UNIVERSITY OF TARTU

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A POSTSTRUCTURALIST APPROACH TO STRATEGIC CULTURE: ESTONIA'S STRATEGIC RESPONSE TO RUSSIA'S HYBRID THREAT

Master's Thesis

Supervisor: Thomas Linsenmaier (MA)

Tartu 2018

I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced. This thesis contains in total 24,990 words excluding the abstract, acknowledgements, table of contents, list of abbreviations, bibliographic references and appendices.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to express my sincere thanks to my supervisor, Mr. Thomas Linsenmaier, who has provided insightful feedback and invaluable advice even before I arrived in Tartu. I also appreciate the constructive feedback from the reviewer. My special thanks go to Dr. Pääbo for his advice and his effort to arrange a weekly meeting for Master's students of the Baltic Sea Region studies programme which I find extremely useful. I am also indebted to my interviewees who are so generous with their time and provide insightful information. However, I am the only one responsible for any errors in this study. I acknowledge the tremendous help I got from the social sciences librarians. I also would like to thank Lauren, Julia, Fumie, Johanna, Annabel, Huantian, Jeeye, Claudia, and Anthony for the friendship and encouragement.

Along the path of my academic and professional journey, I am very fortunate to have met Dr. Apisak Sukying, Dr. Attasit Pankaew, Dr. Sikarn Issarachaiyos, Dr. Chanintira na Thalang, Dr. Pimrapaat Dusadeeisariyakul, Mr. Supattarayan Thiantheerasombat, Mrs. Juthamas Rajchaprasit and Mrs. Rakrung Pattanawasanpond who are the role models I always look up to.

Adjusting myself to the new environment abroad is not without difficulties. However, with the support, friendship and love I got from my friends in Thailand, I can eventually make it! I thank Ai, Kukkik, Chompoo, Fah, Ing Ing, Chain, Art, Gap, Chuda and Joey for always having my back.

The love and support from my family have always been the most important thing in my life. I grew up in an extended family with unconditional love from grandpa Pichit, grandma Kwanjai, grandma Dara, grandma Kwanruean, grandma Ouikham, grandma Jinda, grandma Jiraprapa, great-grandma Boonchawee as well as uncle Arun and his family. I always know that grandpa Authen is always watching over me from the heaven. Finally, I thank dad, mom, Fon and Prem for every single thing they have done for me. Their incredible support means the world to me.

ABSTRACT

This research has investigated how the hegemonic articulation of Estonian strategic culture mediates its strategic response to Russian hybrid threat in the information sphere. The study employs poststructuralist discourse theory as an intellectual framework and examines Estonia's strategic culture as a discursive context. Poststructuralist discourse analysis is utilised in the empirical analysis of Estonian strategic texts. The central argument of this study is that drawing on the privileged identity of Western democracy, the hegemonic articulation of Estonian strategic culture has rendered a cluster of security practices in response to Russian hybrid threat appropriate and "normal", namely the establishment of ETV+, the authorisation of Sputnik operation in Estonia, the partnership between Tallinn Television and Pervõi Baltiski Channel, and the public debunking practices. At the same time, such a hegemonic articulation excludes the illiberal security practices from the strategic frontier, namely censorship, nationalisation of information sphere and crackdown on Russia's media outlets in Estonia. Therefore, Estonia's strategic culture has created conditions of possibility for the minimalist approach to strategic response to Russian hybrid threat in the information sphere. The existing minimal strategic response is sustained by the concept of media liberalism. At the same time, the challenging political force is trying to disrupt the hegemonic articulation by bringing into play the concept of media sovereignty. However, Estonia's strong Western democratic identity has prevented the latter from gaining momentum.

Keywords: strategic culture, poststructuralist discourse analysis, strategic response, Estonia, Russian hybrid threat

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ECP – Estonian Centre Party

EU – European Union

IR – International Relations

IT – Information technology

KAPO – Kaitsepolitseiamet (The Estonian Internal Security Service)

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

PBK – Pervõi Baltiski Channel

TTV – Tallinn Television

INTRODUCTION

The research studies Estonian strategic response to Russian hybrid threat in the information sphere by using poststructuralist discourse theory as a theoretical framework. In the aftermath of the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea, the discussions in the western media and academic circle about Russian hybrid threat grew strikingly noticeable (e.g., Chivvis, 2017; Bachmann & Gunneriusson, 2015; Galeotti, 2016). At the same time, the military buildup, the employment of the rotating North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) troops, and the increase in military spending in the Baltic states[1] and Poland show serious apprehension about their security and the stability of the European Union (EU) and NATO's eastern flank. Against this backdrop, it is apparent that those states' strategic response to Russian hybrid threat follows the realist logic (Takacs, 2017).

The puzzle this study aims to address emerges from the realist tradition in International Relations (IR). Based on the logic of survival, the realists expect balancing and more assertive security policies in response to the rising threats. Observing the current security dynamics of the Baltic Sea region, it is clear that Russia is perceived as a threat against which states in the region are balancing by employing means at their disposal. The realists would, therefore, expect Estonia – as a rational actor – to pursue an assertive strategic response to Russian hybrid threat in order to reduce overall strategic disadvantages. However, upon a closer inspection into the specific domain of the case of Estonia, this simplistic picture presents more complex facets. Estonia does not adhere to the realist expectations as it continues to pursue a limited strategic response to Russian hybrid threat in the information sphere. The puzzle arises what accounts for this deviancy in the information sphere with regard to the manner Estonia counters Russian hybrid threat.

Whilst the increase of capabilities in the military and security sector has grown larger (see e.g., SIPRI, 2017), Estonia's strategic response to Russian hybrid threat in its information sphere is relatively limited. Estonia has immensely invested in its deterrent capacities. However, at the same time, neither the media censorship laws nor stricter

[1] Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

regulatory framework is publicly entertained in spite of the acknowledgement of Russian hybrid threat. Estonia's behaviour in this respect does not conform to the realist's balance-of-threat explanation. In the light of this deviancy, a closer investigation into the country's domestic ideational factors is needed.

Theories on the states' response to the international strategic environment have been predominantly developed in the field of strategic studies. This study contends that strategic culture is the most suitable concept in tackling the aforementioned puzzle because it reorients the research focus to the intervening ideational factors which mediate between threats and strategic outcomes. The academic research on strategic culture has been bountiful as the literature review of this study shows. However, recently, the significant changes in international strategic environment necessitate a broader understanding of the concept of strategy and thus strategic culture. This, moreover, reveals that current strategic culture literature has not yet bridged this gap.[2] Therefore, the study addresses this intellectual agenda and endeavours to fill this lacuna. It takes strategic culture as a central concept but moves beyond conventional accounts by putting it on a different theoretical ground. It further proposes an alternative reading of strategic culture by treating it as a discursive phenomenon.

The study utilises poststructuralist discourse theory as an analytical frame to examine how the hegemonic articulation of Estonian strategic culture shapes its strategic response to Russian hybrid threat in the information sphere. Accordingly, the intellectual landscape of this study is built on the poststructuralist theorising. Within this scheme of thought, the study espouses radical constructivism which holds that all semantic categories do not have an inherently essential attribute (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001[1985]). It pays a particular attention to the conditions of possibility for certain security practices such as those measures taken by states in response to perceived threats. From this angle, the hegemonic articulation of Estonian strategic culture is always contingent. It enacts conditions of possibility for the minimal strategic response based on Western democratic identity whilst excluding a set of restrictive security practices which do not conform to such

[2] See footnote 11.

an identity. In terms of epistemology, the study adopts the position that "to know reality is to participate in it" (Dillet, 2017, p. 518). Thus, it questions the objectivity of knowledge.

RESEARCH PUZZLE

In the wake of Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, the discussions on Russian hybrid threat in the Baltic states and Poland – amongst others – became heated. The disconcertment about security has since been clear in those countries as Russian hybrid threat is coupled with the neo-imperialist innuendo (Apetroe, 2016), revanchism, and aggressiveness (Jenkins, 2016). This reflects the perception that Russia is a threatening power. Hence, from a realist's theoretical stance, balancing against Russia – as an aggressive state – will ensure a survival of the threatened states (Wivel, 2008, p. 297). In particular, from the point of view of the smaller states around it, they are expected to follow the survival logic. Accordingly, balancing against the perceived threat as a strategic response is a viable explanation (Walt, 1985, pp. 8-9). Such a recurrent theme of Walt's theory of balance of threat is, therefore, feasible from this angle. Besides, taking the empirical phenomena into consideration, in response to Russian threats, the domestic buildup of defence and military capabilities (e.g., internal balancing) in the Baltic states and Poland along with the deployment of NATO troops to these states (e.g., external balancing) unequivocally point to the realist direction of strategic response. Looking at these states' behaviour, the realist proponents would argue that there exists "Russian threat out there". Therefore, as states are rational, they are expected to act according to their interests. The assertive response should, consequently, be expected because it will help mitigate strategic disadvantages and improve overall security. This argument is satisfyingly supported by a great deal of empirical evidence mentioned above.

However, zooming in on the domestic level, the picture significantly changes. In case of Estonia, despite its information sphere being susceptible to Russian hybrid threat, the current strategic response is strangely minimal. For instance, the flow of Russian propaganda and disinformation on daily basis in almost all available local Russian media outlets encounters limited obstructions (see Dougherty & Kaljurand, 2015, pp. 14-18). This demonstrates that the balance-of-threat account does not satisfactorily explain this

particular phenomenon as the increase of threat does not eventuate in the capability mobilisation and the intensification of response – such as imposing censorship – to ensure states' security. From a regional perspective, Estonia significantly differs from Latvia, Lithuania and Poland in dealing with Russian hybrid threat in the information sphere. In this respect, Estonia's strategic behaviour exhibits deviancy from the general pattern premised on the realist's balance-of-threat theory. It is precisely Estonia's management of Russian hybrid threat in the information sphere that needs further scrutiny and more accurate analysis. This is the puzzle the study addresses. In a nutshell, realist explanation accounts for why Estonia is balancing but its limited strategic response to Russian hybrid threat in the information sphere has not yet been sufficiently tackled. Thus, by researching Estonia's response to Russian hybrid threat in the information sphere, this study will contribute to a more precise analysis of Estonia's strategic behaviour.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research question of this study is: How does strategic culture mediate Estonia's strategic response to Russia's hybrid threat? Additionally, a complementary sub-question is: How did Estonia's limited response become normal response? Whilst the former asks about the conditions of possibility of the response, the latter enquires into how this response became considered not only as appropriate but also "normal[3]". "Normal" response is understood as a response that complies with the discursively-informed standard of correctness (Croce & Salvatore, 2017, p. 276). Both questions are embedded in the strand of *how-possible questions*[4] which will guide the investigation towards the conditions of

[3] Acknowledging that the concept of "normal" is perspectival and contestable, the study stipulates what "normal response" is in the context of poststructuralist discourse theory. In the light of poststructuralist reading, a standard of correctness is discursively constructed and it renders a certain strategic response normal. An inquiry through the lens of normality defined as such will further illuminate how other modes of possible strategic response are excluded from the hegemonic articulation. Simply put, the concept of normality highlights the disciplining of the significant Other treated as "abnormality" in the discursive construction of Estonia's strategic culture.

[4] My position here is in line with the discursive approach to foreign policy analysis such as Aydın-Düzgit (2013), Doty (1993), and Hansen (2006).

possibility which enable the hegemonic articulation of strategic culture and a certain mode of strategic response to the perceived threat. The study expects the hegemonic articulation of states' strategic culture defines a range of appropriate security practices in response to hybrid threat by filtering out security practices which challenge such an articulation.

From the theoretical expectation, the study contends that the hegemonic articulation of Estonian strategic culture minimalises its strategic response to Russian hybrid threat in the information sphere. This hegemonic discourse also reproduces Estonia's Western democratic identity[5]. Therefore, to the extent that a strategic response does not disrupt the articulation of its Western democratic identity with which the hegemonic strategic culture identifies, it is regarded as an appropriate strategic option. Hence, the existing limited security practices are expected to show their Western democratic overtones. The study proposes that Estonia's Western democratic identity is the privileged identity since the country keeps reproducing its representation based on such an identity (Mälksoo, 2013, p. 158; Tambur, 2014). Accordingly, the illiberal security practices are expected to be filtered out.

In the light of the research questions, this study has defined two objectives. First, it aims at explaining how the strategic culture of Estonia mediates its strategic response to Russian hybrid threat in its information sphere through the analytical frame of poststructuralist discourse theory. Second, it seeks to elucidate how the hegemonic articulation of the Estonian strategic culture creates conditions of possibility for certain security practices to become appropriate and "normal" strategic options. Both objectives will further shed light on Estonia's strategic behaviour at a particular moment in time.

In order to achieve these goals, the study utilises a poststructuralist approach to strategic culture as a theoretical framework because it facilitates an analysis which addresses the multiple possibilities of the framing of strategic response. The practice of strategic framing, in turn, informs how states should respond to the perceived threat.

[5] The Western liberal democratic identity consists in the following qualities; "individual freedom, political participation, private property, and equality of opportunity" (Doyle, 1986, p. 1152).

Accordingly, the theoretical amalgam of poststructuralist discourse theory and strategic culture can help to explain why certain strategic choices – amongst the possible – are filtered out and deemed unsuitable although they seem to produce the best strategic outcome, i.e., it is the most efficient solution to enhance states' overall security. The study will also illustrate that the interpretive frame developed in this research can better capture the politico-cultural dynamics in strategic considerations in the nonmilitary strategic environment. Furthermore, this theoretical framework allows a treatment of strategic culture as a discursive phenomenon and thus takes discourses as objects of analysis. Specifically, those discourses can be located "at the level of explicit articulations" (Hansen, 2006, p. 41). This reveals the theoretical assumption of the study which embraces the ontological and epistemological primacy of discourses.

