WHO IS THE OTHER
COMPETING DISCOURSES ON UKRAINE IN THE DUTCH FOREIGN POLICY DEBATE

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Abstract

Language has the capacity to make politics, create narratives and impact policy making (Hajer, 2006). In the study of foreign policy, discourses define the issues at stake, create a sense of shared ‘common knowledge’ and legitimize foreign policies as necessary and plausible (Hansen, 2013, 2016). When the Ukrainian crisis breaks out in 2014, Europe is confronted with one of the most complex situations for decades. The sense of urgency increases for one member state in particular when flight MH17 is shot down above Ukraine. Losing almost 200 citizens in the crash, the Netherlands suddenly becomes a central actor in this conflict. The literature, however, pays little attention to the domestic political debates regarding Ukraine. Moreover, the role of parliaments and oppositional political parties in foreign policy is under-accounted for. Therefore, this thesis analyses whether and how discourses are reflected in the Dutch foreign policy debate since the Ukrainian crisis and what role the parliament and political parties play in Dutch foreign policy. A discourse analysis is conducted to see what discourses are reflected in the parliamentary debates. This studies shows that identity-policy constructions – articulated through discourses – are crucial for defining and legitimizing Dutch foreign policies. Furthermore, it finds that the Government’s official foreign policy discourse is influenced and constrained by oppositional discourses that stress the normative and geopolitical aspects of Dutch foreign policy. Hence, this study provides new insight into the role of discourse in the wider political debate in the Netherlands. Though this thesis establishes that the parliament and political parties matter in this specific case, more research is needed on the role of parliaments and political parties to make generalizable conclusions for foreign policy more broadly.
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<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Association Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDA</td>
<td>Christen-Democratisch Appèl</td>
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<tr>
<td>CU</td>
<td>Christen Unie</td>
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<tr>
<td>D66</td>
<td>Democraten 66</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>FvD</td>
<td>Forum voor Democratie</td>
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<td>JIT</td>
<td>Joint Investigation Team</td>
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<td>MFA</td>
<td>Minister of Foreign Affairs</td>
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<td>MH17</td>
<td>Malaysia Airlines-flight 17</td>
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<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>OVV</td>
<td>Onderzoeksraad voor Veiligheid</td>
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<tr>
<td>PM</td>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
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<tr>
<td>PvdA</td>
<td>Partij van de Arbeid</td>
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<tr>
<td>PvdD</td>
<td>Partij voor de Dieren</td>
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<tr>
<td>PVV</td>
<td>Partij voor de Vrijheid</td>
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<tr>
<td>SGP</td>
<td>Staatskundig Gereformeerde Partij</td>
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<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>Socialistische Partij</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>VVD</td>
<td>Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie</td>
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1. Introduction

How horrible must have been the final moments of their lives, when they knew the plane was going down. Did they lock hands with their loved ones, did they hold their children close to their hearts, did they look each other in the eyes, one final time, in an unarticulated goodbye? We will never know. The demise of almost 200 of my compatriots has left a hole in the heart of the Dutch nation.¹

Starting with these words, the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Timmermans delivered a memorable speech at the UN Security Council four days after flight MH17 was shot down above Ukraine. The emotional words spoken by the minister illustrate the power that language has; the power to move and unite people, to define what happened and to establish what should happen in response. Language is ‘the central social medium through which meaning is generated’ (Hansen, 2016, p.102). The tragic event of MH17 took place in the context of a civil war in Ukraine. When the Ukrainian Crisis broke out earlier in 2014 after former President Yanukovych refused to sign the Association Agreement (AA) with the EU, Europe was confronted with one of the most complex situations for decades (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2014). The killing of almost 200 Dutch civilians in the MH17 crash increased the criticalness of the situation and suddenly dragged the Netherlands into the armed conflict. Though the Netherlands traditionally followed its allies in NATO and the EU in its foreign policies (Ter Haar, 2017), it was now forced to take a more pro-active stance and it became a central actor in the relationship with Ukraine and Russia. The MH17 crash became a defining moment in Dutch history and foreign policy.

Through language, foreign policy actors seek to justify and legitimize their policies as necessary and plausible (Hansen, 2016). Different scholars stress the importance and constitutive role of discourse and identity in foreign policy (Campbell, 1992; Milliken, 1999; Larsen, 2005; Hansen, 2013, 2016; Diez, 2016). Discourses define the issues at stake and enable and exclude policy options and actors. They affirm a certain mode of ‘common sense’, while making others meaningless or ‘simply’ wrong (Milliken, 1999, p.229). Language thus has the capacity to make politics, create narratives and impact policy making (Hajer, 2006). Within this process, decisionmakers work in a broader political and public sphere in which their representations are formed by and draw upon the representations articulated by a larger number of actors (Hansen, 2013, p.6). However, since heads of states and ministers of foreign affairs have the formal authority, the literature tends to focus only on the government’s official foreign policy discourse (Hansen, 2013, Diez, 2001). As a consequence, the role of political parties other than the governing ones is under-studied. Hansen (2013) and Diez (2001) therefore argue that foreign policy

should be studied within a wider discursive field, such as the competing discourses advocated by oppositional politicians. This broader view does not only provide a better understanding of the hegemony of official discourse, but also shows the contingency of statements and the likelihood of changes in foreign policy. It is therefore important to study the alternative positions in the political debate that might not follow the ‘common sense’ and get marginalized as a result (Diez, 2001, Hansen, 2013). This raises questions on whether and how the parliamentary opposition reflect, reinforce or contest the official government’s discourse (Hansen, 2013, p.7). The research question that is central in this thesis is: “Whether and how are discourses reflected in the Dutch foreign policy debate since the Ukrainian Crisis?”

Hence, this thesis analyzes what is said in the Dutch parliament about Ukraine and whether and how this is reflected in the foreign policies that emerge. It aims to enhance our understanding of how discourses reflect and shape foreign policy and what role oppositional parties in the parliament play in this. In order to systematically study this, a discourse analysis is conducted. Both the dominant discourse and the competing discourses in the Dutch parliamentary debates are covered. Such a broader view does not only provide an understanding of the differences but also what competing discourses do agree upon (Hansen, 2016). A discourse analysis does not necessary analyze why a certain policy is adopted (Hansen, 2016). Hence, this thesis does not look at causal relationships to explain the Dutch foreign policy towards Ukraine. However, it does give insights in the political implications of adopting a certain discourse, as a discourse provides a particular understanding of events which makes certain policy options reasonable while others not (Hansen, 2016). By using discourse analysis, this thesis shows how political actors try to get their message across and use language to establish their statements as self-evident and true (Schneider, 2013).

As the crisis in Ukraine continues and seems to reach an impasse, the political debate on what to do with Ukraine and Russia becomes even more relevant. At the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Ukraine opened a case against Russia for the annexation of the Crimea and the support to separatists in eastern Ukraine. ² Moreover, because its independence was questioned, Ukraine delegated the responsibly of the criminal investigation on MH17 to the Netherlands, which is a rather unique event in international law. ³ The Netherlands leads the Joint Investigation Team (JIT), in which it cooperates with Belgium, Australia, Malaysia and Ukraine. In this process, the Dutch have been phrased for the work they have done, and received a lot of support from the international community. Being respected as a

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central actor, this illustrates the significance of the Netherlands in the international order. Because the Dutch have a leading role in this critical moment, the Dutch foreign policy debate is not only important for bilateral relations with Ukraine and Russia, but also meaningful for EU-Russia-Ukraine relations more broadly.

By studying the importance of discourse in foreign policy and by analyzing this through the case of Dutch foreign policy on Ukraine, this thesis contributes to two streams of literature. First it addresses a gap in the literature on the role of discourse in foreign policy in relation to political parties in parliament. This broader scope is rarely studied (Hansen, 2013). Moreover, the literature does generally not recall the parliament as an important actor in foreign policy. Instead, it focusses on the parties in government or – when it considers other actors – it mainly studies the role of public opinion or media (Robinson, 2016). Therefore this thesis aims to fill this gap, by looking at the discourses of political parties in parliament and whether and how these are reflected in the Dutch foreign policy debate. Secondly, by taking the Netherlands as a case, this thesis also contributes to the literature on Dutch foreign policy. While the EU is a leading actor in the relationship with Ukraine, the member states remain the main decision-making actors in the intergovernmental foreign policy area (Chelotti, 2016). Nevertheless, the focus in the literature has been primarily on the EU’s response to the Ukrainian crisis, (see Cadier, 2014; Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2014; Gawrich, Melnykovska & Schweickert, 2010; Haukkala, 2015; Ikani, 2018; Jones & Clark, 2008; Korosteleva, 2011; Natorski, 2017; Smith, 2014). The literature therefore misses an understanding of the domestic foreign policy debates regarding Ukraine, and the position of the Netherlands in particular, after it suddenly received a prominent role in the international field. This study therefore aims to fill both gaps by showing how Dutch politicians use different discourses to create a common understanding and to legitimize certain foreign policies.

In order to answer the research question and present the findings in a coherent manner, this thesis is structured in the following way. First, Chapter 2 provides the theoretical basis to understand and examine the research question. It discusses the existing theory on the two relevant streams of literature: Dutch foreign policy and the role of discourse and identity. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology of this thesis, elaborating on the relevance of a discursive approach in the study of foreign policy and the type of discourse analysis that is conducted for this research. In Chapter 4, the reader is given the necessary context to understand the Ukrainian crisis and the key events that happened since. The main body of this thesis presents the results of the analysis and is divided into three chapters. Chapter 5 talks the reader through the dominant discourse that is reflected in Dutch foreign policy. Chapter 6 addresses the marginalized voices that challenge this dominant discourse. Chapter 7 draws upon the previous chapters and discusses how the official Dutch foreign policy has developed since the Ukrainian Crisis. Finally, the thesis ends with a conclusion on the importance of discourse in Dutch foreign policy and whether and how discourses are reflected in foreign policy debate since the Ukrainian Crisis.
2. Literature Review

This chapter provides an overview of the literature that is consulted to create a theoretical foundation that helps to answer the research question “Whether and how are discourses reflected in the Dutch foreign policy debate since the Ukrainian Crisis?”. As this thesis examines the importance of discourse in foreign policy by studying the Dutch foreign policy on Ukraine, this chapter first discusses the literature on Dutch foreign policy. Secondly, in order to establish who the relevant actors are when examining the discourses that shape the Dutch foreign policy debate, the different actors involved in the foreign policy making are discussed. The chapter ends with a discussion of the literature on the role of discourse in foreign policy.

