addition, the three shadow cases further demonstrate the plausibility of this by presenting instances where the US maintained its leadership in the climate change domain and also in the security and defense domain. While we do not have the opportunity to observe an alternative version of history and the events that could have transpired, the history of the relations in the transatlantic space and the counterfactual analysis presented in this chapter allow us to observe the effects of the relational dynamics and consider the impact of the US withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol and its environmental leadership for the EU's leadership ambitions in the domain of climate change.

In 2017, the United States once again expressed an intention to withdraw from another significant global agreement on climate change when a newly elected President Donald Trump decided to put the US on the list of countries of non-parties to the Paris Agreement, among Iran, Libya, and Yemen. The EU's response this time around was confident and stern, refusing Trump's attempt for renegotiation and mellowing down of the Paris Agreement, pointing to the EU's established global leadership position (Petri and Biedenkopf 2021). As demonstrated by the counterfactual analysis in this chapter, America's retreat from global environmental and climate

change leadership in the 1990s and culminating in the 2001 withdrawal from the Kyoto Accord indicated a shift in the Transatlantic relationship that enabled the EU to pursue and solidify its global leadership ambition.

CHAPTER 4. INTER-MEMBER STATE RELATIONS AS DRIVERS OF EU CLIMATE FOREIGN POLICY AMBITIONS: THE EAST-WEST AXIS

Introduction

As the previous chapters have revealed, the EU has been building a robust reputation for itself as a leader in global climate politics since the 1990s (Oberthür and Roche Kelly 2008; Oberthür and Dupont 2021). It has done that both by pursuing progressive policies at home and by pushing for ambitious commitments on the global stage, especially through the UN climate regime. By setting strict and ambitious targets, implementing market mechanisms for emissions reduction, investing in energy-efficient low-carbon technologies, and integrating the attention to climate change in a wide variety of policies, among others, the EU has earned its title of a progressive leader by example in this domain (see Delbeke and Vis 2015, 2-3). But does this mean that there is a unified home front that drives these progressive ambitions? A casual bystander might easily reach the conclusion that all member states of the EU share this ideal and actively support the EU's leadership ambitions in the climate domain given their scale, persistency, and efforts to influence the behavior of other actors on the global stage. However, a deeper look into the political landscape of the EU reveals a grand paradox: while the EU is considered an indisputable progressive global leader in the climate regime, a substantial portion of its member states lag in their ambitions, commitments, and achievements in this domain. In fact, there is a pronounced divide along the East-West axis in the EU, and climate change policy is a contested domain that sees pronounced opposition from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) while it remains a major priority for many Western European states (Lessenski 2019; Oroschakoff 2019). Given this paradox, questions regarding the power dynamics and influence of different regions and member states in the policy-making and ambition-setting process of the EU should be asked. That is, are there power

asymmetries within the EU that shed light on the EU's leadership ambitions given the identified paradox?

Studies have found that countries from CEE do not have the power to significantly slow down or disrupt the processes of policy-making and ambition setting in the Council of the EU (Toshkov 2017, 179). The existence and mechanisms of asymmetrical power dynamics among the EU member states have been theorized in other occasions as well. For instance, Maris and Sklias (2020) explore them in the EU's economic integration and the European Monetary Union. Using the eurozone crisis as an illustrative case, they demonstrate how powerful (Western) member states reproduce their dominance through the manner of policy proposition, thus shaping the system of economic governance and decision making. Similarly, Fabbrini (2015) observes inter-state asymmetries and domination in the European Council as well as specific economic measures and policies promoted by the more powerful member states following the eurozone crisis.

In this chapter, I argue that the relational dynamics of power within the East-West divide have an influence on the foreign policy ambitions the EU sets for itself and should thus be brought to the forefront of analysis. That is, the power asymmetries in the relations among Western and CEE states manifest in the EU policy-making process and exert influence on its ambitions. To test this argument, I examine the manifestation of difference in the positions of Western and CEE member states in the foreign policy-making process of the EU and compare how their preferences align with the ambitions present in the policy proposals under discussion.

Overall, I make the argument that the identified relational asymmetries between the Western and CEE member states affect the EU's foreign policy ambition formation in the domain of climate change. Specifically, they allow for the interests of the Western member states to be promoted and not those of the CEE states. To test this argument, I employ the case of the EU's

climate change leadership ambitions. That is, the EU is an ambitious climate leader because this position aligns with the interests of the West while the interests of CEE states do not hold the same power in this ambition formation process. Here, I focus on how and why the EU sets its ambitions, and not on the final outcome (i.e., successful or effective exertion of leadership) or the final version of a given policy itself as other endogenous and exogenous factors within the EU's policy-making process come into play in these cases. Rather, I seek to explore the effects that these asymmetrical relations along the East-West divide have on the ambitions the EU sets for itself. Thus, it follows that if the EU was led by the ambitions of the CEE states in the domain of climate change governance, the EU would not show the same (if any) climate leadership ambitions. What is more, this ambition arose before the accession of CEE states – indicating that it has been in line with Western states' preferences.[26] These relational asymmetries among East-West prevent the interests of the East to have the same determining power for the ambitions of the EU as the interests of the West. To test this argument, I look at how national interests are manifested in the EU's climate foreign policy-making process and how the interests of Eastern and Western member states compare with the EU's ambitions in terms of policy proposals. The public debates held in the Council of the European Union (Council) present the ideal opportunity to observe and study those as they represent national positions on issues related to climate policy in the EU in a critical part of the EU's climate foreign policy-making process. I employ Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) of member state speeches in public debates within the environment Council configuration (ENV) to trace the variation in levels of ambition and national priorities among member states and the

[26] Here I am once again referring to the rich literature on the environmental leadership transition that occurred between the United States and the EU in the 1990s and culminated with the American withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001. See, for example, Hovi et al. (2003); Vogler and Bretherton (2006); Walker and Biedenkopf (2018).

European Commission. My findings suggest that there is a clear alignment of Western interests with the ambitions of the EU, while the interests of Eastern member states are more rarely reflected in the proposals, especially in the initial drafts.

The article begins by introducing the East-West divide before discussing the historical roots of the identified relational asymmetries, followed by an overview of the EU's internal divisions literature to establish the justification for the emphasis of the East-West divide. This discussion is then followed by a review of the data and empirical strategy I employ to test my argument before moving onto a discussion of findings and concluding remarks.

What Of the East-West Divide in the European Union?

The existence of an East-West divide within the EU has been a widely theorized and fiercely debated phenomenon not only in the literature of European Studies and International Relations for decades, but in the political arena as well. Attempts have been made to close this discussion once and for all by claiming that the divide has been overcome through the economic and political reforms in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and that it is more rhetorical rather than tangible (see Lehne 2019) in an effort to prevent the negative normative consequences stemming from such divisions. A most recent special issue in a leading ES journal[27] finds, however, that the East-West divide is alive and well and persists despite the ongoing efforts and rhetoric to close the gap between East and West. The authors build on a rich body of literature that has approached the issue of divisions within the EU, giving careful attention to the East-West divide, and encompassing economic, cultural, and political dimensions. Nevertheless, a gap in this extensive literature can be identified regarding the reasons for the persistency of the East-West

[27] The special issue was published in the Journal of European Public Policy, 31(3), in early 2024.

divide as well as its scope (Volintiru et al. 2024). Furthermore, how the divide translates to and the effects it has for the policy-making and ambition-setting of the EU as a global actor also remain relatively understudied.

In an effort to fill in these literature gaps, authors in the special issue explore the interplay of economic, cultural, and political factors (Volintiru et al. 2024, 784), including democratic vulnerability (Ananda and Dawson 2024), regulatory and monetary integration as predictors for the FDI-dependent growth model among CEE (Bruszt and Vukov 2024), and the effects of eroding rule-of-law in CEE for the EU's external democracy promotion efforts (Burlyuk et al. 2024), among others. Furthermore, others have looked at issues of EU enlargement to the East and accession through a "standards of civilization" lens, offering an insightful perspective on the legacy dynamics present at the time of accession negotiations and the setting of accession criteria (Behr 2007).

In this article, I also seek to further address the identified gap in the literature on the internal divisions within the EU by proposing a relational theoretical perspective (Jackson and Nexon 1999; 2019) with an emphasis on relational asymmetries among CEE and Western member states. These relational power asymmetries have been established as a result of diverging legacies of imperialism among Western and CEE states, indicating different experiences with domination and subordination, and as a consequence of the standards of civilization divisions. They manifest in the persistent East-West divide, and affect various processes related to the EU's behavior on the global stage, including in its foreign policy ambition setting.

Relational Asymmetries: Roots and Reasoning

Many of the EU's Western member states have a long experience as imperial and colonial powers which in some cases extended to the early years of the European project in the 1950s and beyond. On the other hand, the common experience among CEE states has been contrasting as, for the most part, they have found themselves on the opposite end of the domination-subordination spectrum.[28] In the context of EU foreign policy and external action, the narrative of the EU's "virgin birth" has been criticized by scholars in the EU foreign policy decentering literature (e.g., Nicolaïdis and Fisher Onar 2015; Fisher Onar and Nicolaïdis 2013; 2021), drawing attention to the member states' colonial past and the responsibility they need to take for it, but an aspect of this discourse that remains largely occluded is the starkly different experiences with imperialism and domination among the EU member states (Bechev 2015). That is, the EU represents a coin with two sides of imperial legacies, and focusing on one of these sides only tells part of the story. Moreover, it occludes the effects that these diverging legacies might have on the identity and behavior of the EU. Overall, the impact of the starkly different experiences with imperialism within the EU (Behr 2007) and the relational asymmetries among member states it has produced remains vastly understudied.

Furthermore, historically, the relations between the European West and East have been built within the parameters of the standards of civilization which defined the accession of the "other", the outsiders, to the European international system (Diez and Whitman 2002; Behr 2007; Stivachtis 2008). The expectations and processes associated with the EU's "membership conditionality" exert numerous similarities to the historical standards of civilization associated with the expansion of the European international society in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Stivachtis 2010).

[28] Of course, this statement does not apply exclusively to the CEE states. For example, Greece has been under the domination of the Ottoman Empire, and Ireland, Malta, and Cyprus have been affected by British imperialism.

