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Discourses of Responsibility and the Entanglement of Self and Other

**The European Union's Discourse of Responsibility Regarding the Advancement of the
Middle East Peace Process 1999-2021**

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Declaration of Authenticity	Fehler! Textmarke nicht definiert.

List of Abbreviations

AMA	Israeli-Palestinian Agreement on Movement and Access
AHLC	Ad Hoc Liaison Committee
CEECs	Central and Eastern European countries
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSDP	Common Security and Defense Policy
EC	European Community
EEAS	European External Action Service
EMAA	Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement
EMP	Euro-Mediterranean Partnership
ENP	European Neighborhood Policy
EU	European Union
EUBAM Rafah	European Union Border Assistance Mission in Rafah
EUPOL COPPS	European Union Police Coordination Office for Palestinian Police Support
EUSR	EU Special Representative
GABC	General Administration for Borders and Crossings of the Palestinian Authority
HR/VP	High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/ Vice-President of the Commission
MEPP	Middle East peace process
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PNA	Palestinian National Authority
PRDP	Palestinian Reform and Development Plan
SSR	Security Sector Reform
TEU	Treaty on European Union
UfM	Union for the Mediterranean
UN	United Nations
UN OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
US	United States of America
WTO	World Trade Organization

1. Introduction

References to responsibility are increasingly part of the standard repertoire of vocabulary used in world political debates – be it regarding the Covid-19 crisis, the increasingly exigent fight against climate change, or its explicit articulation as the responsibility to protect (R2P) (Bukovansky et al. 2012: 1, Daase et al. 2017: 3, Vetterlein and Hansen-Magnusson 2020: 3). The European Union (EU) certainly represents everything but an exception to this observation. In contrast, when zooming in on the EU it is striking that references to responsibility, duties, obligations, and commitments in view of a broad variety of global issues and conflict areas almost systematically pervade statements, agendas, declarations, and its strategic documents (Vogt 2006: 2). While some might hold that this discourse of responsibility, as I call it, merely represents empty rhetoric that may have symbolic value at best or is completely meaningless at worst, I argue that the EU's discourse of responsibility is indeed productive.

The EU's discourse of responsibility first and foremost generates a specific identity for the European Union as it determines on what grounds the EU bears responsibility, to whom it owes responsibility, and how this responsibility shall be met action-wise. Hence, references to responsibility serve as a significant instrument to construct EU identity. However, any attempt of constructing, any articulation of identity does not represent a neutral endeavor but encompasses a dimension of power (Diez 2005: 632; Jørgensen and Philips 2002: 37; see also Said 2014: 145). Hence, I strive to map how the EU's discourse of responsibility constructs the identity of the EU and to unveil how power comes to play in it. I hold that the EU's discourse of responsibility firstly constructs the EU as superior vis-à-vis those it deems itself responsible for – the very reason why the EU bears responsibility roots in the perspective that the EU's assistance is needed as other actors may not sufficiently engage in a specific issue area or are incapable of leading a conflict towards resolution. This discourse generates an identity for the EU that naturalizes and legitimizes its engagement with and presence in international conflictual areas. Returning to the perception that an intensifying discourse of responsibility is observable internationally, especially players often referred to as great powers - such as the United States (US) or China - partake in this discourse. Thus, I hold that by engaging in this international discourse of responsibility the EU participates in the structuring of international order and carves out a space for itself on the international stage as it partakes in the distribution of legitimate power (Bukovansky et al. 2012: 11).

The fact that discourses of responsibility generally, and within the EU particularly, have not received abundant scholarly attention yet is certainly connected to the inherent fuzziness of the

term “responsibility”. Concerning the question of what responsibility (as a historically evolved term) actually means, one will find fairly different answers depending on the disciplinary, temporal or country-specific context. As a result, the concept of responsibility appears unsteady and “elastic” (Vogt 2006: 2), which renders a problematization of how it generates meaning necessary. It is thus neither obvious nor predetermined what it means to be a responsible EU. Responsibility does not have any fixed, essential meaning, but functions as a discursive carrier of various potential claims. Consequently, responsibility cannot be something that the EU has *eo ipso*, or that emerges as a natural consequence of a certain international status based on material capabilities or social standing. Responsibilities do not simply exist. Instead, they must be actively discursively invoked to be brought into existence and unfold meaning.

Even though a discourse of responsibility overarches the EU’s external behavior in numerous policy fields, this thesis concentrates on the EU’s discourse of responsibility regarding the Middle East peace process (MEPP) from 1999-2021. Early on, the European Council identified active assistance to the MEPP as a priority for Europe’s external action (Bretherton and Vogler 2008: 167). Between 1967 and 2009 more than 800 declarations and statements on the Arab-Israeli conflict have been issued by the EC/EU. Thus, far more attention has been paid to this conflict than to any other one, which renders it “unique” in EC/EU discourse (Persson 2019: 144). The EU (as well as the European Community (EC)) has been confronted with the conflict in the Middle East since its very inception. Therefore, not only the significance of the Arab-Israeli conflict for the EU but also its persistence render it ideal to shed light on long-term identity formation processes. A cursory review of selected documents from the Archive of the European Parliament and the Bulletin of the European Communities reveals that the notion of a specific European responsibility regarding the conflict already appears early on. For instance, in the context of the Third Arab-Israeli War, the European Parliament declared in its resolution of June 1967 that this armed confrontation was not only “of immediate import [sic!] to the security and development of Europe [but also] to its political responsibility towards its partners”. In parallel, the European Parliament deplored that the EC had so far not managed to present a common policy to promote a peaceful settlement of the conflict as no European country alone was “in a satisfactory position to defend the interests of their continent or to assume its responsibilities”. A common policy is therefore a requirement that would enable the EC to “be present at any negotiations *as a Community*” (Bulletin of the European Economic Community 8-1967: 96, emphasis added). This historical example demonstrates that discourses of responsibility are productive - the fact that the EC bears joint responsibility regarding the conflict brings the Community into being.

Taking all these aspects into account, the EU's discourse of responsibility on the advancement of the MEPP appears to be the obvious choice for this thesis. However, my aim is also to denaturalize the claim that the EU evidently bears responsibility in regard to the MEPP and to emphasize that the assumption of responsibility constitutes an active and intentional discursive endeavor. One might argue that the prevalence of references to responsibility vis-à-vis the Middle East conflict is self-evident due to the colonial legacy of several European countries, above all Great Britain and France. Further, the Second World War and the Holocaust must obviously play an important role when thinking of a genuinely European responsibility to contribute to Middle Eastern peace. Nevertheless, even if historical references are identifiable within the EU's discourse of responsibility regarding the MEPP, these should not be taken for granted. The significant point to be made here is that responsibility is constructed for the EU as such. Yet neither did all member states equally participate in colonialism in the Middle East nor are their perspectives on World War II uniform. The Holocaust certainly continued to play a major role in German collective consciousness, while this was not the case to the same extent in other countries of Europe. However, Schwelling (2007) and Kucia (2016) uncover a deliberate, incremental process of "Europeanization of Holocaust memory" since the 1990s and especially the early 2000s that shapes European identity and feeds into the European founding myth. Hence, the prevalence of notions of responsibility in EU debates on the MEPP must not be taken for granted but should be interrogated and treated as an intentional, impactful discursive endeavor. The EU's discourse of responsibility constructs the EU as having a stake in the MEPP and as an actor that is evidently and legitimately engaged.

Again, I hold that the invocation of responsibility necessarily constructs a responsible Self, which is why the analysis of discourses of responsibility lends itself particularly well to shed light on constructions of EU identity. As I strive to demonstrate in the ensuing chapters, this identity predominantly revolves around positive motifs such as capacity, morality, communal ties, or the deference to international law, and provides a solid foundation for the EU's aspiration to be engaged in the MEPP. However, an identity in the sense of a cognition of "Self" requires the existence of "Other". As it is impossible to imagine responsibility without the very encounter between Self and Other, responsibility encapsulates the core mechanism that enables identity to come into being. Hence, references to responsibility always construct a responsible Self as well as an Other in regard to which the Self bears responsibility. In consequence, my analysis shall not only shed light on the discursive generation of the EU's identity but must also extend to the different images of the Other the discourse of responsibility implies.

A central specificity of the concept of responsibility is its inherent relationality. Responsibility does not only elicit constructions of Self and Other that then remain unconnected. Responsibility also relates Self and Other and thereby establishes a specific relationship between them that is not based on equality but subordination, implying the superiority of the Self in terms of capacity, expertise, and morality (Demirtas-Bagdonas 2014: 144; Hansen 2006: 35; Loke 2013: 215; Poopuu 2020: 80). In this sense, the analysis of references to responsibility reveals its critical potential anew as such social configurations are not treated as given but interrogated based on the assumption that they are discursively constructed and inherently imbued with power. Not only do discourses of responsibility co-construct the identity of the Other, but the identification of the Self's responsibility also necessarily entails a behavioral dimension vis-à-vis the Other. Due to the strong positive and altruistic connotation of the term "responsibility" in everyday language, it is easily overlooked that this construction of the Self invests the Self with power, legitimizes, and thereby naturalizes its involvement in conflicts or problem areas around the globe. Hence, the natural question that ensues asks how discourses of responsibility seek to prescribe how the responsible Self ought to act in regard to the Other. As this thesis revolves around the EU's engagement in the MEPP, I am interested in the specific foreign policies that this discourse suggests. However, while it is a core assumption of this thesis that identities matter for the formulation of foreign policy, the identification of problems, and how to solve them, I equally emphasize that I do not consider the relationship between identity and foreign policy to be based on causality. Instead, ideas of how a "responsible European Union" ought to act limit the range of policy options that appear appropriate and thereby render the adoption of certain policies more likely than others.

I find that such deliberations on the EU's foreign policy options regarding the MEPP remain rather constant throughout the two decades under analysis, which appears surprising considering the major upheavals that have characterized the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I argue that any idea of responsibility begins with the Self, not with the Other. Therefore, discourses of responsibility predominantly revolve around the Self, foreground what the Self deems as the right and appropriate objective and what it can and is willing to do to achieve it. Meanwhile, the actual conflict setting and the Other's perspective move to the background. Hence, I suggest that the close connection between the EU's discourse of responsibility and its identity construction can contribute to an understanding of why the EU struggles to formulate new approaches to the resolution of this conflict and to adjust or overhaul its long-standing strategy. Lastly, I seek to shed light on another characteristic of the EU's discourse of responsibility. It does not only allocate responsibility to the EU itself, it also frequently allocates responsibility

to other actors and thereby determines who qualifies as a responsible actor, what kind of responsibilities this actor bears, and how they are supposed to be met. Therefore, I also investigate how the allocation of responsibility contributes to constructing these Others, yet equally implies certain ideas of the EU's Self and thereby complements its identity construction.

In sum, these preceding thoughts give rise to three interrelated questions that this thesis is devoted to: How does the EU's discourse of responsibility construct the EU's Self, its Others, and the relationship between them?

The EU and "the" Middle East Peace Process – A Brief Recapitulation

Discourses are inextricably linked with the specific contexts in which they unfold. It is impossible to produce meaning without context, yet such contexts only become humanly accessible to the extent that they are themselves given meaning (Angermuller 2014: 4). As this thesis analyzes the EU's discourse of responsibility regarding the MEPP, the following remarks serve to provide a short overview of the broad contours of the EU's engagement in the MEPP since the 1990s. My aim here is not to recapitulate all EU policies *en detail* but to sketch major policy lines and to draw attention to the central challenges the EU faced and continues to face.

The Madrid Peace Conference of 1991 represents the first milestone considered here. It was co-organized by the United States and the Soviet Union and is still credited with significant symbolic value as delegations from Israel, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, participated (Sucharov 2008: 164-166). The major goal of Madrid was to convene all parties involved and to initiate bilateral and multilateral negotiations, whereas the latter were to take place in five working groups on issues of regional importance. The EC was entrusted with the chairmanship of the Regional Economic Development Group. This assignment already anticipates two important aspects that will inform European engagement in the MEPP: the regional perspective on the conflict and the EC/EU's emphasis on economic assistance. While the Madrid Conference can be seen as a success for the EC as it chaired its own working group next to those of the US, Canada, and Japan, it should equally be noted that the EC advocated for such a conference already years before but still did not have an organizing role (Altunışik 2008: 107). Neither was the EC able to position itself as a genuinely political actor yet but established itself as a financial backer of the peace process (*ibid.*).

While the multilateral negotiations that started in the aftermath of the Madrid Conference did not lead to significant progress (and were not attended by Syria and Lebanon), it seemed as if after the beginning of the Oslo process and the ensuing Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1995 another window of opportunity had opened to enhance relations between the countries of the

Mediterranean. The overarching idea was to transform the whole region based on intensified contact and cooperation (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008: 274). Consequently, it was in 1993 that the European Commission set the boundaries of the geographic scope of the EU's Mediterranean policy and decided that Israel and the Mashreq countries should be included (Gomez and Christou 2004: 191). To upgrade its political engagement, the EU initiated the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) at the 1995 Barcelona Euro-Mediterranean Conference, which set the so-called Barcelona Process in motion. The EMP was designed as a "separate but complementary", genuinely European initiative accompanying the MEPP (Ambos and von Behr 2006: 295). Yet, by early 1996 the prospects for successfully concluding the Oslo process had already decreased, and so did the relevance of the EMP. In contrast to its extensive ambitions, the EMP's outcome is generally described as "disappointing" (Bretherton and Vogler 2008: 156).

After the collapse of the MEPP in 2000, the EU's approach to the region underwent a strong bilateralization. Hence, instead of the EU's former comprehensive, region-wide approach that had dominated the EMP, the Middle East conflict increasingly began to be understood as synonymous with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Azhar and Pinfari 2017: 63). In 2003 the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) was launched as an instrument to systematically deepen bilateral ties with the EU's eastern and southern "neighbors" through the conclusion of Action Plans. These Action Plans complement formerly existing Association Agreements and are designed to bind countries even closer to the EU by granting access to its markets and programs, and by ensuring that they comply with European regulatory frameworks, standards, and legislation (EEAS 2021). The EU concluded Action Plans with Israel, the PNA, and Egypt in 2005. Apart from that, the strengthening of bilateral ties is particularly visible when it comes to the EU-Israel dyad. For instance, both parties concluded various additional agreements and decided to "upgrade" bilateral relations in more than 15 fields in 2012 (Del Sarto 2015: 9). This leads Del Sarto (ibid.) to assert that "to some extent, Israel is already part of the European Union in specific issue areas". Nevertheless, it is precisely the EU's predominantly bilateral policies towards Israel and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA)¹ respectively that have been criticized as they have proven unable to capture the complex interconnectedness that binds the Palestinian territories to Israel (Del Sarto 2014: 200-202).

The so-called Middle East Quartet, consisting of the US, Russia, the UN, and the EU, constitutes another forum in which the EU is aiming to contribute to a peaceful settlement of

¹ Instead of the commonly used abbreviation "PA" for Palestinian Authority in EU documents, I use "PNA" in accordance with the formal Arabic translation of the term "السلطة الوطنية الفلسطينية".

the Middle East conflict. It was founded in the wake of the second Intifada, which erupted in September 2000. In 2003, the Quartet officially presented its “Roadmap for Peace”, which was significantly influenced by the EU (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008: 286). The Roadmap foresaw three phases to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. An independent Palestinian state should have been established in phase II, which should have been completed by the end of 2003. Even though both Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and President of the PNA Mahmoud Abbas accepted the Roadmap, its implementation quickly reached a dead end (Altunişik 2008: 112). Still, as the EU’s inclusion in the Quartet was considered a major step forward regarding a proactive, political role for the Union in the MEPP, the Roadmap remained an important point of reference for the EU for many years to come (Bretherton and Vogler 2008: 185).

Considering the EU’s strong financial contributions to the Palestinians, it is often argued that the EU is strong in the field of monetary assistance but lacks political influence. However, it is wrong to portray the EU in such simplified colors. Firstly, this assessment builds on the faulty assumption that financial contributions can be generally apolitical. Secondly, the EU significantly contributed to shaping the international discourse on what a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should look like (Persson 2017). For instance, in the Berlin Declaration of 1999, the EU endorsed “the option of a [Palestinian] state” for the first time - the US only followed in 2001. Consequently, the EU has been heavily involved in the process of Palestinian state-building. In this endeavor, special attention has been paid to security, more concretely to security sector reform (SSR) of the PNA (Bouris 2012: 257). In the domain of SSR, the EU deployed two Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) missions: the European Union police coordination office for Palestinian police support (EUPOL COPPS) in 2006, and the European Union Border Assistance Mission in Rafah (EUBAM Rafah) from 2005 until its suspension in June 2007. While progress has been achieved in the PNA’s security sector, improvements in terms of democratic accountability and rule of law have been limited (ibid.). Beyond SSR, the EU covers the salaries of PNA civil servants and other costs, which help prevent the PNA from financial collapse – a danger that has been looming for years. The PNA’s collapse would have severe economic and political consequences as the perspective of reaching a settlement to the conflict (in terms of a two-state solution) would look even grimmer than it does already (UNCTAD 2019).

Apart from the EU’s long-standing conviction that a negotiated two-state solution based on the 1967 lines is the best and the only viable solution to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the EU has had a clear position on other aspects related to the conflict for decades. Firstly, a core tenet of the EU’s position is its emphasis on the security of Israel and its right to existence. Secondly,

the EU reiterates the importance of international law and the binding character of the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. Consequently, Israeli settlement activities in East Jerusalem and the West Bank continue to be condemned by the EU, which considers them illegal under international law as well as a major obstacle to peace. This notwithstanding, the settler population in the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) has risen from 274,500 in 2008 to 442,100 in 2020 according to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS). Lastly, the EU reiterates its opposition to any kind of extremism and the need to combat terrorism. This aspect is closely connected to the EU's efforts to assist the PNA in the consolidation of its security apparatus. These core tenets have proven consistent within the EU, even though from today's perspective the two-state solution seems ever farther away.

Overview of the Thesis

So far, I have outlined my research interests, explained why this thesis focuses on the Middle East peace process and provided an overview of the EU's engagement in the Middle East conflict to contextualize my research object. Above I maintain that the EU's discourse of responsibility serves as an important means to construct the identity of the European Union. Therefore, the first part of chapter 2 explores to what extent this connection has been made in the literature. I argue that the notion of responsibility establishes a relationship between Self and Other and implies a certain idea of how this relationship ought to unfold. Thus, the next section presents literature that is occupied with the kinds of external behavior that references to responsibility suggest and how this renders some options more legitimate and likely than others. The chapter concludes with a critical examination of literature that classifies the EU as a particular kind of power and ascribes a corresponding international role to it. While I focus on the Normative Power Europe debate here, I also reflect on the notion of "great power" and its links to responsibility.

I then proceed to establish my theoretical framework in chapter 3, which builds on three pillars. Firstly, I expand on my conceptualization of responsibility. My take on responsibility heavily draws on poststructuralist reasoning, which means that I understand responsibility as a floating signifier that defies an ultimate definition. I operationalize responsibility through a four-dimensional conceptual framework and thereby avoid imposing a predetermined meaning on the term. Secondly, I expand on the notion of "an" identity of the European Union and shed light on several pitfalls that must be avoided when envisioning an EU identity. Thereafter, I carve out my own understanding of the EU's identity and establish what this term denotes in this thesis. The last pillar of my theoretical framework occupies itself with the connection

between discourses and foreign policy. I hold that discourses of responsibility suggest a certain kind of behavior to the European Union. However, I emphasize that this does not mean that the EU's responsibility discourse causally leads to this behavior. Hence, this subchapter serves to illuminate why and how discursive practices still matter for the formulation of EU foreign policies, thus configuring the above-mentioned relationship between the EU and its Others.

The ensuing chapter presents my research design. As I pursue a discourse analytical approach, I first lay out my understanding of discourse and then elaborate on how I render the EU's discourse of responsibility accessible for my research. After having introduced my analytical strategy which has a theoretically informed coding scheme at its center, I reflect on the limitations of my methodological proceedings and on potential ways to overcome them. I conduct my discourse analysis in chapter 5 and present my results along the general tripartite line of thinking that underlies this thesis. I expand on how the EU's discourse of responsibility on the MEPP constructs the EU's Self, its Others, and the relationship between them. In so doing, I unveil the immanent power structures that discourses of responsibility establish.

2. A Responsible Union?

The core of this thesis revolves around the connection between the EU's discourses of responsibility and EU identity building. In a first step, I examine to what extent such a connection has been made. Consequently, I will, on the one hand, provide an overview of academic contributions that focus on EU responsibility and make references to identity formation processes. On the other hand, I present literature that explicitly deals with European identity and considers the notion of responsibility. Approaching what I call the "identity-responsibility-nexus" from these two analytical perspectives allows me to demonstrate that while several authors acknowledge the constitutive relation between responsibility and identity, a thorough analysis of how notions of responsibility are deployed to construct EU identity is still lacking. Moreover, responsibility and identity are highly contested concepts, which means that understandings of these terms differ greatly. Thus, I provide my own grasp of responsibility and identity as two interconnected discursive constructs in my ensuing theoretical framework.

As I hold that responsibility is inherently relational, the ensuing section reviews literature concerned with the connection between discourses of responsibility and the formulation of foreign policy. As EU-level discourses of responsibility as such have not been analyzed too extensively yet, I also consider literature that occupies itself with EU member states, particularly Germany. This strand of literature demonstrates the discursive contingency and

evolutionary nature of understandings of responsibility. Therefore, responsibility may convey varying perceptions of which kind of external behavior is (in)appropriate.

In a last step, I critically engage with literature that designs a specific role or “international identity” for the EU as a normative, civilian, and ethical power. I first demonstrate that responsibility only plays a marginal role in this literature and explain why none of these approaches represents an appropriate point of departure for my research endeavor. Beyond that, I briefly touch upon English School-inspired works regarding their notion of great power status and its close entanglement with the idea of “special responsibilities” in international society.

2.1 Responsibility and European Identity, European Identity and Responsibility – A Connection?

2.1.1 Responsibility Angle

When reviewing existing literature on responsibility in the context of the European Union, it becomes apparent that such works are firstly rather denumerable and that they rarely address the links between responsibility and the EU’s identity. Responsibility is often treated as a notion with a fixed, positive meaning and as a feature the EU either simply has *eo ipso* or derives from its ethical foundations (Gehler et al. 2020: 12; Szigeti 2006). Both approaches to EU responsibility appear problematic.

Firstly, arguing that the EU is an inherently responsible actor builds on the necessary precondition that the EU as an international institution can indeed be classified as a moral agent to qualify as a bearer of responsibility (Vogt 2006: 4). Nevertheless, the identification of the EU as a moral agent has not been examined thoroughly yet and should be treated cautiously considering that in the broader theoretical debate on institutional moral agency, for instance, the United Nations (UN) is only referred to as a “moral agent with limits” (Erskine 2004: 37). Here, a persisting identity that transcends the identities of the sum of its constitutive parts is one of the preconditions for an institution to be a moral agent and thus bear responsibilities (Erskine 2001: 72). In the pages that follow, I turn the argument around. Instead of arguing that an actor requires an identity to assume or allocate responsibilities, I suggest that the assumption (and allocation) of responsibility is by itself an identity-constructing act. Therefore, I do not aspire to provide a definitive answer to whether the EU can be a responsible actor or possesses moral agency. My point of departure is that the EU is discursively constructed as such - as being able and therefore obliged to respond to the imperative of its responsibilities.

Secondly, grounding the EU's responsibility in ethics is problematic as this already ascribes a specific identity to the EU. This imposes a fixed, altruistic meaning on responsibility and engages in the construction of the EU as a "force for good", and thereby partakes in investing the EU with power as its actions appear morally right and legitimate *ex ante*. Further, this perspective excludes various other meanings that responsibility may convey. As I will demonstrate below, responsibility may be connected to morally inspired arguments but may also serve as a means to construct the EU as a capable actor, as an actor embedded in the history of its continent, in the international legal framework, or in international structures of belonging. Hence, my discourse analytical approach and conceptualization of responsibility as a floating signifier allows me to uncover a much more multifaceted perspective of what a responsible EU is or does and how this idea of the EU in turn shapes its relationship to its outside world. Lastly, stating that the EU simply bears responsibility due to the kind of actor it is ignores the conscious political construction of the EU's "responsibility architecture" that determines for which specific conflict areas or global issues the EU assumes responsibility.

Consequently, works that depart from the notion of EU responsibility either partake in the construction of the EU's identity themselves or only superficially touch upon potential interlinkages between responsibility and identity. For instance, Vogt (2006: 9) considers these interlinkages "interesting", yet they do not receive any further attention. He holds that responsibility could indeed form a part of the EU's identity (*ibid.*). However, he quickly dismisses this idea and hypothesizes - hinting at the mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion that underlie any construction of identity - that "if indeed the idea of responsibility were part of a European identity, one could imagine that the field of exclusion would be fairly small; a 'fortress Europe' would not exist" (*ibid.*: 10). In consequence, such a lack of exclusion would dilute and weaken the European Union. This assessment, however, misfires and demonstrates the need to conceptualize responsibility as a discursive construction, not an element of European identity *as such*. Responsibility rather conveys a broad range of ideas about what the EU is and what it should do. As a result, references to responsibility can be exclusionary and perpetuate the difference between the EU and its external world. The Others for whom the EU bears responsibility do not automatically become part of its Self and thereby dilute the EU's identity - the opposite is the case. The Other for whom the EU bears responsibility is necessarily constructed as inferior to the EU or else there would be no social space for EU responsibility. Another tacit connection between responsibility and identity is further established regarding responsibility's behavioral dimension. Here, the argument is that the complete disregard of the EU's supposed responsibility may lead to the "implosion of its core identity" (Szigeti 2006:

31). That this means that responsibility must have contributed to a certain idea of EU identity in the first place, is, nevertheless, not considered.