2.1 The development of Dutch foreign policy

As the central question of this thesis is on Dutch foreign policy, it is important to have an understanding of its roots and nature. In the study of Dutch foreign policy, a lot is written about its history, its role in the World Wars and its colonial past (Voorhoeve, 1979; Hellema, 1995). Though this constitutes an important part of Dutch foreign policy, it goes beyond the scope of this study to discuss it. Other central topics in the Dutch foreign policy literature are small power politics (Vandenbosch, 2012), the commitment to the international legal order (Mallinson, 2010; Schrijver, 2010) and the role of human rights (Baehr, Castermans-Holleman & Grundfeld, 2002; Kuitenbrouwer, 2003). Many of these studies are, however, from a historical perspective and focus on the development of Dutch foreign policy after the Second World War. Much less attention is attributed to recent developments and changes in foreign policy.

This can partly be explained by the relative continuum that is typical for foreign policy. Also Dutch foreign policy is characterized by a high degree of continuity (Rood, 2011). Since the Second World War, Dutch foreign policy has been based on three anchors: the Transatlantic relation (the US and NATO), the EU and the UN. These alliances have formed the cornerstone of a very active foreign policy approach (Arts, Kleistra, Klem & Rem, 2011). Also in terms of the central objectives – the development of the international legal order, security and stability and the focus on human rights – there has been a continuum (Schrijver, 2010; Rood, 2011). Because of the active Dutch approach, it has often been claimed that the Dutch foreign policy is characterized by a strong moralistic overtone (Baehr, 1980; Baehr, Castermans-Holleman & Grundfeld, 2002). However, moralism and activism were certainly not the only drivers of Dutch foreign policy. It has been led by both moral and pragmatic and commercial

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4 For a detailed description, see Hellema (1995) or Voorhoeve (1979)
considerations, which is also known in the literature as the ‘reverend-merchant’ approach (Rood, 2011; Schrijver, 2010). Dutch foreign policy has thus been characterized by a strong commitment to multilateralism, in which both the norms and values of the reverend and the economic interests of the merchant were served (Hoebink, 2006). This direction always rested on an overall permissive consensus. Decision makers could enact foreign policy without much involvement of citizens (Arts, et al., 2011; Baehr, 1980; Rood, 2011).

While we can thus speak of a relative continuum in Dutch foreign policy, more attention should be paid to recent changes such as the effect of upcoming far-right political parties, the shifting balance between economic interests and values, and possible critical junctures like the Ukraine crisis and the downing of MH17. Though there used to be a broad consensus on the principles of Dutch foreign policy, several authors stress that this has changed (Rood, 2011; Arts, et al., 2011). Rood (2011) argues that instead of an focus on activism and moralism, national and economic interests have increasingly become central in the foreign policy of the Netherlands. According to Ter Haar (2017), Dutch foreign policy is characterized by three dominant strands of thinking: trade, engagement and withdrawal. Like embodied in the reverend-merchant metaphor, Ter Haar (2017) argues that the main drivers behind Dutch foreign policy are trade and engagement. While the trade logic seem to have gain importance over the last decades, Ter Haar (2017) also argues that this got seriously questioned after the downing of MH17. Moreover, he emphasizes the upcoming of the withdrawal perspective. According to this view, international engagement is only beneficial for the elite while it compromises the interests of the lower class (Ter Haar, 2017). Hence, though the literature mainly stresses the active role of the Netherlands in foreign policy and the relevance of values and norms, new developments show changes in these foreign policy traditions. This thesis therefore addresses whether and how the Dutch foreign policy changed after the Ukrainian Crisis and the downing of MH17.

Besides these partnerships and objectives, different factors can impact, shape and reflect foreign policy. To understand the nature of Dutch foreign policy it is important to look at what shapes it. In the literature, there has been a debate on the relevance of internal vis-à-vis external factors in Dutch foreign policy. The origin of this debate lies in the influential works of Voorhoeve and Hellema (Kuitenbrouwer, 2003). Voorhoeve argued that the Netherlands, despite its position as a small power, still has a surprisingly broad and intensive foreign policy (Voorhoeve, 1979). He argued that this have been determined since the seventeenth century by three policy traditions: the maritime-commercial tradition, the neutralist-abstentionist tradition and the internationalist-idealistic tradition (Voorhoeve, 1979). Other important internal factors are social-economic circumstances, party political orientation, the influence of domestic NGO’s and the personalities of individual decision-makers (Kuitenbrouwer, 2003). On the other hand, Hellema fundamentally criticized this emphasis on internal factors. He argued that external factors are much more important for small states like the Netherlands and that Dutch foreign policy is organized to
adopt to international developments (Hellema, 1995). According to this view, external factors such as the geographical location, the position in the world economy and the international power structure, are decisive (Kuitenbrouwer, 2003). For the purpose of this thesis, Russia and its role in the energy security of Europe are particularly important external factors in the Dutch foreign policy on Ukraine. Besides the economic concerns that erupt from potential disruptions or shortages in the delivery of energy, countries have political concerns about the power and leverage enjoyed by exporter states such as Russia over both importer countries (the Netherlands) and transit countries (Ukraine). Energy security therefore constitutes a significant foreign policy factor (Hadfield, 2016).

Baehr (1980) provides another perspective on the discussion between internal and external factors. While he recognizes the physical limits that geography, population size and economic resources create for foreign policy, he argues that the perception of the foreign policy elite regarding the influence and power of a country may be decisive in what influence it will in fact exercise. Similar to this view, is the argument that Dutch foreign policy behavior is driven by its role conception of being activist, which results in the Netherlands providing more foreign assistance (Breuning, 1997 in Thies, 2010). Also bridging the division between internal and external factors, Hansen (2013) emphasises the importance of key events. Key events can give insights on how important ‘facts’ are brought together to constitute events and policy-identity constructions. During such events, competing discourses can try to destabilize the official policy (Hansen, 2013, p.28). The downing of MH17 and the Dutch referendum on the AA can both be examples of such events. Hence, despite the undeniable importance of external factors, it is argued here that party politics, key events, and role conceptions can also shape Dutch foreign policies.

### 2.2 The actors in foreign policy analysis

In order to analyze foreign policy, one must know which actors are involved in the process of foreign policy. Traditionally, the IR literature had been dominated by the ‘state as actor’ model, in which the state forms the central level of analysis. However, the state is rarely a unified actor. While governments are the traditional and most important actor in foreign policy, there are a number of actors involved in national foreign policy making (Kuitenbrouwer, 2003). This paragraph therefore discusses the role of different actors in (Dutch) foreign policy.

The most common and obvious actors are those that are politically responsible and represent the society (Carlsnaes, 2016). With regard to Dutch foreign policy, the Minister of Foreign Affairs dominates the scene and takes most initiatives (Baehr, 1980; Kuitenbrouwer, 2003). The Dutch Prime Minister is also very important, though he mainly serves as the chairman of the Council of Minister and as coordinator of policies (Hagan et al, 2001). Besides this focus on governments, Carlsnaes (2016) also includes
political parties and parliaments as important foreign policy actors. This is a rather rare comment in the literature, since foreign policy is generally considered a sensitive and higher policy area in which the government and the governing parties have the power. Nevertheless, in line with Carlsnaes (2016), Baehr (1980) and Kuitenbrouwer (2003) recall that the Dutch Parliament matters, especially the parliamentary committees that deal with foreign policy, and that the different political parties are also influential actors in the field of foreign policy. Though these scholars provide a unique perspective, their contributions do not bring us much further in understanding and comprehending the role of parliaments and political parties in the development of foreign policy. Hence, there is a gap in the literature on whether and how political parties other than the ones in government play a role in this policy area. This thesis therefore focusses on political parties in parliament and their role in the foreign policy debate.

The literature pays to a different extent attention to a wider array of actors such as civil servants, experts, military establishments and intelligence services (Carlsnaes, 2016). These actors are frequently involved in the process of foreign policy making, though there are different views on the discretion they possess (Carlsnaes, 2016; Chelotti, 2016). In the Dutch case, the officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affair play a central role in the decision-making process (Baehr, 1980; Kuitenbrouwer, 2003). However, assessing the relevance of actors within the bureaucracy goes beyond the scope of this thesis. Secondly, the role of the public opinion is also discussed in the literature (Hansen, 2013). Lobbying firms, NGO’s, think tanks, research institutes and the media are all actors that might influence the foreign policy debate (Carlsnaes, 2016). However, there is no consensus in the literature about the role and importance of such actors (Robinson, 2016). In the Netherlands, the public has traditionally not been involved in foreign policy, but non-state actors do increasingly play a role mobilizing social pressure, especially through the media and the Internet (Arts, et al., 2011). Nevertheless the media seems not the most relevant actor in the process of foreign policy making and is therefore not incorporated in the analysis of this study.5

Besides the discussions on the relevance of these domestic actors, Dutch foreign policy is obviously not made in isolation. Foreign policy is conducted in a complex system of both national and international environments (Carlsnaes, 2016). Participation in international organizations, such as the UN, NATO and the EU, and cooperation with other countries has been essential for Dutch foreign policy (Arts, et al., 2011). Especially the EU and its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is important in that regard (Larsen, 2009; Arts, et al, 2011). This double-sided nature of foreign policy, where both negotiations and interest formation happen at the national and international level, has complicated the analysis of foreign policy (Carlsnaes, 2016). While the intertwining of national and European foreign policy is acknowledged here, the focus in this thesis is on the domestic politics and debate.

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5 For a further account on the discussion of the role of media and public opinion, see the work of Piers Robinson (2016)
2.3 Role of discourse and identity in foreign policy

Having examined the literature on Dutch foreign policy in terms of its roots, the factors that shape it and the relevant actors, one important aspect of the Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) remained undiscussed. Since the 1980s, post-structuralism and its focus on the power of language has gained importance in the IR literature (Hansen, 2016). It is argued that the construction of national identity through discourse is crucial for legitimizing policies (Hansen & Weaver, 2003; Hansen, 2016). Discourses are constructed, basic frameworks of meaning, which can shape and constrain national foreign policy (Larsen, 2016). This section therefore discusses the theory on the role of identity and discourse in foreign policy.