The age of exploration and the periods of European colonialism and imperialism that followed can be characterized by the external expansion of the European international society with its system of norms, values, principles, and understandings, resulting in its superimposition and subsequent acceptance of the primacy of its rules and institutions on a global scale (Stivachtis 2010, 10). The outsiders to the European international society, in turn, had to conform to these rules and institutions in order to gain access and thus meet the European "standards of civilization" (Gong 1984; Strivachtis 1998; Suzuki 2009). This division presupposed a cultural differentiation between the core European standard setters and a non-European "other" who was expected to follow the rules and abide by the European norms in order to participate in the European international institutions like international law and the conduct of diplomacy (Bull et al. 1990, 82; cited in Stivachtis 2010, 10). Those states who did not meet the standards of civilization were left outside the European society. Over time, these standards became increasingly harder to meet and often presented themselves as moving targets, making it necessary for European states to get directly involved in the domestic politics and organization and influence the people of these states (Gong 1984, 22; cited in Stivachtis 2010, 11).

Over time, these practices and "standards of civilization" came to be perceived as unjust, oppressive, and associated with colonial practices. Nevertheless, this distinction between a European (or Western) "core" and the non-such "other" persisted and went through transformations during the Cold War to reach its next evolutionary step: a division between states who followed the liberal democratic model and states who did not (Stivachtis 2008). The collapse of the Soviet Union and the impending transitions of the former communist states within the Eastern bloc served as a catalyst for this renewed division, making them the "other" who needed to be socialized in the Western European standard. Historically, however, the states in Central and

Eastern Europe who achieved EU membership in the 2000s and 2010s were never part of the standard-of-civilization-setting club due to their different historical experiences from their core Western counterparts. As such, they were not seeking reentrance into the European club, but were rather looking to access it for the first time.

These legacies of relational asymmetries have been established through history and have been visible through different aspects of the EU's ambition-setting, decision-making, and accession processes. They manifested in the othering of CEE states, perception of "less than equal" as evident through their accession process and requirements, and power within the EU ambition-formation and decision-making process. A logic emerges, then, that the interests of the powerful Western member states would take prevalence in the EU's overall foreign policy ambitions, because the interests of the CEE states have not held the same power within the ambition-setting processes of the EU.

Internal Divisions within the European Union: The East-West Divide

The reality of regional diversity within the European Union is not a novel discovery. There is extensive literature on the categorization of how the fault lines between the EU's regions should be drawn, and debates on this matter abound. The literature reveals internal dynamics among EU states that result in asymmetrical power relations within the EU. They, in turn, play an important role for the determination of EU foreign policy behavior. There are cleavages along different lines of contention that posit hierarchies and asymmetry along member states, allowing one side of the cleavage to exert influence over the other. Such significant cleavages have been identified in the literature to cut along the north-south divide (Landesmann 2015), sometimes referred to as the creditor-debtor states divide (Perez 2019), big states-small states (Magnette and Nicolaïdis 2003), East-West divide (Janning 2018; Volintiru et al. 2021), old versus new members (Bârgăoanu et al.

2019; Vlasek 2019; Volintiru et al. 2021), and core-periphery (Weissenbacher 2019), among several others. Next, I will look at some of these divides in more detail.

The North-South divide typically takes on economic dimensions in the literature. Landesmann (2015) offers a broad geographical definition of the European "South" when discussing the economic and fiscal effects of the 2008 economic crisis. In his view, the countries in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe, together with Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain (the "GIPS"), make up the European Union's South. A united definitional factor is their status as Europe's "emerging economies" (Landesmann 2015, 60). He argues that "Europe's South" encompasses a broad range of economies with low or middle income that have "experienced the build-up of unsustainable external imbalances, an accelerating rise in the debt positions (mostly of the private sectors) and strong distortions in their economic structures to the detriment of a sufficiently strong tradable sector" (p.1). Thus, in his view the North-South divide that runs through the EU is an economic and fiscal one, perpetuated by the policy framework of European integration and the "emphasis on stabilization rather than loosening the growth constraints" associated with the policy framework of the eurozone (p.1). To Landesmann, the main driver of this divide stems from the period prior to the 2008 global financial crisis and the "build-up of external imbalances" within the EU (p.4).

In a similar vein, Gary Marks (2012) writes about the EU as an empire in a comparative study vis-à-vis four other historical empires: Rome, the Frankish Empire, Napoleonic France, and the Third Reich. Using the sovereign debt crisis as an example, he differentiates between "weak" and "strong" economies within the EU as a political divide. The "weaker" economies, he argues, are seen by their more "stable" counterparts as free riders in a situation of collective action when

it comes to creating and maintaining a public good (a European bond) to deal with the debt problem (Marks 2012, 16-17).

Others argue that additional regions should be brought into this conversation to better reflect the reality in the EU. Fagerberg and Verspagen (2014) distinguish between three different regions that merit equal attention when discussing the roots of the EU's economic problems: North, South, and East. In their view the three regions differ in terms of adaptability and performance in the face of globalization and European economic integration (p.2). The notable exclusions from the Northern region in their model are Belgium, France, and Luxembourg which would typically be included in the "West" or "North" in other instances of the literature. These authors' reasoning for this exclusion is based on their performance on the specific economic indicators that they use to differentiate among the general diverse regions. For instance, they argue that according to their model, France exhibits similarities with the performances of some Southern European states (slow growth, high dependence on foreign sources) (p.19).

While the North-South divide is usually present in the literature discussing the economic and fiscal aspects of the EU, the other divides typically incorporate other dimensions as well. The East-West internal EU divide is a strong candidate for an influential relational dynamic that might have a direct impact on the EU's foreign policy behavior. Analysis of the EU Cohesion Monitor report of changes in internal cohesion among the member states over a ten-year period between 2007-2017 shows that the East-West political divide that runs within the Union continues to have determining and shaping effects for EU policy (Janning 2018, 1). This report found that a close look at the structural cohesion among the EU member states reveals a pronounced East-West split. In fact, with the exceptions of Austria and Cyprus, the report's mapped results demonstrate a clear geographical divide beginning to the east of Germany and Italy (Janning 2018, 4). It appears that

Central and Eastern European states have seen an increase in their structural cohesions score, while their Western counterparts have experienced a decline. Janning (2018) argues that the reason for these developments is driven by the two regions' different experiences with "EU funding, progressive integration into the single market, and membership of mechanisms of deep integration such as Schengen area and the eurozone" (p.4). While these were prevalent in the CEE region, their role had declined in the West as Western EU states had already experienced them in past periods. Nevertheless, these results signify that the levels of structural cohesion in CEE can be expected to steadily decline as these early membership tools start to be expended.

In a similar fashion, Volintiru et al. (2021) see a persistent East-West divide in the EU on developmental socio-economic grounds and poor socio-economic cohesion. They find that the main drivers for this internal division are persistent developmental disparities (p.94). They also refer to this divide as one between old and new members because they perceive the "East" in their analysis to encompass the CEE states that accessed to the Union since 2004. In their view, it is not uncommon for this divide to be discussed as a political or ideological one instead, but the socio-economic factors resulting from regional historical legacies and a "failure of catching-up" are the main drivers (p.103). Different historical legacies and the type of effects they have had on the regions are seen as persistent culprits for the divide along the east-west axis by others as well. Walsch (2018) argues that the two broad regions in Europe experienced two very different defining events in their histories: the effects of the post-1945 period for Western Europe, and the post-communist transitions in 1989 for CEE.

The East-West divide is also brought up by scholars who study the European refugee crisis since 2015. The crisis and the response from Brussels aggravated a sensitive topic for many CEE states: – their demographic problems. What Brussels and many in Western Europe consider a "lack

of solidarity" can, in fact, be perceived as a "clash of solidarities: national, ethnic and religious solidarity chafing against [the CEE states'] moral and legal obligations with respect to the refugees" (Krastev 2017, 292). Krastev (2017) also demonstrates how this crisis has done even more than lay the asymmetrical relations within the EU in plain sight – the crisis has shown how the liberal, cosmopolitan values that are the very foundation of the EU can not only be perceived as a threat to, but can be outright incompatible with, member states' national interests. Nevertheless, factors like collective psychology, national pride, and national self-esteem also present themselves as driving factors for some of these strong adverse reactions to Western Europe's and the EU's liberal values (Krastev and Holmes 2018).

For some scholars, the East-West divide within Europe is not a new phenomenon – on the contrary, it dates back centuries, and continues to present itself today within the internal affairs of the EU (Epstein and Jacoby 2014). Historically, narratives of the Eastern European "backwardness" have been associated with the othering of the region by the Western part of the continent and notions of the region's incapability of sustaining genuine democracies and economic prosperity (von Hagen 1995, 660). Böröcz (2001) further argues that the rhetoric of "eastern enlargement" of the EU since the 1990s implies orientalization of the region, a "process of simple augmentation" of the (Western) European project (p.6). In his view, this sense of othering of the CEE region is amplified by the fact that no previous EU enlargement to the east of the "original six" has been called by the same name. In fact, the works in the edited volume by Böröcz et al. (2001) suggest an analysis of the EU – of its essence, rhetoric, and behavior – through a lens centered upon the concepts of empire and coloniality along the East-West axis.

The discourse of "othering" of member states became clearly visible in the immediate aftermath of the Greek financial crisis in which Greece found itself an outsider in the Eurozone,

underpinned by asymmetries and power politics that dominate the EU space (Mikelis 2016; Mikelis and Stroikos 2017). Behr (2007) also points out that the practice of "othering" and the power asymmetries in internal EU relations can be traced back to the times of empires in the 19th century. Namely, he identifies stark similarities between the EU's accession politics and the old imperial practices and standards in the unilateral design of the accession conditions and procedures that draw a sharp distinction between the members of the club and the newcomers, as well as the continuous development discourse, demarcating core from peripheries (p.240). The Copenhagen Criteria, adopted for the accession of the CEE countries, are heavily criticized for their embodiment of such hierarchies and power asymmetries. The vagueness and ambiguity associated with them allowed the old EU member states to create the conditions and change them as the other party – the states seeking accession – sought to adjust and comply with these demands (Grabbe 2002; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2004; Schimmelfennig and Scholtz 2008; Strivachtis 2008).

In the recent decade a rhetoric of a "new" East-West divide has emerged, basing the debate around the populist challenge stemming from the CEE against the Western liberal values (Iacob et al. 2020). Iacob et al. (2020) argue, however, that the rhetoric behind this new internal divide has been fueled by the discourse of democratic backsliding and the Western perception of the CEE as backward and harboring illiberal tendencies without consideration of the global rise of populism and other global factors. Others also claim that the commonly perceived East-West divide reflects more of a larger divide between political elites and the general public in many EU states who show disappointment in the elites' lack of response to voters' concerns (Grzymala-Busse 2016). Thus, the rise of populism cannot be confined to the CEE states, and they also cannot be universally blamed for the erosion of democracy or liberal democratic values.