This study, moreover, demonstrates the theorisation of the relationship between discourse, identity and strategic culture provides a firm conceptual ground for an analysis of Estonia's strategic response to Russia's hybrid threat. In particular, analysing the interplay between strategic culture and identity through the rubric of poststructuralist discourse theory will shed light on the appropriateness-in-making and normalisation of a certain mode of strategic response to the perceived threat. The study further elucidates how the concept of Russian hybrid threat is articulated by Estonia's public discourses. This helps to specify the scope of such a concept in the context of this study. All in all, the study attempts to show that the poststructuralist reading of strategic culture provides a precise understanding of Estonia's strategic behaviour in the context of Russia's hybrid threat in its information sphere. Through this approach, the mediating effects of the discursive context are exposed and entertained.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The remainder of this chapter presents critical reviews of two strands of relevant literature, namely the literature on Baltic states' response to Russian hybrid threat and literature on the theoretical approach to the study of strategic culture.

In the wake of Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, the study of the new type of warfare in which Russia employed a wide array of unconventional military tactics together with conventional operations in warfare against Ukraine has proliferated.[6] Such hybrid military operations coupled with Russia's aggressiveness in its traditional sphere of influence trigger scholarly discussions on how the Baltic states and the West can (or should) respond to Russia's hybrid threat.

Currently, there are two major research orientations which investigate how the Baltic states have responded to the potential (and existential) Russia's hybrid threat, namely the policy-oriented research with practical suggestions, if not solutions, and the theory-oriented research which attempts to explain Baltic states' strategic response within a context of a particular theory. The former includes scholars such as Bērziņš (2014), Hurt (2014), Lanoszka (2016), Szymański (2015), and Takacs (2017). They generally suggested that the increase in both self-defence capabilities of the Baltic states and NATO's readiness in collective defence operations are needed to counter Russia's hybrid threat. However, Thornton & Karagiannis (2016) argued that the increase in building up defence capabilities is counterproductive. Regarding the latter, Vilson (2016) posited Estonia's response to Russia's disinformation within the Europeanisation framework whereas Männik (2013) and Paulauskas (2013) pointed to the conceptual framework of collective security (e.g., NATO membership) in explaining Estonia's response to information-related threats posed by Russia. Bartkowski (2015) employed the theory of strategic nonviolent conflict to explain Lithuania's response by publishing the manual which provides practical guidance for Lithuanian people in the scenario of foreign invasion. Jurkynas (2014) pointed out that due to Estonia's historical experience during the Soviet occupation, it tends to implement assertive security policies in response to Russian threats. In addition, Mölder (2014) explained Estonia's strategic culture in relation to its active participation in the international peace operations. This again hints at Estonia's response to international security environment through the collective security framework. What remain unattended by those studies are the conditions of possibility in which a certain cluster of strategic response is

[6] See footnote 14.

deemed as the most viable and appropriate option. Moreover, the research that investigates strategic response from the discursive angle remains scant. It is this study's objective to fill this lacuna. It will provide a more nuanced interpretive frame which facilitates an analysis of the conditions that enable (or constrain) the hegemonic articulation of strategic culture which, in turn, mediates states' strategic response to the perceived threat.

A number of scholarships on strategic culture have contributed to the theorisation of the relationships between domestic ideational factors and states' strategic behavior. They can be broadly categorised into three clusters as follows: first, culture and historical experiences informing states' strategic response to the conflicting international security environment (see e.g., Gilboy & Heginbotham (2012) on the comparison of Chinese and Indian strategic culture in the context of major power competitions in Asia, Norheim-Martinsen (2012) on the military component of EU's security policies, and Das (2009) on the constructivist approach to India and Pakistan's nuclear strategy); second, the legitimate use of force and threat (see e.g., Dalgaard-Neilsen (2005) on German strategic culture and the refusal to support the US-led war in Iraq and Echevarria II (2011) on American strategic culture and its strategic preferences in warfare); third, the role of armed forces (see e.g., Showalter (2013) on the strategic cultures of European powers during the Interwar period.) However, this body of research rests on the narrow definition of strategy, regardless of their epistemological and methodological standing. Although the critical undertakings of strategic culture which address the emerging analytical challenges due to the changing nature of warfare have surfaced recently such as Adamsky (2018) on Russia's strategic culture in relation to hybrid warfare, they remain marginal. This study aims not merely at contributing to the critical spectrum of strategic culture scholarship but also putting forth a disciplinary critique by highlighting the need to broaden the concept of strategy.

This study is structured as follows. The first chapter elucidates the theoretical framework of this study and engages with a clarification of the important concepts used in this study. The second chapter maps out the methodological outlook of the study. It comprises of research design, selection of texts, and method of analysis. The interpretive

frame is also elaborated in this chapter. The third chapter shows the empirical analysis of discourses and the logical linkage between Russian hybrid threat and Estonian strategic response with strategic culture as a discursive intervention. The conclusion discusses the findings, the theoretical implications and the avenue for future research.

CHAPTER I

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: A POSTSTRUCTURALIST APPROACH TO STRATEGIC CULTURE

Before discussing the theoretical framework, a few reflections on the realist explanation are provided. It is obvious that in the context of conventional warfare, the realist explanation is still relevant in tackling the issue of strategic response. What is more, it is evident that Estonia's strategic response to Russian threats at large can be sufficiently explained through the theoretical framework of realism. Such responses include, for instance, the retaining of conscription, the active involvement in NATO, the increase in military expenditure – to name but a few. However, the scope of this study is clearly defined to account for Estonia's strategic response to Russia's hybrid threat in the information sphere. To re-emphasise, it is this particular angle that manifests deviancy from the realist expectations. Engaging with Russian hybrid threat in this particular sphere needs a more nuanced analytical approach which is sensitive to the domestic ideational factors which influence states' response to the perceived threats in the nonmilitary strategic environment. In the light of this state of affairs, the poststructuralist approach to strategic culture which focuses on the imprint of identity on a certain strategic response will entail an additional understanding of states' strategic behaviour. In short, it investigates the factors that realist explanation either takes them for granted or treats them as a given.

POSTSTRUCTURALIST THEORISATION OF STRATEGIC CULTURE

The traditional study of strategic culture generally either presupposes a prior existence of states' security culture or disregards the conditions of possibility through which a certain mode of strategic culture has become dominant. Alternatively, this study introduces a discursive approach which can be utilised in the critical research on strategic culture. This approach enables an analysis that reveals how the responsive dispositions to the perceived threat and particular modes of strategic culture are made possible and subsequently reproduced (Doty, 1993). This approach to strategic culture is thus formulated in a manner that resonates with this study's research questions.

This section offers a conceptual reformulation of strategic culture by arguing that the conception of strategic culture as a discursive phenomenon helps to disclose how the hegemonic articulation of strategic culture mediates Estonia's strategic response to Russian hybrid threat. The conceptual reorganisation provides the two-pronged broadening of strategic culture. On the one hand, it aims at basing the concept of strategic culture on the poststructuralist theoretical ground, on the other, broadening the understanding of the notion of strategy in strategic culture. In particular, the former has a significant implication on the enquiry of strategic culture – how strategic culture should be studied.

The first step is to problematise the widely accepted conceptualisation of strategic culture and point out that drawing on the privileged identity, a certain mode strategic culture enables a cluster of security practices to become the appropriate and "normal" strategic response. On the contrary, those challenging the hegemonic articulation of this strategic culture will be filtered out. The second step is to illustrate how the broadening of the concept of strategy in strategic culture opens up an opportunity to include into the analysis nonmilitary security matters – such as Russian hybrid threat in information sphere, to which this study attends. The final step is to elucidate the dynamic interplay between the concept of discourse, identity and strategic culture which generates the mediating effects on states' response to the perceived threat.

WHAT IS STRATEGIC CULTURE?

The concept of strategic culture – coined in the late 1970s by Snyder to explain the ideational factors influencing the Soviet Union and the United States' nuclear strategy (Snyder, 1977) – has been widely utilised in the analysis of states' strategic behaviour. Being an alternative to the rationalist and systemic explanation, strategic culture approach deals with the ideational factors at the domestic level and provides a cultural account that sheds better light on why states strategically act in the way they do. Generally, the questions revolving around the concept of strategic culture concern with the relationship between states' culture and their foreign and security policies (Duffield, 1999, p. 765). Hence, the epistemological locus of strategic culture approach encompasses states'

domestic ideational factors such as historical experience, national identity and political culture.

The bulk of strategic culture literature generally agrees on the definition of strategic culture as the historico-cultural predispositions of the perception of war and peace and the use of force (Ball, 1993; Krause, 1999, pp. 11-13), a context that gives meaning to strategic behaviour (Gray, 1999, p. 51), a national strategic style based on political culture (Lantis, 2002), and the symbolic systems of conception of long-term strategic preferences/strategic options with respect to military force (Johnston, 1995, p. 46; Rosa, 2014, pp. 91-92). Drawing on the above definitions, the study has identified three crucial discursive dimensions of strategic culture, namely political culture, national identity, and historical experience discourse. These discourses will be analysed in relation to Estonia's strategic posture in dealing with Russian hybrid threat in the information sphere. Although the insights provided by the existing strategic culture literature have considerably contributed to the understanding of states' strategic behaviour, there are two shortcomings that need be addressed, namely the insensitivity to the conditions of possibility of a certain mode of strategic culture in the rationalist approach and the narrowed definition of the concept of strategy.

PROBLEMATISING STRATEGIC CULTURE (I): RETHINKING THE APPROACH

Johnston (1995) had divided strategic culture literature into three generations. The first generation tried to explain the cultural differences between Soviet and American strategic behaviour in relation to their nuclear strategies. The second generation focused on the historically produced instrumentality of strategic culture in establishing political hegemony in the realm of strategic decision-making. The third generation highlighted the theoretical and methodological shortcomings of the first two generations and endeavoured to make strategic culture a testable theory.[7] In short, the first and the third generation

[7] See Zaman (2009) for a delineation and chronical explanation of each generation's characteristics and conceptual strengths and weaknesses.

assumed that ideational factors – be it ideology, historical experience, or culture – are a given, meaning that they are treated as an unquestioned precondition for a particular strategic culture. On the contrary, the second generation questioned those given categories and exposed the "cultural hegemony" in a certain politico-military strategy (Klein, 1988, p. 136). However, they did not delve into how identity has become a source of legitimacy for that cultural hegemony. Moreover, the three generations share a predominant focus on the military aspects of strategic culture such as the role of armed forces, the experiences of war and peace, and the civil-military relations, to name but a few (Krause, 1999, pp. 15-16).

In the sub-discipline of strategic culture, the debate between Johnston and Gray on how the relationship between strategic culture and strategic behaviour should be theorised marks a point of departure for the conceptual discussion of strategic culture. Johnston exhibited a positivist leaning and sought to formulate a causal and falsifiable strategic culture theory (Johnston, 1995). On the contrary, Gray contended that "strategic culture can be conceived of as a context out there that surrounds, and gives meaning to, strategic behaviour" (Gray, 1999, p. 51). Otherwise stated, for Gray, strategic culture is a context in which causal relationships are established. Therefore, neither can it be reduced to the cause nor effect.

There are two major limitations pertaining to Johnston and Grey's treatment of strategic culture. First, with regard to Johnston and positivist strategic cultural scholarships at large, they have overlooked the question how a certain mode of strategic culture has become dominant. This suggests their presupposition of the pre-existing strategic culture which is objectively identifiable. This view downplays the inclusionary/exclusionary dimension in the formation of states' strategic response to the perceived threat. For instance, certain security practices are deemed as appropriate response whilst others are marginalised since they are regarded as unsuitable response. Therefore, the political struggle over the hegemonic status of strategic culture remains unattended. Second, although Grey accepted that analysing strategic culture is an interpretive enterprise rather than an attempt to construct an explanatory concept. The uneasy location of material and ideational factors in his interpretive frame tends to produce an imbalanced strategic analysis

in which the focus on the former is at the expense of the latter and vice versa. Poore (2003) also highlighted this tension, arguing that Grey ruled out the assumption that "material variables possess an independent causality" because they expose a discrepancy in his contextualist approach (p. 282). In response to the shortcomings outlined above, this study contends that by adopting poststructuralist discourse theory, the issue of political struggle over hegemony in relation to strategic culture will be accounted for. This approach also accommodates an analysis that harmonises material and ideational factors as shown in the following sections.

In the sub-discipline of strategic culture, there is an attempt to skirt around the shadow of Johnston-Gray debate in order to provide the alternative conceptualisation of strategic culture. This alternative approach brings the attention to the critical spectrum of strategic culture by treating strategy as a cultural practice which establishes hegemony (Klein, 1988). Building on critical constructivist theory and Klein's argument, Lock offered an alternative approach to strategic cultural analysis. He argued that strategic behaviour is a practice in which strategic culture is produced (Lock, 2010, p. 687). Lock additionally highlighted that strategic culture is inhabited by "a political web of interpretation in which strategic practices gain meaning" (ibid, p. 697). Lock's main argument is that strategic culture as a practice has become meaningful because of the meanings attributed to it through discourses. The emphasis on the meaning-producing dimension in the study of strategic culture consequently facilitates a conceptual connection between material and ideational factors, enabling the investigation of strategic culture as "an interplay between practice and discourse" (Neumann & Heikka, 2005, p. 10). The conceptualisation of strategic culture as such is further in congruence with critical constructivist scholarships which pay attention to the role of national identities in actors' interpretation of strategic environment (Zyla, 2015, p. 107). In this respect, identities and meanings are incorporated into an analysis of strategic culture. In a similar vein, in the study of Swiss strategic culture, Mirow (2012) argued that the socially constructed identities, on the one hand, influence actor's strategic preferences. On the other hand, they construct culture (p. 344).

