Introduction[1]

What is the European Union's (EU) social standing in world politics? The research engaged in this line of enquiry has produced sweeping definitions or labels of the EU's role and 'being' in world politics. Based on the Union's own ends, means, capabilities, policy scope, or ambition, these labels range from small power to superpower; international organization to neo-medieval power; and hybrid polity to normative power. Yet as deep as this research field is, it has underplayed some of the more problematic aspects of conceptualizing the EU's existence in world politics. We still lack a coherent analytical framework to assess the EU's standing compared to other actors with similar prerogatives.

In this article, I re-conceptualize the EU's 'being' in world politics.[2] I explore the type of acknowledgement and level of recognition the EU receives from other actors. I do not investigate what kind of actor or power the EU is. Instead, I ask: what kind of *social status* is the EU attributed with in world politics? To answer this question, I extend Keene's (2012) recast of Normative Power Europe (NPE) as a status management strategy for the EU to keep its privileged position in world politics. I argue that being an actor in world politics requires recognition. Recognition bestows the EU with a restricted *club status*, often being acknowledged as a member of an exclusive community of social polities. Furthermore, I propose that patterns of diplomatic representation and recognition

[2] 'Being' here refers to the social existence of the EU in the domain of world politics. 'Being' is here preferred over 'presence' since the conceptual underpinnings of the latter's strand of literature is a point of academic disagreement in this text.

breeds inequality and stratification. I marry these insights with the quantitative-oriented literature on status in International Relations (IR) and propose that repeated practices of diplomatic representation is a good proxy for capturing polities' *positional status* (Duque, 2018; Kinne, 2014; Renshon, 2017). Patterns of recognition and representation thus allow for coherent comparisons of 'being' among heterogeneous polities in world politics.

To showcase the methodological purchase of social status as a starting point of analysis, I apply Social Network Analysis (SNA) to a self-compiled dataset on the EU's exchange of diplomatic ties. I here measure the eigenvector centrality of the EU compared to other countries. The measure indicates how the EU and its predecessors'[3] positional status has developed from 1960 to 2010. The results show the EU's meteoric rise in positional status since 1960, currently residing in the upper echelons of the status hierarchy of world politics. Yet, the EU has yet to capitalize on its status. Fear of status congestion and status dilution among countries has fueled attempts to thwart the EU's full inclusion to the various status clubs of nation-states. Due to lack of full club memberships, the EU struggles to convert its high positional status into influence.

This article proceeds in three acts. Act one surveys the two dominating perspectives of the EU's 'being' in world politics and identifies the problems associated with these analytical frameworks. Act two develops a framework for capturing the EU's club and positional status. Act three applies a network centrality measure of diplomatic ties to explore, measure, and discuss, the development and sources of the EU's positional status from 1960 to 2010, as well as the EU's membership status affects the conversion of positional status to power and influence.

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[3] The EU here refers to both European Economic Community (1957-1967) and the European Community (1967-1993).

I. The EU as an actor in world politics

Two perspectives dominate the academic discourse on the EU's 'being' in world politics. First, in the 1970s, *actorness* became a term used to described polities that did not fit the mold of states (Cosgrove and Twitchett, 1970, pp. 12–14). Actorness here means the capacity or capability to act independent in international affairs (Sjöstedt, 1977, pp. 15–16). Since the 1970, scholars have used actorness as a heuristic device to understand the EU's engagement with its surroundings on a range of topics and policy fields.[4] Others view the EU's ability to cause things due to its *presence* or existence in world politics. Canonical in this regard has been Manners' (2002, p. 239) influential concept of NPE, which refers to the EU's 'ability to shape conceptions of 'normal' in international relations'. Manners expanded on Allen and Smith's (1990, p. 21) earlier conceptualization of 'presence' as a 'feature or a quality of arenas, of issue-areas or of networks of activity, [that] influence the actions and expectations of participant.' Common to both NPE and 'presence', and in contrast to the purposive conceptualization of actorness, is a view that presence endows polities to exert influence by mere consequence of being (Bretherton and Vogler, 2006, p. 26). The presence-based literature, along with the NPE version of it, has expanded in the last two decades and spawned empirical work across a host of policy fields. [5]

Despite rich empirics and the development of sound theoretical and methodological toolkits, scholars have yet to address at least two problematic aspects of these approaches. First, large parts of this literature have refrained from comparing the EU to other international actors. This comparison reluctance is often accompanied by a view of the EU as a *sui generis* player. The NPE framework goes for this solution, even though Manners (2011, p. 241; 2002, p. 240) himself prefers the word 'hybrid' over *sui generis*. The analytical drawback of this approach is that we cannot compare the EU