Zielonka and Mair (2002) point out that the "East" in the East-West divide should not be perceived as a homogenous entity when considered from a political culture perspective. For instance, states in Central Europe, like some of the Visegrad countries, cannot be properly compared to Bulgaria and Romania when it comes to their post-communist transitions (Zielonka and Main 2002, 10). Furthermore, Zielonka (2006) rejects the presence of an East-West divide within the EU in his study of the EU as a 'neo-medieval' empire rather than as a Westphalian superstate. Nevertheless, he examines the differences between new and old members in the EU (following the 2004 enlargement into CEE), which he calls "an impressive exercise in empire building" (p.44). While he acknowledges the undeniable presence of benefits for the old members in the face of taking the reigns of the power vacuum and access to new markets in the post-communist states in CEE, Zielonka (2006) steers the focus away from such an internal division. Instead, he argues that the eastern enlargement has increased the Union's heterogeneity and prevents any further movement towards a Westphalian superstate that would, indeed, feature strong center-regional dynamics and homogeneity (see also Klinke 2006/2007, 136).

In a similar skeptical vein, other analysts argue that the actual divide that defines the internal EU relations is not purely East-West per se, but rather a core-periphery split that loosely coincides with the regional definitions of Western Europe and CEE (Lehne 2019). Lehne bases this argument on the geographical challenge of clearly grouping all the CEE countries into the same category for every issue and characteristic. To Lehne (2019), there are regional varieties and peculiarities that prevent a clear analytical category along and East-West split.

Other proponents of a core-periphery split within the EU make strong arguments for the existence and consequences of such a divide. Rudy Weissenbacher (2019) relies on a dependency approach to build a case for persistent asymmetrical relations between an entrenched core of

Western/Northern EU states and a perpetual periphery and semi-periphery in the European Southern, Central, and Eastern regions. He traces this power dynamic as far back as the 1960s, and shows no upward mobility for periphery/semi-periphery countries into the club of the EU's core. Additionally, the eastern enlargement of the Union further entrenched the core-periphery division by making the periphery/semi-periphery a very diverse region, making it difficult for these states to overcome the power dynamics.

Volintiru et al. (2021) also look at another line of contention within the EU by comparing the old member states (in this specific analysis, the EU 15[29]), and the newer members, and argue that the division is also one driven by persistent economic disparities. Their argument is augmented by the fact that the GIPS have encountered economic challenges that have differentiated them from the other "old" states in this category. Others also contend that the divide that defines the EU is one fueled by differences in the levels of development between the "Old" and the "New" member states, which according to Bârgăoanu et al. (2019) coincide with the categories of the Western member states (old) and the CEE members (new). Thus, the literature points to a convergence between some of these categories on temporal and regional grounds.

Some other structural factors along the East-West divide become visible in the literature as well. For instance, Veronica Anghel (2020) argues that Eastern member states enjoy endemically weaker representation in the EU decision-making process and exercise little power in the affairs of the Union. CEE representatives very rarely take senior leadership positions in EU institutions, due mainly to lack of expertise in navigating the elite circles and to biased perceptions among the EU elites (Anghel 2020, 191). A chronic under-representation of CEE citizens in EU leadership

[29] The EU 15 are: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom.

roles inevitably breeds discontent and perceptions of uneven power dynamics with the Union (Drounau 2019). Central and Eastern states are also not included in the Brussels "knowledge culture" and have not achieved significant successes in finding ways to influence European policy-making (Anghel 2020, 192). Experts from CEE states are rarely sought for consultation and input by Western European think tanks or policy-making professionals, leaving little room for influence stemming from the Eastern region (Anghel 2020, 192; Busse et al. 2020). Thus, when decisions in Brussels are made, the CEE perspective is not well represented. This persistent decision-making power inequality alludes to a necessary discussion of the relational power dynamics within the decisions made and directions taken by the EU in its internal and external affairs, including foreign policy ambitions.

An important point that merits attention regards the self-identification and group membership of the member states to the East. The literature shows that the former post-communist countries have not sought a common group identity as CEE states, or smaller inter-state associations (Sandru 2012; Anghel 2020; Volintiru et al. 2021, 96). With the exceptions of the Baltic states and the Visegrad 4, the other states in the region have for the most part sought to compare themselves against the Western states rather than as a distinct region with common objectives. Nevertheless, there have been instances where CEE states take adamant collective positions against Western agenda in the EU, and the East-West divide becomes clearly visible. Such issues include instances of rule-of-law sanctions and climate and immigration policies (Anghel 2020, 193). The lack of regional cohesion and serious coalition building strategies further exacerbates the representation vulnerability of the CEE states, making them an easier obstacle to overcome by Western EU states in the pursuit of their interests and vision for the EU.

Around the time of the first wave of CEE accession in 2004, there was a growing literature interpreting the dynamics between the East and West to be based on historical asymmetrical power dynamics. The attitude of the Western European states, or the old member states of the EU, towards the accessing states from the CEE were classified as paternalistic embodying a view of economic and intellectual superiority (Domański 2004), or even as a "perverted colonial attitude" based on notions of cultural relativity (van Zon 2003, 182; cited in Domański 2004, 378). Some expressed a view that the core values of the EU coincided entirely with the Western European ones, so the accessing states were to be expected to adopt them if their desire was to become truly European (Habermas and Derrida 2003), thus expressing a sentiment of unidirectional flow of institutions, values, and norms.

Overall, the review of relevant literature shows that the East-West divide in its broad form presents itself as the most consequential one for the EU and formation of many EU policies. Bârgăoanu et al. (2019) make a compelling argument for this classification by listing several reasons in support of this claim (p.106). First, they argue that the East-West divide amplifies many of the other divides discussed in the literature and in this paper by building on them. Additionally, the persistent political categories of "liberal" versus "illiberal" continue to define the undertone of the divide in rhetoric and discourse in the European political environment, giving new life to old notions of the "civilized" Europe versus the "other" Europe, as also discussed by Böröcz et al. (2001) and the authors in their edited volume. The economic and fiscal differences between the West and East are also not easy to overcome, perpetuating this developmental divide for an undetermined period of time into the future. Lastly, this divide, unlike the others, carries on clear geopolitical implications, especially with the rising Russian threat to the east, as geopolitical interests and threats have differed historically.

Thus, the review of literature demonstrates the many dividing lines that run through the European Union, each one of them reflecting asymmetrical power relations and affecting the member states differently depending on the side they fall into. While each one of them is a valid way to differentiate among the member states, in this article I incorporate a sole focus on the East-West divide that also largely coincides with the Old-New member states line of contention. Using the categorization provided by Bârgăoanu et al. (2019), I divide the member states into the two groups presented in Table 1 below. This division reflects a relative synergy between the Old vs. New and the East vs. West divides while simultaneously crystalizing the distinction based on geographical parameters:

Table 1

The Internal East-West Divide in the European Union			
East		**West**	
Bulgaria	Poland	Austria	Luxembourg
Croatia	Slovakia	Belgium	Portugal
Cyprus	Slovenia	Denmark	Spain
Czech Republic	Romania	France	Sweden
Estonia		Finland	The Netherlands
Hungary		Germany	United Kingdom
Latvia		Greece	
Lithuania		Ireland	
Malta		Italy	

The existing literature reveals that this is the internal EU divide that plays the most deciding role in the policy-making for the European Union and its behavior on the international stage, especially in the domain of environmental politics and climate change (also visible in data from the Council of the EU on topics of contestation and salience among member states from the DEU III dataset – see Arregui and Perarnaud 2022). This divide is also represented in the top leadership positions in the EU where the disproportionate representation of Western and Southern states compared to CEE states is easily detectable (Drounau 2019; Anghel 2020). Moreover, these two

categories represent a stark division within the EU on both a temporal and historical-geographic dimension. The East category includes the majority of states that were part of the massive Eastern enlargement of the EU in the 2000s. However, this expansion brought significant changes to the EU not only in quantitative terms due to the territorial augmentation and the sheer number of people, but also in qualitative terms as these states brought with them a different kind of legacy of imperial rule and experience (Bechev 2015). As such, the colonial legacies and experiences of Cyprus and Malta and their accession timeline prompt me to include them under the "East" category.

The East-West Divide in EU Climate Change Ambitions

The East-West divide is easily distinguishable in the realm of climate change governance. In fact, it has grasped the attention of scholars and analysists as a frequent reference for the overall existence of an East-West divide (e.g., Lessenski 2019; Oroschakoff 2019). This divide became clearly visible following the Eastern enlargements in the 2000s as CEE states generally perceived the EU's climate leadership ambitions as a threat to their economic and other national interests in general (Wurzel et al. 2019). What is more, there has been a general sentiment among the CEE states that the EU's climate ambitions would not offer significant benefits in terms of business growth or jobs (Braun 2014). The divergence in support for climate leadership within the EU is based primarily on economic conditions and interests when it comes to the difference in the energy industrial sectors between the Western EU members, who are the main proponents of the progressive climate change policies and leadership goals of the EU, and the CEE states, most of whose national interests and capacities are severely affected by the supranational level of commitment to climate action (Volintiru et al. 2019). For instance, unlike the majority of the Western member states, most of the CEE countries have experienced a relatively slow growth in

renewable energy while still heavily relying on coal (Ámon 2020). Other reasons for the divide often cited in the literature include lower GDP levels in CEE states, combined with their constraining energy mixes and high reliance on coal, as well as general skepticism towards the ideas of ecological modernization and low carbon economy (Wurzel et al. 2019, 261; also Braun 2014; Skjærseth 2018).

As such, while the EU presents a unified front at climate negotiations and agreements and is widely considered to be a leader in this domain, a deeper look inside the EU paints a different picture. The ambitious goals set forth by Brussels are viewed by some member states as solely representing the interests and priorities of Western European member states (Börzel 2002). With lower levels of economic development and generally lacking the institutional infrastructure to adopt many environmental policies, many EU states in the East find themselves at a disadvantage compared to their Western counterparts. Specifically, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Finland, and Sweden are considered the "green sextet" and unofficial leaders among the member states when it comes to climate change policies (Wurzel and Connelly 2011).

