Creating Unity to Ensure Support: Member States’ Positions towards NATO after ‘Crimea’

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Abstract

Since the end of the Cold War, a debate about a new security role for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has continuously taken place, outside and inside the alliance. Noetzel & Schreer (2009) have shown that NATO even became divided in different camps of member states, each opting for another direction the organization should take in the twenty-first century. The annexation of Crimea by Russia, four years ago, has put NATO’s traditional position vis-à-vis Russia back in the spotlights. Academic agreement on the necessity of NATO to refocus on Russia was quickly reached afterwards. The position of NATO’s separate member states, however, has been so far neglected in this regard. This paper, therefore, researches the question how the annexation of Crimea has changed member states’ positions towards NATO. By using the theoretical model of Noetzel & Schreer and analysing policy documents of nine NATO member states, it finds that member states’ positions towards the alliance have converged in the aftermath of the annexation, without taking a pure focus on Russia. Rather, the broad security role NATO developed after the Cold War is being confirmed. This can, remarkably, best be attributed to NATO’s Eastern member states, which have widened their positions towards the alliance in order to ensure support of other member states in their response to the Russian threat. This finding gives ground to the debate about NATO’s security role and raises questions about the realist notion that states solely engage in alliances to balance against common threats.
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Introduction

With the annexation of the Ukrainian peninsula Crimea in 2014, the Russian Federation showed its teeth to the world in an attempt to (re-)claim its position on the global political stage. Promulgated by ‘justifications’ as the historical and geopolitical relationship between the country and Crimea, its Crimea-based fleet, maritime territorial claims (Biersack & O’Lear, 2014) and a quickly organized referendum, Russia left the West behind in a bewildered way. The United States (US) and European Union (EU), considering the annexation as unacceptable and illegal, responded by imposing sanctions. The United Nations (UN), adopting a resolution of its General Assembly on the annexation, classified the referendum held in Crimea as invalid (2014). The illegality of the annexation by Russia has been confirmed by international law scholars as well (Grant, 2015). Nevertheless, four years later, the conflict in Eastern Ukraine is still ongoing and the Russians remain to be at odds with the West.

In this context, special attention has been paid to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Established in 1949, NATO fulfilled a key role during the Cold War as a collective defence mechanism against Russia. The fall of the Berlin Wall and, correspondingly, the end of the Cold War, removed this task of the alliance to the background. Subsequently, NATO was active in Kosovo and, after invoking its famous Article 5 for the first time in history in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US, Afghanistan. As such, the security role of the organization was broadened from a pure focus on collective defence towards participation in international peace operations and stabilization and humanitarian missions. That did, however, not happen without a struggle between NATO’s member states. Noetzel & Schreer (2009) identified different tiers within the alliance, consisting of camps of separate member states, each having a different conception about what NATO’s post-Cold War security role should look like. The United States, Canada and the United Kingdom pushed for a broadening of NATO’s tasks, while Western European member states preferred a more cautious development, and members on the Eastern part of NATO’s territory urged to keep a focus on collective defence against Russia, which they still considered necessary.

The annexation of Crimea by Russia has proven the fear of NATO’s Eastern member states to be justified. Scholars have criticized NATO on its ignorance of the possibility of the revival of a Russian threat (Kroenig, 2015; Kühn, 2015). The alliance would have disregarded its raison d’être, providing collective defence against Russia, prior to the annexation of Crimea (Friis, 2017). A new focus and strategy on the Russian aggression, according to them, is therefore required. It is another question, however, what the positions of NATO’s separate
member states are in this regard. So far, this has been an underexposed topic within the literature, though highly relevant. After all, a debate about whether, and if so: how, NATO should refocus on Russia, at the expense of other tasks it developed during the past three decades, cannot be guided into a politically reachable outcome if the positions of the separate member states are not taken into account. These positions determined which direction NATO has taken after the annexation of Crimea and which direction the organization will take in the near future. As such, research into member states’ positions will provide insight in how member states consider NATO to be a relevant organization in the post-Cold War order, or whether the annexation of Crimea has been a trigger for member states to let NATO return to its Cold War posture, with a strong focus on Russia. Moreover, it will shed light on whether the different tiers NATO was facing before the annexation of Crimea still exist, or whether NATO’s Eastern member states have succeeded in gaining support from other member states in their desire to focus first and foremost on Russia again. From a societal perspective, these elements are valuable to study because they can tell us something about the current threat perception states have in an increasingly unstable world order and the relevance they attribute to international organizations like NATO in (re-)stabilizing that same order, in the aftermath of events like the annexation of Crimea.

It is for these reasons this paper will research how the annexation of Crimea changed member states’ positions towards NATO. In doing so, it adapts and slightly adopts the theoretical model of Noetzel & Schreer (2009), which classified NATO into three different camps of member states. Using this model allows us to test whether the annexation of Crimea has converged member states’ positions vis-à-vis the organization. On the basis of realist assumptions, a convergence of member states’ positions towards the notion that it is necessary for NATO to focus on its collective defence against Russia again is expected. This expectation is tested by analysing policy documents on the topics of defence and security of nine NATO member states. All these member states – the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Italy, Poland, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia – are representatives of the different camps Noetzel & Schreer identify.

The paper is structured in the following manner. Firstly, below, an overview of the literature on the relevance of international organizations and military alliances for member states, and the position of NATO in this regard, will be provided. A gap in the literature will be identified, from which the research question can be derived and academically justified. Afterwards, the theoretical model of Noetzel & Schreer (2009) will be introduced and adapted in order to be able to use it for this research specifically. Three different hypotheses are derived...
from the model and expect a convergence of member states’ positions towards NATO on the issues of NATO’s raison d’être, relationship vis-à-vis the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) of the European Union, and enlargement. A methodological section will show the details of the research conducted. The analytical part of this paper will test the three hypotheses separately for three different groups of member states. This, finally, enables us to answer the research question in a concluding section.

The results give ground to the debate about NATO’s role as security organization vis-à-vis Russia in the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea. It will be shown that the positions of NATO’s member states towards the organization indeed have converged. Consequently, the multi-tier structure of the alliance Noetzel & Schreer (2009) identified has largely disappeared. The convergence of member states’ positions does, however, not look as expected. The annexation of Crimea has increased NATO’s focus on its collective defence mechanism, but rather than moving back to a unilateral focus on Russia, the member states keep opting for a broad security role of the alliance. This can, remarkably, best be attributed to NATO’s Eastern member states. In the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea, with the Russian threat becoming more pertinent for them, they have shown an increased sympathy for a broad security role for NATO. This a move in comparison to the positions they took before the annexation of Crimea, made to ensure themselves of support of other member states and a unified NATO in their response to the Russian threat.

**Literature review**

The notion that sovereign states solely act as individual units, without attributing importance to trans-governmental, international relations, disappeared a long time ago (Keohane & Nye, 1974). The twentieth century faced a large increase in the number, and importance, of international organizations (IOs), with as notable examples the United Nations, World Trade Organization (WTO) and NATO. Meanwhile, more than 260 intergovernmental organizations have been established, in which states have united themselves to discuss matters of global politics (Willetts, 2014, p. 321). The reason for the rise of these international organizations at the global political stage has been a central issue of debate within the field of International Relations for many years. From its early stage, this debate has been especially formed by the well-known propositions of realists and neoliberal scholars. Both sides tried to explain the raison d’être of international organizations and, as (most) important part thereof, why states created such organizations.
Little (2014, p. 290) provides a useful overview of the general liberal and realist positions in the debate, which is, although originally meant for discussing the existence of international regimes, also applicable to the creation of international organizations. Realists and liberals agree that states create international organizations rationally in an anarchic world system. The former, however, believe states only do so to be able to coordinate and to generate benefits for their own, while members of the latter stress the opportunity for collaboration and the promotion of the common good. This difference between the two camps is also forcefully summarized by Baylis (2014, p. 234), stating that liberals argue ‘that international institutions are much more important in helping to achieve cooperation and stability than structural realists realize’. Over time, institutionalist and economical approaches also developed arguments for the existence of international organizations. Barnett & Finnemore (1999, p. 699) point to this increase of various approaches in the literature by overarchingly stating that most authors ‘explain IO creation as a response to problems of incomplete information, transaction costs and other barriers to Pareto inefficiency and welfare improvements’.