Overall, scholars detect the responsibilities of the EU in a broad array of fields. For instance, human rights, global security, immigration but also “constructive and realistic engagement in the Middle East” count as significant EU responsibilities (Mayer and Vogt 2006: 232; Mayer 2008). As a result, the impression arises that the EU bears indiscriminate responsibility for a wide range of conflicts or issue areas (Lippert 2012). As this impression is substantially generated by the EU itself, I deem it necessary to treat responsibility as an intentional discursive construction that invests the EU with power and legitimacy. Responsibilities do not simply exist and are inherent to a specific kind of actor. Instead, responsibilities need to be discursively invoked to acquire any meaning. Thus, in contrast to other works that conceive of the EU’s responsibilities as ethically or inherently given, I seek to trace on what grounds they are constructed and how this aspect feeds into the construction of a complex identity of the European Union that goes beyond the notion of a “genuinely ethical project”.

2.1.2 Identity Angle

Works that depart from the angle of EU identity refer to the notion of responsibility more frequently and can be roughly divided into two categories. The first category consists of works that emphasize that responsibility as such is an element of the EU’s identity (Lucarelli 2006a; Sedelmeier 2005a). Here, responsibility is either considered a general element of the EU’s identity or a specific one that only resonates in particular social relationships. In these works, the term responsibility is either not problematized at all, or it is solely clarified that the EU’s discourse of responsibility must not be equated with European altruism (Sedelmeier 2005a: 30). Instead of departing from an essentialized understanding of responsibility or ascribing a specific meaning to it, I hold that responsibility lacks an essential meaning but functions as a discursively contingent means to construct the EU’s identity. While such a perspective has been brought forward concerning the EU specifically (Poopuu 2020; Bretherton and Vogler 2008), it is indeed Hansen’s (2006: 46) seminal work on the general connection between identity and foreign policy formulation that clarifies most outspokenly that “space, time, and responsibility are the big concepts through which political communities [...] are thought and argued”.

Thus, in this strand of literature, a clear connection between notions of responsibility and (European) identity has been made. However, as identity remains a highly contested concept, it is not surprising that understandings of identity differ greatly among all these works. These understandings range from an EU-level collective identity (Sedelmeier 2005a; Bretherton and

Vogler 2008), via a specific CSDP identity of the European Union (Poopuu 2020), to a European identity, which is explicitly not to be understood as an identity of the EU as such but refers to the political identity of individual European citizens (Lucarelli 2006a: 48). As I will further outline below, this thesis draws on the notion of a collective identity of the EU and understands both responsibility and identity as interconnected discursive constructions.

2.2 Responsibility and the Suggestion of External Behavior

2.2.1 Discourses of Responsibility – Linking Identity and Foreign Policy

Focusing on the behavioral dimension of responsibility, the ensuing section explores literature that focuses on the intersection of identity and foreign policy formulation. The core idea here is that discourses of responsibility construct an actor's identity and thereby prescribe a specific kind of behavior to it. In correspondence with an actor's identity, discourses of responsibility render some policy options more (il)legitimate than others, which influences potential support or opposition to them. The protagonist of such works is most often not the EU as such (Sedelmeier 1998, 2005a, 2005b; to a lesser extent Kaya 2013) but rather EU member states (Harnisch and Stahl 2009) and Germany in particular (Baumann and Hellmann 2001; Gardner Feldman 1994; Hauswedell 2017; Stahl 2017; Swoboda 2009; Wittlinger and Larose 2007).

A major strength of the literature on Germany's discourses of responsibility is that it most often takes a broader perspective that encompasses several decades and does not only focus on individual events. Consequently, due to the prevalence of the notion of responsibility in German foreign policy discourses, responsibility has been recognized as significantly contributing to Germany's identity construction without neglecting the fact that the meaning of responsibility is discursively contingent. Thus, it is evident from the outset that we cannot ascribe a pre-defined, fixed meaning to responsibility. References to responsibility may prescribe very different kinds of external behavior. For instance, in Germany's post-reunification discourse, responsibility was used as a prevalent "code word for sticking with the anti-militarist 'culture of restraint' of the Bonn Republic" (Baumann and Hellmann 2001: 69). However, following international expectations, responsibility began to denote the justification for the use of military means by Germany and hence entailed the incremental normalization of Germany's military power during the 1990s (*ibid.*: 77). This altered understanding of responsibility derives from external expectations as well as an adaptation of the interpretation of German collective memory of the Holocaust and World War II (Wittlinger and Larose 2007). This profound reinterpretation of how a responsible Germany is supposed to behave externally was very

clearly revealed in the context of the Kosovo crisis. Instead of responsibility implying restraint and repugnance regarding the use of military means, responsibility began to justify a very different kind of foreign policy for Germany, namely one that may include the use of force to prevent mass atrocities and humanitarian catastrophes (Swoboda 2009: 159). This discursive rebranding of responsibility opened considerable room to maneuver as the (limited) use of military means began to appear as a responsible, legitimate policy option and ceased to be conflicting with Germany's identity. Hence, I strive to investigate to what extent substantial shifts in meaning can be observed in the EU's discourse of responsibility as well.

Additionally, responsibility has been increasingly connected to security, which may lead to the general prioritization of military action over civilian options (Hauswedell 2017: 213). While this rebranding of responsibility as Germany's moral obligation to prevent genocide or grave human rights violations sounds commendable at first, it still needs to be critically questioned. Such an extensive understanding of responsibility might inscribe a self-authorization to resort to (unsolicited) interference in Germany's foreign policy (Kießling 2019: 493). Hence, responsibility discourses are inherently imbued with power as they determine that an actor has the obligation (and the right) to intervene where it deems necessary. Therefore, it is my goal to further this critical understanding of responsibility discourses in regard to the EU level.

2.2.2 The EU – What Kind of Actor?

When contemplating the links between identity and external behavior in the case of the European Union, the conceptual literature that strives to capture the EU's international identity as civilian or normative power naturally comes to mind. Before critically engaging with this strand of literature regarding my research endeavor, I briefly introduce both terms. As the argument goes, the EU represents an inherently distinctive actor on the world stage, which predestines it to shape its foreign relations differently from traditional powers. At first, the scholarly debate revolved around the conception of civilian power Europe (CPE) (Duchêne 1972), which may be summarized as building on a triad of multilateralism, international law, and non-military, civilian forms of power (Diez and Manners 2007: 178). Maull (cited after Diez 2005: 617) defines a civilian power's external behavior as generally being "tied to particular objectives, values, principles, as well as forms of influence and instruments of power which serve the civilisation of international relations". In a similar approach to the means and ends of EU foreign policy, the concept of "normative power Europe" (NPE) is grounded in the conviction that "not only is the EU constructed on a normative basis, but importantly [...] this predisposes it to act in a normative way in world politics" (Manners 2002: 252). While NPE

works through “ideas, opinions and conscience” (Diez and Manners 2007: 175), this does, in contrast to CPE, not exclude the resort to military means altogether as these may be used to assert the EU’s foundational values (Diez 2005: 620). Hence, due to the conceptual overlaps of CPE and NPE, CPE may be subsumed under the broader term NPE (ibid.: 635).

Ever since his seminal work on NPE, Manners set out to determine the EU’s “normative basis” (2002: 242), its “normative constitution” (2006: 70), or its “normative ethics” (2008). However, even though the core argument of NPE relates to the question of how the EU engages with others and seeks to transform them in accordance with its own values (Diez 2005: 615), he does not consider responsibility as a building block of the EU’s “normative role in world politics” (Manners 2006: 70). Similarly, responsibility neither features prominently in the literature on CPE, even if the “willingness to assume international responsibility” represents one of the defining criteria of an ideal type of civilian power (Maull 1997: 103). In acknowledgment of the fact that responsibility plays an ever-greater role in the EU’s foreign policy discourse, Aggestam (2008: 6) introduces the term “ethical power Europe” (EPE), which shall divert the focus from “what it is” (see Manners 2002: 252) to “what it does”. EPE as well as its sub-category “responsible power Europe” – guided by a commitment to the well-being of others – represent ideal types which the EU does not necessarily correspond with (ibid.: 8-9).

These conceptualizations of European power thus give us insights into how a power that is considered civilian, normative, or responsible is expected to behave in its external relations. Nevertheless, none of these concepts seem particularly helpful for the present research endeavor as the goal is not to analyze to what extent the EU’s discursive identity formation corresponds to such ideal type conceptualizations of Europe’s international identity. To use one such concept would anticipate a direction according to which the identity of the EU is discursively constructed. This “direction” must, however, not be treated as a given (see Schlag 2016: 14-15). In contrast, the goal here is to inductively explore how discourses of responsibility construct EU identity in the course of time. Capturing EU identity through the lens of its responsibility discourse allows me to approach it in a nuanced, flexible, and procedural way. In addition, concepts such as NPE can serve to articulate a hegemonic claim on the part of the EU (Diez and Pace 2011: 211). In this sense, Diez (2005: 626) aptly emphasizes the inherent “power of the ‘normative power Europe’ discourse” (see also: Larsen 2020). Building on this line of reasoning, it is precisely my goal to illuminate to what extent the EU’s discourse of responsibility is itself imbued with power. I strive to demonstrate how this power reflects in the construction of the EU, the representation of the Other, and the relationship between them.

Moving away from the EU, I lastly engage with literature that revolves around the notion of great powers as a specific kind of actor. In the scholarly and political arenas, great power status has always been connected to a discourse of (special) responsibility (Bull 1980, see also Connolly 1983). In the realm of International Relations at large, the English School has by far directed the most attention to the concept of responsibility. Generally, the allocation of responsibility produces and structures international society, and determines how international society functions as well as who belongs to international society and who does not (Bukovansky et al. 2012; Gaskarth 2017; Kopra 2019). A major strength of English School-inspired works is their acknowledgment of the fact that the allocation of responsibility constitutes an international practice (or a process of “responsabilisation”, Kopra 2019: 2), which entails that an actor’s responsibilities are not simply given or invariable but require constant (re-) articulation. Nevertheless, they do deploy an ethical understanding of responsibility, grounded in a moral orientation towards international politics. In this sense, “responsibility highlights the significance of good outcomes” (Kora 2019: 13). Yet, who defines what constitutes a “good outcome”, and for whom must this outcome be good? As I hold that these questions must not be obscured but have to be considered anew in each situation in which an actor claims responsibility, I do not treat responsibility as an inherently ethical term.

While generally all actors that are accepted as (sovereign) members of international society bear responsibilities, the conviction has prevailed that great powers firstly have the greatest responsibility to uphold international order, and secondly that they possess special responsibilities in the workings of it. Hence, the characteristic of bearing such responsibilities represents a significant element of great power identity (Brittingham 2007: 84-85; Foot 2001: 3). Most often, these special responsibilities simply derive from the great powers’ superior capabilities according to the well-known proverb “with great power comes great responsibility”. However, two aspects must be emphasized in this regard. Firstly, as Loke (2013: 214) demonstrates concerning China’s rise to great power status during the early 1940s, international discourses of responsibility do not necessarily have to revolve around an actor’s actual existing material capabilities but may very well be rooted in an idea of imagined or potential power. This, again, highlights that responsibilities need to be articulated and do not automatically stem from an actor’s material capabilities. Secondly, responsibilities do not solely derive from power, the allocation of responsibilities also constitutes a source of power (Bukovansky et al. 2012: 10-11). For instance, in regard to specific issue areas, the allocation of responsibility firstly structures and construes the issue area, and secondly determines which actor holds legitimate power in it (ibid.).

Certainly, works that are occupied with great power responsibility in international society predominantly revolve around the US, China, or the BRICS as “rising powers”, and do not focus on the EU. Nevertheless, this strand of literature provides several takeaway points that inform my ensuing research. This body of scholarship emphasizes that the allocation of responsibility invests an actor with power and legitimacy to uphold their idea of international order and to be engaged in various issue areas. Further, considering that the EU’s discourse of responsibility is not limited to the MEPP but involves a broad variety of local and global issues, one could argue that the EU seeks to carve out a leadership role for itself on the international stage. Yet, as the notion of special responsibilities is inextricably linked to great powers as a distinct group of particularly powerful and influential international actors, the question arises of how the EU positions itself regarding states that are internationally accepted as great powers. In respect of the MEPP, I thus strive to analyze how far the EU’s ambition goes – does it see itself as being on par with the United States, its follower, or sometimes even a leader? Lastly, as responsibility constitutes a criterion that determines who may be a member of international society in English School thinking, I take up the idea of responsibility’s exclusionary potential.

3. Responsibility in its Facets and Functions – A Theoretical Approximation

The theoretical framework of this thesis is tripartite. In a first step, I expand on my grasp of the concept of responsibility. As responsibility functions as a carrier of manifold meanings, I conceive of responsibility as a floating signifier. This entails that responsibility defies an ultimate definition. To operationalize the term without imposing a predetermined meaning on it, I establish a four-dimensional conceptual framework along which responsibility unfolds. This conceptualization of responsibility serves as the basis for the ensuing empirical analysis. Further, I strive to make the connection between responsibility and identity-building processes explicit. Especially responsibility’s relational dimension hints at similarities regarding the concept of identity. For that reason, discourses of responsibility lend themselves particularly well to further the study of EU identity.

It has become clear that various understandings of *EU* identity or *European* identity pervade the literature. Consequently, the second sub-chapter clarifies that this thesis focuses on the identity of the European Union, understood as a complex conglomerate of shared understandings of “what the EU is [...] and what it should (or should not) do” (Bretherton and Vogler 2008: 38). As this approach to identity indicates, there is an action-guiding component inherent to it. Hence, the third pillar of this theoretical framework builds on the question of how

identity and foreign policy behavior are interrelated. I assume that the relationship between foreign policy and identity is not causal but co-constitutive (Hansen 2006: 10). Identity and foreign policy are discursively connected, which means that the identity-foreign policy nexus works bidirectionally. This entails the following implication for my analysis: While I do examine potential courses of action that references to responsibility prescribe, I do not investigate actual foreign policy behavior and how it may (or may not) correspond with EU identity. Rather, I examine how the EU's external behavior and its foreign policy outcomes are discursively processed and thereby tie back into EU identity constructions.

3.1 Responsibility – Approaching a “Notoriously Awkward Concept”

Since the 1990s, the concept of responsibility increasingly gained prominence in international political debates (Daase et al. 2017: 3). Even so, responsibility has not received commensurate academic attention and the concept is often not considered beyond a vague idea of what responsibility may mean. Responsibility is commonly reckoned with as an ethical-normative, action-guiding principle, which is predominantly associated with altruism and care for others. However, similarly to other conceptions such as sovereignty or security, justice or dignity, by its very nature the concept of responsibility is much more versatile and controversial than one would assume at first glance (ibid.; Neuhäuser 2017: 81). Thus, so as to deal with this “notoriously awkward concept” (Erskine 2003: 7), I will firstly justify the poststructuralist reasoning that underlies this thesis. In a second step, I provide a conceptual approximation to responsibility without giving the term a fixed meaning or ultimate definition. Thereafter, I expand on the theoretical link between responsibility and identity-building processes. Lastly, I briefly reflect on the significance of responsibility as an (international) ordering principle that goes beyond the specific relationship between Self and Other.

What does responsibility mean? One might hold that responsibility is always connected to goodness, to moral actors, and legitimate action, and then simply close the case. However, I argue that the concept deserves a second thought in order to fully capture what responsibility is and what it does. Even from an ethical perspective, it represents a neutral concept of secondary order (Baumgärtner et al. 2018: 11). This means that “responsibility establishes an architecture of argument to assess and guide actions” but the concept of responsibility itself does not predetermine against which (primary) ethical principle, societal convention, or standard an action is to be assessed (ibid.: 2, 4). Thus, what responsibility actually means, always depends on the context in which it is deployed. This highlights the functional character of responsibility as a means to bring forward (normative) claims. Consequently, the concept of responsibility

must not be essentialized and defies an ultimate definition. This claim can be supported by the historicity of the concept of responsibility. A genealogy of the term demonstrates that responsibility carries different meanings depending on the time, place, and context (be it in moral philosophy and ethics, law, or politics) of its use (Vogelmann 2017). The fact that responsibility can have a myriad of meanings thus certainly also derives from its conceptual development. Thus, if we want to understand what responsibility means to the European Union, we cannot simply consult a dictionary (Ringmar 1996: 70). Instead, one needs to trace the “experiences and memories with which words are associated” (ibid.). Or, to put it more generally, the goal is to understand how and in which contexts a specific term is used. Thus, as Wittgenstein (1958: 20) so famously stated, “the meaning of a word is its use in language”.

Hence, this thesis strongly relies on poststructuralist reasoning, which firstly holds that the social world is constructed through discourse (Jørgensen and Philips 2002: 6). Discourses can be defined as a “specific series of representations and practices through which meanings are produced, identities constituted, social relations established, and political and ethical outcomes made more or less possible” (Campbell and Bleiker 2016: 208). Discourses must consequently be considered performative as they do not only constitute the object a discourse refers to but also the subject that is partaking in the discourse (ibid.: 209). As this thesis revolves around the generation of the identities of Self and Other as well as the relationship between them, it is particularly important to refer to the understanding of “power” that underlies this thesis. As Jørgensen and Philips (2002: 37) point out, in discourse theory power shall be understood not as an actor’s material trait but as something “which produces the social”.

Another core poststructuralist assumption is that language is inherently unstable so that meaning is continuously subject to change (Jørgensen and Philips 2002: 6). Due to responsibility’s polymorphism, I treat responsibility as a floating signifier (cf. Stahl 2017). Floating signifiers are terms that “are particularly open to different ascriptions of meaning” (Jørgensen and Philips 2002: 28). Thus, responsibility only unfolds meaning as soon as it is invoked by discourse.² For those who consider responsibility as an inherently positive, ethical principle, the understanding of responsibility deployed here might seem unusual. However, “articulations of ethics are inevitably political” (Zehfuss 2016: 99). Thus, what we understand

² A floating signifier must not be confused with an empty signifier. Empty signifiers describe “discursive elements that have been emptied of their actual content and provide for the unity of the discourse” (Methmann 2010: 352). According to Methmann (2010), “climate protection” has become an empty signifier as various international actors refer to climate protection without having to change their behavior in any way. Here, in a process of dilution several international organizations deliberately stripped climate protection of any meaning in their discourse. In contrast, while a floating signifier may be empty by itself and can be invoked in innumerable contexts, its core function of conveying meaning(s) has not disappeared.

by ethics is constructed by discourse and is not based on a universally valid meaning that outlasts time and space (see also Aggestam 2008: 9; Linsenmaier et al. 2021). In consequence, postmodern approaches often face the reproach of a certain “normative uprooting” (Diez 2010: 513; see also Diez 1996: 259). Yet, this accusation ignores that a core concern of postmodern thinkers is to challenge claims to universality and thereby counter totalitarianisms of all kinds (ibid.). Moreover, as I clarified above, even when arguing from a standpoint of ethical theory, responsibility is to be construed as a neutral vehicle for a substantial claim (Baumgärtner et al. 2018: 17). Hence, responsibility constitutes a discursive means to present actors and their actions as legitimate and as striving for “the good” according to their definition of it.

Evidently, a floating signifier evades final fixation, which means that a universally valid definition of responsibility cannot be provided. Nevertheless, notions of responsibility can be thought of according to four interconnected dimensions: (1) a temporal dimension, (2) a dimension of sources, (3) a dimension that captures proposals for courses of action to meet the respective responsibility, and, most importantly, (4) a relational dimension, which involves the responsible Self, the Other and the relationship between the two.

Firstly, the temporal dimension relates to the question of which point in time a claim to responsibility refers to. In that sense, some theorists differentiate between retrospective and prospective responsibility (Erskine 2003; Günther 2006; Szigeti 2006). Retrospective responsibility refers to past wrongdoing. In contrast, responsibilities in the sense of specific tasks that an actor incurs as a result of what they deem to be obliged to do are understood as prospective responsibilities. Hence, the reference point of retrospective responsibility is in the past (e.g., referring to historical wrongdoings) and prospective responsibility refers to the future. While this distinction appears reasonable theoretically, its analytical merit may be questioned as both temporal dimensions of responsibility are intimately linked. A statement that includes the assumption of retrospective responsibility always bears significance for the future, which means that retrospective responsibility transitions to prospective responsibility. Therefore, I do not differentiate between retro- and prospective responsibilities in this thesis.

The second dimension refers to potential sources of responsibility. In this respect, Szigeti (2006: 27-30) provides a useful list of six principles that capture on what grounds responsibility is usually assigned. The first principle is the contribution principle (1), which describes the responsibility of an actor that has caused harm. The beneficiary principle (2) means that if an actor benefits from a specific situation that has brought about harm, they are responsible to mitigate or eradicate the damage. Thirdly, the community principle (3) holds that an actor bears

responsibility toward other actors due to their membership in the same group. I understand this principle in an extensive way, as I hold that it does not matter whether such a community exists formally or is brought into existence by construction through references to common values, historical ties, or other aspects that create a notion of belonging. One of the most prominent principles, the capacity principle (4), describes that if a certain action needs to be carried out to avoid or mitigate harm, every actor capable of doing so has a responsibility to act. The last two principles, the principle of legitimate expectations (5) and the consent principle (6) are strongly connected. While the consent principle refers to responsibilities an actor bears as they have agreed or stated their intention to do something, the principle of legitimate expectations denotes the responsibility of an actor to act in congruence with the resulting expectations of others. In contrast to Szigeti (2006: 27), however, I do not consider these principles as “normative sources” from which responsibility necessarily and automatically arises. Rather, I conceive of these principles as frameworks of meaning and argumentative lines along which responsibility can be discursively constructed.

After an actor is discursively presented as bearing certain responsibilities, the question arises of how these shall be met. Consequently, responsibility always has a behavioral dimension. This third dimension of responsibility asks which courses of action are presented as legitimate and appropriate in accordance with an actor’s responsibility (Stahl 2017; Sedelmeier 2005a, 2005b). Since responsibility is devoid of any essential meaning but depends on its respective discursive context, responsibility may prescribe very different kinds of behavior.

Lastly, responsibility has a relational dimension (Neuhäuser 2017: 83). This fourth dimension overarches the three preceding ones as the notion of responsibility presupposes a relationship between X, the bearer of responsibility, and Y as the Other that X is responsible for. Hence, this dimension implies three important aspects: who is X, who is Y, and how are they connected? Regarding the question of “who is X?”, it is important to note that responsibility, first and foremost, presupposes a conception of a Self and what it means to be a responsible actor (Vogelmann 2017: 29). Building on Nietzsche’s contemplations regarding the process through which a Self is enabled to bear responsibility and thus *be* an autonomous subject, responsibility can be conceived of as a “technique for the generation of subjects” (ibid., my translation).³ Additionally, the invocation of responsibility simultaneously establishes and

³ Similarly, Campbell (1994: 460) asserts in reaction to Emmanuel Levinas’ reasoning that “[r]esponsibility understood in this way refigures subjectivity: the very origin of the subject is to be found in its subjection to the ‘other’, a subjection that precedes consciousness, identity, and freedom, and as such does not originate in a vow or decision. [...] In other words, subjects are constituted by their relationship with the ‘other’.”

limits this Self's agency. On the one hand, the Self subordinates to a specific understanding of its responsibility, which (theoretically) requires it to act accordingly. On the other hand, the assumption of responsibility invests the Self with power and a position of authority (Hansen 2006: 50; Vogelmann 2017: 30;). In short, responsibility is both productive and constraining.

Nevertheless, the assumption (or allocation) of responsibility does not only bring the Self into being, but it also equally constructs the Other ("who is Y?"). This generation of *ego* and *alter* might remind us of core tenets around which the academic debate on the construction of identity revolves. For instance, any identity necessarily builds on the differentiation and demarcation from a constitutive Other, a process termed "othering" (e.g. Manners and Whitman 2003, Rumelili 2004, Diez 2004). Hence, similar to responsibility, identity cannot be devised without an Other – there is a "radical interdependence" between Self and Other (Campbell 1993: 96). Furthermore, identity formations are often accompanied by notions of superiority, thus inscribing a specific relationship between Self and Other. Likewise, the invocation of responsibility constructs "hierarchies of power and morality" among the responsible actor and the Other this actor is responsible for (Demirtas-Bagdonas 2014: 144; see also Hansen 2006: 35; Loke 2013: 215; Poopuu 2020: 80). This kind of power that references to responsibility generate is best described in terms of Barnett and Duvall's (2005: 46) "power to", as power that – in contrast to "power over" – is produced by social relations that define "who actors are and what capacities and practices they are socially empowered to undertake". Thus, it is a central concern of this thesis to uncover and problematize underlying power structures that are implicit in the notion of responsibility. Relations of power certainly do not only play a role when responsibility is assumed vis-à-vis an incapable Other. The allocation of responsibilities to other actors produces a similar social set-up. Here, the actor that ascribes responsibility puts itself into a position of superiority as it is for this actor to decide who bears responsibility, for what reasons, and how this responsibility is supposed to be met. For that reason, the allocation of responsibility to oneself as well as to others serves as a source of social power and legitimacy and thereby constitutes "structures of political power" (Bukovansky et al. 2012: 9).