In sum, the general proposals of the constructivist strategic cultural scholars are as follows. First, security practices constitute a strategic culture. Second, identities and meanings do matter in an analysis of any strategic culture. Finally, policymakers' interpretations of the world in which they live are to be taken into consideration. The study will take the constructivist understanding of strategic culture as a point of departure for further conceptual reformulation. It is contended that the constructivist's emphasis on the constitutive characteristics of security practices and strategic culture is of crucial importance in that it opens up a possibility to trace their discursive constructions. Such constructions can be understood through the rubric of the poststructuralist discourse analysis which deals with the articulatory practices and hegemonic discourse. Moreover, examining the discursive aspect of strategic culture is useful because it helps to avoid the deterministic pitfall of positivist's causal conception of the relationship between strategic culture and the ensuing response to the perceived threat.[8]

In her critical re-reading of India's nuclear strategic culture, Das (2010) suggested a rethinking of the approach to strategic culture. Her approach takes into account how discourses ascribe meanings to strategic realities and produce the underlying ideology (p. 492). Das's argument bespeaks a conceptual multifariousness which can be construed as the triad combination of critical constructivism, poststructuralism, and securitisation theory. In this respect, her broadened analytical approach is sufficiently flexible to capture the meaning-making practice within the discursive structure which, in turn, reproduces the identity embedded in each security practice. This study underscores that Das's approach to strategic culture lays an intellectual foundation for postpositivist conception of strategic culture in that it provides an interpretive frame in engaging with the discursive dimension of states' strategic response to the perceived threat. Within this frame, the conceptualisation of strategic culture as a discursive context is possible. Drawing on this insight, the study critically assesses states' strategic response to the perceived threat by analysing the articulatory practices within which discourses and identities provide the meaning for certain security practices. In this respect, the issues related to an over- or underestimation of

[8] See Lock (2010) for a critique of the deterministic understanding of strategic culture.

strategic realities[9] and the question of the political limits of a certain strategic response can be more accurately tackled. In Klein's (1988) words, through the discursive lens, "we can trace out the closure of political space within the trajectory of discourse and the winnowing down of the open" (p. 297). Simply put, the appropriate strategic response is not a given but it has gained meanings through the political struggle in the articulation of strategic culture. In a nutshell, with this poststructuralist approach, it is possible to examine the discursive interplay between a cluster of security practices and the privileged identity which mediates states' strategic response to the perceived threat.

PROBLEMATISING STRATEGIC CULTURE (II): RE-BORDERING THE SCOPE

There remains a concern left marginally attended in the study of strategic culture – its narrow view of the notion of strategy. Most of strategic cultural scholarships are concentrating on the military aspect of the notion of strategy (see e.g., Klein 1991; Åselius, 2005; Echevarria II, 2011). Put differently, it is conceptually narrowed down to the military matters. However, after the end of the Cold War, the international strategic environment has been constantly changing (Dannreuther, 2009), giving rise to the new modes of warfare. In the light of such "changing physiognomy of contemporary warfare" (Frunzeti, 2013), there is an apparent need for analytical tools which are sensitive to nonmilitary threats[10] such as Russia's use of available media outlets to pursue its own revisionist political objective (Giles, 2015, p. 1). Recently, Russia has already employed information operations extensively as "a critical part of nonmilitary warfare" (Waltzman, 2017, pp. 3-4). It can be considered as a civilian avatar of military actions. Accordingly, as "hybrid warfare leads to a re-conceptualisation of conflict" (Mosquera & Bachmann, 2016, p. 64), the notion of strategy must be reframed accordingly so as to capture the hybrid characteristics of (non)military strategy. Besides, regarding Russia's contemporary strategic calculation that the use of force is not necessarily a central feature of a certain mode of warfare (Galeotti, 2016, p. 21), this calls for a more nuanced conceptualisation of strategy in order that it can

[9] Toje's (2008) conceptualisation of strategic culture has addressed this matter (p. 19).

[10] In fact, a scholarly call for taking nonmilitary threats into consideration in the post- Cold War security studies was made since the early 1990s by Camilleri (1994).

account for a plethora of situations in which the distinction not only between military and nonmilitary domain but also the use and non-use of force is hardly possible. Furthermore, looking from the disciplinary angle, strategic studies is oftentimes mistakenly regarded as an equivalence to the study of military affairs in the absence of a discipline of war studies (Barkawi, 2011, p. 704). This implies that the issues of inquiry in strategic studies can be diverse and are not necessarily about the use of force, war and the military.[11] The scope of the notion of strategy can, therefore, be broadened to include the nonmilitary strategy in hybrid warfare. Consequently, this opens up an opportunity for the concept of strategic culture to break free from the preoccupation with military affairs and revitalises its analytical potential. Widening strategic culture agenda is, moreover, interrelated with the widening of the concept of security which challenges the primary emphasis on military threats (Huysmans, 1998, p. 227). In the light of the focus of this study, it is argued that Russian hybrid threat in Estonian information sphere is primarily produced by civilian actors rather than military operations. This requires a new mode of security thinking which resonates with a broader framework of strategic analysis. The empirical reality under investigation in this study which involves primarily in nonmilitary hybrid threats further demonstrates the analytical leverage of the broadened scope of the notion of strategy in strategic culture. The broadening agenda put forth in this study essentially encourages re-bordering of the disciplinary scope.

To reiterate the proposal of double-broadening agendas of strategic culture, the study highlights that the concept of strategic culture can be treated as a discursive phenomenon, thereby opening up a possibility to investigate how the hegemonic articulation of Estonian strategic culture defines a range of appropriate security practices in response to Russian hybrid threat by excluding the counter-hegemonic security practices from the legitimate selection of strategic response. In short, strategic culture construed as such generates mediating effects on states' strategic response to the perceived threat.

[11] Vannesson (2017) argued that critical security scholars misunderstand the concept of strategy as confined to the narrow domain of military and warfare. In contrast, historically, the conceptual scope of strategy has been broader. In other words, "strategic thinking can be used to analyse any security issue when actors interact in a conflicting environment" (p. 377).

Simultaneously, due to the new empirical challenges on the ground, the concept of strategic culture need be broadened in order to better capture the dynamics of strategic realities. In this respect, instead of focusing predominantly on the use of force and the military sector, the concept of strategic culture employed in this study shifts the emphasis to the nonmilitary security challenges.

THE INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN DISCOURSE, IDENTITY AND STRATEGIC CULTURE

In this section, the study aims at elaborating the theoretical cross-fertilisation between the broadened concept of strategic culture and the poststructuralist discourse theory. It can be understood as a poststructuralist approach to strategic culture. The study begins by showing the poststructuralist theorisation of identity and discourse. Both concepts are essential to the understanding of strategic culture as a discursive practice. All in all, the purpose of this theoretical discussion is to lay out how the interplays between discourse, identity and strategic culture enable the hegemonic articulation of strategic culture which, in turn, mediates states' response to the perceived threat.

The turn to discourse in International Relations is associated with the interpretive/textual study of world politics which marks a departure from the dominant rationalist-materialist explanation (see e.g., Doty, 1993; Weldes, J. & Saco, D., 1996; Campbell, 1998; Hansen, 2006; Der Derain, 2010). This turn is influenced by the wider linguistic turn in social sciences. It finds its root in the Later Wittgensteinian understanding of language in that language is not an independent category. Rather it is essentially context-bound. Language and social practices are thus interlinked. Otherwise put, the rules governing each language game are operated in a "cultural context embedded in a form of life" (Jacquette, 2017). In this sense, strategic culture is governed by societal/political rules informed by a certain mode of language game.

The interpretivist IR scholars – both constructivist and poststructuralist proponents – hold the ontological assumption that a reality is constructed rather than given. They argue that a reality is a part of the linguistic construction. However, whilst the conventional

constructivist theorisation of identity is based on the assumption that identity can be treated as an explanatory variable which is ultimately assumed to have an essential nature[12], the poststructuralist argument instead asserts that identity is discursively constructed. The poststructuralist understanding of identity thus holds that identity is unstable, relational, and partially fixed within a discursive field (Laclau & Zac, 1994). In other words, there is no fixed and static identity. This poststructuralist's anti-essentialist ontological position is reflected in Laclau's and Mouffe's theory of discourse. In their words, "there is no social identity fully protected from a discursive exterior that deforms it and prevents becoming fully sutured" (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001[1985]). In the context of poststructuralist discourse theory, each strategic culture is constructed as a part of social identity formation in that it is a representation of social identity in the strategic domain. Hence, the articulation of strategic culture simultaneously reinforces the *privileged identity* which is defined as the identity which the hegemonic discourse (re)produces. Taking this conception of identity as a point of departure, the study will further illuminate Laclau and Mouffe's poststructuralist theorisation of discourse.

For poststructuralist theorists, a discourse is generally defined as "a system of meaningful practices that form the identities of subjects and objects" (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000, p. 3-4). Hence, discourses provide conditions of possibility for any meaningful social practice (Torfing, 2003, p. 161; Weldes & Saco, 1996, pp. 372-374). However, this does not suggest that everything exists only in discourses. Although poststructuralist theorists give prime importance to discourses, they never deny the existence of the material world. For instance, poststructuralists would not argue that the anti-ballistic missiles do not exist as a material fact. However, they are instead interested in the meanings ascribed to those missiles which depend on discourses, i.e., they are your friend's or foe's. Hence, within the poststructuralist theoretical framework, the distinction between discursive and non-discursive realm is a fallacious argument. Phelan & Dahlberg (2013) nicely summarised that "the extra-linguistic and linguistic elements always already have a constituting effect on each other," (p. 4) showing the ontological inseparability

[12] See Wendt (1992).

between idea/language and material practices in the poststructuralist theorisation. Therefore, "all objects are objects of discourses, as their meaning depends on a socially constructed system of rules and significant difference" (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000, p. 3). The significant difference is another conceptual basis on which identities are formed. Mouffe (2000) argued that to construct "us" is to simultaneously create "them" (p. 149). From the theoretical viewpoint elaborated above, a strategic culture is an object of discourse through which it becomes socially meaningful. Besides, as the binary opposition of us versus them is always present in any identity construction, a strategic culture consequently has to exclude the "them" from the "us" components to preserve its existence.

What remains unexplained here is how meanings are actually produced within the discourses. It is necessary to introduce two basic categories, namely elements and moments. Both concepts are specific to Laclau and Mouffe's conceptualisation. Elements can be understood as signs which are not being articulated whereas moments are signs with a meaning that are already articulated into and partly fixed within a discursive chain (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001[1985], pp. 105-113). For Laclau and Mouffe (2001[1985]), the articulation is defined as "any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice" (p. 105). Additionally, there are floating signifiers within a discourse which stay open for diverse meanings (Bergström, Ekström & Boréus, 2017, p. 214). This study particularly interests in the floating signifier "Western democracy" which is central to Estonia's strategic culture. What enable elements to become moments are nodal points which are "privileged signifiers that fix the meaning of a signifying chain" (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001[1985], p. 112). These nodal points contribute to the emergence of hegemonic discourse. The hegemonic discourse embodies partially fixed meanings and identities produced at a particular moment in time and sustains a contingent decidability within the undecidable system of signs (Mole, 2012, p. 14).

Looking at discourses in a more concrete slant, Laclau and Mouffe introduced two logics which facilitate discursive analysis, namely the logic of equivalence and the logic of difference. The logic of equivalence refers to the merging of signs with different meanings

and unassociated identities in order to form a new meaning (Bergström, Ekström & Boréus, 2017, pp. 215-218). In contrast, the logic of difference corresponds to a discursive practice of dissipating the chain of equivalence. Social identities emerge out of the interactions between the two logics. Such an interaction is determined by political struggles (Torfing, 2003, p. 162). However, not all available meanings are ascribed to the moments in each discourse. Those extra meanings can be located in the field of discursivity which is "the field of irreducible surplus meaning" (ibid., p. 163). From this theoretical perspective, the hegemonic articulation of strategic culture thus gives meanings to the semantic categories used in the strategic narratives such as "hybrid threat", "an appropriate strategic option", and "normal strategic response". These categories are manifested through security practices such as non-banning of television broadcast or the establishment of official propaganda-debunking team. Besides, the hegemonic articulation of strategic culture is partially fixed by the nodal points, namely "liberalism", "the West", "democracy" and "multiculturalism". These nodal points resonate with the privileged identity which provides legitimacy for the hegemonic position of a certain mode of strategic culture.

Furthermore, the discursively constructed identity informs subject position. A subject cannot be conceived of as a subject of totality or completeness (Žižek, 1994). To quote Laclau (2006), "The presence of the antagonistic other prevents me from fully being myself" (p. 106). Antagonism, according to Laclau and Mouffe (2001[1985], pp. 122-127) can be summarised as the linguistic disruption within the discursive system, contributing to the dislocation of hegemonic discourse. Such a dislocation "induces identity crisis for a subject" (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000, p. 13). The constant dislocations within the discursive structure thereby produce "a subject that always emerges as a split subject" (Torfing, 2003, p. 165). Consequently, when dislocation occurs, the identity of the subject will also be threatened and the subject will be compelled to reassert its subjectivity (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000, p. 13). The incompleteness of the subject reflects that "the subjectivity of the agent is penetrated by the same precariousness and absence of suture apparent at any other point of the discursive totality of which it is part" (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001 [1985], p.121). Consequently, the subject will identify itself with the hegemonic

discourse which, in turn, confers a certain identity on them (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000, pp. 13-14).

