The EU’s Response to Two International Conflicts
An Analysis of the EU’s Response to the Ukraine-Russia Conflict Compared to the Israel-Gaza Conflict Based on IR theories
Abstract

The EU is one of the biggest supranational organizations in the world, the third-biggest global economy after the US and China. At the start of the 2020s, two major conflicts have commenced in two different areas of the world: in Eastern Europe between Ukraine and Russia and the Middle East between Israel and Gaza. As of this study being written, neither conflict has been resolved and none are looking closer to accomplishing this. Therefore, the purpose of this case study is to analyze the EU’s responses to these two conflicts during the first month of each conflict and how they can be explained. As a theoretical background, the study uses two different types of IR theories: Realism and Constructivism. For an easier analysis, three indicators from each theory have been operationalized, based on key concepts from each theory. The intention is that these theories will help explain and analyze the EU’s responses. The results show that there are different responses from the EU concerning the two different conflicts, which differ more or less depending on which indicator is being studied.

Key words

The EU, The Ukraine-Russia Conflict, The Israel-Gaza Conflict, IR Theories, Realism, Constructivism, Diplomacy
Table of Contents

Abstract.................................................................................................................................................. 3
Key words............................................................................................................................................... 3
Table of Contents.................................................................................................................................. 4

1 Introduction......................................................................................................................................... 1
  1.1. Preface........................................................................................................................................ 1
  1.2. Purpose and Research Problem.............................................................................................. 2
  1.3. Previous Research..................................................................................................................... 2
    1.3.1. Ukraine and Russia............................................................................................................. 3
    1.3.2. Israel and Gaza.................................................................................................................. 4
  1.4. The IR Theories.......................................................................................................................... 5
    1.4.1. Realism.............................................................................................................................. 6
    1.4.2. Constructivism.................................................................................................................... 7
    1.4.3. Table of the IR Theories................................................................................................... 8

2. Method.................................................................................................................................................. 9
  2.1. Design........................................................................................................................................ 9
  2.2. Case........................................................................................................................................... 10
  2.3. Time Period................................................................................................................................ 11
  2.4. Material..................................................................................................................................... 12
  2.5. Validity....................................................................................................................................... 13

3. Result................................................................................................................................................... 14
  3.1. Realism - Survival of the State............................................................................................... 14
    3.1.1. Ukraine and Russia.......................................................................................................... 14
    3.1.2. Israel and Gaza............................................................................................................... 15
  3.2. Realism - Balance of Power..................................................................................................... 17
    3.2.1. Ukraine and Russia.......................................................................................................... 17
    3.2.2. Israel and Gaza............................................................................................................... 19
  3.3. Realism - Self-Help.................................................................................................................... 20
    3.3.1. Ukraine and Russia.......................................................................................................... 20
    3.3.3. Israel and Gaza............................................................................................................... 22
  3.4. Constructivism - Identity.......................................................................................................... 23
    3.4.1. Ukraine and Russia.......................................................................................................... 23
    3.4.2. Israel and Gaza............................................................................................................... 25
  3.5. Constructivism - Norms............................................................................................................ 26
    3.5.1. Ukraine and Russia.......................................................................................................... 26
    3.5.2. Israel and Gaza............................................................................................................... 28
  3.6. Constructivism - Social Constructions..................................................................................... 29
    3.6.1. Ukraine and Russia.......................................................................................................... 30
    3.6.2. Israel and Gaza............................................................................................................... 32

4. Findings.............................................................................................................................................. 33
  4.1. The Research Problem............................................................................................................ 33
4.2. Theoretical Findings........................................................................................................34
4.3. Methodological Findings............................................................................................35
4.4. Future Research..........................................................................................................35
5. References......................................................................................................................36
1 Introduction

1.1. Preface

The amount of media coverage global conflicts have been exposed to has continuously increased in the last decade.. The 2020s in particular have started with (various occasions of) bloodshed. One of the most talked about incidents is Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022. It was the first time in history the world could watch a conflict of this scale unfold live in front of their eyes, while never leaving the comfort of their living room. Unfortunately, this conflict wouldn’t be the last. A little over a year later another conflict escalated, gaining media attention from all over the world: in October 2023 (as) the Hamas launched their attack on Israel (Narea 2023).

One of the world’s biggest global actors is the EU. The union promotes prevention and resolution of conflicts to support peace and prosperity around the world, combining conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding based on analysis of the conflict (EEAS 2021). Despite the union playing the part of a third party in both of these conflicts, there have been differences in the way the union has reacted to what is happening in Ukraine and Gaza. The two conflicts also present the difference in the aligning opinions among the member states (Kirby 2023). While they show a united front in regards to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the same can not be said about their stance on the conflict in Israel and Gaza, where their divisions have been on display in the United Nations in particular. Some see this as Europe squandering its position as an honest broker, as its more muddled position on Gaza is a stark contrast to its indisputable condemnation of Russia’s attacks (Kirby 2023).

Since both of these conflicts are relatively new, there are still a lot of interesting academic findings to be discovered. With this being said, right now is an excellent opportunity to study the beginnings of these two conflicts and how the EU’s response regarding them is similar or different from each
other. Doing this research in real-time as the conflicts are of immediate concern to the international stage, makes the research directly relevant to the events currently taking place. That is why this study aims to fill this academic gap and hopefully give readers a deeper understanding of how the EU’s policy varies and provide explanations of this as well by using International Relations (IR) theories.

1.2. Purpose and Research Problem

The purpose of this comparative case study is to try to understand the differences in the EU's course of actions during the respective first month of each conflict, why these differences exist and the EU's part is in these conflicts as a whole.

For this, the organization's actions will be analyzed with the help of two IR theories; Realism and Constructivism. Two primary questions will help guide the case study forward:

- Based on these IR theories, how can the EU’s response regarding these two conflicts be explained?
- Based on these IR theories, how can these differences be explained?

1.3. Previous Research

Despite the start of these conflicts being quite recent, many researchers have turned their attention to them, especially in regards to the older one of the two. However, sorting through previous research, it is evident that there is a gap in the case study that this thesis is going to be conducting. There is some research on the EU’s policy concerning these conflicts but nothing that compares and explains the two of them with one another. That is why this study aims to fill that gap and hopefully give readers a deeper understanding of how the EU’s policy varies and provide explanations of this.
1.3.1. Ukraine and Russia

The conflict between Ukraine and Russia has a long history that stretches much further back than Russia’s invasion in 2022. The EU has always been a crucial factor in the conflict especially since it fundamentally was about the EU. The Euromaidan (a wave of civil unrest) was triggered when the former president of Ukraine, Yanukovych, declined to sign an association agreement with the EU, prompting many Ukrainians to take to the streets and wave the EU flag (Davis Cross & Pawel Karolewski 2017, p. 4). Once Russia started their annexation, the EU was quick to react, imposing increasingly restrictive measures against the Russian Federation. Simultaneously, the union focused on de-escalating the crisis by further engaging Russia in diplomatic dialogue, and supporting Ukraine financially and organizationally (Davis Cross & Pawel Karolweski 2017, p. 5).