On a last note, the significance of notions of responsibility in international politics transcends the specific "one-to-one relationship" between Self and Other (Campbell 1994: 463). In the international realm, the Self faces an abundance of Others and the question arises of what we can infer from the multiplicity of Self-Other relationships that build on responsibility. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to elaborate more deeply on this line of thinking, yet I briefly touch on this theoretical aspect. To recall, the notion of responsibility pervades EU foreign policy discourses generally, far beyond the specific issue of the Middle East peace process.

Consequently, one could conceive of responsibility as a principle ordering relationships with various Others, thus as an attempt on the European Union's part of making sense of and constructing a certain kind of (international⁴) order – an attempt of *ordering*.⁵ If we then consider this ordering as an intersubjective, discursive endeavor, then the EU's attempt of partaking in the construction of international order will only prevail as long as it is discursively reconstructed and not challenged by a powerful counter-discourse. This hints at the fact that EU discourses of responsibility certainly do not happen in a vacuum. Zooming out from the EU-level, English School-inspired reasoning comes to play. The increase of “responsibility talk” in world politics generally can be considered a consequence of a shifting understanding of the state. States are not merely conceived of as “actors in some quasi-mechanical international system, but also as the bearers of responsibilities in an international society” (Bukovansky et al. 2012: 1). This shift has set in after the end of the Cold War, which entailed a “normative globalization” (Aggestam 2008: 4). This normative globalization resonates with the international discourse that began to challenge sovereignty's absoluteness and culminated in the emergence of the responsibility to protect (R2P) principle. The very idea of seeking “responsibility beyond borders” (ibid.) is encapsulated in this changing normative context and influenced the EU in the configuration of its common foreign and security policy (see also Badie 2004: 161-162; Chandler 2003; Coicaud and Wheeler 2008; Vogt 2006). This changing context further corresponds with the notion of the current epoch of postmodernity which is characterized by a dense relational network that radically questions “any one-dimensional representation of agency, power, responsibility, or sovereignty” (Campbell 1993: 84).

Consequently, I conceive of this changing normative context as an overarching discourse that provides specific discursive resources and enables actors such as the EU to partake in the ordering of international relations through its own discourse of responsibility. Thus, as the case of the European Union shows – which does not count among the so-called great powers (see chapter 2.2.2) – any answer to the question of who are the “great responsables” (Bull 1979: 447) might not be self-evident but is subject to discursive structuring. My argument here is that the phenomenon of the assumption and allocation of responsibilities in the realm of international politics builds on a discursive endeavor of creating international order and of carving out a central position for the EU in this order. This international discourse of responsibility does not

⁴ In this respect, Daase et al. (2017: 3) hold that the expansion of allocations of responsibility and changes in the ways in which responsibility is invoked may also serve as indicators regarding major changes in global political contexts, such as processes of internationalization, transnationalization and globalization.

⁵ Certainly, the term “international order” is by itself a highly contentious term in the discipline of International Relations. For an overview of different theoretical takes on order, see Lascurettes and Poznansky 2021.

necessarily mean, however, that a genuine “moral transformation” (Wheeler 2000: 310) has taken place which leads to a more morally sound behavior of the various actors in the international sphere. Rather, the idea of assuming and allocating responsibilities serves to construct a certain kind of order that is not automatically more just – responsibility still needs to be considered an ethically neutral term. As stated above, especially the assumption of responsibility exhibits a claim to hierarchy and a specific configuration of power. Asking who bears responsibility further touches upon another aspect central to order: the question of membership (Lascurettes 2020: 6). Assuming responsibility and even more so allocating responsibility to specific actors can be considered as a marker of the participants of that order. In this thesis, this aspect seems particularly relevant regarding the status of Palestine. For that reason, I assume that if the EU increasingly allocates responsibility to Palestine (and Israel alike), then this hints at the perception that Palestine has a specific role to play in this order and is required to comply with the expectations that come along with the membership in it.

In sum, I conceive of responsibility as a floating signifier, which means that it does not bear any predetermined meaning. Responsibility defies an ultimate definition, but it can be conceptualized as building on four interconnected dimensions (the dimensions of sources and courses of action as well as the temporal and relational dimensions). All of these dimensions reveal certain aspects of how EU identity is constructed – be it through references to European history and EU capacities as sources of its responsibility (dimension of sources), or through contemplations on how the EU should act (dimension of courses of action). Responsibility’s most fundamental dimension, the relational dimension, exhibits several similarities between the concepts of responsibility and identity. This invigorates the theoretical link between allocations of responsibility and the construction of identity. For these reasons, an analysis of discourses of responsibility lends itself particularly well to the endeavor of tracing identity-building processes. Finally, I have tried to extend the idea that responsibility establishes a certain relation between Self and Other and to transfer it to international relations at large. I outlined that the notion of responsibility does not only pervade the EU’s foreign policy discourse. Responsibility has generally gained prevalence, which led me to assume that responsibility may be considered an ordering principle (with a significant hierarchical component) of the international sphere that touches upon fundamental questions of membership and the distribution of power.

3.2 Envisioning an Identity of the European Union – “Who are EU?”

There is hardly a concept in the humanities and social sciences that has received as much attention as that of identity. This has resulted in a multitude of different conceptions and

understandings, which have informed reflections on a specific EU identity. Due to the persisting fuzziness of the term, I will begin with an outline of various pitfalls when trying to envision an identity of the EU – or, in Strange’s (1998) words, when asking “Who are EU?”. In the ensuing paragraphs, I then carve out my own grasp of a discursively constructed EU identity.

The first aspect that needs to be considered is a prominent assumption regarding the study of identity in International Relations: “if it works for the parts, namely, for the individual, then it must work for the whole, or states, too” (Epstein 2011: 339). This assumption is, however, faulty and the presumption of the existence of a unitary, essentialized Self when theorizing the identity of a state or another collective actor in international politics should be avoided (ibid.; see also Ringmar 1996: 88-89; Browning and Joenniemi 2017: 34). Rather, identity should be considered a “dynamic process of *identification*” by which the Self is being made (Epstein 2011: 334, emphasis in original). As noted in the previous section, discourses of responsibility contribute to this Self-making. Thus, when analyzing EU identity, the goal is not to delve into the search for a “soul of our Union” (von der Leyen 2021) or to identify *the* EU’s Self but to uncover discursive constructions and prevalent ideas of it.

In line with the poststructuralist tenets outlined above, identities are constituted by discourse – pre-social identities do therefore not exist, neither when it comes to individuals, nor collective actors. A discourse theoretical approach to identity entails that the process of identity formation is never complete. Identities must be conceived as non-essential, fragmented constructions that are contingent and may be subject to change (Wæver 1996: 115, 127; Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 41). Building on that, we should be careful when diagnosing a fully-fledged “identity crisis” as this notion potentially obscures identities’ inherent ambiguity, multiplicity, and the incessant need to (re)construct them (Stark Urrestarazu 2015: 191).

The significance of constitutive Others for any identity-building process has been mentioned earlier. The construction of identity is indeed only possible through the emphasis on the differences between Self and Other(s). While earlier works highlighted the prevalence of radical otherness in national security discourses, a reconceptualization of the difference between Self and Other has been established, which holds that there are several “degrees of Otherness” (Hansen 2006: 38-41; Diez 2010: 497). These range from radical otherness to contending or even complementary identities. Thus, stating that identity is built on difference does not predetermine how different the Other is. One could further think of identities as being situated in a “web” of multiple Others. This entails that identity is not only stabilized through its general differentiation from these Others but also through the ordering of these Others as being closer

or farther away from the Self (Hansen 2006: 41, 213). Further, the Self's Others are themselves stabilized through their positioning in relation to other Others (ibid.: 41). Additionally, Rumelili (2004: 29) introduces an important distinction between the necessary differentiation of *ego* from *alter* and the behavioral relationship that follows. This means that the distance (or closeness respectively) between Self and Other does not predetermine whether the Other is considered as threatening to the Self's identity or not. The construction of identity through discourses of responsibility is a case in point. Thus, whether an Other is considered threatening or not always follows from a specific discursive setting and is not exclusively conditioned by the Other's degree of otherness.

If we assume that identity requires articulation or narration, the question that ensues is "who speaks?" (Epstein 2011: 341). This question is particularly relevant when it comes to the EU. Two main approaches to the EU's identity can be broadly distinguished (Sedelmeier 2004: 126-27). The first theoretical strand maintains that the EU's identity is based on a specific configuration of its member states' common identity traits. Connected to this line of thinking is the question of whether the EU really has an identity that is "more than the sum of its parts" (Aggestam 2006: 11). The second approach holds that a collective European identity is constituted and articulated on the EU level as a distinct sphere from that of the member states. The problem is, however, that answering the question of who partakes in the discursive construction of an EU identity is not as simple – can we really neatly separate the EU level from that of the member states, as well as from the role that external perspectives play in relation to the EU's identity construction? In this vein, Calhoun (2001: 38) argues that the EU may be considered "as an institutional arena within which diversity and multiple connections among people and organizations can flourish partly because they never add up to a single, integrating whole". Thus, trying to capture the totality of the EU's identity – or *identities* if we agree with Manners and Whitman's (2003: 396) assessment that the EU's identity is composed of a set of complex, relational, and potentially contradictive identities (see also Checkel and Katzenstein 2009: 25) – is impossible in the first place (Manners and Whitman 1998: 238). This complex notion of EU identity discloses why it is at times paraphrased as the "nature of the beast" (e.g., Bretherton and Vogler 2008).

Only superficially touching upon the question of "who speaks?", Bretherton and Vogler (2008: 38) provide the following definition of the EU's collective identity:

Collective identity is constituted by shared understandings, both within the EU and among third parties, about what the EU is, in terms of its character

and its values and what it should (or should not) do, in terms of its external policies and actions.

Thus, while an indefinite number of actors inside and outside of the EU partake in its identity construction, this thesis concentrates on such “shared understandings” that are articulated by the EU’s main institutions. I assume that these count among the most important actors when it comes to constructing the EU’s identity. Not only do they possess the undeniable discursive authority that enables them to “speak identity”, but they are also being heard by an audience inside and outside of the European Union (cf. Diez 2010: 494). However, as this focus only allows me to shed light on a small fraction of EU identity constructions, I will further justify this analytical choice in chapter 4.

On a last note, it is important to shed light on the relationship between identity and role. Both terms are often used interchangeably, which hints at considerable confusion regarding the delimitation of identity and role from one another (Kießling 2019: 477; Sedelmeier 2004: 125). To resolve the uneasy parallel use of identity and role, I suggest that both concepts overlap in the notion of role conception. A role conception reflects an actor’s own definition of his or her role and defines “the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to [...] the roleholder, and of the functions, if any, [...] [the roleholder] should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in subordinate regional systems” (Holsti 1970: 245-246). Further, a role conception includes “the intention and motives of the foreign-policy actor, in other words, the meaning of action” (Aggestam 2006: 19). Hence, I use Bretherton and Vogler’s (2008: 38) definition of the EU’s collective identity, which includes perceptions of what the EU “should (or should not) do” (see also Lucarelli 2006a: 49). In accordance with the non-causal interlinkage of identity and foreign policy that underlies this thesis and will be presented in more detail in the next sub-chapter, foreign policy relies on notions of an actor’s identity, but its formulation (re-) produces identities at the same time. It is responsibility’s third dimension, which encompasses potential courses of action, that contributes to constructing this aspect of EU identity. Despite this overlap in the notion of role conception, identity and role must not be used interchangeably as they are not congruent and encompass aspects that the respective other concept does not include. For instance, while role performance lies at the core of the concept of role, I do not consider role performance as such to be part of identity.

The difficulties of delimiting identity and role that pervade the literature hint at the broader problem of how to conceptualize the connection between identity and foreign policy. Consequently, the next section sheds light on the so-called identity-foreign policy nexus from a poststructuralist point of view. The main aspect here is that the relationship between identity

and foreign policy is co-constitutive and cannot be forced into a causal analytical scheme. Thus, the ensuing subchapter outlines how identity constructions do matter for the formulation of foreign policy and further sheds light on a process that is often overlooked: the process through which actual external behavior and foreign policy outcomes are discursively incorporated and given meaning and may, consequently, pose a challenge to the EU's discourse of responsibility.

3.3 The Foreign Policy of a *Responsible* European Union

References to responsibility do not only construct the Self (and its Others) but most often also propose concrete courses of action, thus conveying an idea of how this Self ought to act. This is what I termed responsibility's behavioral dimension above. As such actions are predominantly directed towards the Other, this aspect further taps into another dimension of responsibility, namely its inherent relationalism. Hence, as the discursive practice of foreign policy formulation *qua definitionem* designs the relationship between the Self and "the foreign", this begs the question of how the EU's identity as created through its discourse of responsibility informs its foreign policy.

However, before delving into the widely debated questions of how and to what extent the EU's identity matters regarding its external behavior, it is firstly necessary to provide a definition of what is meant by "EU foreign policy" – and what is not. Here, I draw on Hill's (2003: 3) standard definition of foreign policy, which denotes "the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually a state) in international relations". This definition is particularly suitable to be applied to the EU for several reasons. Firstly, it becomes clear that foreign policy is considered "the sum" of official external relations, which enables me to include different EU organs that (to a varying extent) partake in the formulation and implementation of EU foreign policy as well as various policy areas that constitute the "mosaic of EU foreign policy" (ibid.; Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet and Rieger 2015: 10). Secondly, EU foreign policy only includes relations with actors that are external to the European Union – practices of "making foreign" within the EU are therefore not considered here (see Hellmann 2016: 41). Thirdly, this parsimonious definition does not presuppose a certain kind of actor quality or capacity to cover all possible foreign policy options that a nation state has at its disposal (ibid.: 40). Even though it remains difficult to neatly delimitate a genuine EU foreign policy from that of its member states, I understand EU foreign policy – in contrast to the all-encompassing term "European foreign policy" (White 2004: 13) – as being constituted of those external relations that are negotiated and decided upon within the framework of the EU.

Returning to the identity-foreign policy nexus, a broad range of perspectives exists regarding the question of how exactly the impact of identity on foreign policy unfolds. This thesis follows a non-causal approach to this nexus that is in line with its general poststructuralist point of departure. From a poststructuralist point of view, it is impossible to conceive of identity as a variable that could be compared with the causal influence of material factors on foreign policy (Hansen 2006: 1). Rather, identity and foreign policy are connected by discourse, in which potential courses of action are argumentatively related to an actor's identity (Stahl 2017: 442). The relationship between identity and foreign policy can therefore be described as a "non-causal process of combinability" – any foreign policy discourse strives to present particular policy options as matching an actor's identity (Hansen 2006: 18). Consequently, identities do not directly determine foreign policy but what they do is provide a restricted framework within which suitable policy options may be chosen (Sedelmeier 2005b: 121-122; Larsen 1997: 21; see also: Dunn and Neumann 2016: 264). As identities are discursively generated, the underlying argument builds on the poststructuralist tenet that "a discourse is a reduction of possibilities" (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 27; see also Dunn and Neumann 2016: 263). However, as discourses are constantly in flux, the decision regarding which policy option is (most) appropriate is not only discourse-dependent per se but is further highly context-sensitive and contingent (Sedelmeier 2003: 12; Hebel and Lenz 2016: 478). Thus, it is impossible to "translate" identity into foreign policy behavior directly (*ibid.*; see also Larsen 2004: 68). This holds particularly true in the case of the EU, considering the complex and multifaceted nature of its collective identity (Bretherton and Vogler 2008: 58-59). Hence, this thesis aims at tracing which "policy spaces" (Hansen 2006: 213) the EU's discourse of responsibility establishes, to identify continuities and disruptions in the case of the MEPP.

The argument that identity restricts the range of suitable foreign policy options has been challenged by others who contend that instead of identity, it is mostly interests that guide an actor's foreign policy formulation. However, a juxtaposition of the interests of the EU and its identity does not hold as interests are not simply "out there" but are intrinsically linked to the (discursively generated) identity of the European Union (Aggestam 2008: 4; Diez 2001: 9; Diez 2005: 621-22; Lucarelli 2006b: 3-4; Risse 2007: 55; Rosamond 2014; Schlag 2016: 14; on the interlocking of EU identity and interests regarding its engagement in the Middle East, see Del Sarto 2021: 25 and Sacharov 2008: 171). Del Sarto (2016: 215-16) further erodes the artificial dichotomy between identity and interests when stating that the pursuit of certain interests (e.g., the spread of democracy in the European Union's direct neighborhood) also serves the construction of a "normative identity". This aspect will be further demonstrated in the ensuing

analytical part of this thesis as interests also feature prominently in the EU's discourse of responsibility. Hence, identity and interests are strongly interwoven.

As stated above, identity and foreign policy are connected by discourse. This means that the relationship between the two is co-constitutive (Hansen 2006: 10; see also Lucarelli 2006a: 48-49). Not only does identity create a limited framework within which foreign policy unfolds, but foreign policy also feeds back into the (re-)construction of identity. Even though there seems to be a consensus that foreign policy behavior and foreign policy outcomes tie back into an actor's identity construction, most authors do not investigate this "feedback loop" (Hebel and Lenz 2016: 487). In line with the assumption that identity needs to be understood as reflexive and fluid, I therefore strive to uncover how the perceived success of EU foreign policy – or lack thereof – shapes the EU's discourse of responsibility and thereby its identity constructions. This approach seems particularly fruitful considering that this thesis covers slightly more than two decades of EU responsibility discourses regarding the MEPP.

To incorporate foreign policy behavior and its outcomes into a discourse-theoretical model of identity-building processes, Poopuu (2020: 30-35) establishes a frame of analysis that includes both "telling and acting". Consequently, discourse is not necessarily a "purely linguistic concept" (Hall 2001: 72). Practice plays a significant role, yet it is through language that practice acquires meaning, is enabled or inhibited, and ultimately becomes part of the discourse. This aspect is aptly elucidated by Hannah Arendt (1998: 178-79, cited in Poopuu 2020: 13), who holds that

though his deed can be perceived in its brute physical appearance without verbal accompaniment, it becomes relevant only through the spoken word in which he identifies himself as the actor, announcing what he does, has done, and intends to do.

While various academic contributions conclude that a mismatch between the EU's engagement in the MEPP and its normative rhetoric, stated goals, and ultimately identity exists (see Tocci 2009: 388; Ambos and Behr 2006; Harpaz and Shamis 2010; Azhar and Pinfari 2017), I do not seek to delve into this debate as, building on poststructuralist reasoning, neither do I expect that the EU stringently lives up to its rhetoric nor does this aspect constitute the focus of my research. I still aspire to take up this debate. Hence, I strive to analyze how the EU itself assesses its foreign policy behavior and how such assessments are discursively reflected. With such an approach I avoid imposing my own understanding of successful or appropriate policies and can trace how the EU deals with foreign policy outcomes without declaring them un-/successful beforehand. I certainly expect that positive views on the EU's engagement in the MEPP

strengthen the EU's discourse of responsibility. Yet, what happens with EU responsibility if its approach to the conflict appears futile or even detrimental? To shed light on this and several other aspects, I expand on my analytical strategy in the following chapter.

4. From Abstract to Concrete – Methodological Considerations

It is a characteristic of research that is occupied with discourses that theoretical commitments and methodological proceedings are inextricably linked, thus forming an “integrated whole” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 4). Departing from the discursive epistemology that underlies this thesis, a discourse analytical approach is not only the natural but also the most suitable choice. However, in contrast to other methods that build on a more rigid set of steps that need to be carried out one after another, a discourse analysis allows for the research process to be developed and adjusted to the subject area under study based on a combination of discourse analytical tools and specific analytic choices. Hence, in the following subchapters, I carve out my own research strategy and strive to render the research process as transparent as possible.

To begin with, I return to the understanding of “discourse” that permeates this thesis. The term has not only increased in vagueness due to its fashionable and diffuse usage in everyday language but also the scientific community is far from being united on the question of “what discourses are or how to analyse them” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 1). For instance, while Laclau and Mouffe's well-known poststructuralist approach holds that discourses construct the social world and that nothing exists outside of discourse, others (e.g., Fairclough 2003) contend that the social consists of discursive as well as non-discursive dimensions. Consequently, if we depart from an understanding that sees the social as being fully constructed by discourse, then all social phenomena can be analyzed through discourse analysis. The main idea here is that reality is only accessible to the extent that meaning is assigned to it by actors, who are part of a discourse and are themselves constituted by this discourse (Jäger and Maier 2015: 112). On the most basic level discourses may be defined as “a particular way of talking about and understanding the world” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 1). Yet, it is important not to obscure that a discourse as such does not simply exist waiting to be analyzed. Rather, a discourse is by itself a construction, modeled by the researcher according to her focus and analytical choices (ibid.: 144). Thus, in the following, I will firstly elaborate on what exactly constitutes the discourse that is the focus of this thesis. I will outline whom I consider the most relevant actors, establish the period of analysis, and explain my choice of documents to grasp the discourse. The ensuing subchapter delves into what Hansen (2006: 2) coined as the “methodology of

reading”. Here, I expound on how I approach the selected material and present the analytical strategy that enables me to investigate constructions of Self, Other(s), and the relationship between them. At the heart of my analytical strategy lies a theoretically informed coding scheme, which facilitates the identification of patterns of meaning-making.

4.1 Identifying the Discourse – Tracing the Common Thread

As indicated above, a discourse is not simply “out there” but is deliberately modeled and delimited as a research object by the researcher. Thus, the selection of a specific case serves as the first building block when constituting the discourse under study. Already in the introduction, I clarified that references to responsibility, certain duties, and obligations run like a common thread through the EU’s rhetoric regarding a broad array of policy fields. Thus, I firstly want to recall why I chose the EU’s discourse of responsibility regarding the MEPP among all possible options. I touched upon this decision earlier and argued that the Middle East peace process lends itself particularly well as it represents a matter of international relevance in which the EU has been engaged financially and politically for several decades. At the same time, a cursory review of selected documents from the Archive of the European Parliament and the Bulletin of the European Communities revealed that a narrative of specific European responsibilities is historically rooted and surfaced long before the European Communities were replaced by the European Union. Hence, one could argue that even before it could be debated “who” the EU would become and which direction it would take, the idea of specifically European responsibility was already in place. Additionally, as I strive to demonstrate that the notion of responsibility plays a significant role in the construction of the EU’s identity, it was necessary to choose a case in which a broad variety of identity-related factors are likely to be prominent. In this respect, the Middle East peace process seems particularly suitable as historical ties, geographic proximity (especially after the accession rounds of 2004 and 2007), and references to culture, religion, and values all at once play an important role within respective EU debates.

Apart from that, my case selection is consistent with further theoretical and practical considerations. Firstly, as I consider identities to be non-essential and in flux, it appears logical to choose a case that enables me to investigate how EU identity constructions evolve over time and thus adopt an evolutionary, temporal perspective. The MEPP is ideal in this respect as it has continuously been one of the core items on the EU’s agenda throughout the period under study. Secondly, I chose the MEPP as an issue relating to a concrete conflict over global political concerns such as climate change or migration as the allocation of responsibility follows much clearer lines of argumentation and it is much less diffuse who the significant Others are

that the Self is constructed against. Consequently, especially the social, and relational aspect of the concept of responsibility finds better expression here. Lastly, considering my multidimensional conceptualization of responsibility, the MEPP represents a case that enables me to apply my theoretical considerations in their full range.

The next step when modeling the discourse under study refers to the definition of a period of investigation. I have decided to choose the year 1999 as the starting date of my analysis, which will extend up to the year 2021. My analysis begins in 1999 for two reasons: because of institutional aspects of the EU itself and because of the state of the peace process. Yet, certainly, any definition of a caesura must appear artificial to a certain extent. In October 1999 Javier Solana took office as the first High Representative for Common Foreign and Security of the Union (HR, as of 2009 High Representative/Vice President (HR/VP)). This position was established by the Treaty of Amsterdam (1999) and was meant to render EU foreign policy more effective and visible. Together with the president of the Council and the President of the Commission, the High Representative was to represent the EU externally. Especially HR Solana significantly contributed to the establishment of the EU as a foreign policy actor and promoted the further “Brusselization” of EU foreign policy (Bretherton and Vogler 2008: 5, Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet and Rüger 2015: 74). Additionally, the 1990s generally brought with them an important upgrade of EU foreign policy, especially with the Treaty on European Union (TEU) setting general objectives for the EU’s CFSP, providing policy instruments, and introducing supportive institutional innovations (Bretherton and Vogler 2008: 4). Thus, there are powerful reasons to start my analysis at this point as the EU began to have its own foreign policy tools and capabilities for the first time, which may have found reflection in its discourse of responsibility in the course of increasing awareness of its “actorness in the making”. From the perspective of the peace process, the year 1999 is characterized by a cautious hope that a conclusion of the Oslo process was still possible, especially as Israeli elections had just taken place - replacing Benjamin Netanyahu, whose tenure was characterized by a complete stalling of the peace process, with Ehud Barak as the new Prime Minister - and preparations for Camp David II were underway. This timeframe consisting of a bit more than two decades shall ensure that conclusions can be drawn on the question of whether and how the EU’s understanding of its responsibilities and thus self-image evolves. Further, this temporal perspective enables me to investigate whether what Dinan, Nugent, and Paterson (2017: 1) call the EU’s “age of crisis” since 2009 or what former EU Commission President Juncker (2016) termed the EU’s “polycrisis” are reflected in the EU’s (in-) ability to formulate responsibilities and thereby craft a coherent European identity.