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[4] See Koops (2011, pp. 95–146) for a comprehensive review of the actorness literature.
[5] See Whitman (2011) for review of the literature on NPE.

with other polities because the framework intends to capture what *sets it apart* from the others (Sjursen, 2006; Youngs, 2004). In other words, the only way to assess the effects of the EU's is by how well it performs on a unique yardstick developed to assess the EU (see for instance Diez, 2005). Though less tautological, scholars in the actorness literature suffer from a similar handicap. In their seminal book, Bretherton & Vogler (2006, p. 34) claim that 'comparisons between the EU and other actors in the global system are likely to produce only limited insights' because '[T]he EU is an actor *sui generis*.' These authors are right that the study of the EU does not always require a comparative framework. However, as full solution to the 'what-kind-of-actor' conundrum, this version is sub-optimal. Any approach sidestepping comparisons also miss any meaningful estimate of the relative effects of the EU's 'being' in world politics (Risse-kappen, 1996; Rosamond, 2005, p. 469).

The actorness literature has in recent years relaxed the idea of the EU as a *sui generis* actor. In their introduction to a special issue on the EU effectiveness, Niemann & Bretherton (2013, p. 263) advocate a move 'away from viewing the EU as an actor *sui generis*' towards 'a more comparative perspective'. However, this move reveals a second issue with the existing literature: its aversion to abstract and generalize. The special issue contributors compare the EU to other major players in world politics, but they only do so on narrow policy fields. In another volume, Peters (2016a, p. 25) asks: 'How effective is EU foreign policy compared to other international actors?' Despite the promising comparative framework and rich empirical case studies, the takeaway on the EU's actorness in is underwhelming. As Peters himself (2016b, p. 275) concludes: 'the EU is neither more effective in terms of output and outcome nor in terms of impact, nor is it less effective than most other actors considered in our case studies.' Though a move towards a comparative framework is commendable, it is hard to deduce general trends in the 'being' of the EU in world politics with an analytical lens so far zoomed-in.

How can we better compare and generalize the EU's 'being' in world politics? In the following segments, I argue we ought to explore the EU's *social status* rather than its essences (material or ideational). Here, social status represents a different take on the EU's 'being' in world politics. It answers the call for research on the social acknowledgement of the EU's presence, actorness and effectiveness, to understand how its agency in world politics is effectuated (Larsen, 2014). This approach sacrifices meticulous 'thick' descriptions at the altar of analytical parsimony. I accept this tradeoff with the hope to offer a general, consistent, comparative framework of analysis that enables an assessment of the EU's social standing vis-à-vis other actors in world politics.

II. The social status of the EU

The EU not only has stuff like money, bureaucratic institutions, identity and personnel, it also has social status. Social status positions an actor in a group or social hierarchy based on the shared and often mute acknowledgement of that actor's attributes on a relational rank of prestige (Larson *et al.*, 2014, p. 7). Status is thus often related to material power, but it cannot be reduced to it. A host of countries, for instance, have enjoyed a social status removed from their standing on material capabilities (Dafoe *et al.*, 2014; Neumann, 2014; Renshon, 2017; Beaumont, 2018). In fact, material power is both generative of, and contingent on status. Going from power to status, powerful actors can gather recognition by other actors that translates into a status that is beneficial for influence in other spheres (Magee and Galinsky, 2008, p. 364). Development and procurement of nuclear weapons and aircraft carriers, for instance, increases the coercive power of a country, but also facilitates the acquisition of an entry ticket to a status group of actors known and admired for possessing those material capabilities (Gilady, 2018, p. 22). Going from status to power, a high-status actor might impact another actor to voluntary defer to the high-status actor's wishes (Tyler, 1997, p. 325; Lukes,

2005, pp. 27–29). For example, high status in world politics provides access to privileges, having the ear of important actors, as well as clarifying expectations of deference (Renshon, 2017, pp. 41–42; Cooper, 2013, p. 971). Exploring the EU's social status forces us to use different yardsticks when we compare the Union to other actors in world politics. To be sure, scholars might disagree about how much, money, guns or personnel the EU controls, the autonomy it enjoys, or the particularity of its identity. Yet, what seem certain is that the EU, much like nation-states, is acknowledged, recognized and attributed with a social status.