Furthermore, EU candidate states are obligated to comply with pre-accession conditionality that manifest as ambitious goals and a vision of serious institutional, structural, political, and cultural transformations. The overall "Europeanization" process of the CEE region was a largely top-down process. The literature talks of "Europeanization," which exerts an influence on domestic opportunity structures, on strategies for addressing various issues, as well as on state and non-state actors' beliefs, values, expectations, and policy preferences for addressing environmental and other issues (Andonova and VanDeveer 2012). Post accession, many of the new CEE member states made it clear that they do not agree with the more ambitious climate policy plans put forth by the European Commission. For instance, Poland and Estonia, supported by a

few other CEE states, challenged the Commission's rejection of their suggested carbon quotas for the 2008-2012 period through their national allocation plan (NAP). In 2019, three CEE states: Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland blocked the EU's ambition for climate neutrality by 2050 (Reuters 2019).

Next, I turn towards discussing the empirical strategy for this chapter and the findings from my analysis.

Empirical Strategy and Research Design

My argument in this article is that the nature and character of the relational dynamics within the EU along the East-West axis exert important influence on the leadership ambitions that the EU sets for itself in the global climate regime. Specifically, I argue that the historical asymmetrical relations between West and East continue to exist today, albeit to a different extent, and they define the overall climate ambitions of the bloc. These relations and their institutionalization in the EU processes and institutions act in such a way that they enable the pursuit of ambitions that are driven by the West and are imposed on the East. That is, the Eastern member states have a limited influence in the ambition setting process because it is constrained by these historical asymmetrical relations with the West that continue to underlie their EU experience. To test this argument, I examine the elements of the ambition-setting process within the EU as it pertains to climate change. I do so by evaluating whether there are in fact differences in the positions and ambitions to climate change between East and West, and how they are represented in the overall climate change ambition of the EU. I evaluate the presence or absence of such differences in the Council debates and whether such tensions exist along the East-West axis, and how they are represented in the official position of the EU. That is, can a case be made that the position of the West takes prevalence over the position of the East? Do the East-West relational asymmetry and identified

relational dynamics have a constitutive effect on the ambition formation process when it comes to the EU's climate foreign policy? To what extent do these relations of asymmetrical power dynamics play a role within the EU institutions directly involved in this process? I suspect that the interests of the Western member states will match more closely to the proposals expressed by the Commission,[30] unlike the interests of the Eastern member states which will be positioned further away. To approach these questions, the relational dynamics among the member states must be captured in the ambition formation and policy process. These processes are deeply intertwined in a complex web of inter-institutional dynamics dictated by treaties and established procedures.

There are two institutions that represent the national governments' positions of the member states in the EU's policy-making and foreign policy-making process: the European Council and the Council of the EU. While the European Council, made up of the heads of government of each member state, sets the course and general direction for the EU, it is the Council of the EU (Council) that conducts daily legislative work, including the coordination of policies among member states, developing the Union's foreign and security policy, and concluding international agreements for the EU, among others. Furthermore, there are severe access limitations related to European Council data as the debates and deliberations happening in the European Council are not available to the public, making it more difficult to discern and study power relational dynamics among the member states and their national interests. This is not the case for the Council where various debates and deliberations are publicly available, and thus national interests and preferences of the

[30] For the purposes of my dissertation, I look at the proposals and legislation coming from the Commission and those discussed in the ENV Council debates to represent the overall ambition of the EU. As such, I do not open the "black box" of the ambition formation process that takes place in the Commission, but others do so, including the excellent studies by Skovgaard (2013); Bürgin (2015); and Szulecki et al. (2016), to name but a few.

attending member states can be observed directly.[31] Thus, I use such data from the Council as the primary source for this article's empirical strategy.

Before diving into the specifics of the analysis, it is important to provide a brief overview of the structure and processes of the EU's foreign policy, especially in the context of climate change, in order to understand my choice of empirical strategy. Keukeleire and Delreux (2022) offer a meticulous account of the EU's foreign policy structure and architecture, to which I will refer extensively in the following paragraph. The climate foreign policy of the EU falls under the category of "external dimensions of internal policies" of the EU's multifaceted foreign policy architecture (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022). According to Keukeleire and Delrex (2022), this category is one of four facets, with the other three being the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), and external action. Each one of these categories follows a distinct set of rules and procedures, and each of the involved actors has different elements in their responsibilities. The category of external dimensions of internal policies includes the externalization of the EU's "internal policies and regulatory standards to actors outside Europe" (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022, 247). Prominent examples of such internal policies are environment and climate change, energy, migration and asylum, and health. Specifically for environmental policies, the process requires the Commission to make a proposal over which the Council debates, sometimes in coordination with the European Parliament. The adoption of the proposal is followed by implementation by the Commission who also acts as a controller and manager of budgets (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022, 77). The Commission plays an important role in international environmental negotiations and represents the EU's interest, but it requires the

[31] Video data of Council of the EU public deliberations are available at: https://video.consilium.europa.eu/home/en

support and authorization of the Council through a negotiation mandate to do so. Despite the Commission's "exclusive right of initiative" (p.95) in proposing environmental policies, the Council has the ability to "nudge" the Commission to do so. Furthermore, because adopted environmental provisions are legally binding for the member states, the Commission should carefully consider the interests of all member states in order for its proposals to pass in the Council (p. 95).

Within this process, the Council is defined as the "main foreign policy decision-making body in the EU in both political and legal terms" due to its "composition, competences and frequent meetings" (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022, 82). The Council is composed of ten Council configurations, each with a specific distinct issue area focus. There are two primary configurations related to climate foreign policy: the Foreign Affairs Council configuration (FAC) and the Environmental Council configuration (ENV), which represent the "central forums of foreign climate policy decision-making among EU Member States" (Petri and Biedenkopf 2021, 386). For the purposes of my analysis, I look at data from the ENV configuration only and not from FAC. There are two particular reasons for this decision. First, an important detail about the responsibilities of the two configurations is that the FAC does not get involved in decisions related to the EU's participation in international environmental negotiations as the EU "conducts those international relations on the basis of Council conclusions adopted in the relevant Council configuration," which in this case is ENV (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022, 83). Second, due to its structure and institutional arrangement, the FAC debates very rarely include "genuine exchange of views and arguments" by the member states (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022, 85). They usually occur during informal meetings of ministers, although they are still insufficient for discussing many of the details in the national positions. This is an important limitation of the FAC public

debates data as they do not provide a pure look into the diverging national views and positions on many issues of importance and are thus excluded from my analysis.

While central for the EU's law-making process, data from the European Commission and the European Parliament is not considered here for two important reasons. First, "deliberation is not at the heart" of the Commission as its main tasks are initiating legislation and implementing the EU's climate ambitions in this particular case (Petri and Biedenkopf 2021, 383). On the other hand, the representatives in the Parliament are expected to vote and generally share the sentiments of their political group within the institution rather than their home countries' national interests. In addition, the representatives in the European Parliament are considered to represent the interests of EU citizens rather than those of their countries. Unlike European Parliament debates, Council deliberations have a more technical nature with the purpose to clearly express national positions on the big picture at hand as well as on specific details and offer advice to other national representatives on implementation and other possible domestic issues related to the given proposal (Wratil and Hobolt 2019, 514).

For my empirical analysis, I take inspiration from the DICEU approach – Debates in the Council of the European Union - developed by Wratil and Hobolt (2019), for the data collection and usage. They pioneer the use of video debates in the Council configurations as a source for data on the national governments' positions in the legislative process in the EU and thus reveal potential and real points of conflict and contention. They identify Council video data as a relatively unexplored data source for studying various issues and dynamics in the legislative process in the Council (p.514; subsequently used by Hobolt and Wratil 2020) Using raw video data of Council public debates allows for overcoming some of the main limitations of the existing research that has relied on other Council data, such as voting records (e.g., Hagemann 2007; Mattila 2004; 2009,

as cited in Wratil and Hobolt 2019) and expert interviews (e.g., Kleine 2013; Wasserfallen et al. 2019, as cited in Wratil and Hobolt 2019). For instance, expert interviews can suffer from various biases and are difficult to replicate while voting data does not provide an insight on the preceding deliberations and starting national positions (Wratil and Hobolt 2019, 512). Other studies involve QCA of documents of Council formations meetings (e.g., Petri and Biedenkopf 2021) and while they produce important insights, they do not capture the deliberation dynamics and conflict points among member states or their national positions. The DEU data approach – Decision-making of the EU, developed by Thomson et al. (2012) and Arregui and Perarnaud (2022) – develops a more holistic approach to capturing national positions and identifying points of contention, but it still does not give access to deliberation dynamics or exact national positions.

A portion of Council deliberations were made open to the public in 2006, and following the Lisbon Treaty, the Council is required to hold public deliberations, and recordings of these public sessions since 2011 are available on the Council website (Wratil and Hobolt 2019, 514). Unlike Wratil and Hobolt (2019), who adopt a quantitative approach using an item-response theory model and quantitative text analysis (QTA) to demonstrate the utility of the Council video data for social science research, I employ a qualitative analytical strategy for the purposes of my study of asymmetrical power relations. The video data is first transformed into text and transcribed via an automatic speech recognition system (OpenAI Whisper software), followed by robust manual checks for accuracy, and then coded for the purposes of QCA (Schreier 2012) through the NVivo 14 software.

Study Timeframe and Coding Strategy

The timeframe of this study encompasses two years of ENV Council configuration data (2014 and 2015) to capture the immediate attitudes in the period preceding the Paris Agreement.

This period is chosen for two reasons. First, the Copenhagen Conference of the Parties (COP) in 2009 is considered to be a true test and relative failure to EU leadership on climate change (see Chapter 3). However, the EU managed to press even harder after that and modified its negotiation strategies to achieve success in Paris in 2015. Second, this period is within the era post-EU Eastern Enlargement with Croatia joining the Union in 2013. Thus, it offers a fruitful opportunity to examine the nature of the East-West relations and their effect, if any, on the EU's climate change ambitions.

There are 19 total debates in this two-year period, amounting to a total of 377 country speeches from member state ministers representing national positions and 30 speeches made by the attending commissioners, making the total coded speeches 407 (see Appendix 2 for full list of debates included in the analysis). Of these, 174 country speeches were made by Eastern member states, and 203 country speeches were made by Western member states. The unit of coding is each speech in its totality. There is a variety of topics discussed, including topics related directly to climate change policy, as well as waste, biodiversity, plastic bags, and GMOs. I am including all of the topics in the study as they are nevertheless related to the EU's global environmental leadership ambition and style (leading by example) (Schunz 2019).