After having clarified my case selection and the period of investigation, the next analytical choice refers to the question of which texts shall constitute the discourse to be analyzed. To delve into the material selection, I firstly clarify whom I consider the most relevant actors that shape the discourse of responsibility regarding the MEPP within the EU. As indicated in the preceding theoretical framework, I have chosen to concentrate on the EU's four main institutions – the European Parliament, the EU Commission, the Council of the EU, and the European Council – as well as the HR/VP as I assume that they most profoundly shape the EU's official discourse and bear the highest discursive authority to articulate the identity of the EU. This analytical choice can further be justified as said institutions (to varying degrees) shape the EU's foreign policy. This aspect is significant as I strive to investigate how the EU itself assesses its foreign policy behavior and how such assessments are discursively reflected. I referred to this aspect in terms of a “feedback loop” (Hebel and Lenz 2016: 476) earlier. Even though it is a very significant one, I am aware that I only focus on *one* specific identity construction by selected actors within the EU and thereby reject any claim to exclusivity. I will elaborate on the limitations that come with my focus on the official EU-level discourse below.

As the term “MEPP” increasingly began to refer to the specific Israeli-Palestinian dimension, each potential document had to include the keywords “peace process”, “Middle East” and/or “Israel” and “Palestine”. It is important to note here that I deliberately excluded documents that did include the aforementioned keywords but thematically dealt with the EU's broader engagement in the Mediterranean (be it regarding the EMP/Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) or in terms of its neighborhood policy) rather than the MEPP as such. Additionally, as I intend to analyze the EU-level discourse of responsibility regarding the MEPP, each document had to include a reference to “responsib*” or “duty”, “duties”, “commit*” or “oblig*”.

Certainly, the European Parliament represents the heart of the political debate in the EU and therefore occupies a special position in the ensuing analysis. Not only does the European Parliament hold several plenary sessions on the MEPP per year but up until 2010, these plenary debates were usually attended by a varying combination of the HR/VP, the European Commissioner for External Relations, and a representative of the Council of the European Union. I chose one parliamentary debate on the MEPP per year that had to contain references to responsibility and was attended by the HR/VP due to their intermediate institutional position as well as the most representatives of other EU institutions if I could choose from several debates within one year. From 2012 onwards, the European Parliament debates are not available in translation any longer. Hence, I manually translated the debates with an online translator and tried – regarding the languages of which I have a sufficient command – to ensure that the

translations are as adequate as possible. Due to the focus on language in use within discourse analyses, one could question whether important aspects of the debates got “lost in translation” as I analyze them solely in English. The so-called Sapir-Whorf hypothesis holds that “formal characteristics of a language govern the kinds of conceptions of the world that its speakers have” (Chilton 2004: 26). However, this hypothesis has been refuted by linguists as it is not a specific language that causes us to think and speak in a certain way but that it is about the patterns of language use (ibid.: 26-27; see also Said 2014: 142). Thus, translations do not pose a problem to discourse analyses as they explicitly investigate such patterns of language use. Further, as I do not only search for references to responsibility but also to duties, obligations, and commitments, it is not pivotal whether a text is translated into the exactly corresponding English terms or not. Apart from the parliamentary debates, I included 30 of the 39 resolutions that the European Parliament passed on the MEPP since 1999 according to my selection criteria.

Regarding the Council of the EU, I identified 51 documents that fulfill the criteria outlined above. These documents consist of the “Council Conclusions on the Middle East peace process”, six Declarations of the HR/VP on behalf of the Council, and one “Outcome of the Council Meeting” (2017). The Declarations of the HR/VP on behalf of the Council particularly represent the years between 2016 and 2021 as no official Council Conclusion on the MEPP could be reached after 2016. For the European Council, I included 21 documents, consisting of conclusions and declarations on the MEPP as well as Presidency Conclusions. All such outputs must be adopted unanimously at European Council meetings and are therefore representative of the discourse within the European Council. It is important to note that 19 of the 21 documents I selected have been published between 1999 and 2010. This tilt does, however, not result from the fact that the European Council did not refer to European commitments, obligations, and the like anymore in its foreign policy discourses. It is a consequence of the striking absence of the MEPP, Israel, and Palestine specifically, and the Middle East as a region from 2015 to 2020.

Apart from the statements of the Commissioner for External Relations, who participated in all chosen European Parliament debates until 2009, I assembled eight landmark documents issued by the European Commission that fulfill my selection criteria. These being, for instance, the EU-Israel and the EU-PA Action Plans or the EU Action Strategy on Statebuilding for Peace in the Middle East. The last batch of documents revolves around HR Solana, and HR/VPs Ashton, Mogherini, and Borrell. Apart from their respective statements in the chosen European Parliament debates, I identified 30 more documents. These consist of official statements, speeches given at the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLIC), statements after trips to the region, guest contributions to newspapers, or HR/VP Borrell’s blog “A Window to the World”.

A total of 164 documents will feed into the ensuing analysis.⁶ All documents could be retrieved from the official institutional webpages, the personal websites of the HR/VPs, the Archive of European Integration (AEI) of the University of Pittsburgh, and the archive of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL). To underpin my search for relevant documents, I also investigated intertextual references in European Parliament resolutions and consulted secondary literature and documentary histories (e.g., Kaya 2013; Pardo and Peters 2012; Persson 2020). After having outlined the central parameters that define the discourse under analysis, I will expand on my analytical strategy, present my coding scheme, and discuss analytical difficulties in the following.

4.2 The Art of Reading

When recalling my theoretical grasp on the concept of responsibility, I argued that it can be captured along four dimensions that refer to sources of responsibility, courses of action that are suggested to meet this responsibility, the construction of a specific relationship between Self and Other as well as the temporal perspective. To investigate how responsibility contributes to constructing Self, Other, and the relationship between them, I have created a coding scheme that is based on my theoretical considerations and shall guide my reading of the documents. This notwithstanding, I adjusted my coding scheme in the process of interacting with the selected material and refined it accordingly. Every document or speech in the European Parliament will be treated as one unit of analysis. I apply codes 2-7 on the phrase of interest and include one sentence before or after if necessary for the comprehensibility of the key phrase.

Table 1: Refined Coding Scheme

Code	Sub-Codes	Explanatory Remarks/ Example
EU Institution	European Parliament	Organizational Code
	European Council	
	Council of the EU	
	European Commission	
	HR/VP	
Speaker European Parliament	Party	Organizational Code
	Home Country	
1. Reference to Responsibility	1.1 Responsib*	
	1.2 Commit*	
	1.3 Oblig*	
	1.4 Duty/Duties	
2. Reference to Irresponsibility	2.1 Irresponsible Acts	Reference to terrorist acts, acts that are connoted as irrational or not well-thought-out

⁶ A list of all cited documents will be provided in the Bibliography, section “Cited Primary Documents and Data”.

	2.2 Non-fulfillment of Obligations	Failure to meet obligations, actions run counter obligations
	2.3 Lack of Commitment	Lacking commitment regarding agreed principles or stated commitments
3. De-Responsabilization		Denial of Responsibility E.g., “We do not feel responsible for that”, “We cannot take over this responsibility”
4. Bearer of Responsibility	4.1 Arab States/Countries in the Region	
	4.2 European Union	
	4.3 International Community	References to the international community but also to “collective responsibility”.
	4.4 Israel	
	4.5 Middle East Quartet	
	4.6 Palestine	Sub-sub-codes: PNA, Hamas, Palestinians
	4.7 UN	
	4.8 USA	
	4.9 Others	
5. Sources of Responsibility	5.1 Capacity	Responsibility is connected to the EU’s status as an “influential player” or “unique guarantor”, its experience and expertise.
	5.2 Community	The speaker connects responsibility to a sense of community (as in shared roots, geographic proximity, historical ties, or shared values).
	5.3 Contribution	Responsibility is said to arise from inactivity or wrong activity.
	5.4 International Law / Legal Duties	Responsibility is said to arise from international treaties, agreements, or international law more generally.
	5.5 International Threat	Responsibility is connected to international threats, e.g., “if [the conflict] is not solved, [it] contributes to creating radicalization and also hate. So we have a global responsibility”.
	5.6 Legitimate Expectations	Responsibility that stems from promises made or hopes generated by the EU or others.
	5.7 Morality / Increasing Suffering	The Speaker refers to moral responsibilities, ethics, specific values, human dignity, a humanitarian responsibility, or severe human suffering.
	5.8 Actor-Specific Responsibilities	Functional or official responsibilities deriving from a specific office or position.
6. Reference Point of Responsibility		What is an actor thought to be responsible for? E.g., for the creation of a Palestinian state, the security of Israel, the implementation of existing agreements and international law, etc.
7. Suggested Courses of Action for the <u>European Union</u>		How should this responsibility be translated into concrete action? E.g., the EU should recognize Palestine, suspend the EU-Israel Association Agreement, etc.
8. Assessments of EU engagement in the MEPP	8.1 Positive	Does the EU meet its responsibilities appropriately? What follows from the assessment if it does (not)?
	8.2 Negative	

The first two codes are organizational as they are used to specify the institutional origin of the analyzed documents and to record the speakers within the European Parliament according to their party and home country. I chose to collect this information about the Members of the European Parliament to make sure that my assumption holds true that references to responsibility are not country-specific (especially regarding Germany) but are prevalent within the European Union independently of the nationality of the speaker and, additionally, are not merely characteristic of the rhetoric of a specific European party.

I use the sub-codes of code 1 “References to Responsibility” whenever the words responsibility, commitment, duty, or obligation (as well as their grammatical inflections) appear. This allows me to add a quantifiable aspect to my analysis as it enables me to trace when references to responsibility were particularly prominent. In addition, I will be able to compare which kind of specific wording is used in the different EU institutions as well as by the HR/VPs. While I generally refer to the discourse of *responsibility*, I deem it important to include references to commitments, duties, or obligations as well because these terms are often used interchangeably with responsibility, and all fulfill similar discursive functions as the invocation of responsibility (see Vogt 2006: 1). Nevertheless, I observed that the terms obligation or duty are often used in connection with international law or formal agreements, and commitments are usually linked with broader, less specific aspects and rather refer to declared intentions instead of formal obligations. In consequence, I take into account which actors prefer to refer to commitments instead of responsibilities and investigate whether such patterns of language use change over time. Certainly, when analyzing references to responsibility, it is also expedient to investigate when actors are represented as irresponsible (code 2). Therefore, in accordance with the slight differences in meaning of the words “obligation”, “duty” and “commitment”, I created three sub-codes that shall capture when the non-fulfillment of obligations or a lack of commitment is deplored and when a speaker refers to irresponsible behavior. As I strictly adhere to explicit articulations, I use this last sub-code only when an action is assessed as being “irresponsible”, which regularly happens in the context of terrorist attacks. I use code 3 for instances in which the EU’s responsibility is denied or attempts are made to divert responsibility from it.

As code 4 “Bearer of Responsibility” is quite self-explanatory, it shall suffice to draw attention to one specific analytical difficulty. Very often the different European speakers refer to “both parties” or simply “the parties” of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. When the expression “both parties” is used, it is most often contextually derivable that it refers to Israel on the one side and the PNA on the other (instead of the PLO which is, technically, recognized as the “representative of the Palestinian people” by the UN). However, especially after Hamas took

control over the Gaza strip in 2007, the expression “all parties” could also include Hamas as a third party. In such instances, I use the sub-codes Israel and Palestine instead of any of the sub-sub-codes to 4.6. I will further elaborate on the split of the Palestinian subject in chapter 5.3.

Code 5 refers to the sources of responsibility that I have introduced in the preceding theoretical chapter and builds on Szigeti’s (2006: 27-30) list of sources of responsibility. I inductively derived further sources of responsibility that regularly appear in the analyzed documents. Thus, I added international law as well as morality as frequently appearing sources of responsibility.

Code 6 (Reference Point of Responsibility), code 7 (Suggested Courses of Actions), and code 8 (assessments of the EU’s engagement in the MEPP) are rather open questions instead of clear-cut analytical categories. Code 6 refers to those instances in which actors are said to have responsibility for something specifically, as in, e.g., “The international community must take its responsibility in facilitating [...] [the] resumption of negotiations”. In contrast to code 6, code 7 is exclusively used in regard to the European Union and asks how the EU should meet its responsibilities in terms of concrete actions. Doubtlessly, dozens of possible options regarding the reference points of responsibility and the suggested courses of action for the EU will appear in the texts under analysis. The goal here is, however, not to investigate all options that are mentioned but to aggregate them and to assort them in broader strands that shall facilitate the analysis. Lastly, code 8 serves to collect assessments of whether the EU manages or fails to meet its responsibilities and asks which consequences the respective speaker infers from their assessment regarding the EU’s future approach to the MEPP. Hence, code 8 will be helpful to trace potential “feedback loops” (Hebel and Lenz 2016: 476) as mentioned above.

Within the coded segments I further pay attention to additional aspects. Firstly, I focus on predications that “construct the thing(s) named as a particular sort of thing, with particular features and capacities” (Milliken 1999: 232). One basic example would be when the President of the European Parliament referred to the European Union as “a *political* actor [...] [that is] now under the obligation and ha[s] the responsibility to do everything [it] can to enable the people in the Middle East to live together in peace” (European Parliament, 4 February 2009). Connected to this predication analysis is a reading strategy that identifies instances of “linking and differentiation” (Hansen 2006: 41-42). Thus, identity is not only constructed through the attribution of certain signs to it but also through the juxtaposition of signs that the Self explicitly does not identify with and often ascribes to the Other. I will further consider this process of linking and differentiation regarding subject positions. Here, the focus lies on the relationship between different subjects (Dunn and Neumann 2016: 266). For instance, an example of the

creation of a specific subject position can be found when HR Solana refers to “our Israeli *friends*” (HR Solana, European Parliament 2002). Lastly, I seek to pay attention to noticeable grammatical moods (especially regarding the use of the conditional mood).

4.3 Methodological Constraints and Critical Reflection

Throughout this chapter, I have already pointed out several limitations regarding what this thesis can and cannot do. I firstly need to return to the fact that I only focus on how the identity of the EU is constructed from within. This approach might be subject to criticism as any analysis of identity that excludes the recognition or repudiation of the Other will remain a purely self-referential endeavor. Thus, external views on the EU in terms of self-image and performance generally remain under-represented and have - with rare exceptions (see Lucarelli and Fioramonti 2011) - not been considered. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to equally delve into the question of how the EU’s identity construction is received in Israel and Palestine in particular. Nevertheless, to mitigate this constraint at least to a limited extent, I chose to include the speeches that representatives of Israel and Palestine held when invited to the European Parliament. It is already significant to note that the European Parliament (almost) managed to invite representatives of both countries equally often and within a short time span. Exceptionally, in 2000 Avraham Burg, Speaker of the Knesset, and Ahmed Qurie, Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Assembly (who would later become Palestinian Prime Minister), even visited the European Parliament together. Consequently, these seven speeches in total, three given by an Israeli representative (Speaker Burg, President Peres, and President Rivlin) and four given by a Palestinian representative (Speaker Qurie, and President Abbas thrice) shall flow into my analysis. The core idea here is to add a dialogic aspect to my analysis. As the Israeli and Palestinian invitees speak in the specific setting of the European Parliament, the very purpose of their visits is to answer to the EU and to provide a reaction to the EU’s statement and policies from their respective perspectives. This further allows me to shed light on whether and to what extent these external views have an impact on the EU’s discourse of responsibility.

Even within the EU, it could have been worthwhile to include a broader array of actors that go beyond the official EU-level discourse, for instance, voices that belong to the broader political (e.g., national political actors, the media, or civil society actors). The discourse within the broader political realm might follow different discursive patterns and thus produce a different perspective on the EU’s responsibilities and what this means regarding the formulation of its foreign policy. Similarly, the EU’s discourse of responsibility concerning the MEPP cannot be seen as a representative case. Any discourse of responsibility unfolds differently, which means

that how references to responsibility contribute to the construction of Self, Other and their relationship will certainly differ when comparing the discourse on the MEPP with debates on EU-African relations or climate change.

Moving on to the documents that were chosen as the backbone of the ensuing discourse analysis, I shall address the question of potential biases within European Parliament debates: are references to responsibility indeed prevalent within the European Parliament independently of the nationality of the speaker or her/his membership to a specific European party? It stands to reason to pursue these questions considering that, as I have explained above, the concept of responsibility plays a significant role especially in the German national political discourse. However, the fact that members of the European Parliament (MEPs) of some EU member states speak much more often in Parliament than others renders cross-country comparisons difficult. This notwithstanding, when comparing MEPs from France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom – MEPs from these countries speak the most often in debates on the MEPP and all of these countries already were EU member states in 1999 – no imbalance regarding Germany’s frequency of referring to responsibility can be identified. They all rank on a similar level with the UK ranking lowest and France ranking highest. Except for MEPs from Croatia, Latvia, and Lithuania, all MEPs partake in the EU’s discourse of responsibility to a certain extent. While I consider these three countries to be represented in the EU’s intergovernmental organs, such as the European Council which decides on its conclusions unanimously, the reproach regarding a certain “Western European or even a ‘E3’ (Germany, France, and the UK) bias” (Lang 2021) faced by many studies on the EU cannot be refuted altogether in this thesis. Apart from the country of origin of the MEPs, I did not find that the concept of responsibility is merely a characteristic of a particular European party family. In addition, the discourse of responsibility permeates all EU institutions under analysis. Yet, the language used differs among them. While references to responsibility are prevalent in speeches of the HR/VP and the European Parliament, it is noteworthy that the European Council, the Council, and the European Commission rather refer to the EU’s commitments regarding the MEPP. This does not mean, however, that the concept of responsibility does not play a role in these institutions. On the contrary, these institutions rather draw on the notion of responsibility when referring to others (see ch. 5.3). Thus, the discourse of responsibility to be analyzed here indeed represents a phenomenon that can be attributed to the European Union as such.

Aside from that, there are general constraints regarding the researcher herself that shall not be obscured. Even though I strive to approach the EU’s identity construction as impartially and unprejudiced as possible, I am aware of my own position as a researcher – or “observer” in the

Luhmannian (1990: 75) sense – socialized in the EU. This social position can be problematic as my reading of the texts is more likely to overlook taken-for-granted assumptions or issues that are treated as common-sensical without interrogating such instances appropriately (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 21).

Keeping these constraints in mind, this thesis strives to contribute to a more elaborate understanding of how references to responsibility feed into the construction of the EU's identity and the constitution of its Others. The following analysis will further enable me to shed light on the specific relationship that the notion of responsibility establishes between the EU and its Others in terms of asymmetries in power and ethical standing but also regarding the concrete adoption of EU foreign policies that shape this relationship. My approach to analyzing approximately two decades of the EU's discourse on the MEPP allows me to read the material with a sense of temporal sensitivity. I pay particular attention to how the idea of EU responsibilities evolves, and how the identity that the EU's discourse of responsibility constructs for the EU was challenged, reconfirmed, or even partially fell victim to (temporary) discursive disappearance.

5. The EU, Responsibility, and Middle East Peace – A Discourse Analysis

The analytical part of this thesis is divided into three parts. The first subchapter sheds light on how the EU's identity is constructed by means of references to responsibility. I first outline the main grounds based on which a particular responsibility of the EU regarding the MEPP is articulated on the EU level. When identifying these main sources of the EU's responsibility, it becomes clear that these are inextricably linked with the following questions: what is the EU responsible for, which goals does it seek to achieve and to whom does it owe this responsibility? Building on this last aspect, I strive to uncover how the Other is always implicitly excogitated as well – e.g., as being incapable or in need of EU assistance, as being close or distant to the EU's Self. When using words such as “incapable”, it already becomes clear that the ensuing chapters aim at uncovering how asymmetries in terms of power and moral standing are manifested in the EU's discourse of responsibility. As I included the speeches of Israeli and Palestinian representatives to the European Parliament in my document corpus, I strive to integrate their perspectives and the ways in which they “answer” to the EU's visions and actions as well. Still, I reemphasize that their evidential weight is limited due to their small number.

I argue that responsibility does not only construct Self and Other but also designs a specific relationship between them. Hence, the second subchapter focuses on how the EU is suggested

to act in pursuit of its declared goals as a consequence of bearing responsibility. Here, I seek to demonstrate that as responsibility functions as a discursively contingent carrier, perceptions of what it means to act in accordance with one's own responsibility evolve. Thus, options that were discussed in the European Parliament in the beginning of the 2000s seem unimaginable today. Additionally, I further investigate to what extent the EU's discourse of responsibility is indeed reflexive in the sense of a "feedback loop" (see ch. 3.3). I trace whether and how the perceived (lack of) success of EU foreign policy is discursively mediated by the different actors within the European Union and how this influences its discourse of responsibility and ultimately the construction of its identity.

The final analytical subchapter examines how the EU allocates responsibility to other actors. The overarching goal here is to shed light on how the discursive practice of allocating responsibility to others partakes in their construction and further implies a certain understanding of the Self that gets to decide who bears responsibility, for what reason, and how this responsibility shall be met. Since the responsibility of "the conflicting parties" appears frequently in the EU's discourse of responsibility, I firstly elaborate on who the EU considers to be a party to the conflict. I demonstrate that even though the EU largely sees Israel and the PNA as the two protagonists of the conflict, this dichotomous view has softened in recent years, thus (implicitly) acknowledging the split of the Palestinian subject. Hence, I trace how the EU incorporates the PNA, Hamas, and Israel into its discourse of responsibility. Regarding the PNA and Hamas, I seek to illuminate the exclusionary potential of the EU's discourse of responsibility – granting legitimacy as a political actor to the previous while doing the exact opposite to the latter. Secondly, I investigate how the EU's discourse of responsibility incorporates the US as the most important non-local actor in the conflict, how the EU acknowledges the US' "special responsibility" (European Parliament Resolution 2002) and simultaneously challenges it.

5.1 Being Responsible – Constructing Self, Implying Others

Analyzing how the EU constructs its responsibility reveals ideas regarding what characterizes the EU as an actor, what it attaches importance to in its international relations, and which goals it seeks to achieve. As the ensuing analysis demonstrates, the EU paints itself as an actor with manifold responsibilities that it bears for different reasons. In the EU's discourse of responsibility on the MEPP especially its capacity, its close ties to the Middle East, its morality and consciousness of the severe human suffering on the ground, as well as international law serve as the most frequent sources from which a genuine responsibility of the EU derives.

Hence, I will present these sources of responsibility and explain how they establish a specific framework of meaning. Consequently, when actors within the EU assert that the EU bears responsibility, they equally convey an idea of what it is responsible for and to whom it owes this responsibility. Thus, in the following I will outline how the EU articulates its responsibility regarding the MEPP and how it thereby constructs its identity while simultaneously demarcating itself from others – those being predominantly Israel, the Palestinians, and the US. Nevertheless, discursive constructions of identity only represent attempts to fix meaning. To recall, my understanding of identity builds on the core tenet that identity is not an essentialized, unitary construct. Rather, identities are fragmented and several ideas of the Self co-exist and compete with one another in terms of discursive relevance and resonance. Thus, I will expand on the up- and downswing of the different strategies to construct the EU's identity at the end of this chapter. This temporal perspective serves as a means to illustrate how ideas of what a responsible European Union is evolve and are contested for over time.

The EU – More Capable than Others

A core conviction that permeates the EU's discourse of responsibility is that the EU is particularly eligible to assist in the advancement of the MEPP. Hence, the EU's supposed capacity serves as a prevalent motif based on which a genuine European responsibility is constructed. It appears already in the beginning of the 2000s in the European Parliament and builds on the self-recognition that the EU is a political actor in its own right, which entails that the mere provision of economic assistance is not sufficient to do justice to this status. The idea that the EU is particularly well suited to contribute to the MEPP derives from two main arguments. Firstly, the EU has various political, legal, and institutional tools at its disposal that strengthen its external action and are suitable to advance the MEPP. Hence, the EU can draw on its "political relations and institutional expertise" (European Parliament Resolution 2015), and its "moral and military power oblige [...] us and they also allow us" (Alliot-Marie, European Parliament 2015) to be active in the MEPP. In addition, the EU's membership in the Middle East Quartet renders it even more relevant as the Quartet can make extensive commitments for which "[n]one of the Quartet's members has the credibility in the eyes of the parties [...] on its own" (Brok, European Parliament 2005). Secondly, the EU derives authority from its experience in engaging in the conflict. The major argument here refers to the EU's ability to impartially speak to all parties involved. This renders the EU a significant actor that bears responsibility as "there are not many international actors that are able to play this role" (HR/VP Mogherini, European Parliament 2014). This continuous emphasis on the importance

of negotiations and the notion of the EU “as a civil power [that] resolve[s] conflicts by means of diplomacy, peaceful solutions and multilateral institutions” (European Parliament Resolution 2003) hints at one of the core aspects that the EU sees itself responsible for: the fostering of dialogue between the conflicting parties and the quest for a non-military, diplomatic solution to the conflict. In sum, the EU constructs itself as a “special”, almost chosen actor that has unique capabilities and is therefore predestined to advancing the MEPP. Thus, the EU’s responsibility appears as a logical consequence that necessarily derives from its capacity to act.

The idea that the EU bears responsibility as it is particularly capable is, however, not only constructed through its portrayal as an “influential player” (European Parliament Resolution 2015). Equally, presentations of the Other as less capable or even incapable support this narrative. The argument that the conflicting parties are unable to solve the conflict alone and therefore require (the EU’s) assistance appears in several facets. One line of argument holds that the parties are simply “not ready” to work for a peaceful solution on their own. Consequently, the parties are “trapped inside a bubble, where they can only find justifications for their own violence”, which is why the EU must “help the parties get out of it” (HR/VP Mogherini 2015b). Others contend that the parties are not only “not ready” but that they are ultimately incapable as they “have already shown themselves to be inadequate” (Gambús, European Parliament 2014). Regarding the establishment of a Palestinian state “[t]he Palestinian people cannot succeed alone. They need our presence and our experience, not only our money” (Castaldo, European Parliament 2014). Hence, the idea that the EU bears responsibility as it can provide expertise is often connected to the explicit denial of the Palestinians’ ability to build a viable Palestinian state without external involvement.