The study of discourse finds its roots in the post-structuralist philosophies of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. To emphasize the power that language has, Foucault argued that discourses entail values, assumptions and perceptions, which constitute certain forms of knowledge, identities and social relations, and which become to construct the social world (Larsen, 2016; Elchardus, 2014). According to Derrida, discourse are largely structured in terms of binary oppositions in which one element is often superior (Derrida, 1981, in Milliken, 1999). In this way, they produce a boundary between the inside, ‘we’, and the outside, ‘them’ (Hansen, 2016). Following Derrida’s binary oppositions, identity is a relational concept in that it is always given through the reference of something it is not. For instance, when something or someone is described as ‘European’ or ‘developed’, this automatically lead to the constitution of the other as ‘non-European’ or ‘undeveloped’ (Hansen, 2013). Language thus produces and reproduces norms, values and identities, based on distinctions between the Self and the Other. At the same time, identity is used to legitimize the proposed policies. Policy and identity are inseparable and enacted through discourses (Hansen, 2013). Discourses are therefore crucial for the conduction and articulation of foreign policy. They provide representations of the problem, threat, crisis or countries that the policies aim to address (Hansen, 2013). In order to answer the research question on whether and how discourses are reflected in the Dutch foreign policy debate it is therefore important to look at the construction of identities.

Discourse studies on foreign policy analyze how the official discourse of a government made certain courses of action possible, while excluding other policies or making them seem as improper, unintelligible or unworkable (Milliken, 1999). In this way, a dominating discourse produces and reproduces the social reality. This production of ‘the reality’ is, however, not an automatic process. On the contrary, discourses require efforts from the authorized speakers and these efforts are not always successful (Milliken, 1999, p.242). Foreign policy decision-makers act within a wider political and public sphere, and their official discourse might therefore face resistance from other actors. Governments can be confronted with competing discourses, that challenge their representations and policies and provide different understandings of facts and events (Hansen, 2013). The way governments
respond to these discourses is important for the impact that competing discourses have on the foreign policy and on the debate. First, a government can change its own policy-identity construction in response to an oppositional discourse (Hansen, 2013). This happens for example when new facts can’t be explained or justified in the official discursive framework. An alternative and very common reaction is that the official discourse acknowledges these new facts, but that it explains them within its own discursive framework (Hansen, 2013). They are then explained in such a way that they fit or even strengthen the official discourse. A third strategy is to disregard the oppositional discourse and let the facts cease in silence. While this might be seen as the best option when it is difficult to integrate facts within the official discourse, it is rather precarious in the case of massive media coverage and fierce criticism (Hansen, 2013, p.29). These different responses can give insights on the stability of the official discourse and the role of oppositional discourses in the Dutch foreign policy debate on Ukraine.

This chapter discussed the literature on Dutch foreign policy and the literature on the role of discourse and identity in the study of foreign policy. It established that traditionally, the Dutch foreign policy has been focused on its partnerships with the EU, the UN, NATO and the US. Its foreign policy approach has been characterized by activism, moralism and pragmatism, relying on a permissive consensus. However, this literature review also showed that the Netherlands is experiencing changes in this regard. Other actors besides the foreign policy elite become increasingly important in the Dutch foreign policy debate. However, the role of the parliament and oppositional political parties remains ambiguous and is therefore further studied in this thesis. Moreover, this literature review elaborated on the role of identity and discourse in foreign policy. Through discourses, political actors try to legitimize, initiate or contest certain policies. Having established that discourse matters for how foreign policy is shaped and analyzed, the following chapter talks the reader through the research design that is applied in this thesis.
3. Methodology

The previous chapter provided an overview of the consulted literature that forms the foundation of this research. In this chapter, the chosen methodology, research design and the selection of texts for the analysis are explained. In order to answer the question how discourses are reflected in Dutch foreign policy debate since the Ukrainian Crisis, a discourse analysis is conducted. The method of discourse analysis is still relatively new, and therefore no single definition of discourse or discourse analysis exists (Broad & Daddow, 2010, p.209). The discourse analysis used in this thesis is inspired by Hansen’s work. This chapter therefore also addresses how and why her theory was used for deciding the scope and methodology.

3.1 Discourse analysis

In this thesis, discourses are defined as a basic set of ideas, concepts and categories that give meaning to the social world, which are produced and reproduced through certain (linguistic) practices (Hajer, 2006, p.67). This is based on the assumption that language is not a neutral medium that reflects the world ‘out there’, but that it actively shapes and arguably determines the way we view it (Hajer, 2006; Hansen, 2016). Hansen’s theory on poststructuralist discourse analysis provides the foundation for this thesis. She argues that representations of identity and policy are linked through discourse. Contrary to the belief of constructivists and realists, there is no causal relationship between the two as representations of identity are simultaneously the precondition for and produced through articulations of policy (Hansen, 2013, 2016). Political actors use the structuring power of language to mobilise support, generate consensus and legitimise their actions and policies (Fairclough, 2001; Hansen, 2013). Therefore, the use of discourse analysis is an essential contribution to the study of foreign policy (Larsen, 2005; Hansen, 2013, 2016).

In order to conduct a discourse analysis, one has to establish where to specifically look at. Political actors can be seen as storytellers, who make their statements and arguments in the form of narratives (Yanow, 2000; Hajer, 2006). These narratives create meaning by relating things that are understood to have happened and by establishing a coherence to all the events they refer to (Yanow, 2000, p.58). Within such narratives, specific attention should be paid to the linguistic details of a text. Discourses are understood as having the capacity to naturalize certain statements as common sense or facts, even though these statements can actually be controversial (Schneider, 2013; Milliken, 1999). The next section elaborates on the specific focus of this discourse analysis and discusses the research design.
The following section discusses the research design, in terms of the discourse analysis, the focus of this study and lastly, the selection of sources. The previous paragraph established the importance of discourse analysis and broadly discussed where to pay attention to when conducting such an analysis. Figure 1 gives a summary of the discourse analysis used in this thesis. The focus on narratives is central in this analysis. This means that specific attention is paid to how different actors bring a logic order in what they understood to have happened and hence, tell their story about Ukraine. However, as explained above, it is also important to zoom in on the linguistic elements of a texts. These are summarized in Figure 1 as grammar, metaphors and self-evident truths. First, the analysis focuses on expressions that suggest factuality or self-evidence. Expressions such as ‘of course’, ‘obviously’ or ‘as we all know’ are highlighted in the texts as indicators of self-evident truths. Second, metaphors and sayings are important concepts in the study of discourse, because they make us understand and experience one thing in terms of another (Hajer, 2006, p.68). They create a certain understanding of a situation and imply possible actions as response (Yanow, 2000, pp.42-43). In the analysis of the following chapters metaphors such as ‘The Maidan square is on fire’ or the ‘Russian bear’ are detected. A last important feature in the analysis is grammar. Though grammar entails a lot of different things, this analysis looked specifically at pronouns and adjectives and adverbs. The frequent or systematic use of pronouns like ‘we’ or ‘them’ says something about the subject and object of statements (Schneider, 2013). Furthermore, by looking at the adjectives and adverbs that are used, such as ‘corrupt’ or ‘sovereign’, it becomes clear how the identity of Self and the Other are constituted.
Having established the discourse analysis, choices had to be made regarding the focus of the study. The research design is based on the four dimension identified by Hansen (2013): the scope of the analysis, the number of ‘selves’, the temporal perspective and the number of events. In terms of the scope of analysis, the first question is whether to focus on the official foreign policy discourse or to expand the scope to political opposition, the media or other marginal discourses (Hansen, 2013, p.65). Most discourse analysis of foreign policy has a strong national, top-down focus and the literature mainly pays attention to the official political discourse (Hansen, 2013; Milliken, 1999; Diez, 2001). This leads to states often being addressed analytically as one actor, thereby undermining the different actors and the dynamic context in which foreign policy is debated and created (Diez, 2001). Only to the extent that oppositional discourses are explicitly responded to in the official political discourse, are they included in most studies. As a result, these studies also miss an important opportunity to assess the degree of stability that an official discourse may or may not enjoy in the wider political and public sphere (Hansen, 2013). While this focus is understandable because the government is responsible for conducting foreign policies, the argument was made in the literature review that this should be situated within a wider discursive field. It is important to include other actors and positions to identify oppositional discourses (Hansen, 2013). As the aim of this thesis is to understand how discourses shape and reflect the Dutch foreign policy debate on Ukraine, the official discourse needs to be analyzed in connection with alternative discourses that might not follow the same logic and get more or less marginalized as a result (Diez, 2001). Therefore, the scope of this research is broadened from a narrow focus on the official political discourse to the wider political debate. Besides the Dutch government, the other political parties and their representatives in Parliament are studied.

The second dimension, the number of selves, concerns how many states or other foreign policy subjects are studied (Hansen, 2013, p.67). To make a discourse analysis practically viable it is important to take into account that one must possess strong linguistic knowledge of the Self (Hansen, 2013, p.67). Corresponding to the language proficiency of the author, it was chosen to only focus on the Netherlands. It is therefore a so-called ‘single-Self’ study. Turning to the third dimension, the temporal perspective, studies can address an issue or event either at one particular moment or through a longer historical analysis (Hansen, 2013, p.69). In terms of the timespan, it was decided to look at the Dutch foreign policy debate over a five year period from the start of the Ukraine crisis in 2014. This is seen as a possible historical turning point in the relationship between the EU and the Ukraine and hence maybe in Dutch foreign policy. The temporal perspective is closely related to the fourth dimension of the research design, namely the number of events. Events can be broadly seen as policy issues as well as a commonly understood events such as wars (Hansen, 2013, p.71). In this thesis one event was central, namely the conflict in Ukraine. However, it is important to note that one event is often studied through analyzing ‘events within that event’ (Hansen, 2013, p.71). For example, the MH17 crash had a huge
societal impact and was therefore a very important development in the Dutch foreign policy debate. Hence, the conflict in Ukraine is defined in the research design as one event, but the analysis will trace the discursive construction of multiple events over a five year period such as the Euromaidan protests, the armed fighting in eastern Ukraine, the downing of MH17 and the Association Agreement (Hansen, 2013, p.71).

For an overview of the research design that captures these four dimensions, see figure 2 below.

The selection of materials that constitute the basis of the analysis is the last important part of the research design. First, a timeline of the relevant moments in the history of Ukraine, the EU and the Netherlands was constructed. Subsequently, the selection of texts was coupled to this, because selecting sources around periods of heightened political and media activity is useful for analyzing how discourses reproduce themselves in the face of criticism, developments and new ‘facts’ (Hansen, 2013, p.78). Afterwards, all possibly relevant actors in the Dutch foreign policy debate were summarized in a schematic overview. Based on the decision to focus on the official discourse and the political opposition, all relevant texts of these actors regarding Ukraine were put into the overview. Following Hansen’s terminology, the term ‘official discourse’ is used to refer to the texts and discourse of the Dutch government. In the Netherlands, all parties that are not in government but that are present in the parliament are called ‘opposition’. More information on the composition of the political parties in the latest Dutch governments and parliaments is provided for in Table 1 below. The schematic overview
made clear which parties in the opposition are generally supportive and which contested the official political discourse. Because this study is about the interaction of different (oppositional) discourses, the parties SP, PvdD, PVV and FvD are the most important for discovering the marginalized discourses in the Dutch foreign policy debate.