The main questions guiding me in determining my coding strategy included: 1) Do we observe high or low ambition in the country speeches? 2) Are there observable power dynamics in the speeches made by the member states and the Commission? 3) Is there a focus on national interests in the country speeches? 4) Are there issue linkages? 5) Is there a focus on the EU's global actorness in terms of climate leadership? 6) Is there a focus on the detrimental effects of climate change legislation on national interests? My coding strategy seeks to differentiate between

prioritization of "Western" interests (i.e., emissions reduction, climate consciousness, explicit care about the future, etc.) vs. "Eastern" interests (i.e., development, economic focus, poverty, etc.).

Thus, my coding strategy is based on three starting points. First, I derive the majority of the codes from my theoretical framework. I am interested in examining any potential differences in the national positions of the Eastern and Western member states as defined in my categorization in Table 1 above. Thus, I code each speech as either East or West (except the speeches made by the commissioners – see below). Furthermore, I seek to examine the level of ambition of the member states manifested in the ministers' speeches on the ENV Council floor and how it compares to the overall EU ambition (which I assume to be high for the purposes of the study as I assume it strives for leadership). Here, I also draw on Petri and Biedenkopf (2021) and their QCA coding strategy for debates data from the European Parliament. In this article, they seek to explore the levels of ambition for the EU of members of the European Parliament (MEPs) with regards to the Paris Agreement and multilateral climate policy.[32] They code MEP speeches as either high or low ambition and give coding examples as guidance. Next, I seek to discover what themes the member states pay attention to in their speeches. I theorize some topics to be associated with higher ambitions, such as talking about the future, responsibility to our children, etc., as well as mentions of the EU's leadership role in international negotiations, and positive perspectives on economic benefits from high ambitions. On the other hand, I seek to also identify themes that could be associated with low ambitions, such as focusing on detrimental economic effects from high ambitions, talks of the importance of national sovereignty and justice and fairness for all member states, perceived disregard for the national interests of some member states, etc. Here, I theorize

[32] I am referring to Annex 4 of Petri and Biedenkopf's (2021) article. This is publicly available supplementary material published alongside their article.

that member states would talk about issues like energy poverty, less developed economy, etc. I am also interested in understanding how member states talk about each other and whether they use any words and references that might reveal dynamics of power, normative connotations, collaborations and common positions, perceptions of inadequacy, etc. In this coding category, I am also considering the speeches by the Commission representative in each debate. I assume that the commissioner speeches represent the EU's level of ambition, which I identify as high and EU standard for the purposes of my study and are thus not coded in any of the other categories. Lastly, I derive some codes from the ENV Council data itself. These codes were added during the pilot study phase when the data revealed important codes that I had not derived deductively.

Discussion of Findings

The QCA on the public debates data from the ENV configuration reveals a clear demarcation along the East-West axis with regards to the ambitions and priorities expressed in the country speeches (see Appendix 1). Most often than not, the interests of Western member states match well with the ambitions expressed in the proposal under discussion, while it is more frequent that Eastern member states express lower levels of ambition than what is presented by the Commission and the given proposal. The typical structure of the analyzed debates includes an introduction by the Chair of the ENV configuration (from the member state that holds the rotating Council presidency), followed by an introduction of the proposal and its goals by the Commissioner. A public debate follows in which member state representatives have the opportunity to take the floor and express their position on the proposal. In some instances, the ministers deliver their speeches based on a few specific questions posed by the Chair and given to them beforehand. The debate ends with concluding remarks from the Commissioner. Several of the analyzed debates include speeches from all member states (except the state holding the rotating

presidency), while others do not include speeches from every member states. One of the analyzed debates, for instance, deals with issues related to shipping and maritime transport, so only member states with direct vested interest in maritime transport delivered speeches. Furthermore, the topics of each of the debates vary, including discussions of the 2030 Framework for Climate and Energy, the Clean Air Program, greening the European semester, national emissions reduction, as well as GMOs, plastic bag ban, and waste legislation, to name a few. As such, not every speech reveals a level of ambition or takes position on the EU's climate leadership.

I coded the speeches along several categories to capture the levels of ambitions expressed in them as well as various issues that the member states prioritize in their speeches and whether and how they talk about other member states. It is important to mention that the nature of these speeches in the ENV configuration is quite technical, so not all speeches explicitly express levels of ambition or priorities that can be coded in any of the identified categories. For instance, in some cases the member state ministers acknowledge the proposal without expressing his or her government's support or opposition to the level of ambition. In other cases, the speeches can be so technical that they do not have relevance to any of the coding categories.

In terms of levels of ambition, I identified three coding categories: (1) EU Standard (High); (2) Low; and (3) Higher than EU. The first category represents the level of ambition expressed in the given proposal under discussion. This level of ambition is clearly identified by the Commissioner's speech in the beginning and at the end of the given debate, and I consider it to equate to the level of ambition of the EU for the purposes of my theoretical approach. On the other hand, speeches coded under the "Low" ambition category explicitly express their opposition to the EU Standard level of ambition because they perceive it as being too high or unrealistic, while speeches coded as "Higher than EU" urge for the further increase of the EU Standard ambition as

they perceive it as not being ambitious enough to achieve the EU's ultimate objectives related to the specific topic.

The analysis demarcates some clear distinctions in levels of ambition among member states from the East and the West. Of the total 108 speeches coded in the "EU Standard (High)" category, only 31% are made by Eastern member states compared to Western member states who express an alignment with the EU's level of ambition on various topics and issues a lot more frequently. Most "EU Standard (High)" speeches are made by France (8) and Portugal (7), followed by Denmark, The Netherlands, Finland, and Sweden (6). All of the Western member states make at least 3 speeches within the 2-year coded period that fall within this category. Among the Eastern member states, Malta makes the most speeches that are coded "EU Standard (High)" (6), followed by Slovenia and Croatia (4). The only member state that does not make a single speech within this period that can be coded in this category is Poland. In a rare occasion, all but 2 Eastern member states (Poland and Cyprus) make an "EU Standard (High)" speech in support of a compromised proposal on the topic of reduction of national emissions (15 December 2015, Deb. Ab), generally agreeing with the proposed level of ambition but warning that they would not be in support of any increases in the level of ambition. Simultaneously, 4 Western member states express their dissatisfaction with the lower, compromised levels of ambition of this proposal.

At the same time, the majority of speeches that can be coded as expressing Low ambition are made by Eastern member states. Of the total speeches coded here (42), 34 were made by Eastern member states and only 8 came from the West. In the debate of national emissions reduction proposal for certain pollutants, Italy and Spain expressed a concern that the targets proposed for some of the pollutants might not reflect the real numbers and thus making them too ambitious and unrealistic (14 June 2015, Debate A). Ireland also makes a speech that was coded

in this category as they emphasize the importance of finding the right balance between climate ambitions and economic recovery following the financial and banking crisis in the late 2000s/ early 2010s (11 June 2014, Debate Ab). In contrast, in an earlier debate the same year, the Netherlands expressed a pro-ambition economic position stating that "climate policy makes a contribution towards improving the competitiveness of European industry and will lead to the EU leaving the crisis more quickly" (2 March 2014, Debate A). On the other hand, the Eastern member states generally express concerns about the unfeasibility and heavy burden of the proposed ambitions on their national economic interests. In debating the 2030 Framework and the proposed emissions reduction target, Slovakia states that "the target of 40 percent in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions is too ambitious and it is unreasonably expensive for poorer member states" (2 March 2014, Debate A). Hungary made the most "Low" ambition speeches (6), followed by Poland and Bulgaria (5), and Romania (4). All of the Eastern member states made low ambition speeches in the two-year period with the exception of Latvia which on the other hand expressed EU standard level of ambition in two speeches.[33] Of the Western member states, speeches by Ireland are coded three times in this category, followed by Spain with two. Germany, Austria, and Italy all have one coded speech in this category.

The opposite trend is visible in speeches expressing ambition Higher than the EU's as only 1 out of 35 speeches came from an Eastern member state. In this particularly rare occasion, the minister from Slovenia expressed a desire for higher ambition with regards to proposed legislation on medium combustion plants (16 December 2014, Debate Cb), stating that Slovenia "can support the general approach today even though we would have liked to see stricter emission limit values than those proposed." During this same debate, four Western states also expressed a desire for

[33] This is a finding that could be explored further in future research.

higher ambition levels, and the Commissioner acknowledged and lamented that this amended version of the proposal had to lower its initial ambition level in order to gain the necessary support from member states who previously expressed lower levels of ambition on the topic. Simultaneously, three Eastern member states still express “Low” levels of ambition during this debate by arguing that the amended ambitions are still too high. Overall, the leaders among the member states who express ambitions “Higher than EU” are Sweden (6) and Germany (5), followed by the UK and The Netherlands (4).

These findings on the proportions of the expressed levels of ambition of the member states also translate to the topics and priorities they discuss in their speeches. For instance, the level of ambition is visible in how the member states talk about economic issues and topics. All but one of the speeches that include an economic focus through an anti-ambition lens (a total of 15 coded speeches) came from Eastern member states. The prevalent theme here is the negative economic consequences for member states that will result from the high ambitions of the given proposal. The one exception here came from Ireland in the 2030 Framework debate (11 June 2014, Debate Ab) where the Irish minister makes a cautious economy-focused speech and emphasizes the need to find balance between economic considerations and responses to climate change. In contrast, in the same debate, four Western states discussed economic topics through a pro-ambition lens by mentioning the positive economic effects of higher ambitions. For instance, Sweden states that “economic growth and reduced emissions do not contradict each other. Rather, … green growth provides competitiveness, better environments, better quality of life for our citizens and that is what we have to keep in mind while negotiating this very important dossier.” This particular debate features a very clear distinction along the Eastern and Western states’ approach to the topic with Western representatives focusing on the support of the EU’s proposed level of ambition and

focusing on the economic and environmental benefits of more ambitious targets, while Eastern states focused extensively on issues related to state sovereignty and fairness and consideration for each member states' circumstances. The sole outlier here was Ireland as they were the only Western member state to align closer with the rhetoric coming from the East. On the other hand, a total of 26 speeches were coded in the economic focus through a pro-ambition lens category, and the majority of them came from Western member states (18). Here, some member states express their support for a given proposal and its ambition levels as they draw a connection between increased climate ambitions and the beneficial impacts for the economy. For instance, Portugal mentions the existence of scientific evidence that ambitious policy for climate and energy has a positive impact on competitiveness and employment figures (2 March 2014, Debate A). On several instances, Eastern states make speeches that are coded in this category as well.