Throughout the years the EU has tried to avoid completely alienating Russia. Russia was included in trade and territorial discussions. In the end, the EU was a crucial part of reaching the agreement on a ceasefire between Ukraine and Russia in 2015 (Davis Cross & Pawel Karolweski 2017, p. 6).

Since the biggest turn in this conflict occurred - when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022 - there has been plenty of research studying and analyzing the EU’s policy toward the conflict. One such study is *Russia’s 2022 War Against Ukraine and the Foreign Policy Reaction of the EU: Context, Diplomacy and Law* by Luigi Lonardo (2023), who concludes that the EU has done its best to help Ukraine despite geopolitical constraints (Lonardo 2023, p. 59). Another article which touches on the subject is *Humanitarian Aid and Political Aims in Eastern Ukraine: Russian Involvement and European Response* by Andrei Scrinic (2014).

When it comes to studying the conflict, attention has been on various factors. One example is the article *Mearsheimer, Realism, and the Ukraine War* (2022) by Nicholas Ross Smith and Grant Dawson. In the study, the two
authors aim to explain the reason Russia invaded Ukraine, also with the use of Realism like in this study. This can provide insight into how Realism should be applied to the conflict in this study as well. There has also been a clear focus on the economic consequences of the war and how it has affected the European economy which can be seen in studies such as Economic Costs of the Russia-Ukraine War (2022) by Liadze et al. and Russia’s War in Ukraine: Consequences for European Countries’ Business and Economies (2022) by Anatolijs Prohorovs. By highlighting the influence of economic consequences this can provide another point of view for explaining the EU’s policies in the conflict.

Nonetheless, there is a research gap to be found. As the conflict is still relatively new more research will be developed as time goes on but right now is an excellent opportunity to shine light on the EU’s response and use the well-established IR theories to try to explain the background to the implemented policies.

1.3.2. Israel and Gaza

As this thesis is being written, the conflict in Israel-Gaza is still ongoing. Seeing how fresh the conflict is there is still a small amount of published research to be found, even less so at the analytical scale. However, that is not to say that research hasn’t been published; in his article Who Speaks on Behalf of the European Union? (2023) Peter van Elsuwege discusses the divergent reactions from the union, which according to him undermines the coherence and credibility of the EU. Other authors’ articles have a more short-term view on the situation, many focusing on the critical humanitarian situation which has been a result of the conflict; in articles such as The healthcare community must approach the violence in Israel and Gaza with inclusive compassion and Israel desecrates the sanctity of healthcare with its attacks (Hina J Shahid and Paul G Wallance 2023; Aayesha Soni 2023).
However, since the conflict dates back to the days when Israel was founded (1948), a lot of research has been done studying earlier events of the conflict. One example is the book *EU Diplomacy and the Israeli-Arab Conflict, 1967-2019* (2020) by Anders Persson which offers a chronological timeline of the EU’s policy and involvement in the conflict. In this study, Persson concludes that the conflict is more important to the union than any other as it has been central in shaping the EU’s foreign policy overall. This conclusion supports the choice of this conflict as a case for this comparative study. Further studies that display the EU’s deep involvement in the conflict are *Occupation and Sovereignty: Renewing EU Policy in Israel-Palestine* (2017) by Hugh Lovatt and *Defining Borders and People in the Borderlands: EU Policies, Israeli Prerogatives and the Palestinians* (2013) by Raffaella A. Del Sarto.

Nevertheless, these new sets of events are forming a gap in the research field and therefore it is of utmost importance that new analyses are conducted. This offers an excellent opportunity for this thesis to try to address this gap. For this conflict there is also a gap of analysis made by using the IR theories, which the study aims to fill.

1.4. The IR Theories

Barry Buzan and George Lawson (2019) argue that the revolutions of modernity that took place during this century transformed the international system. The revolutions would then lay the foundation for the set of ideas, actors, systems and processes that define IR today (Acharya & Buzan 2019, p. 8). The theories of international relations have grown in numbers along with international relations growing in complexity, with some theories becoming more legitimized and widely accepted than others (McGlinchey, Walters & Gold 2017, pp. 3-4). Three of the key theories in international relations are Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism (Norwich University n.d.). Traditionally, Realism and Liberalism have been the central theories in
IR (McGlinchey, Walters & Gold 2017, p. 4). However, as these traditional
theories failed to account for events such as the Cold War, today
Constructivism is also considered to be a well-established theory (Theys
2017, p. 36).

1.4.1. Realism

For many scholars, the foundations of Realism started with the philosophical
historian Thucydides (Doyle 1990, p. 223). In 431 BC he wrote his famous
work The History of the Peloponnesian War, which would lay down the
foundation for future Realist thinkers all over the world (McGlinchey,
Walters & Gold 2017, p. 5). Realists believe there is no sovereign in charge
of the world, fear and disorder are what rule international relations. Realists
think that we live in a system of ‘international anarchy’, which is why war
seems more common than peace in their eyes (Korab-Karpowicz 2017, p. 4).

The big idea of twentieth-century Classical Realism is that politics is
governed by the laws that are created by human nature. To understand
international politics we have to understand the concept of interests, defined
in terms of powers. In foreign policy, the most important interest is to secure
the Survival of the State. The pursuit of interests always has to be congruent
with the power the certain state possesses (Mearsheimer 2016, p. 74).

One of the most recognized Realists, Hans Morgenthau, urged on another
key concept of Realism in his famous work Politics Among Nations (1948),
Balance of Power. According to Morgenthau, Balance of Power is a direct
result of states’ desire to see their policies prevail over the policies of others.
If one state tries to increase its power to control the decisions of the other, the
latter will in turn increase its power to be able to resist the first state. This
will create stability in the relationship between the states (Morgenthau 1948,
130-131). As long as Balance of Power operates, successful peace can
remain between the two actors (Morgenthau 1948, 130-131).
Moving on from the early days of Realism, Neorealism was established in Kenneth Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics* (1979). The core concept of this branch is that anarchy leads to a logic of *Self-Help*, in which states seek to maximize their security (Waltz 1979, p. 105). Waltz argues that power is a means to an end, that end being security. The result of this is that states are security maximizers rather than power maximizers (Waltz 1979, p. 105).

### 1.4.2. Constructivism

A later-developed theory is Constructivism. Unlike other perspectives, Constructivism highlights the importance of shared interests and values on the global stage. Constructivists believe that international relations exist in the interactions between people. The core of Constructivism is that ideas have power (McGlinchey, Walters & Gold 2017, p. 6).

Although there are many kinds of Constructivism, one mutual factor is the focus on human consciousness. This focus demands a commitment to idealism and holism. Idealism insists that we take the role of ideas in world politics seriously. Idealism does not reject the material world but argues that the construction of this world is dependent on ideas and interpretation. Material forces gain meaning and consequences through human interpretations. Constructivism also accepts the idea of holism. This view sees the world as social and that it can not be decomposed into properties of already existing actors. Still, holism recognizes that agents have some autonomy that allows them to construct, reproduce, and transform structures (Barnett 2020, p. 195).

