

## **The EU's sanction revolution**

How role conceptions and the USA influenced EU-Russia sanctions

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the European Union's (EU) adoption of economic sanctions against Russia between February 22, 2022 and October 23, 2025. The sanctions mark a historical shift in EU sanctions policy, being comprehensive rather than targeted in scope. The thesis analyses the reasons behind the comprehensive sanctions, combining Role Theory and Policy Diffusion, creating the framework of Role Driven Policy Diffusion, allowing a new perspective on the issue. The thesis explores how this theoretical framework can explain the reasons behind the EU's adoption of sanctions.

The findings show that the EU changed its role conception from primarily a defender of international law, to a regional and global geostrategic player. The US influenced the EU through the cooperation and coordination of sanctions. As the EU's role conception evolved, it more closely resembled the US' role conception, thus motivating the EU to emulate US sanctions policy.

The thesis provides an alternative perspective on the reasons behind the change in EU sanctions against Russia, stressing the importance of the EU's role conception, but also US influence. The thesis also contributes to Role Theory and Policy Diffusion literature, by analysing EU role conception and transatlantic Policy Diffusion.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

A central part of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is the use of economic sanctions, also known as restrictive measures. These aim to change a country's behaviour by e.g. restricting travel or freezing assets for certain targeted individuals, but also implementing financial restrictions and import/export bans, which are more comprehensive for the nation and its population (Meissner & Graziani 2023). Since the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the larger Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, there have been major economic sanctions directed at Russia. The restrictive measures of 2014 were limited in scope, aiming at key natural and legal persons in Russian politics and economics, rather than the entire economy. This was partly due to humanitarian considerations (Meissner & Graziani 2023), but also a lack of consensus within EU member states (Korkea-aho & Lonardo 2025). Since 2022 the sanctions have increased in scope, becoming more comprehensive and affecting larger parts of the Russian economy and society (Meissner & Graziani, 2023), seemingly abandoning humanitarian considerations.

The EU has applied the sanctions against Russia in coordination with the USA (e.g. European Commission 2022i). EU-US cooperation within the area of foreign affairs is not unprecedented - the EU emulating the US views on China has been studied by Biba (2025). Lacatus & Blanc (2023, p. 12) list several areas of known EU-US cooperation, including climate change, Covid and anti-terrorism. During the 2014 Russia-Ukraine crisis, there was a pronounced EU-US cooperation regarding sanctions against Russia (Beauregard 2022).

The sanctions implemented against Russia have changed scope from targeted to comprehensive (Meissner & Graziani, 2023). Due to Russian circumvention of sanctions through imports from third countries, the EU has shifted toward secondary sanctions, meaning sanctions placed against third countries who conduct business with countries under primary sanctions (e.g. European Commission 2024b).

While the sanctions are a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the strict and global nature of the sanctions marks a distinct shift in EU policy. Secondary sanctions are new for the EU, but they have been a US strategy for a longer period of time, e.g. towards Cuba

(Härkönnen 2024, p.266). The EU has previously opposed secondary sanctions (Härkönnen 2024, p.270), making the shift in EU policy surprising.

## **1.2 Research problem**

There has been a distinct shift in the EU's sanctions toward Russia between 2022-2025. The EU has shown a shift in Russian sanctions policy, from being targeted against certain key individuals and industries, to being more comprehensive, thus affecting large parts of the Russian economy and populace (Meissner & Graziani, 2023). In more recent EU regulation, a shift toward secondary sanctions against Russia has also been made (e.g. European Commission 2023f). The sanctions are similar to those that the US has adopted against Cuba (Härkönnen 2024, p.266). Historically the EU has criticised these sanctions, but the EU are adopting similar measures against Russia. What explains this shift in attitude and policy adoption?

The US is shown to have an influence on EU policymaking, (Biba, 2025) and the transatlantic nations are known to cooperate within sanctions against Russia, acting as one unit (Beauregard, 2022 p.33). The EU and US share a long history of cooperation within sanctions and other policy areas, with the US influencing EU policy (Beauregard, 2022 p.33, Lacatus & Blanc 2023, Biba 2025). To what degree then, has EU-US cooperation impacted EU sanctions against Russia?

Naturally, there are a multitude of theories that aim to explain why a nation (or an intergovernmental institution such as the EU) shifts its foreign policy, all focusing on different values and variables. A realist approach might see EU sanctions as a balancing act - a response to Russia as a growing military threat (Donnelly 2022). This doesn't however provide a satisfying explanation, since the impact of the sanctions is limited (Glenn, 2023). Economic sanctions with a limited impact cannot be understood as the EU balancing against Russia. Realism is also unable to explain the cooperation within sanctions against Russia (Beauregard, 2022). A liberal approach also struggles in explaining the shift in sanctions. As Biba (2025) highlights, sanctions impact a nation's citizens in a negative way by limiting access to trade and resources, and is therefore incompatible with the liberal perspective (Burchill 2022).

Several areas surrounding the EU sanctions against Russia have been studied. The fact that sanctions have become more comprehensive in scope (Meissner & Graziani, 2023), the internal reasons behind the move toward more comprehensive sanctions (Sanus, Akgül-Acikmese, Karaoguz, 2024. Korkhea-aho & Lonardo, 2025), and how sanction circumvention can be minimised (Hilgenstock, Ribakova, Vlasyuk & Wolff, 2024) have all been studied. However, the changes in sanctions policy as a result of a change in EU role conception and Policy Diffusion has not been studied. Moreover, realism and liberalism leave much to be desired in explaining this shift. Biba (2025) examined the EU emulating a US policy regarding China using Role Theory, which enables this study to do a similar evaluation of the EU emulating US sanctions against Russia. Policy Diffusion could also provide an explanation into the change in EU sanctions, analysing interplay between the EU and US in the area of sanctions. Gilardi & Wasserfallen (2019) explain how states do not adopt policies without discrimination., but rather adopt policies that already fit their politics. There isn't however a theoretical framework which encompasses both the internal politics (or role conception) of the state, and the Policy Diffusion mechanisms. According to Gilardi & Wasserfallen (2019), the policy mechanisms drive policy change, while internal politics gatekeep the policies enacted.

### **1.3 Aim**

This thesis aims to analyse the qualitative change in EU sanctions policy, by reviewing EU role conception and transatlantic Policy Diffusion from the US to the EU. Qualitative change relates to the change in sanctions from targeted to comprehensive. To explain the change, the thesis will create a new theoretical framework - Role Driven Policy Diffusion. The framework combines key characteristics of Role Theory and Policy Diffusion, which creates a new perspective on the issue.

Since Role Driven Policy Diffusion explains changes in policy adoption as originating in a nation's role conceptions, but also Policy Diffusion mechanics. The Policy Diffusion mechanics of this thesis will relate to the US and EU. This analysis will be achieved by examining EU speeches indicating role conceptions relating to the release of EU sanction packages, and diffusion mechanisms relating interactions with the US.

This analysis will facilitate a deeper understanding of EU role conceptions between 2022-2025, in relation to the EU's restrictive measures against Russia. Furthermore, the thesis will address a research gap within international relations, relating to how transatlantic Policy Diffusion has affected the adoption of sanctions against Russia. It also facilitates a review of EU role conception between 2022-2025, thus filling another research gap.