Two additional thematic coding categories capture high ambitions: (1) EU Leadership and (2) Future Oriented. The first one includes speeches that refer to the EU's position and leadership in global climate negotiations and international agreements, while the second one seeks to capture references to topics such as responsibility to future generations and assuring a world with less impacts from climate change. A smaller number of Eastern member states talk about the EU's global climate leadership, so the majority of the speeches coded here come from Western member states (11 speeches from Eastern member states compared to 33 from Western member states). In a few cases Eastern member states make fleeting references to international agreements but they do so mostly to express their skepticism towards further climate ambitions as they bring up other major polluters and their reluctance to commit to reducing their emissions and do their part.[34]

[34] In one debate (2 March 2014, Debate A), Italy also brought up the United States, China, and Russia and the importance that they also "meet their responsibilities with obligations that are in line with what we have agreed."

Romania raises caution about the "involvement of international partners … at the global effort on emission reduction [as] we cannot accept the risk of putting our industry at a … disadvantage" (2 March 2014, Debate A). Poland, on the other hand, talks about "the ineffectiveness of models such as Kyoto in tackling climate change worldwide" (2 March 2014, Debate A). A similar situation can be observed in the "Future Oriented" category where only 4 speeches from Eastern member states were coded compared to 28 from Western member states. On the other hand, Western member states frequently talk about the EU's responsibility to future generations in tackling climate change. For instance, Austria talks about the cost of not acting that must be avoided because "this world is only unknown to us from our children. We owe it to them, … to protect … and to deal responsibly with the environment" (2 March 2014, Debate A).

Similarly, two additional categories capture lower levels of ambition among member states: (1) Justice and Fairness for Member States and (2) National Interest Suffers. The first category includes speeches that feature a focus on issues of member state sovereignty and express a desire to take national situations, interests, and circumstances into consideration. The second one includes speeches that directly state that a given proposal and/or level of ambition is detrimental to the state's national interests. As expected, the vast majority of speeches coded here were made by Eastern member states. For instance, in discussing the 2030 Framework, Hungary expresses the opinion that "it's necessary to have the fewest possible number of commitments and it is one aim we have to focus on a realistic reduction of greenhouse gases; one that recognizes member states' conditions, abilities to generate energy, and one that also relies on the potentials of the internal market" (11 June 2014, Debate Ab). There are 2 Western speeches coded in the National Interest Suffers category, one of which is the already discussed remark by Ireland (11 June 2014, Debate Ab). The other one is made by Sweden during a debate discussing national emissions reduction

and expresses a concern about its national interest driven by the lower level of ambition of this specific proposal (15 December 2015, Debate Ab). As such, this speech by Sweden represents a paradox in this category as while all the other speeches coded here are preoccupied with the effects of the proposed higher levels of ambition, Sweden worries that a lower common ambition on the EU level jeopardizes the member states who have implemented a "more ambitious agenda" on the national level and require the Commission to perform an analysis to estimate "how this affects competition between member states for each sector" (15 December 2015, Debate Ab).

Lastly, my coding strategy allowed me to track whether and how member states (and here also the Commissioners) refer to other member states in their speeches. I included two subcategories: (1) Normative References and (2) Working Together. The first subcategory captures speeches where a member state or the Commissioner makes a loaded reference, for instance to strongly urge all or some member states or the Commission to do or consider something. The East-West split is relatively evenly distributed, with 3 mentions from the East and 2 from the West. Similarly, both Eastern and Western member states discuss situations of joint work, but they stay within their own East-West camps. Some Eastern member states frequently talk about working within the Visegrad 4 group and in some instances express joint positions in these debates. For Western member states, the coded mentions also predominantly include collaboration with other fellow Western member states.

What these findings suggest is that there is a clear alignment of Western interests with the ambitions of the EU, while the interests of Eastern member states are more rarely matched in the proposals, especially in the initial drafts. Thus, an argument can be made that existing relational asymmetries along the East-West axis are also present in and exert an effect on the EU's ambition-setting and climate foreign policy-making processes.

Conclusion

The findings of this chapter represent the debates and member state positions on environmental legislation proposals in the two-year period immediately before the Paris Agreement during COP 21 in 2015, with the exception of the 3 debates that took place on 15 December 2015 which occurred 3 days after the conclusion of COP 21. This particular time period was selected for several key reasons. First, it represents the lead up to one of the most successful instances of climate leadership exertion by the EU in recent years, following a less successful performance at the COP 15 in Copenhagen in 2009. Additionally, it is a time period that encompasses all of the CEE member states following the EU enlargement in the 2000s and 2010s. As such, it provides a complete look at both the Eastern and Western member states' positions and interests at the Council forum on issues pertaining to the EU's global climate leadership. The ENV Council debates are part of the EU's foreign policy making process and affect implicitly and explicitly its global leadership in the climate change domain as it is considered to lead by example, including "the diffusion of internal policies as a 'model'" (Schunz 2019, 348). The analyzed debates, then, reveal entrenched asymmetries in the ambition-setting of the EU in its climate leadership that are not a new phenomenon but that can be rather traced back to historical relational dynamics between Europe's West and its East.

With this chapter, I make three primary contributions to the fields of European Studies and International Relations. First, I seek to offer a novel way to approach the internal EU divisions among member states and, more specifically, work towards addressing the literature gap on the persistency and scope of the East-West divide. Second, and related, I apply the relational theoretical approach and framework that I develop in my dissertation to understanding the ambition formation of the EU in its foreign policy that could be applied to cases and issues in the

broader ES and IR disciplines. The universe of relational approaches in IR has grown exponentially over the past quarter century (see Jackson and Nexon 2019), and their added value has been recognized extensively. Third, this approach digs into the contemporary impacts of the historical legacies of colonialism, imperialism, domination, and subordination, providing insights to how they affect the EU's position and behavior on the global stage. As such, further exploration with a relational compass would be able to capture these dynamics when it comes to the EU's security and defense domain, as well as its positioning as a geopolitical actor in a regional and global perspective. Applying this relational approach to these issues would expand on the literature on decentering EU foreign policy by critically examining the different legacies of domination among the member states and the effects they exert on interests and foreign policy on both the national and supranational levels in Europe.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

As a student of International Relations, I noticed a paradox at the heart of the discipline hiding in plain sight in its very name: much of mainstream International Relations does not really study or capture relations. It also does not engage in a deep ontological conversation of how relations should be conceptualized and studied. As a scholar of International Relations, my goal in this dissertation has been to address this paradox by making relations the center of focus and analysis. This paradox has also been recognized by other relational IR scholars (e.g., Kurki 2022), and a large and growing literature whose aim is to bring relations into the heart of International Relations has been thriving for over a quarter century. As discussed in Chapter 1, this "relational turn" is occurring in many corners of the academic world of IR. In addition to this development in Western IR, an abundance of scholarship seeking to incorporate various geocultural relational and non-Westen philosophical traditions has made a significant impact to the "worlding" efforts aimed at overcoming the discipline's longstanding Eurocentric biases. These efforts have made their way to the center stage of IR, evident in the fact that they captured the attention of the International Studies Association (ISA) – the largest global professional association for academics and practitioners in International Studies and IR – who dedicated the central theme of its 65th Annual Convention in 2024 to relational scholarship under the title "Putting Relationality at the Centre of International Studies."[35]

Relationalism has also made its way into the study of the European Union. For instance, a substantial body of literature applies network analysis to various EU institutions and aspects of

[35] To access the website for the International Studies Association 65th Annual Convention, you can visit https://isanet.org/Conferences/ISA2024.

European politics (e.g., see Malang et al. 2019; Martinsen et al. 2021; Windzio et al. 2021). Furthermore, several academic networks and associations have emerged with the aim of promoting relational scholarship on and in Europe. For example, one prominent network has been the RELATE network on European Studies in a Relational Universe, organized by the University Association for Contemporary European Studies (UACES).[36] These developments and the abundance of recent relational literature cited throughout my dissertation speak to the impact the "relational turn" has already had on the disciplines of IR and ES and allow us to speculate about its continuous effects in the years to come.

Overall, the purpose of this dissertation has been to make valuable contributions to both International Relations and European Studies by developing a relational theoretical approach to studying the ambitions that the EU sets for itself as a unified actor on the global stage. Furthermore, it makes a contribution to the field of Global Environmental Politics (GEP) by putting the case of the EU's climate change leadership ambitions at the center of analysis. These three fields have defined my scholarship during my PhD program at Colorado State University, and my dissertation represents a synergy of it. In this concluding chapter, I will elaborate on this synergy by providing a summary of my findings from the two empirical chapters, as well as discussing the significance of my findings and my theoretical approach and the scope of their implications for relational theorizing and the study of the EU and its climate leadership. I will then make a few final notes about relationalism and what research trajectories I hope to pursue next in my career.

Contributions

[36] You can find the RELATE network website here: https://relateuaces.blog/.

I engage in a theory generating exercise in this dissertation, and I test the plausibility of my argument in the two empirical chapters. I develop a theoretical framework that provides an encompassing account of an intricate and complex web of relations that, together and intertwined, offers a valuable contribution to the understanding of EU foreign policy ambitions, as well as to the global disciplinary effort to bring relations to the forefront of IR and thus push the discipline beyond its substantialist, paradigm-centered understandings and approaches to phenomena and world politics. My ontological starting point is the understanding that a vast web of relations comprises world politics and constitutes the actors within it and has determining effects for the behavior of these actors. I focus specifically on the EU as an entity and the web of relations that constitutes it. Within this web of relations, I focus on the relational power dynamics that characterize these relations and their constitutive effects both for the EU more broadly and for the EU's foreign policy ambitions more specifically. That is, I build the argument that the relational power dynamics that make up the EU exert a driving effect for its foreign policy ambitions. This focus on historical relations of power is inspired by some of the critical theoretical approaches in IR, such as World Systems Theory, Dependency Theory, and even postcolonialism, although the latter is not applied to a Western context in the manner I do so in my dissertation. Unlike these theoretical traditions, however, my approach is not focused exclusively on relations of production and the global and regional division of labor, or racial hierarchies, nor is it concentrated primarily on a structural understanding of world politics and power relations. Rather, it gives primacy to historical asymmetrical relations of power that, despite their historical embeddedness, are dynamic and changeable and do not emerge as a result of – and are not exclusively determined by - the structure of the international system. These relations - and not the international system itself - are what exerts the causal action in my theoretical framework. The unique contribution of my

theoretical approach is the focus on the asymmetrical power dynamics and the embedded relations of domination and subordination as the explanatory factors. That is, it is the nature of the theorized relations themselves that exert the theorized effect.

