Abstract
This dissertation aims to explore and illustrate the value role theory can add to the discipline of International Relations (IR) and its sub-field of EU studies. In doing so, this dissertation addresses two shortcomings in the role theory literature – role theory’s conceptual complexity and the lack of engagement of role theorists in relevant disciplinary debates – which together have obscured role theory’s value for the study of international affairs. Concretely, the dissertation, on the one hand, addresses the lacking engagement of role theorists in relevant disciplinary debates by fostering a more direct and pragmatic conversation between role-theoretical concepts and those concepts more ubiquitous in the IR and EU studies literature. To this end, it provides a set of four essays, which explore and illustrate the value a role-theoretical perspective can add to specific disciplinary debates revolving around the notions of ‘Normative Power Europe’, ‘EU actorness’ and ‘ontological security’, as well as the relations between regions and external actors.
On the other hand, this dissertation addresses role theory’s conceptual complexity by placing its emphasis on explicating and illustrating the practical value of a specific role-theoretical approach, interactionist role theory (IRT), and its particular conceptual apparatus which draws on the socio-psychological theorizing of pragmatist philosopher George Herbert Mead. In doing so, this dissertation aims to provide a clear understanding of the value a specific role-theoretical perspective can add to the study of international affairs. Taken together, these measures aimed at addressing the two identified shortcomings in the role theory literature, the dissertation argues, not only promise to clarify role theory’s practical utility for IR and EU studies scholars – and thus to strengthen role theory’s development within the discipline – but also to contribute to the development of IR and EU studies more generally through the provision of direct role-theoretical contributions to relevant disciplinary debates.