The notion that the EU bears responsibility due to its capacity serves to construct the EU as an actor that should be engaged in the MEPP as it can provide valuable assistance to the conflicting parties. In parallel, Israel and Palestine are portrayed as incapable to solve the conflict by themselves, which establishes their need of EU assistance. Certainly, this construction of the EU as being particularly capable while stripping the Israelis and Palestinians off their agency is an expression of power (Diez 2005: 639; see also Said 2014: 145). Additionally, when recalling the poststructuralist point of departure of this thesis, the extensive references to the EU’s capacities also bring them about and make them a discursively generated reality (Jäger and Maier 2015: 112). Another aspect to critically point out here is the EU’s self-authorization that results from this perfect match between the EU’s capabilities and the Others’ lack thereof (cf. Kießling 2019: 493). Hence, the EU’s responsibility represents a claim to power.

The identity of the EU is, however, not only constituted by actors within the EU. As I outlined in chapter 3.2, identities are social and relational, which means that actors outside of the EU also partake in the EU's identity-building process as they may confirm, challenge, or modify perceptions of what we understand as "EU identity" (Bretherton and Vogler 2008: 38; Manners and Whitman 1998: 238). If we now turn to the speeches that representatives of Israel and Palestine gave in the European Parliament, we observe that the Palestinian side rather strengthens this narrative of the EU bearing responsibility to advance the MEPP due to its capacity to do so, while the Israelis increasingly oppose this narrative. This difference is already visible in 2000 when Ahmed Qurie, President of the Palestinian Legislative Council, declared that "Europe has always had an important role to play throughout the world. We welcome its involvement in the Middle East Peace Process" (Qurie 2000). Avraham Burg, Speaker of the Knesset, who directly spoke after Qurie did state that "we need help and mediation from the rest of the world" (Burg 2000). However, he also hinted at mutual misunderstandings between Israel and the EU and envisaged an economic role for the EU in the Middle East region – without even referring to the MEPP as such.

Throughout the years, President of the PNA Mahmoud Abbas continuously referred to the extensive assistance that the EU gave to Palestine as well as to close ties between Palestine and the EU which leads to the EU "being a major actor for us" (Abbas 2016). While Abbas does not invoke a specifically European responsibility, he nevertheless mentions the responsibility of the international community and, in 2009 and 2016, outlined clear proposals on how the EU could be further involved in the MEPP. While Abbas is trying to involve the EU ever more, exactly the opposite is the case on the Israeli side. Building on the line of thinking presented by Burg, Israeli President Shimon Peres does not mention a potential role of the EU in the peace process. The clearest challenge to the idea that the EU bears responsibility in the MEPP due to its capacity to bring about progress has, however, been posed by Israeli President Reuven Rivlin in 2016. He strongly criticizes the EU's approach to the MEPP when stating that "one cannot hope to achieve better results while resorting to the same outlooks and tools that have previously failed time after time" (Rivlin 2016). Thus, "[t]he responsibility for building trust between [Israel] and our neighbors rests, first and foremost, on the shoulders of the two parties". Again, if the EU wanted to be a "constructive factor" it should focus on economic cooperation (which precisely contradicts the EU's aspiration of a more political role). Hence, Palestinian and Israeli views on EU engagement in the MEPP were more divergent than ever in 2016.

When tracing to what extent and how these speeches were discussed in the European Parliament, two aspects stand out. Firstly, except for the years 2000 and 2016, the visits of the

Israeli and Palestinian representatives were not even mentioned in the following European Parliament debate on the Middle East. Secondly, when the speeches of the Israeli and Palestinian representatives were discussed in Parliament, they were considered as confirming the EU's self-image. For instance, in 2000 Pierre Moscovici, representing the Council of the EU in the European Parliament, argued that the fact that representatives of both Israel and Palestine jointly visited the EU is to be understood "as a gesture of recognition of the European Union's unceasing efforts to promote peace in the region, a recognition which is also accompanied by high expectations of Europe" (Moscovici, European Parliament 2000). Additionally, when HR/VP Mogherini refers to the visits of Abbas and Rivlin to the European Parliament in 2016, she does not discuss their speeches concerning their content. Rather, she connects the fact that some "think the current leaderships [of the conflicting parties] are not up to the task" with the conviction that "we [as the EU] have a duty to keep working for positive change with patience and courage, and a precise interest in doing so" (HR/VP Mogherini, European Parliament 2016). Thus, the perspective of the Other – regardless of whether it corresponds to the EU's own identity construction – plays a marginal role here. Does the perspective of the Other in terms of expectations in regard to the EU – as perceived by the EU – bear any significance in the EU's discourse of responsibility? My analysis shows that the EU's responsibility is rarely connected to the hopes and expectations of those affected. Yet, if this occurs, then such expectations clearly construct a responsibility of the EU to contribute to the resolution of the conflict and thereby perfectly feed into the "capable European Union" narrative. For instance, the European Parliament critically states that it "[d]eplores the fact that the European Union is not assuming the responsibility for the solution to the Middle East conflicts expected by people in the region and in Europe" (European Parliament Resolution 2006c). As the European Parliament deplores the lack of unity of the European Council to find a common European position right in the preceding sentence, it is beyond doubt that the EU *could* be a capable actor and therefore should be engaged in the MEPP – especially as "the people in the region" expect it to do so. Thus, the "people in the region" are portrayed as acknowledging the capacity of the EU and as asking for its engagement.

In sum, the conflicting parties are either constructed as being incapable of solving the conflict on their own or as directly asking for the EU's assistance, even if, as the speeches of Israeli representatives demonstrate, the engagement of the EU in the MEPP is only welcome to a varying extent. This reflects the unequal relations of power that are produced within the EU's discourse and further illustrates how the construction of identities is in itself imbued with power (Jørgensen and Philips 2002: 37). Hence, the EU's discourse of responsibility is obviously also

a discourse of power. Yet, this does not mean that the idea of a capable EU remained unchallenged from within. Instead, as I will outline at the end of this chapter, especially this element of the EU's self-image evolved and was subject to severe fluctuations over time.

Creating a Sense of Community – On Neighbors and Friends

Apart from the EU's capacity, the EU's discourse of responsibility regarding the MEPP revolves to a large extent around a certain feeling of belonging that derives from a notion of proximity as well as commonalities between itself and the conflicting parties. Hence, especially the notion of Israel and Palestine having become part of the EU's neighborhood plays a role. While HR Solana already referred to the Middle East as "our neighbours" in 2003 (HR Solana, European Parliament 2003), this designation logically gains in prevalence after the accessions of 2004 and the integration of several Middle Eastern countries into the European Neighborhood Policy. Thus, it became a matter of course to state that "the European Union has a special responsibility for peace and security in the Middle East, which is Europe's neighbourhood" (European Parliament Resolution 2006d). The notion of "neighborhood" certainly conveys a different connotation compared to simply noting geographic proximity. Being a neighbor implies two aspects. Firstly, any problem of the EU's neighbors is considered a problem for the EU itself that it is entitled – and bears responsibility – to get involved in. In that sense, HR/VP Mogherini asks:

"What is our role? It is not interference. I heard someone say that we should not interfere and that it is not for the European Union to do anything about this. [...] Our role is also to take care of our neighbourhood, our region. [...] [T]he Middle East is close, and our relations with both the Palestinians, the Israelis and many of the countries that are concerned by the conflict are so strong that *this is our business*. Definitely so. So it is not a matter of interference but one of playing our role in a responsible and effective way." (HR/VP Mogherini, European Parliament 2014, emphasis added)

Hence, HR/VP Mogherini juxtaposes interference, which bears a strong negative connotation as it mostly refers to external, unsolicited meddling, with responsible involvement, which grants the EU legitimacy and the normative authority to be engaged (cf. Bretherton and Vogler 2008: 157-158). Secondly, the notion of neighborhood is closely tied to friendship in the EU's discourse of responsibility. This implies a feeling of belonging and solidarity and introduces an emotional component to the rather neutral term "neighborhood". As HR Solana states regarding the Middle East as a "region that is so close to our hearts",

"I like to say, and I would like to say once again, that certain countries see the problems of the Middle East as strategic problems. We do not see them as just

strategic problems. [...] The Middle East is in our neighbourhood, they are our neighbours, as well as our friends. I must therefore insist once again that we Europeans have a great responsibility.” (HR Solana, European Parliament 2005)

Again, it becomes clear that what is happening in the EU’s neighborhood is a direct concern for the European Union. In addition, as HR Solana seeks to clarify when referring to the Middle Eastern countries as “our friends”, the EU is not merely engaged in the Middle East due to material interests but because it genuinely cares for the wellbeing of these “friends”. Thus, the EU’s presence in the region appears legitimate as it is not merely self-serving. The notion of “neighborhood” as well as the notion of “friendship” serve to authorize and legitimize the EU’s engagement in the MEPP. Both Israel and Palestine are referred to as “our friends” - or countries with which “the European Union has a long tradition of close relations” (Barroso, European Commission 2014) - which makes the EU seem evenhanded and equally caring for both sides. However, throughout the two decades, MEPs refer to Israel as a “friend” of the EU more frequently. Yet, to dispel doubts that the EU is more inclined towards Israel than the Palestinians and therefore has a skewed perspective on the conflict, the friendship between the EU and Israel obliges the EU to “say to our friends that we do not agree with the activities they are engaged in” (HR Solana, European Parliament 2002). More concretely, “[t]he people who are not now prepared to criticise Israel cannot call themselves its friends” (Cohn-Bendit, European Parliament 2010). Thus, the fact that Israel and Palestine are not only considered neighbors but also friends of the EU functions as a source of its responsibility, justifies the EU’s engagement in the conflict, and constructs close ties between them.

Beyond the notions of neighborhood and friendship, “the Europeans, for historical, cultural and even religious reasons, have an enormous responsibility which we cannot ignore” (Barón Crespo, European Parliament 2002). Such enumerations constructing proximity between the EU and the conflicting parties are not uncommon. While “intensive economic exchanges with the region” (European Parliament Resolution 2015) are sometimes added to this list of sources from which a responsibility of the EU arises, it is striking that shared values are almost absent from the EU’s discourse of responsibility. Certainly, the EU is referred to as a “a union of values with, in prime place, the value of peace” (Salafranca, European Parliament 2009). These values function as another source of responsibility and portray the EU as being peculiar and distinct from others. However, these values are seldom referred to as “shared”. Thus, what counts are the EU’s values, regardless of whether or to what extent they are shared.

Far more important are the historical ties between Europe and the Middle East. Thus, “Europe has a special historical responsibility for the peace process in the Middle East” (Sichrovsky,

European Parliament 2000). The European Council only refers to “historic responsibility” once and remains very vague regarding the bearers of this responsibility. In reference to the “international community’s vision of two States living side by side in peace and security”, it only declares that “[a]ll those involved share a historic responsibility for turning this vision into reality” (European Council 2003a). In contrast, a livelier historical reflection is taking place in the European Parliament, which goes beyond the mere assertion of a “special historical responsibility” on the part of the EU (Sichrovsky, European Parliament 2000). As I explained in the theoretical part of this thesis, I do not differentiate between retrospective and prospective responsibility as a reference to retrospective (historical) responsibility always bears significance for the future. This argument holds particularly true in the EU’s discourse of responsibility. The EU’s historical responsibility is connected to the emergence of the Middle East conflict in the first place – “we bear a historical responsibility as Europeans for part of the roots of this debate” (HR/VP Mogherini, European Parliament 2014). Nevertheless, not only Europe appears as a bearer of historical responsibility but also specific EU member states, the West, or the international community. Tracing references to historical responsibility demonstrates two aspects. First, historical responsibility and moral responsibility are closely intertwined. Secondly, stating that Europe (or specific member states, or the West) bears historical responsibility for the emergence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is directly connected with a present responsibility of the EU to help bring about the two-state solution as a corrective to this historically grown situation.

When comparing these facets of the EU’s discourse with the speeches of Israeli and Palestinian representatives, it becomes clear that several of the motifs that construct a sense of community also resonate here. For instance, the following statement by President Abbas contains various aspects: “I convey the message of the Palestinian people to the peoples of a continent we have always been linked to with relations of neighbourliness and as a result of our historical links of cooperation and friendship and partnership and association in numerous sectors” (Abbas 2006). Similarly, President Peres (2013) states: “I have come to thank you for your friendship, based on common values, geographic proximity and a long history”. Thus, the discourses of the Israelis and the Palestinians both construct a solid sense of community in regard to the EU. While neither of them allocates responsibility to the EU based on the grounds of this togetherness, they do mirror narratives that are prevalent in the EU’s discourse of responsibility.

Certainly, the historic dimension of the EU’s discourse of responsibility also revolves around the Holocaust. Thus, “Europe as the continent where the Holocaust took place, has a particular responsibility to lead the fight against any resurgence of anti-Semitism, whenever and wherever

it occurs” (Barroso, European Commission 2014). In a similar vein, President of the European Parliament Martin Schulz states that “[i]t is this ‘never again’ that is the supreme duty of me as a German Member of this House who has the great honor of being President of a multinational Parliament - and I believe of everyone here - today and for all time” (Schulz 2013). Here, Schulz explicitly extends this duty to all MEPs. Both statements hint at what I referred to as the “Europeanization of Holocaust memory” earlier (Kucia 2016; Schwelling 2007). Thus, the responsibility to act against resurgent anti-Semitism is a collective European responsibility. The fight against anti-Semitism represents a recurring topic in European Parliament debates on the Middle East as several MEPs connect the rise in anti-Semitism in Europe with the periodic escalation of the conflict in Israel and Palestine. Thus, “nothing that happens in the Middle East can ever justify acts of anti-Semitism being committed in any of our countries, whether ad hoc or organised, acts which take us back to the darkest hours of the previous century and revive our memories” (Berès, European Parliament 2002). Further, “there is no justification for anti-Semitism, hatred and violence, not on this continent and not in the European Union, which is committed to freedom of religion and human rights for all our citizens” (McAllister, European Parliament 2021). These are examples of temporal othering - a process in which identity is not constructed along the difference to an external Other but “Europe’s other is Europe’s own past which should not be allowed to become its future” Wæver (1998: 90). As the discourse predominantly revolves around rising anti-Semitism *within* the EU, this historical responsibility is on the one hand owed to itself. On the other hand, this historical responsibility serves as one of the reasons that justify the EU’s engagement in the MEPP. This historical awareness makes the EU seem self-reflective (Diez 2004: 321), as an actor that does not only acknowledge the shadows of the past but draws lessons from it based on its moral consciousness.

Facing Suffering and Violence - Morality and Interests

Morality plays the most explicit role in the EU’s discourse of responsibility when it is connected to the consciousness of severe human suffering as a consequence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Hence, the provision of aid for the Palestinians represents “a moral imperative, which the European Union must never renounce — it has not done so in the past, it is not doing so today, and it will not do so in the future” (HR Solana, European Parliament 2006). Firstly, the invocation of a “moral imperative” makes the EU appear emphatic and altruistic. Secondly, duties that derive from morality appear steadfast and final, which renders the EU a reliable partner in the field of humanitarian assistance. Aside from the specific aspect of aid, the EU “cannot renounce what many have described as its moral obligation to strive for peace and reconciliation” (President-in-Office of the Council Dowgielewicz, European Parliament 2011).

Again, the reference to morality as the source for the EU's obligation renders this obligation irrevocable, thus transcending temporal and political considerations. Apart from the EU's general engagement in the MEPP, this "moral obligation" most often commands the EU to provide humanitarian aid to the Palestinians and to support UNRWA. Occasionally MEPs referred to the recognition of Palestine as a "responsibility and a moral obligation" (Vallina, European Parliament 2014) to move the issue of recognition from the realm of political options to the overriding level of moral necessity.

The notion of a "moral obligation" on the part of the EU is not only connected to legitimizing different policies but often appears in direct connection with the EU's interests. This can be best illustrated by two speeches given by HR/VP Mogherini. For instance, at the 2018 Ministerial Conference of UNRWA, she emphasizes the need to preserve UNRWA's work and states: "We care, because it is a moral duty but also a self-interest". Here, this self-interest refers to the argument that "UNRWA's work contributes to regional stability" – this is a crucial aspect as "[t]he situation in the Middle East is extremely volatile and we can't afford even greater destabilization" (HR/VP Mogherini 2018). In 2015 she argues "[w]e also have, I believe, the political interest and the moral duty to work together as much as possible to reestablish a political horizon without which even the concrete steps that make the life of the people more positive on the ground would not be enough" (HR/VP Mogherini 2015a). In this case, the EU's interests are two-fold. Firstly, this statement resonates well with the recurring topos that the "commitments of the European Union in the region in financial terms must be balanced with a clear presence in the political field" (European Parliament Resolution 2000a). Secondly, the EU is certainly interested in ensuring that its humanitarian aid will not be provided in vain.⁷ Therefore, as these examples show, the EU's humanitarian assistance is not only interwoven with interests but – as HR/VP Mogherini's first quote illuminates – the provision of aid represents an interest in itself. Thus, on the one hand, the EU is presented as an actor characterized by its morality. On the other hand, I found several instances in which the "moral duties" of the EU are explicitly connected to its interests. As I outlined in chapter 3.3, a lively theoretical debate revolves around the question of whether it is the EU's (here: moral) identity that guides its external behavior (here: provision of humanitarian assistance) or whether its foreign policy is purely interest-driven. However, as Schlag (2016: 14, own translation) points out, this is a "misleading question" – a question of either/or simply does not pose itself. It shows

⁷ In 2021 the demolition or seizure of EU-funded structures in the West Bank reached a new high since 2016. In this five-year period, Israeli authorities demolished or seized EU-funded structures valued at € 2,110,151 (Office of the European Union Representative to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, UNRWA 2022). This issue "continued to be raised by the EU with relevant interlocutors through various diplomatic channels" (ibid.).

again here that identity and interests are strongly interwoven. Not only are interests intimately linked to identity, the pursuit of interests through, for instance, the provision of humanitarian aid equally feeds into the construction of the EU's (moral) identity (see Del Sarto 2016).

Certainly, the EU's own security appears as an interest in its discourse on the MEPP. For instance, “[i]t is time for Europe to accept its responsibilities towards the Middle East, as our own security is also directly threatened by that interminable conflict” (Sbarbati, European Parliament 2005). Nevertheless, the idea that the EU bears responsibility due to a threat that is directed at the EU as such or even global in scope only surfaces rarely and erratically. Therefore, the EU constructs its collective identity only to a very limited extent on the notion of a threatening outside world within its discourse of responsibility regarding the MEPP (cf. Wæver 1998). This notwithstanding, the EU partakes in drawing a clear boundary between the international community and terrorists as the ultimate Other. It clarifies that “the fight against terrorism in all its forms remains one of the priorities of the European Union as well as of the entire international community and [...] it is the duty of all countries, particularly of those in the region, to cooperate actively in the fight against terrorism and to abstain from all support, direct or indirect, for terrorist organisations” (European Council 2003b). While the European Council states that the fight against terrorism is a “duty of all countries”, its emphasis on the particular duty of “those in the region” links them to terrorist activity. This linkage conveys the message that these countries have not acknowledged this international duty sufficiently yet and may have even undermined the fight against terrorism. Terrorists represent the ultimate Other or the “absolute enemy” (Herschinger 2013) the international community is confronted with. Hence, the European Council enforces the delimitation between those who belong to the international community and those external to it, between legitimate and “disqualified” actors (Leclercq 2012: 109). While it is beyond doubt on which side the EU is to be found, the position of the countries in the Middle East is constructed as less steadfast.

When reviewing what the EU deemed itself responsible for so far, it becomes clear that the provision of security (for itself and others) or the explicit fight against terrorism only feature as a sidenote – an observation that coincides with the kinds of capacities the EU constructs for itself (see above). In the field of security, the EU's responsibilities predominantly appear as being shared with other actors. Not only regarding the fight against terrorism but also considering the inflammatory potential of the conflict, the EU shoulders a “global responsibility that we can play with our global partners” (HR/VP Mogherini, European Parliament 2015). These “global partners” are “our partners in the region, starting from our Arab friends” (ibid.) but also the US. The EU shares with the US “a responsibility in addressing key threats and

challenges, such as regional conflicts, in particular the Middle East” (European Council 2004b). This emphasis on multilateral cooperation invests the EU with legitimacy and power as it generates the impression that the EU is positioned in the middle of international society and, in the Middle East, acts not only alongside but in partnership with the US. More than serving to construct EU identity itself, the topos of security operates as a tool to construct the identity of Others in the EU’s discourse of responsibility – be it regarding regional states that appear to lack decisiveness in combatting terrorism or regarding the US as a prime guarantor of security.

Delving into the perspective of Israeli and Palestinian representatives who spoke to the European Parliament, it becomes clear that neither of the parties allocates significant responsibility to the EU in the realm of security. Both parties coincide in the view that in the field of security, the EU firstly rather occupies an assisting role, and secondly, that the EU’s impact only gains in significance if it orients itself towards the US as the dominant actor in terms of security. Considering the EU’s own emphasis on multilateral cooperation as well as the acknowledgment of the importance of the US “in addressing key threats and challenges” (European Council 2004b), the views of the EU on the one side and of the Israelis and Palestinians on the other are not so far apart.

Pacta Sunt Servanda – International Law and Negotiated Agreements

The last dominant facet of the EU’s discourse of responsibility refers to the EU’s commitments, responsibilities, and duties that derive from legal sources such as general provisions of international law, EU legislation, bilateral agreements as well as political documents such as the Quartet Roadmap that was endorsed by Israel and the PNA alike.

“Today our political duty is to achieve a peace agreement; tomorrow it will be to ensure that the agreement and international law are respected” (Fava, European Parliament 2001). Here, “today” refers to the year 2001. After Israel and the PNA endorsed the Roadmap that was presented to them two years later by the Middle East Quartet, especially the European Council issued many Conclusions that included statements similar to the following one: “The European Union remains committed to working within the Quartet towards the goal of a just, viable and lasting solution based on existing agreements, the relevant UNSC resolutions and the principles laid down in the Roadmap” (European Council 2006). With statements like these, the EU seeks to highlight the central parameters within which its policies unfold as well as the goals it sees itself committed to achieving. The reiteration of these very same parameters makes the EU seem reliable and creates the impression that it attaches importance to ensuring that agreements reached jointly are actually adhered to. Consequently, throughout the years, the EU’s stated

commitment to implement UN Security Council Resolutions, the Roadmap but also agreements negotiated between Israel and the PNA, such as the Wye River Memorandum (1998) or the Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA) of 2005 represents a recurring theme.

Apart from the Roadmap, especially the implementation of the AMA has outstanding significance for the EU. Here, the EU was invited by the Israeli government and the PNA to assist in the concrete implementation of this agreement (Council Joint Action 2005/889/CFSP). To do so, it launched EUBAM Rafah in November 2005. This civilian mission sought to assist in the general management of the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and Gaza, to facilitate cooperation among the Palestinian, Israeli, and Egyptian authorities, and to monitor the operation of the border. Thus, the European Parliament declared that the EU must “face its full responsibility on the implementation of this agreement” (European Parliament Resolution 2006d). Even though the mission was suspended after the Rafah crossing point (RCP) was closed in the aftermath of Hamas’ takeover in Gaza, EUBAM Rafah’s mandate is still running. Thus, since 2007 EUBAM Rafah has maintained its capacity to resume its tasks at the RCP and meanwhile assists the PNA’s General Administration for Borders and Crossings (GABC).

Generally, the European Parliament highlights “the EU’s obligation to ensure consistency between the different areas of its external action and between those and its other policies, pursuant to Article 21 of the Treaty on European Union” (European Parliament Resolution 2012). This reference to Article 21 TEU is particularly relevant as its first paragraph states that the EU’s external behavior shall be informed by – among others - “the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law”. Apart from that, references to international law and European legislation occur prevalently regarding the EU’s relationship with Israel in particular. A major debate that gained prominence in the EU’s discourse on the MEPP from 2012 onwards revolved around the consistency between EU external policies and international law: the inapplicability of the free trade agreement between the EU and Israel on products that originate in the Occupied Territories. In this regard, the Council of the EU repeatedly stated that

“[t]he EU and its Member States are committed to ensure continued, full and effective implementation of existing EU legislation and bilateral arrangements applicable to settlements products. The EU expresses its commitment to ensure that - in line with international law - all agreements between the State of Israel and the EU must unequivocally and explicitly indicate their inapplicability to the territories occupied by Israel in 1967. This does not constitute a boycott of Israel which the EU strongly opposes.” (Council of the EU 2016a)

Building on that, the European Parliament asserts that “whereas under international law, any third party, including the EU Member States, has a duty not to recognise, aid or assist settlements in an occupied territory, as well as a duty to effectively oppose them” (European Parliament Resolution 2018). As law shall apply equally to all, “unwavering commitment to international law” backs the EU’s aspiration to be “the neutral peace broker in Israel and Palestine” (Dowding, European Parliament 2019).