A core concept in the Constructivist theory is *identity*, which by Alexander Wendt is defined as a somewhat stable view of oneself and their role and expectations. Our identities then lay out the basis of what our interests will be. Depending on whether states have a positive or negative identification
with other states, they will be more or less willing to engage in collective actions (Wendt 1999). Another important concept of Constructivism is *norms*. *Norms* emerge from the actions and beliefs of actors in specific communities (Hoffman 2017). The general assumption is that actors tend to comply with a *Logic of Appropriateness*. This means that they follow internalized prescriptions of what to them is socially defined as normal and right. The international stage is just one of many spaces where certain rules and practices define what are legitimate arguments, standards of justification and criticism in different situations. This affects whose justice and rationality have primacy; who becomes the winners and losers (Wendt 1999).

1.4.3. Table of the IR Theories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IR Theories</th>
<th>Central Concepts</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
<th>Operationalization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Realism</td>
<td>Survival of the State</td>
<td>The most important interest of the state; must be ensured before pursuit of other interests.</td>
<td>Desire to preserve the survival and security of the EU and its areas of interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Balance of Power</td>
<td>States protect themselves against other states by attempting to match their power against the power of the other side.</td>
<td>Ensure that the balance of power remains for their benefit in the EU’s areas of interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Help</td>
<td>States must provide security for themselves; no other</td>
<td>Actions to preserve power and influence in their regions of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The study will be build on Realism and Constructivism to try to explain the differences in the EU's response to the conflict in Ukraine versus Gaza. To do this the two IR theories need to be fully understood which will be accomplished by studying previous research that explains and demonstrates the theories. The ambition of using these two theories is to gain a better understanding of different types of responses and how these affect conflicts.
Overall, the theories fill various functions and by being used together they will contribute to the purpose of the study by creating a picture of the European response to these conflicts. The result will then be analyzed with the theories as a backdrop to see how they are reflected in the EU’s actions. The analysis will highlight the EU’s response to the conflicts no matter how they have affected the conflict in question but also pay attention to the times when the union has not responded. The reason for this is that the purpose of this study is to create a picture of the differences in the EU’s response to the conflict. Doing nothing is also a response that will be taken into consideration. The union’s actions will be addressed with the theories they are supported by to create a clear picture and understanding of what correlates to which theory.

2.2. Case

One of the reasons for these two cases being chosen to compare is their relevance. Both of the conflicts have begun in the last two years and are still very much ongoing (The Visual Journalism Team 2023; Pietromarchi, Siddiqui & Mohamed 2023). They are also two of the most media-covered conflicts ever, both because of the time they are taking place, but also because of their big scale and international relevance. The war in Ukraine is still receiving live media coverage every day despite the conflict having been ongoing since February 2022 (Smith 2023; The Guardian 2023). Ever since the start of the war between Israel and Hamas however, some of the spotlight has been removed from Ukraine, as can be seen in the way cable news coverage of the Ukraine war plummeted after Hamas attacks on October 7 (Darcy 2023). Additionally, much like the invasion of Ukraine, the situation in Israel-Gaza has been under live reporting ever since the conflict started (NBC News 2023; Sky News 2023). Unfortunately, not all conflicts in the world receive this sort of attention but in the context of this study, it is
fortunate that these two conflicts are receiving the coverage that they are since it will simplify the process of studying them.

The interest in analyzing these two conflicts in particular also stems from the fact that although they are different they both have had severe effects on the civilians that have been caught in the crossfire, resulting in refugees being injured and killed (Operational Data Portal 2023; United Nations 2023; Wilson et al. 2023). These similarities are an interesting factor to take into consideration when regarding the union’s response to these humanitarian crises. One problematic aspect of using two such unique cases is that it limits the possibility of generalization. However, they can still be representative of how the European Union tends to respond to international conflicts.

2.3. Time Period

The period that has been chosen is the first month of the conflicts respectively. Thus the period for the conflict in Ukraine will begin from February 24 until March 24, 2022 (Reuters 2022). The period for the conflict in Israel-Gaza will stretch from October 7 until November 7, 2023 (Hutchinson 2023). The period has various reasons for being selected. The first reason is that the two conflicts have not been active for the same amount of time, as the conflict in Ukraine started over a year prior. To make sure the analysis is fair the decision has been made to limit the period in this way since the EU has had more time to respond to the older conflict. The second reason is that both conflicts are still ongoing and new information will be provided as this study is being written, therefore to be able to finish this study without constantly adding new information, a time limit has been drawn to focus solely on the information provided in the first month of each conflict.
2.4. Material

To examine the differences in the EU’s response to the two conflicts by using IR theories both primary sources and secondary sources have been used. To create an in-depth understanding of the theories and what they entail, academic secondary sources have been used. The criteria for the use of the material have been based on four classic rules of source criticism to judge the veracity of the material. These four rules are authenticity, independence, simultaneity, and tendency (Esaiasson et al. 2012, p. 282). What authenticity entails is to make sure that the source has been produced at the time, in the context and by the person or persons as it is indicated (Esaiasson et al. 2012, p. 282). The second rule focuses on independence where three aspects of independence are brought up; the opportunities to verify stories, the distance between the author and the story, and the degree of the author’s independence (Esaiasson et al. 2012, p. 283). Simultaneity is the third rule and implies that stories with simultaneity are more trustworthy since people tend to forget and post-rationalize (Esaiasson et al. 2012, p. 884). The last rule is tendency which concerns how the researcher ponders systematically over which environment and under what circumstances a source has been created (Esaiasson et al. 2012, p. 885).

The empirical material mainly comes from primary sources, such as the EU’s website where the organization’s statements are published. The material has not been produced by experienced researchers in the academic field but alas that is not the point of the empirical material. The study’s empirical material aims only to retell and showcase the EU’s responses to these two conflicts to later be analyzed by the leading theories in the study. For this reason, primary sources in the shape of direct statements from the union work since they have a higher simultaneity than secondary sources which decreases the risk of details being forgotten or post-rationalized (Esaiasson et al. 2012, p. 284).
2.5. Validity

Validity is one of the most central problems within the empirical social science since it operates both with practical and theoretical languages. There are three main definitions of what validity entails: 1) the compliance between operational indicator and theoretical definition; 2) the absence of systematic errors; 3) the measurement of what was intended to be measured. Despite these separate definitions, there is usually a segregation between definitions 1) and 2), and they are often viewed as two different types of validity: concept validity and result validity (Esaiasson et al. 2012, p. 57).

Concept validity implies that there is compliance between theoretical concepts and the empirical indicators that have been chosen for the study. To be able to measure theoretical concepts they must be operationalized (Esaiasson et al. 2012, p. 58). To reach satisfying concept validity there needs to be an absence of systematic errors in concern to the empirical indicators. The second type is result validity and it answers the question of whether what is measured is what was intended to be measured. To reach a satisfactory level of this type of validity two demands have to be met: the concept validity has to be acceptable and the reliability high. To reach high reliability there has to be an absence of accidental or unsystematic errors which might have been caused during the collection or processing of the data (Esaiasson et al. 2012, p. 63).