#### **1.4 Research questions**

For this thesis, three research questions are being used. One main research question and two sub-questions. The main research question is the main focus of the thesis, and explores the wider area of Role Driven Policy Diffusion. The sub-questions are narrower, aiming to enable better clarity, precision and comprehensiveness for the researcher, as well as the reader. The first sub-question explores role conception, with the second examining Policy Diffusion between the EU and US. Collectively, they answer the main research question, since Role Driven Policy Diffusion is a combination of Role Theory and Policy Diffusion.

The date between February 22, 2022 and October 23, 2025 was chosen since this reflects the span between the first and 19th EU sanctions package against Russia.

#### **Main research question**

How can Role Driven Policy Diffusion explain the qualitative change in EU sanctions directed to Russia between February 22, 2022 and October 23, 2025?

#### **Sub-questions**

1. How has EU role conceptions changed between February 22, 2022 and October 23, 2025, in relation to sanctions against Russia?
2. How has Policy Diffusion between the US and EU influenced EU sanction policy against Russia between February 22, 2022 and October 23, 2025?

While the second sub-question assumes that Policy Diffusion between the EU and the US exists, this assumption is grounded in previous research, such as Beauregard (2022) and Lacatus & Blanc (2023). The following sections will explore this further.

## **2.1 Literature review**

Since the aim of the thesis is to analyse the shift in EU sanctions policy using Role Driven Policy Diffusion, the literature review will examine the literature on EU sanctions, the literature on Role Theory applied to the EU, and Policy Diffusion through transatlantic cooperation between the US and EU.

### **Sanctions**

The literature on sanctions is wide and substantial, dealing with the how and why of sanctions in general, and EU sanctions directed toward Russia in particular. Meissner & Graziani (2023) analyses the history of EU sanctions against Russia since 2014, and makes the distinction between targeted and comprehensive sanctions. The early sanctions against Russia were targeted against specific natural and legal persons, whereas the sanctions imposed after 2022 have been more comprehensive in scope. The former encompassed travel bans and asset freezes, the latter affected larger aspects of everyday life with sanctions in the areas of finance, economy and transport.

The authors also highlight the conditions which they theorise affect the development of sanctions. These include the EU's humanitarian principles which might dissuade the EU from imposing sanctions with a large negative impact on the general populace of a receiving country. Domestic considerations are also likely to shape sanctions, since sanctions are adopted in line with lobbying activities. The lobbying and interest groups are minimising the negative economic impact on the sender state. Lastly there are geostrategical considerations which impact the decision making around sanctions. Sanctions are meant to be proportional to the target state's behaviour, and since the events of 2022 posed a threat to the European community, they would be expected to maximise the cost for the target state. The authors find that the humanitarian considerations have taken a back seat in favour of punitive sanctions against Russia since 2022 (Meissner & Graziani, 2023). Korkea-aho & Lonardo (2025) identify causes for the changed sanction policy in the role of the European Commission. Due to the scale and time limitations, the commission has taken on a larger role in the formation of sanctions, which has streamlined the process. While they agree that the extraordinary conditions of the invasion were pivotal to the formation of sanctions, they argue that the conditions were a unifying force in a Europe otherwise in disagreement.

The articles above review the internal factors which affect EU sanctions adoption. This motivates the aim of the thesis, since the interplay of US Policy Diffusion is not explored. Importantly, the research above shows how multiple factors are at play regarding the adoption of sanctions. The results of this thesis are therefore not categorical, but rather a piece of the entire explanation.

Glenn (2023) identifies the strategies that Russia has adopted to minimise the economic blow of western sanctions. Firstly, Russia employs protectionistic policies by e.g. creating substitutes for American goods, creating their own Payment Processing System, and the creation of a tax-free zone for returning Russian foreign investments. Secondly, by creating and maintaining relations with China and African states, they diversify their trade and create material offsets. This is also a diplomatic move to display the international support that Moscow receives. Third, retaliation has been employed as a Russian strategy. By recalling diplomats and imposing counter sanctions, they “obscure perceptions of international support [...] and focus domestic attention on an external threat requiring a strong government in Moscow to address” (Glenn, 2023 p. 110). Lastly, “de-dollarisation” reduces the risk for Russia to be cut off from the global economic system, as well as reducing the impact of sanctions that impact dollar trading (Glenn, 2023).

As a result, the Russian “sanctions proofing” has evoked three main lessons to keep sanctions effective. 1) Multilateral coordination makes de-dollarisation a less efficient solution. 2) A strong dollar has the effect of keeping third parties out of trading with sanctioned states, not wanting to risk secondary sanctions and being cut off the US market. 3) Other policies than sanctions need to be explored, since the Russian export of oil and gas has to be met. If Russia is able to keep up the export of oil and gas, the sanctions will have little to no effect (Glenn, 2023).

Hilgenstock, Ribakova, Vlasyuk & Wolff (2024) agree that sanctions are not effective, but for a different reason. The sanctions the EU imposed on Russia since 2022 are unprecedented in speed, scope and comprehensiveness. They are also imposed on a - until recently - integrated trading partner. The EU has a lack of experience with these types of sanctions, which has caused challenges. The sanctions aim to restrict Russian access to military goods, but have failed in this aim. Russia is able to circumvent sanctions by importing goods via third countries such as China, Hong Kong, Turkey and the UAE, which calls for new methods. The authors argue that private actors partly are to blame due to lacking Know-Your-Customer

routines. These routines are common in finance, and banks are therefore useful in collecting trade related data, to further reduce sanction evasion (Hilgenstock, Ribakova, Vlasyuk & Wolff, 2024).

By examining the research above, an explanation to the aggressive sanctions against Russia and third countries is provided. Since Russian sanctions are being circumvented, a large piece of EU sanction policy against Russia concerns anti-circumvention.

### **Role Theory**

Role Theory has been applied to explain other shifts in EU policy. Biba (2025) seeks to explain the recent alignment in China policy between the EU and US. Role Theory was utilised to examine the change in EU policy toward China. Since the EU moved toward the US, both US and EU role conceptions were studied by analysing relevant speeches and official documents. The EU embodied the role as a normative power with a mission to westernise China during the early 2000s. This eventually made them disillusioned, since China moved away from the EU in regards to values. Differences in values made diplomacy hard, and the EU's role conceptions changed from normative power to geostrategical power. This in turn aligned the EU more toward the US role conception of a global hegemon, which initiated cooperation. Biba's research both points toward transatlantic cooperation and shifts in Role Theory, providing essential background to the thesis. Biba (2025) also shows the potential of Role Theory to analyse the non-material changes which influence a polity's foreign policy, which adds to its relevance in this thesis. Furthermore the article's account of the EU and US role conceptions have influenced the role conceptions used in this thesis. The role conception of the EU as a normative great power, but also a geostrategic great power, has been identified in the following analysis. The thesis also draws from Biba's identification of the US role conception of a global hegemon.

### **EU-US Policy Diffusion**

Lacatus & Blanc (2024) examines EU-US cooperation during and after the 2020 presidential election. After Trump's first presidency, there was a need to renew transatlantic cooperation. Cooperation was initiated in several areas, such as Covid and climate change. The paper is highly relevant to the thesis, since it establishes the presence, importance, and willingness of EU-US cooperation during the Biden administration. Though this thesis explores EU-US

Policy Diffusion between 2022-2025, most, but not all of the years studied below are during the Biden administration.