At the end of the 20st century, when states had been members of several international organizations for a few decades already, the debate started to move beyond the creation of international organizations. Abbott & Snidal (1998), for example, dived into the question why states actually kept acting through IOs. They argued that two main features of international organizations, centralization and independence, fostered many advantages for states in a wide range of areas in global politics, making it relevant for states to use them. That way, centralization – ‘a concrete and stable organizational structure and an administrative apparatus managing collective activities’ (p. 9) – can support state interaction by providing a stable negotiation forum, manage substantive operations like UN peacekeeping missions, and pool both assets and risks, which, in turn, also makes interstate, joint production possible, as for example is the case with the European Organization for Nuclear Research (joint atomic research) and NATO (joint military alliance). The independence – ‘the authority to act with a degree of autonomy’ (p. 9) – of international organizations additionally makes sure that this all can be done in a neutral way as well, which lowers the bridge for states to participate and increases the credibility and likelihood of success. Abbott & Snidal (p. 18) also call this ‘laundering’: ‘activities that might be unacceptable in their state-to-state form become acceptable when run through an independent, or seemingly independent IO’, which is neutral and impartial. In addition, the possibility to delegate policies to make use of more specialized knowledge, to increase credibility or to solve disputes has been found to be of relevance for member states of international organizations as well (Hawkins, Lake, Nielson & Tierney, 2006).
In the particular case of China, Kent (2002) has shown that the country furthermore considers membership of IOs as a tool to earn prestige and status, as well as an opportunity to defend the interests of developing countries.

A special connection: international organizations and peace
The relevance of being a member of an international organization for a state can get more concrete in specific sectors. In the trade sector, the WTO, for example, ‘creates a uniform web of trade rules across [its] trading zone and helps to drive down both the rates of tariff applied by countries and the transaction costs of trading firms’ (Hurd, 2011, p. 46). Rose (2005) indeed states that a membership of the WTO, but also of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), generates positive effects for countries’ trade positions as such. A later study confirmed this for the WTO again (Goldstein, Rivers & Tomz, 2007). Mansfield & Reinhardt (2015) extend the argument by showing that such international trade organizations not only increase trade between countries, but also reduce market volatility and assist in providing price stability in that way. Additionally, also a joint membership of countries of social and cultural IOs appeared to foster trade benefits (Ingram, Robinson & Busch, 2005). The International Labour Organization (ILO), in turn, has been relevant for states because it provides them with the opportunity to guarantee labour standards to their citizens, without losing a comparative advantage in this world of trade (Hurd, 2011, pp. 161-162). In the financial realm, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank come into the picture. Both bring the principle of pooling Abbott & Snidal (1998) talked about in practice, by lending capital their member states brought in to countries in need (Hurd, 2011, p. 67).

A central theme in studying the relevance of being a member of international organizations for countries has been the (direct) relationship between IOs and peace. Mansfield & Pevehouse (2000) for example show that IOs play an intermediary role in the relationship between international trade and peace. Without explicitly making a connection to peace, Bearce & Bondanella (2007) find evidence that international organizations make the interests of member states more similar over time, which might lower the likelihood of disputes as well. Others have suggested that a direct link between IOs and peace exists, by arguing that a membership of international organizations strongly reduces the probability for a country to get involved in a military conflict (Oneal & Russett, 1999; 2001). This view has been nuanced a bit by Boehmer, Gartzke & Nordstrom (2004), who state that only international organizations with a security mandate and sophisticatedly developed institutional structures are able to influence disputes. Pevehouse & Russett (2006) responded by showing that IOs with democratic countries
as member states are more likely to maintain peaceful relations. Lupu & Greenhill (2017) argue that it is not particularly a joint membership of IOs that leads to peace among states, but that ‘the pacifying effect of IGO membership [rather] stems from the extent to which pairs of states are more deeply embedded within the wider IGO network’ (p. 833). A counter argument is made by Chapman & Wolford (2010), who do not directly challenge a relationship between international organizations and peace, but state that IOs can also be used by countries to get support for outside war. They conclude that ‘IOs are neither ineffectual, nor universally a force for peace, as their decisions can sometimes raise rather than lower the probability that crisis escalate to war’ (p. 228). This is, however, a somewhat ignored point of view in the literature: although a direct relationship between international organizations and peace thus has been contested, it is generally agreed upon that a connection between the two exists.

Military alliances as peace-enforcing IOs and the case of NATO
Within this connection, a group of scholars has paid special attention to military alliances as IOs. The possible effect of military alliances on interstate conflict, and the benefit of maintaining peace by being a member of them, is reason for a separate debate within the debate shown above (Leeds, 2003). O’Neal, Russett & Berbaum (2003) deny the reducing effect of purely military alliances on conflict. International organizations are only successful in doing so if they also try to consolidate democracy and create economic interdependence. Bearce, Flanagan & Floros (2006), on the other hand, do believe that military alliances reduce the likelihood of interstate conflict, because they provide ‘information [about each other’s military capabilities] to participants, and greater knowledge within the alliance about member-state capabilities reduces certain informational problems that could potentially lead to war’ (p. 595). Others have suggested that trade is a crucial component: military alliances maintain peace only if there is a sufficient amount of international trade between the allies (Jackson & Nei, 2015). Leeds (2003) himself initially took an intermediary position. His claim was that it depends on the treaty of the alliance whether it serves to deter or encourage conflict and, thus, whether or not it does so. In a later co-study, he did acknowledge the deterrent function of alliances in maintaining peace. Moreover, he and his co-authors claimed that these alliances ‘have an influence well beyond collaborative war fighting and deterrence’ (Fang, Johnson & Leeds, 2014, p. 776). They also have an institutional function in conflict management, both between member states and outside states. Therefore, ‘alliances can be broad institutions for peace that play an important role in maintaining the stability of the international system’ (p. 776).
Probably the best-known example of a military alliance is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The relevance of this international organization has recently become a central issue within the literature again. Since the end of the Cold War, when the direct threat of NATO’s traditional opponent Soviet Union disappeared, it has been contested what exactly the ‘new’ functional benefits of NATO are. Shortly after the end of the Cold War, the end of the organization was even predicted (Mearsheimer, 1990; Waltz, 1993). The opposite appeared to become truth, which has been attributed to NATO’s ability to adapt itself to the new security environment (Wallander, 2000). That being said, the absence of a serious new security threat did keep chasing NATO. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States, when NATO’s famous Article 5 was invoked for the first time in the alliance’s history, it was momentarily thought that ‘terrorism’ could perhaps function as a new opponent in NATO’s utility mechanism (Gordon, 2001). Half a decade later, however, it was argued that ‘NATO plays, at best, a supportive role in US efforts to combat terrorism’ (de Nevers, 2007, p. 34), thereby concluding that a new security threat, necessary for sustaining the value of the organization, was still absent. At the same time, NATO had to face an emerging and further developing European Common Security and Defence Policy, which tried to find its own position in the European security strategy as well, leading to difficulties in the cooperation with NATO (Keohane, 2009). Noetzel & Schreer (2009) show that NATO, without the existence of an existential threat, became disintegrated in three different camps of member states, each pushing the organization in a different way to go: a group of ‘reformist’ countries wanted NATO to adopt a broader security strategy, including the proliferation of nuclear weapons and provision of energy security; a second group of member states preferred to maintain the ‘status quo’, with more eye of the alliance for European interests and, finally, a ‘reversal’ group of particular Eastern European countries wanted to renew the focus on NATO’s Article 5, ‘based on the perception of a resurgent Russian threat’ (p. 216). Such a threat assessment, however, was ‘not shared by major European allies’ (p. 216). In this way, in the ongoing absence of a serious security threat for the organization or, at least, agreement on what such a threat looked like, NATO thus became strongly divided.

New security threat, new strategy
Within the literature, however, agreement about a ‘new’ security threat for NATO was quickly reached after the five-day Russian-Georgian conflict and, especially, the annexation of Crimea by Russia. The latter event truly put NATO’s traditional opponent back in the spotlights of scholars again. Soon after ‘Crimea’, Kroenig (2015), for example, already stated that NATO’s
post-Cold War strategy had totally ignored threats from Russia and had become lapsed for that reason. Kühn (2015) also made a case that NATO lacked a strategy towards Russia. Friis (2017) convincingly argued that NATO disregarded its *raison d’être* prior to the annexation of Crimea: the organization had not paid any attention to its collective defence against Russia.