From this ontological starting point, I move towards the relational context of the EU, its foreign policy, and the ambitions it sets for itself in its foreign policy. The theoretical approach and framework I develop in Chapter 2 are intended to provide a relational account for the EU's foreign policy ambitions by shedding light on various categories of relations and how their makeup of historical power asymmetries – individually and jointly – affects the foreign policy ambition setting process for the EU. My theoretical framework is designed to work as a classic View Master stereoscope device that will bring to the front different categories of relations based on the temporal and issue domain specifics. For instance, while a focus on EU trade and development policy might require a look into the relational dynamics between the EU and Global South states, as well as individual member states' colonial legacies and neocolonial arrangements (e.g., Sicking 2004; Odijie 2022), an emphasis on the EU's security and defense would demand a look at the EU's relations with the US and relations with and within NATO.

To illustrate the application and value of my theoretical framework, I focus exclusively on the case of climate change, and particularly on the EU's foreign policy ambitions for leadership in the global climate regime. I identify two categories of relations to have substantial effects on the formation of this ambition: (1) relations in the transatlantic space between the US and the European project; and (2) relations among EU member states along the East-West axis. These two categories of relations are imbued with relational power asymmetries that have developed historically. In the first case, the relations that developed and persisted in the transatlantic space since the end of WWII had a formative effect for the establishment and development of the European project, as

well as for the ambitions it sets for itself. In the second category, relational dynamics among Western and CEE states embody historical power asymmetries that remain and exert an effect on the EU's policy-making process and, thus, the EU's climate ambitions of the global stage. In the two empirical chapters of my dissertation, I look at the two separate categories of relations that come together in my theoretical framework to exert the theorized effects. Furthermore, the two categories in my framework are connected temporally in a sequential manner. That is, I first focus on the relations in the transatlantic space and the temporal period in which the environmental leadership switch occurred between the US and the EU in the 1990s and early 2000s. Afterwards, I turn my attention to the East-West relational dynamics and their manifestation for the EU's ambition-setting after the accession of CEE states in 2004, 2007, and 2013.

The first empirical chapter – Chapter 3 – explores the theorized relational dynamics in the transatlantic space between the European project and the US and their effects for the EU's climate leadership ambitions. This chapter reveals two important implications. First, tracing the historical development of the transatlantic relationship at the inception of the European project and beyond demonstrates the primacy and importance of the relationship for the manner in which the European project has developed through the years. It is important to mention that my approach understands these relational dynamics and their effects to be bidirectional, meaning that the relations in the transatlantic space have undoubtedly exerted influence on the development of the US and its foreign policy, but this analytical avenue remains beyond the scope of my dissertation. Second, a focus on the domain of environmental and climate change governance reveals a clear leadership transition between the US and the EU only after the US started showing signs of withdrawal in the 1990s. The use of qualitative counterfactual analysis as a methodological tool allowed me to look in depth into the leadership transition period and imagine a scenario where the US maintained its

commitment to its global environmental and climate leadership, further illustrated through three shadow cases. Namely, I explore the circumstances around the establishment of the UNFCCC in the early 1990s and the roles the EU and the US played in it as well as the case of the apparent return of the US to the global climate regime stage in 2009 at COP 15 in Copenhagen. In the first case, although the US was already showing signs of its weakened leadership position and the EU was demonstrating early ambitions, the impact of the EU on the UNFCCC and later during the Kyoto Protocol negotiations is considered to be comparatively limited as they were heavily influenced by the US (Oberthür and Roche Kelly 2008, 36). There was a pronounced change in this trend after the US withdrawal in 2001 with visibly "more impressive" achievements of EU leadership (Oberthür and Roche Kelly 2008, 36). In the second case, the US made a return to the global climate regime stage after the election of Barack Obama and is considered by some to be the American leadership revival moment after the Bush Administration's withdrawal announcement from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001. At the same time, COP 15 was considered a "failure of EU global leadership" (Bäckstrand and Elgström 2013, 1378) as the EU was excluded from the most critical part of the negotiations which was taken over by the US and the BASIC countries at the last stage of the negotiations. A breakthrough resulting in the Copenhagen Accord was achieved at a small meeting among President Obama and the heads of state/government of Brazil, India, China, and South Africa, and was announced by President Obama at a press conference (Bodansky 2010, 234). Lastly, the third case represents a departure from the climate domain and instead explores a policy area where the US has maintained its grip on global leadership: security and defense. The discussion of the relational dynamics in the transatlantic space in this issue domain reveals the EU's continuous dependence on the US and NATO for its

security and defense although Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has pushed Europeans to respond by making important changes to the EU's security and defense policies.

Overall, the counterfactual analysis allowed me to dive deeply into the circumstances of the transatlantic leadership switch in the 1990s and early 2000s by paying careful attention to the significance of the historical relational dynamics in the transatlantic space. While we do not have the luxury to observe an alternative version of history and the events that transpired, the history of the relations in the transatlantic space and the counterfactual analysis allow us to observe the effects of the relational dynamics and consider the impact of the US withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol for the EU's leadership ambitions in the domain of climate change.

The second empirical chapter of my dissertation – Chapter 4 – shifts the focus to the dynamics within the EU's policy-making process to examine the effects of relational power dynamics among member states for the climate foreign policy ambitions the EU sets for itself. Within this process, the Council of the European Union is "the most powerful legislative body" (Wratil and Hobolt 2019, 511) and it features public deliberations of legislative proposals among ministers from each of the member states. As such, national positions are expressed on all different matters. In this chapter, I develop an empirical strategy to capture the differences in national positions among Eastern and Western member states within public deliberations in the ENV Council configuration to trace 1) whether there is a difference in the level of ambition expressed among member states along the East-West axis; and 2) to understand what themes and topics are most prominent in their speeches and whether they diverge among Eastern and Western member states. I then compare the expressed levels of ambition and themes discussed in the debates to the proposal under discussion which for the purposes of this dissertation I equate to the position of the EU and thus the EU level of ambition. My findings suggest that there is a clear alignment of

Western interests with the ambitions of the EU, while the interests of Eastern member states are more rarely matched in the proposals, particularly in the initial drafts. The findings reveal entrenched asymmetries in the ambition-setting of the EU in its climate leadership that are not a new phenomenon but that can be rather traced back to historical relational dynamics between Europe's West and East.

Furthermore, the East-West divide within the EU has been widely discussed by academics and practitioners alike but nevertheless questions about its driving factors, manifestation, and effects and consequences for EU politics remain (see Volintiru et al. 2024). One of the central remaining issues continues to be the overall lack of coherent theorizing of the divide.[37] In my dissertation, I have sought to address this issue by approaching the East-West divide through a relational theoretical lens and focusing on the relational dynamics of power that lie at its core as well as the effects they continue to exert on the EU by focusing on the EU's ambitions in the climate change domain. By analyzing the ENV Council debates and the national positions member states express in them, I was able to establish the divisions between Western and Eastern member states in terms of the level of ambition they express and the themes they emphasize. I then compare them to the ambitions coming from the EU and demonstrate that Western states' ambitions and interests align closer and more often to them compared to those coming from Eastern member states. This indicates a persistent power dynamic within the EU's policy-making and ambition-setting processes that favors the West and ultimately impacts the ambitions the EU exerts on the global stage in one of the most contested issue domains for the EU. This finding is important not

[37] This insight came from a discussion with Veronica Anghel at the 2024 ISA Annual Convention in San Francisco in April 2024.

only for the purposes of my dissertation but also for taking stock of the East-West divide and the significance of the relational power dynamics embedded in it.

The two empirical chapters and their findings demonstrate the relevance of the temporal sequence of the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2. The analysis of events in Chapter 3 demonstrated that the EU had already established itself as a leader in the global climate domain by the time of accession of CEE states in 2004, 2007, and 2013. Thus, the CEE states joined an EU that was already a recognized leading player on the global climate stage and that has pursued leadership ambitions in its climate foreign policy. In turn, what Chapter 4 demonstrates is that although the EU added 13 new member states with the Eastern enlargement whose interests in this domain did not fit ideally with the established leadership ambitions at the EU level, the EU nevertheless maintained its high leadership ambitions in the climate change domain. As such, although the EU almost doubled its size, the interests of the old, Western member states largely continued to prevail in the ambition-setting and foreign policy-making processes.

Further Thoughts on Relational Theorizing

On Ethics - The theoretical approach I develop in this dissertation incorporates some of the main concepts in IR, such as power, relationships of dominations and subordination, foreign policy and foreign policy ambitions, leadership, and international negotiations, among others. As such, my approach ventures into the territory of politics and ethics when it comes to centering on the effects of the specific relational dynamics of power, domination, and subordination that have developed in the Euro-Atlantic space over the past 80 years and among the EU member states. My approach, then, is not entirely neutral as it makes a qualitative assessment of the nature of the relations that are the focus of analysis. In the transatlantic space, clear power asymmetries between the US and the European project have developed through the years and can be easily observed,

while within the EU itself, deeply embedded relations of power asymmetry can also be observed among the member states along the East-West axis – relational dynamics that can be traced far back in the history of the continent. However, unlike other relational approaches in IR, I do not center my approach exclusively and explicitly around the ethics embedded in these relations. In contrast, others pay special attention to the ethics of the theorized relations, such as Benjamin Klasche and Birgit Poopuu (2023) who try to understand what relations matter in relationalism by developing a critical relationalist approach. In their work, they combine the commitments of deep relationalism and critical theories (especially de/post-colonial and feminist approaches) to focus explicitly on raced and gendered relations of power and highlight the importance and significance of centering these relations versus others.

Nevertheless, the theoretical framework I develop in this dissertation is envisioned to serve as a stereoscope device that can illuminate various categories of relations depending on the issue at hand. The large variety of issues that could be explored presupposes different relational categories, and thus ethical and normative considerations could indeed take center stage. While traditionally the debate on ethical and political issues has not taken center stage for relationalism (Klasche and Poopuu 2023, 2), it is important to keep them in mind when working with power relations.

On Methods - The methodological tools I employ in my dissertation were carefully selected considering the analysis and nature of the argument. The qualitative counterfactual analysis in Chapter 3 allowed me to trace the effects of the transatlantic relations on the EU's pursuit of leadership ambition. It allowed me to imagine a scenario where the US did not relinquish its leadership in the global climate domain and what effects this turn of events would have had on the EU's leadership ambitions. On the other hand, I employ qualitative content analysis in Chapter 4

for the purposes of finding evidence for the existence and effects of the theorized historical relational dynamics between Western and CEE member states in the EU's foreign policy-making process. Through it, I sought to examine the role that these relational dynamics play for the ambitions the EU sets for itself on the global stage.