Edward Keene's (2012) excellent article is the first to theorize the EU's status in world politics. Keene suggest NPE is a type of induced stratification that differentiates the EU from other status groups based on its lifestyle, culture, values, wealth and/or strength. To aid his narrative, Keene introduces a Weberian notion of status defined as 'every typical component of the life of men that is determined by a specific, positive or negative social estimation of *honour*.' (quoted in Keene, 2012, p. 946; Weber, 1978, p. 932 [original emphasis]) As Weber (1978, p. 43) himself suggested, social groups are closed 'against outsiders so far as, according to its subjective meaning and its binding rules, participation of certain persons is excluded, limited, or subject to conditions.' This form of social closure, Weber and Keene contend, generates social status. It allows the EU 'to mark itself off as a distinctive kind of actor in world politics and win prestige for the values it embodies.' (Keene, 2012, p. 950) While 19th century Europe took pride in being the 'standard of civilization', Keene argues that the 20th century EU bases its status-seeking on knowledge and competence in the fields of liberalism, economy and peace (Keene, 2012, p. 953).

In this paper, I build and expand upon Keene's initial status move in three ways. First, I distinguish between two forms of social status – club status and positional status. Second, I ground these two status forms in practices of recognition between social polities. I here suggest that diplomacy enables us to observe these practices and determine the level of recognition polities enjoy. Third and final, I

measure the positional status of the EU between 1960 and 2010, compare it to other countries, discuss its possible sources, and explore its fungibility in world politics.

Recognition, club status, and positional status

Practices of recognition were in the early days of the international society 'everyday forms of behavior into which the recognition which states granted each other was embedded.' (Ringmar, 2014, p. 447). Over time, these recognition practices generated boundaries between those perceived as capable of conforming to the rules established by the European states, and those Asian, African and American states that were not (Bartelson, 2013, pp. 121–122; Ringmar, 2014, pp. 448–452). Recognition was here bestowed to the former at the expense of the latter. These practices are still upheld. To 'exist' in world politics, polities rely upon mutual recognition. Consequently, nation-states take part in a 'recognition game' where they settle 'who or what we can be' (Ringmar, 2002, p. 120). To receive recognition here enables the social self and thus creates 'being' in world politics.

Recognition produces two types of social status. First, selective recognition creates distinctive *status clubs* (Naylor, 2018; Larson, 2018). Status clubs are social structures of distinction that excludes and includes actors based on the club's own standards and in turn grants privileges and bestows duties upon its members. Actors in world politics participate in a range of clubs that offer certain status benefits. Being a club member is an attribution of identity as something. How we classify actors in world politics is not their internal organization, composition or their formal power, but often rather based on their membership in status clubs.

A theoretical gambit of this article is that the international society is a nation-state club that operates with the same underlying logic as other status clubs (see Naylor, 2018 for similar argument). A possible counterargument could be that the international society is not a status club because it

encompasses actors from every corner of the world and it does not arbitrarily discriminate against prospective members. Yet, upon closer inspection, these essentialist characteristics we base our ideas of countries on are more fluctuating than what we commonly believe (Ringmar, 1996).[6] In short, being recognized as a nation-state is a politically negotiated process in which certain characteristics – monopoly of violence, territory and population – often feature, but are never by themselves sufficient for joining a status club (Krasner, 1999). In other words, the status club of the international society is as political and messy, permeable, yet arbitrarily exclusionary, as any other status clubs in world politics. Actors' internal make-up or capabilities are only means that eventually might help facilitate the acquisition of the entry ticket to certain status clubs.

Second, recognition produces *positional status.* Club status is enacted by 'thin' recognition in that it is about identity *with* other actors (Gustafsson, 2015, p. 258). In contrast, positional status is produced by practices of 'thick' recognition, where an actor is acknowledged and 'respected for what makes a person special or unique.' (Wendt, 2003, p. 511) Actors who receive thick recognition have already received enough thin recognition to partake in the games inside the status club. Positional status is thus similar to the normal conception of status in IR, namely as a 'collective belief about a given state's ranking on valued attributes' (Larson *et al.*, 2014, p. 7). Here, positional status is conceived of as an element in a hierarchy among 'powers', often accompanied by the prefixes 'small', 'middle', 'great' or 'super' (Carvalho and Neumann, 2015; Mattern and Zarakol, 2016, pp. 642–643).