Beauregard (2022) explores the sanctions directed towards Russia in 2014, and why the transatlantic coordination was so successful. His research utilises emotional resonance to explain the success in coordination between the nations. Emotional resonance explains why the EU and US both were willing to adopt sanctions against Russia, though they were costly for them. This research provides a history of EU-US cooperation with regard to sanctions against Russia. Cooperation and coordination has been common between the two units, in relation to sanctions against Russia. This further strengthens the notion of transatlantic Policy Diffusion having a large impact on EU policy. This theme will be further explored in the thesis.

## **2.2 Theoretical framework**

This thesis will combine Role Theory and Policy Diffusion to explain the EU's change in sanction policy 2022-2025. This will create the new theory of Role Driven Policy Diffusion. Role Theory is utilised since it focuses on the immaterial rather than material aspects of international relations. It has also been used to explain similar phenomena (see Biba, 2025). Since this thesis focuses on sanctions legislation, Policy Diffusion will provide a perspective on how foreign policies can influence EU legislation.

### **2.2.1 Role Theory**

Role Theory takes inspiration from psychology, where a person's understanding of themselves paired with the alter's expectations shapes the person's actions. Holsti (1970) applies this to states. While other theories also have identified the existence of roles in e.g. neutral, allied and satellite states, Holsti sees these as far too general. He realises that two neutral states or great powers can have varied behaviours. The power of a state does not determine its behaviour. Instead, two main independent variables constitute a state's behaviour: the National Role Conception (NRC) and the national role prescription of other states/the system.

Changes and differences in NRCs between states can have different causes, such as a nation's interest groups, political parties, ideology, established roles, the personality of key actors, internal opinion, geography and various resources. Critical events also form a nation's role conceptions, through how it is interpreted by the state (Holsti 1970). These factors may

influence a state's willingness to engage with other states in general, or a state in particular. A state with staunch anti-imperial sentiments will react stronger against imperial states; the mood of the populace will impact how a state acts; and the personalities of key decision makers are decisive for the NRC.

The external environment also plays a part in forming the role prescriptions. This includes the structure of the international system, values of the system, values expressed through organisations, and the critical events that form the values of the system. When, however, the internal role conceptions and external role prescriptions clash, the former tends to take precedence over the latter (Holsti 1970).

Meanwhile, a state is not limited by a single NRC. By analysing the speeches of state leaders, the average state was observed to embody several different roles. Importantly for this thesis, these roles can differ on regional vs. international levels (Holsti 1970). In this examination of EU sanction policy, Role Theory allows us to examine many possible variables, since it both opens for non-material explanations and multiple roles for single actors.

### **2.2.2 Policy Diffusion**

Along with Role Theory, Policy Diffusion will be used as a complementary framework to examine and understand the influence of pre-existing US policy on EU sanction policy. Blatter, Portmann & Rausis (2022) define Policy Diffusion as the policymaking and policy outcomes in one polity influencing the policymaking and policy outcome in another polity. Policies from one polity can diffuse through four different mechanisms: learning, competition, coercion and emulation. 1) The success or failure of a policy in a different polity as a source of **learning**. Since it is difficult to foresee the consequences of a policy beforehand, experiences from other polities have a large influence on adoption. 2) Resource **competition** as a motivating factor in influencing the policies of rivaling polities. Countries anticipate the behaviour of competing countries to maintain an edge, typical for tax legislation. 3) **Coercion** from international organisations or institutions. Visible in certain legislation needing to be followed for a country to gain access to resources (IMF financial help, or EU membership). 4) **Emulation** of policies because of appropriateness, rather than the objective characteristics. This can be understood as norm diffusion (Gilardi & Wasserfallen, 2019, p. 1245. Gilardi, 2012).

Policy Diffusion as a field has interdisciplinary roots, and has been identified by several authors as incoherent in its epistemology as a consequence. Blatter, Portmann & Rausis (2022) distinguish between a rationalist and constructivist approach to Policy Diffusion, whereby the rationalist view focuses on the polity and its components (e.g. a state and its ministers), and the constructivist view focuses on the policy itself, as well as the reason behind its adoption (interest groups etc.). This framework will however not be adopted.

While Policy Diffusion shows how states and policies influence polities, it tends to be technocratic, believing that the policy process is parallel, almost disconnected, from politics. Rather, legislation needs to be understood with politics as a background (Gilardi & Wasserfallen, 2019) or as this thesis argues, with the role conception as a background. This thesis will combine Policy Diffusion and Role Theory into the following framework.

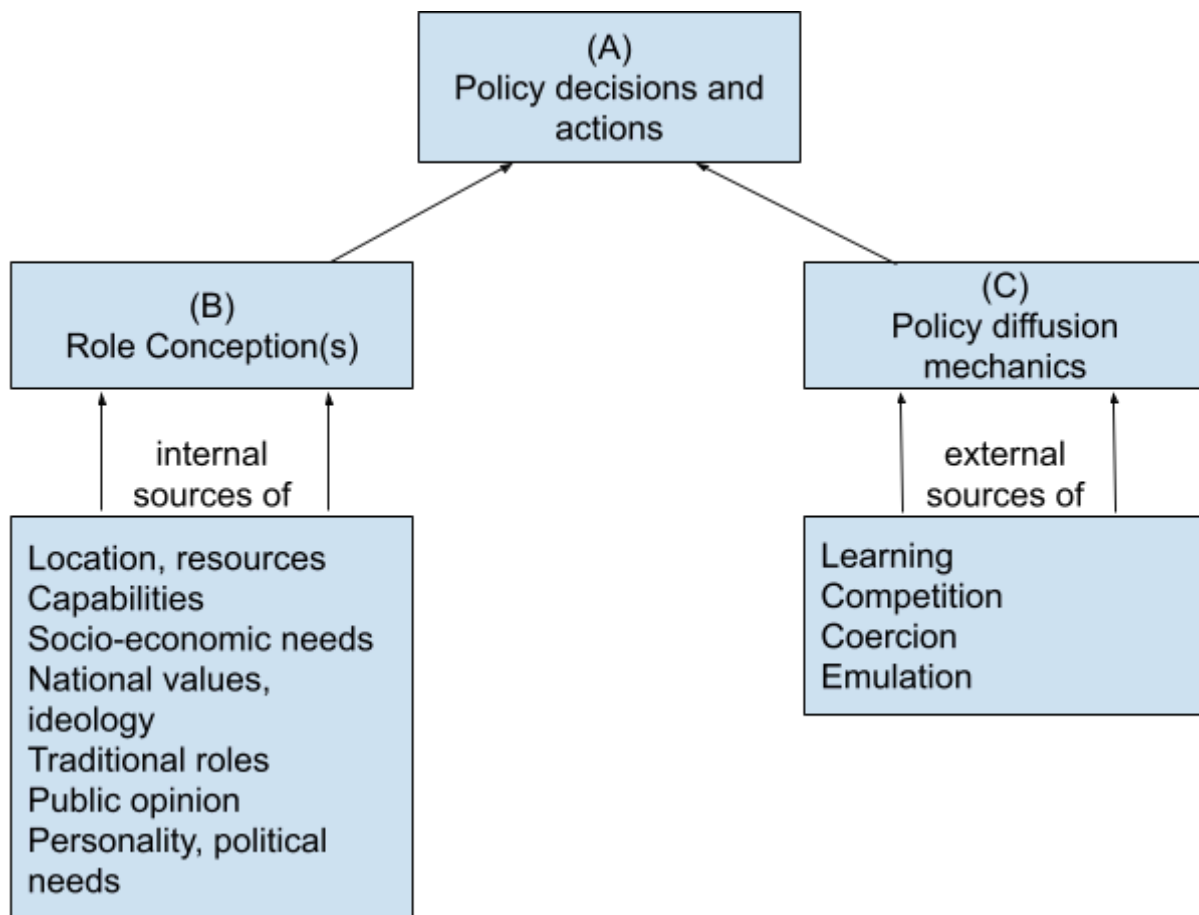
### **2.2.3 Role Driven Policy Diffusion**

Role Theory can provide useful insight into policy change, by highlighting non-material variables such as: a) the national role conception(s) - the unit's conception of their role in relation to other units, and b) role prescription(s) - how the expectations of other units influence the behaviour of a unit (Holsti, 1970).