With the shared assessment of the resurgent Russian threat in mind, a big debate about how to redesign NATO’s strategy immediately started. Kühn (2015) himself advocates a new strategy similar to NATO’s 1967 Harmel one, which combined the security elements of power, order and liberal values in an equal manner. In doing so, NATO can both deter and engage Russia, preventing the country from dividing NATO member states on political and economic issues. The edited volume of Friis (2017), on the other hand, argues that deterrence is only possible if NATO’s collective defence system is a credible one. This, in turn, depends on US’ willingness to provide NATO with a budget and military means, which – so is the argument made – is much more important than NATO’s troop reorganization and therefore needs full attention. Ringsmose & Rynning (2017), however, do not agree with that latter statement. Rather than focussing on budget discussions, according to them, attention should be paid to political guidance for a new strategy. Both US leadership and European willingness are needed in doing so. In more concrete terms about such a new strategy, Kroenig (2015) is a proponent of a strategy in which crisis management, as NATO did in Afghanistan and Libya, and collective defence are downgraded; the former more than the latter. Within the remaining collective defence system, there should be paid more attention to human rights and democracy, instead of to disarmament. Additionally, according to him, NATO’s enlargement ambitions should be scaled back, until it is credible that NATO’s collective defence system for its current members is consolidated. Moreover, among other things, NATO should find a clearer definition of what an ‘attack’ as described in Article 5 contains. Prior (2017) believes that NATO needs more focus on resilience, for which it will be necessary to think beyond Article 5: to reach the goal of collective defence in this ‘hyper-connected and interdependent world’ (p. 3), NATO must be able to engage with a broader range of actors, as for example non-state actors. Shifrinson (2017) points to the fact that the Russian threat is most pertinent in the Eastern European states. However, so is his argument, the Baltic states are not really of interest for the United States, NATO’s largest and most important member state. Therefore, it is questionable whether the US is willing to live up the security guarantees it currently provides to the Baltics via NATO. This doubt weakens NATO’s credibility. In a new NATO strategy, the Baltic states should get less attention for that reason. Shifrinson himself, however, acknowledges
immediately that support for such a strategy is politically impossible to reach within the organization, due to the possibility for the Baltic countries to veto such a policy decision.

The aftermath of Crimea: towards a converged NATO again?
By admitting the unlikeliness of putting his argument into practice, because of the Baltics’ views, Shifrinson indirectly points to a very fair point: the interests of NATO’s separate member states. As shown above, after the annexation of Crimea, there has been written a lot about strategies NATO should take to respond to the Russian threat. The common agreement clearly is that a new, or revived, Russian security threat for NATO, which surfaced with the annexation of Crimea, also asks for a new strategy. Within this debate, however, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the positions of NATO’s separate member states in this regard. As mentioned, the study of Noetzel & Schreer (2009) revealed that NATO, in the absence of (agreement on) a security threat, became disintegrated in different tiers of member states. If a new security threat for NATO exists in the form of Russia since the annexation of Crimea, as the literature has agreed on, it becomes an interesting question whether the positions of NATO’s member states towards the organization have then converged again.

In agreeing on the existence of a resurgent Russian threat and starting the debate about which new strategy NATO should take in response to this, scholars have too easily ignored that question. Answering this question should have been the first step taken, because, in order to be able to debate about a strategy NATO should take, it is necessary to know more about the separate positions of NATO’s member states towards the organization; especially when these positions before the annexation of Crimea were diverged. After all, the member states will be the ones who will form a NATO strategy, and a unified NATO is essential in doing so. Except for a Dutch advisory board, which officially advises the Dutch government on matters of international affairs and briefly mentioned member states’ interests within NATO in one of its reports (Adviesraad voor Internationale Vraagstukken, 2017, pp. 37-40), no study has researched member states’ positions towards NATO and whether these have changed since the Russian threat resurfaced with the annexation of Crimea. This is a gap in the literature, that needs to be addressed. Therefore, the research question of this paper will be:

*How has the annexation of Crimea changed member states’ positions towards NATO?*

As shown in this entire section, the view from the literature is that states become members of international organizations because it can be relevant for them in a wide range of areas. Despite the literature’s agreement on the existence of a Russian threat for NATO and the need for a new
strategy, it should not be taken for granted that member states share this conception. The statements of United States’ President Donald Trump, who questioned – despite the annexation of Crimea – the relevance of NATO by calling the organization ‘obsolete’ and asked for NATO-involvement in fighting terrorism, underline this as well (Kaufman, 2017). Conducting research into member states’ conceptions will provide insight in how member states consider the Russian threat and, in that same line, the relevance member states attribute to NATO as a security actor vis-à-vis Russia. In this way, necessary knowledge for the debate about NATO’s strategy towards Russia will be obtained. Additionally, these same insights will contribute to the debate about the relevance of military alliances and, at a more general level, international organizations for states.

**A multi-tier NATO: Noetzel & Schreer’s model applied**

In answering the research question, the framework of Noetzel & Schreer (2009) can be used as a theoretical model. As briefly mentioned in the previous paragraph, they argued that NATO was facing a ‘multi-tier’ structure before the annexation of Crimea. The divided NATO was consisting of a status quo camp, a reversal camp and, finally, a reformer camp of countries. Member states in the latter tier want ‘NATO to take on a broader set of challenges that include combating the proliferation of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons (NBC), tackling the threat of nuclear terrorism and providing energy security’ (p. 215). By propagating for such a role, ‘reformist’ member states clearly desire the alliance to adopt a broader security role than it once had, focussing on a wide range of (new) aspects of importance in global security. NATO should thereby also try to enforce the liberal values of its member states internationally, to maintain the existing international liberal order in world politics.

The status quo tier, secondly, is rather ‘sceptical about [such] a ‘globalized alliance’, in part lest such a move interfere with its desire to strengthen the ESDP\(^1\), but also for fear that such a development might alienate major powers such as Russia and China’ (p. 216). As appears from the focus on the European Common Security and Defence Policy, status quo-oriented members are especially concerned with European interests. This, at the same time, means that they are doubtful, as Noetzel & Schreer put it (p. 216), ‘to see US grand strategic thinking as a framework for their own NATO policy’. Taking in mind United States’ traditional leading role within NATO, this camp of member states could have been labelled as more progressive as

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\(^1\) The ESDP has been renamed CSDP with the establishment of the Lisbon Treaty. ‘ESDP’ is used in quoting Noetzel & Schreer (2009), where CSDP is used anywhere else here.
well. In this regard, it is important to note that ‘status quo’ mainly refers to NATO’s role in global security and the desire not to further widen that one.

Noetzel & Scheers’ third and final tier consists of reversal-oriented member states, which favour ‘an alliance still focused on Article 5, based on the perception of a resurgent Russian threat’ (p. 216). Collective defence, in their opinion, is and should be the central task of the alliance. The desire to take this direction is called ‘reversal’, because NATO had taken a role that included more than a focus on the Eastern part of its territory since the end of the Cold War. Unsurprisingly, the reversal-oriented member states are mainly Eastern European ones. The status quo camp consists of Western member states, like Germany, France, Italy and Spain, while the United States, Britain and to some extent Canada are classified as ‘reformist’ by Noetzel & Schreer.

In arguing that a three-tier-structure of NATO exists, Noetzel & Schreer talk about structural factors that enforce factions within the alliance. Frictions between NATO’s member states presented themselves alongside these structural factors and alongside several (policy) issues related to those structural factors. By looking into to member states’ current positions on some of these issues in more detail, it can be tested whether NATO’s perceived multi-tier structure has been strengthened, stabilized or disappeared after the annexation of Crimea.

**Raison d’être, Europeanization and enlargement**

The structural factors Noetzel & Schreer mention are questions about NATO’s (renewed) *raison d’être*, the use of force and Europeanization. The first one is associated with discussions about NATO’s role as a security actor after the end of the Cold War and the purpose of the organization in the current international order. ‘The use of force’ as a factor is about different conceptions of when and how to use NATO’s potential military power and capabilities in dealing with security challenges. The factor of Europeanization relates to the debate about, on the one hand, United States’ leadership within the alliance and, on the other hand, the relationship between NATO and the Common Security and Defence Policy of the European Union. These structural factors divide the alliance, which becomes visible alongside member states’ positions on policy issues as for example NATO’s *raison d’être*, threat perception, Europeanization, Article 5, enlargement, a ‘Global NATO’, Afghanistan and military capabilities (Noetzel & Schreer, p. 223).

The scope of this paper allows us to choose three issues, each related to one of the three structural factors Noetzel & Schreer identify, on which member states’ current positions can be analysed. The issues picked here are NATO’s *raison d’être*, enlargement and the question of
Europeanization. Needless to say, the first issue is related to the structural factor of *raison d’être* and is, as mentioned before, about the security role member states want NATO to take. The issue of enlargement perfectly fits in the ‘use of force’ factor, because it tells something about member states’ desire to extend the alliance’s military capabilities by permitting new members to join. Finally, within the question of Europeanization, the relationship between CSDP and NATO is at stake, which provides insight in the relevance especially European member states attribute to NATO vis-à-vis a more European security actor.