Club status and positional status are mutually constitutive. To receive positional status among peers, actors must often secure club status. If club status is only partially granted, actors will struggle to get full access to their positional status privileges. For example, Kosovo is a small country, albeit a well-

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[6] The sovereignty of Bosnia is questionable (see for instance Chandler, 2006). France is responsible for Monaco's defense and questions of diplomacy for Andorra is left for France and Spain to decide. Furthermore, contested territorial spaces – like Kosovo, Abkhazia, Crimea, Greenland and Taiwan – underline the existence of such an exclusive club (see McConnell, 2017).

known one, that arguably has a moderately high positional status.[7] Yet, because of Kosovo's liminal membership status in the club of international society, it does not have access to the same benefits and privileges normally assumed with countries of similar positional status (Visoka, 2018).

Reversely, an actor with high positional status is often seen as an attractive candidate for club membership because it can increase club prestige. However, having high positional status might also exclude you from a club. Fear of status congestion and dilution of an actor's personal positional status might hinder other actors of joining. A concrete example of this kind of exclusion is China's rejection of Japan's bid for a permanent seat in the UNSC. China feared UNSC reforms 'would undermine China's position as the sole Asian representative on the council and its claim to great power status.' (Malik, 2005, p. 26) Japan's accession to a permanent seat in the UNSC represented a status bump to a competitor. It also would alter the dynamics inside the club so that China was no longer the Asian representative, and thus dilute China's positional status. Thus, China maintained that Japan was unfit for permanent membership (Gries, 2005, p. 110). Ultimately, the way club status and positional status interacts is contingent on the type and form of social relations that constitute interactions inside and outside the club (Røren, 2019, p. 7).

In the next sections, I showcase the analytical fruitfulness of exploring the social status of the EU by investigating the EU's positional status via diplomatic practices of recognition and representation. I also explore the development of EU's positional status in relation to its ambiguous membership in the various status clubs of nation-states and theorize how this club status impacts the effective use of its positional status.

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[7] In the measure of positional status below, Kosovo ranks 148th in the world in 2010.

III. Enter the corps: the positional status of the EU (1960-2010)

How can we operationalize, measure and analyze the positional status of polities? Numerous practices in world politics can carry notions of social esteem, acknowledgement, and recognition. Among the most common are memberships in international organizations, visa policies, hosted state visits, and diplomatic representation (Hafner-Burton *et al.*, 2009; Volgy *et al.*, 2014; Duque, 2018). In this article, I use the exchange of embassies to tap into the relational dynamics of status hierarchies in world politics (Renshon, 2017; Duque, 2018; Volgy *et al.*, 2014).[8] Diplomatic representation is a good fit for social status for two reasons. First, polities cannot establish embassies in every corner of the world because they cost a lot (Neumayer, 2008, p. 230). Therefore, actors choose to send embassies to polities deemed important enough for the sending actor's interest. This diplomatic practice thus becomes 'attempts at maximizing the benefits of diplomacy while minimizing costs.' (Kinne, 2014, p. 249) Second, diplomatic bonds are normally reciprocated. When they are not, it is 'usually a product of a marked sense of material or moral superiority (or both) on the part of the receiving state.' (Berridge and James, 2003, p. 82) Embassies thus perform a 'symbolic role as a concrete representation of the importance attached to a bilateral relationship' (Malone, 2013, p. 124). To establish and maintain an embassy in another polity is therefore a recognition practice of the hosting polity. Withdrawal or non-establishment signals that such a tie of importance is nonexistent. In sum, the composition of a *diplomatic corps* becomes the embodied recognition of a polity's social status in world politics (Duque, 2018; Renshon, 2017; Volgy *et al.*, 2014).

To be sure, diplomatic representation is an imperfect measure of status (see Røren and Beaumont, 2019). However, as noted in most of the state-of-the-art status research, sending embassies represent

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[8] Membership in international organizations are here treated as evidence of club status. Visa policies corresponds more to the individuals' socials status with citizenship from an EU country and is not treated further. I reject state visits because, the long-term, much more demanding practice of embassy maintenance provides a more robust proxy for recognition: states can organize state visits on a relative whim compared to when they decide to establish or relinquish an embassy (see Røren and Beaumont, 2019, pp. 5–6).

the closest we can get at recognition practices because they are expensive, require the host to be important in the eyes of the sending state, and thus in aggregate signify a certain level of social esteem (Duque, 2018). Thus, while diplomatic representation 'offers a workable proxy for status recognition it is not a panacea, and as such should always be used with its limitations in mind and in tandem with other evidence.'(Røren and Beaumont, 2019, p. 6)

The conceptualization of positional status, despite its potential flaws as outlined above, allows for consistent longitudinal comparisons of heterogeneous polities in world politics. A systematic analysis of these diplomatic recognition practices does not bank on innovative and complex measures of things or essences that the EU possesses. Rather, it centers on the *social* consequences of those things: the patterns of unequal recognition that provides a source for stratification and positional status.