Policy Diffusion is able to provide key insight into how and why US sanctions policy has influenced EU sanctions legislation, and its adoption of secondary sanctions (see Beauregard 2022 and Biba 2025). Policy Diffusion focuses on how policies and legislation in one country can influence another, through different mechanisms such as learning, competition, coercion and emulation (Gilardi 2012).

These theoretical frameworks both provide valuable insights into the mechanics at play in the shift of EU sanctions legislation. Role Theory provides an evaluation of the non-material political motivation behind the shift in sanctions. Policy Diffusion provides insight into how policies outside the EU can influence EU legislation in various ways. These frameworks will therefore be combined into the new framework of *Role Driven Policy Diffusion*.

This thesis proposes the framework of Role Driven Policy Diffusion. This framework seeks to complement the two theories, while also making it more applicable to the field of policy analysis.



*The figure above was illustrated by the author.*

Relating to the thesis, the EU is found in A and B, while the US finds itself under C. The EU's role conception (A) bases itself upon the variables stated above, and expresses itself through speech acts from EU ministers and presidents. The Policy Diffusion mechanics (C) relate to the EU's relation to the US, i.e. how the US influences the EU, directly or indirectly. The policy decision itself is committed by the EU.

The framework of Role Driven Policy Diffusion builds upon the Role Theory framework developed by Holsti (1970), whereby a unit's actions are based on its status. The nation's status is constituted by the national role conceptions and the alter's role prescriptions.

This framework has been modified for Policy Diffusion analysis. The external prescriptions, or expectations in Holsti's framework, have been replaced with the four main mechanics of Policy Diffusion, since these also are external in nature, influencing the behaviour of a unit by external influences/pressures (especially noticeable for coercion and emulation). Note the shift from a focus on roles, to the adaption to policy related influences. This framework maintains a role driven analysis, but with a greater applicability to policy related influences.

Role Driven Policy Diffusion builds upon Role Theory, whereby a unit's actions are based on its (B) role conceptions and the (C) external Policy Diffusion drivers. Ideologies influence, bias and prioritise certain types of policies. A neo-liberal state is more willing to adopt tax-minimising legislation, compared to a socialist state, even with the same information and analysis available. States do not simply analyse the information available to them, and make the "best" policy decision (Gilardi & Wasserfallen, 2019). The information is rather filtered through (B) role conceptions and (C) Policy Diffusion mechanics, before the (A) policy decision is made.

The national role conceptions are defined through speeches by the relevant representatives. States with similar role conceptions are more likely to collaborate. However, the role conception does not solely define a state's actions (Holsti 1970). Similarly, a state's willingness to adopt a new policy is not solely based on domestic factors. External factors play a major role in influencing policy, directly or indirectly. The external factors are constituted by the four mechanics of learning, competition, coercion and emulation (Gilardi, 2012). The external expectations from Role Theory (role prescriptions) are thereby replaced by the mechanisms from Policy Diffusion.

Summarily, the tendency of a state to adopt a policy (A) is twofold - the internal factors constituted by a unit's national role conception(s) (B) and the Policy Diffusion mechanics (C). While these mechanics enable a state's adoption of a policy, the national role conception gatekeeps the decision to implement it.

This framework will be applied for the analysis of European Commission statements in the following sections. The framework will be operationalised in section 3.5.

### **2.3 Operationalisation**

The theory has been operationalised in the coding framework section (3.5).

### **3 Method**

#### **3.1 Research design**

To best evaluate the effect of role conceptions and Policy Diffusion, a qualitative content analysis has been applied to this thesis. This is due to it being a method commonly paired with Role Theory, because of the method's reliability and transparency (see Holsti 1970 p.273-283, Le Prestre 1997 p.11-14, Strycharz 2022 p. 51-54). Gilardi (2012) also advocated for the use of content analysis as a method for Policy Diffusion, and mentioned the growing availability of policy agendas, allowing for analysis of the possible transatlantic diffusion. Critics may argue that the validity of content analysis of speeches is limited, since speeches don't necessarily reflect the policymaker's intentions or beliefs. Strycharz (2022) dismissed this critique on several grounds, but at the most basic level - people's words tend to reflect their thoughts and beliefs, and the actions of countries tend to coincide well with the speeches of national leaders.

There are multiple approaches available for a qualitative content analysis, three of which are reviewed by Hsieh and Shannon (2005). With consideration of the three approaches, this thesis uses the directed content analysis approach. The directed content analysis is theory-driven, building upon a theoretical framework and aiming to validate or extend it. It uses a framework to validate it, or apply it to new data (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005 p. 1281-1283). The aim of the thesis is to apply a theoretical framework to a case, and directed content analysis is fitting the aim of the thesis.

The conventional content analysis is more appropriate for inductive approaches with limited prior research in the area. It bases itself upon the data, and forms new understanding based on the findings. Since Role Driven Policy Diffusion relies heavily on preconceived variables from both Role Theory and Policy Diffusion theory, a deductive directed content analysis was suitable as a method.

Role identification, however, is generally understood as both an inductive and a deductive approach (Strycharz, 2022 p. 52). I have both analysed possible roles by reading, coding, and analysing EU speeches, while also having a preconception of the roles of the EU and US through earlier literature (see Biba 2025). Policy Diffusion is best understood as a deductive

approach, using the four main mechanisms (learning, competition, coercion, and emulation) as a framework and stepping stones for further analysis.

The thesis is therefore best understood as mainly deductive, since established theories are used to examine EU speeches and Policy Diffusion, while also influencing the author's understanding of EU role conceptions. Meanwhile, the understanding of EU role conceptions are necessarily based on the speeches themselves, and therefore allowing inductive adjustments accounting for emerging themes.

As with the EU's role conceptions, the Policy Diffusion mechanics are affected by the element of interpretation from the author, creating the need for further research to ensure reliability.

### **3.2 Data collection**

The data concerning EU sanctions was collected from press statements from the European Commission's press corner on its website. The statements collected were coinciding with, or otherwise relating to sanctions packages against Russia released between February 22, 2022 and October 23, 2025, i.e. the 1st-19th sanctions packages against Russia. The statements were found through the search feature on the European Commission website, using the key phrases "Russia sanction" and "Sanctions package" to find pages relevant to the thesis. The searches were filtered by the search categories of *speeches* and *statements* to analyse the role conceptions of the EU. These categories were selected since they better reflect the role conceptions of the EU than e.g. news or factsheets.