In terms of the type of texts, official reports of parliamentary debates and statements from political parties are used as the main source of data. Multiple parliamentary debates on the situation in Ukraine, MH17, the AA and Russian gas are analyzed. These issues are identified in the literature review as either key events in the debate on Ukraine or important intervening factors (Russia and energy policies). To discover the official political discourse in response to some of the criticism in the debates, two letters of the Government addressed to the Second Chamber are also analyzed. A last important source for the official political discourse is the Government’s communication strategy on the AA referendum that was accidentally leaked into the press. After the collection of this sources, the texts are codified and analyzed with the help of Nvivo.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Coalition</th>
<th>Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs</th>
<th>Opposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017 – now</td>
<td>Center-right: VVD, CDA, D66, CU</td>
<td>PM: Rutte (VVD)</td>
<td>PVV, GroenLinks, SP, PVDA, PvdD, 50Plus, SGP, Denk, FVD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Dutch political system since 2012

To conclude, this chapter explained the research design of this study. In order to answer the research question, “Whether and how are discourses reflected in Dutch foreign policy debate since the Ukrainian Crisis?”, a discourse analysis is conducted. In this analysis special attention is paid to the narratives in the debate on Ukraine. Over a five years period based on multiple key events, the official discourse of both the Government and the discourses of oppositional political parties are studied. In the following chapters, the results of this analysis are presented. First, the next chapter starts with a discussion on the key events that shaped the foreign policy debate in the Netherlands.

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6 For a complete list of the sources, see the Appendix
4. Key events and the official policy response

In order to analyze how different discourses reflect Dutch foreign policy since the Ukrainian crisis, it is necessary to first understand how the foreign policy debate in the Netherlands unfolded since then. In the previous chapters, different moments have been highlighted as key events in this debate: the Ukrainian crisis, the downing of flight MH17 and the Dutch referendum on the Association Agreement (AA). This chapter therefore further elaborates on these events. First, a broader context is given on the complex situation of Ukraine and its position between the EU and Russia, before examining the Ukrainian crisis and the response of the EU. As the Dutch foreign policy is situated within the EU and the study focuses on foreign policy towards Ukraine, this constitutes necessary background knowledge. Afterwards, the downing of MH17 and the Dutch referendum on the AA are shortly discussed to establish the context of the analyzed debates.

4.1 The case of Ukraine

Throughout Ukraine’s history, its territory had been divided and ruled by various powers. Ukraine was for the first time territorially united in 1940 when it merged into the Soviet Union (Wilson, 2013). After the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Ukraine declared its independence. However, despite this break away from Russia, pro-Russian sentiments remained. This is especially the case in eastern parts of the country which largely constitute of Russian speaking territories (Wilson, 2013). Because of the historical, social and economic ties with Ukraine, Russia proposed in 2003 the Eurasian Economic Space, a single market within the Eurasian Economic Union that provides the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital. However, Ukraine decided not to join this initiative (Wilson, 2013). In the meantime, also the EU created a close relationship with Ukraine. After the big enlargement of 2004, the EU made extensive efforts to establish regional cooperation with its new direct neighbours, exemplified in its European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnerships (Jones & Clark, 2008). Hence, both the EU and Russia tried to integrate Ukraine into their markets, leading to increased competition in the neighbourhood. In 2004, these relationships were shaken up by the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. A democratic, western-orientated movement won the elections decisively (Wilson, 2013). Subsequently, the new President Viktor Yushchenko called for negotiations with the EU on an Association Agreement, a contractual arrangement that constitutes the most advanced stage of economic integration that a non-candidate state can reach (Cadier, 2014; Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2014). Meanwhile, Russia increased its economic pressure on Ukraine (Wilson, 2013).

However, the period of democratization and ‘Orange’ governments turned out to be a disappointment and in 2010 President Yushchenko lost the elections to Viktor Yanukovych (Wilson. 2013). President
Yanukovych then decided in 2013 to postpone the signing of the AA, which spurred big protests in the country as many Ukrainians supported the EU over closer ties with Russia. However, pro-EU supporters regularly clashed with supporters of Yanukovych and Russia and the country descended in a crisis. Soon, the so called Euromaidan movement grew and tensions rose at the Maidan square in Kyiv. This eventually resulted in violent clashes between the riot police and protesters, leading to more than a hundred deaths. (Ikani, 2018). The Maidan protesters demanded the departure of the president and as the violence increased, President Yanukovych fled the country on February 22nd 2014. That same day, the Ukrainian parliament removed him from office by vote (Wilson, 2013).

While a new government was formed, this spurred widespread protests in Eastern and Southern parts of Ukraine where a lot of people supported Yanukovych. Pro-Russian armed men seized buildings in the capital of the Crimea. According to Russia, the new government was an illegitimate coup and a threat to the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine. Therefore, it unofficially interfered with military support in Eastern Ukraine (Cadier, 2014). With support of Russia, a legally challenged referendum in the Crimea led to an overwhelming majority voting to join Russia. This vote was then followed by the Russian annexation of the peninsula. The Government in Kyiv and the international community broadly consider this a fundamental breach of international law (Ikani, 2018). Moreover, a civil war in the east of the country broke out. So called separatists, supported by Russia, are fighting against the Ukrainian government there. The crisis in Ukraine has therefore put severe pressure on the relationship between the EU and Russia. While the need to reform and strengthen the foreign policies towards Ukraine was stressed within the EU (Ikani, 2018), it continued the conclusion of the AA. On June 27 2014, the newly elected President Poroshenko signed the full agreement. Moreover, in response to Russia’s violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty, the deliberate destabilization of the east of the country and with the goal of changing this attitude, the EU imposed restrictive measures against Russia (European Council, n.d.).

4.2 The downing of MH17

In the Dutch debate about the AA and the response to Russia’s interference in Ukraine, there had been an emphasis on economic interests and trade. However, this approach got seriously questioned after the crash of MH17. On July 17th 2014, flight MH17 from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur was brought down above east Ukraine. All passengers and staff on board died in the crash, out of which 196 Dutch citizens. Shortly after the crash, new economic sanctions against Russia were imposed. Though this was decided in the context of the EU and the reason was the remaining military involvement in Ukraine, the crash of flight MH17 did change the Dutch attitude towards sanctions (Ter Haar, 2017). While it first emphasized its economic interests and the need for a gradual approach, the Dutch government was now stronger in favor of these new sanctions (Timmermans, August 6th 2014). The MH17 crash therefore formed a significant moment in the history of the Netherlands and Dutch foreign policy.
In the official response to the incident, the Dutch government set three priorities: repatriating and identifying the victims, establishing the cause of the crash and conducting a criminal investigation (Rijksoverheid, n.d.). In order to do this, two research teams were created: the Dutch Safety Board investigation (OVV) and the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) (OM, n.d.). Because of the different narratives on what caused the downing of MH17 (Kiel, 2015), the conclusions of the investigation teams were very important in the Dutch foreign policy debate to establish ‘the facts’. In 2015, the OVV concluded that flight MH17 was shot down with a BUK missile from the ground. Moreover, it argued that Ukraine had sufficient reasons to close the airspace over the eastern Ukraine before the crash (OVV, 2015). The JIT concluded that the BUK missile originated from a unit of the Russian army in Kursk in the Russian Federation (OM, n.d.) In response to this news, the Dutch and Australian government decided to hold Russia responsible under international law for its part in the downing of flight MH17 (Blok, May 25th 2018). While there was a broad consensus in the Dutch political debate on this legal step, the findings of these investigations also rose questions. Most important for this study is the critique that the Government ignores any state responsibility of Ukraine despite the conclusions of the OVV. This is important because the study of discourse is not only about what is being said, but also about what is not being said.

4.3 The Dutch referendum on the EU’s Association Agreement with Ukraine

Another important moment in the development of the Dutch foreign policy debate is the referendum on the AA with Ukraine. In this moment, the different perspectives on Dutch foreign policy clashed again. Moreover, the public involvement showed the salience of the relationship with Ukraine in the Dutch foreign policy debate. The initiative for the referendum was launched by the civil society. As a consequence, the Dutch population was asked on April 6th 2016 to vote in favour or against the act to approve the AA with Ukraine (Wessel, 2016). While most parties actively campaigned in the running up to the referendum, the Government decided to not do this. Instead, its strategy was to provide information on why it signed the agreement. Though the voter turnout was not high (32 per cent), 61.1 per cent voted against the ratification of the AA. This brought the Dutch government in a complex situation to gain parliamentary support for ratification and negotiate in the EU for a possible solution (Wessel, 2016). In the end, it negotiated a legally binding decision between the EU’s Heads of States and Governments to address some of the concerns of the Dutch no-voters regarding Ukrainian membership, corruption and military support (Wessel, 2016).

In conclusion, this chapter discussed the complexity of the Ukrainian conflict. It argued that relationship between Russia, the EU and the Ukraine has been difficult since the country’s independence, because
of different integration efforts and the ties Ukraine has to both the EU and Russia. This chapter also looked at how the foreign policy debate developed since the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis and provided the reader with a context of the important moments that shaped the political debate: the MH17 crash and the AA referendum. These events were used to analyze how different discourses talk about them and how discourses are then connected to foreign policy. In the next three chapters these discourses and the way they reflect the Dutch foreign policy debate will be discussed. Because of the significance of the above described events, the analysis follows these moments. First, Chapter 5 will report on the results of the dominant Dutch foreign policy discourse regarding Ukraine.
5. The dominant discourse: sovereignty, democracy and geopolitics

This chapter presents the discourses that dominate the Dutch parliamentary debate. Within the Dutch foreign policy discourse on Ukraine, multiple identities are articulated and constructed. This involves not only a simple Self-Other construction of ‘the Netherlands’ being the Self and ‘Ukraine’ being the Other, but it portrays a web of identities in which there are multiple Selves and multiple more or less ‘radical’ Others (Hansen, 2013). In the dominant discourse, the identity of the Self is referred to in different ways that are often interchangeably used, being the Netherlands, the EU, Europe and the West. This creates a clear division between European and non-European and East and West, which in time becomes a central theme in the foreign policy debate on Ukraine. The dominant discourse is carried out by multiple parties in the Dutch parliament, which creates a strong sense of ‘shared common knowledge’. Representatives of the VVD, PVDA, D66, CDA, CU, GroenLinks, SGP and 50Plus⁷ all used (elements of) it to construct their argument and legitimize their foreign policy approach. Although there are clear differences in terms of party political orientation and the position in the political system, these parties share some of the narratives and identity constructions that are central in this dominant discourse. First, this chapter talks the reader through the construction of Ukraine as the Other. Then, it addresses the role of Russia as the radical Other. It becomes clear that these identity constructions of the Self and the Others are crucial for defining and legitimizing Dutch foreign policies, thereby confirming the literature on the role of discourse in foreign policy.