Measuring positional status

To measure the positional status of the EU, I use SNA applied to world diplomatic exchange data. As discussed above, the practice of diplomatic representation is a suitable tie to measure and capture an international dynamic that resembles status recognition. The number of embassies the EU host, its diplomatic corps, is a good measure of its positional status in world politics. However, SNA also allows us to further use the information transmitted through the diplomatic network. As Renshon (2017, p. 126) shows, 'who sends diplomats to an actor matters as much as (perhaps more than) the raw number of diplomats the state receives.' To harvest this extra set of information, I apply an eigenvector centrality measure to the diplomatic exchange data. Eigenvector centrality incorporates not only the number of incoming ties, but also the centrality of those nodes (Hafner-Burton *et al.*, 2009, pp. 564–565). In other words, a node (the EU) is more important (status) if it connects (diplomatic ties) to important nodes (countries). For example, the EU would receive a higher

centrality score if it received embassies from other polities with high centrality than from polities with lower centrality score. The type of eigenvector centrality measure used in the calculation is close to Google's PageRank algorithm. PageRank adds an exclusivity element to the eigenvector centrality measure. The algorithm specifies that nodes receive a higher eigenvector centrality if it connects to nodes with fewer outgoing ties rather than to nodes with many outgoing ties (see Renshon, 2017).

I used data from the Diplomatic Contact Database (DIPCON) for embassy exchanges between countries to calculate each polity's positional status. I added the EU to this diplomatic network by recording the diplomatic missions hosted by the EU using the same coding process as the DIPCON dataset. I used the EU Commission (EC) protocol service's own historical list of the authorized diplomatic corps to create this dataset. Here, a tie is only registered if a diplomatic mission is accredited to the EU.[9] This data was then merged with Frauke Austermann's dataset on the EU's own diplomatic missions. [10] To structure the analysis, I selected a group of benchmark countries to compare the EU with. I separated the raw PageRank scores (table 1a) as calculated in R using the igraph package (Csardi and Nepusz, 2006), and the polities world rank on that score for each year (table 1b).

Results

The EU has been on a stable trajectory towards higher positional status in world politics since the 1960s. The EU's lowest measured positional status was 1960 when it ranked 57 out of a total 94 polities (table 1b). It is impressive that the EU continued its rise on positional status beyond 1965. The stability and impermeability of high-status communities makes it a lot harder to make significant

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[9] The diplomatic innovation of accrediting diplomats to the EU becomes an issue when recording diplomatic exchanges. It is impossible to determine whether an embassy in Brussels is a 'vote' of importance towards the EU or Belgium. I view dual accreditation to the EU and Belgium as primarily being in Brussels to represent their polity at the EU rather than Belgium. Thus, in this measure, a diplomatic mission counts as a representational tie if ambassadorial accreditation is solely given to the EU or if it is given to both Belgium and the EU.

[10] See complete overview of all sources in table 1

status gains over a short period of time (Renshon, 2017, pp. 145–147; Volgy *et al.*, 2014, p. 69). Already by the end of the 1980s, it was clear that the EU's positional status was more akin to the great powers, such as the UK and France, than that of small middle powers such as Sweden. From the 1990s up until 2010, the EU has enjoyed the second highest positional status in world politics. This finding contradicts those who has suggested it is and will remain a minor force in world politics. Toje (2011), for instance, concludes that the EU is a 'small power' akin to Sweden or Argentina, something which this measure refutes. Indeed, it does also suggest that the EU is at the top of the status echelons of world politics, strengthening some claims about the EU's imminent superpower standing (see for instance Moravcsik, 2010).

(INSERT TABLE 1 HERE)

The sources of the EU's positional status

What generated the EU's meteoric rise in positional status? Though it is beyond this article's scope to provide any definite answers to this question, I will here derive a set of plausible propositions

that can explain the rise of the EU's positional status based on the existing literature and a qualitative examination of the data used to generate the measure.