In sum, the EU is constructed as an actor that attributes significant value to international law generally and the implementation of existing agreements specifically. Again, the EU’s emphasis on the need to solve the Middle East conflict by means of negotiations and ensuing agreements becomes apparent. Further, as the debate on the inapplicability of preferential treatment in tariffs on settlement products indicates, the EU is presented as an actor that is earnestly concerned about its own policies complying with international law, thus producing legitimacy and righteousness on the side of the EU. With its strong emphasis on international law and EU legislation, the EU partakes in the discursive construction of a “World Order based on the Rule of Law” (Koskeniemi 1990: 7) and simultaneously establishes itself as an unquestionable member of this order in proclaiming its adherence to this order’s “membership rules” (Lascurettes 2020: 6). Only in rare instances does the EU’s affirmation of its commitments to international law, EU legislation, or existing agreements include an explicit demarcation from Others. However, HR Solana stating that “we are obliged to say what we think” to Israel is a case in point (HR Solana, European Parliament 2002). What he did think was that Israel’s Operation Defensive Shield (2002) “is taking place in violation of humanitarian law and military law, which we cannot ignore”. Thus, in contrast to Others, the EU appears to be fundamentally committed to international law, which empowers it to assess who acts in accordance with international law and, as in this case, generates an obligation to call Israel out on violations. Hence, regarding international law, the EU does not only emphasize its own commitments. Far more often, the EU “reminds” Israel and the PNA of their obligations under international law as well as negotiated agreements. This practice is equally telling regarding the question of how the EU envisions its Others – and simultaneously implies superior conceptions of itself. I will further elaborate on this aspect in chapter 5.3.

The EU as Part of the Problem

So far, I argued that the EU’s discourse of responsibility can be read as a power discourse that generates an identity for the EU that naturalizes and legitimizes its engagement with and presence in the Middle East conflict. However, what happens if the EU itself appears to be part

of the problem? A smaller strand within the EU's discourse of responsibility builds on the notion of contribution. Instead of the EU being particularly able to contribute to a peaceful solution to the conflict, MEPs occasionally consider the EU to bear responsibility as it contributed to the conflict remaining unresolved. For instance, the EU is "partly responsible for having allowed for 40 years, a situation of total lawlessness to take hold in Palestine" (de Keyser, European Parliament 2007). Further, "we are all partly responsible for what is happening today in the Middle East. We, in Europe, and we, in the international community, have allowed the situation to get worse; we did nothing when Israel's security was under threat, and we did nothing when the blockade was making life in Gaza absolutely impossible" (de Sarnez, European Parliament 2009). The word "allowed" already demonstrates that the target of the MEPs' critique is not the EU's (or the international community's) lack of capacity, it is its failure to use it. What this strand of the EU's discourse of responsibility illustrates, is the perception of the EU being simultaneously part of the problem as well as the solution.

Regarding its relationship with the conflicting parties, the EU's negative contribution derives from two main lines of reasoning. Firstly, MEPs criticize the EU's one-sided support to Israel which is considered unjust as they identify Israel as the aggressor or at least as the more powerful side to the conflict (and the Palestinians as victims). Thus, the "European Union [...] bears a great responsibility for upgrading its relations with Israel, identifying the perpetrator with the victim, and reducing the just struggle of the Palestinian people to terrorism" (Papadakis, European Parliament 2017). Secondly, MEPs consider the EU's approach of "equidistance" as contributing to the ongoing gridlock of the MEPP. From the basic sense of the word, equidistance describes a situation in which the EU keeps equal distance from both Israel and Palestine, meaning both sides are treated equally. This stands in contradiction to the first line of thinking, which holds that equidistance is lacking (to the benefit of Israel). This notwithstanding, in this discursive strand, MEPs consider an equidistant stance unjust as a neutral stance toward the conflict renders the EU complicit in strengthening the oppressing side, instead of empowering the oppressed. Hence, a beneficial treatment of Israel is wrong, and so is equidistance, which leaves stronger support for the Palestinians as the only legitimate option.

In sum, this strand of the EU's discourse of responsibility holds that the EU bears responsibility as it either left its capacity to positively influence the MEPP unused or even negatively affected it. However, while the notion of the EU bearing responsibility due to its negative contribution to the conflict certainly challenges facets of the EU's identity, e.g., its morality or unwavering commitment to international law, it does not substantially question the core narrative that underlies the EU's discourse of responsibility. Even though the EU bears (partial) responsibility

for the standstill of the peace process, this responsibility is subsequently linked to suggestions on how the EU could use its capacity to make up for its inactivity or negative contribution, e.g., through using its increasingly close cooperation with Israel to exert influence on Israel. Hence, the contribution motif even contributes to constructing the EU's capacity to resolve the conflict and feeds into the idea of the EU being naturally and legitimately engaged in the MEPP.

The tension between the different facets of responsibility that contribute to the formation of EU identity demonstrates that identities do not form unitary, unambiguous constructs (see ch. 3.2). The EU represents a particularly suitable case to demonstrate this theoretical consideration. The motifs based on which a responsibility of the EU is constructed differ regarding their general prevalence as well as their appearance within the different EU institutions. I identified the EU's capacity, a sense of belonging that connects the EU to the Middle East (and Israel and Palestine in particular), an understanding of morality, and international law as the most important sources from which the EU's responsibility originates. Certainly, The European Parliament is the leading institution in which the EU's responsibility is invoked. For instance, the idea that the EU bears responsibility as it contributed to the manifestation of the conflict only appears here. Other motifs can be found across the EU's institutions. When comparing the different EU organs, it stands out that the European Council and the Council of the EU rather refer to commitments, and less often to responsibilities or duties of the EU. Their conclusions often simply declare those commitments without providing any framing on how these commitments come about. Thus, these documents will play a more crucial role in the consecutive subchapters.

In sum, since different EU institutions partake in the construction of the EU's identity and due to the multifaceted nature of the EU's discourse of responsibility regarding the MEPP, this identity unveils itself as a mosaic of compatible and partly contradictive elements. As the very wording "construction" or "shaping" of identities already discloses, identities are constantly in flux and require constant (re-) instantiation. Building on this procedural nature of identity, the ensuing and final section of this chapter adopts a temporal perspective and traces discursive transformations regarding the (dis-) appearance of the just presented motifs.

EU Responsibility and the Signs of the Times

While some of the sources from which the EU's responsibility originates are almost constantly invoked throughout the period of analysis, I identified several years that mark significant shifts in the EU's discourse of responsibility. Either the EU's discourse of responsibility intensifies and actors within the European Union are particularly engaged in constructing the EU's identity vis à vis the conflicting parties or references to responsibility decrease sharply and the EU's

identity is increasingly contested for. I identified five years that serve to illustrate this observation: 2002, 2006, 2009, 2014, and 2016. As the goal of this section is to trace the temporal development of the EU's discourse of responsibility, I connect those years that I consider discursive turning points with observations of the phases in between. Certainly, apart from 2016 all the years that I consider discursive turning points are characterized by major events that substantially shaped the progression of the conflict. However, as the EU's discourse of responsibility does not uniformly reflect the aggravation of the conflict in the context of the different crises, and as 2016 constitutes a discursive turning point even though there was no major crisis, I argue that the state of the conflict is not the primary driver of the EU's discourse of responsibility. Rather, internal debates and perceptions of what the EU should and can (or cannot) do to advance the peace process appear to be more decisive.

Up until 2002, the EU's discourse of responsibility was characterized by a richness of different grounds on which the EU was constructed as an actor with a broad array of responsibilities. In the first years under analysis (1999-2002) several major events occurred that continue to shape the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to this day. In the beginning, there was hope that a comprehensive agreement between Israel and the Palestinians could still be reached after the Oslo II Accord's transitional period ended without such an agreement in May 1999. Consequently, during the following two years, multiple international summits took place (Camp David and Sharm el Sheikh in 2000, Taba in 2001) that aimed at reaching a final settlement to the conflict. Meanwhile, as the second Intifada broke out in September 2000, the need for a breakthrough in the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks increased ever further. During this initial period, the EU positioned itself as an actor bearing responsibility for historical and moral reasons, and due to its sense of community regarding the Middle East region. Additionally, in the early 2000s some references to the EU's responsibility based on its capacity already appear but remain rather vague - e.g., in the sense of "a role which cannot be ignored" (President-in-Office of the Council de Miguel, European Parliament 2002).

The year 2002 presents itself as a turning point in the Middle East conflict that coincides with a discursive shift in the EU. Regarding the state of the conflict, 2002 marks the second Intifada coming to a height. Israel was hit by 53 suicide attacks throughout 2002 alone and launched Operation Defensive Shield. This military operation represented a major setback in terms of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as it led to the reoccupation of the West Bank and received heavy criticism due to violations of international law (Byman 2011: 141, 151). While Operation Defensive Shield was still ongoing, representatives of the UN, USA, EU, and Russia met in Madrid and established the Middle East Quartet "to coordinate our actions to resolve the

current crisis” (Letter from the UN Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council, S/2002/369). In this context, the EU’s discourse of responsibility reached a culminating point. Various actors within the EU invoked a broad array of different motifs that allocated responsibility to the EU. Especially its sense of community regarding the conflicting parties became a prevalent motif.

After this peak in 2002, the EU’s discourse of responsibility changed. As it became already visible in 2002 that prospects to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the short term had declined rapidly, the narrative of a capable EU was pushed into the background and even became challenged with statements such as “we all feel incredibly powerless, disgusted and frustrated” (Malmström, European Parliament 2002). This sense of frustration intensifies in the following two years. In a speech to the European Parliament in 2003, HR Solana himself declares, “I too am overcome by a feeling of frustration. I am frustrated because the Middle East is still bleeding to death” (HR Solana, European Parliament 2003). While he later adds that “[i]t is imperative not to allow this frustration to cloud our vision” and that this “should motivate us to remain on the alert and assume all our duties and responsibilities” (ibid.), references to the EU’s own responsibility, commitments, or the like occur notably less frequent until they surge again in 2005. Motifs such as capacity disappear completely, while the motif of contribution appears for the first time. As I argued above, this does not lead to a major shift in the EU’s discourse of responsibility. Statements such as “Europe is failing in its duty; it is unable to do its job despite the efforts of our High Representative, despite the efforts made in the Quartet” (Dell’Alba, European Parliament 2003) remain marginal. However, even though there is no substantial shift in the EU’s discourse of responsibility in the direction of acknowledging the EU’s failure to meet its responsibilities, the number of references to responsibility declines. Hence, the frustration concerning the continuing deadlock in the peace process at the time is rather expressed through the fact that responsibility does not serve as a prevalent, appropriate means to construct the EU’s identity anymore. As identity requires continuous (re-) articulation, a challenge to an identity cannot only be identified when it is directly opposed but also when it ceases to be articulated or is articulated significantly less often. Hence, after 2002 a challenging period regarding the EU’s identity as constructed through its discourse of responsibility set in. Moving away from the EU’s responsibilities as such, the allocation of responsibility to the Middle East Quartet, Israel, and the PNA dominates the EU’s discourse of responsibility in this period.

The next discursive turning point can be identified in 2006. This is a context marked by Israel’s disengagement from Gaza in 2005, the successful conduction of Palestinian presidential

elections, and increasing engagement of the EU with the parties (e.g., through the agreement of Action Plans or the deployment of EUBAM Rafah). In this setting, the EU's discourse of responsibility intensifies again, and all major sources of responsibility (capacity, community, morality, and international law) reappear. However, 2006 heralds a phase in which the EU's discourse of responsibility predominantly revolves around the motifs community, morality, and contribution in reflection of the deteriorating situation on the ground. In this year, Hamas won the Palestinian legislative elections. This electoral victory was accompanied by inner-Palestinian violent clashes between Hamas and Fatah, the latter having so far dominated the PNA and the PLO. Further, Israel withheld the transfer of Palestinian tax and customs revenues and a military conflict between Israel and Gaza erupted in June 2006. This military conflict was characterized by ground incursions, air strikes, and artillery shelling on Israel's side as well as rockets fired from the Gaza Strip. Hundreds of civilian casualties, severe damage to civilian infrastructure in Gaza, and heavy restrictions of Palestinian movement formed the outcome of the Israel-Gaza conflict of 2006 (UN OCHA 2006). Amidst this exacerbated situation, many international donors faced a dilemma regarding the provision of humanitarian assistance to the now Hamas-governed PNA as many Western countries – and the EU in 2003 – designated Hamas a terrorist organization and therefore an unacceptable partner. Even though the EU established the “Temporal International Mechanism” in June 2006, which was intended to uphold the flow of international aid in circumvention of Hamas, the European Parliament already foresaw that “whereas the international community and the European Union are providing considerable support for efforts to solve the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, [...] this assistance cannot meet all needs” (European Parliament Resolution 2006d). By 2007, the PNA had returned to the hands of the Fatah, and Hamas had taken control in Gaza, which manifested the ongoing political split between the West Bank and Gaza. Israel reacted with the complete blockade of the Gaza Strip which markedly exacerbated the difficult living conditions there.

This phase of the EU's discourse of responsibility culminates in 2009 after the Gaza War of 2008-2009 ended in January that year. In 2009 the motif of contribution appears particularly often and severe questions regarding the EU's identity arose among MEPs. Firstly, the EU's capacity to contribute to the MEPP is doubted. While the international community “ought to have done more”, the EU showed “a serious inadequacy: an incapacity to build a real, strategic, and lasting peace policy” (Angelilli, European Parliament 2009). In connection with that, the whole discourse of responsibility is questioned for the first time, which in itself discloses the EU's inability to substantially influence the conflict:

“So, what should we do now to ensure that our debate today is not what it often is – a somewhat pointless, futile confrontation? Continuing to hurl abuse at each other about the historic responsibilities of the different parties seems to me to be a perfect example of such futility.” (Ries, European Parliament 2009)

The second major challenge to the EU’s identity derives from its relationship with Israel. In this sense, “if the business-as-usual approach continues and remains an ongoing part of our relations with Israel, with the 1,000 deaths in Gaza, you will bury Article 11 of the Treaty, you will bury the Union’s ‘human rights’ policy and you will bury the European project” (Flautre, European Parliament 2009). This negative shift in the EU’s discourse of responsibility continued in the following years and revolved around the motifs of contribution, morality, and international law, while others such as capacity or community completely disappeared.

This only changed in 2014 as a year in which the EU’s discourse of responsibility was particularly lively. In contrast to reactions to the Gaza War of 2008-2009, the EU’s discourse of responsibility developed in a completely different fashion in the context of yet another military conflict in Gaza, which even surpassed the events of 2008-2009 in terms of casualties and the destruction of Gaza’s civilian infrastructure (Human Rights Council 2015). Leaving the 2014 Gaza War aside - prospects of resolving the conflict had already become slim in the beginning of 2014. In spring a round of direct talks between Israel and Palestine collapsed after several months of negotiation that were initiated by the US. Moreover, the negotiations were accompanied by a record high in Israeli designations of state land and significant approvals of settlement constructions in the West Bank (Levinson 2014). Even so, the EU’s discourse of responsibility took a considerable turn in 2014, and references to a genuine responsibility of the EU increased sharply. For instance, after several years of absence, the motif of capacity reappeared multiple times and the community motif, especially regarding a historically rooted responsibility of the EU, rose to levels that only compare to the early 2000s. Additionally, 2014 constitutes one of the years in which the broadest array of sources of the EU’s responsibility appears in the discourse. While back in 2009 the protagonists of the EU’s discourse of responsibility were not so much the EU itself but rather the Middle East Quartet and the international community – apart from the conflicting parties themselves – in 2014 the EU’s responsibility takes center stage.

This discursive shift can be explained by the fact that in contrast to 2009 (and the years in between), the EU brought forward concrete proposals on how it could contribute to the advancement of the MEPP. For instance, the Council emphasized the EU’s readiness regarding the “reactivation and possible extension in scope and mandate of its EUBAM Rafah and

EUPOL COPPS missions” (Council of the EU 2014b) and reiterated “the offer of a Special Privileged Partnership, which will ensure unprecedented economic, political and security support for both parties in the event of a final status agreement” (Council of the EU 2014a). Moreover, the European Parliament discussed the recognition of Palestinian Statehood and concluded that this constituted a step it “[s]upports in principle” (European Parliament Resolution 2014). In essence, the discourse reflected the conviction “that the European Union should take its responsibility and become a *genuine actor* and facilitator in the Middle East peace process” (ibid., emphasis added).

The last turning point in the EU’s discourse of responsibility can be discerned in 2016. Two aspects stand out that shape the discourse to this day. Firstly, while all other motifs are pushed into the background, the discourse largely revolves around capacity and international law as the dominant sources of EU responsibility. As I will further outline in the ensuing chapter, especially responsibilities and commitments deriving from the EU’s own legislation and bilateral agreements with Israel begin to be widely debated. The motif of morality flared up in the context of the protests and clashes with the Israeli military at the border between Israel and Gaza in March 2018 as well as the outbreak of widespread violence and an Israeli airstrike campaign against Gaza in 2021. For instance, in 2018 Commissioner Hahn told the European Parliament that considering “[w]hat has happened near the Gaza fence and in Jerusalem in the past weeks [...] what we urgently need is to reopen a path that may eventually lead to peace and security for all people in the region. As Europeans we have a duty to play our part in this, however we can, and we will” (Hahn, European Parliament 2018). Nevertheless, even though the events of 2018 left even more inhabitants of Gaza wounded than the Gaza War of 2014, the EU’s discourse of responsibility did not reflect this intensification of the conflict (UN OCHA 2018). The discourse predominantly revolved around US decisions and approaches. In this regard, MEPs condemn “Mr. Trump’s unilateral and irrational announcement” to recognize Jerusalem as the Israeli capital and to move the US embassy thereto, and simultaneously declare that “the EU has the tools [...] but above all it has the political responsibility for peace in the Middle East” (Arena, European Parliament 2017). Nevertheless, in comparison to 2014, proposals regarding concrete initiatives to advance the MEPP on the EU’s side are lacking.

The second aspect that shaped the EU’s discourse of responsibility since 2016 relates to the question of which actors within the EU continued to partake in it. Firstly, apart from a European Council Conclusion that devoted only three sentences to the MEPP in 2021, the MEPP did not play any role in European Council Conclusions from 2015 onwards. Further, after 2016 the Council of the EU did not issue any official “Council Conclusion on the Middle East Peace

Process”. Instead, in the name of the Council, the HR/VP issued “Declarations on behalf of the European Union”, which are significantly shorter than the earlier Council Conclusions. This demonstrates the increasing discord within the EU’s intergovernmental fora regarding the question of how the EU should position itself vis-à-vis Israel and the state of the peace process, particularly amidst the Trump Administration’s actions that ran counter core tenets of the EU’s approach to the conflict. Consequently, the European Parliament averred that “in order to support a genuine European peace initiative, it is the primary duty of the Member States to contribute actively to the shaping of a united European position and to refrain from unilateral initiatives that weaken European action” (European Parliament Resolution 2017).

Considering that the European Parliament and the HR/VP became the exclusive protagonists of the EU’s discourse of responsibility, the question arises whether this development can be connected to what former President of the Commission Juncker called a “polycrisis” in 2016. This “polycrisis” is predicated on “[o]ur various challenges – from the security threats in our neighbourhood and at home, to the refugee crisis, and to the UK referendum – [...] [which] feed each other, creating a sense of doubt and uncertainty in the minds of our people” (Juncker 2016). The absence of outputs by the European Council demonstrates that finding a common position on the MEPP has become another challenge for the EU. Yet, as the European Parliament and the HR/VP have always been the most engaged in the EU’s discourse of responsibility (and not the Council of the EU or the European Council), how could this supposed age of a “polycrisis” explain why the EU’s discourse of responsibility did not respond to the crises of 2018 or 2021 in a similar way as it did in 2014?

The clashes of 2018 led to the highest death toll registered in a single year since 2014 and to the highest number of injured Palestinians that UN OCHA ever recorded. Therefore, it would be reasonable to assume that the EU’s manifold responsibilities in the face of the deterioration of the conflict feature prominently in its discourse at this point (UN OCHA 2018). But, as my analysis shows, the severity of the conditions on the ground is not the most important driver of the EU’s discourse of responsibility. Instead, references to responsibility being grounded in various sources increase when actors within the EU bring forward genuine initiatives of the European Union and ideas of how the EU itself could forward the MEPP. Thus, the EU’s responsibility showed particularly strong in the early 2000s (when the EU debated a broad range of possible ways to bring about a negotiated solution to the conflict, co-founded the Middle East Quartet, and in this framework put forward the Roadmap), in 2005-2006 (when the EU launched EUBAM Rafah and EUPOL COPPS), and in 2014-2015 when again several tools to restart the MEPP were debated (such as the establishment of special privileged partnerships or

the recognition of Palestine). In other years that were, like 2014, characterized by a severe aggravation of the conflict (2007, 2009, 2018, 2021), the EU's discourse of responsibility did not reflect these developments. Hence, the blockade in the European Council and the lack of room to maneuver on the part of the HR/VP that began in 2016 can explain why the EU's discourse of responsibility did not intensify in the face of recent crises as no new EU policies concerning the conflict could be explored. Additionally, the US took the lead with unilateral decisions that left the EU reacting instead of acting and impeded joint action in the Quartet. As a result, for years the EU's discourse of responsibility continued to stagnate and thereby reflected the EU's inability to formulate a new, genuinely European initiative to advance the MEPP. Hence, the observation that the EU's discourse of responsibility did not intensify in parallel with major upheavals in the conflict leads me to suggest that in contrast to responsibility's altruistic undertone in everyday language, any idea of responsibility begins with the Self, not the Other.

5.2 Acting Responsibly – “We shall Do All in Our Power”

While the last chapter was devoted to the grounds on which a genuine responsibility of the EU is constructed, this chapter delves into the behavioral realm and asks which kinds of foreign policies the EU's discourse of responsibility suggests. Above I outlined that there is no causal relationship between identity and foreign policy. However, the conception of the EU's responsibilities is very often connected to clear ideas of how the EU should act in its relations with others. Therefore, the EU's discourse of responsibility proposes certain kinds of external behavior that appear more legitimate and appropriate than others as they seem to be more in line with the EU's identity. Apart from that, as the articulation of foreign policy draws on an actor's identity, it simultaneously reproduces this identity (Hansen 2006: 6). Consequently, the articulation of foreign policy also feeds into the EU's collective identity-building process.

Nevertheless, the adoption of policy options that are discursively presented as appropriate is not a necessary consequence. Rather, the discourse introduces these policy options to an actual “realm of possibilities” and thereby renders these options not only conceivable but viable. Hence, the ensuing chapter illuminates which kinds of behavior references to the EU's responsibility imply and how this configures a specific relationship between the EU and its Others. Lastly, building on the theoretical consideration that the relationship between identity and foreign policy is bi-directional, I strive to investigate “feedback loops” (Hebel and Lenz 2016: 487): do actors within the EU reflect on the EU's (in-) ability to meet its responsibility

through the foreign policy it has adopted? Whether such reflections can be identified and how these might influence EU identity constructions will be investigated in the end of this chapter.

Actors within the EU invoke a broad array of sources from which the EU's responsibilities derive. The reference points of its responsibility, that is, what the EU deems itself responsible for, are equally wide-ranging. Hence, this construction of the EU bearing multiple responsibilities vis-à-vis conflicts and peoples external to its borders does not only establish the notion of the EU being a capable, powerful actor as a feature of its identity, but it also inscribes a self-authorization into the EU's foreign policy (see Kießling 2019: 493). As the EU bears these responsibilities, its engagement in the MEPP appears as a natural consequence. Whether its presence is desired and whether its involvement is even helpful is only of secondary importance. In most general terms the EU has "a responsibility to do everything we can to enable the people in the Middle East to live together in peace" (Poettering, European Parliament 2009). For the EU this entails more concretely "its commitment to a negotiated agreement resulting in two viable, sovereign and independent states, Israel and Palestine, based on the borders of 1967, living side by side in peace and security, in the framework of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East, as laid out in the Road Map drawn up by the Quartet" (European Council 2004a). These are the stated goals, yet how shall the EU contribute to their achievement?

Having an Impact on the Ground – Building the Second State

While the EU affirmed the Palestinians' right to self-determination as early as 1980, it only endorsed the "option of a [Palestinian] state" in its Berlin declaration of 1999 (European Council 1999). Nevertheless, the EU's engagement in the "state-building project in Palestine" already began in the wake of the Oslo process when the EU rose to the position of Palestine's biggest international donor (Bouris 2020: 94-95). When tracing how the EU's discourse of responsibility reflects "our strong commitment to the two states" (HR/VP Mogherini 2017), two aspects stand out. Firstly, actors within the EU rather refer to commitments in the realm of state-building and the notion of responsibility mostly appears in connection to Palestine. Hence, the EU's discourse prominently revolves around responsibilities that the PNA either has assumed or "needs to be prepared for" (European Commission 2005). Consequently, the EU reiterates its commitment to assist Palestine's state-building process, yet the goal is to establish "a Palestinian state able to assume *its* responsibilities and exercise the functions of a modern democracy" (ibid., emphasis added). The EU's allocation of responsibility to the PNA or the (future) Palestinian state creates a specific idea of how this state shall be constituted, how it

shall be governed, and how it is supposed to act (see chapter 5.3). However, the new EU-PA Action Plan of 2013 constitutes a striking exception to this observation. This Action Plan provides an exhaustive list of explicit “EU responsibilities” such as, e.g., support to civil society actors, the Palestinian judiciary, or electoral assistance. Thus, the EU’s responsibilities vis-à-vis Palestine take center stage here, which implies the absence of the PNA’s ability to meet the responsibilities that would theoretically be its own.