For this study, empirical indicators have been operationalized from the two theories to create a good concept validity. For an easier understanding of the analysis, three indicators have been operationalized from every theory and have then been compiled into a table. The empirical material in this study is not personally created by the researcher hence decreasing the risk of poor reliability, however, notes have been taken during the data collection process. By focusing on maintaining a satisfying concept validity and a high reliability, the study can obtain a positive result validity.
3. Result

3.1. Realism - Survival of the State

In this study *Survival of the State* is seen as the EU’s desire to preserve the survival of the union as an entity and its areas of interest. The following section will showcase the importance of these conflicts regarding the union’s survival and interests and how this is shown in the EU’s actions.

3.1.1. Ukraine and Russia

Ever since being a part of the Soviet Union, Ukraine has become a geopolitical flashpoint between Western Europe and Russia. The general opinion has been divided in the country itself as the western parts support the move toward the EU while the eastern parts favor closer ties with Russia (Masters 2020). Keeping this in mind, it is clear that Ukraine is a vital area for the union, especially since Russia’s invasion in 2022. Having had such close ties with Russia in the past there is always the possibility of its foreign policy falling into old patterns which would be seen as a threat to the EU’s security, both because it could result in the loss of a potential member and a gained ally to Russia. It is also in the EU’s interest to ensure that Ukraine remains a democracy to not remove the possibility of it becoming a member in the future. Losing Ukraine to Russia could result in a negative trend throughout Europe concerning the union’s interest. If the union would be unable to secure one of the biggest countries in Europe it could create a wave in other eastern countries to forge closer ties with Russia which would threaten the union’s existence.

In their actions during the Ukraine and Russia conflict this need to ensure Ukraine’s survival can be seen in multiple ways. It was clear from the start that the union was fully on Ukraine’s side and determined to stand by it during the conflict. Right on the day Russia began its invasion, all of the EU leaders issued a joint statement where they condemned Russia’s actions. In
the same statement, the leaders demanded that Russia immediately cease military actions and fully respect Ukraine’s sovereignty and independence. With these responses in particular and the continued response in support of Ukraine that took place during the first month of the conflict the union clearly shows that the survival of Ukraine is their highest priority (European Council 2023). Not only by their clear declaration of where they stand but also by concrete actions where they showcase in multiple ways how strong their intention to protect Ukraine is. Multiple sanctions against Russia to weaken the country and thus its ability to keep on fighting are one of the ways the union is displaying this desire. As well as, providing Ukraine with supplies for their armed forces to increase their ability to protect their territory (European Council 2023).

However, it is worth noting that during the first month the union has not sent any foreign troops to Ukraine, only military aid. This can potentially showcase the consequences of Ukraine not being a full-on member of the union yet. Even though it is in the EU’s interest to make sure that Ukraine survives and remains a democracy, it is not at the stage where the EU is prepared to risk its troops for Ukraine’s survival. This embodies the core of the Survival of the State concept, that no interest can come before the state's survival. Therefore, the union won’t fully risk its own for a country that is not fully a part of its organization as it would put its survival at too much risk. All in all, the EU has a strong desire to ensure Ukraine’s survival, especially in regards to it remaining a democracy and also having a stable security environment. The prime focus is to make sure Ukraine regains their territory and to stop Russia’s invasion.

3.1.2. Israel and Gaza

Despite the larger geographic distance to this conflict it is clear that it has been of great importance to the EU ever since it began (Persson 2020, p. 2). As the conflict started unfolding between Israel and Palestine, it soon became
clear that the EU was a part of it; having political and economic ties with Israel and supplying Palestine with economic support (Persson 2020, p. 5).

Given the EU’s close ties with the region it is fair to say that it has become an area of interest for the EU and its survival is of importance. This can be seen in the EU’s commitment to the two-state solution, showcasing that the union wishes for both the nation’s survival and coexistence. Naturally, the new escalation of the conflict in the aftermath of Hamas’ attack on Israel has turned the EU’s focus to the region once again. On the day of the attacks, the EU condemned Hamas and immediately called for the cessation of their attacks, which they believed would further increase the tension on the ground and undermine the Palestinians’ aspirations for peace (European Council 2023).

In the same statement the union proclaimed their solidarity with Israel and its right to defend itself per international law, finishing the statement by recalling the importance of working toward a lasting peace through the Middle East Peace Process (European Council 2023). This statement makes it clear that the EU has not moved on from its stance on a two-state solution from earlier days of the conflict and intends to keep on promoting it. This is reasonable as it is in the union’s interest to make sure both states survive. Both for the political and economic ties mentioned above but there could also be an element of humanitarian reasons for it. Completely ignoring the civilians of primarily Gaza would go against their efforts to spread democracy and peace around the world.

In a later statement, the union further condemned Hamas and called on the group to release all hostages. At the end of the statement, the EU openly declared their commitment to the two-state solution and underlined the need to engage with legitimate Palestinian authorities. They also made it clear that they want to avoid further escalation of the conflict, which can showcase their desire to control the security threat both for the region and themselves (European Council 2023).
During a video conference on October 17, the president of the European Council made a public statement, stating multiple points of importance regarding the conflict, two of them correlating with the question of security. He highlighted the importance of doing everything possible to ensure the conflict does not escalate in the region as this would pose danger to the region, but also to Europe - especially when adding the ongoing war in Ukraine. (European Council 2023). This statement during the press conference highlights that even though the conflict is taking place in the Middle East it is of interest to the EU to prevent it from escalating as it poses a security threat to Europe as well despite the geographical distance. This is a great example of the concept of *Survival of the State* as it showcases that at the end of the day, the state’s security is always going to be the most central interest, even if the situation might be more severe in other areas of the world. Nonetheless, based on the EU’s responses it is clear that the focus is to make sure the conflict doesn’t escalate, both within the area but also the surrounding ones. The EU remains consistent with its belief in the two-state solution but does not mention any clear actions as to how the territory between the two states should be divided.

### 3.2. Realism - Balance of Power

In the context of this study, *Balance of Power* refers to the union’s desire to keep this state of power, both concerning the EU itself and in its areas of interest. The upcoming section will focus on the EU’s efforts to maintain this balance in the areas where these two conflicts are taking place and why this is of importance to them.

#### 3.2.1. Ukraine and Russia

Historically, for over six decades the West has hoped for a concerted Europe. But with tensions growing in Ukraine over the 2010s repudiating such a
partnership seemed bleak. While the Western concert is 60 years old and institutionalized in both the EU and NATO, there has always been a challenge in accommodating Russia (Rynning 2015, p. 539).