Achieving higher positional status is often a result of two cases. Either the actor in question has actively sought social status from its peers, or the actor receives recognition for actions, possessions, or power, that are not carried out, sought, or acquired with the goal of achieving status. EU officials scoff at the idea that they are to seek prestige on behalf of the EU, and rather that increased prestige is tied to the EU's effectiveness (Wood, 2015, p. 311). Instead, in its regular activities, 'the EU is directed by functionaries without great personal authority or esteem as a group in the public sphere, even if valued among their colleagues.' (Wood, 2015, p. 308)

However, even though the EU has been an inconspicuous status seeker the last 50 years, recent scholarship has documented that it is still a status seeker nonetheless. For instance, Mälksoo (2016, p. 383) considers the 2003 European Security Strategy and the 2016 Global strategy as 'rhetorical anchors in claiming the EU's status as a global actor among the peers in the international society of states and traditional security organizations'. Similarly to the security field, Nitoiu (2016, p. 143) suggest that the EU has sought to 'achieve great power status' by enhancing its presence in the post-Soviet Space. Specifically, he suggests the European Neighborhood Policy has underlined 'the EU's aspiration of playing a greater role in the neighbourhood and through this laying the groundwork for an effective global presence.' (Nitoiu, 2016, p. 144).

Over the measured period, the EC largely drives the EU's status seeking. A useful example is the set-up of the EU's proto-diplomatic delegations. The EU emerged as a political actor during the decolonialization of Africa and Asia and benefited from the established ties and expertise of the former colonial powers France, Belgium, and later the United Kingdom. The jump from rank 57 to 12 in 1965 can be accredited to the dissolvement of the French, Belgian and British colonial

empires along with the continuation of this tradition through the EC. The EC delegations' role from 1960s and onwards were much bound up to the France and Belgium's colonial ties (Austermann, 2014, pp. 92–93). Delegations were set up as quasi-colonial administrations in the capitals of the former colonies to keep control and to oversee development projects (Dimier and McGeever, 2006, pp. 487–489). By 1980, the EU had received diplomatic missions from former French colonies Benin, Togo, Cameroon, and Republic of the Congo, as well as former British colonies Gambia, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi. The postcolonial states treated the diplomatic exchange more as a 'sign of prestige and friendship than as an institution serving a positive function.' (Zartman, 1966, p. 70). Thus, the EC was decisive in forming a global presence for the EU, and therefore also securing a position in the status hierarchy of actors in world politics.

Beyond establishing global presence, the EU/EC has also managed to navigate itself into a position where a virtuous processual cycle of increased recognition has propagated. As established in the literature on diplomatic network, status, and prestige, polities chose their target based on preferential attachment and reciprocity. In other words, polities prefer to send ties to countries hosting many diplomatic missions and those who send missions in return (Kinne, 2014, p. 255; also see Duque, 2018; Neumayer, 2008). In terms of preferential attachment, the EU by 1970, helped by its former colonial ties and expertise in the EC, boasted the eight largest diplomatic corps in the world. This helped perpetuate a continuous influx of new diplomatic missions to Brussels. For instance, the Chinese decision to establish a mission to the EU in 1975 was a direct acknowledgement of the Union's international potential (Möller, 2002, p. 11). A plausible explanation for this preferential attachment, as Kinne (2014, p. 257) suggests 'is that states pursue ties to prestigious partners precisely because highly integrated states offer greater informational resources'. By 1990, the EU had reciprocated 68% of the missions it received ten years earlier, and by 2000 it had reciprocated 75% of the missions it received in 1990. This is not an exceptionally

high reciprocity rate, as earlier studies have indicated that countries on average reciprocate about 90% of all ties (Neumayer, 2008, p. 235; Kinne, 2014). Yet, this finding only strengthens the earlier mentioned insight that the lack of reciprocation is a product of a sense of superiority on the part of the receiving polity (the EU) (Berridge and James, 2003, p. 82).

I should here stress that a considerable source of the EU's high positional status cannot be reduced to concrete actions of the EC. Certain fundamental values associated with the EU – most notably democracy, capitalism, and liberalism – are known to attract representation and recognition. Keene suggests that ideas of 19th century European civilization is key in the EU's status recognition. He suggests its 'international identity draws upon a set of principles that had already been established as a central part of the structure of international society. The EU is drawing on the cultural capital that was gradually accumulated over the two centuries before its foundation' (Keene, 2012, p. 952). Two recent influential studies find that such fundamental values, especially since the 1970s, has a significantly positive effect on the likelihood of establishing diplomatic representation in world politics (Duque, 2018, pp. 588; 599; Renshon, 2017, p. 139). Despite the initial status boost coming from the former colonies of the EU member states, these alone cannot explain the continuous positive status trajectory in the remaining years. Numerous Latin American countries - among others Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Peru, Bolivia and Uruguay – established missions at the EU from 1970 up until 1980. The influx of South American countries establishing their mission to the EU were conscious attempts by these countries to seek a counterweight to US economic influence (Muñiz, 1980, p. 58). Overall, the positional status measure, including their underlying numbers, builds up under the external perception literature's finding the world often recognizes the EU as an 'economic giant' (Lucarelli, 2014, p. 7) , a 'great power' (Sheahan *et al.*, 2010, p. 348), and sometimes even a *potential* superpower (Bain *et al.*, 2014, p. 200).