5.1 Ukraine: the Other that choses to go the ‘European way’

When the Ukrainian crisis started in 2013, most political parties split the subject of Ukraine into two. The dominant discourse presents on the one hand ‘President Yanukovych and his regime’ and on the other hand ‘the common Ukrainian people’. By creating this division, the crisis in Ukraine is constituted as a battle of the Ukrainian people for freedom and democracy and against the corrupt, violent and pro-Russian Yanukovych regime. This narrative is illustrated in the following statement:

The Maidan square is on fire. At the place where tens of thousands of protesters have been camping for months, security forces are shooting at demonstrators who have had enough of the corrupt regime, whose personal liberties have been curtailed by that regime in no time and who want Ukraine to be able to choose with whom and under what conditions it cooperates. […] Ukraine must decide for itself what its future looks like and must be able to choose for freedom, prosperity and a decent

⁷ A table on the Dutch political system summarizing the parties in Government, the opposition and the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs can be found in Chapter 3.
While this constructs the regime as a radical Other, this makes the people of Ukraine the ‘less-radical’ Other. As evident from this discourse, the Ukrainian people want a liberal and democratic change and desire a future that is based on European values. Although the Ukrainian people are still the Other, they are directly linked to the identity of Europe and therefore the Netherlands in this discourse. This can be seen in the following example, where the identity of the Other and the Self are represented as equivalents because of shared values: “So it is very important not only to stand for the values of the people there, but also for our own values. Let those values be the same now: freedom, the democratic constitutional state, self-determination and stability” (my emphasis) (Servaes for PVDA, 02.04.2015). As a relationship between the Other and the Self is created, this also implies a certain moral obligation on the Self to support the Ukrainian people ‘in their battle for freedom’. This narrative therefore illustrates a ‘development and democracy’ discourse that is strongly reflected in the Dutch foreign policy debate on Ukraine. This results in a moral responsibility to engage, which confirms Ter Haar’s argument (2017) about the dominance of the engagement approach in Dutch foreign policy.

A very important element of this discourse is the legal narrative of Ukraine being a sovereign state that should be able to make its own decisions. This legal narrative talks about the pressures exerted on Ukraine by Russia. Here we are told Yanukovych refused to sign the AA under pressure of Russia while a majority of the country wanted (and wants) to move closer to the EU. Moreover, Russia is portrayed as interfering and destabilizing Ukraine, because it refuses to accept the sovereignty and decisions of Ukraine as a free country. The people of Ukraine are cast as having made a brave choice to fight against this interference and for the AA, even though this agreement requires them to undergo painful reforms. During the debate on the AA with both Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, this legal narrative is naturalized as a fact and common sense, as seen in this excerpt from the debate on 01.04.2015: “we obviously all know what the story is behind these agreements” (my emphasis) (Servaes for PVDA). The debate continued by referring to the legal rights of states and peoples to choose: “Today is in essence about the sovereign right of countries to decide in all freedom which future they choose. It is about the stories behind them, about the battle […] of three countries to decide their own destiny” (my emphasis) (Servaes for PVDA, 01.04.2015). The VVD enforces this narrative by using metaphors to compare the AA to the financial aid that was proposed by Putin:

I’m happy that the people on the Maidan square, who have chosen for their own freedom, now have the opportunity to fully achieve that. It is not an easy solution, that cooperation agreement with the European Union. They choose a form of cod liver oil, instead of the sugar cake that Russia came with […]. So it is a courageous

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8 A complete list of dates of the debates, their document numbers and the topic of the debates, can be found in the Appendix.
choice and it must be supported by the European Union” (my emphasis) (Ten Broeke for VVD, 04.03.2014).

The metaphor of ‘cod liver oil’ creates the image that cooperation with the EU is good for Ukraine, even though the required reforms are hard to get down. By comparing this to the ‘Russian sugar cake’ – which might be tasty and nice in the short term, but is in fact unhealthy and bad in the long term – the AA with the EU is portrayed as the wise and best option for Ukraine. It also indicates that despite the initial negative effects of the AA, the Ukrainian people still chose this hard way to get to a future they desire. A future that is, as evident from this discourse, based on European values. This, in turn, strengthens and legitimizes the development and democracy discourse.

Most parties, however, also stress that Ukraine still has a long way to go, clearly differentiating the Other against the Self. Here we are told that even though corruption in Ukraine is improving since the Ukrainian crisis, it remains as a very important issue. This topic becomes central in the dominant discourse when the foreign policy debate involves the financial aid from the EU. At that moment, the dominant discourse is seriously being contested by an oppositional discourse that portrays the problems Ukraine has as something inherent to the society and the people there. The opposition comes with ‘new facts’ that show for example that extreme right forces, corruption and oligarchs are a part of the whole Ukrainian society. In this way, the opposition’s discourse can be perceived as an attempt to change the identity construction of the ‘common’ Ukrainian people who are driven by European values and who are fighting against corruption. This is consistent with Hansen’s arguments as set out in the literature review on the role of identity articulations in defining and trying to change foreign policies.

A government can respond to such oppositional discourses in different ways. The most common reaction according to Hansen’s theory (2013) is that the official discourse acknowledges these new facts, but that it explains them within the own discursive framework. This is exactly what happens in this case. The parties that present the dominant discourse acknowledge the problems that Ukraine has. However, they portray it as something that is not a part of Ukraine’s identity in such a way that it is unchangeable. When discussing the seriousness of the corruption issue, the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, for example, frames it as something that has been inflicted upon the country instead of something that is an innate element of the people making up their society:

I have to say that some of the protests in Eastern Ukraine, aside from Russia's interference, stem from the fact that the people have seen so much insane corruption over the past 20 years. […] many Ukrainians are just very angry about what has happened to their country, with so many potential resources” (my emphasis) (Timmermans as MFA, 23.04.2014).
Moreover, most parties respond to this oppositional discourse by saying that these problems are actually a reason to engage. In this way they can still fit these signs of corruption in the dominant discourse, as illustrated by the following statement: “We cannot be strict enough on this point [corruption], but at the same time Ukraine needs to be helped” (my emphasis) (Timmermans as MFA, 23-04-2014). This is also explicitly articulated in the Government’s campaign strategy:

> Why work together with a corrupt, poor, undemocratic, instable country? This shows that the AA is actually necessary. Ukraine wants to modernize and the EU can help them with that. […] This agreement helps the government to stay on the right path” (my emphasis) (Rijksoverheid, n.d.).

This shows how the Government tries to naturalize the narrative of Ukraine choosing to change, while portraying the new Ukrainian government as it doing the right thing and improving the situation (‘to stay on the right path’). It strengthens the legitimacy of the Ukrainian government and it simultaneously makes the Dutch government able to legitimize the EU’s financial support, despite the worries of corruption. Through this discourse, the Government and the other parties can create a common sense that financial support is necessary: “But let’s be honest. It is good and it must happen, because this country needs to be helped in order to make sure that it become more democratic and safe” (Buma for CDA, 08.11.2016). Hence, these parties partly change the dominant identity construction of Ukraine by acknowledging some of the signs of the oppositional discourse (corruption, instability, underdevelopment). However, they link these to other signs (changeable, help) so that there is no effect on the proposed policy. Though it is evident from the democracy and development discourse that Ukraine is still very different from the West, Ukraine is also cast as being able to change into a ‘Western’ democratic country with the support of the EU.

### 5.2 Russia: the radical Other that claims its sphere of influence

Following a geopolitical and legal narrative, the role of Russia in the Ukrainian crisis is a central element in the dominant ‘stability and peace’ discourse. As evident from this discourse, Russia is highly distrusted and is said to threaten the stability and peace in Europe. The Dutch government therefore portrays its policies as contributing to the stability in both Ukraine and the whole of Europe. As stability and peace are directly and indirectly articulated as core values of the Self’s identity, the Government can be perceived as trying to legitimize its policies through this discourse.

Almost all Dutch parties represent Russia as the one that is to blame for the destabilization of Eastern Ukraine, the annexation of the Crimea and the tensions with the EU. They portray Russia’s actions as proof that it never really recognized the sovereignty of Ukraine, as seen in the following statement: Putin
did not consider Ukraine to be a country. He considers the disintegration of the Soviet Union the greatest tragedy of this century” (my emphasis) (Sjoerdema for D66, 01.04.2015). In contrast to Russia, the parties describe that there is no battle for spheres of influence from the EU’s side. Instead, as the dominant discourse shows, Ukraine has chosen the ‘European model’ voluntary, while Russia is the one turning this into a geopolitical conflict: “These association agreements are geopolitical. We don’t determine that; Putin determines that. Speaking in defense terms: the enemy has a vote” (Knops for CDA, 01.04.2015). Although there are some parties, such as the SP and the PVV that stress the provocative role of the EU in this geopolitical conflict, this is commonly framed as ‘false’, thereby marginalizing their voices. This is exemplified by the following statement of a D66 representative: “some parties will argue that the European Union is to blame, […] but that is of course absolute nonsense” (Sjoerdema for D66, 01.04.2015). Here, one can see how politicians use phrases of self-evidently to institutionalize a certain truth, while making other arguments be perceived as not only wrong but sometimes even ridiculous. As a consequence, the dominant discourse limits how events may be interpreted and therefore what policy options seems reasonable, an argument consistent with the theory as set out in the literature review.

Putin plays an important role in this geopolitical discourse. Putin and Russia are interchangeably used to refer to the same identity, being the radical Other that is frustrated by the past. By using Putin as the subject, the narrative seems to embody and personalize an enemy. This creates a stronger sense of Russia being ‘the villain’ of the piece, which limits the ability of self-reflection. Criticizing the Dutch and European foreign policies is consequently portrayed as choosing ‘the side of Putin’. Further, the debate continues this narrative as many parties articulate the treat of Russia to other countries. The crisis of Ukraine is not portrayed as a unique case. Rather, this narrative explains it in a context of different (possible) invasions and conflicts, as seen in the next fragment:

In 2008 the tanks [of Russia] rolled into Georgia. In 2013, green men appeared in the Crimea. This was followed by the hybrid warfare in eastern Ukraine. […] Moldova threatens to be next on Putin’s chessboard, possibly as a springboard to the Balkans (my emphasis) (Knops for CDA, 01.04.2015).