The wide variety of relational analysis in IR is not confined by strict methodological expectations. While some frequently employ network analysis as a methodological tool, it does not constitute a rule to be followed by all who engage in relational analysis. This is especially evident when exploring the variety of approaches employed by relational scholars from the worldling and relational cosmology camps who seek to transcend the Western biases of social science and of doing IR.

On the Vibrancy of Relationalism - A curious phenomenon can be observed within the abundant relational literature in IR and Political Science that has mushroomed over the past three decades. That is, several different approaches have claimed their flavor of relaitonalism represents the future of relational work within the given discipline. For McClurg and Young (2011), for example, the future of truly relational work within Political Science requires the integration of social network topics and analysis into the core of the discipline, while for McCourt (2016), practice-relational constructivism – an amalgamation of practice theory and relationalism – embodies the next generation of constructivist work in IR. Yet others argue for the necessity to eradicate the Western (especially American) biases in IR and the social sciences more generally by pursuing a relational cosmology approach (Kurki 2022) and bringing in different geo-cultural relational traditions into the analysis of social phenomena (Trownsell et al. 2021). This plurality of relational convictions – while it may appear messy and even contradictory to some – is where the vibrancy of relationalism can be found in its current stage. The lack of confinement within

specific theoretical aggregates or being boxed into a particular school of thought with its required consistent theoretical propositions and core principles (Jackson and Nexon 2019) holds the vast potential of the myriad relational approaches, especially in IR. As Michelsen (2022) puts it, "[t]he idea that there is an ontology that privileges 'things' that can be counterpoised to relational thinking opens significant thinking space, and has the potential to offer novel analytic ethical, transcultural, transnational and ecological ways of writing and being," pointing not only to the plurality of analytical foci, but also to the variety of different ways to understand what it means to think and be relational (p. 145).

Future Research Trajectories and Concluding Remarks

Making a new contribution to the rich and continuously vibrant academic debate on the EU's leadership in the domain of climate change over two decades after the first scholarly works were being published has been an intriguing challenge. The Paris Agreement of 2015, the adoption of the EU Green Deal in 2019, and the swift manner in which the EU was able to deal with its problematic energy dependence on Russia after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 demonstrate that the EU maintains a steady course of leadership and leadership ambitions over thirty years after the establishment of the UN climate regime through the UNFCCC. Climbing to new record highs in temperatures and an increasing frequency of weather event anomalies, in combination with the most recent IPCC reports, demonstrate that the dangerous effects of climate change discussed by scientists, non-state actors, and state representatives and negotiators in the UN climate regime framework at the turn of the millennium were not words of fiction or bad science.[38] Climate change has entered the realm of high politics, and the EU has managed to

[38] See for example the most recent IPCC report: https://www.ipcc.ch/assessment-report/ar6/.

maintain its leadership ambitions while solidifying its leadership performance on the global stage and in its domestic climate law and policies (Rayner et al. 2023). These developments in climate change science and the actual changes in the climate that have become an indelible part of our lives, combined with the EU's persistent ambition to look for the most effective ways to address the challenges posed by the changing climate, and how they can best be understood and approached in the academic realm have been driving my curiosity while writing my dissertation. As such, my dissertation's focus on the EU's foreign policy leadership ambitions in the domain of climate change through a relational theoretical perspective epitomizes the trifecta of my training and research trajectories as a PhD student at Colorado State University in the fields of Global Environmental Politics, European Studies, and International Relations.

As a next step in my research, I want to maintain my focus on relational approaches in IR but turn my attention to the domain of European security and defense. I plan to expand substantially on the shadow case on the issue domain developed in Chapter 3 and trace the transatlantic relational dynamics during the Cold War and beyond, as well as the EU's continued dependence on the US and NATO, on the current state of – and future possibility for – a European grand strategy. If security and defense were not taking center stage for the EU during most of its existence, Russia's full-scale attack on Ukraine in 2022 dramatically changed this mindset. For instance, in a recent speech from April 2024, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy – Josep Borrell – proposed a substitution for the oft-used before the 2022 full-scale invasion but nevertheless incredibly fuzzy and ambiguous concept of "strategic autonomy" with the term "strategic responsibility." He recognized the "absolutely irreplaceable" position of NATO for European security and defense but urged for the further development of the EU's own security and defense capabilities within the NATO security umbrella

(Borrell 2024). In this speech, he also alluded to the uncertainty stemming from the unstable political situation surrounding the 2024 US Presidential elections and the US position on European security and defense. This example already demonstrates a change of official EU rhetoric as a result of shifting relational dynamics with both Russia and the US, presenting an interesting avenue for future exploration. With this, my ultimate goal is to combine the cases of climate change and security and defense, approached through a relational lens, into a book manuscript.

In conclusion, this dissertation is my first touch of relationalism. As such, it is not an end but rather a beginning of my academic journey, especially in the realm of relational thinking. It is by no means a final product or my complete internalization and understanding of relational theorizing. In fact, it is a first step towards developing a more complete and well-rounded formulation of understanding politics and the global in relational terms. To me, my dissertation is a starting point on which I will build and will always come back to as I continue to work and think relationally of the concepts, problems, and phenomena that I will pursue in my professional career. As such, it is simultaneously a final point for my graduate training and a springboard for my development as a scholar and thinker in Political Science and International Relations, holding a splendid bouquet of possibilities and potential for my future career path.

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APPENDIX 1. QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF ENV COUNCIL CONFIGURATION DEBATES (2014-2015)

Total debates: 19 Total Commission speeches: 30

Total country speeches: 377 Total Coded speeches: 407

Total speeches East: 174 Total speeches West: 203

Coding Categories		Number of Coded Speeches	Number of Speeches (East)	Number of Speeches (West)	Coding Examples
Level of Ambition					
	EU Standard (High)	**108**	**34**	**74**	Austria (11 June 2014, Debate B): "This proposal for a directive for ... national limits for 2020 is very ambitious if it aims at all pollutants. However, we do think it is particularly welcome."
	Low	**42**	**34**	**8**	Romania (11 June 2014, Debate B): "This is why we think that the suggestions for commitments for 2030 are much too ambitions, and they do not take account of the specific circumstances of all member states. I think we need ... to reach first existing targets and then set more restrictive values."
	Higher than EU	**35**	**1**	**34**	Luxembourg (2 March 2014, Debate A): "To conclude, I deplore the low level of general ambition when it comes to the renewable energies and also the lack of an objective for new initiatives when it comes to energy efficiency. Twenty-seven percent renewables is really just a business as usual. A more ambitious objective would be advisable, at least 30 percent."
Priorities:					
Economic Focus					

	Anti-Ambition	**15**	**14**	**1**	Poland (2 March 2014, Debate A): "So for a member states, such Poland, the costs will be drastically higher than in the other member states. So a natural question is how does the Commission propose to solve this issue? We do not see anything about possible solutions in the communication. It seems that the entire issue of climate problems and solving it by higher reduction objectives in non-ETEs and higher ETS will not be effective after 2020 for such countries as Poland. We are much more at burden than other countries with these proposals, so we are not happy."
	Pro-Ambition	**26**	**8**	**18**	Portugal (2 March 2014, Debate A): "We want a package that is more ambitious, more all-encompassing and that will create the necessary conditions for cost efficiency and we believe that this climate and energy package for 2030 needs to be approved in March Council already. Now, firstly, for reasons of responsibility because we have signals and studies that show how our climate is changing and secondly, because of reasons of competitiveness, all the studies reinforce the economic data and employment figures and this justifies an ambitious policy for our climate and energy"
EU Leadership		**44**	**11**	**33**	France (11 June 2014, Debate Ab): "The European Union must be perceived as credible at the climate conferences next year and this credibility then will make it possible for Europe to involve other parts of the world as well so that humanity can make progress towards a new energy model tackling greenhouse gas emissions, tackling climate change and which will make it possible for us to move forward together."
Future Oriented		**32**	**4**	**28**	Austria (2 March 2014, Debate A): "We know that the cost for not acting needs to be avoided. This world is only unknown to us from our children. We

					owe it to them, ... to protect ... and to deal responsibly with the environment."
Justice and Fairness for Member States		**74**	**59**	**15**	Slovakia (2 March 2014, Debate A): "We think that the target of 40 percent in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions is too ambitious and it is unreasonably expensive for poorer member states"
National Interest Suffers		**18**	**16**	**2**	Hungary (11 June 2014, Debate B): "When it comes to national emission ceilings, different ecological conditions, traditions, cultures and ambitions of each member states should be taken into account, especially when it comes to member states with a lower GDP, the burden sharing scheme is very disadvantageous."
References to Others					
	Normative	**5**	**3**	**2**	Latvia (11 June 2014, Debate B): "Therefore, I call the colleagues to agree on such measures that would take account of the situation in the member states and would be proportionate to the available resources."
	Working Together	**25**	**15**	**10**	Luxembourg (16 December 2014, Debate Cb): "Luxembourg supports it as does Austria, Germany and other partners, particularly at a crucial point in time."; Hungary (11 June 2014, Debate B): "Hungary as the president of the V4 group expresses the views on behalf of the V4 plus group, Romania and Bulgaria, that the power sectors, especially electricity and heat, and the industries falling under carbon leakage pose a particular challenge to reduce emissions until 2030."

APPENDIX 2. ENV COUNCIL DEBATES INCLUDED IN DATA ANALYSIS (CHAPTER FOUR)

All debates are available as videos at https://video.consilium.europa.eu/home/en.

Date	Time Stamp	Coding Reference	Topic
2 March 2014	11:45	Debate A	2030 Framework
	16:15	Debate B	GMO ban
	18:30	Debate C	Clean Air Package
11 June 2014	10:25	Debate Aa	GMO ban
	10:25	Debate Ab	2030 Framework
	16:20	Debate B	Clean Air Program
27 October 2014	10:20	Debate A	Greening European Semester
	12:00	Debate B	Waste Legislative Package
16 December 2014	09:58	Debate A	CO2 shipping emissions
	10:35	Debate B	Market Stability Reserve
	11:36	Debate Ca	Plastic bags ban
	11:36	Debate Cb	Medium combustion plants
	11:36	Debate Cc	Waste Package
14 June 2015	10:15	Debate A	Emissions on certain pollutants
	13:50	Debate B	MSR for ETS
25 October 2015	10:10	Debate A	ETS efficiency
15 December 2015	10:20	Debate Aa	2020 Biodiversity Strategy
	10:20	Debate Ab	Emissions on certain pollutants
	16:30	Debate B	Circular Economy