Since the double enlargement of the EU in 2004 when ten new member states were added (eight which came from Central and Eastern Europe), the EU changed the regional balances of power. This resulted in a strong feeling in Moscow that they are retreating, in contrast to the EU which is expanding (Gomart 2006, p. 5). The accumulation of differences and conflicts in the economic, political and security arenas has caused a deep division between the EU and Russia, culminating in the conflict in Ukraine that began in late 2013 (Siddi 2022, p. 894), which - as time would tell - would reach an even bigger turning point in 2022.

The EU has always worked towards the goal of stability, both domestically and internationally. This course of action has not changed regarding their response to the war in Ukraine. Through their response, it can be seen that the union’s main focus has been on weakening the power of Russia. As early as on the day of the invasion the EU pronounced that they would implement sanctions on Russia. During the forthcoming months, the EU implemented multiple sanctions packages toward Russia, showing their clear determination to weaken the country in that aspect. Additionally, the union decided on a support package worth €500 million, increasing this amount by double about a month later, reaching a total of €1 billion. The EU also decided to further support Ukraine economically by setting up a Ukraine Solidarity Trust Fund (European Council 2023).

Surveying these responses, it is possible to see that the EU favored decreasing Russia’s power to balance the power system rather than increasing the power of Ukraine, at least not to a substantial amount. Here are some reasons as to why this might be the case. For one, Ukraine is not a full-fledged member of the union yet which is why the EU might be less
inclined to provide as many military forces. With this being said, even if Ukraine was a member it is still easier and requires less resources from the union to weaken Russia with sanctions rather than sending military supplies to Ukraine. This fits into the concept of Balance of Power as the goal is not to make Ukraine strong enough to overpower Russia but to protect its territory and sovereignty.

3.2.2. Israel and Gaza

For many years the EU’s common goal for the conflict has been the two-state solution - however, it has yet to be successfully implemented. The implementation has been limited by multiple factors such as the Israeli settlement expansions and the collapse of Palestinian authorities (Rayan 2021, pp. 28-29).

A successful two-state solution would result in a balance of power in the area as the two states would have their territory with a decreased fear of losing it to a bigger power. Creating stability in the region would benefit the EU in multiple ways. Both security-wise in terms of its geographical proximity to the region and consideration of social aspects such as strained relations between the two religious communities in Europe, namely Jews and Muslims. The union also has an economic aspect to consider since the EU has a dependency on Arab oil which will be difficult to provide if a full-blown war starts in the area (Norris 2002, p. 77). As this new wave of conflict has blossomed, the union remains true to its beliefs on how Balance of Power should be achieved. In their statement by the High Representative, they highlight the importance of working toward a lasting and sustainable peace through the Middle East Peace Process (European Council 2023).

Unlike in the Ukraine-Russia conflict, the union’s provisions in terms of material resources are scarce. The EU affirms that Israel has the right to defend itself in line with humanitarian and international law. It has mobilized
to provide humanitarian support for the people in Gaza but is sending no support for Palestine’s military forces either (European Council 2023). However, despite the union not providing either party with any weapons, they can acquire weapons from Europe via export, particularly Israel as the wealthier party (Askew 2023). This reluctance could be explained by the EU’s desire to avoid escalation between the two powers in the region, by providing little support to either party. In that regard, the union is supporting their agenda of not destabilizing the Balance of Power which would move them even further away from ever achieving the two-state resolution. But as mentioned, the actors can destabilize this power balance in other ways, ways which become a bit hidden as they are not directly provided by the union. This could be viewed as slightly hypocritical as the EU is priding itself on being a peace organization.

3.3. Realism - Self-Help

*Self-Help* is here seen as the actions the EU is taking to preserve its power and influence in the concerned regions. The next passage will showcase the EU’s efforts to reach this goal and by doing so apply its *Self-Help*.

3.3.1. Ukraine and Russia

The EU has been making an effort to influence Ukraine ever since its independence. Already in 1994 it established its visions for their bilateral relations (Moskalenko & Streltsov 2015, pp. 120-121). This was the start of the EU promoting their values in Ukraine as a form of *Self-Help*, as a Ukraine with similar values as the union would open the door for easier EU influence in the country. The Russia factor has also always been a major reason for the EU to want to ensure their influence in the country. A badly governed Ukraine would be more vulnerable under Moscow’s pressure and thus result in a higher chance of the country moving closer to Russia (Shumylo-Tapiola 2013).
The EU’s incentive to keep exercising influence in Ukraine has not diminished, only increased. It is still possible to see how the union is exercising *Self-Help* regarding their responses to the conflict. In an address to the people of Ukraine on February 27, President of the European Council Charles Michel proclaimed the EU is ready to support Ukraine with not just words but concrete and immediate action (European Council 2023). By promising to help Ukraine the union paints themselves in a positive light for the people of Ukraine - which will increase the chances of the Ukrainian people accepting and supporting European influence in the future.

The EU continued to paint itself in this positive light for the Ukrainian people by introducing the temporary protection scheme on March 4. Later on during a video conference the EU health ministers welcomed the establishment of the EU solidarity mechanism. This further stabilized the foundation of Michel’s statement and further promoted the positive view of the EU in the eyes of Ukraine and its people (European Council 2023). The EU is also showing its urge to gain influence over the Ukrainian people through its joint response to the schooling of Ukrainian children in the EU. The education ministers highlighted the importance of establishing European coordination to promote the exchange of good practices, which can be seen as the EU wanting to promote its values to the Ukrainian children.

Finally, one of the biggest ways the EU could influence Ukraine is if the country became a full-fledged member - and on February 28 Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky officially signed the application. If Ukraine were to join the union it would have to satisfy certain conditions which in practicality would result in the most influence the EU can have over the country - as it would have to adhere to EU values (Treisman 2022). This is one of the biggest ways of *Self-Help* the union can provide itself concerning this conflict as it would be a testament that Ukraine has moved away from Russia.
3.3.3. Israel and Gaza

The EU has been exercising influence over the Israel-Palestine region since its inception on a single European policy in the region in the 1970s. But even further back since the establishment of Israel and the parallel creation of the Palestinian refugee problem, the EU attempted to maintain its influence as a power broker. Moving into the 1990s, the EU was given responsibility for the Regional Economic Development Working Group (REDWG). The EU became both a major financier to the Palestinians and a major trading partner to Israel. Even if there was a big emphasis on the economy, the EU also influenced the region by being a leading normative power in the conflict and also becoming more and more involved on the ground in the occupied territories (Persson 2020, p. 68).

In line with the ever-changing dimensions in the conflict and its latest escalation in 2023, it is still a vital interest for the EU to preserve their influence and power in the region as a form of Self-Help. In their statement on the day of the attack by Hamas, the EU recalled the importance of working toward a long-lasting peace through reinvigorated efforts in the Middle East Peace Process (European Council 2023). Since the process started in 1991 (Hasan 1993, p. 20) the EU has been one of its biggest supporters (Persson 2020, p. 68). By supporting and actively trying to be a part of the peace process the union can exercise their influence over it and move it toward a direction that would be beneficial to it.