The image of Russia being the villain and the aggressor is naturalized through the use of metaphors. ‘Putin’s chessboard’ and the ‘springboard to the Balkans’ in the passage above suggest that Russia will likely interfere with other countries that used be part of the Soviet Union, creating the image of a bigger threat. Also the VVD enforces and embodies this narrative by using a metaphor: “The recent territorial expansion [the annexation of the Crimea] apparently acts as a painkiller” (my emphasis) (Ten Broeke for VVD, 23.04.2014). The comparison to a drug implies that the annexation of the Crimea is just a temporary solution to ease the pain of Russia having lost its empire and power in the 20th century. Hence, the dominant geopolitical discourse portrays Russia as a threat to the European continent. This narrative
is very consistent in the debates on Ukraine. Multiple times, politicians enforce it by using phrases like ‘as we all know’, suggesting evidentialities and facts. As a consequence, all Russia’s actions are portrayed as attempts to claim its sphere of influence and to restore the Soviet Union, as seen in the following statement:

*It will not have escaped anyone in this house that* Russia has been struggling for years with the geopolitical reality of the Cold War and losing control over the former spheres of influence. *After the annexation of Crimea, the old Russian empire, to which Putin thinks back with so much nostalgia*, has been restored to its former glory (Ten Broeke for VVD, 23.04.2014).

By using the expression ‘it will not have escaped anyone in this house’ a sense of shared common knowledge is created. This again illustrates how politicians can institutionalize a certain definition of ‘the reality’ through discourse, which, through repetition, results in a discursive hegemony. Moreover, this creates not only a clear difference between the Self and the radical Other, but it also puts Ukraine closer to the Self, as Russia is casted as a shared enemy.

Besides these geopolitical aspects, the dominant discourse talks about the kind of actor that the EU is and the values that it stands for. The identity of the Self is thereby clearly constructed in opposition to the radical Other Russia. As a consequence, a division based on values is created between the West and the East and European and non-European. This can be exemplified by the following statement:

*Democracy, free trade, human rights, a rules-based world order and peaceful conflict resolution are beautiful principles, but unfortunately these are no longer self-evident, not even in Europe. They are certainly not in authoritarian countries such as Russia and China (my emphasis)* (Van Helvert for CDA, 20.02.2019).

As Russia’s identity is articulated throughout the debates as untrustworthy, deceptive and violent, this constructs the EU’s identity in opposition: trustworthy, peaceful, fair and honest. This is explicitly done in the example above where the ‘beautiful principles’ are summarized in contrast to Russia. By constituting and maintaining such a normative difference, it also implies that the EU and the Netherlands should defend their values. As evident from this discourse, the values that define Europe are now being threatened in Europe itself. The identity of the Self is thus attacked by the conflict in Ukraine and the role Russia plays in it. This discourse also manifests itself in the discussion on MH17. Russia is believed to not fully cooperate in the investigation, which is framed as a battle of values: “The fight for justice, for the relatives of MH17, is a fight that has become wider. It has become a struggle against factlessness and lawlessness. It has become a struggle against the erosion of international standards” (Sjoerdsma for D66, 31.05.2018). This fragment shows that the discourse constitutes Russia as a threat to the legal and democratic order that Europe stands for. The ‘European’ values are therefore casted as a precondition for action. In this moment of crisis, the Netherlands needs to reaffirm its (European)
identity in contrast to the challenging context of ‘lawlessness and factlessness’. Hence, the construction of the European identity is reflected in and reproduced through Dutch foreign policies. This confirms Hansen’s theory (2016) that the identity of the Self depends on discourse, as it is both invoked as a reason for foreign policies and it is produced and reproduced exactly because it is cast as a reason for action.

The legal narrative about Russia violating international law is a central aspect in the dominant discourse. In this narrative, the Ukrainian crisis, the annexation of the Crimea and the role of Russia in MH17 are described as huge violations of almost all legal instruments that have been built up since the Second World War to ensure stability and peace on the European continent. This creates a geopolitical tension that brings the narrative back to the WWII and the Cold War. As a result, the radical Other is not only Russia, that violates the legal order, but also Europe’s past, that has been full of wars and violence. By articulating the identity of the Self through differentiation against both Europe’s past and ‘authoritarian regimes’ like Russia, this discourse creates a necessity for the EU and the Netherlands to engage actively in Ukraine. The EU is thereby casted as a symbol of peace and law and order that must respond to this new and at the same time familiar geopolitical reality ‘that has been created by Russia’. By constructing the identities of the EU, Russia and Ukraine in such ways, the foreign policies towards Russia of both sanctions and diplomacy are legitimized as the logical and right response. As evident from this discourse, sanctions are necessary because of Russia’s attitude and role in the conflict, and diplomacy because – in contrast to Russia and Europe’s past – the EU now solves conflicts with dialogues and diplomacy. The parties thus uses the stability and peace discourse to legitimize their foreign policies that are all based on the identity construction of Europe being a peaceful and stable continent.

This chapter concludes that the legal and the geopolitical narrative are central in the stability and peace discourse in the Dutch foreign policy debate. In terms of a broader foreign policy discourse, it becomes clear that a development and democracy discourse is reflected in Dutch foreign policy, through the references to help eliminate corruption in Ukraine and to support those demonstrating against a suppressing regime. An important aspect of this is the construction of Ukraine, the Other, as slowly progressing towards the Self. The narrative of the EU that has embraced certain values and established a legal order after a violent past, in combination with the narrative of neighboring countries (Others) that are trying to get there, is shaping the foreign policy debate on Ukraine. At the same time, a crucial element in the dominant discourse is the role of Russia as the radical Other. The Dutch foreign policies thus rely upon a discourse that constitutes, produces and maintains the identities of the Self (the developed and democratic West), the Other (Ukraine) and the radical Other (Russia). These identities are invoked to define and legitimize foreign policies, but as the same time they are produced and reproduced because they are invoked as preconditions for those policies (Hansen, 2016). Hence, this
chapter established that the development and democracy discourse and the stability and peace discourse of parties both in the Parliament and Government are strongly reflected in the Dutch foreign policy debate. The next chapter discusses the marginalized parties that challenge this dominant discourse and deliver oppositional discourses to further answer the research question “Whether and how are discourses reflected in the Dutch foreign policy debate since the Ukrainian Crisis?”.
6. ‘There are two sides to every story’: oppositional discourses

The previous chapter discussed the dominant discourses that are reflected in the Dutch foreign policy debate. However, there are also marginalized parties that present oppositional discourses. Though these discourses may not directly be reflected in the policies at the moment, they are important because they do shape and influence the political context in which Dutch foreign policy is created. Moreover, it is important to analyze them, not only to establish the hegemonic power of the dominant discourse, but also because a discourse is not set and can change. These marginal discourses might therefore become dominant in time. Hence, this chapter discusses the oppositional discourses that are reflected in the debate on Ukraine. In the Dutch parliament, the parties that mainly challenge the dominant discourse and therefore often get marginalized are the SP, PVV, FvD and PvdD.

The oppositional parties present a different narrative on what happened during the Ukrainian crisis. In contrast to the dominant discourse, the SP and the PvdD emphasize the democratic legitimacy of President Yanukovych. Here we are told that President Yanukovych had to flee despite his willingness to come to an agreement with the opposition: “They decided to hold early elections, but one day later the democratically elected president was chased away after one of the opposition parties rejected the agreement” (my emphasis) (Thieme for PvdD, 05.03.2014). This changes the dominant identity construction of Yanukovych being the undemocratic leader that was unwilling to listen and suppressing his people. Moreover, the SP and the PVV stress that it is not sure who caused all the violence at the Maidan square. In this narrative, the protestors are not casted as the peaceful Other who desire European values, as seen in the following statement: “There are also simply rioters, right-wing forces (my emphasis) (Van Bommel for SP, 20.02.2014). This narrative is enforced by expressions that suggest factuality: “The point, of course, is that there must be a fair representation of things in which we should not pretend that everyone who goes out onto the street has an agenda that the West, Europe, should endorse” (my emphasis) (Van Bommel for SP, 20.02.2014). In this way, the oppositional parties can be perceived as trying to change the construction of the Ukrainian people as the Other versus Yanukovych as the radical Other.

Further in the debates, the new Ukrainian government is also portrayed differently than in the dominant discourse. The marginalized parties talk about the ‘anti-Semitic, racist and xenophobic views’ of Svoboda, one of the parties in the Government that has acquired a strong position in Ukraine. As the foreign policy of financial aid relies upon the identity representation of the new Ukrainian government being more like the Self, choosing ‘European values’ and improving the situation, this policy becomes questioned when changing the identity construction: “We know Svoboda as an ultranationalist, homophobic and anti-Semitic party. To whom does the European Union intend to provide support of billions of euros?” (my emphasis) (Thieme for PvdD, 05.03.2014).
The main oppositional parties thus challenge the dominant representation of Ukraine choosing the European model. In this narrative, they cast Ukraine as a highly corrupt country, where human rights, animal rights and political freedoms are not respected. This is illustrated in the following excerpt from the debate on the AA with Ukraine: “It is about trade with the most corrupt country on the European continent […] The problem is that Ukraine is structurally ignoring human rights, animal welfare and environmental rules.” (Thieme for PvdD, 21.02.2017). By introducing new ‘facts’, the oppositional parties stress that ‘they’ are not like ‘us’. Hence, in contrast to the dominant discourse, the oppositional discourse separates the Self from the Other, as seen in the following statement: “The PVV does not feel any cultural connection with these countries, where there is corruption in all capillaries of the society” (my emphasis) (Beertema for PVV, 01.04.2015). According to the literature, the goal of oppositional foreign policy discourses is to propose different policies. This often involves attacking and rearticulating the representations of identity, that underlie a certain foreign policy (Hansen, 2013). The challenging identity representations of Ukraine presented by marginalized parties confirm this theory. As a consequence, these parties legitimize their position against the AA with Ukraine. They criticize the ‘shared values’ that are portrayed to be the precondition for cooperation in the dominant discourse: “There is no so-called cultural connectivity, whereas it is precisely this cultural connection that forms the basis for political cooperation” (my emphasis) (Beertema for PVV, 01.04.2015).