The fungibility of the EU's positional status

Can the EU's high positional status be 'cashed in' for power and influence? High status, according to a seminal piece in the field, 'confers tangible benefits in the form of decision-making autonomy and deference on the part of others concerning issues of importance, including but not limited to security and prosperity.' (Larson *et al.*, 2014, pp. 18–19) Voluntary deference here represents the consequence of high status. It makes social actors comply 'unaccompanied by threat or coercion.' (Anderson *et al.*, 2015, p. 2) Positional status transmits information of authority which allow those at the top of the status hierarchy to have more to say compared to those at the bottom (Lake, 2011).

Considering this general proposition, we should expect to see actors in deferring more often to the EU. EU's own diplomatic service here provides a suitable area to explore. Diplomats embody the polity they represent. As Neumann (2012, p. 171) suggests, 'the diplomats metaphorically and literally enable the state to "govern from afar"; they may still be seen as a, I would even say the, key embodiment of the state beyond its own borders.' Consider then the positional status measure to work as a 'status baggage' that diplomats carry with them in multilateral and bilateral arenas (for a similar take, see Pouliot, 2016, pp. 223–239). The academic literature does indicate an increased standing for EU practitioners over the years. Onestini (2015, p. 74) suggests 'the EU Delegation has enhanced its status overall; the fact that the EU Head of Delegation is responsible for all EU issues […] is clearly changing perceptions and interaction at local level.' Likewise, for small and medium sized member states, the EU is delegations function as a pathway to higher standing in the diplomatic pecking order (Maurer and Raik, 2018, pp. 69–70).

Despite the increasing weight of their status baggage, however, the EU diplomats still face obstacles in solidifying their club status as part of other country-based diplomats. In her analysis of EU delegations in Beijing, Moscow and India, Austermann (2014, p. 167) suggests the EU member state embassies 'do not easily accept the EU delegations as "one of them."' More recently, the Trump

administration downgraded the EU mission in Washington in its order of precedence (The Washington Post, 2019). The EU's official status thus became equal to international organizations and below embassies from countries. This does not necessarily mean the deterioration of the EU's positional status. But the fact that the US government have the option of downgrading its legal status indicates that the EU's club status is yet to be fully solidified.

Nested clubs provide another example of lacking club status. Membership in smaller esteemed clubs – such as G7, G20, BRICS, and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) – are also dependent on positional status (Alden and Schoeman, 2013; Pouliot, 2014; Cooper, 2013). Specifically, just like the UNSC does for great powers, so does the G20 and G7 offer a litmus test for status attribution of the second-tier powers (Larson *et al.*, 2014, p. 23; Pu, 2017, pp. 3–4). The EU has since 1977 been a member of what was once the G6 and now the G7. However, it did not 'count' as one of the six, seven or even eight. Conversely, the EU is recognized and *does* count as one of the twenty in the G20 (Debaere, 2015, pp. 14–20). However, even in the G20, the EU finds itself in a secondary position. Naylor (2018) shows that the EU member states inside the G architecture often make sure the EU representatives are not treated as club equals, and often merely as a tool for member states to get extra seats at the table. As a result, and because the EU to a large extent is at the mercy of its members, the EU representatives 'acknowledge that as the only non-sovereign actor sitting at the table with the club of states they have to "behave accordingly".' (Naylor, 2018, p. 107)

In a competitive status game, blocking the EU from gaining full membership in clubs is an understandable and effective strategy. The fear of status congestion, and as a result, status dilution, provides an incentive for countries to keep the EU from gaining full membership in the status club of international society and in other nested nation-state status clubs. For example, the rise of Japan, Germany and the EU, coupled with a significant increase in the number of UN members, fueled demands for UNSC reform in the 1990s. These demands were outright rejected by the sitting

permanent members. 'The obvious reason', Bourantonis (2004, p. 30) suggests, 'was their reluctance to share their privileged position with others and/or fear of losing their position, which they saw as a symbol of their international status and prestige.' Thus, although the EU's positive status trajectory and its current high positional status is evident, the EU suffers from lack of inclusion into the status clubs of nation-states. Therefore, the EU has yet demonstrated its ability to convert this status into influence, especially in comparison to other countries with similar positional status (Lucarelli, 2014, pp. 6–11).