**Hypotheses**

A (defensive) realist perspective can help us to raise expectations about how the annexation of Crimea have changed member states’ positions towards NATO and how this becomes visible within Noetzel & Schreer’s framework. Before doing so, it is not necessary to go into the well-known basics of realist theory here. What does need to be briefly addressed, however, is the position of international organizations within realist conceptions, which is an ambiguous one. State membership of international organizations as a means of win-win cooperation namely has, traditionally, rather a central place in the liberal realm (Dunne, 2014), while the state-centred realist approach does not automatically coincide with IOs consisting of multiple members. That being said, it has not been contested that realists do perceive international organizations as a tool to combine forces in an official alliance if necessary to balance power. Historically, the establishment of NATO is probably even the best example that fits in this picture (Dunne & Schmidt, 2014). A realist perspective is appropriate here, because its state-centred approach overlaps with the departing point of this paper: not a focus on NATO as organization, but a focus on NATO’s separate member states. Waltz’s (1988, p. 616) defensive remark that ‘the ultimate concern of states is not for power but for security’ is thereby, additionally, leading. In this regard, as Dunne & Schmidt (2014, p. 105) put it, ‘rather than being power maximizers (…), states are [considered to be] security maximizers.’ This is relevant in the case of Crimea, because NATO’s member states’ responding positions will not so much have to do with power, but rather with concerns of security vis-à-vis Russia.

As shown in the literature review in the previous section, the annexation of Crimea by Russia has resurfaced a Russian threat for NATO and its member states. Some have argued that this is an existential threat that NATO’s member states did not face since the end of the Cold War and which needs a response (Kroenig, 2015; Friis, 2017; Kühn, 2015). It is thus in the interest of the member states to deal with the Russian threat and to defend themselves against possible offensive interferences from Russia in or close to their own territory. In their search to
a suitable way of doing so, member states will quickly look to NATO: the collective defence system of the organization, with Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty as cornerstone, can provide them with a solid protection against Russia. The successfulness of NATO in the past to form a collective alliance, dealing effectively with Russia during the Cold War, can convince member states easily that NATO is the best tool for them in responding to the renewed Russian threat, and that it should be NATO’s core task to do so. After all, the organization was once established primarily in an era in which Russia’s threats were the most severe ones in world politics for NATO’s member states. Following this line, it can be expected that member states agreed on the matter that NATO should first and foremost focus on the Russian threat after the annexation of Crimea again. Then, the thesis can be made that the annexation of Crimea has converged member states’ positions towards NATO and that, in Noetzel & Schreer’s terms, the multi-tier structure of NATO has disappeared. This can be established further alongside the three picked issues that were at the basis of this multi-tier structure.

Regarding NATO’s raison d’être, the annexation of Crimea points NATO’s member states to the resurged Russian threat, which needs to be dealt with. The focus on Russia will shift away the discussion about a possible necessary, new and broad security role for NATO, because NATO’s traditional role has become relevant again for the member states. In this light, it is likely that the reversal tier, which primarily consisted out of Eastern European member states before the annexation of Crimea and considers collective defence against Russia as NATO’s central task, will gain support from other member states. This, then, leads to the following hypothesis:

1. The annexation of Crimea has converged member states’ positions on NATO’s raison d’être towards a focus on collective defence against Russia.

In line with this, it might be expected that regarding the question of Europeanization, (European) member states will attribute importance to their membership of NATO vis-à-vis their devotion to the European Common Security and Defence Policy since the annexation of Crimea. This because NATO’s framework has been proven to be an adequate mechanism to deal with Russian threats in the past. Here, the reversal tier of member states would have gained support from other member states after the annexation of Crimea for that reason as well. A second hypothesis can then also be formed:

2. The annexation of Crimea has converged (European) member states’ positions towards importance for NATO vis-à-vis the CSDP.
The issue of enlargement is a slightly different one. From a pure, offensive realist perspective, increasing support for the reversal tier can again be expected: the thesis would then be that NATO’s member states are looking for additional allies with whom they can form a greater block against Russia’s aggression. However, from a more defensive perspective, rather than power, NATO’s member states will be looking for security vis-à-vis Russia. It has been argued that NATO’s enlargement since the end of the Cold War has interfered too much in Russia’s traditional spheres of influence and provoked Russian aggression for that reason (Mearsheimer, 2014). Taking this in mind, it can then rather be expected that the annexation of Crimea has made NATO’s member states aware of the inverted effects of enlargement. This, in turn, would result in more support for the status quo tier than for the reversal camp: NATO should not welcome additional members. A third and final hypothesis can then be formed:

3. The annexation of Crimea has converged member states' positions on enlargement towards the notion that NATO should currently not enlarge itself.

Operationalization of hypotheses
Together, the three hypotheses form a broad claim that the annexation of Crimea has converged NATO’s member states positions towards the organization. It must be stressed that with ‘converged’ it is meant here that member states share a same position towards NATO: they think in the same way about NATO’s raison d’être, the importance of NATO vis-à-vis the CSDP, and enlargement of the alliance. Rather than Noetzel & Schreer’s multi-tier structure, in which NATO existed out of three camps, there is agreement among member states about the direction NATO should take. The three hypotheses thus assume a relationship between the annexation of Crimea on the one hand, and agreement among member states on, respectively, NATO’s raison d’être, the importance of the organization vis-à-vis the CSDP and enlargement on the other hand. The annexation of Crimea thus takes the form of an independent variable here, where member states’ positions about NATO’s raison d’être, importance vis-à-vis the CSDP and enlargement then are the dependent variables. These three latter concepts themselves might need some further clarification as well.

Regarding the first hypothesis, the concept of raison d’être points to the discussion which tasks NATO must perform, and, most importantly, what its current core task is, according to its member states. In Noetzel & Schreer’s classification, member states in the reformer camp opt, as mentioned, for example for a broad security role for NATO. The organization should, in addition to its traditional role of securing collective defence, also focus on the proliferation of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, enforcing liberal values around the world and, to
do so, closing partnerships with other main countries in the world (2009, p. 215). A role for NATO at the southern flank of its European territory, where member states are affected by the European migration crisis and still have to deal with yearly flows of migrants coming from Northern Africa, might more recently be added to this row too. The reversal camp, on the other hand, does not support such a broader security role. Instead, NATO should ‘reset its strategic priorities and make preparations for defence against a conventional threat the centre of NATO defence planning’ (Noetzel & Schreer, p. 216). This conventional threat is, in the eyes of member states belonging to the reversal camp, coming from Russia. To respond to this threat, NATO should increase and extend the troops it has available for territorial defence, and not use these for other purposes (Noetzel & Schreer, p. 216). Rather than broadening NATO’s security role, the alliance should thus foremostly focus on collective defence against Russia. It is this latter notion the first hypothesis expects support for since the annexation of Crimea. The hypothesis, therefore, will be accepted if it appears that NATO’s member states agree that NATO’s most important, current task is the one of collective defence against Russia and that a broader security role for NATO is subordinate to this.

The importance of the Common Security and Defence Policy, as stated in the second hypothesis, relates to what Noetzel & Schreer (p. 221) describe as ‘the inclination of the European political elite to perceive the strengthening of the ESDP as the preferable project’ vis-à-vis NATO to provide security for the European continent. The hypothesis expects, however, that the contrary is the case since the annexation of Crimea: (European) member states would agree that NATO is their most important framework to guarantee the security of the European continent. This can, firstly, be shown if it appears that member states respond to the Russian threat foremost within the NATO framework, and not within the CSDP framework. Secondly, increased attention for NATO by the member states instead of further developing the CSDP – which is, compared to NATO, a relatively new instrument for most member states – can be considered as a sign that member states attribute more importance to NATO vis-à-vis the CSDP as well. Therefore, the second hypothesis will be accepted if it appears that member states consider NATO as a more appropriate framework to respond to the Russian threat and if it appears that they perceive the further development of the CSDP subordinate to NATO’s activities.

The third hypothesis, finally, is straightforward. It expects that NATO’s member states do not want to enlarge the organization by permitting new member states to join. In this regard, it is important to stress that the hypothesis can only be accepted if member states take this position because of the annexation of Crimea, and not regardless of the annexation of Crimea.
It should thus appear that member states’ positions not to enlarge NATO have been caused by the annexation of Crimea, for example because they do not want to provoke additional Russian aggression by enlarging the organization.

Having operationalized the different components in the hypotheses and having established when the hypotheses can be accepted, it is possible to develop a method to test the hypotheses. The next section will elaborate on this.