In total, 38 sources from the European Commission were analysed: 14 sources from 2022, 8 from 2023, 7 from 2024, and 9 from 2025.

During the coding, G7 and the EU-US Trade and Technology Council (TTC) stood out as a node of collaboration, which prompted the inclusion of statements from the respective institutions, also relating to sanctions against Russia. The EU-US Trade and Technology Council (TTC) statements between 2022-2025 were collected, as well as G7 statements on the European Commission website relating to sanctions against Russia. These statements were collected from the European Commission website ([commission.europa.eu](https://commission.europa.eu)).

### **3.3 Data analysis**

After the data was collected, a coding framework was developed with variables based on Role Theory and Policy Diffusion theory (see section 3.5). The sources were ordered and reviewed in order of date, ranging from the earliest to the latest sources. Only the parts of the material relating to sanctions were reviewed and coded. The coding was based on the explicit elements of a text (Bergström & Boréus, 2012 p.51). These elements, in turn, were interpreted to reveal the non-explicit, such as correlations.

After a source was read, the relevant coding units were identified in the coding framework. The finding was summarized in a digital spreadsheet, to enable a better overview for the researcher.

### **3.4 Limitations**

While the summarisation of events and a chronological ordering of data allowed for a better overview of events and turning points for the author, this causes at least one issue of reliability: the risk that the interpretation of the data changes as the author becomes more familiar with it. In turn, this might have influenced how the data was interpreted and coded in different periods. This also leads into the issue of inter-coder reliability. Due to limitations in time, the researcher was not able to code the material in two far-apart instances. This makes it impossible to control the inter-coder subjectivity, and the clarity of the coding framework (Bergström & Boréus, 2012 p.56-57). These limitations affect the validity of the study, and thereby the generalisation of the results. Future research should address these limitations by reviewing the dataset in a random order with dual-coding to ensure better reliability. After coding the entire dataset, the earliest sources were revisited and recoded. No major discrepancies were found, which suggests that the change in interpretation from the author was limited.

To address generalisability, the findings of this thesis is limited to the special circumstances of EU-US relations, as well as their relations to Russia, and the background to the Russia-Ukraine war. The framework used in this thesis, is however intended to be used in other cases.

Furthermore, this thesis makes the generalisation of the EU as a single actor, acknowledging but not examining the internal conflict of interests between member states, in favour of seeing the EU as a unified, single actor with a clear expression of role conceptions. In turn,

the statements of the European Commission do not necessarily reflect the role conception of all member states, merely the role conception of the high-appointed officials in the European Commission.

### **3.5 Coding framework**

The following coding framework was created by the author based on previous research. The codes aim to cover relevant aspects of the theoretical framework, i.e. the policy decision and actions, role conception(s), and Policy Diffusion mechanisms.

#### **Policy adoption**

Policy adoption covers an adopted policy in the EU, as stated in the coded document. The code was only registered if it was a sanction-related policy decision. If the data showed no policy adoption, or if the policy adoption was not related to sanctions against Russia, the cell was either left blank or registered as “not sanctions related”, ”no policy adoption”, or a similar descriptive.

#### **Role conception**

Role conception relates to the EU’s explicit motivation for an action. This code builds upon Holsti’s (1970) concept of role conception. The analysed statement has to be in relation to the EU’s self perception, and cannot relate to another state. An example of an explicit role conception is as follows: “As long as the bloodshed in Ukraine continues, Europe will maintain diplomatic and, in particular, economic pressure on Russia” (European Commission 2024c). In this statement, von der Leyen frames the EU’s role conception as a geostrategic player against Russia.

#### **Learning, Competition, Coercion and Emulation**

These four coding units are derived from Gilardi’s (2012) four Policy Diffusion mechanisms. Since these variables were developed to relate to the general study of Policy Diffusion, some variables were not relevant to the case in this thesis. All four mechanisms were however included to enable the framework to be used in different cases. Competition and coercion, though a part of the general theory of Policy Diffusion, were not found to be meaningful in this thesis. No examples of these coding units can therefore be given relating to the subject of the thesis. General definitions and examples are given below for the coding units.

Learning relates to a unit adopting a policy based on the success or failure of the policy, in another legislative unit (Ibid). For this thesis, cooperation and coordination were commonly found in the material. These concepts were registered as learning in the coding framework, since learning most closely relates to cooperation/coordination, of the four Policy Diffusion mechanics. The researcher did not create a new, separate code for cooperation/coordination, since it would not be based on any previous research.

Emulation is the adoption of a policy based on perceived “appropriateness” (Ibid). This thesis builds upon the theory that information, and policies in particular, are filtered through a nation’s self perception and beliefs (Gilardi & Wasserfallen 2019). States are therefore more likely to adopt or emulate legislation from a state with a similar role conception. Examples of emulation in this thesis relate to shared values and visions between the EU and the US. Examples of emulation were most commonly found in joint EU-US statements, where the two parts display shared values and plans for legislation.

Coding unit	Definition	Example of coding unit
Policy adoption	The policy decision relating to a source.	[Sanctions] Targeting the Russian defence sector, but also importantly including export restrictions to Iranian entities. Also includes measures against circumvention (European Commission 2023a)
Role conception	The EUs conception of its main roles in the international or regional system.	Geostrategic player. Sanctions are used as leverage in peace talks. Maintain peace in Europe. Mentioning of the war as a violation of the UN charter (European Commission 2025a)
Learning	A unit learning from the success/failiure of a policy, thus affecting their willingness to adopt a policy.	Coordinating sanctions through the EU-US Trade and Technology Council (European Commission 2023c)
Competition	Two units anticipating each others behaviour to gain a competitive edge.	Race-to-the-bottom tax legislation. (Gilardi, 2012)
Coercion	International institutions or powerful nations coercing other nations to follow legislation to gain access to resources.	Financial help from IMF (Gilardi, 2012)

Emulation	Adoption of policies due to their degree of appropriateness.	The EU emulating their views with the US in using sanctions against Russia (European Commission 2022h)
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## 4 Results

These are the following results from coding the press statements from the European Commission (henceforth Commission), as well as the EU-US Trade and Technology Council (TTC) press releases, G7 statements and Presidential Executive Orders, all relating to the sanctions directed toward Russia between 2022-2025. To restate the research question: “How can Role Driven Policy Diffusion explain the qualitative change in EU sanctions directed to Russia from 2022-2025?”

The result was presented in a chronological order through a year-by-year review. This structure allowed a better overview of the change in variables over time. The review began in the first sanctions package in February 2022, to the 19th package in October 2025.

### 4.1 Overview of the findings

The following section gives an overview of the empirical findings, with limited discussion. The findings are later summarised under section 4.2 and discussed under section 4.3.