On October 15 the union adopted a statement that set the EU’s common position on the situation. The union strongly emphasized Israel’s right to defend itself in line with humanitarian and international law. Simultaneously they reiterated the importance of providing humanitarian aid to civilians in Gaza and making sure it is not abused by terrorist organizations. By showing their support for Israel and not condemning their actions the EU remains on good terms with Israel which is supporting their Self-Help, which is
important as the actors have a history of antagonism. If this relationship reignites, it will aggravate the EU’s opportunities in Israel (Yacobi & Newman 2008, pp. 182). Also in regards to their statement about Gaza, the EU is painting a more positive light of themselves for the people of Palestine as they are offering support to the civilians. Giving them a positive view of the EU will open the door for more European influence in the future which is favorable for the union’s Self-Help. Another response to increasing the union’s Self-Help was brought up by President Charles Michel. He discussed the EU’s need to be an active actor when it comes to political and diplomatic engagement with Israel and the rest of their partners in the region. By pushing the EU toward an active role in this area it increases the chances of the EU influencing the future of the region (European Council 2023). When looking at these responses it is clear that the EU has an interest in influencing the outcome of the conflict, as its ultimate goal for the region is a two-state solution, However, most actions come in the form of soft power and the actual influence the union is having might be compromising.

3.4. Constructivism - Identity

The following section will focus on explaining the EU’s identity and its role in its responses to the two conflicts. In this study, the concept of identity is defined as how the union displays its identity as a peace organization, and how they do this in relation to others.

3.4.1. Ukraine and Russia

After the bloodshed of the Second World War the politicians of Europe had a sentiment of ‘never again’ and in 1949 the Council of Europe was established to promote democracy, protect human rights and the rule of law, marking the beginning of the EU we know today (EU n.d.). The aims of the union remain the same within the wider world; they are to promote the EU’s values and interests, contribute to peace and security, the protection of human rights, and strict observance of international law (EU n.d.).
An important perspective is how this identity is perceived from other actors' perspectives. While self-perceptions were positive, analysis of Ukrainian civil society elite perceptions reveals a different picture. The union is seen as a major power in the economic and normative sphere but as an inefficient mediator (Siddi 2021, p. 896). Russia’s perceptions of the union is also important as the country is often led by the images it holds of it. Russia redefines the EU’s identity up to the point where any move is seen as negatively aimed against Russia (Casier 2016, p. 16).

Although most responses can be seen as having their foundation in the EU being a peace organization, there are some responses and declarations that clearly show the EU displaying its identity and drawing attention to it. In the first joint statement by the European Council, it condemned Russia’s actions in the strongest possible terms. They found the reasoning behind these condemnations by drawing back on the union’s values. In the same statement the Council also deplores humanitarian suffering and declares to be ready to provide humanitarian emergency response - following their values to protect human rights (European Council 2023).

A few days later President Charles Michel addressed the Ukrainians, his speech reflecting and promoting the identity of the union. Speaking directly to the people he said that they have “made the brave and free choice of liberty, democracy and rule of law” (European Council 2023), he also added that the EU has both a political and moral duty to aid Ukraine, as the freedom and democracy of the whole of Europe is under attack. By applauding and highlighting the European values displayed by Ukraine, the President is drawing attention to the union’s identity - and also fulfilling their aim to promote their values outside of its borders (European Council 2023). The union’s responses show that it views Ukraine as a country that holds the values of the EU and is ‘part of the family’, which the opposite can be said about Russia. However, this might also be a result of the EU now comparing
Ukraine to Russia, if their values perfectly befitted the EU then the logical result would be that Ukraine would already be a member of the union, or at least on the application list. However, Ukraine did not send in its application until after the conflict started. This further promotes the argument that the EU wants Ukraine to become a member primarily to move it away from Russia.

3.4.2. Israel and Gaza

In all of its history the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been characterized by a strong identity dimension - as the terminology of Jewish/Palestinian is used for the right to territorial claims. The EU has always been eager to influence this subordination dimension of the conflict by addressing the core political and territorial issues (Yacobi & Newman 2008, p. 178). This has led to the union taking the identity dimensions as a given, particularly that both sides are entitled to self-determination, security and sovereignty (Yacobi & Newman 2008, p. 180). However, behind this looms the complex identity relation between Israelis and Palestinians (Yacobi & Newman 2008, p. 184).

The EU’s responses to the conflict are displaying the union’s identity as a peace organization in various ways. In regards to this conflict, the identity of the EU has been mostly displayed and highlighted through various speeches by the president as he and the union have addressed the situation in the Middle East. In President Charles Michel’s remarks after a video conference between the members of the European Council, he said that the events that have occurred compel “us to act as Europeans” (European Council 2023). He continued by saying that acting as Europeans implies that their actions must be guided by two principles: unity and consistency (European Council 2023). The union must stand up for peace, international law and international humanitarian law at all times. He also added that the union is committed to the peace process based on a two-state solution. By urging people to ‘act as Europeans’ and also show the EU’s commitment to its central values the
president is drawing attention to how the EU aims to handle the situation differently than the two actors in the region (European Council 2023). While the union affirms that Israel has the right to defend itself the union is showing the commitment to create a long-lasting peace first and foremost based on the two-state solution, therefore based on support for the Palestinian Authority (European Council 2023). Based on this response it is clear that the EU intends to spread its values and promote its identity as a means to reach its ultimate goal for the conflict, a two-state solution.

At a later date at the Cairo Peace Summit, President Michel once again drew attention to European identity. In his remarks he mentions how the EU is a political project that came into being in the aftermath of the two world wars. He read out Article 3 of the Treaty establishing the EU which states that it contributes to peace, security, sustainable development on Earth, solidarity and mutual respect among peoples and the protection of human rights, as well as strict observance of international law (European Council 2023). Once again he highlights the European identity and this time in front of an international audience as the summit is taking place outside of Europe. By pushing forward its identity of contributing to peace it can give the union something to fall back on if ever questioned why they are not taking a firmer stand in the conflict.

3.5. Constructivism - Norms

In this study norms are defined as the following concept: promotions of the EU’s norms and whether or not they are delivered through normative means. In this following section, the EU’s normative actions in the two conflicts will be discussed as well as how they reflect on the norms within the union itself.

3.5.1. Ukraine and Russia

Over the past two decades the EU has been associated with the export of certain universal norms, rules and practices to other countries. The main
principles and norms are considered to be: democracy, the rule of law, a strong commitment to human rights, fundamental freedoms, and social justice. Based on these normative ties between the member states the union has also searched to promote them in neighboring countries, including Russia. However, after the war with Georgia in 2008 questions were posed about Russia’s reliability in its dedication to democratic goals.

Then after the violent outbreak between Russia and Ukraine in late 2013 (and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in the future), it was demonstrated that the EU had failed in its pursuit of Russia despite provided mutual relations and financial support (Veebel 2018, p. 698). Some studies argue that in practice the EU has diverted from its norms and values and seems to be more focused on keeping the status quo. While investigating three different conflicts in Europe, Skolimowska (2015) demonstrates that there is “a gap between the normative activity of the EU and the way it is perceived in the international environment” (Veebel 2018, p. 701).