**Methodology**

Noetzel & Schreer (2009, p. 222) did not classify all NATO member states in their three-tier structure, based ‘on the assumption that on issues of strategic importance major allies form a core of each particular tier around which the smaller allies then group themselves.’ Germany, France, Italy and Spain are labelled as status quo; Poland, Czech Republic and the three Baltic States belong to the reversal tier and the United States, United Kingdom and, to a lesser extent, Canada are part of the group of ‘reformist’ countries (p. 223). In using Noetzel & Schreer’s model to test whether the positions of member states towards NATO have converged after the annexation of Crimea, case studies on these particular member states need to be done. Including other member states in the research will be useless, because the theoretical model does not tell us something about their positions before the annexation of Crimea and cannot help us in testing whether these positions have been changed after the annexation of Crimea for that reason. Therefore, Noetzel & Schreer’s classification of the different member states will be adopted.

To test the three hypotheses, a document analysis of policy documents of NATO’s separate member states is conducted. These documents are a suitable source for testing the hypotheses, because they provide insight in the positions member states take separately from each other, thereby taking their own interests and vision on NATO in mind. The policy documents are analysed on member states’ positions on NATO’s raison d’être, importance vis-à-vis the CSDP and enlargement.

**Data selection**

Documents from all countries mentioned above are analysed, except for three members of the status quo camp: France, Spain and Germany. No official policy documents in the English language are available on their governments’ websites. All policy documents that are analysed are publicly available on the websites of member states’ Ministries of Defence. Documents from these ministries are selected, and not documents of, for example, Ministries of Foreign
Affairs. This because NATO is, as it mentions on its own website, most concerned with security. This is a topic that is most closely related to the Defence Departments of the member states. It can be expected, for that reason, that member states’ positions towards NATO are highlighted into more detail in defence-related policy documents than in policy documents about broader issues of foreign affairs. From all countries, only policy documents published after the annexation of Crimea, which took place in 2014, are selected. Noetzel & Schreer’s framework namely provides us with the overview of member states’ positions towards NATO before the annexation of Crimea. The policy documents, in turn, show member states’ current positions, from which can be observed whether these have been changed or not since the annexation of Crimea.


The documents are selected based on public availability and on their comparability. They all contain member states’ current, most leading views on issues of security and defence. As such, although sometimes labelled differently, all documents form a basis for or are the main source of member states’ defence policies – either explained in military terms for experts in the field (labelled ‘strategy’ or ‘concept’) or for the wider, general public (labelled ‘white paper’). This makes the documents comparable to each other. Lithuania, Latvia and the US have more than one relevant policy document available, which have all been selected, to get the broadest

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2 [https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index.html](https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index.html)
possible insight into their defence policies. From the other countries, just one relevant policy document was publicly available.

**Additional remarks**
Two remarks concerning this methodology must be made. First of all, it is important to have in mind that Italy is the only country from Noetzel & Schreer’s status quo camp that is analysed. In drawing conclusions about the results of the analysis of Italy, it should therefore be taken into account that it might be an oversimplification in this particular case to assume that Italy single-handedly forms, in the absence of France, Germany and Spain, a core ‘around which the smaller allies then group themselves’ (Noetzel & Schreer, 2009, p. 222). Secondly, regarding the second hypothesis, it needs to be mentioned that the focus will be on NATO’s European member states there, because they are committed to both NATO and the CSDP, while the United States and Canada are not a party in the latter.

The analysis as described above will provide insight in the current positions towards NATO of member states from each of the three tiers Noetzel & Schreer identify. This insight will enable us to answer the research question.

**Results: showing solidarity to achieve solidarity**
This section is structured in the following manner. It addresses the tests of the three hypotheses separately. In doing so, it also distinguishes the three camps of member states identified in Noetzel & Schreer’s framework (2009). A three-by-three structure, in which each of the three hypotheses is tested alongside the positions of member states in the three different camps, is thus being used. The results of the three separate tests will also be discussed together at the end of this section. It will appear that member states’ positions towards NATO have indeed converged. However, the convergence does not look as expected. The annexation of Crimea and the corresponding rise of a Russian threat do underline the importance of NATO for member states in such a way, that they realize that a unified NATO is needed. Incorporating security issues of all allies in the NATO framework is therefore key, rather than moving back to a unilateral focus on just one of these issues, as for example Russia. NATO’s Eastern member states do make a considerable move in this regard.

**NATO’s raison d’être: a focus on collective defence against Russia?**
*The reformer camp: United States, Canada and the United Kingdom*
Short after the annexation of Crimea, the Obama Administration presented a new National Security Strategy (NSS) for the United States (President of the United States of America, 2015).
Unsurprisingly, Russia’s actions concerned the US. Regarding the annexation of Crimea, the Obama Administration for example stated that it ‘makes clear that European security and the international rules and norms against territorial aggression cannot be taken for granted’ (p. 25). The United States announced to respond by imposing sanctions on Russia, by backing its security commitments to European partners and increase its military presence in Eastern Europe as a matter of deterrence. The latter two both, indeed, take place in a NATO framework. The 2015 Military Strategy of the United States (MSS), originating from the NSS, explicitly called NATO ‘strategically important for deterring conflict’ in the light of Russia’s annexation of Crimea (Joint Chiefs of Staff United States’ Army, 2015, p. 9), hinting on a possible main task for the alliance. That being said, however, the NSS does identify NATO as ‘the hub of an expanding global security network’ (2015, p. 25). In this regard, the Obama Administration for example considered the NATO mission in Afghanistan still an important part of its counterterrorism strategy, as can be traced back from both the NSS (2015, pp. 9-10) and MSS (2015, p. 8). The Trump Administration, more recently, calls ‘inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, (…) the primary concern in U.S. national security’ (Ministry of Defence United States of America, 2018, p. 3). Within Trump’s National Security Strategy (President of the United States of America, 2017), Russia is increasingly viewed as a revisionist, main security threat, which tries to undermine the transatlantic alliance and challenge the United States by developing advanced weapons and spreading disinformation. The new US Defence Strategy (2018, p. 11) plans to use NATO as a tool to ‘deter Russian adventurism’. At the same time, however, it asks the alliance to ‘defeat terrorists who seek to murder innocents, and address the arc of instability building on [its] periphery’ (p. 11), thereby pointing to security threats coming from Northern Africa and the Middle East. This has been put a bit more explicitly in the NSS, where – in addition to increasing NATO’s deterrence and defence at its eastern flank – Trump also plans to improve NATO’s defence against Iranian ballistic and cruise missile threats and counterterrorism cooperation (2017, p. 48). It underlines that the United States still sees NATO as a broader security organization, even in the light of an inter-state strategic competition with Russia.

A similar notion can be found in Canada’s Defence Policy (2017). The Canadians consider the annexation of Crimea as an example of a new form of power politics the world is facing, to which NATO needs to respond with deterrence (p. 50). Canada’s leading position in the presence of NATO’s troops in Central and Eastern Europe – which were stationed there after the annexation of Crimea – is mentioned as a necessary step in this regard (p. 82). Together with deterrence, ‘collective defence and cooperative security remain core tasks’ of NATO,
having more importance than the crisis management operations of the alliance, although NATO should still deploy troops for the latter ones in the form of contributions to international peace operations and stabilization missions (p. 82). The core tasks of collective defence and cooperative security, importantly, should be executed against a threat of ‘any potential adversary’, including terrorists (p. 83, emphasis added). Efforts of the alliance in the field of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation contribute in doing so. Although the Canadians thus take deterrence in Eastern Europe seriously, they also have a broader conception of NATO’s collective defence mechanism than a pure focus on Russia.

The United Kingdom considers collective defence to be NATO’s core task as well (2015, p. 40). Russia’s actions in Ukraine are labelled as a threat to which NATO needed and has responded, but – again – NATO’s collective defence is not limited to this: the UK ‘will continue to support a robust Alliance response (…) to threats from any direction’ (p. 51). Part of this is addressing risks coming from the southern flank of Europe (p. 18), continuing to work with NATO in countering terrorism (p. 39) and keep training the Afghan military (p. 58). UK’s concern that the country is drawn into a military conflict due to its treaty obligations after a terrorist attack (p. 85), thereby implicitly pointing to NATO’s Article 5, indirectly shows that the UK considers counterterrorism as part of NATO’s collective defence framework as well.

The status quo camp: Italy
Italy’s Ministry of Defence (2015, p. 38) puts it very clear:

‘NATO has evolved over time, taking on a different, larger role, but it remains central to the context of collective defence. To date, only the Alliance between North America and Europe is able to dissuade, deter and provide military defence against any kind of threat.’