Conclusion

In this article, I sought to tell a theoretically informed, comparative and coherent story about the EU's 'being' in world politics. I initially asked what kind of social status the EU enjoys in world politics. I answered that question by drawing on symbolic recognition practices, enabled by the exchanges of diplomatic representation. I have shown the EU's meteoric rise in the international status hierarchy since the 1960s. Complimentary to existing literature, I portrayed the EU as a giant that has struggled to capitalize on its status. I here showed that positional status enables access to certain privileges, but also that converting this status into power and influence depends on whether the EU becomes fully included into the various status clubs of nation-states.

I have left a few clues about where we should go from here. First, the positional status measure allows for a consistent longitudinal comparison of heterogeneous polities (nation-states and the EU) in world politics. Future studies may here further investigate the sources of the EU's high positional status by rigorously testing or exploring the propositions set out in this article. Second, this first inquiry into the positional status opens for finer grained inquires on the effects of high status. Here, scholars are right to explore the EU's role in political, military, economic, or environmental areas to understand

whether high status is easier to convert in some policy fields rather than in others. Third, I launched the lack of full club membership as central explanation for the lack of the EU's positional status convertibility in this article. To follow up on this idea, future research can probe why the EU is demoted to outsider status in various clubs beyond the theoretical explanation of status congestion and dilution. Ultimately, social status as depicted here, lays the groundwork for research that go beyond the *sui generis* label of the EU but still can complement current and future research on both the presence and actorness of the Union.

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Table 1. Positional status (1960-2010)

a.   Raw PageRank scores

Year	EU	USA	BRA	CHN	FRN	IND	SWD
1960	0,0079	0,0418	0,0200	0,0117	0,0331	0,0222	0,0146
1965	0,0150	0,0366	0,0128	0,0120	0,0287	0,0186	0,0128
1970	0,0189	0,0332	0,0123	0,0091	0,0270	0,0179	0,0133
1975	0,0193	0,0291	0,0121	0,0109	0,0225	0,0157	0,0117
1980	0,0194	0,0217	0,0126	0,0155	0,0238	0,0160	0,0123
1985	0,0236	0,0253	0,0120	0,0177	0,0197	0,0161	0,0115
1990	0,0237	0,0250	0,0120	0,0162	0,0199	0,0143	0,0110
1995	0,0261	0,0286	0,0108	0,0170	0,0200	0,0131	0,0122
2000	0,0236	0,0254	0,0113	0,0175	0,0208	0,0132	0,0115
2005	0,0222	0,0241	0,0104	0,0188	0,0187	0,0123	0,0108
2010	0,0214	0,0227	0,0132	0,0189	0,0162	0,0159	0,0103

b.   World rank on positional status (PageRank)

Year	EU	USA	BRA	CHN	FRN	IND	SWD	N
1960	57	1	10	25	3	7	17	94
1965	12	1	18	20	4	7	19	127
1970	8	1	22	36	2	9	15	133
1975	7	1	17	25	3	10	19	145
1980	5	3	15	11	1	8	17	156
1985	3	1	15	7	4	9	18	161
1990	2	1	14	7	4	12	19	163
1995	2	1	18	6	5	12	13	185
2000	2	1	17	7	4	12	16	186
2005	2	1	20	4	5	12	18	187
2010	2	1	13	3	5	6	21	189

Sources: DIPCON data set 2.3 and 3.0 (Rhamey *et al.*, 2010; Rhamey *et al.*, 2013), Austermann's (2014) dataset on the EU's delegations abroad, and EC protocol service's list over authorized diplomatic corps (Service du Protocole, 1962-1966; Service du Protocole, 1971-1991; Service du Protocole, 2001-2010) *Notes*: DIPCON records a diplomatic tie if: (1) the diplomatic structure is listed as an embassy; (2) Its physical residence is in the capital of the host country; (3) either an ambassador, or a high commissioner listed with a name and address and residing at the embassy. The merging of Austermann's dataset and my own data with the DIPCON datasets followed the same coding procedure.