In the aftermath of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, one of the EU’s responses has been to spread its norms and values in their surrounding areas and beyond. On the 25th of February, the Extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council agreed to enhance diplomatic efforts to assure the widest possible international condemnation of Russia’s actions. There was also a clear consensus to step up efforts to tackle disinformation (European Council 2023). These responses show off the EU’s incentive to spread their norms and make sure they are agreed upon by other actors across the world. By also wanting to tackle disinformation, it shows that the union wants to make sure that nothing is being spread or acted upon that goes against their norms, as well as decreasing the security threat. A few weeks later, this package of measures was complemented by further sanctions. The EU suspended Russian media outlets as they have engaged in systematic, international campaigns of “disinformation, information manipulation and distortion of facts.” (European Council 2023). The union claims that these actions are
targeted at the EU and neighboring civil society members (European Council 2023). This further highlights the EU’s efforts to, if not spread, protect their norms. It also shows that it wants to be in control of its narrative and make sure that no one else is spreading information that is not on its terms.

3.5.2. Israel and Gaza

The EU’s normative power in the Israel-Palestine conflict can be considered to have been relatively weak. Its work to reaffirm the Green Line as the border has been successful since the whole international community is in clear opposition to Israel’s settlement policies. However, its normative power has failed to translate itself into a significant policy impact on the ground, neither in political nor economic terms (Persson 2018, pp. 202-203).

When looking at interviews with Israeli civil society, elites consider there to be several interrelated factors that pose a problem for them to learn from the EU despite the appeal of its norms and values (Sabatovych 2019, p. 298). Such things as a lack of understanding, lack of direct involvement, the distancing from controversial and complex issues, not adhering to proclaimed ideals, and lack of consensus within the EU are believed to hinder the union’s effectiveness in promoting its norms. In the context of the conflict, all these issues are considered to foster an environment in which the EU’s normative promotion and appeal are overlooked. The consensus is that the EU is neither helpful nor preeminent for Israel’s well-being. The elites aspire to adopt the EU’s norms and values, but the EU is not living up to their expectations by not upholding an unbiased and open-minded approach to conflict resolution in their opinion (Sabatovych et al. 2019, p. 295). The EU is facing obstacles when it comes to Palestinian civil society as well. These obstacles in particular come in the form of the inaccessibility of structures and the perceived lack of political will, resulting in the application and ultimately the outcome of EU norms and values falling short (Sabatovych 2019, p. 298).
Despite the questionable effects the EU’s normative power has had in this conflict, that is not to say they are not promoting its norms as a response to it. In his remarks on October 17, President Michel announced that the EU would support leaders in the region who are seeking to mediate and that extensive efforts are undertaken in that area and have the full support of the EU. He also added the need for active political and diplomatic engagement with Israel, as well as all partners in the region (European Council 2023). He further pressed the necessity of this at the Cairo Peace Summit as he said that it is everyone’s responsibility to work toward a lasting peace that must be based on the two-state solution (European Council 2023). In these statements the union is showing its norms of solving conflicts through soft power; by the use of such things as mediation and diplomatic talks. The EU is also actively spreading its desire for a two-state solution and argues that this is the solution all other parties must also strive for.

In both statements, the President speaks of the importance of humanitarian aid and the support the EU will send to support civilians in the region (European Council 2023). These responses showcase its norms of protecting human rights and civilians. However, it is also important to note that as of right now the EU is not actively spreading these norms on the ground to Israel or Palestine but is mostly focused on the international community. A reasonable explanation for this could be that since the EU is anticipating Ukraine to become a member of the union in the future, it is of interest to the EU that the people in the country share its norms, whereas the incentive to do this in Israel-Gaza is not as big.

3.6. Constructivism - Social Constructions

The upcoming section will focus on the concept of Social Constructions. In this study, the concept is defined as the symbols and language the EU is using to shape the narrative of the two conflicts. By analyzing these two components the section aims to highlight how the union is speaking about
these conflicts to showcase if there are differences in the language being used.

3.6.1. Ukraine and Russia

To provide further insight and understanding as to why the EU is using a certain language around different parties, it is worth taking a look at how the union views their relations. According to the EU itself, its partnership with Ukraine is based on common values such as democracy, rule of law, respect for international law and human rights. Since its independence, the EU has been a strategic partner to help ensure a “stable, prosperous and democratic future” (EEAS 2022) for Ukraine; and in 2022 the country was granted EU candidate status. In regards to the union’s relations with Ukraine, they condemn Russia’s “illegal and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine” (EEAS 2022). The EU will support Ukraine’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity for as long as it takes (EEAS 2022).

The EU’s relations with Ukraine are in stark contrast to those of Russia. As the union describes, relations with Russia have been strained since the 2014 annexation of Crimea and destabilizing actions in eastern Ukraine. After the invasion of Ukraine all remaining political, cultural and scientific cooperation has been suspended (EEAS 2022). These views the EU has on the countries in the conflict provide a background for the narrative and language they have been using when making their responding remarks. From the EU’s first joint statement in regards to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine a firm and hostile language is used when commenting on Russia’s actions. Some of these quotes are the following (European Council 2023):

“…Russia’s unprecedented military aggression…”

“By its unprovoked and unjustified military actions, Russia is grossly violating international law…”

“Such use of force and coercion has no place in the 21st century.”

(European Council 2023).
The language used about Ukraine and its situation showcases the EU’s determination to stand by and support Ukraine in the conflict (European Council 2023).

“We deplore the loss of life and humanitarian suffering.”
“The EU stands firmly by Ukraine and its people…” (European Council 2023).

The language being used in the speech paints the picture clearly of where they stand in the war. They are condemning all of Russia’s actions and are not trying to sugarcoat to try to smooth over relations with Russia, which can be explained by them already being strained before the invasion (European Council 2023).

The EU continues to paint this narrative as President Charles Michel directly addresses the Ukrainian people on February 27. The same type of hostile language is unchanging as he describes the actions of Russia.

“Russia has decided to launch a brutal, savage war; based on despicable lies. And you, the Ukrainian people, you are the innocent victims of this folly and of these lies. This is the Kremlin’s war. Putin’s war. This is not the Russian people’s war.” (European Council 2023)

The President is once again painting the narrative of Russia’s attacks and actions as being inhumane while showing that they believe it is Ukraine that is the victim and must be supported. However, in this speech, he also makes it clear that the EU does not want the blame to go to the Russian people, but instead to Putin and the Russian government. Both of these statements’ aims are to create a narrative that will persuade other international actors to support Russia and instead take actions that align with the EU’s opinion and interest.
3.6.2. Israel and Gaza

Being aware of the EU’s previous relations with the actors of the conflict provides insightful knowledge to understand the type of language the EU is using when addressing them. According to the EU itself, it shares a long common history with Israel that is marked by growing interdependence and cooperation, and shares common values (EEAS 2021). The EU portrays its relationship with the Palestinians in a positive light as well, stating that it has a long-standing commitment to the vision of an independent state of Palestine, side by side with Israel in peace. The union also has a strong partnership with the Palestinian Authority (EEAS 2021).