Hence, competing discourses can construct the same signs to different effects. Where corruption and violation of rights are used as reasons to engage in the dominant discourse, they are used by the marginalized parties as reasons not to do so. Moreover, by saying that they wish not to be associated with corruption, child labor and oligarchs, the parties reinforce the identity representation of the Self as a protector of human and animal rights. The same dominant identity construction of the Self is therefore used in the oppositional discourse to challenge the Dutch foreign policies. The difference in the two lines of arguments lies in whether Ukraine is portrayed as being able and willing to change and whether it is the task of the EU. As evident from the oppositional discourse, the Other (Ukraine) is not only not like the Self, but is also not going to change. For example, the PVV concludes that political integration with Ukraine will never have any chance by comparing Ukraine to countries that are considered ‘radical Others’ in the dominant discourse: “According to Transparency International, Ukraine became even more corrupt in 2014. The country scores even worse than among others Nigeria, Iran, Russia and Morocco” (my emphasis) (Beertema for PVV, 01.04.2015). By using the identity construction of other countries that are apparently clearly different from the Netherlands, this comparison distances the Other even further from the Self.

Besides this focus on corruption and values, the oppositional discourse presents Ukraine as a highly divided nation. Here, we are told that there is a strong internal division: The population of […] Ukraine
is very divided about whether to establish closer ties with Russia or with Europe (Van Bommel for SP, 01.04.2015). As a consequence, the identity construction of ‘the common Ukrainian people choosing the European way’ is changed, because the oppositional discourse splits the Ukrainian people into two. As evident from this discourse, the Ukrainian people are not one subject that can be contrasted against Yanukovych’ regime and Russia. The SP uses expressions of self-evidentialities to enforce the narrative that the Ukrainian people are divided amongst themselves, as seen in the following excerpt from the debate about cooperation with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia: “It is about a population that wants to enter into two different orientations. This sometimes literally translates to areas in these countries. We have named them for Moldova, we know them for Georgia and Ukraine” (my emphasis) (Van Bommel for SP, 02.04.2015).

The narrative continues that, because of this division, the people of Ukraine find themselves torn between two superpowers. Hence, it portrays the Ukrainian crisis as a geopolitical battle between both the EU and Russia. Not only the actions of Russia, but also the actions of the EU are portrayed as attempts to increase the sphere of influence. Moreover, the marginalized parties use this narrative to criticize the lack of self-reflection from the EU, as illustrated in the following excerpt from a debate on the developments in Ukraine: “Instead of reflecting on the EU’s own share in the run-up to this annexation […] the EU is steadily continuing tug-of-war for influence in Ukraine” (De Roon for PVV, 20.03.2014). This narrative is enforced by the use of different metaphors:

The signing of political parts of the Association Agreement with Ukraine, the granting of unilateral tariff preferences and the holding of a 13 billion sausage to Ukraine are examples of this [tug of war]. This reinforces the image in Russia of the European child molester in Brussels that offers Ukraine sweets. (De Roon for PVV, 20.03.2014).

By comparing the financial aid to a sausage and the EU to a child molester that offers sweets, these metaphors give the impression that the EU’s foreign policies can – and maybe should – be interpreted in a similar way as the EU interprets Russia’s actions, namely as provocative and geopolitical. Though there is common understanding on the role of Russia in the parliamentary debates, illustrating the hegemonic power of the dominant discourse, the oppositional discourse is in stark contrast with the dominant discourse regarding the role of the EU. Some metaphors consistently come back in the oppositional discourse to enforce their argumentation. For example, the EU and the Netherlands are said ‘to add fuel to the fire’ with their foreign policies. Moreover, ‘tug of war’ is commonly used, as seen in the example above as well. This metaphor literally pits two teams against each other in a test of strength, which implies that there is a struggle between the EU and Russia for supremacy and control.

In line with this geopolitical discourse that is naturalized and illustrated through various metaphors, the marginalized parties stress that the EU should not try to ‘outbid’ Russia, as this will only contribute to
a further rupture and destabilization of Ukraine. The representation of the Other as a divided country and the Ukrainian crisis as a geopolitical battle between the EU and Russia, thus has consequences for which policies seem reasonable. As evident from the oppositional discourse, the AA and the involvement of the EU will further increase the divisions in Ukraine instead of promoting stability. Hence, there is a strong focus on stability and de-escalation. As can be remembered from the previous chapter, the signs of stabilization and de-escalation were also central in the dominant discourse. However, the marginalized parties use them to question the Dutch foreign policies. They argue that the policies often fail to fit the peace and stability discourse that is dominantly carried out by the Government and other parties, as seen in this example: “My party […] cannot quite reconcile the call for de-escalation with the billions of support that the EU wants to give Ukraine” (Thieme for PvdD, 05.03.2014). In this way, the AA, the sanctions against Russia and the financial support to Ukraine are all challenged as they are said to not serve the Dutch and European interest of stability in the region. This is strengthened by the constant use of expressions suggesting common knowledge and factuality, such as ‘We have seen where divisions on European issues have led to in Ukraine’ or ‘with the lesson of Ukraine in mind’.

To conclude, there are two narratives central in the main oppositional discourse: Ukraine as a divided, unstable and corrupt country, and the geopolitical battle between the EU and Russia. As a result, the marginalized parties question the engagement logic that underlies the dominant foreign policy discourse in the Dutch parliament. Following the same signs of geopolitics, de-escalation and stability, the oppositional discourse criticizes the official foreign policies. Hence, the stability narrative is a central aspect of both the dominant and the oppositional discourse, though it is used to a different end. The main difference is in the identity construction of Ukraine and the emphasis that marginalized parties place on the questionable role of the EU. This chapter therefore showed again how identity-policy constructions – articulated through discourses – are crucial for defining and legitimizing foreign policies. It also became clear that all parties seems to agree on the role of Russia in the conflict. In that regard, the foreign policy discourse has a strong hegemony in the Dutch parliament. Moreover, the analysis showed that the dominant and the oppositional discourses are both very geopolitical. In Chapter 7 we will see how the Government responds to these geopolitical discourses, how the financial aspects are talked about, and how the official foreign policy discourse developed overall since the Ukrainian crisis.
7. The Dutch foreign policy discourse: changes and continuities

This chapter discusses the changes and continuities in the official foreign policy discourse to see how Dutch foreign policy has developed since the Ukrainian crisis. This gives insights in whether and how the discourses of political parties in parliament can influence and transform the official foreign policy discourse. More broadly, it says something about the role of the parliament in Dutch foreign policy. This is important, because this thesis not only studies the role of discourse in foreign policy, but also aims to contribute to the literature on Dutch foreign policy. As set out in the literature review, there is a tendency to focus on a certain continuum of Dutch foreign policy. However, it becomes clear that there are important changes in the official foreign policy discourse since the Ukrainian crisis. This chapter therefore starts with a discussion of the official foreign policy discourse and how this has changed. Moreover, it elaborates on the commitment to international cooperation and the relationship between the Netherlands and the EU.

While the discourses of the political parties in the opposition focusses on the geopolitical aspects of the relationship with Ukraine, as described in Chapter 5 and 6, the foreign policy discourse of the Government starts from an economic perspective. The Government’s communication strategy regarding the AA referendum reveals that it wants to discourage an emphasis on geopolitical arguments. This also becomes clear in the analysis of the debates. In stark contrast to the more normatively driven discourses, the Government talks about economic interests and trade. It describes the AA with Ukraine mainly as a common trade agreement. According to the Government, the AA is about easy trade for the Netherlands and stability for Ukraine, which again is portrayed to serve the Dutch economic interest. This trade discourse is illustrated by the VVD in the following excerpt from a debate on the situation in Ukraine:

> The Netherlands has an interest in a stable Ukraine […]. Otherwise the foreign investors leave. […] No fewer than 250 Dutch companies are active in Ukraine. They now see their investments going up in the smoke that rises from the Maidan square (my emphasis) (Ten Broeke for VVD, 20.02.2014).

As seen in this fragment, the importance of international stability and cooperation is viewed from a perspective of economic pragmatism. As evident from this discourse, international trade has made the Netherlands successful and Europe stable. Hence, the official discourse presents the promotion of foreign trade and investment as the main objective of foreign policy. This confirms that the trade discourse is dominant in defining and reflecting Dutch foreign policies, like Ter Haar (2017) and Rood (2011) suggested.

However, because of the huge societal impact of MH17 and the sudden involvement in the Ukrainian conflict, this focus on economic pragmatism becomes fundamentally questioned. The MH17 crash
forms a critical juncture in the Dutch foreign policy discourse, which forces the Government to let go of the emphasis on trade: “It is no longer about trade interests and contracts, but about fundamental political security issues and about legal and humanitarian issues” (Timmermans as MFA, 29.07.2014). The Minister of Foreign Affairs clearly states this change as he reports on a meeting with the Foreign Affairs Council in the EU: “I have said once and again that the Dutch government makes geopolitical, humanitarian and legal arguments prevail over business arguments” (Timmermans as MFA, 29.07.2014). This shows how MH17 became a critical moment for Dutch foreign policy in which the geopolitical narrative took over the trade narrative in the official discourse. This is remarkable, because, as set out in the literature review, trade and economic interests are two central drivers of Dutch foreign policy. Rood (2011) even argued that this economic focus had become stronger over the last years with the liberal VVD being the biggest political party in the Netherlands. However, the analysis shows that this changed again after MH17 when the geopolitical discourse of parties such as D66, PVDA and GroenLinks was suddenly better able to define the ‘reality’. As a consequence, the Government’s trade discourse became constrained and limited by the interaction with the opposition’s dominant discourse in parliament. MH17 became about a choice between economic interests and norms and values. As a result, the Government made a discursive turn towards geopolitics.

Later, when the Dutch public rejects the AA, the Government continues this discursive shift in its official foreign policy discourse. Instead of the focus on economic interests, as evident from the trade discourse earlier, the Government now fully incorporates the geopolitical narrative. It tells us that there are ‘great interests’ at stake and that this vote has to be viewed in the context of a changed ‘international reality’ that was created by Russia. When the Government explains it reasons for not rejecting the AA despite the outcome of the referendum, the Prime Minister uses expressions of self-evidentialties to institutionalize this geopolitical discourse: “It simply has to do with one important fact: at the moment, Russia is a threat to the security order of the whole of Europe” (my emphasis) (Rutte as PM, 08.11.2016). He continues to emphasize the Dutch security interest and compares the situation to a burglar in your street:

This is a direct existential interest of the Netherlands. If someone invades your neighbor, you can of course choose to shrug your shoulders, but you cannot shirk it, because before you know it, it will become a habit throughout the whole street” (my emphasis) (Rutte as PM, 08.11.2016).