Likewise, the hegemonic strategic culture is not an ontologically complete entity. As extra-meanings are always available in the field of discursivity, it is possible that the counter-hegemonic strategic culture (antagonism) can emerge and lead to the dislocation of the hegemonic articulation of strategic culture. However, owing to the inescapability from being constantly dislocated, the hegemonic strategic culture will reproduce the privileged identity to secure itself. This identity is superimposed on the range of possible strategic response and provides legitimacy for the corresponding security practices. By the same token, each security practice in response to the perceived threat serves as a site within which the privileged identity is (re)produced.

To recapitulate, the anti-essentialist poststructuralist reading of strategic culture highlights that strategic culture is not given but discursively constructed. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that there is *a prior* strategic culture. Instead, it is contingent and constantly contested (Strömbom, 2012, p. 172; Bucher & Jasper, 2016, pp. 393-395). Furthermore, as there is no distinction between an extra-discursive and a discursive realm, discourses serve as a nexus between an interpretation and an action. Simply put, discourses make security practices meaningful by conferring not merely meanings but also identity on them. As "political struggles are key to the emergence of hegemonic discourse" (Mole, 2012, p. 14), the hegemonic articulation of strategic culture needs politico-cultural legitimacy to render certain security practices it justifies appropriate and "normal".[13] One way of doing so is to exclude the challenging signs underpinned by antagonistic political forces from the hegemonic articulation. Nevertheless, as the "antagonistic Other" is always needed in the process of identity construction (Herschinger, 2012), constant othering of antagonistic categories is always a part of the articulation of strategic culture. The hegemonic strategic culture is thus compelled to defend the privileged identity with which it identifies so as to maintain its dominant status. Through these discursive dynamics,

[13] In their study of NATO's operations in Darfur, Pomarède & Schjødt (2015) argued that discourses make certain politico-military practices appear "normal" and legitimate.

security practices containing the elements of antagonistic Other will be either marginalised or filtered out. Simply put, a strategic response carrying antagonistic connotations is labelled as an inappropriate response.

Building on the theoretical intersections between discourse, identity and strategic culture, this study proposes that security practice is defined as *the total sum of political, security and historical discourse which provides a cognitive frame for the evaluation of and in response to the perceived threat*. The security practices *gaining a hegemonic status* through political struggles are subsequently consolidated within the contour of the *hegemonic strategic culture*. Therefore, both are mutually constitutive. The hegemonic articulation of strategic culture is sustained by certain nodal points embedded within the security practices. Through this consolidating and constituting process, a certain floating signifier becomes established as a *privileged identity*. In the light of this theorisation, the hegemonic articulation of strategic culture *mediates* states' strategic response to the perceived threat in the manner that it filters out security practices which challenge the hegemonic strategic culture whilst rendering certain security practices as appropriate and "normal". As contingency and non-essentialisation of an entity are inherent characteristics of poststructuralist discourse theory, there is always a room for the restructuring of a discursive system, rendering strategic culture susceptible to constant dislocations. The theoretical implication on this study is that strategic culture needs to be constantly reproduced through the practice of strategic response. Therefore, the privileged identity embedded in the strategic culture is also present in each strategic response.

All in all, through the poststructuralist approach developed in this chapter, the study can better capture how the hegemonic articulation of Estonian strategic culture mediates the country's response to Russian hybrid threat in its information sphere. What is more, unpacking the discursive formation and disposition of Estonia's strategic culture further sheds light on the likelihood of strategic response to such a threat. In the final section of this chapter, the study lays out the articulation of Russian hybrid threat through Estonian discourses.

THE ARTICULATION OF RUSSIAN HYBRID THREAT IN ESTONIAN DISCOURSES

This section is devoted to the discussion on how the concept of Russian hybrid threat is understood in the Estonian context. The conception of strategic culture as a discursive context demonstrated above necessitates a reappraisal of the notion of Russian hybrid threat. In other words, it must also be based on the poststructuralist theoretical ground. The main argument of this section is that Russian hybrid threat is not an objective phenomenon but is produced by discourses.

The traditional conception of threat in strategic culture literature is generally based on the essentialising of threat (see e.g., Minkina, 2011; Búzás, 2013, p. 579). This reflects an assumption that threats have a stable ontology and thus can be objectively identified. However, from a poststructuralist theoretical perspective, Russian hybrid threat is a semantic category which does not have an essential feature, but it depends on meanings ascribed to it by the articulation of certain discourses. Otherwise put, the existence of Russian hybrid threat as a given is impossible (see Brown, 1994, pp. 222-227). Although it is beyond the scope of this study to delve further into the discursive construction of Russian hybrid threat, for the sake of analytical precision it is worth mapping out the representation of Russian hybrid threat in Estonian public discourses. This intellectual enterprise is necessary because it provides a sense of what Russian hybrid threat refers to in this study. It also responds to the literature criticising that the concept of hybrid threat is devoid of analytical significance (See Renz & Smith, 2016, p. 1; Renz, 2016). This line of reproval is, too, present in Estonian discourse (Tagel, 2015).

Turning to the discussion on Russian hybrid threat in the western policy and academic texts, the concept is generally referred to as a strategy that employs both military and nonmilitary methods in conflicts, keeps the military operations below the full-scale war threshold, creates vulnerabilities from within through subtle manipulation of a civilian

population, and makes the strategic response imprecise.[14] These definitions point to the nonmilitary and unconventional features of Russian hybrid warfare. Taking this as a point of departure, the intertextual analysis exhibits that the notion of Russian hybrid threat has become articulated shortly after Russia's operations in the conflicts in eastern Ukraine and Crimea in 2014 in which a wide array of military and nonmilitary strategies was employed. Despite echoing the Western usage of the term "Russian hybrid threat", the localised conception of this term in Estonian public discourses reveals four specific representations.

In 2014 Estonian Defence Forces' year book, Rosin delineated the characteristics of Russian hybrid operations, noting that "in the 21st century military operations rely considerably on nonmilitary measures to achieve political goals" (p. 33). Estonian security expert Henrik Praks also shared a similar understanding of Russian hybrid threat. For him, the nonmilitary threats stemmed from the strategy of hybrid warfare can potentially lead to the destabilisation of Estonian society (Praks, 2017). Accordingly, the nonmilitary aspect of Russian hybrid threat is accentuated. For Estonia, an emphasis is additionally placed on the potential hybrid threat in its cyberspace. (Hunter & Pernik, 2015) Moreover, Teperik (2018) linked the informational-psychological influence through disinformation with the category "Russian hybrid threat". Clarifying the characteristics of Russia's strategy in contemporary warfare, Arold (2016) suggested that hybrid threat should be construed through Russia's military term "information operation" which is associated with Putin's regime. Estonian academic Vladimir Sazonov further pointed out that the presence of Russian media in Estonia's information sphere makes Estonia particularly susceptible to Russia (Kaukvere, 2016a). Estonian National Defence College had also developed scenarios and training in response to the potential informational threats from Russia

[14] Mansoor (2012) on the combination of conventional military forces and irregulars (p. 2); Cîrdei (2015) on the avoidance of an open and direct confrontation (p. 114); Bachmann & Gunneriusson (2015) and Waltzman (2017) on the combination of new technology and information in warfare; Major & Mölling (2015) and Schaub Jr., Murphy & Hoffman (2017) on the exploitation of the vulnerabilities of the target countries; Raitasalo (2017), Erol & Oğuz (2015), and Munteanu (2015) on the influencing public opinion and destabilising internal cohesion; and Deep (2015) and Stavridis (2016) on the creation of confusion and grey zones in which military response can be indecisive.

(Kaukvere, 2016b). Drawing on the discussion on Russian hybrid threat in Estonian public discourses presented above, the following four main representations of such a threat articulated through Estonian public discourses are spelt out. First, Russian hybrid threat is associated with the nonmilitary measure in warfare whilst the conventional military aspect remains prominent. In other words, Estonian understanding of hybrid warfare is twofold in the sense that military aspect must always be present *pari passu* with nonmilitary measures. Therefore, although the study focuses on Estonia's strategic response to the nonmilitary aspect of Russian hybrid threat, it does not suggest that the military angle is disappearing from the strategic calculation. Figure 1 helps to illustrate the overarching intellectual model of Estonian understanding of Russian hybrid threat. Additionally, the figure also displays the boundary of Estonian information sphere understood in this study. It must be clarified that this figure is an analytical construct which is meant to facilitate a precise conceptual communication. Hence, its aim is not to essentialise the concept.

Figure 1: Estonian understanding of Russian hybrid threat

	Military	**Nonmilitary**
Conventional	Battlefield combat Intelligence Strategic deterrence • Nuclear threat	Political[15] and economic influence[16] • Soft power projection • Humanitarian assistance
Unconventional	Clandestine/deniable operation • Insurgency • Proxies • Military-operated cyber warfare	Informational-psychological influence • Propaganda and disinformation in all available media outlets

Information sphere

Second, the informational-psychological influence is considered to be an integral part of the strategy of hybrid warfare. Thus, from Estonian point of view, Russia's media outlets are understood within the framework of Russian hybrid war strategy. Third, Russian hybrid threat can potentially destabilise societal cohesion. Taking the case of Estonia into consideration, a significant gap in the perception of Russian threat between Estonian- and Russian-speaking population raises the problems about the political trust in the state and the cohesion of the society (Mattiisen, 2017). Therefore, Russia's disinformation and propaganda campaigns are playing with the "truth" and "trust" in Estonia's information sphere in the sense that multiple truths are presented to confuse the public and undermine

[15] Contemporary Russian public diplomacy is characterised by the combination of "propaganda, cultural diplomacy and political influence techniques" (Saari, 2015, p. 61). Moreover, Russia's Compatriot Policy launched in 2006 also involves in the use of media to spread propaganda to influence Russian-speaking population abroad (Kudors, 2015).

[16] Major & von Voss (2016) argued that economic blackmail/coercion can be combined with other military means to destabilise a target state (p. 2).

political trust in the government (Bittman, 1985, p. 49; Schultz & Godson, 1984, Wilson, 2005, pp. 8-9, 33; Estonian Encyclopaedia, 2006). The truth-trust strategy in Russian hybrid threat can be summarised in the words of Besemeres (2016) as "a semi-truthful narrative with big lies in its strategic points" (p. 356). In case of Estonia, major Russian propaganda revolves around the recurrent trope of the legitimacy of Soviet rule over Estonia (and other Baltic states), the oppression of Russian minority, "anti-NATO rhetoric" (Mattiisen, 2017), and Nazi-sympathetic mentality amongst the Estonians (Kiviräkh, 2010, p. 61). The circulation of such narratives through Russian media outlets in Estonia has become articulated as a threat precisely because it can alter the public perception of certain events, induces confusion (Priimägi, 2015, p. 48) and undermines the country's overall security (Radin, 2017, p. 18). Fourth, the concept of propaganda and disinformation can be located in the equivalential relationship. They are articulated into the common frame of Russian hybrid threat. Accordingly, this study does not distinguish between disinformation and propaganda and uses the terms interchangeably. To conclude, the key argument made in this section is that Russian hybrid threat is discursively constructed and imprinted in the four representations outlined above.

CHAPTER II

POSTSTRUCTURALIST DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

This chapter discusses the study's methodology. It starts with the research design, followed by the selection of texts. The method of analysis section lays out the logical sequences in the application of the poststructuralist intertextual analysis on the research. The analysis is performed on the corpus of strategic texts in order to identify the nodal points sustaining Estonia's strategic culture and security practices. The study further elaborates how the discursive context sews discursive elements together.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research is a qualitative single-case study of a deviant case. The deviant case analysis aims at revealing "the limits of extant theory" (Wicks, 2010, p. 291; see also Bennett & Elman, 2007, p. 176). With regard to this study, researching the case of Estonia points to the limit of IR realist's balance of threat theory whose theoretical prediction does not adequately capture Estonia's strategic behaviour in managing Russian hybrid threats in its information sphere. The empirical case study is Estonian strategic response to Russian hybrid threat in the information sphere after Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. Accordingly, the temporal (2014-2018) and spatial context (Estonia) define the boundary of the case.

Drawing on the pioneering work of Laclau & Mouffe (2001[1985]) and Hansen (2006), poststructuralist discourse analysis is employed as a method of analysis. Approaching Estonia's strategic response to Russia's hybrid threat in its information sphere through the rubric of poststructuralist discourse theory needs an interpretive frame which is sensitive to the interplays between different discursive components. In response to this challenge, the study revisits the ideational factors that "the traditional rationalist-materialist theoretical models of strategic decision-making overlook" (Bloomfield, 2012, p. 437), namely political culture, national identity and historical experience. It subsequently situates the three notions in the contour of poststructuralist discourse theory. Within this framework, they become understood as basic discourses which highlight "the points of

contestation within a debate" (Hansen, 2006, p. 52). As demonstrated in the previous chapter, discourses are sustained by nodal points. Accordingly, the study analyses political culture, national identity and historical experience discourse along the axis of their nodal points in order to identify the discursive link between security practices, identity and strategic culture. With this scheme of analysis, it is possible to sketch a range of perceivable strategic response to Russian hybrid threats.