According to the Italians, NATO’s focus should thus be on collective defence against all kinds of threats. In doing so, an effective deterrence policy is key (2015, p. 39). That Italy is not that much focused on the relationship between NATO and Russia, is underlined by the fact that ‘Russia’ nor ‘Crimea’ is explicitly mentioned a single time in the country’s White Paper on International Security and Defence. Italy’s priorities, not surprisingly given the current situation in Northern Africa and the Middle East and its own geographical location, are in the Mediterranean area. The country asserts that the security of the latter cannot be separated from the security of the Euro-Atlantic region (p. 30). It is for this reason that Italy welcomes and wants to further develop NATO’s policies in the region (p. 41). It must be mentioned, however, that the country conceives the European Union as a more important security actor in the area,
on which will be elaborated below. That does not change the fact that Italy advocates for a NATO that is also active on the southern flank of its territory.

The reversal camp: Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland
Support for the first hypothesis might be expected first and foremost in the reversal camp of member states, consisting of Eastern European countries, due to their geographical proximity to Russia. To a certain extent, this is true. Czech Republic (2015; 2017), Estonia (2017), Latvia (2015; 2016), Lithuania (2016; 2017a; 2017b) and Poland (2017) are all very much concerned about the rising Russian threat and consider this the most pertinent one for the European continent. In this light, the Czech Republic (2015, p. 15) supports the strengthening of NATO’s Article 5 and, correspondingly, NATO’s collective defence framework. Estonia (2017, p. 4) calls NATO ‘the foundation of security and defence cooperation’ in relation to Russian’s increasing aggression. NATO’s ‘core task is to defend the territory of its member states’ (p. 9). The presence of NATO troops in the Baltic States is, in the wake of the annexation of Crimea, considered as crucial (p. 9), because it provides Estonia with the necessary deterrence towards Russia. This conception is fully shared by Latvia (2015, p. 14; 2016, p. 5, p. 9, p. 13) and Lithuania (2016; 2017a; 2017b). These two countries also stress the importance of strengthening NATO’s defence against Russia’s hybrid and cyberwarfare (Ministry of Defence Latvia, 2015, p. 28; Ministry of Defence Lithuania, 2017a, p. 13). For Poland, finally, Russia’s aggression, as shown by the annexation of Crimea, is the main reason to advocate that ‘after [a] period of focusing on out-of-area operations, collective defence and deterrence returns to the forefront of NATO’s considerations’ (2017, p. 30). In sum, the Eastern states do agree that NATO’s core task is the one of providing collective defence and that this core task currently needs to be executed at NATO’s eastern flank.

However, Czech Republic (2015, p. 31) and Lithuania (2016, p. 8; 2017b, p. 20) also ask for NATO activity in the area of energy security, something that had originally been advocated by especially the reformer camp of member states. The desire not to be dependent on Russia’s energy supply, encouraged by the worsening security environment the Eastern countries identify, might be an explanation for this. Additionally, the Czech Republic (2015, p. 17) accentuates its role within NATO in the fight against terrorism. The conception of a terrorist threat for NATO is also shared by Lithuania (2017a, p. 5), which prepares itself ‘to actively participate in international operations of NATO (…) in order to contribute to the fight against terrorism and other security issues’ (2017b, p. 13). It considers this to be necessary in ensuring stability beyond NATO’s borders and demonstrating solidarity with its allies. Latvia (2015, p.
24) explicitly puts forward that it is necessary to act against terrorism within the NATO framework as well. These are, surprisingly, signs that NATO’s Eastern member states acknowledge the broader security role for NATO as well, even in the light of a very present Russian threat.

There are more clear signs. For example, the Czech Republic (2017, p. 7) and, once more, Lithuania (2017a, p. 3) recognize threats at NATO’s southern flank explicitly, to which Lithuania also applies NATO’s collective defence framework (2017b, p. 17). Additionally, the country places the strengthening of NATO’s crisis management and partnerships high on the agenda and, in this regard, wants to contribute to NATO’s international operations outside NATO’s territory (2016, p. 8). Latvia (2016, p. 10) makes clear its awareness of and ensures its participation in ‘the resolution of current challenges NATO (…) [is] facing, including those, which do not directly affect the security of Latvia.’ Estonia states it in the strongest way. The country needs a NATO that can deliver a credible form of deterrence and defence. Therefore, unity within the alliance is needed. And ‘to develop unity, NATO must deal with security threats of all the allies and guarantee a uniform level of security across its territory’ (2017, p. 12). This is an interesting observation. NATO’s Eastern member states particularly need NATO to respond to the Russian threat, but seem to agree with a broader security role for the organization, in order to create solidarity among the member states. Although less firm in expressing its willingness than the other four countries, making the remark that it may not endure ‘negative effects to our national defence capabilities’ (2017, p. 28), Poland also expects that it must support its allies in response to threats coming from Northern Africa and the Middle East (pp. 27-28), by conducting stabilization, humanitarian and military missions.

Rejection of the first hypothesis
The condition for accepting the first hypothesis was that NATO’s member states should agree that NATO’s most important, current task is the one of collective defence against Russia and that a broader security role for NATO is subordinate to this. The reformer camp, consisting of the United States, Canada and United Kingdom, does recognize the Russian threat and do agree on NATO’s core task of collective defence, but still highly values NATO’s broader security role as well: they apply NATO’s collective defence framework to more security threats than Russia alone. Italy, as representative of the status quo camp, shares this latter perspective and is also particularly concerned about the security situation in the Mediterranean area. Support for the first hypothesis has thus not been found in these two camps. Hypothesis 1 needs to be rejected for that reason. The Eastern member states do consider collective defence against
Russia as a NATO priority, but are surprisingly sympathetic to a broader security role for the alliance as well. This contrasts the traditional characteristics of the reversal camp of member states.

**NATO’s importance vis-à-vis the CSDP**

*The reformer camp: United States, Canada and the United Kingdom*

As the only European country in the reformer camp, and thus only ‘reformist’ party in the CSDP, the United Kingdom deserves most attention here. It must be stressed, however, that its 2015 National Security Strategy was adopted before the UK decided by referendum to leave the European Union. After having left the EU and, correspondingly, the CSDP, it might be expected that UK will start to devote more importance to NATO. In its 2015 NSS, however, the country still shows support for the security agenda of the EU. It especially appreciates the ‘range of capabilities [the EU has] to build security and to respond to threats, which can be complementary to those of NATO’ (Ministry of Defence United Kingdom, 2015, p. 53). Sanctions, military and civilian missions, and security and development assistance are mentioned as examples. With regard to Russia’s annexation of Crimea, at the EU level, the UK especially wanted to keep putting pressure on Russia by imposing sanctions (pp. 53-54), in addition to NATO measures such as the establishment of a Readiness Action Plan and deploying troops to the Baltic states (p. 18). It shows that the UK advocated a response to Russia both at the EU and NATO level. The country’s commitment to EU projects building resilience in the Western Balkans and EU’s peacekeeping mission in Bosnia, which uses NATO’s Headquarters, underlines this as well (p. 54). UK’s support for the CSDP in relation to NATO further appears from its announcement to ‘continue to foster closer coordination and cooperation’ (p. 53) between the EU and NATO.

The United States and Canada remain more silent on this topic. The Obama Administration was quite clear in 2015, by announcing that the US wanted ‘to deepen NATO-EU ties to enhance transatlantic security’ (p. 25). President Trump’s more recent National and Military Security Strategies (2017; 2018) do not mention the relationship between the EU, its CSDP and NATO at all, however. Neither does Canada in its 2017 Defence Policy.

*The status quo camp: Italy*

Italy was and remains a proponent of European integration in the area of defence and security. It not only opts for a ‘closer understanding between European defence and NATO’ (2015, p. 37), but explicitly ‘values the strengthening of [the] EU Common Security and Defence Policy strategic[ally] and for that reason actively promotes the development of the role of Europe in a
way that requires more integration of resources and capabilities among member countries’ (p. 36). In this regard, the country for example proposes to exclude defence investments from the financial thresholds of the European Stability and Growth Pact (p. 37) and to align national defence policies primarily with European partners. That this will be involved with sharing its defence sovereignty, is something Italy considers to be worth it (p. 38). Italy’s White Paper also states that the Italian forces need to be ready to contribute to EU-related defence and security activities and operations in the future, thereby hinting on an expansion of the scope and deepening of the CSDP. These activities and operations include, among others, international peace and stabilization missions, specialist training abroad and humanitarian assistance (p. 54). The CSDP is also perceived by Italy as a suitable instrument for deterrence, in addition to NATO. If deficiencies in this instrument will be identified, the country will even address them as ‘national priorities’ (p. 39).

It is thus clear that Italy desires to further develop EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy. From a strategic perspective, as the Italian quote above already mentioned, this is understandable. Although NATO, through Article 5, remains the biggest guarantor of Italian security (p. 38), the focus of the organization is on the Euro-Atlantic area, while ‘the Euro-Mediterranean area is the main area of national intervention’ (p. 40) for Italy. Instable situations in the Horn of Africa and in the Mashreq and Sahel regions, causing migration, illegal international trafficking and, also, a terrorist threat are mentioned as the country’s most tangible concern (pp. 30-32).