This metaphor suggests that if the Netherlands refuses the AA, this would directly lead to instability and security issues throughout Europe (the whole street). Though this argumentation could surely be questioned, the use of metaphors and expressions suggesting facts does strengthen it.
This geopolitical discourse also implies a need for international cooperation: “The only answer to this Russian attitude is European unity” (Rutte as PM, 08.11.2016). This is directly linked to the position of the Netherlands in the international community. “As a country, we are also part of a broader international community that fights as one front for stability on our borders and against aggression in the world” (Rutte as PM, 28.10.2016). The EU therefore takes a central position in the official foreign policy discourse. It is casted as an important and political organization that needs to defend its values and take its responsibility in mediating and de-escalating the conflict. The discourse of the Government appeals to the EU and its member states to ‘form one front’ and take a strong position towards Russia and Ukraine. As seen in Chapter 5, most parties in the Dutch parliament also present this engagement discourse. From the literature, we know that the Netherlands has a strong tendency of supporting international organizations in its foreign policies. This is consistent with its call for a European response.

However, this commitment to international cooperation seems to be used sometimes to bypass critique and policy proposals of the opposition. In the case of the AA referendum for example, the Government tells us that it would lose its ‘entree ticket’ to the EU’s negotiation table if it would reject the AA. By using this metaphor of ‘entree ticket’, it portrays the Netherlands as a rather powerless country in the EU context that could easily be left out by the other member states. The discourse of the Government constructs the identity of the Netherlands as a small country and the EU as an influential actor that is needed for the stability and prosperity, which can be seen in the following fragment:

*The fact that a small country such as the Netherlands is assured and embedded in European cooperation [...] is of vital importance to Dutch interests. This also means that a country must make sure that it does everything it can to not harm the geopolitical impact that Europe can have* (my emphasis) (Rutte as PM, 08.11.2016).

The EU is said to be ‘vital’ for the Netherlands to remain stable and secure, thereby naturalizing the existence of a ‘Russian threat’. As evident from the official discourse, the Netherlands should therefore invest in its membership and not reject the AA. As the Government’s trade discourse was apparently not able to persuade the Dutch public to vote in favor of the agreement, this geopolitical discourse can be perceived as a new attempt to legitimize the Dutch foreign policy. The marginalized parties contest this reasoning as the representation of the Netherlands clashes with the traditional role conception of the Netherlands as an active and quite influential state, despite some limitations such as the country’s size (Voorhoeve, 1979; Baehr, 1980; Thies, 2010). Regardless of this critique on the identity construction and role conception of the Netherlands as a small country, most parties do agree upon the Government’s appeal to a strong EU in foreign policy. This is illustrated by the reaction of the party leader of the CDA: “We are the sixth economy of Europe and the fifth economy of the euro zone, *so we are not a small country, but we do have a very strong interest in European unity*” (my emphasis) (Buma, 08.11.2016).
Hence, the official foreign policy discourse confirms the argument that Dutch foreign policy is firmly grounded in a need to play an active role in international cooperation (Arts, Kleistra, Klem & Rem, 2011). Cooperation with the EU has been a cornerstone of Dutch foreign policy. This remains to be the case after the Ukrainian crisis, though this might be used sometimes to circumvent criticism and oppositional discourses. However, the analysis indicates that this commitment to international cooperation is not anymore as self-evident as suggested in the literature. There is a battle in the Dutch foreign policy debate between this focus on international cooperation and what Ter Haar (2017) called a ‘withdrawal logic’. The PVV stresses that international engagement comes at the expense of the ordinary Dutch people, who – as evident from this discourse – already suffer economically. Though the PVV is the strongest presenter of this withdrawal discourse, it sometimes finds support from other parties. The CU for examples enforces this narrative by the use of a ‘train’ metaphor: “Somewhere along the way, the European Union has forgotten its citizens, while the train of European integration rumbles on” (Voordewind for CU, 21.02.2017). This creates the image of an unstoppable, ever continuing process of European integration, which ‘the people’ are said to be done with. Hence, while Dutch foreign policy used to rely upon a permissive consensus as set out in the literature review, the developments in the foreign policy debate show that this is changing. The PvdD illustrates this when the party leader tells us that ‘the numbers of the referendum were more than clear’ and that these are ‘crashing figures for those who thought that the population was all fine with it’ (Thieme for PvdD, 13.04.2016).

In order to establish whether and how discourses are reflected in Dutch foreign policy, it was important to see how the Dutch foreign policy discourse developed since the Ukrainian crisis. Therefore this chapter discussed the changes and continuities in the official foreign policy discourse. For a long time, the Government avoided the geopolitical narrative that was dominant in the Dutch foreign policy debate. On the contrary, the Government’s trade discourse focused on the economic benefits of international cooperation and stability. However, the dominance of the geopolitical and normative discourse in the Parliament seems to have contributed to a change in the Government’s foreign policy discourse. The MH17 crash and the outcome of the AA referendum were two crucial moments for this change. Especially the MH17 can be seen as a critical juncture after which the trade discourse of the Government got fundamentally questioned. It resulted in a different approach to Dutch foreign policy in which values gained importance compared to trade. This not only tells us something about how Dutch foreign policy is developing, but also illustrates that the parties in the opposition are important in shaping and reflecting the Dutch foreign policy discourse. Hence, this chapter showed that not only the Government, but also party political orientation and parliamentary debates can be important in Dutch foreign policy. Chapter 8 will elaborate on this and present the conclusion of this study.
8. Conclusion

This study has evaluated the question “Whether and how are discourses reflected in the Dutch foreign policy debate since the Ukrainian Crisis?”. For this purpose, it has conducted a discourse analysis of parliamentary debates in the Netherlands. The selection of debates was based on defined key moments. This study was inspired by the work of Hansen (2013, 2016). She argued that representations of identity and policy are linked through discourse and used to legitimize foreign policies. Moreover, it was argued that, rather than the traditional and narrow focus on governments, foreign policy should be studied within a wider discursive field. This thesis therefore aimed to establish whether discourses of political parties in the Parliament matter, and how discourse and identity play a role in the construction and legitimation of Dutch foreign policies. It revealed that the geopolitical and normatively driven discourses influenced and constrained the official foreign policy discourse. In this process, MH17 was indicated as a critical juncture after which the Government was forced to change its trade discourse. Regarding the role of discourse in foreign policy, this thesis concluded that identity-policy constructions – articulated through discourses – are crucial for defining and legitimizing foreign policies.

Based on the discourse analysis, it can be concluded that a ‘development and democracy’ and a ‘stability and peace’ discourse are reflected in the Dutch foreign policy debate on Ukraine. These discourses are presented and reproduced by a majority of the political parties. As a consequence, they create a discursive hegemony and marginalize parties that do not follow this ‘common sense’. An important element is the narrative that the EU overcame a violent past and now stands for its ‘European’ norms and values. Ukraine is portrayed as collectively choosing this European model, thereby linking the Other to the Self. This narrative implies a need to engage and cooperate that is strongly reflected in Dutch foreign policy. At the same time, the role of Russia as the radical Other is crucial for embodying an enemy and defining a common and clear threat. This puts Ukraine, as the Other, even closer to the Self. The identities of the Self (the developed and democratic West), the Other (Ukraine) and the radical Other (Russia and the Yanukovych regime) are constantly constituted, produced and maintained in the Dutch parliament. They are invoked to define and legitimize foreign policies, but simultaneously they are produced and reproduced exactly because they are used as reasons for those policies. Hence, this thesis confirms Hansen’s theorizing (2016) on the role of discourse and identity in foreign policy. Moreover, the discourse analysis yielded further evidence for the argument that Dutch foreign policy is driven by an engagement logic (Ter Haar, 2017).

The analysis also showed that there are oppositional discourses reflected in the Dutch foreign policy debate. These discourses challenge the identity-policy constructions that are articulated in the dominant discourse and used to legitimize Dutch foreign policies. Changing the identity representation of the Other, the marginalized parties argue that Ukraine is a divided, unstable and corrupt country, separating
the Self from the Other. They use it to question the engagement logic that underlies the dominant discourse and official foreign policies. Moreover, through a geopolitical discourse, they point out the EU’s role in this geopolitical conflict and the lack of self-reflection. Hence, these parties present alternative perspectives on the conflict in Ukraine and Dutch foreign policy. Nevertheless, the results also indicate that all parties condemn the role of Russia and more or less construct it as the radical Other. In that regard, the foreign policy discourse has a strong hegemony in the Dutch parliament.

To conclude, the political parties in the Dutch parliament matter as actors in Dutch foreign policy. Under the pressure of their dominant discourses, the economic pragmatism of the Government became untenable. As a consequence, the Government made a discursive shift towards geopolitics. Though this study confirms the argument that trade is one of the central drivers of Dutch foreign policy, it also indicates a turn away from this economic emphasis after the Ukrainian crisis. The MH17 crash and the outcome of the AA referendum were two crucial moments for this change, providing evidence for Hansen’s (2013) argument on the importance of key events in foreign policy. Especially MH17 can be seen as a critical juncture as it forced the Government to transform its official foreign policy discourse from trade to the geopolitical discourse that dominates the debate. Hence, this study concludes that the Parliament and the political opposition matter in Dutch foreign policy, because they influenced a discursive shift of the Government. However, the findings of this study also show that there are limits to this influence. Despite the shift in the Government’s discourse, there was no real change in the Dutch foreign policies. This became very clear in Chapter 7, as the Government used the dominant discourse to legitimize its foreign policy decision to stay supportive of the AA. Hence, this ‘new’, official and geopolitical discourse was mainly used to legitimize the same policies and to bypass criticism from oppositional discourses.

This thesis has contributed to the gap in the literature on the role of discourses and political parties in foreign policy. This is important because the literature tends to focus on the government, or, when a wider array of actors is considered, on the media and public opinion. However, it rarely recalls the parliament and oppositional political parties as important actors. This contribution therefore added to our knowledge on whether and how political parties in parliament reflect and shape foreign policies. It is, however, important to recognize the limitations of this study. The most important limitation stems from the research design. Because Dutch foreign policy on Ukraine was used as a single case to illustrate the role of discourse in foreign policy, the conclusions of this study are limited to this specific context and cannot be generalized. To make generalizing conclusions on what this means for foreign policy more broadly, more research is needed on the role of parliaments and political parties in other contexts. In terms of future research agendas there should be more work on this in other countries. Nevertheless, while the chosen research design limits the generalizability of the results, this study did provide new insights into the role of discourse in the wider political debate in the Netherlands.
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## Appendix: List of sources

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