In order to examine the hegemonic articulation of Estonian strategic culture, the study relies on a corpus of strategic texts and transcribed texts from six interviews as its main sources. Reading intertextually, these texts present the debates on how Estonia should appropriately respond to Russian hybrid threat in the information sphere. The selected texts used in this study also contain strategic narratives. It is worth underscoring that these texts are just the "vehicle for understanding" (Dunn and Neumann, 2016, p. 2) but they are not the discourses themselves. Regarding the interview, six additional semi-structured elite interviews with Estonian officials and security experts were conducted. The aim of the interviews is twofold. First, the interviews help to deepen the analysis of how Estonia's hegemonic strategic culture is articulated amongst the practitioners who (re)produce the discourse containing what is understood to be appropriate strategic response to Russian hybrid threat. Second, the interviews compensate my limited access to the classified documents.

This study, however, has three major limitations. First, this study is selective in that it excludes relevant books written in Estonian due to my limited knowledge of the language. It instead relies extensively on news articles in both English and Estonian and English translation of official documents. However, whilst this may limit the depth of the study, the sample is still sufficient to identify main traits of Estonia's strategic culture in response to Russian hybrid threat. Second, although this study does not aim at formulating a causal explanation, it remains liable to equifinality since many other factors may be in play such as a lack of resources, institutional constraints, or Europeanisation. Third, the accessibility of information has been a challenge in security and defence studies (Walt, 1991, pp. 227-228). Restrictions on access to certain information unavoidably limit the

depth of my analysis. Nonetheless, the absence of such classified resources does not undermine the intellectual enterprise this study pursues seeing that the hegemonic articulation of Estonian strategic culture is not only confined to those classified documents.

As regards the selection of case, Estonia is chosen due to its deviancy from the realist's theoretical expectations. It deviates in the sense that given its size, geo-strategic location, the degree of digitalisation, the presence of sizeable Russian ethnic minority, it can be expected to adhere to realist expectations. But when it comes to the information sphere, Estonia exhibits the following deviations. First, Estonia, albeit being a member of NATO, remains vulnerable to Russian hybrid threat because of its sizeable Russian-speaking population who are not fully integrated into Estonian society (Włodarska-Frykowska, 2016) and "live in a separate information space" (Bulakh et al., 2014). The study adopts the definition of Russian-speaking population as defined by Schulze (2010) which is "those members of the minority community who declare Russian as their mother tongue or as their second language" (p. 363). Although Latvia is intimately similar in this respect, Schulze (2009) argued that "Latvian elites questioned the loyalty of segments of the Russian-speaking minority more than Estonian elites did" (p. 7). This marks a significant qualitative difference between Estonia and Latvia. Moreover, in 2007, Russia launched cyberattacks against Estonia in response to the decision to move the memorial commemorating Soviet soldiers from a square in Tallinn. The ensuing riots by ethnic Russian were largely a result of Russian instigation through disinformation (Lucas & Pomeranzev, 2016). Estonia is thus susceptible to Russian (informational-psychological) hybrid threat. It is, however, of crucial importance not to overstate the impact of Russia's disinformation campaigns because there is no irredentist inclination amongst Estonia's Russian-speaking population (Petsinis, 2016). They are diverse along the spectrum from pro-Kremlin to pro-Estonia (Dougherty & Kaljurand, 2015).

Second, despite being exposed to Russian hybrid threat especially in the form of disinformation and propaganda, Estonia remains committed to the liberal principle of freedom of speech. Whilst Latvia and Lithuania temporarily banned Russian media outlets such as Sputnik News and Ren TV Baltic in response to Russia's disinformation

campaigns, Estonia decided not to block those Russian broadcasts (EUACTIV, 2016; Gathman, 2017). From a regional perspective, the three Baltic states respond to Russian hybrid threat in their information spheres differently, despite their shared hostility towards Russia. Lithuania is considered to be the most responsive towards Russian aggression and most vocal in criticising Russia. For instance, Lithuanian defence ministry published in 2014 a manual entitled "How to Act in Extreme Situations or Instances of War." The manual also outlines scenarios of foreign invasion (Kuncina & Sindelar, 2015). In case of Latvia, the separatism-related image appearing on Facebook of Vladimir Linderman – a pro-Russian activist – did alarm Latvian authority, leading to an inquiry by security services (Rettman, 2015). This exhibits a serious anxiety amongst the Latvian authorities which results in the implementation of more restrictive measures against Russian threats vis-à-vis Estonia. In this regard, all Baltic states face a similar threat but Estonia responds differently. Put simply, although Estonia would be most likely to respond assertively as the realists would expect, it does not. This deviancy suggests that a domestic factor (e.g. strategic culture) is expected to be at work.

Third, website blocking or cyber surveillance are effective measures in tackling Russia's disinformation and propaganda campaigns. Implementing such expedients will infringe on the principle of freedom of speech, however. In case of Estonia, the country is ranked amongst the highest with regard to Internet freedom (Crosby, 2017), showing that the flow of information is unencumbered, albeit risk of disinformation and propaganda. This once again insinuates that Estonia's liberal strategic culture may mediate its strategic response.

Fourth, Estonia is considered to be one of the world's most wired country (Campbell, 2017). Public services in Estonia depend immensely on the uninterrupted functioning of the country's information technology (IT) system. This obviously, from a defence perspective, brings about a great deal of disquietude that the country's IT infrastructure will be targeted by external threats. In case of Estonia, in spite of the threats from politically motivated cyberattacks (RIA, 2015), the balance between security and civil liberties (e.g., freedom of speech, privacy, media pluralism) has been well proportioned.

Strictures – such as cyber surveillance – imposed on the citizens are limited (personal communication, 2018, February 6). In contrast, Estonia clearly focuses on enhancing cyber hygiene which is essentially an empowerment of individual cyberspace users. (personal communication, 2018, January 22) This again hints at the liberal undertone which is expected to play a crucial role in mediating the country's strategic response to Russian hybrid threat.

It is nonetheless important to re-emphasise that Estonian national defence policies still stress the building up of the conventional defence capabilities inasmuch as the conventional warfare is concerned (Salu & Männik, 2013). This undoubtedly reflects a realist posture. It is inaccurate to argue that realist inclination does not present itself in Estonian strategic culture. However, in relation to Russian hybrid threat in Estonia's information sphere, "domestic variables such as culture may have a more independent impact" (Desch, 1998, p. 166). Therefore, this leads to the adoption of strategic culture as a conceptual framework for this study. The assumption is that augmenting military capabilities in response to the increasing threat (balance of threat) may not be the only logic that Estonia adopts in formulating its defence strategies and security policies.

SELECTION OF TEXTS

In order to compile the corpus of Estonia's strategic texts, the first task is to develop a guideline of textual selections. In this study, three criteria are established as follows. First, strategic texts must contain strategic narratives in the sense that the discussions on strategic response to Russian hybrid threat must be present. Second, strategic texts must be of Estonian origin. This facilitates a context-bound genealogical reading of power relations underlying Estonian strategic culture (Gutting, 1990). Third, strategic texts should correspond with the time frame of the study (Hansen, 2006, p. 82). Therefore, the majority of the texts in this study were authored between 2014 and 2018. The second task is to identify a set of relevant texts which forms an intertextual web (Hansen, 2016, pp. 73-92). The intertextual reading of the text is useful because it foregrounds the "social framework regulating textual production within a discourse community" (Porter, 1986, pp. 38-39). Drawing on this insight, the study particularly focuses on the texts produced by Estonian

official strategic planning community – namely Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government and President Office of Estonia and Estonian Defence Forces – as a point of departure. The texts produced by those organisations – namely official government policies, press release, and official speeches – cluster around the core of the intertextual web of strategic texts. Shapiro (1990) further pointed out that the major function of official discourse is to "strategically affect the interpretation of policy structures, ideals and implementation" (p. 334). Hence, analysing such discourses helps to trace the political legitimacy underlying certain security practices that are deemed as appropriate and "normal" strategic options. The next group of texts is *Estonian expert*'s analysis and *Estonian official*'s published opinion. The last series of strategic texts is the journalistic reports and other relevant articles which convey explicit quotes of Estonian officials on the one hand and texts reflecting public debate, on the other. In short, the relevancy of textual sources is justified inasmuch as the text reflects Estonia's "strategic narratives"[17] regarding Russian hybrid threat in the country's information sphere. Finally, this study intentionally presents *direct quotations* from selected strategic texts in order to show the relevant nodal points and how the study interprets them. Sixty-seven strategic texts are included in the analysis.[18]

Furthermore, a supplementary tool added to this study's methodology is the interview which primarily helps to identify the (in)consistency of the hegemonic articulation of Estonia's strategic culture by policymakers. The interview data are interpreted in line with the study's poststructuralist theoretical frame in that each interview is transcribed and treated as one of the textual sources. Additionally, the study looks for "the linkage between interviewees' subject position with the wider discursive articulations" (Wetherell, 1998, p. 401). This facilitates a location of the transcribed texts within the intertextual web of strategic texts.

[17] See Becker & Malesky (2017) for the detailed discussion on the characteristics of strategic texts.

[18] See appendix 1.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

In conducting a concrete analysis utilising poststructuralist discourse analysis method, clear markers of enunciated and discursively articulated signs are of supreme importance since the interactions between those signs are fundamental to the hegemonic articulation of Estonia's strategic culture. The first step in analysing the strategic texts is to spell out three signs which are necessary in the construction of privileged identity, namely "element (a sign that is under contention), moment (an element with partially fixed meaning) and floating signifier (a highly contested element remaining open to different meanings)" (Bergström, Ekström & Boréus, 2017, pp. 217-218). The three signs interact in "the process of linking and differentiation" (Hansen, 2006) which is underpinned by political struggles. Stated differently, through this process, certain signs are linked together and form a privileged identity. Identifying the privileged identity is a point of departure for detecting other essential semantic categories which are linked, marginalised and juxtaposed in the debates on the strategic response. However, such a process is not linear but constantly disrupted and contested. The task here is to capture the dynamic interactions between signs in the process of linking and differentiating. In order to do so, the study proposes that in the second step, an investigation of the political impacts of such a process must be conducted in accordance with the logic of interpretation. In his historical appraisal of American foreign policy, Campbell (1998) introduced the logic of interpretation as an analytic frame which deals with "the political effects of prioritising one mode of representation over another" (p. 4). The logic of interpretation highlights a rank of some statements and representations within a value-grading hierarchy which can be conceptualised as a discursive economy (ibid., pp. 6-7). Otherwise put, some discourses have the privilege over others. Hence, discursive economy explicates the relationships between different discourses. The concept of discursive economy, moreover, helps to trace the traits of political legitimacy of certain security practices which are seen as appropriate and "normal" response. In short, certain discourses which (re)produce the privileged identity have gained greater value than others and become the legitimate point of reference for Estonia's strategic response to Russian hybrid threat.

The third step is to expound on to what extent other competing discourses are in play. This is crucial because the hegemonic discourse can be dislocated by the counter-hegemonic discourses underpinned by antagonistic political forces. When analysing texts, the dislocation can be specified within the chain of difference which disrupts the hegemonic articulation. Exclusions and negations are displayed when the hegemonic discourses are dislocated (Howarth, 2010, p. 312). In this respect, the challenging signs must be singled out too. Engaging with competing discourses, moreover, helps to make clear the boundary of the hegemonic discourse which articulates Estonia's hegemonic strategic culture. As argued in the previous chapter, the privileged identity is constructed on the binary opposition of the Self and Other as "others are always already involved *in* our identity" (Wæver, 1996, p. 127, original emphasis). The hegemonic strategic culture has to repeatedly assert the privileged identity with which it identifies. This demonstrates that the contingent hegemonic strategic discourse is constantly struggling to withstand the challenging antagonistic forces. The hegemonic strategic discourse consequently tries to exclude the antagonistic signs from gaining hegemony. The legitimisation of the existing Estonian security practices, therefore, keeps the antagonistic forces out of the terrain of political legitimacy.

CHAPTER III

THE HEGEMONIC ARTICULATION OF ESTONIAN STRATEGIC CULTURE AND THE APPROPRIATE STRATEGIC RESPONSE TO RUSSIAN HYBRID THREAT

Drawing on the theoretical and methodological discussions in the previous chapters, this chapter turns to a concrete analysis of the hegemonic articulation of Estonia's strategic culture and its mediating effects which render certain security practices in response to Russian hybrid threat in the information sphere appropriate and "normal". In particular, it directs the attention towards the political debates about the appropriate strategic response to Russian hybrid threat in Estonia's information sphere.

As this study focuses on the discourses underpinning three aspects of strategic culture, namely political culture, national identity and historical experience discourse, it has identified the nodal points sustaining such discourses. The objective of this enterprise is to explicate the corresponding relationship between nodal points, the privileged identity and the type of discourse by following the methods outlined in the previous chapter. The nodal points serve as the markers informing which relevant signs can be linked with or differentiated from which discourse. Three clusters of main nodal points are singled out as follows:

(A) The hegemonic political culture discourse is sustained by the nodal point "media liberalism," referencing the privileged identity "Western democracy".

(B) The hegemonic historical experience discourse is sustained by the nodal point "normal unpeace," referencing the privileged identity "anti-Soviet/non-Russia".

(C) The counter-hegemonic national identity discourse is sustained by the nodal point "media sovereignty," referencing the privileged identity "Estonian singularity".