*The reversal camp: Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland*

Czech Republics’ 2017 Defence Strategy (p. 8) ‘supports the strengthening of Europe’s security and defence and therefore actively engages in deepening defence cooperation within the EU framework’. Its defence planning therefore is, although primarily driven by NATO, ‘in tune with the needs of the EU’ (p. 10). Two years earlier, shortly after the annexation of Crimea, the Czechs had already adopted a similar notion in their security strategy, which clarity is – despite its length – worth it to quote here (2015, p. 16):

The Czech Republic supports, on a long-term basis, the building of a set of EU capacities, mechanisms and capabilities designed to strengthen the system of cooperative security, to reinforce stability and to manage conflicts and crises using civil resources. It also participates in and contributes its capabilities to the building of permanent EU military capacities (…), a process which is complementary to and coordinated with NATO and intended to strengthen the overall defence potential of European allies. The Czech Republic consistently supports the strengthening of EU-NATO relations and the EU’s cooperation with the United States on security matters.
For Estonia (2017, p. 5) the CSDP has ‘become more important than ever’ in times of Russian aggression, economic hardship, terrorism and mass migration. The country supports a further development of the policy because this will increase the EU’s influence, power and security at the global stage. In doing so, the country stresses the need for coherence within the CSDP and between the activities of NATO and the EU. It will actively promote the solidarity of EU and NATO member states in issues of security (p. 7), as well as political dialogue and bilateral coordination between the two actors (p. 10). The country’s main goal, in this regard, is to achieve ‘greater unanimity and consistency in EU’s and NATO’s policy’ (p. 10). Estonia considers this as crucial, because ‘the weakening of the ties that keep the European Union [and NATO] together may bring Russia to understanding that its aggressive policies are working and encourage it to proceed with its power politics’ (p. 5). Two aspects are interesting in this regard. Estonia, first of all, uses the development of the CSDP as a tool in dealing with the Russian threat it is facing. Related to that, secondly, is the country’s support for the further development of the CSDP, to create unity within EU’s and NATO’s policies and within NATO itself, which Estonia regards as crucial vis-à-vis Russia.

According to Latvia (2016, p. 10), the strengths of EU’s security and defence policies are especially in the non-military realm. The CSDP therefore has ‘a supplementary role to the collective defence measures of NATO’ (Ministry of Defence Latvia, 2015, p. 2), but participation of EU institutions is a ‘precondition’ (2016, p. 10) in resolving issues of security and defence. As such, Latvia advocates the further development of the CSDP as well. It wants to broaden the scope of the CSDP to, for example, issues of border security, energy security and cyberspace, in order to respond to growing hybrid threats (2015, p. 2).

Lithuania perceives the security guarantees of the European Union as additional to those of NATO (2016, p. 2; 2017a, p. 3). That being said, the country announces ‘to contribute to the development of [a] effective EU foreign, security and defence policy (…), [and] to promote close cooperation between NATO and the EU’ (2016, p. 9). Lithuania’s support for the further development of the CSDP will particularly being shown by backing ‘the EU initiatives that further contribute to building military capabilities in Europe, fosters the EU role providing additional security guarantees as well as the solidarity of the EU members in the area of security and defence’ (2017b, p. 21). Important is, so adds Lithuania, that these initiatives should remain voluntarily and must complement NATO’s work (p. 21). Although that might sound a bit cautious, Lithuania is committed to these complementary measures, because the country perceives them of mutual interest, since the EU and NATO face the same challenges. It desires the two organizations, therefore, to cooperate in a wide range of areas, as for example military
operations and responses to hybrid threats. Moreover, Lithuania – implicitly referring to Russia’s annexation of Crimea by mentioning ‘security challenges in the neighbourhood’ as a reason – ‘encourages to initiate new EU security and defence projects’ in the eastern part of the European Union (2017b, p. 22). Poland is less progressive, calling security issues part of the ‘dilemma of further [EU] integration’ (2017, p. 32). Still, the country is willing to support EU efforts in the area, as long as they ‘complement and enrich NATO operations in a non-competitive manner’ (p. 32). Poland also stresses the importance of consensus and solidarity within NATO in this regard (p. 30). These are positions comparable to those of all other Eastern European states mentioned above.

Rejection of the second hypothesis

The conditions for accepting the second hypothesis were that member states should consider NATO as a more appropriate framework to respond to the Russian threat and that they should perceive the further development of the CSDP as subordinate to NATO’s activities. These conditions are not met, and for that reason the second hypothesis needs to be rejected as well. Italy, first of all, does not consider the CSDP as subordinate to NATO’s activities. In fact, it strongly prefers to strengthen and expand the policy. The UK – as the only European country in the reformer camp the most relevant member state to look at in this regard – is less outspoken, but attributes a lot of importance to the imposition of sanctions at the EU level, in response to the Russian threat. Therefore, it cannot be stated that the UK considers NATO as a more appropriate framework than the EU to respond to the Russian threat. Support for the hypothesis, again most surprisingly, is not found either in the reversal camp of Eastern European member states. Although the countries consider the CSDP as complementary to NATO, they support the further development of the policy and, in some cases, even want it to actively look eastward, enabling them to use it as a tool against the Russian threat.

The enlargement of NATO

The reformer camp: United States, Canada and the United Kingdom

Enlargement of NATO is not an issue the United States, Canada and the UK devoted their security and defence strategies to. The US, under the Obama Administration, was ambiguous. On the one hand, it declared to ‘steadfastly support the aspirations of countries in the Balkans and Eastern Europe toward European and Euro-Atlantic integration’ (President of the United States of America, 2015, p. 25). In this regard, the US mentioned Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine explicitly, but the way of doing so, on the other hand, raised questions: the US would support these countries to make sure ‘they can better work alongside the United States and
NATO, as well as provide for their own defence’ (p. 31). Especially the latter part of the sentence does not seem to show much enthusiasm for a NATO membership of these countries. This assumption was, still under the Obama presidency, also confirmed by the US Ambassador to NATO (Reuters, 2016). President Trump’s security and defence strategies do not give reason to think that the American position has changed. Quite the contrary, the President cynically states that the US ‘believed that liberal-democratic enlargement and inclusion would fundamentally alter the nature of international relations and that competition would give way to peaceful cooperation’, but that reassertion of Chinese and Russian influence in the world currently shows the opposite (2017, p. 27). In the plans of Trump’s Secretary of Defence Mattis to ‘fortify’ NATO, enlargement is not being mentioned either (Ministry of Defence United States of America, 2018, p. 11).

Canada (2017) and the United Kingdom (2015) do not pay attention, neither implicitly or explicitly, to the issue of enlargement and Euro-Atlantic integration. That remaining silent on the topic means that both countries are opposing enlargement might be a conclusion drawn too soon. However, as some of the Eastern European countries will also show below, explicit support for enlargement is something that would have been expressed by them. This is a more reserved position than the US, Canada and UK had in Noetzel & Schreer’s framework, where the reformer group considered ‘enlargement as a tool to broaden NATO’s influence in the world’ (2009, p. 217). That being said, it must be noted that Montenegro has recently become a NATO member. Its accession was approved after the annexation of Crimea, by all NATO members, thus including the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom (NATO, 2017).

The status quo camp: Italy
For Italy (2015), the same story applies. The country does not pay any attention to the issue of enlargement in its security and defence policies. As such, its independent position towards the issue is not clarified, except for Italy’s agreement on the accession of Montenegro. In order to get to know a bit more about Italy’s position, the final communiqué of NATO’s Warsaw Summit (2016) provides some insight. It reaffirms the commitment of member states to NATO’s Open Door policy, which is based on Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty and states that European countries can become a member if they meet the standards of the alliance. Support to continue to take steps in this regard is given to Georgia, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (paragraph 110). The communiqué has been agreed upon by all member states, thus including Italy, and therefore tells us, at least, something about the country’s position on
the issue. Still, it is important to have in mind that this does not show the full picture of Italy’s independent position at all.

**The reversal camp: Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland**

Poland (2017) and Latvia (2015; 2016), also, individually remain silent on the issue of enlargement. Estonia, on the other hand, clearly is in favour. It states the following (2017, p. 10):

> Estonia supports enlargement of both the European Union and NATO. The enlargement will reinforce the Western values and virtues in Europe and around the world. (…) Estonia will support the integration of states that would like to join NATO and the European Union, and help them to carry out required reforms and develop civil society.