Year	Policy adoption	Role conceptions	Diffusion mechanics
2022	Targeted and sectoral sanctions within Russia	Defender of international law. Regional geostrategic player	Learning, emulation
2023	Anti-circumvention by listing third-country entities for sanctions	Regional and global geostrategic player. Defender of international law.	Learning, emulation
2024	Anti-circumvention by listing third-country entities for sanctions	Regional and global geostrategic power. Defender of international law.	Learning, emulation
2025	Sanctions in several areas aiming at the Russian financial, oil and military sector. Sanctions against	Global geostrategic player. Peacebroker. Defender of international law.	Learning, emulation

	entities in third countries.		
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#### **4.1.1 2022 - A shift in EU role conception**

##### **Policy adoption**

The first sanctions against Russia were targeted against a small number of Russian individuals involved with the war (European Commission, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d). Gradually the sanctions became sectoral, i.e. encompassing all entities involved in a certain sector. In this case financial entities and entities involved in the Russian military (European Commission, 2022f, 2022g, 2022l, 2022n).

##### **Role conceptions**

The first sanctions package was announced on February 23 2022, after the Russian recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk, but before the larger invasion of Ukraine. The adoption of the first sanctions package was motivated by the illegal nature of the recognition and the de-stabilising effect of the actions on the situation in Ukraine (European Commission, 2022a & 2022b). The EU's role conceptions involve them as defenders of Ukraine and international law.

After the invasion the EU launches the second sanctions package, further emphasising their role as a defender of the peace order, international law, and the rules based system. The sanctions remain directed toward a number of key individuals, asset freezes travel bans, etc (European Commission, 2022c).

The statement connected to the first and third package declare that the sanctions are formed by cooperation with allies (European Commission 2022a & 2022d), and by the third package, the rhetoric takes a geostrategic turn by targeting the Russian military. The role conception of "geostrategic player" is largely replacing the "defender of international law" conception in the sanction statements following the 3rd package. This is mainly noted through the focus on disrupting and crippling the Russian economy and/or military, and the commitment to stop the war.

Further sanctions during 2022 target the oil sector (European Commission, 2022c, 2022j, 2022l), banking/financial sector (European Commission 2022c, 2022d, 2022j, 2022n), and

military (European Commission 2022c, 2022l, 2022n). Meanwhile, the cooperation between the US and EU is strengthening through the EU-US TTC, and the EU embodies the role conception of “transatlantic partner”, through the partnership with the USA. Through the TTC, the EU also embodies the role conception of a “shaper of the future global standards on technology and security” (European Commission 2022i & 2022m).

### **Policy Diffusion**

The main mechanic of Policy Diffusion in 2022 was learning. In various statements, the emphasis lied on cooperation with allies, among them the US through TTC. Emulation could also be a driver of policy adoption - the EU emulating US sanctions because of their similar role conceptions. This argument will be expanded upon in the results discussion (4.3).

#### **4.1.2 2023 - Going global**

### **Policy adoption**

On the one year mark of the Russian invasion, the EU launched their 10th sanctions package. Over 2023, only three sanctions packages are adopted, as compared to the 9 packages adopted in 2022. A large theme for the sanctions themselves are anti-circumvention measures, listing entities in third countries as targets for sanctions (European Commission 2023a, 2023b, 2023e, 2023f, 2023g).

### **Role conceptions**

The main role conception during 2023 was regional and global geostrategic player. Efforts were not only larger in scope in regards to the Russian economy and war effort, but also larger in a geographical scope (European Commission 2023a, 2023b, 2023e, 2023f, 2023g). The sanctions were regional, but also global, which emphasises the role of the EU as a regional and global geostrategical player. The role of the EU as a defender of international law is still present (European Commission 2023e), but it is not as prominent as other role conceptions.

### **Policy Diffusion**

The main mechanics of Policy Diffusion were learning through the cooperation and coordination of sanctions with the US (European Commission 2023b, 2023c, 2023d, 2023h). Emulation was also a mechanic at play, with the US influencing the norms of policies.

### **4.1.3 2024 - Breaking Russia**

#### **Policy adoption**

The main policies adopted during 2024 were anti-circumvention measures targeted against entities in third countries (European Commission, 2024b, 2024d).

#### **Role conceptions**

In 2024, the EU enforced their role as a key geostrategic player in the defence of Ukraine against Russia (European Commission, 2024b, 2024c, 2024d, 2024f, 2024g). There is a strong anti-Russian, pro-Ukrainian role conception present, as Joseph Borell states in the press release of the 14th sanctions package.

Our sanctions have already significantly weakened the Russian economy and prevented Putin from accomplishing his plans to destroy Ukraine, although he still continues the illegal aggression targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure. The 14th package of sanctions demonstrates our unity in supporting Ukraine and seeking to limit Russia's criminal activities against Ukrainians, including efforts to circumvent EU measures. (European Commission, 2024f)

The global scope increased by punishing entities in third countries, such as China (European Commission, 2024b, 2024d). EU parent companies were also required to by their “best efforts” ensure that their daughter companies located outside the EU follow EU sanctions (European Commission, 2024f).

The role conception of “defender of international law” was present (European Commission 2024b), but less so than “geostrategic player”.

#### **Policy Diffusion**

During this period, transatlantic cooperation is a large theme in the material. As collaboration with the US and G7 continues (European Commission, 2024a, 2024d, 2024e), learning from and emulation of US and G7 sanction policy are the primary Policy Diffusion mechanics of 2024.

#### **4.1.4 2025 - Peace broker**

##### **Policy adoption**

In 2025 there are multiple policies adopted which aim towards breaking the Russian war effort, and increasing the chance of a peace deal. There are financial sanctions (European Commission 2025a), the price cap of Russian oil is lowered (European Commission, 2025f), further sanctions are directed toward the oil sector and third country entities (European Commission 2025i), and sanctions are further coordinated with the US and G7 (European Commission 2025b, 2025d, 2025e, 2025g).

##### **Role conceptions**

On the 3rd year mark of the invasion the EU announced the 16th sanctions package against Russia. The role of sanctions as a means to create peace is stressed (European Commission 2025a), which implies the EU role conception of a “peace broker”. “Global geostrategical player” was also prevalent as the increased its scope to list entities outside of the EU and Russia (European Commission 2025a, 2025c, 2025d, 2025e, 2025f, 2025h, 2025f). The role of the EU as a “defender of international law” is also present (2025a).

##### **Policy Diffusion**

As collaboration and coordination with the US and G7 members continue, there is further learning and emulation of US sanctions policy (European Commission, 2025b, 2025d, 2025e, 2025g).

#### **4.2 Main patterns**

By reviewing the year-by-year policy adoptions, role conceptions and diffusion mechanisms, some main patterns stand out. In early 2022, the sanctions were mainly aimed towards a small group of individuals and entities, politically or militarily involved in the war. This was paired with a “defender of international law” role conception. During this time, the EU were adopting sanctions in coordination with their allies, and adopting appropriate sanctions through learning from others, but also emulating what was normatively expected.

There was however a shift in both policy adoption and role conception by the end of the year. The “defender of international law” conception was followed by the geostrategic player, which involved the EU (if indirectly) in the war against Russia. The sanctions and role conception was directed towards making a negative impact on the Russian war effort and economy. This role conception was both regional, such as including Belarus in the sanctions against Russia (e.g. European Commission 2022e) and global, taking the liberty of sanctioning entities in third nations for breaking EU sanctions.

Meanwhile, the collaboration with the US through the TTC is increasing, which further acts as a learning and emulating driver of Policy Diffusion.

A recurring pattern was that harsher and more comprehensive sanctions were often met with a stronger geostrategical role conception from the EU.