These relations are reflected in the language the EU uses when making remarks to the conflict. In the first statement by the High Representative on the attacks against Israel, the union makes it clear that their disapproval is against Hamas and not the Palestinian Authority (European Council 2023).

“The EU condemns in the strongest possible terms the multiple and indiscriminate attacks across Israel by Hamas...”

“The EU calls for an immediate cessation of these senseless attacks and violence...”

“Seriously undermine Palestinian people’s aspirations for peace”

(European Council 2023).

The language used to describe Hamas’ attacks is hostile but at the same time, there is a clear desire to distinguish Hamas and Palestinians from each other. This shows that the EU values their relations with the Palestinian Authority and has an interest in not damaging this relationship. At the same time, the EU declares that it stands in solidarity with Israel. Their desire to maintain their relationship with Israel is there but the union is not portraying Israel as big of a victim as Ukraine or their support for Israel as strongly.

Another noticeable difference in this conflict is that the EU speaks in terms of both actors having innocent victims. President Michel remarked in a press
conference on October 17 that there are innocent victims both in Israel and Palestine who have lost their lives - as opposed to no mentions of lost lives in Russia in the other conflict. The focus is kept on the civilians and the protection of them in his following remarks during the Cairo Peace Summit (European Council 2023). The narrative of the Israel-Palestine conflict is not as quick to distribute blame nor the same hostile language. While the union is condemning certain actions, such as instantly condemning Hamas for their actions, they are using a softer and not as firm tone as in the Ukraine and Russia conflict. By looking back at the relations the EU has with these countries the plausible explanation is that the EU wishes to remain on positive terms with both of these actors after the conflict and is therefore deciding to be more vague in their narrative of who is at fault. It is important to note that the EU is condemning the actions of Hamas and stating them as a terrorist organization, but the union also makes sure to distinguish Hamas from the rest of Palestine. This further supports that the EU still wants to remain on positive terms with Palestine after the conflict. At the same time, the EU is also supporting Israel’s right to defend itself, thus wanting to continue a positive relationship here as well. By doing this the EU is not fully supporting either side, but also not being ‘anti’ against any of them either.

4. Findings

4.1. The Research Problem

The case study has aimed to investigate the EU’s responses to the conflict between Ukraine and Russia and between Israel and Gaza, and how they compare to each other. To investigate this, the responses from the EU during the first month of each conflict were analyzed with the use of the two IR theories: realism and constructivism. This has been done by looking at multiple responses from the first month when the EU has either addressed verbally or executed practical actions regarding the conflicts.
The findings of the research show that there are differences in the EU’s responses to these conflicts, which are based on multiple factors such as security threats, bilateral relations and the international landscape to name a few. The research problem could have been even more expanded by adding another IR theory and deepening the analysis of different aspects within the theories. An extra context could also have been provided by looking at more personal actors such as presidents, ministers and other foreign workers and more personal comments on the conflict which would provide a different angle and more views of the conflict. However, with the deadline and the pre-decided scope of the thesis, the chosen focus has been on the union itself and its explicit statements.

4.2. Theoretical Findings

The two IR theories, Realism and Constructivism, have been used to compare and understand the EU’s different responses in the conflicts between Ukraine and Russia as well as Israel and Gaza. Overall, the theories have satisfyingly fulfilled their purpose since they have provided a framework that is simple to follow and elevated the understanding of what different responses entail as well as their function. One negative aspect of using these theories is that they were designed to apply to countries operating on the international stage. Even if the EU does operate on the international stage there are differences in how the union is organized and what actions it can take since it is not a country with sovereignty but a group of countries working in collaboration. Since the union has limitations that states do not, the theories have been operationalized to accustom for these which poses a risk of the theories not capturing everything they are intended for. If another case had been chosen the theories might have been able to reach an even higher potential but because of the research problem and interest of study, these alterations were necessary and justified. It would also have been
possible to analyze the case study with other types of theories, such as the conflict theories.

4.3. Methodological Findings

The method that has been used is a case study where the examined case is the EU’s responses and how they differentiate in the conflict in Ukraine-Russia versus Israel-Gaza. The materials in use have consisted of both primary- and secondary sources where multiple methodological criteria have been applied to determine their validity and relevance. The collected material has accomplished to satisfyingly encapsulate the EU’s responses and explain the theories. Something noticeable when collecting the primary sources, particularly from the EU’s website, was that the access to their responses to the Ukraine-Russia conflict was much easier to retrieve since all the statements were collected and provided in a timeline. Whereas in regards to the Israel-Gaza conflict the researcher had to search by dates and sort through the statements on their own. There was also a limited period chosen from when the sources would be taken, which was a month after each respective conflict started. While a longer timespan would allow for more context and empirical knowledge, the fact that both conflicts have been ongoing for different periods would make it unfair to compare them in that scenario since a longer conflict gives the EU more time to respond to it. Some of the sources used to explain the theories are a bit dated, but while it is always favorable to use as newly updated sources as possible it is also beneficial to use original sources, especially when it comes to established theories like these as they do not change much over the years.

4.4. Future Research

Finally, in future research, it would be interesting to examine other conflicts where the EU influences a third party to discover if there are differences between their responses to the two conflicts analyzed in this study. In this scenario, the continued usage of the IR theories would be advised as to truly
be able to compare the different cases. It would also be compelling to see
how other third-party actors respond to the conflict and if they would handle it differently compared to the EU. Additionally, as these conflicts progress and hopefully end it would be fascinating to study further responses from the EU and if they - in the end - had any impact on the outcome of the conflicts. Based on this there are considerable opportunities to expand on the research on the EU’s response to different conflicts, both using the IR theories and others, as well as looking at other conflicts of relevance. Hopefully, this can indulge in further understanding of both how the EU operates in conflicts and how that may differ between them.

5. References


Askew, J. (2023). Europe ‘aiding and assisting’ Israel’s war in Gaza with key weapons. Euronews. 6 November.


EU. (n.d.). Aims and Values. *EU.*


https://indianstrategicknowledgeonline.com/web/Ukraine_%20Conflict%20at%20the%20Crossroads%20of%20Europe%20and%20Russia%20_Council%20on%20Foreign%20Relations.pdf [Accessed: 2023-12-05].


Norwich University. (n.d.) Key Theories of International Relations. Norwich University. [Accessed: 2023-11-08].


Thucydides. (431 BC). *The History of the Peloponnesian War*.


https://books.google.se/books?hl=sv&lr=&id=9iz9QC11keUC&oi=fnd&pg=PA173&dq=europe+israel+palestine+&ots=tnzcpfh-Sc&sig=-NDTxB5XovhWgCsRMYTshvc3rBc&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false [Accessed: 2023-12-16].
Appendix 1

Note that the appendices have separate pagination and that they have to be listed manually in table of contents.