Secondly, the European Commission and the European Council propose the most concrete courses of action to support Palestinian state-building, while the discourse is the least concrete among MEPs. HR Solana (2007) summarizes the EU’s approach to state-making in Palestine as helping “the Palestinian Government economically, politically and in security matters”. Starting with “security matters”, the EU puts particular emphasis on the reform of the Palestinian security forces, which translates into “improving the capacity of its civil police and law enforcement capacity” (European Council 2004a). The importance the EU allocates to SSR is evident considering the deployment of its two civilian missions EUBAM Rafah and EUPOL COPPS. EUPOL COPPS’ underlying idea was that if the PNA managed to “end incitement and dismantle terrorist structures”, security would improve, and Israel would be more willing to advance the peace process (European Commission 2005). This focus on Israeli security needs instead of the Palestinian Police Forces’ obligations towards Palestinians has been critically investigated elsewhere (e.g., Bouris 2020; Farsakh 2021; Turner 2006).

Moving to the political realm, institution-building serves as the most prominent task the EU strives to support. Thus, “aid to the Palestinian institutions [...] remains a European commitment we should maintain” (European Council 2001). More concretely, building on the provisions of the Oslo process, “the European Union’s fundamental objective is to preserve the institutional structure of the Palestinian Authority. The European Union has invested a lot, has devoted resources and effort to the creation of that Authority and believes that it must be maintained” (HR Solana, European Parliament 2006). Not only does the EU’s assistance to the PNA aim at strengthening its civil administrative capacity. Extensive financial support by the EU, especially regarding the payment of salaries and allowances, also contributes to keeping it functioning (European Commission 2013). The inflation of the PNA’s public sector (ranging at 29 % in 2020) derives from an attempt to decrease unemployment rates and grew steadily due to the public sector’s politicization (PCBS 2021; Alayasa and Musa 2021: 112-113). Hence, the PNA requires ever higher funding to provide for its public servants’ salaries. While the EU-PA Action Plan of 2013 states that the EU “has a particular interest and responsibility in proactively promoting democratisation leading to stability and prosperity in the region”, the EU’s

commitment to the strengthening of democracy in Palestine appears far less prominent in the EU's discourse of responsibility than references to institutional assistance or SSR.

Lastly, the EU contributes to Palestinian state-building through its assistance to Palestinian economic development. In this regard, the "Council confirms its commitment to help build the institutions and economy of the future Palestinian state and stresses the need to fully develop the economy in the Occupied Palestinian territories, including the promotion of cooperation with the Palestinian private sector" (Council Conclusion 2007b). Hence, the EU follows the neoliberal economic paradigm, which was endorsed by the PNA's Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (PRDP) of 2007, co-written with World Bank and IMF advisors (Hanieh 2021: 33). The EU's promotion of economic growth in Palestine is embedded in a regional and international economic prospect. On the one hand, the EU stresses the "vital significance of greater regional cooperation and more trade and cooperation between the countries to the south and not just between Europe and the countries of the South" (Commissioner Patten, European Parliament 2000). Economic liberalization shall "help to consolidate political developments in the region" (ibid.). On the other hand, "continued advocacy for Palestinian observership [sic!] as a first step towards accession negotiations to the World Trade Organisation" (WTO) constitutes one of the "EU responsibilities" listed in the 2013 EU-PA Action Plan. While Palestine submitted a request for WTO observer status in 2009, the EU's "advocacy" to integrate Palestine into global economic governance structures has so far not borne fruit.

In sum, the EU's approach to Palestinian state-building evolved within the overarching liberal peace paradigm, which holds that post-conflict state-building should focus on "democratisation, human rights, civil society, the rule of law and economic liberalisation in the form of free-market reform and development" (Richmond and Franks 2009: 3). As I have demonstrated above, the EU focuses on security matters, institutional capacity-building, and (neoliberal) economic reform to assist the "Palestinian state-to-be". Again, this approach has received heavy criticism as it did not produce the promised outcomes (e.g., Richmond and Franks 2009: 158; Alayasa and Musa 2021: 116). The EU's prioritization in regard to Palestinian state-building reflects and reinforces some of the EU's identity traits outlined earlier. Not only does its adherence to the liberal peace paradigm reveal how the EU envisions the ideal future Palestinian state, but it also grants the EU a position of power as it is up to the EU to support others in reaching an ideal that it claims to act from already. Further, the EU's support for the political and economic integration of Palestine into the global system demonstrates how the EU seeks to contribute to upholding and consolidating a specific conception of global order. Again, this

constructs unequal power relations as it is for the EU to assess to what extent and under which conditions Palestine is rightfully becoming part of this global system.

On a last note, the EU takes pride in describing itself as “holding the status of main donor” (European Parliament Resolution 1999) and as “the major and most predictable donor to the Palestinian people” (European Commission 2013). Thus, apart from the EU’s extensive financial contributions to Palestinian state-making, humanitarian assistance features prominently in the EU’s discourse of responsibility and is often mentioned together with economic assistance. In this regard, the discourse revolves around the EU’s general “commitment to help the Palestinian people” (Council of the EU 2006c), the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza in particular, which “is a moral duty to provide” (European Parliament Resolution 2009), as well as continued financial support to UNRWA.

A Political Apart From an Economic Role

Considering the EU’s diverse financial contributions, an important feature of the EU’s discourse of responsibility revolves around the conviction that “the commitments of the European Union in the region in financial terms must be balanced with a clear presence in the political field” (European Parliament Resolution 2000a). Hence, the European Parliament draws a clear dividing line between the provision of humanitarian aid and economic assistance – which appears as an apolitical endeavor – and the need to assume “not only humanitarian responsibilities, but real political responsibilities” (de Keyser, European Parliament 2006). In the EU’s discourse of responsibility, the notion of “political responsibilities” was particularly important in the beginning of the 2000s, when common assessment had it that “[w]e are, unfortunately, still in the old situation of ‘paying but not playing’” (Martínez, European Parliament 2001). Thus, the EU “must *become* a political body” (Sbarbati, European Parliament 2000, emphasis added).

The “political responsibilities” of such a “political body” mainly translate into three related courses of action. Firstly, as the EU promotes a negotiated solution to the conflict, the EU should have a role of “supporting, facilitating and mediating” (President-in-Office of the Council Moscovici, European Parliament 2000). This requires, first and foremost, that “the EU should be involved in all the negotiations of the peace process” (European Parliament Resolution 2000a). This aspect was particularly prominent in the early 2000s when the EU was present at the international conferences of Sharm el-Sheikh and Taba. The idea that the EU should try to establish a peace conference by itself, in reminiscence of the Madrid conference of 1991 or a “European Camp David” (Patrie, European Parliament 2007), does, however, only

appear thrice in the European Parliament throughout the 22 years under analysis. Moreover, especially between 1999 and 2003, it was a common conviction within the EU that “[p]eace in the Middle East will not be comprehensive if it does not include Syria and Lebanon” (European Council 2003b). Even though the EU occasionally reiterated this aspect in later years, the EU’s discourse of responsibility always concentrated on how to advance the negotiations between Israel and Palestine, which became a *pars pro toto* for the (originally multi-track) MEPP.

Secondly, yet connected to the EU’s participation in peace negotiations, the EU should ensure its general diplomatic presence. Consequently, “Ambassador Moratinos [...] has managed to give Europe a profile in the Middle East by cultivating daily contacts with all the leaders in the region” (HR Solana, European Parliament 2000). While the EU’s Special Representative (EUSR) for the MEPP played a key role in upholding the EU’s diplomatic presence in the early 2000s, this task was increasingly attributed to the HR/VP. Hence, especially HR/VP Mogherini received a lot of praise from the European Parliament after she visited Israel and Palestine due to the “confidence [...] [she] has established with the different parties, including the greater engagement to which she has committed herself again today with the Arab partners” (Howitt, European Parliament 2015). As the last part of this quote demonstrates, the EU’s diplomatic presence does not only refer to the conflicting parties themselves but hints at the need to maintain close contact to its “Arab partners” apart from its general emphasis on multilateral cooperation and working through the Quartet (Council of the EU 2009).

Thirdly, a recurring course of action revolves around the need to put pressure on the conflicting parties to bring them back to the negotiation table or to ensure the respect of international law and the implementation of agreements. To begin with, the element of conditionality certainly serves as one such means to exert political pressure. For instance, both Action Plans between the EU and Israel and the PNA respectively state that the “level of ambition of the EU-PA [or EU-Israel] relationship” depends on the “degree of commitment to common values” and whether “jointly agreed priorities” are implemented. Further, Article 2 in the EU-Israel Association Agreement – the so-called human rights clause – holds that “respect for human rights and democratic principles [...] constitutes an essential element of this Agreement”.⁸ Hence, throughout the years MEPs have demanded to suspend the Association Agreement arguing that “[t]rade preferences are carrots and sticks. If we are afraid to use the stick when facing such disregard for international law, then our claims to have values in our foreign policy

⁸ The EU concluded an interim Association Agreement with the PLO on behalf on the PNA in 1997, yet it does not play a role in the EU’s discourse (and neither in Palestine’s, see Santoro and Nasrallah 2011) due to the low trading volume between the EU and the PNA (see European Commission 2021).

become empty words” (Martin, European Parliament 2015). This quote demonstrates how the debate on the suspension of the Association Agreement is connected to a particular conception of EU identity. As the EU shall not tolerate violations of international law and “expect[s] the people we trade with to act responsibly, proportionately, and within the law”, the suspension of the Association Agreement represents an appropriate policy option that is in line with the EU’s identity (Taylor, European Parliament 2018). Despite this discursive opening of a potential “policy space” (Hansen 2006: 213), the EU-Israel Association Agreement has never been suspended. Yet, neither has the EU ever suspended any other bilateral trade agreement containing a human rights clause (European Parliament Briefing 2019). In consequence, the fact that the EU consistently avoids the suspension of bilateral trade agreements due to breaches of the human rights clauses and rather opts for “political dialogue, consultations and a range of cooperation measures” constitutes a general problem that transcends EU-Israel ties (ibid.).

Aside from demands to suspend the EU-Israel Association Agreement altogether, since 2012 MEPs and the Council of the EU continuously reiterate that the EU shall at least ensure that the benefits of the Association Agreement do not apply to products that originate in Israeli settlements. Hence, a major strand in the EU’s discourse of responsibility holds that the most important step would firstly be to guarantee that the Association Agreement is not circumvented but also to implement existing EU legislation. References to existing EU legislation hint at the necessity to enforce the general requirement of origin labeling (see Regulation No. 1169/2011, Art. 26 (2)a). In Israel’s case, this means that it must clearly indicate whether a product originates in Israel (as recognized by the EU) or an Israeli settlement on Palestinian territory.

Conditionality also plays a role in the EU’s relations with Palestine, yet it is less prominent in the EU’s cross-institutional discourse (see Tocci 2009: 393). Firstly, continued reforms of Palestinian institutions serve as “reform-related conditions to its [the EU’s] financial support to the Palestinian Authority” (European Commission 2005). As I explained above, Hamas’ electoral victory in 2006 led the EU to temporarily suspend institutional assistance to Palestine “[u]ntil Hamas expresses unequivocally that it intends to respect the principles of the international community” (HR Solana, European Parliament 2006). However, after the intra-Palestinian split manifested and the PNA returned to the hands of Fatah, governing exclusively over the West Bank, aid payments resumed to the PNA. While Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner made it clear that “unless the new government complies with the Quartet’s conditions, [...] there will inevitably be an impact on assistance to the Palestinian Government”, she equally emphasized that this would not affect the provision of emergency humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians by the EU (Ferrero-Waldner, European Parliament 2006).

Apart from the tool of conditionality, several other means to put pressure on the conflicting parties appear in the EU's discourse. Firstly, MEPs discuss the possible imposition of sanctions on Israel, yet occasionally also on Palestine. Most concretely, they call for an arms embargo on both sides – a demand that was particularly prominent in 2002 and is even mentioned in a European Parliament Resolution of April that year. Nevertheless, so far, no arms embargo has been set up. Instead, the value of export licenses of military goods originating in EU countries ranges on an average level of € 666 million per year since 2012 (European Network Against Arms Trade 2022). In contrast to EU exports to Egypt or Saudi Arabia, this export volume does not seem to be high, yet when tracing EU arms exports to Israel since 1999, the year 2012 evidently marks a watershed indicating a higher level of EU-Israel arms trade.

Leaving aside the option of sanctions, several actors within the EU emphasize the importance of three further rhetoric means to increase pressure on Israel and Palestine to refrain from actions that may hamper any possible return to the negotiating table. The first one relates to public condemnation of unlawful acts on either side – e.g., in one European Council Conclusion the European Council simultaneously “condemns the violence against Palestinian civilians”, “condemns the launching of Qassem rockets against population centres in Israel” and it “reiterates its condemnation of extra-judicial killings” (European Council 2006). Secondly, another means to rhetorically pressurize Israel to refrain from further settlement constructions or annexations of Palestinian territory is the constant reiteration that the EU “will not recognise any changes to the pre-1967 borders, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties” (Council of the EU 2012). Lastly, already in 1999, the EU stated that it “reaffirms the continuing and unqualified Palestinian right to self-determination including the option of a state” (European Council 1999). However, in the EU's discourse of responsibility, the potential recognition of the State of Palestine only began to be re-discussed in 2011 and reached its peak in 2014 when the European Parliament declared that it supports “in principle [the] recognition of Palestinian statehood” (European Parliament Resolution 2014). Not only is the “recognition of the Palestinian State [...] a responsibility and a moral obligation” (Vallina, European Parliament 2014), but MEPs increasingly understand the recognition of Palestinian statehood as a means to “send a clear message that the international community and the EU are opposed to occupation and committed to a two-state solution involving two fully-fledged, recognised states” (Anderson, European Parliament 2014). To this day, eight European member states recognize the State of Palestine; Sweden being the last one to grant recognition in 2014.

To sum up, the “political role” that the EU envisions for itself mainly builds on courses of action that refer to the realms of diplomacy and economic ties and do not include the use of force. This

does not mean, however, that military options have never been discussed. For instance, in 2001 the European Parliament demanded “to make available to the conflicting parties and to the United Nations all appropriate EU military and civil crisis management instruments, which are currently being developed within the evolving framework of the ESDP [European Security and Defence Policy]” (European Parliament Resolution 2001). Further, in 2002 MEPs discussed the need for the EU, together with the other members of the Quartet, “to express with one voice the need for a ceasefire and their joint willingness to send an international peace enforcement and observation force” (Barón Crespo, European Parliament 2002). To what extent and how the EU would contribute to such an international force remains, however, vague. That potential military means are discussed in the early 2000s in particular is certainly not coincidental. Rather, the European Parliament’s debate on the MEPP reflects the *Zeitgeist* of the time – with EUFOR Concordia the EU had indeed set up a peacekeeping mission in 2003, and in the same year the EU sent a UN-authorized military mission to the Democratic Republic of Congo (Operation Artemis). Even though such a (potentially European) peace enforcement mission was never deployed to Israel and Palestine, the debate regarding the establishment of an international mission demonstrates the evolution of what Poopuu (2020) calls the EU’s “CSDP identity” – inner-European reflections on how the EU is willing to and capable of shaping conflict dynamics. Yet, as the demand regarding the deployment of troops did not take hold, the potential usage of military means remains negligible in the EU’s discourse on the MEPP.

Returning to the question of how foreign policy discourses feed into identity constructions, the preceding analysis of the main strands of external action that are being considered in the EU illustrates how the EU is painted as a predominantly diplomatic actor. As such, the EU has a broad variety of means at its disposal that could be used to advance the MEPP. Nevertheless, I also indicated that several of these means have not been used yet, and the EU’s stated core goal of a negotiated two-state solution has not become reality. Hence, the final section of this chapter investigates how the EU’s foreign policy behavior is discursively processed and thus feeds back into its identity construction.

Tracing Feedback Loops

Identity and foreign policy are connected by discourse. So far, I investigated what kinds of foreign policy behavior the EU’s discourse of responsibility suggests as corresponding to the EU’s identity. However, since both identity and foreign policy are discursively formulated and are therefore conceptualized as being co-constitutive, foreign policy behavior and foreign policy outcomes certainly tie back into an actor’s identity construction. Consequently, this last

section traces such “feedback loops” (Hebel and Lenz 2016: 476) and asks how the EU’s foreign policies and their outcomes are taken up in the EU’s discourse of responsibility. Do positive or negative assessments of the EU’s external action confirm or lead to challenges to the EU’s identity construction? Further, based on these assessments, which expectations arise regarding its future engagement in the MEPP?

Certainly, the European Parliament serves as the most significant arena in which such debates can be traced. When it comes to positive assessments of the EU’s engagement in the MEPP, it is not surprising that these reinforce the EU’s discourse of responsibility. As I outlined above in respect of the capacity motif that serves as a prevalent source to construct the EU’s responsibility to be involved in the peace process, this discursive strand makes the EU appear as a capable, trusted, and influential player. On the one hand, such positive assessments strengthen and confirm the EU’s identity, yet on the other hand, they simultaneously establish the need (and expectation) to assume more responsibility and thus engage more extensively in conflict resolution in Israel and Palestine. For instance, already in 1999, the European Parliament concludes that “the European Union and its Member States have for years been the principal supplier of economic assistance to the Territories and that, by preventing a further deterioration of the economic situation in which the Palestinian people finds itself, such aid has beyond a shadow of doubt helped to further the peace process” (European Parliament Resolution 1999). Therefore, the EU shall “take an initiative as a signal [...] that the EU, over and above its financial role, henceforth assumes enhanced political responsibility in the Middle East” (ibid.). In addition, when fast-forwarding a few years, another aspect appears that economists refer to as “sunk costs”. The EU should not only assume more responsibility as it successfully contributes to advance the MEPP, but it is “duty-bound to ensure that what has been achieved will not be needlessly lost” (President-in-Office of the Council Dowgielewicz, European Parliament 2011). In this regard, the EU’s discourse of responsibility is self-reinforcing. As the EU strove to be involved in the MEPP for decades and invested considerably in the two-state solution, it cannot simply discontinue its engagement. This hints at the mechanism of “rhetorical entrapment”, according to which the reiteration of responsibilities and declarations of intent bind an actor to a specific conflict setting, which, in turn, leads to further responsibilities from which the actor appears unable to withdraw (Strasheim et al. 2017: 294). Hence, a responsibility once assumed cannot so easily be renounced.

Moving to negative assessments of the EU’s performance in the MEPP, this perspective revolves around two arguments: either the EU is not active enough, or its actions are wrong as they fail to bring about (or even run counter) its stated goals. Regarding the first assessment,

MEPs often identify the lack of unity within the EU as a reason for its supposed inactivity. For instance, regarding the EU's "political responsibility", the EU is "only managing to play a valuable role in the peace process in very small steps. That is due not least to the dissension within the Union" (van der Laan, European Parliament 2001). Hence, if the EU were only more united internally, it could meet its responsibility more properly. Consequently, assessments of the EU's engagement in the MEPP pleading that the EU is not active enough do not significantly challenge the EU's discourse of responsibility and embedded identity constructions. What counts is that the EU could – in theory – contribute to advancing the MEPP according to its responsibilities and the solid conviction that it is still not too late for the EU to do so (more).

Even when referring to "the EU as part of the problem" (see ch. 5.1), its discourse of responsibility does not falter. Instead, even though "[w]e in the European Union have indeed made mistakes in that region [,] [...] have bitterly disappointed people's hopes and have failed to harness their willingness to look to the future", the EU "must act before the situation slides completely out of control" (Beer, European Parliament 2007). Similarly, HR/VP Borrell emphasizes that "[w]e have seen years of 'peace process negotiations' which, however, have not solved the conflict, nor halted the expansion of settlements on Palestinian territory", but still "we have a duty to try" (HR/VP Borrell 2021). Again, it may be true that the EU has not proven capable of bringing about a peaceful solution so far, yet this does not change the perception that the EU is (still) able to contribute to advancing the MEPP. In terms of expectations regarding the EU's external action, this translates into further engagement in the MEPP. Certainly, in the two decades under analysis, some voices state that as "Europe is failing in its duty", "Europe is stepping back, and, very often, this can be positive in hindsight" (Dell'Alba, European Parliament 2003). Yet, such perspectives as well as attempts to "de-responsabilize" the EU only play a marginal role. Therefore, both positive and negative assessments alike translate into the EU being obliged to be engaged in the MEPP.

Thus, the EU's discourse of responsibility contributes to making the EU's engagement seem inescapable in two ways. Firstly, it constructs the EU's identity in a way that makes it difficult for the EU to be uninvolved (e.g., in the sense of close historical and cultural ties, the EU's capacity, its emphasis on international law, etc.) and creates a strong path dependency. Again, as the EU claimed to bear responsibility in the MEPP early on, it appears almost impossible to inscribe a new meaning to the EU's responsibility, which would allow the EU to retreat, or diverge from its long-held belief in a two-state solution. This, however, impedes its reactivity regarding a solidifying scholarly debate on alternative ways to end the current deadlock (Boehm 2021; Ehrenberg and Peled 2016; Erakat 2019; Farsakh 2021; Shumsky 2018), as well as the

dwindling support for the two-state solution among Israelis and Palestinians alike, which reflects the incrementally decreasing feasibility of this option (Cubbison 2018; PSR 2020).

My analysis reveals that even those MEPs that state that the EU made mistakes and was unable to significantly advance the MEPP simultaneously hold that due to the kind of actor the EU is, it cannot be uninvolved and that the EU could do more if it only had the political will and unity to do so. Thus, the EU's incapacity is chosen, not inbuilt. In sum, positive and negative perspectives on the EU's involvement in the MEPP rather strengthen than challenge its discourse of responsibility.

5.3 Allocating Responsibility – Constructing Others, Implying Self

Apart from establishing the manifold responsibilities of the EU, the EU's discourse of responsibility also allocates responsibility to actors that are parties to the conflict or seek to engage in its resolution. Above, I have argued that the EU's discourse of responsibility does not only construct the EU's identity but, as responsibility is relational in nature, simultaneously implies an idea of the Other the EU bears responsibility for. In this chapter, I hold that the Other is directly constructed through the allocation of responsibilities to them. By means of holding the Other responsible for specific aspects, the EU exerts discursive power as it imposes an identity on the Other (Diez 2005: 628-29; Jørgensen and Philips 2002: 37). Yet, this practice is not an "authorless endeavor" (Poopuu 2020: 78), which means that the allocation of specific responsibilities to the Other equally implies the EU's Self. Moreover, shedding light on the EU's practice of allocating responsibility to others, I disclose how responsibility serves as an ordering principle that structures the social field that surrounds the MEPP, determines who is legitimately part of it, and how these players should engage in it respectively. Certainly, within the EU's discourse of responsibility, various actors appear to bear responsibility. Nevertheless, the ensuing chapter concentrates on the "conflicting parties" as the second most important protagonists in the EU's discourse of responsibility apart from the EU itself, and on the US as the most significant actor of reference for the EU that is not a direct party to the conflict.

The Conflicting Parties – On "Both Parties" and "All Sides"

Firstly, there are several responsibilities that the conflicting parties share. When tracing discursive processes of linking and differentiation (Hansen 2006: 19), it becomes clear that in the EU's discourse the conflicting parties' shared responsibility is often connected to restraint, "political courage," a "commitment to peace", "reason and tolerance", and is contrasted with "fear, hatred and extremism" as well as unilateral action (European Council 2000; President-

in-Office of the Council Moscovici, European Parliament 2000). In practical terms, this means that “[b]oth parties to the conflict need to demonstrate, through policies and actions, a genuine commitment to a peaceful solution in order to rebuild mutual trust and create conditions for direct and meaningful negotiations” (Council of the EU 2016b). Additionally, the EU “calls on both parties to refrain from any action which may undermine the prospects of the two-state solution” and which “call[s] into question stated commitments to a negotiated solution” (European Parliament Resolution 2014). In consequence, “irresponsible acts” are always linked to violence, extremism, and incitement in the EU’s discourse of responsibility – be it in regard to Israeli military activity or “extremist elements” (European Parliament Resolution 2000b).

Yet, who are exactly the conflicting parties that the EU allocates these commitments and responsibilities to? Especially when it comes to European Council conclusions it is evident that “both parties” or “the parties” refers to Israel on the one side and the PNA on the other. Yet, since the inner-Palestinian fissure that culminated in the establishment of two separate governments in the West Bank and Gaza, it is necessary to investigate to what extent the EU’s discourse of responsibility acknowledges the split of the Palestinian subject – who bears responsibility for “the Palestinians”? The EU designated Hamas a terrorist organization in 2003 and Hamas did not recognize the principles outlined by the Middle East Quartet which constituted a condition for being part of the political process (see Middle East Quartet 2006). Hence, the Fatah-led PNA is the only legitimate Palestinian interlocutor to the EU. It is therefore not surprising that Hamas does not play a prominent role in the EU’s discourse of responsibility, especially not within the European Council and the Council of the EU.

Nevertheless, as Hamas governance in Gaza did not prove temporary, the Council of the EU did slightly alter its rhetoric to include Hamas in its appeals without mentioning them explicitly - which neither the European Council nor the Council of the EU does often generally. The Council discursively ensures that the PNA as a legitimate interlocutor does not appear as being on a par with Hamas, while increasingly acknowledging that Hamas rule in Gaza has become a reality that cannot simply be ignored. For instance, in the aftermath of Hamas’ electoral victory in 2006, the Council refers to the necessary “unequivocal commitment by *all* parties to a viable independent Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with Israel” (Council of the EU 2006a, emphasis added). Similarly, in several of its conclusions in the context of the Gaza Wars of 2009, 2012, and 2014, the Council uses the expressions “all parties to the conflict” or “all sides” to remind them of “their obligations under international humanitarian law” (Council of the EU 2009). Most explicitly, in 2016 the Council did not only state that “[a]ll stakeholders must commit to non-violence and peace”, but also referred to “all

parties, state and non-state actors” as well as to “the Palestinian *sides*” that shall “make the reconstruction of Gaza an overarching national priority” (Council of the EU 2016a, emphasis added). Thus, with time the EU’s discourse refined regarding the dichotomous view on the conflicting parties which is why I outline the responsibilities allocated to the PNA, Hamas, and Israel in the following.