### **4.3 Results discussion**

To recap, according to the theoretical framework used for this thesis (2.2.3), the policy decisions of a legislative unit is partly influenced by the unit’s role conception(s), and partly by Policy Diffusion mechanics (such as learning, competition, etc). Role conceptions are expressed through the speeches and statements of leaders or ministers. Policy Diffusion mechanics, meanwhile, are the drivers behind policy adoption and express themselves through statements expressing e.g. cooperation (see examples in coding framework, 3.5).

During the early phases of the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian war, the EU was quick in condemning the illegal nature of the war, and thereby entrenching their position as a defender of international law (European Commission 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2024d). The following statement from Josep Borell during the first sanctions package expresses the EU's concern with the violation of international law. “Such decisions are illegal and unacceptable. They violate international law, Ukraine’s territorial integrity and sovereignty, Russia’s own international commitments and further escalate the crisis” (European Commission 2022b). A similar message is found in von der Leyen's press statement from just a day before. “Russia's decision to recognise the Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk is illegal and completely unacceptable. [...] Russia is not respecting its international obligations and it is violating core principles of international law” (European Commission 2022a). Von der Leyen also mentions close coordination of sanctions with “our partners” (Ibid).

These statements and the following sanctions aim to punish the violation of international law. Furthermore, the sanctions are mainly directed toward key individuals in the Kremlin, thus not aiming to impose pressure on the Russian economy at large. The second sanctions package, which was formulated after the invasion of Ukraine mentions that “[t]he EU today decided to sanction Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation and Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation” (European Commission 2022c). Again, having a targeted scope.

A turning point was reached in the third sanctions package, in which the EU assists Ukraine in financing “for the first time - **lethal equipment**” (sic!) (European Commission 2022d). Moreover, the EU also mentions how “the Council today agreed on a new set of measures that will impose severe consequences on Russia for its actions. Such decisions was agreed in close coordination with EU's partners and allies” (Ibid). This cements the EU as a geostrategic player, directly involved in purveying Ukraine with weapons to be used against Russia. It also shows us how the sanctions are diffused to the EU, through learning from their partners. In this case, “partners” is an ambiguous term. The literature review however shows that the US is a recurring partner for the EU regarding security (Biba 2025 & Lacatus & Blanc 2023 p.12-13). The data collection also showed a recurrence of joint press conferences with the US, more so than other nations (see European Commission 2023b, 2023c, 2025d), as well as mentionings of the US during domestic press conferences and statements (European Commission 2022h, 2025b). It is therefore reasonable to henceforth interpret the term “partners” as mainly a partnership with the US. Therefore, the Policy Diffusion mechanism of learning involves learning through cooperation with the US.

### **The EU-US TTC**

In May of 2022, the EU-US Trade and Technology Council (TTC) held its second ministerial meeting. The TTC is a key institution for Policy Diffusion, where the US influences key EU legislation. While multiple policy areas were up for discussion, the Russian invasion of Ukraine was the main focus. In this area, there are clear signs of cooperation and partnership, which has manifested itself as a “swift and aligned deployment of export controls on advanced technologies such as aerospace and cyber surveillance to undermine Russia's ability to further develop its industrial and military capabilities” (European Commission, 2022i).

To further examine the TTC, during the third meeting seven months later, it is stated that “[g]eostrategic challenges, including Russia's unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine,

have reinforced the importance of close coordination under the TTC” (European Commission 2022m). Again, learning was the main mechanism for the implementation of sanctions (in this case export controls), which is visible in the following quote: “The EU and the US agreed to further cooperate in this field, particularly with respect to information sharing” (Ibid). This information sharing can be understood as learning, which acts as a driver for policy implementation in the EU. The same logic follows in other meetings: The TTC has already bolstered transatlantic coordination in key areas, notably in our trade-related sanctions against Russia” (European Commission 2024a).

The TTC was put on hold during the US election, and has not been reconstituted during the 2025 presidency of Trump.

### **Frustration building**

As the war went on, the EU's role conception derived through rhetoric, continued to evolve. The main role conception of the early stages of the war was “defender of international law”, with sanctions aimed at Putin and the inner circle, as if the war was a crime with a small group of perpetrators who could be punished individually for their actions. Eventually speeches and sanctions aim more towards hurting Russia *itself* and punishing her allies and trading partners, as well as liberating Ukraine (European Commission 2022n, 2023a, 2023e, 2023f, 2024c, 2024d, 2025a, 2025f, 2025h). Along with this evolution, the EU's role conception of themselves as a geostrategic player on a regional and in some cases (European Commission 2025f) also a global level, came to define her actions. The EU still considered itself a defender of international law and the UN charter, but geostrategy took the main stage in policies, rhetoric and role conception.

Examples of this shift can be found in the ninth and 13th sanctions package press releases:

“In response to Russia’s continuing war of aggression against Ukraine and the gravity of the current escalation against civilians and civilian infrastructure, the Council adopted today a ninth package of new measures intended to step up pressure on Russia and its government.” (European Commission 2022n). Here, the focus lies on pressuring Russia, without any (explicit) mention of international law.

The EU claims responsibility for creating peace in Ukraine, framing itself as a geostrategic player on a regional level. “There is no doubt about who the aggressor is, who should pay and be held accountable for this war. Every sanction package deprives the Kremlin of funds to

wage war. With talks underway to end Russia's aggression, we must put Ukraine in the strongest possible position. Sanctions provide leverage." (European Commission 2025g)

Persons and cooperations in third countries are also targeted, expanding the EU's role conception as a geostrategic player, to a global scale. "As we reach the sad mark of two years since Vladimir Putin launched the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the European Union keeps up the pressure on Russia. Today, we are further tightening the restrictive measures against Russia's military and defence sector, targeting further entities in third countries who supply equipment [...]" (European Commission 2024b)

These texts show how the EU has been changing its role conception to a global geostrategic power with a vested interest in bringing down the war and the Russian military, if not the entire Russian economy. It's important to note that the role conception of the EU as a defender of international law and the UN charter still remains in the later sources. The press release for the 18th sanctions package mentions that "The European Council reaffirmed its support for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace based on the principles of the UN Charter and international law, in line with the key principles and objectives of Ukraine's Peace Formula" (European Commission 2025f).

### **Partnership with the US**

Now that the EU's change in role conception has been established, we will continue to examine the Policy Diffusion mechanics between the US and the EU. It was previously argued that the EU-US TTC was a main driver of policy change in regards to trade-related sanctions against Russia. This type of Policy Diffusion can be linked to the mechanism of learning. Further examining instances of joint statements between the EU and the US, learning stays the main driving mechanism of Policy Diffusion. This mainly expresses itself as coordination and cooperation between the two units, such as in the following excerpt from a joint statement by Biden and von der Leyen.

We have also taken unprecedented, coordinated, and effective sanctions and other economic measures together to further degrade Russia's capacity to wage its illegal war and its military-industrial system. We are deepening our joint work to aggressively enforce our sanctions and export control measures and also to end and deter circumvention and backfill, including by expanded authorities to close down Russia's access to all inputs that can support its war machine. (European Commission 2023b)

A similar spirit of cooperation is notable in the meeting between von der Leyen and Lindsey Graham.