The Estonians find a partner in Czech Republic here. While the country’s security strategy (2015, p. 15) only mentions Czech support for NATO’s Open Door Policy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is more clear on its website (2018), by declaring that ‘the Czech Republic embraces further convergence of the three existing aspirant countries towards NATO’ and that an ‘enlargement process is mutually beneficial [because] the accession of new members strengthens the element of collective defence, extends the stability zone and increases the Alliance’s capacity to respond to possible security crises.’ Lithuania is less outspoken, but does show its support for the Open Door Policy (2016, p. 8) and the Euro-Atlantic integration of Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova specifically (2016, p. 10; 2017b, p. 13), and plays, in its own words, ‘an active role’ (2017b, p. 21) in this regard.

**Rejection of the third hypothesis**

The condition for accepting the third hypothesis was that NATO’s member states should not permit other states to become a member of the alliance, because of the annexation of Crimea. This hypothesis needs to be rejected as well, for three reasons. The accession of Montenegro as a new member after the annexation of Crimea, firstly, does not meet the condition of the hypothesis already. Moreover, some member states clearly express their position in favour of further enlarging NATO. Thirdly, even if the fact that most member states do not pay attention to the topic is considered a sign that they do not want to enlarge the alliance, no evidence has been found that such a position has been caused by the annexation of Crimea.

**A more convergent NATO**

The rejection of all three hypotheses raises two questions. Why, firstly, are the outcomes contrary to the expectations? And, secondly, does the rejection of the hypotheses mean that the
positions of member states towards NATO have not converged and NATO, consequently, remains a multi-tier organization? Both issues, finally, need to be addressed.

That the findings shown above differ from the expectations is something that can best be attributed to the move that Eastern European countries in the reversal camp, surprisingly, have made. They have taken positions acknowledging the broader security role of NATO and agree with the further development of the CSDP, rather than keeping a unilateral focus on the Russian threat after the annexation of Crimea. As such, the group of member states that was most focused on Russia before the annexation of Crimea has widened its position towards NATO after the annexation. In doing so, the Eastern member states themselves clearly show interest in – or at least understanding of – the interests of NATO’s other member states. A suitable explanation for this move is the following. The Eastern member states are dependent on NATO for their security vis-à-vis Russia. The annexation of Crimea and, correspondingly, the Russian threat to the Eastern states has underlined the importance of NATO and NATO’s safeguards for them. The member states need a unified NATO response to Russia to deal with the persisting threat. At the same time, however, NATO’s other member states are confronted with a wide range of other threats, including terrorism and instability at the southern flank, as well, which are more tangible for them. In this regard, it has been shown that the perceptions about the severity of the Russian threat sharply differ among NATO’s member states and are, indeed, most present in the Eastern member states (Pezard, Radin, Szayna & Larrabee, 2017). Two aspects are of importance for the Eastern member states here. First of all, and conditionally, they need support of NATO’s other member states in order to respond to the Russian threat. Secondly, they need to keep unity within the alliance to be able to fulfil such a response in the most powerful way. In order to guarantee support and unity, the Eastern member states have widened their positions towards NATO: showing solidarity with the interests of other member states, to reach solidarity for their own interests.

Consequently, rather than diverged, the positions of NATO’s member states towards the alliance have converged on the important issues of raison d'être and NATO’s relationship with the EU’s CSDP. Not in the expected way, with increasing support for the reversal camp of member states, but more towards agreement on the necessity of NATO’s readiness to a broad kind of threats. Regarding the issue of raison d'être, member states do commonly agree on NATO’s core task of collective defence, in the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea. This collective defence role is broadly taken and not solely focused on Russia. Member states do mostly agree on the further development of the CSDP and its relationship towards NATO as
well. Only on the issue of enlargement, the positions of separate member states still considerably differ from each other.

The multi-tier structure of NATO that Noetzel & Schreer (2009) identified, then, has largely disappeared in the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea. On the issue of enlargement, it looks differently: where enlargement was first considered by the US, UK and Canada as ‘a tool to broaden NATO’s influence in the world’ (p. 217), these countries nowadays remain more silent on the topic, possibly leaning more to the original position of the status quo camp of countries, which considered enlargement as provocative towards Russia. On the other two issues, NATO’s member states have found each other, forced by the Russian threat.

**Conclusion**

The annexation of Crimea by Russia has put NATO back in the spotlights again. Scholars intensively discussed how the alliance should respond with a new security strategy to the perceived, reversed Russian threat. Agreement about the existence of a security threat for NATO had remained absent for a long time. Since the end of the Cold War, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO kept struggling and just slowly moving forward to reinvent its own role on the global stage of security issues. Within the literature, the annexation of Crimea was considered a godsend: NATO could, finally, focus itself on Russia again. The position of NATO’s separate member states in this regard, however, seemed to be forgotten. Two aspects, here, were of concern: the member states determine NATO’s strategy, and the unity of NATO was disputed before the annexation of Crimea, while unity between the member states is needed to form an effective strategy. These matters justified a closer look to member states’ positions towards NATO.

This paper, therefore, researched how the annexation of Crimea has changed NATO’s member states’ positions towards the organization. It has shown that member states, in the aftermath of the annexation, have stressed that NATO’s core task is the one of providing collective defence, without putting solely a focus on Russia in doing so. A shift in the position of member states towards NATO has been especially found, surprisingly, in the camp of Eastern member states, which on the important issues of NATO’s *raison d’être* and role vis-à-vis the EU’s CSDP have made a move towards the other member states, thereby acknowledging a broader security role for NATO and agreeing on the further development of the CSDP. As such, the positions of member states towards NATO have become more converged to each other again, after a period of divergence, as a consequence of the annexation of Crimea.
The value of this finding is that it gives ground to the debate about NATO’s Russia-strategy, that was already on its way. Having provided insight in member states’ positions towards the organization, it becomes possible to take member states’ conceptions about NATO’s role in dealing with the Russian security threat into account. Consequently, the debate about which strategy NATO should take can be guided more into a direction in which the outcomes are also politically achievable. Paradoxically, however, the convergence of member states’ positions does not automatically make the mentioned debate easier. The broad perspective member states take on NATO’s collective defence pressures NATO to be ready to respond to a wide range of threats and, thus, excludes a pure focus on Russia. This, in turn, means that in developing a strategy towards Russia NATO’s broader security role should be taken into account too, possibly limiting the instruments member states make available to respond to the Russian threat. That makes the development of such a NATO strategy, both within the literature and practically, more complex.

This paper also intended to provide insight in the relevance NATO’s member states attribute to NATO as a security organization vis-à-vis Russia. That NATO should play a role in dealing with the Russian threat, has never been doubted by the member states. Following from the above, and more importantly, NATO is also functional as a military alliance for its member states in a broad sense. This has implications for the realist notion stating that member states engage in alliances to balance together against common threats. The sympathetic position of NATO’s Eastern member states on issues as a broader security role for NATO and the further development of the CSDP, which could not have been immediately expected from a realist starting point, show however that states are also willing to engage in alliances that deal with threats that do not affect themselves directly, as a means to secure sufficient attention of the alliance for threats that do directly affect them. It underlines the dependence of states on each other on the current political stage and the translation of this in international organizations. In this regard, one might question what the consequences of this development are for ‘internal’ politics within IOs. In relation to military affairs of international organizations, it has been shown already that states employ control mechanisms within IOs to prevent a loss of influence on their outcomes (Dijkstra, 2016). If this battle for influence, in the light of organizations that are perceived to deal with a wide and widening range of member states’ interests, also takes place between states (which it undoubtedly does), it is an interesting question how this affects IOs’ ability to form and keep forming a strategy that is relevant enough for each of their member states.
Where the ‘tipping point’ for NATO will be in this regard, has not been a part of this paper, but is a question that will keep applying to the alliance as well. As such, it can be a suitable topic for future research. The convergence of member states’ positions towards the organization in the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea is positive for NATO. How long this convergence can hold, especially with the diversification of threats the alliance is currently facing, is, however, another story. Taking the importance of the US for NATO in mind, President Trump’s unpredictability and, for the time being, unclear policies will play an important role in this regard as well. Trump’s Defence Strategy (2018, p. 9) showed clear support for NATO, but also provides some dust by stating that ‘NATO must adapt to remain relevant and fit for our time – in purpose, capability, and responsive decision-making.’ The upcoming NATO Summit in Brussels, the first one since NATO’s Warsaw Summit in 2016, might shed some light on this, and also on the willingness of other member states to satisfy US’ requirements. Whether, especially, NATO's Eastern member states will continue moving into the direction they took after the annexation of Crimea, is then an issue at stake again as well. One thing is already certain: the separate positions of NATO’s member states towards the alliance remain worth it to observe closely.

References