Two types of hegemonic discourses underlying Estonia's strategic culture are thus identified, namely political culture and historical experience discourse. The interplays

between the hegemonic political culture and historical experience discourse consequently define Estonia's political frontier[19] which enables (or restrains) a certain strategic response and appropriate security practices. The national identity discourse is specified as the counter-hegemonic discourse. Drawing on the privileged identity, the hegemonic articulations of political culture and historical experience discourse ascribe the quality of appropriateness to certain security practices whilst delegitimising others carrying antagonistic signs. The antagonistic signs need be singled out because they enable the hegemonic strategic culture to distinguish itself from the significant Other. The study will further demonstrate that security practices are consolidated within and simultaneously reproduce Estonia's hegemonic strategic culture. Simultaneously, the counter-hegemonic forces challenging the dominant strategic culture are presented through the national identity discourse. Such forces are trying to dislocate Estonia's minimalist strategic culture and are thus excluded from the hegemonic articulations. Figure 2 illustrates the argument made in this section.

[19] The extent to which strategic response can be politically legitimately perceived.

Figure 2: Summary of the hegemonic articulation of Estonian strategic culture in countering Russian hybrid threat

discursive mode / articulation	Estonia's hegemonic strategic culture			
	Discourse	**Main nodal point**	**Privileged identity**	**Security practice**
Hegemonic	Political culture	Media liberalism	Western democracy	Minimalism
	Historical experience	Normal unpeace	Anti-Soviet/non-Russia	Challenge
Counter-hegemonic	National identity	Media sovereignty	Estonian singularity	

In what follows, the study elaborates on Estonia's hegemonic political culture discourse, the counter-hegemonic national identity discourse and the hegemonic historical experience discourse respectively. Subsequently, it illustrates how the interplays between the two hegemonic discourses enable each security practice to become appropriate strategic response to Russian hybrid threat. The study argues that the mutual gravitation between the hegemonic political culture and historical experience discourse creates conditions of possibility for the minimalist orientation of Estonia's strategic culture. The study also accentuates the counter-hegemonic forces at work. The strategic texts are analysed along the axis of the above-outlined nodal points. Through these logical sequences, the mediating effects of the hegemonic articulation of Estonian strategic culture on Estonia's strategic response to Russian hybrid threat in the information sphere are disclosed.

POLITICAL CULTURE DISCOURSE: MEDIA LIBERALISM

Media liberalism has long been celebrated in Estonia. Harro-Loit & Loit (2014) argued that since the 1990s, Estonia's media policies have been characterised by a liberal approach. Moreover, from a historical perspective, they highlighted that "Estonian news media formed part of the nation's cultural resistance against the Soviet ideology" (ibid., p. 214). This liberal media tradition has been constantly reproduced through a number of non-restrictive institutional arrangements in Estonia's information sphere. For instance, Estonia has been enforcing minimal media regulations and media laws in place are limited (Loit & Siibak, 2013). Locating Estonia's media liberalism in the wider context of democratic transition, the liberal media tradition has formed an equivalential link with the privileged identity of Western democracy. In Estonia, it can be said that democracy is amongst the notions ranked at the top of the country's political lexicon. Mälksoo (2013) pointed out that, presenting itself in contrast to Russian version of democracy, Estonia has attempted to be "an exemplary part of the Western democratic tradition" (p. 158). Estonia's strong Western democratic identity is underpinned by the "Return to Europe" discourse in the context of the re-independence and the successive integration into the EU and NATO. This particular discourse establishes an equivalential relation between Estonia and Europe (Berg, 2002, p. 118; Feldman, 2001; Aalto & Berg, 2002, p. 261). Put differently, "Estonia is writing itself into the western democratic tradition" (Michaels & Stevick, 2009, pp. 242-243). The Western democratic identity has thus become defined as one of the major sources of political legitimacy in structuring Estonia's politico-security practices. As regards the country's information sphere, Estonian media landscape had become very close to the West's since the first decade of re-independence (Lauristin & Vihalemm, 2002). This suggests a liberal predisposition of Estonia's political and media culture. In short, it can be argued that the widely articulated Estonian political culture is marked by its Western democratic culture. This further underpins Estonia's liberal media tradition. However, being a floating signifier, the concept of democracy has also been used differently in domestic political struggles especially when it comes to the issue of Russian speaking minority. Saarts (2012) described two models of Estonian democracy. One is based on the

concept of ethnocentrist democratic model which subscribes to the idea that national community is built on the titular ethnic group. The other can be conceptualised as the multiculturalist democratic model, embracing the idea that citizenship is a foundation of a nation. The latter provides a ground for the discursive connection between the notion of media liberalism with multiculturalism as the following discussion about the purchase of Pervõi Baltiski Channel (PBK) programmes by Tallinn Television (TTV) will demonstrate. Simply put, different conceptualisations of democracy play out in the debate over Estonia's strategic solution to Russian hybrid threat. It should also be reminded that Estonian version of ethno-nationalism is a moderate one. Although it is apparent that Estonia's national political landscape is overwhelmingly represented by the titular population, the local level remains relatively open for Russophone speakers to have a share (Cianetti, 2014). Moreover, debatably, the Europeanisation process further moderates the nationalist party's (e.g., the Pro Patria Union) radical agendas (Bennich-Björkman & Magnus, 2012), thereby allowing a moderate political trajectory to prevail. This partly contributes to the minimalisation of nationalists' pressure on Russian media operating in Estonia. Furthermore, through a postcolonial lens, Peiker (2016) argued that constitutional narrative of nationhood helps to sustain Estonia's liberal democracy (p. 120). Knitting this argument into the focus of this study, it can be said that another important trait of Estonian political culture is law-based politics. Therefore, the constitution-oriented political culture further guarantees the protection of media liberalism (see Loit & Harro-Loit, 2016). In sum, Estonia's hegemonic political culture discourse is sustained by the concept of media liberalism underpinned by the Western democratic identity. The study will show that this concept is translated into Estonia's strategic texts and legitimises the existing minimal security practices.

NATIONAL IDENTITY DISCOURSE: MEDIA SOVEREIGNTY

Estonia's national identity discourse has produced antagonistic forces against the hegemonic political culture discourse. The national identity discourse has constructed a binary opposition in which the sign "Soviet/Russia" is the significant Other of the sign "Estonia". Lehti, Jutila & Jokisipilä (2008) nicely summarised that "Russia has remained

the threatening Other against which all elements of Estonian national drama are contested" (p. 406). They also pointed out that there is a "collective amnesia in Estonian society" in that the interpretation of Estonian history under the Soviet rule is entirely about traumatic suffering (ibid., p. 407). Therefore, after the re-independence, Estonia had initiated the nation-building process which emphasises the privileged right of the titular population (Hogan-Brun & Wright, 2013, p. 245). This presents a monist view of identity according to which Estonian identity is the only fundamental component of national identity. It can be conceptualised as "Estonian singularity". It is precisely this idea on which the concept of media sovereignty draws. It thus serves as the privileged identity legitimising the national identity discourse. Nevertheless, this phenomenon is not unique to Estonia as it can be found in other multiethnic post-communist states (Zaslavsky, 1992). In the early years of transition, Estonia had adopted the nationalising trajectory of nation-building (Cheskin, 2015, p. 85) which is based on the idea of the ethnocultural singularity of Estonian-ness. The event of Estonian Song Festival (Laulupidu) – where such ethno-cultural discourses are reproduced – is illustrative of this idea (Pawłusz, 2017, p. 253; Raudsepp & Vikat, 2011). Built on the idea of Estonian singularity, the national identity discourse has created uneasiness amongst the Russophone population. This led them to develop "their own discourse of victimhood" (Hogan-Brun & Wright, 2013, p. 245), narrating the marginalisation they encounter due to the restrictive citizenship law. Thus, the national identity discourse projects the sign "Russian speakers" into the chain of difference. Moreover, this "victimhood" discourse is used by Russia who keeps (re)producing the antagonistic discourse in Estonia's domestic information sphere (see Smith, 2008). Therefore, the counter-hegemonic national identity discourse has generated double-layered effects. One is the legitimisation of the privileged identity of Estonian singularity and the concept of media sovereignty. The other is the side-effect of the idea of Estonian singularity which entails Russophone population's discourse of victimhood.

HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE DISCOURSE: NORMAL UNPEACE AS A STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Before proceeding further, this section sets a stage for the conceptualisation of Estonia's hegemonic strategic culture by engaging with the discursive construction of the strategic reality in Estonia's information sphere according to which the strategic response is framed.[20]

In Estonia, the nation-building project not only aims at returning to Europe but also "rejecting the Soviet past" (Smith, 2008, p. 421). Moreover, the "Return to Europe" discourse is based on "the notion of civilisation clash which loyalty to Estonia requires the hostility against Russia" (Feldman, 2001, p. 12). Therefore, Soviet/Russian identity stands in contrast to Estonian national identity. Simply put, the historical experience discourse juxtaposes the sign "Soviet" (e.g., Selg & Ruutsoo, 2014) and "Russia" (e.g., Mälksoo, 2013) against "Estonia". Estonia's "nationalist narrative of being non-Soviet" (Kirch & Kirch, 1995) consequently encrusts Estonia's strategic response to Russian hybrid threat. Elaborating this point is crucial since Russia's disinformation campaigns oftentimes employ Estonia's own nationalist narrative against itself. For instance, Russian media sources claim that Estonia is sympathetic to fascism when the country re-interprets the narrative of Soviet liberating the Baltic states (Smith, 2008, p. 425). Such a narrative significantly impacts Estonia's subject position as the construction of national identity cannot accommodate the "Other-within" such as the Russophone population. As a result, the representation of the Russian-speaking population as a potential threat to Estonia's national self-understanding is still articulated but it is very much toned down.

In this respect, the spectrum of possible strategic response to Russian hybrid threat is further conditioned by the historical experience discourse of *normal unpeace* in which the historical irreconcilability between Estonia and Russia is fortified as Bahovski (2008) noted that "Estonia is everything that is not Russia." This condition is further translated into Estonia's information sphere. With this historical experience discourse adding another

[20] See Milliken (1999) for a detailed discussion on how discourses construct a social reality.

discursive layer to the hegemonic articulation of Estonian strategic culture, it can be argued that the constructed default setting of the information sphere with which Estonia is dealing encompasses two major components. One is Russia as a historically antagonistic neighbour incessantly feeding Russian version of historical narrative into Estonian information sphere, to wit the interpretation of the Second World War and the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states. The other is Estonia's Russian-speaking population who has been constantly exploited by Russia especially through the available Russian media outlets. These have constructed a strategic reality in which the circulation of Russian antagonistic narratives in Estonia's information sphere is seen as normality. Moreover, as Russian disinformation is generated almost on a daily basis through local Russian media outlets in Estonia's information sphere, the distinction between war and peace in the information sphere has become blurred. Estonian Information System Authority's 2015 Report affirmed this strategic reality and further included cyberspace as another threat-reproduction site:

> Estonia cannot ignore the fact that we are located next to Russia, which uses aggressive rhetoric, is constantly developing its cyber capabilities, and for whom activities directed against other states in cyberspace are merely an instrument to increase its influence […] (p. 5).

The emphasis on geographical proximity shows the understanding that the aforementioned strategic reality is considered to be a given. Hence, it sustains the partial fixation of "Russia" as a natural adversary who incessantly produces conflicting information. Likewise, another strategic assessment pointed to Russia's influence operations by diffusing provocative narratives:

> Estonia has to prepare for different scenarios and make itself as inconvenient opponent as possible. This will include work to further increase resilience against unconventional warfare, all kinds of diversionary acts and provocations, massive foreign propaganda, etc. (Praks, 2016, p. 52).

The articulation of the recurrent theme of "Russia keeps generating antagonistic messages" affirms that wartime and peacetime are becoming indistinguishable. The condition of

unpeace as such appears as normality especially when construed through Estonia's historical experience discourse in which the mutual fear between Estonia and Russia defines their security culture. Mölder (2010) argued that "the Great Fear is embedded in both Russian and Estonian practice of security culture" (p. 172). By virtue of this truth-like historical experience discourse, the strategic reality in Estonia's information sphere is constructed in relation to the condition of normal unpeace. In this context, countering Russian hybrid threat in the information sphere is a part of the day-to-day normal antagonistic relationship as the information that both parties are articulating is based on mutually conflicting historical narratives. Otherwise stated, it is the strategic environment determined by the historical experience discourse which articulates Russia's unabatedly chronic hostility in Estonia's information sphere. Mihkelson (2017), for instance, lamented that:

> Depicting Estonia as a country that discriminates against minorities and promotes Nazism has been one of Russia's largest and most consistent international deception operations in the last 25 years. The reasons […] being Moscow's strategic interest in restoring its authority over the Baltic states. Russia became particularly assertive in the 1990s when Estonia and the other Baltic states were applying for the membership of NATO and the European Union.

Likewise, Kaitsepolitseiamet (KAPO) 2015 Report also emphasises the endurance of Russian hostile information injected into Estonia:

> Information collected by the Internal Security Service clearly indicates that Russian special services persistently try to find or create possibilities to cultivate tension in Estonian society […] (Estonian Internal Security Service Review 2015).

These discourses accentuate the temporal consistency of Russia's informational hostility. They further imply the prolonged existence of such a threat in Estonia's information sphere. This persistent hostility cannot be defeated inasmuch as this Great Fear discourse is

articulated. From this angle, the condition of normal unpeace characterises the strategic reality in Estonia's information sphere. As the situation of normal unpeace neither suggests crisis nor the absence of conflict in the information sphere, the strategic response in such a context is thus located in the in-between space. This means that neither extraordinary measures nor inaction gains momentum. It is rather the limited response that is prevailing. To conclude, although the historical experience discourse is not always present in the public debate under investigation, it informs the scope of perceivable strategic response. It is thus a subtext to any strategic consideration in response to Russian hybrid threat in Estonia's information sphere. This ultimately shows that the articulation of this discursive context does shape strategic culture by making normal unpeace in the information sphere a strategic reality.