This morning in Berlin, President von der Leyen met with US Senator Lindsey Graham to discuss EU-US coordination on sanctions in response to Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine. [...] The EU is preparing its 18th package of hard-biting sanctions, targeting Russia's energy revenues, including Nord Stream infrastructure, Russia's banking sector and lowering the crude oil price cap. These steps, taken together with US measures, would sharply increase the joint impact of our sanctions, said President von der Leyen. (European Commission 2025d)

These statements show a strong cooperation between the EU and US, indicating that the EU is learning from the US, when implementing sanctions.

However, there is another Policy Diffusion mechanism at play. As the EU is changing its role conception, it is becoming more similar to the US role conception. Biba (2025) identifies the US role conception as global hegemon, which I argue closely aligns to the EU role conception of global geostrategic player. Since the role conceptions align, the Policy Diffusion mechanism of *emulation* influences the laws that the EU deems appropriate to adopt. Paraphrased, the EU is emulating US sanctions policy, because of their role conception similarities with the US. Gilardi & Wasserfallen (2019) describe how policy spread depends upon the role conception of the political unit. A socialist state would be less willing to lower taxes than, e.g., a liberal state. Similarly, the EU's emulation of US sanctions policy, depends upon the EU possessing a similar role conception to the US. Contrafactually, if the EU maintained the role conception of "defender of international law", the US sanctions policies might not have spread to Brussels.

To what degree has the EU learned from and emulated US sanctions policies? Similarities in sanctions policies is evident from the mentionings of cooperation and coordinated sanctions against Russia and third countries. This implies that the sanctions created are of similar quantity and quality between the two countries. The legislations themselves could also be examined. Executive Order 14114 issued by Biden in 2023 gives permission to the Secretary of the Treasury to sanction foreign entities who, among other things, facilitate transactions or provide services to sanctioned persons in Russia (Biden, E.O. 14114). This legislation can be compared with the EU regulation concerning restrictive measures against Russia (Regulation No 833/2014) where "[n]atural and legal persons, entities and bodies shall undertake their

best efforts to ensure that any legal person, entity or body established outside the Union that they own or control does not participate in activities that undermine the restrictive measures provided for in this Regulation” (Regulation No 833/2014, article 8a). This de facto imposes EU legislation on entities situated outside the EU. These entities are otherwise under no obligation to adhere to EU legislation or regulation, similar to how the US punishes entities in third countries for breaking US legislation. Summarily, the US and EU are enacting similar sanctions against Russia, both taking the liberty of punishing entities who have financial relations with Russia. This proves similarities between EU and US policies.

## **5. Conclusion**

With the Russian invasion of Ukraine came radical sanctions from the EU and other western actors. The sanctions were motivated by (1) a change in the EU's role conception, and (2) Policy Diffusion from the US. The changes in role conception were due to internal factors and manifested themselves through speeches by von der Leyen, Kallas and Borrell.

To return to the sub-research questions relating to the how the EU's role conception changed, the speeches show a transformation of role conception, from a sole focus on the EU as a defender of international law and the UN charter, to the EU viewing itself as a geostrategic player aiming towards crippling Russia. The EU has maintained its role conception of itself as a defender of international law, stressing the illegal nature of the invasion. Still, the EU's conception of itself as a regional or global geostrategic player has been its main role conception. Some press conferences (e.g. European Commission 2024f) fail to mention international law in any way.

Regarding how the US influenced the EU through Policy Diffusion, the EU learned from and adopted US sanctions policies through cooperation and coordination with the US. The EU-US TTC was shown to be a center for learning between the two political units. As the EU changed its role conception to a geostrategic power, its willingness to emulate the US in policy adoption increased. This is due to greater role-similarities between the two political units, thus making the EU emulate the US and her sanction policy against Russia. This was shown in the adoption of global sanctions, aiming to cripple the Russian economy.

Together, these findings explain how Role Driven Policy Diffusion can explain the qualitative change of EU sanctions against Russia. Between 2022 and 2025, the EU cooperated with the

US regarding sanctions, thus diffusing US policies into the EU. Meanwhile, the EU changed its role conception, making it more similar to the US role conception. Therefore, the EU not only learned from the US, but it also emulated US sanctions since this was deemed appropriate in relation to the EU's changed role conception.

## 6. Further research

While this thesis examined the US influence of EU sanctions, the theoretical framework is applicable to other instances of sudden policy change, where there is a possibility of external influence. Other instances of the EU changing policy could also be studied with this theoretical framework, such as changes in climate or immigration policies. Further research could also examine the internal politics of the EU and how the Commission has reconciled different opinions of member states during the adoption of sanctions.

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European Commission. *EU adopts its latest package of sanctions against Russia over the illegal annexation of Ukraine's Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions*. (2022l)

European Commission. *3rd EU-US Trade and Technology Council addresses common challenges and responds to global crises*. (2022m)

European Commission. *Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: EU adopts 9th package of economic and individual sanctions.* (2022n)

European Commission. *One year of Russia's full-scale invasion and war of aggression against Ukraine, EU adopts its 10th package of economic and individual sanctions.* (2023a)

European Commission. *Joint Statement by President Biden and President von der Leyen.* (2023b)

European Commission. *Keynote Address by Executive Vice-President Dombrovskis at American Enterprise Institute.* (2023c)

European Commission. *4th EU-US Trade and Technology Council enhances cooperation in emerging technologies, sustainable trade and economic security.* (2023d)

European Commission. *Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: EU adopts 11th package of economic and individual sanctions.* (2023e)

European Commission. *EU adopts 11th package of sanctions against Russia for its continued illegal war against Ukraine.* (2023f)

European Commission. *Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine: EU agrees to extend the scope of sanctions on Belarus to fight circumvention.* (2023g)

European Commission. *Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: EU adopts 12th package of economic and individual sanctions.* (2023h)

European Commission. *5th TTC EU and US take stock of trade and technology cooperation.* (2024a)

European Commission. *Russia: two years after the full-scale invasion and war of aggression against Ukraine, EU adopts 13th package of individual and economic sanctions.* (2024b)

European Commission. *Statement by president von der Leyen at the joint press conference with ukrainian president Zelenskyy.* (2024c)

European Commission. *G7 Leaders' statement 24 February 2024.* (2024d)

European Commission. *EU and US continue strong trade and technology cooperation at a time of global challenges.* (2024e)

European Commission. *Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: comprehensive EU's 14th package of sanctions cracks down on circumvention and adopts energy measures.* (2024f)

European Commission. *Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: EU adopts 15th package of restrictive measures.* (2024g)

European Commission. *Three years of Russia's full-scale invasion and war of aggression against Ukraine: EU adopts its 16th package of economic and individual measures.* (2025a)

European Commission. *Joint statement by the president of the european commission, the president of the european council, and the president of the european parliament.* (2025b)

European Commission. *Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: EU agrees 17th package of sanctions.* (2025c)

European Commission. *Read-out of the meeting between president von der leyen and US senator Lindsye Graham.* (2025d)

European Commission. *Statement by high representative/vice-president Kallas with president von der Leyen on the 18th package of sanctions against Russia.* (2025e)

European Commission. *Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: EU adopts 18th package of economic and individual measures.* (2025f)

European Commission. *Statement by president von der Leyen on the 19th package of sanctions against Russia.* (2025g)

European Commission. *Statement by high representative / vice-president Kallas on the 19th package of sanctions against Russia.* (2025h)

European Commission. *19th package of sanctions against Russia: EU targets Russian energy, third-country banks and crypto providers.* (2025i)