Concerning the PNA one could best describe the “responsibility architecture” that the EU constructs for it as being built on the present and the future, the potential and the actual. The EU’s discourse of responsibility revolves heavily around what I call “actor-specific responsibilities” in my coding scheme. As the PNA constitutes the basis of a (future) Palestinian state, the EU allocates a broad range of functional responsibilities to it. Again, ideas of how a Palestinian state is to be constituted and how it shall govern do not appear simultaneously but reflect a very concrete vision generated by the EU. The EU puts particular emphasis on the PNA’s responsibility to ensure the functioning of Palestinian institutions, implement internal reforms (especially regarding the separation of power and its security sector), combat terrorism, control its borders, and hold democratic general elections. In regard to democracy, the EU’s discourse introduces “the Palestinian people” as a distinctive subject in the aftermath of the 2005 presidential elections. Here, the Palestinians have demonstrated their “responsibility and democratic maturity” (Council of the EU 2005). Yet, after Hamas’ victory in the Palestinian legislative elections one year later, the Palestinian people as a responsible subject disappear, which corresponds to the EU’s general top-down approach to Palestine.

Apart from the EU’s strong institutional focus, its emphasis on the PNA’s “responsibility to provide law and order” stands out (European Council 2004a). It is “the Palestinian Authority’s commitment to make rapid progress on security, paving the way to the two states solution” (Council of the EU 2003). From this perspective, security represents one of the most important aspects that will make Palestine a state. Certainly, the EU’s prioritization of security concurs with Israel’s. However, the emphasis on SSR is political in nature and follows a specific agenda “designed to construct a particular form of state governed by international norms” (Jackson 2021: 477). As evidence of successful SSR as an important element of state-building appears limited at best, it remains doubtful whether Palestine would equally focus on the security sector if it were not for external actors (ibid.; el Kurd 2019; Tartir 2018; but see also Hanieh 2021).

Territorially the PNA “must exercise its full government responsibilities in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip including in the field of security, civil administration and through its presence at Gaza’s crossing points” (Council of the EU 2014). Through the allocation of these

responsibilities, the EU constructs an ideal version of how the PNA should function. This ideal version does not only clash with the present, considering the continuing split in terms of governance in the West Bank and Gaza or the absence of Palestinian legislative and presidential elections since 2005 and 2006 respectively. It also alludes to an uncertain future as the handover of responsibilities to the PNA in the West Bank's Area B and C by the Israeli authorities is still pending. Especially the question of which point in time the PNA's responsibilities refer to often remains blurred in the EU's discourse. On the one hand, an awareness exists that "a pre-State with the limited responsibilities of a pre-State is not the same as taking on all the responsibilities of a State" (HR Solana, European Parliament 2005)". On the other hand, actors within the EU refer to the PNA's responsibilities as if it could shoulder them without restrictions.

As I indicated above, as the PNA is clearly the protagonist regarding the allocation of Palestinian responsibilities, explicit references to Hamas' responsibility occur rarely. However, in 2006 Hamas entered the stage of the EU's discourse of responsibility and while it was not seen as a "valid interlocutor unless it changes its views" at the time, "we will be able to look at Hamas as a fully legitimate political body" if it accedes to the Quartet's principles (HR Solana, European Parliament 2006). Indeed, the European Parliament was convinced that there was no other option for Hamas as clearly "the decision of Hamas to participate in the elections and its success will confer on it the responsibility to comply with the previous agreements signed by the Palestinians, which include the rejection of terrorism and the recognition of Israel's right to exist" (European Parliament Resolution 2006a). For several years, Hamas appears as a potentially responsible actor in the EU's discourse. For instance, in the context of the 2009 Gaza War the European Parliament "calls on Hamas to end rocket attacks and to assume its own responsibilities by committing itself to a political process aimed at restoring inter-Palestinian dialogue and contributing to the ongoing process of negotiation" (European Parliament Resolution 2009). Even though the EU had put Hamas and its military wing Hamas-Izz al-Din al-Qassem on its terror list only a few years earlier (Council Decision (CFSP) 2020/20), its electoral victory in 2006 had an impact on the EU's discourse – the image of the terrorist "ultimate Other" could no longer be easily reconciled with an authority that de facto governs Gaza and has to be factored in regarding any advance in the peace process.

Nevertheless, by 2018, in the context of the intensifying violence at the border between Israel and Gaza, any reference to Hamas' political responsibility had disappeared completely from European Parliament debates. Instead, MEPs emphasize that "Hamas is [...] pursuing its strategy of ultraviolence. It is the one who is primarily responsible for the tragedy of the people of Gaza" (Ries, European Parliament 2018). In the EU's discourse, Hamas' responsibility began

to refer exclusively to terrorist attacks, provocation, and incitement. Especially in recent years, Hamas' designation as a terrorist organization moved to the fore, and previous assessments of Hamas as a potentially responsible actor in the sense of a legitimate stakeholder in the MEPP disappeared completely. This case demonstrates the exclusionary potential of the EU's discourse of responsibility. As Hamas did not act according to the responsibilities the EU allocated to it, Hamas began to be reconstructed as the "ultimate Other" and as such, it was disqualified to play a constructive role in regard to the peace process. Thus, I hold that the determination of who counts as a "conflicting party" and is therefore to be invited to the negotiation table represents a clear exertion of discursive power. In combination with the fact that Hamas is generally mentioned rarely in the EU's discourse of responsibility, its existence as a governing body ruling over 40 % of the Palestinians living in the territories (2.1 mio. in Gaza as opposed to 3.2 mio. in the West Bank) is most of the time obscured (Awad 2022).

Moving away from the Palestinian side(s), Israel is the last direct party to the conflict considered here. The EU provides a consistent vision of what responsible behavior on the part of Israel would mean. The EU's discourse of responsibility regarding Israel predominantly revolves around a legal understanding of responsibility (cf. Harpaz 2017). Apart from stating that "Israel should be reminded of its obligations regarding the Oslo Agreements" (European Parliament Resolution 2006a) as well as the Roadmap, the EU reiterates Israeli responsibilities under international law, specifically international human rights law, and international humanitarian law. Regarding international humanitarian law, especially the EU's legal view on the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention in the Palestinian territories under Israeli occupation deserves closer attention. It is seldom mentioned explicitly, yet it serves as an important departing point based on which the EU allocates responsibilities to Israel.

Section III of the Fourth Geneva Convention determines the obligations of an occupying power towards the civilian population inhabiting occupied territory. The view that the Fourth Geneva Convention applies to the West Bank (if not also to East Jerusalem and Gaza) reflects an international consensus and is by no means a specificity of the EU (Erakat 2019: 195; Weiss 2016: 96-97). This legal understanding diametrically opposes Israel's. Israel argues that due to the absence of a sovereign in the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, the territories cannot be treated as being occupied, which makes occupation law inapplicable (Erakat 2019: 10). Instead, it pursues a "sui generis" strategy, which resulted in the creation of "alternative legal models" deployed to rule over Palestinians (ibid.: 17). The EU's emphasis on Israeli responsibilities as an occupying power serves to reproduce and reinforce an international legal discourse that establishes an understanding of the conflict as an instance of occupation, not a "sui generis"

situation. This entails that Israel as the occupying power “bears full responsibility for providing the necessary services, including education, healthcare, and welfare, for the people living under its occupation” (European Parliament Resolution 2018), to halt the construction of settlements, and to find a political solution that results in the end of the occupation. Further, “Israel is a state, not an organisation; it is a member of the United Nations. It has a responsibility towards the international community” (Kyriacos Triantaphyllides, European Parliament 2009). Hence, as a member of the *international* community Israel cannot claim exceptionality and must bear the same responsibilities as any state (mark the difference to the State of Palestine whose statehood is only partially recognized) and adhere to international law as the basis of this community.

Consequently, the furthering of settlement activity, the resort to disproportionate violence, and any other activity that runs counter to legal premises count as irresponsible behavior. While the EU recognizes “Israel’s legitimate right to self-defense” (Council of the EU 2008), and its “right and [...] obligation to protect its citizens” (HR Solana, European Parliament 2006), the EU disagrees with how Israel seeks to enforce these rights. In sum, the EU oscillates between reminding Israel of its responsibilities under international law and holding it responsible for failing to comply with these. This emphasis on Israeli international legal responsibilities implicitly strengthens the EU’s stated commitment to international law (as outlined in ch. 5.1) and serves to demarcate itself from Israel. As stated above, the EU partakes in the definition of Israeli responsibilities and assesses to what extent Israel meets or fails to meet them. This demonstrates how power is imbued in any attempt of constructing the social as the EU contributes to shaping in which terms the conflict is to be understood, how it should be solved, and who bears responsibility for the fact that it continues to be unsettled.

Between Alliance and Alienation: The United States and the EU

In the EU’s discourse of responsibility, the US appears as the most significant external actor in the MEPP and thus provides a particularly interesting case when asking how the allocation of responsibility constructs the Other (US) and implies the Self (EU). Generally, the EU refers to the US’ commitment to “vigorously pursue a two-state solution and a comprehensive peace in the Middle East” (Council of the EU 2009). The US is generally recognized as an “indispensable power” to advance the MEPP (Millán Mon, European Parliament 2014) and further bears a “special responsibility [...] mainly due to its influence on Israeli policy” (European Parliament Resolution 2002). Mostly, the EU’s discourse of responsibility does not transcend this basic description of US responsibility, which may be a consequence of the fact that officially they follow the same approach to the MEPP.

Building on this common approach to the MEPP and the EU's acknowledgment of the US being a crucial actor in advancing the peace process, the US serves as the EU's significant "counterpart" in the peace process (Morillon, European Parliament 2001). The EU carves out its own responsibilities and commitments in relation to the US as its reference point in two ways. Firstly, the EU's engagement in the MEPP shall be "compatible with the fundamental role which the United States Government must continue to play in this whole process" (Galeote Quecedo, European Parliament 2001). Yet, "compatible" does not necessarily mean subordinate. Especially in the beginning of the 2000s the European Parliament confidently demanded "to reorganize the complementary roles played by the European Union and the United States, in respect of both relations with the Israelis and Palestinians and the definition of the responsibilities for international assistance to the peace process" (European Parliament Resolution 1999). The EU sought to overcome the "division of labour of the past, according to which the USA made policy and the European Union paid for it" (Sakellariou, European Parliament 2001). This corresponds with the EU's stated aspiration of being recognized as a political actor in the MEPP, not solely as its financial backer. In chapter 3.1 I have argued that responsibility serves as a means of ordering international relations, of determining who bears responsibility and for what. This is evident here as the EU seeks to (re-) structure who counts as a relevant actor in the MEPP and how these actors shall engage in it respectively. Hence, the EU carves out a position for itself that is to be found alongside the US, not in its shadow.

Secondly, the EU reiterates its commitment to the MEPP in demarcation from the United States. Hence, throughout the years MEPs portray US commitments to the peace process as being insufficient and volatile as they appear sensitive to domestic, electoral considerations. For instance, in 2003 HR Solana argues "that the forthcoming election campaign in the United States is likely to result in the United States becoming less engaged", even if "it is imperative for the United States to remain committed to the process" (HR Solana, European Parliament 2003). Thus, in reflection of the potential realignment of US commitments with each new administration, the EU often refers to the specific "personal commitment of Presidency Clinton [sic!] and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright" (Council of the EU 2000) or the "vision and commitment of the President of the United States George W. Bush" (Prodi and Verhofstadt 2001). Secondly, statements such as "the United States will also have to make a commitment" (Neyts-Uyttebroeck, European Parliament 2009) hint at the EU's conviction that the US should be much more engaged to genuinely advance the MEPP. Additionally, the close ties between the US and Israel do not only render the US an important factor in any attempt to resolve the conflict. MEPs also raise concerns about whether "they [the US and Israel] really want to

commit within the framework of the Roadmap to the resumption of negotiations with the final objective of creating a Palestinian state” (Beglitis, European Parliament 2005). It is this lingering uncertainty about whether the US will uphold its stated commitments that creates the need for the EU to step up and simultaneously demarcate itself from the US. In contrast to the volatility of US engagement in the peace process, the EU presents itself as a predictable, reliable partner that “will certainly maintain its commitment” and that cannot “simply become a sleeping partner in a process sliding down an increasingly slippery slope” (HR Solana, European Parliament 2003). Certainly, the question of whether the US is still committed to the two-state solution as the overarching goal of the MEPP has been posed more vehemently after the Trump Administration came to power in 2017. Especially former US President Trump’s decision to recognize Jerusalem as the Israeli capital has been received as a “choice that is reckless, irresponsible and indeed damaging for both the Israeli and the Palestinian people” (Castaldo, European Parliament 2017). Again, in view of such irresponsibility, the EU must “finally take responsibility in the Middle East, give up its political sleepwalking, get out of the comfortable slipstream of the United States” (Beer, European Parliament 2021).

In sum, the EU’s discourse of responsibility in regard to the US oscillates between two poles: the construction of likeness or togetherness and otherness. On the one hand, the EU acknowledges the crucial role of the US in the MEPP and seeks to construct itself as a reliable partner that shares responsibility in the pursuit of their common goals. On the other hand, the EU seeks to demarcate and emancipate itself from the US as its engagement in the MEPP is either considered to be insufficient or, especially after 2017, even detrimental.

6. Conclusion

אם אין אני לי, מי לי. וכשאני לעצמי, מה אני?

– *“If I am not for me, who will be for me? And when I am for myself alone, what am I?”*
(Hillel, Pirkei Avot 1:14)

Certainly, there are dozens of understandings and translations of this saying by Hillel, a well-known Jewish sage and scholar, who lived in the first century BCE (Buxbaum 2008). To me, it captures a core aspect this thesis builds on. In a first step, it determines that there is a Self. However, in a second step, it becomes clear that the answer to the question of “who am I?” can only be found in the encounter with the Other. In this thesis, I have argued that the concept of responsibility encapsulates this necessary duality between Self and Other. Hence, responsibility generates the identity of the Self, implies an idea of the Other, and establishes a relationship

between them. In everyday use, the concept of responsibility has a strong normative, altruistic connotation. It is easily overlooked that there is a dimension of power to it. Responsibility presupposes an imbalance in terms of, for instance, capacity, expertise, or morality between Self and Other which legitimizes and naturalizes the Self's engagement in conflicts or issue areas of its choosing (Demirtas-Bagdonas 2014: 144; Hansen 2006: 35; Loke 2013: 215; Poopuu 2020: 80).

Drawing on poststructuralist reasoning, I hold that responsibility should be understood as a floating signifier that defies an ultimate definition as it is "particularly open to different ascriptions of meaning" (Jørgensen and Philips 2002: 28). Thus, analyzing constructions of identity through the lens of discourses of responsibility is particularly rewarding. To investigate how the discursive invocation of responsibility unfolds meaning, I operationalized responsibility with a four-dimensional conceptual framework: a temporal dimension, a dimension of sources of responsibility, a dimension that captures proposals for courses of action to meet the respective responsibility, and, lastly, an overarching relational dimension that determines that all of responsibility's dimensions are geared to the specific interlinkage between Self and Other. Departing from these theoretical considerations, I established a coding scheme that served as the basis of my discourse analytical approach.

Overall, this thesis sought to investigate three interrelated questions: How does the EU's discourse of responsibility regarding the MEPP construct the EU's Self, its Others, and the relationship between them? This tripartite line of thought is reflected in the analytical part of this thesis. I started off with an investigation of how the EU's discourse of responsibility constructs the EU's identity. The EU's capacity, its close ties to the Middle East, its morality and consciousness of the severe human suffering on the ground, as well as international law appear as the most frequent sources of EU responsibility. I presented each of them and explained how they establish a specific framework of meaning that legitimizes and naturalizes the EU's involvement in the MEPP. In doing so, I aimed at unveiling how all these motifs do not only construct an idea of the EU but also generate images of its Others. While any construction of the Other represents an expression of power (Diez 2005: 632; Jørgensen and Philips 2002: 37; see also Said 2014: 145), my goal was to make explicit how the dimension of power comes to play in the specific discursive implication of the Other in the EU's discourse of responsibility. Regarding the capacity motif, I illustrated that the emphasis on the EU's capacity and expertise is often connected to an idea of the conflicting parties' incapacity or immaturity to bring about a peaceful solution by themselves. Equally, humanitarian needs and continuous suffering establish an EU responsibility to assist. Hence, on the one hand, the Other

appears as being incapable and afflicted and requiring the help of the EU. The Other is constructed as different and subordinate to the EU. On the other hand, the community motif that revolves around close ties to the Middle East, shared history, and geographic proximity serves to construct the Middle East conflict not as a foreign problem to be dealt with but as “our neighbourhood, our region, [...] our business” (HR/VP Mogherini, European Parliament 2014). Consequently, the EU’s discourse of responsibility vacillates between processes of differentiation and linking (cf. Hansen 2006: 41-42). Either way, there is no doubt that the EU is obliged to be engaged in the MEPP. However, what happens if the EU itself is considered as “part of the problem” as I call it? A smaller strand in the EU’s discourse revolves around the contribution motif which invokes responsibility based on the perception that the EU does not do enough to bring about an end to the conflict or even indurates the stalemate of the peace process. How can this be reconciled with other facets of EU identity such as its capacity to assist the parties in peaceful conflict resolution, its morality, or its unwavering commitment to international law? As the argument goes, if the EU is part of the problem, it must also be part of the solution. The tension between the different facets of responsibility finds mitigation in the dominant conviction that the EU can still make it right, which reinforces the idea of the EU being naturally and legitimately engaged in the MEPP. Additionally, this friction demonstrates that the EU’s discourse of responsibility does not evoke a completely unitary, unambiguous construct but a mosaic of compatible and partly contradictive elements (see Manners and Whitman 1998: 238; Checkel and Katzenstein 2009: 25).

The focus of this thesis lay on the question of how the EU is constructed from within. However, the EU’s discourse of responsibility does not unfold within a vacuum and the Other that is discursively co-constructed is neither mute nor deaf. Therefore, I integrated the speeches of Israeli and Palestinian representatives to the European Parliament in my document corpus, even though I emphasize that this certainly only represents a glimpse into how the EU’s identity construction is perceived in Israel and Palestine. I then set out to trace to what extent and how these speeches were discussed in the European Parliament and found that they were either not mentioned at all in the following European Parliament debates on the MEPP or were considered as confirming the EU’s self-image – regardless of whether this was actually the case. This clearly hints at the power dimension that is imbued in the EU’s discourse of responsibility anew and gives rise to the impression of a European echo chamber.

Lastly, I adopted a temporal perspective and took the whole period under analysis (1999-2021) into account. I sought to identify shifts in the EU’s discourse of responsibility in the sense of an intensification or abatement of the discourse. I found that the intensification of the discourse

does not clearly correspond with major upheavals in the conflict. Hence, the state of the conflict is not the primary driver of the EU's discourse of responsibility. Rather, internal debates and perceptions of what the EU should and can do to advance the peace process appear to be more decisive. This led me to suggest that in contrast to responsibility's altruistic undertone in everyday language, any idea of responsibility begins with the Self, not the Other.

After having outlined on what grounds the EU bears responsibility to advance the MEPP, the second analytical chapter was devoted to responsibility's behavioral dimension. It asked which kinds of foreign policies the EU's discourse of responsibility suggests in relation to the conflicting parties and how the formulation of foreign policy feeds into the EU's identity-building process (Hansen 2006: 6). A major part of the discourse revolves around the question of how the EU could have a visible impact on the ground, especially in regard to Palestinian state-building. The EU's approach to state-building in Palestine reflects the EU's priorities and tackles SSR, institution-building, and the promotion of economic development and international economic integration.

The second behavioral strand of the EU's discourse of responsibility is occupied with defining the general political role of the EU in the MEPP - as opposed to a merely economic one that revolves around the provision of humanitarian aid and development assistance. This political role mainly builds on courses of action that refer to diplomatic dialogue, negotiations, and the imposition of pressure on the conflicting parties through instruments of conditionality, sanctions, and rhetoric, including the consideration of recognizing Palestinian statehood. I closed this chapter with an investigation of "feedback loops" (Hebel and Lenz 2016: 476). Not only does the suggestion of foreign policy draw on identity, but actual foreign policy behavior and foreign policy outcomes also tie back into an actor's identity construction. Hence, I aimed at uncovering how the EU itself assesses its foreign policy outcomes and how these assessments influence the EU's discourse of responsibility. My analysis shows that both positive and negative perspectives on the foreign policy outcomes of the EU strengthen its discourse of responsibility. Positive assessments confirm the EU's identity and establish the need (and expectation) for the EU to assume more responsibility to achieve its objectives concerning the MEPP. Equally, negative assessments do not cancel out EU responsibility due to the conviction that the EU has – in theory – the capacity to meet them, which further confirms the EU's self-image of rightly being involved in the MEPP. The EU's discourse of responsibility is self-reinforcing as it cannot but be engaged in the MEPP. Considering that this thesis covered a bit more than the last two decades, it appears almost impossible to inscribe a new meaning to the EU's responsibility, which would allow the EU to retreat, or open up new policy spaces that

may diverge from its long-held approach to the MEPP. Yet, considering the strongly decreasing viability of the two-state solution and the dramatic changes in the region in recent years, it seems imperative that the EU's discourse of responsibility is more reflective of the evolving situation on the ground.

The third and last empirical chapter was dedicated to the construction of the Other through the allocation of responsibility to them by the EU. Firstly, I turned to the ascription of responsibility to the conflicting parties. I argued that the EU constructs a complex responsibility architecture for the PNA as the only legitimate Palestinian interlocutor to the EU. I held that the EU's discourse of responsibility produces an ideal version of the PNA that serves to prescribe how a Palestinian state shall come into being in accordance with the EU's priorities. Regarding Israel, the EU maintains a predominantly legal understanding of responsibility. In so doing the EU contributes to establishing an understanding of the conflict as a matter of occupation, maps Israel's responsibilities as an occupying power, and assesses to what extent these responsibilities are being met. Holding Israel legally responsible supports the image of the EU being deferent to international law and agreements. Moreover, I shed light on Hamas' standing in the EU's discourse of responsibility. Here, I demonstrated responsibility's exclusionary potential. As Hamas does not represent a responsible actor in the EU's discourse, it does (almost) not exist as a stakeholder in the peace process.

Moving away from those directly affected by the conflict, I lastly considered the US as the most important point of reference for the EU's own responsibilities. The EU constructs the US as bearing special responsibility due to its indispensability to move the conflict towards resolution. Hence, the US represents an ally in the pursuit of common goals in the resolution of the conflict. Yet, this alliance is not always built on firm ground as the US' willingness to act according to the responsibility allocated to it by the EU appears to be unsteady. What derives from that is the necessity for the EU to demonstrate its reliability and assume more responsibility in the MEPP. Consequently, this chapter demonstrated the extent to which responsibility may function as an ordering principle. The EU's discourse of responsibility sets the scene and structures the social field that surrounds the MEPP. It determines who counts as a legitimate actor and organizes which responsibilities the respective actors bear in this social field.

Certainly, this thesis faced several limitations which is why I will briefly draw attention to two of them. The first limitation builds on the fact that I emphasize that identities are social and relational, which means that actors outside of the EU also partake in the EU's identity-building process as they may confirm, challenge, or modify perceptions of what we understand as "EU

identity” (Bretherton and Vogler 2008: 38; Manners and Whitman 1998: 238). Hence, I included the speeches by Israeli and Palestinian representatives to the European Parliament in my analysis to provide preliminary insights on how the other side engages with stated EU responsibilities. Nevertheless, a stronger focus on the Other’s perspective seems to be ever more relevant considering that I found a partial discursive disconnect not only regarding the perspectives of the Israeli and Palestinian representatives but also regarding the evolution of the MEPP itself. Hence, a broader inclusion of external views on the EU’s identity construction and these views’ implications for it constitutes a gap in the literature that remains to be closed.

Secondly, any discourse of responsibility unfolds differently. This means that the arguments I make in regard to the MEPP are not automatically transferable to other discourses of responsibility. The answers to the questions of how references to responsibility contribute to the construction of Self, Other, and their relationship will certainly differ from case to case. Yet it is precisely the fact that references to responsibility are so prevalent in the EU’s discourse as well as in world political debates generally that renders the analysis of discourses of responsibility so relevant. Therefore, it seems fruitful to investigate further how EU discourses of responsibility configure other “zones of responsibility” (Lippert 2012) and thereby partake in the structuring of international relations at large.

To conclude, I sought to illustrate that any discourse of responsibility is also a discourse of power. Hence, the core goal of this thesis was to draw attention to the critical potential of the analysis of discourses of responsibility. Through the lens of responsibility, I interrogated why the EU is engaged in the MEPP, why the EU engages in it as it does, and who else is to be involved in the peace process. I demonstrated that the conception of responsibility starts with the Self, not the Other, their needs, or what they aspire to. Having observed that, this thesis ends with a plea to redirect the focus to the second part of Hillel’s saying: “And when I am for myself alone, what am I?” – when I am for the Other, what am I?

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