To summarise the previous sections, Estonia's hegemonic political culture discourse – within which the concept of media liberalism and Western democratic identity are embedded – is employed to justify Estonia's minimal response to Russian hybrid threat. In contrast, based on the notion of media sovereignty and Estonian singularity, the counter-hegemonic national identity discourse buttresses a more restrictive response. The hegemonic historical experience discourse further adds up to the political culture discourse. As the strategic milieu of unpeace is constructed as normality, the security imperative for extraordinary measures is thus significantly marginalised, allowing the limited strategic response to gain currency.

The next section demonstrates how certain security practices draw on the hegemonic discourses and how the counter-hegemonic discourse comes into play. The dominant security practices are characterised by the notion of minimalism which holds that Estonia's appropriate strategic response to Russian hybrid threat must conform to the Western democratic identity by imposing limited restrictions in its information sphere. Two clusters of security practices are interrogated. The first cluster centres on the debate concerning ETV+, Sputnik, and PBK. The second cluster encompasses other forms of debunking practices which focus on reaching out to the people to provide the official

version of information. Both clusters are not mutually exclusive and they are the integral parts of current Estonia's psychological defence strategy.

ESTONIAN HEGEMONIC STRATEGIC CULTURE: MINIMALISM

In engaging with Estonia's strategic response to Russian hybrid threat, it is necessary to consider the ongoing development in Estonia's psychological defence strategy. In 2015, ETV+ – Estonia's state-financed Russian-language television channel – was established. Shortly after that, the Kremlin-financed Russian news agency Sputnik asked for permission to open its media portals in Estonia, leading to the official authorisation in 2016 (The Baltic Times, 2016). In 2017, the debate over the operation of the Kremlin-friendly PBK in Tallinn had surfaced, showing the continued concern about Russian hybrid threat in Estonia's information sphere. The three major events reflect two different strategic trajectories in managing Russian hybrid threat. Whilst one – the media nationalists – buttresses more assertive strategic posture, the other – the media liberalists – expresses support for the existing minimal response, showing uneasiness with the implementation of restrictive security policies in countering Russian hybrid threat. This cognitive gap between the two groups points to the different references to the underlying discourses: the minimalists subscribe to the concept of media liberalism whereas those supporting more restrictive measures embrace the notion of media sovereignty.

In Estonia, the presence of Russia's media channels is nothing new especially when there was no state's Russian television channel until the establishment of ETV+. Moreover, media in a democratic society are expected to "allow political pluralism to express itself" (Shea, 1998). Therefore, having Russia's media outlets as alternative sources seems initially unproblematic. Against the backdrop, arguably, Russia's media outlets are not necessarily immediate threats to Estonian society. However, they have become explicitly

articulated as threats through public discourses after the Bronze Soldier event in 2007[21] and particularly in the context of Russia's hybrid warfare.

Since the inception of Russia's Compatriots Policy, aiming essentially at influencing Russian-speaking populations abroad (Kudors, 2015), Estonia became seriously sceptical about Russian intentions on its Russophone minorities.[22] Russian propaganda and disinformation against not only Estonia but also the West grew more intensified in the wake of the 2008 Russo-Georgian war and 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea (Paul & Matthews, 2016; Sadik, 2017). Moreover, the strategic assessment by Estonian official shows that Russia uses Estonia as a part of its Western confrontation strategy (Pommereau, 2015). In the specific context of Estonia, the 2007 Bronze Soldier incident – where Russian propaganda largely inflamed the Russian-minority riots – revealed that the country's societal cohesion can potentially be threatened by Russian influence operations. The event brought Estonia's strategic focus to psychological defence which subsequently sparked the debate on how a democracy should respond to what is contemporarily called "hybrid threat". The National Security Concept of Estonia adopted in 2010 acknowledged this strategic challenge:

> Estonia as a democratic and open society may also be affected by the spread of extremist, hostile or hate-based ideologies. This may weaken social cohesion, reduce tolerance and cause social tension. In the environment of open and free media, attacks against cohesion of Estonian society necessitate

[21] Despite disagreement about the actual impact of Russian disinformation on the event (e.g., Crandall, 2014, p. 48), it is not a focus of this study which rather pays attention to the articulation of strategic over-/underestimation of Russian propaganda reflected in public discourses.

[22] Nevertheless, Estonia does not question the loyalty of the Russophone population in the sense that the irredentist demand is out of the question (Schulze, 2009). This claim is supported by Estonian historical narrative concerning the events of the unlawful autonomy referendum in Narva and Sillamäe in 1993. The events are presented as the Russian minority demanding recognition rather than actual autonomy (See Eylandt, 2017).

> greater attention to the sense of cohesion and psychological defence (Riigikogu, 2010, p. 8).

The Concept singles out that media liberalism is susceptible to external threats and may lead to societal destabilisation. From this perspective, Estonia's media liberalism could undermine societal psychological defence. An intertextual reading exhibits the trait that the sign "psychological defence" is projected into Estonia's social integration policy discourse (Ministry of Culture, 2014). In this politico-security project, the sign "Russian-speaking population", however, sits in a binary opposition. It is juxtaposed against the sign "Estonian-speaking population". The National Defence Opinion Surveys – commissioned by the Ministry of Defence to gauge different political vibrations between Estonian and Russian speakers – help to illustrate this point. The way the surveys were conducted rests on the binary logic, treating Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking populations as two mutually exclusive groups (see Kivirähk, 2015, 2016, 2017a, 2017b). The surveys thus reveal a discursive rupture. In other words, in the official discourses, the articulations of a binary opposition imposed on Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking populations remain obvious (see Pawłusz, 2017, p. 267-268). With regard to the surveys, the use of neutral scientific language and objective methodology lead to the normalisation of dichotomous social categories. However, the surveys themselves are not politically neutral and they indirectly affect the strategic calculations in response to Russian hybrid threat. Put differently, they reproduce a binary reasoning, unavoidably pushing the Russian-speaking population to identify politically with the periphery. The side effect is significant because it potentially increases the credibility of Russia's information sources. The subtle othering of Russian speakers is present in the social integration policy discourses which prioritise the singularity of Estonian-ness (Malloy, 2009). This demonstrates that the national identity discourse has come into play. This Janus-faced nature of Estonia's integration project can be understood as "fictive pluralism which promoting pluralism conceals the singular-nation aim" (ibid., p. 245). This way of thinking is translated into the terrain of strategic consideration:

> The national identity of both ethnic Estonians and Estonian Russians is influenced by the perception of threats: while Estonian Russians perceive, in particular, a threat to the preservation of their national culture, Estonians perceive a threat from Russia (Vetik et. al., 2015, p. 4).

The bottom line is that the sign "psychological defence" – superimposed on the aforementioned binary opposition – makes "Russian-speaking population" a strategic locus. Therefore, it reinforces the assumption that media liberalism could widen the gap between the already informationally separated groups. Arisen from this premise is a series of debates on how Estonia – as a democracy – should deal with its media liberalism in the context of Russian hybrid threat whilst improving overall societal psychological defence. The National Defence Strategy adopted in 2010 highlighted the importance of psychological defence which is a part of the total defence principle: "The purpose of psychological defence is to prevent panic, the spread of hostile influences and misinformation, thereby ensuring continued popular support to the state and its national defence efforts" (Estonian Ministry of Defence, 2010, p. 23). In addition, the anxiety about the radicalisation of Russophone population was a central theme in the aftermath of the 2007 Bronze Soldier (Ehala, 2009, pp. 152-154). For instance, the National Security Concept underscored that the values Estonia upholds are threatened by the non-democratic forces:

> Both states and non-state actors compete more actively in influencing the international media, public opinion and political decisions. […] The impact of distorted information may cause tensions in international relations, radicalisation of certain groups of people and harm social cohesion, adding to instability (Riigikogu, 2010, p. 3).

Again, the Concept indirectly expressed concerns about media liberalism potentially leading to radicalisation. This worrying trend is supported by the research of Estonia's International Centre for Defence and Security which proposes that "the threat to Estonia's national security can, too, emerge internally with the incitement from outside" (Männik, 2013, P. 37). Moreover, the former Estonian Minister of Defence Margus Tsahkna is of the same opinion. He remarked that in the context of the Bronze Soldier event, the

dissemination of Russian propaganda was very powerful. It incited hatred in young people who are exposed to it (Lasn, 2017).

In response to the above-mentioned strategic challenges, one of the most striking security practices in improving Estonia's psychological defence is the launch of ETV+. This highlights Estonia's strategic response which resonates with the widely articulated political culture discourse which draws on the privileged identity of Western democracy. Therefore, "a democracy does not fight propaganda with propaganda" (personal communication, 2018, January 22). Estonian President Kersti Kaljulaid's speech at the opening of the Riga StratCom Dialogue in 2017 was one of the most obvious articulations of this discourse. The President emphasised: "It is important not to counter propaganda with propaganda. It is important to teach people the merits of honest and open discussion" (Kaljulaid, 2017). The encouragement to uphold media liberalism and the principle of democracy re-enacts the hegemonic articulation of political culture discourse on which the choice of establishing ETV+ to improve societal psychological defence stands. Furthermore, the hegemonic political culture discourse tries to reconstruct the relationship between Estonia's Russian-speakers and Russia by distancing them from Russia's political gravity. Doing so destabilises the binary opposition between Estonian- and Russian-speaking population and establishes a new dichotomy between Estonian and Russian information sphere as manifested in KAPO's 2014 Report:

> Despite years of Russian influence operations and garish lies in the Russian-government controlled media, the vast majority of Estonia's Russian-speaking population can easily distinguish the hostile propaganda in Estonia (Estonian Internal Security Service, 2014, p. 7).

The political culture discourse thus brings about reworking of the sign "Russian-speaking population" by presenting them as the non-radical. This moderates the general disturbance in Estonia society. The hegemonic articulation of political culture discourse in the past few years clearly emphasises that Russian-speaking population does not undermine democracy and media liberalism. The ensuing politico-security effects are substantial because such a discourse portrays Estonia's Russian-speaking population as a victim of Russian

propaganda rather than the radical proponent of the current Russian regime. Therefore, Estonia's Russophones are considered *not* to be a threat to the Western democratic identity. The exploitative connotation ascribed to Russia further breaks the chain of equivalence that links the sign "Russian-speaking" and "radicalism", showing a successful externalisation of the threat once considered to be internal. For instance, President Kersti Kaljulaid expressed her view on the impact of Russian propaganda on Estonia's Russian-speaking population that: "Some Putin radicals speak very good Estonian. We have to make sure we do not take anybody's language as a marker for what they think" (Weymouth, 2017).

The President's comment signals an emergence of a new representation of Estonia's Russophone population, materialising through the rhetoric of "Russian-speaking population is not a threat anymore". It significantly moves away from the narrative that Russian-speaking population is manipulated by Russia. An implication of this discursive amelioration of the category "Russian-speaking population" for Estonia's strategic response to Russian hybrid threat is immense because it abates the need for restrictive security measures. Simultaneously, it fosters the notion of media liberalism as a justification for the minimal strategic posture. The political culture discourse thus frames the security policies in response to Russian hybrid threat in a significantly less securitised language, confining them to a day-to-day political issue such as societal integration project (see Ministry of Culture, 2014). It is precisely this articulation of the political culture discourse which mediates Estonia's strategic response to Russian hybrid threat by projecting the security matter into a democratic political frame. Therefore, this discourse produces a mutual gravitation between security and normal politics, neutralising the exceptional imperative carried by the securitising discourse (see Aradau, 2004). Counterintuitively, the dominant discourse after Russian annexation of Crimea depicts the Russophone population in a more positive light rather than treating them as a threat to societal cohesion albeit being in a separate information sphere. For instance, Kasekamp (2015) pointed out that, despite sharing sympathy with Russia to a certain degree, the Russian-speaking population "does not want Russian intervention in Estonia" (p. 3). Defence Minister Margus Tsahkna,

likewise, insisted that "Estonia is not deeply divided along the ethnolinguistic line anymore" (Lasn, 2017).

The endeavour to construct a new category of Russian-speaking population results in the articulation which affirms that the influence of Russian propaganda on the country's Russophone population can be confined to the political problem of trust in the state. As neither another riot nor autonomous claim is likely to happen (Veebel & Ploom, 2016, p. 54), this problem can be solved through democratic mechanisms. In this sense, security concerns spawned out of radicalisation of Russophone population have been gradually fading away from the political space. In this respect, Estonia's strategic vision is based on the prioritised logic of enhancing the centre's political attractiveness in order to talk the periphery into the core's political gravity. This clearly reflects the Western democratic tradition. Accordingly, in the course of de-peripheralisation, security in the country's information sphere can be achieved without infringement on media liberalism. The representation of the centre (Estonian state) is, moreover, connected with the teleological idea of social betterment in a Western democracy. The articulation of political culture discourse thus ascribed such a normative connotation to the floating signifier "Western democracy", attempting to prioritise Estonia's political orbit around which Russian-speaking population can revolve. Putting it into Estonia's strategic context, the identity of Western democracy would magnetise the Russophone populations. Thus, the impact of Russian media would be diminished (personal communication, 2018, February 23). Any ban on Russian media is thus not necessary.

In effect, this political culture discourse unties the concept of media liberalism from the connotation that it may destabilise Estonian society. Hence, improving psychological defence does not necessarily point to the security measures curbing media liberalism such as banning or more legal constraints. On the contrary, media liberalism can enhance societal security by enabling Russophone population to create their own narrative independent of Estonian and Russian influences. As Ilmar Raag – the ex-adviser on strategic communication at Estonian Government Office – said that "the TV station

(ETV+) will seek to 'empower the local identity' while the government is clear of any editorial control" (Ummelas, 2015).

Moreover, as a Western democracy, Estonia provides an alternative fact-check source rather than imposing excessive regulations. This discursive pattern shows that the sign "fact" is rearticulated into the equivalential chain centred on the concept of "Western democracy", echoing the founding principle of ETV+. This is a value grading practice shaping the understanding of "appropriateness" in the formulation of strategic response. For instance, when critiquing the EU's naïve understanding of Russian propaganda, Urmas Paet – Estonian Member of the European Parliament – submitted:

> The most effective way to stand against propaganda and false news is to qualify yourselves […] European journalists must be professionals. One must return to the principal rules of classic journalism. All facts must be checked. One must be critical of information sources and take into consideration that not every Russian media publication is a trustworthy source (The Baltic Times, 2018).

President Kersti Kaljuliad's speech at the opening of the Human Rights Conference in 2016 further pronounced this version of appropriateness in countering propaganda. She accepts that "freedom of speech and openness" – the fundamental elements of Estonian society – have been put into question whether they provide a fertile ground for propaganda. But the best way to counteract is to encourage free exchange of opinions standing on fact-based knowledge in the society (Kaljulaid, 2016). Her remarks clearly draw on the hegemonic political culture discourse. The discourse further demarcates the limit of the strategic response to Russian hybrid threat. The security practices which are *not* in congruence with this liberal imperative are filtered out, considered as measures beyond the conceivable strategic response in a Western democracy. Depending on non-fact media platforms as countermeasures is, for instance, excluded from the strategic spectrum as Raag & Günter (2016) wrote that "Estonia is an exemplary case because, in response to the Kremlin's narratives, we upheld the principle of an open and democratic society and did not implement censorship nor anti-propaganda campaigns against the Kremlin" (p. 8). This

affirms the appropriateness of the establishment of ETV+ as a non-propagandistic media channel. The political culture discourse further highlights the persuasive potential of ETV+ as a fact-disseminating security practice. Considered to be liberal-democratically appropriate in integrating the Russian-speaking population, ETV+ is assigned to reduce the influence of Russia's media in Estonia by providing an alternative information source in parallel. President Kersti Kaljulaid championed this strategic move:

> We can hear very pro-Estonian views in Russian and very pro-Russian views in Estonian – language doesn't indicate anything […] What is important is people know that Estonian Public Broadcasting is the place where they can find trustworthy information […] This is the most important thing as we are at the forefront of the propaganda war (ERR, 2017d).

This view is shared not only amongst the country's political elites but also officials in the defence circle. General Riho Terras – the current commander of the Estonian Defense Forces – advocated that the objective of ETV+ is to make Russophone population "more satisfied with the country" (Pommereau, 2015). A similar support for ETV+ as an appropriate security practice can be found in Ilmar Raag's remark, affirming that "the essence of democracy is that we try to persuade people. The debate with each other is clearly accepted" (Raag, 2018). The above statements reflect Estonia's Western democratic identity, affirming that disagreement within a democratic frame is welcomed. This shows that the "agree to disagree" rhetoric serves as a guiding principle for the appropriate response to Russian hybrid threat to Estonia's information sphere.[23] Drawing on the hegemonic political culture discourse, the launch of ETV+ is thus considered as an appropriate strategic response to Russian hybrid threat. At the gist of this security practice lies the strategic imagery of Estonia avoiding media censorship and allowing its people including the Russian-speaking population to choose from which media they want to get information. Estonia thus strategically responds to Russian hybrid threat by upholding the tenet that a free society will be immune from this threat if the public is well-informed and

[23] From my personal communication, all interviewees agree on this point.

can freely exercise individual choice of media consumption. This again reproduces Estonia's Western democratic identity.

Furthermore, this liberal undertone emboldens a liberal interpretation of the state's strategic documents. For instance, Lipre-Järma (2016) pointed out that the overarching aim of Estonia's strategic communication is to ensure the values cherished in the Preamble of the Constitution including "democratic principles, rights and freedoms" (p. 121). Merle Maigre (2015) – the security policy advisor to the president of Estonia – reiterated that "it is critical not to jeopardise liberal democratic values in the fight against Russian hybrid threats" (p. 6). KAPO's 2015 Report is the epitome of this trajectory: "The main duty of the state is to counter Russian media manipulations by democratic means, with legal certainty and consistency" (Estonian Internal Security Service, 2015, p. 9). The key leitmotif in those statements is the concept of Western democracy. From this perspective, the sign "psychological defence" has become identified nicely with the hegemonic political culture discourse despite initially criticised as being incompatible with a democratic society (Jermalavičius & Parmak, 2012). Hence, that Estonia has not adopted illiberal strategic choices such as blocking the broadcast of Russian television channels or restricting Russian media outlets shows that such choices are restrained by its Western democratic identity. Although ETV+ is paradoxically more popular amongst Estonian-speaking audiences (The Baltic Times, 2015), its strategic significance cannot be overlooked. The discursive crossover within the hegemonic articulation of political culture discourse – where the concept of media liberalism, the reworking of the category "Russian-speaking population" and the reproduction of Estonia's Western democratic identity interact – facilitates the minimalisation of Estonia's strategic response to Russian hybrid threat.

However, the antagonistic forces challenging the political culture discourse simultaneously present themselves through disapproving voices bewailing the insufficiency of ETV+ to counter Russian hybrid threat. The national identity discourse is playing a crucial role in justifying more restrictive regulations imposed on Estonia's information sphere. Expressing discontent about the lack of sufficient control over Russia's media outlets in Estonia, Estonian linguist Urmas Sutrop lamented that Estonia has been

preoccupied with managing the information sphere of Russophone population whilst ignoring the penetrative impact of Russian propaganda on Estonian-speaking population. He stated that Estonia may "lose Estonian-speakers to Russian propaganda" (Sutrop, 2014). His remark draws on the concept of media sovereignty which justifies the critique of the existing minimal strategic response. Moreover, the anchor of ETV's programme – Aktuaalne Kaamera – suggested that more restrictions can be justified inasmuch as they are in the interest of the people. To quote, "while we mumble about democracy, hostile propaganda has done its work" (ERR, 2014). As already argued, the notion of media sovereignty is built on the national identity discourse in which Estonian singularity needs to be preserved. The intertextual reading of the above comments illustrates that although media liberalism is the value to be upheld, it can be suspended under certain circumstances. An Estonian scholar Mikhail Lotman, moreover, underscored the problematic nature of applying the idea of media liberalism in the society: "When we enact freedom of speech, we assume that there are only intelligent people. But there are all kinds of people. They also have the right to express their feelings" (Ammas, 2018). In addition, a myriad of suggestive texts carries a message that Estonia should be more careful with Russian propaganda (see Sazonov, 2015, 2016a, 2016b; Pommereau, 2015).

At the crux of this national identity discourse pitched against the minimalists is the affirmation of the privileged right of the titular community to defend their ethnonational interests. It is precisely this discourse that the nodal point "media sovereignty" is fixing. In a similar vein, general Ants Laaneots – the former the Commander of the Estonian Defence Forces – said even before the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea that Estonia should step up its psychological defence measures (Tänavsuu, 2011). The volunteer-based group entitled Propastop[24] has also been urging the government to come up with a plan to inform the public what is an "appropriate response" to Russian hybrid threat (Leivat, 2017). Tailored to the debate on appropriate strategic response, the aforementioned views suggest that the existing measures are not enough to counter Russian hybrid threat. Therefore, more actions are needed.

[24] Propastop is Estonian blog run by volunteers with an objective to expose propaganda.

Furthermore, ETV+ met with Russian reaction claiming that it is Estonia's propaganda television channel (Postimees, 2015). It is evident that Russia has attempted to use the discourse of victimhood developed by the Russophone population in the 1990s to dislocate the hegemonic articulation of political culture discourse. Russian discourse in this respect seeks to recreate the binary opposition between Estonian- and Russian-speaking population.[25] In response to this criticism, Darja Saar – the editor-in-chief of ETV+ – replied that "ETV+ isn't meant to influence anyone. It rather produces quality content serving Estonia's Russian- and Estonian-speakers alike" (Saar, 2017). Additionally, the former Defense Minister Hannes Hanso concurs that: "ETV+ is not a mouthpiece for government […] and in the long run, the best defence against propaganda is factual, trustworthy, (and) good journalism" (Pommereau, 2015). His comment is in line with the media liberalism argument which emphasises the quality of democratic journalism (Encabo, 1995). In short, the hegemonic political culture discourse encounters two major antagonistic forces. One from domestic national identity discourse whereas the other is from Russian discourse localised into Estonia's domestic articulation. Despite facing double discursive pressures, Estonia's political culture discourse remains hegemonic. This confirms Estonia's limited response to Russian hybrid threat in the information sphere is mediated by the political culture discourse of Western democracy in that it disqualifies excessive media regulations and media censorship whilst spotlighting the operation of ETV+.

Shortly after kicking off ETV+, another series of debate arose when the Kremlin-financed news agency Sputnik submitted a request for permission to open its media portals in Estonia, leading to the official authorisation in 2016. It is reasonable to ask why Sputnik is allowed to operate in Estonia despite the country being susceptible to Russian propaganda. Moreover, Estonian elites were aware of the potential threat Sputnik might pose to Estonian society. For instance, Estonian elites saw Sputnik "as part of Russia's new

[25] The representation of Estonia's Russophone population in Russian discourses as a homogeneous group discriminated by Estonian state does not correspond with the reality (personal communication, 2018, February 22). See also the categorisation of Estonia's Russian-speaking population in Kaukvere (2018).

hybrid information war" (Pettai & Ivask, 2017, p. 8). Responding to Sputnik's work in Estonia, some state organisations such as the Security Police Board expressed its intention to deny cooperation with the Kremlin-manipulated news portal (Põld, 2016). Propastop group is particularly vigilant and keeps an eye on Sputnik's news content which the group explicitly calls propaganda (Propastop.org, 2017). Broadly speaking, Sputnik clearly encountered a lot of unwelcome gestures from Estonian public, but the permission to work in Estonia was eventually granted. Reading this phenomenon intertextually, it can be argued that, the point of confrontation between the different discourses underlying the notion of media liberalism and media sovereignty reawakens the question of an appropriate response to Russian hybrid threat. What makes Sputnik debate qualitatively different from the previous ETV+ debate is that it reveals that security practices are governed by the logic of political correctness articulated by the hegemonic political culture discourse. This logic manifests itself through socially-recognised political correctness which predetermines any security practice. The logic of political correctness draws extensively on the hegemonic political culture discourse. Accordingly, the hegemonic articulation of political culture discourse predefines Estonia's strategic response to Russian hybrid threat. This sheds light on the political incorrectness of media censorship. The following debate helps to illustrate this point. When Olga Ivanova – a member of the Riigikogu and the Estonian Centre Party (ECP) – gave an interview to Sputnik. She received critical opprobrium from several Riigikogu members (ERR, 2017b). In response to the criticisms, premier Jüri Ratas forbade his party members from giving an interview to Sputnik (Mäekivi & Mihelson, 2017). However, Ms. Ivanovale justified her action by claiming that "in a way, all media outlets are propagandistic and I will give an interview to any media channel" (Nagel & Vasli, 2017). Her argument essentially accentuated the value of media pluralism in that different views ought to be present in various media outlets (Raeijmaekers & Maeseele, 2015, pp. 1044-1045). In a separate event, when asked about her interview with Sputnik, Yana Toom of the ECP responded: "I will definitely not be subjected to media bans" (ERR, 2017a). Her justification reiterated the principle of freedom of expression which resonates with the political culture discourse. In effect, the rearticulation of political culture discourse into the political vindications reproduces the political incorrectness of censorship. In other words, it

brings uncontestable universal values – the floating signifiers – into local context to legitimise certain political claims. This practice creates conditions of possibility for certain domestic political forces to tap into the discursive resource of Western democracy. Hence, such political vindications justify the operation of Sputnik in Estonia and reinforce minimalism in Estonia's strategic response to Russian hybrid threat. As the hegemonic political culture discourse relies primarily on the universal value of liberalism, transgressing it by exercising censorship would be politically incorrect. This "prior commitment to liberal democracy" excludes any illiberal interpretations opposing the universal values (Tonden & Thomassen, 2005, p. 4). The implication of the politically correct logic for the implementation of security practices in the information sphere is immense because it practically predefines which practices (e.g., censorship and interview ban) are politically incorrect.

In sum, Estonia's strategic response to Russian hybrid threat is additionally shaped by the rearticulation of the hegemonic political culture discourse into certain political vindications. This reproduction of the liberal democratic identity adds another discursive variant to the designation of appropriate strategic response. This discursive variegation predefines which security practice is politically correct. In this case, the authorisation of Sputnik operation in Estonia is seen as politically correct. Thus, the hegemonic political culture discourse is used to justify the liberal-democratically correct security practices built on universal values (e.g., freedom of expression). With this prescriptive register, it would be politically incorrect should more strictures are imposed on Russian media outlets. This, in a nutshell, suggests that Estonia's minimal strategic response is locked in the liberal-democratically correct obligation articulated by the political culture discourse. This makes the limited response to Sputnik (e.g., non-cooperation) appropriate and "normal".

Furthermore, the major debate about the appropriate strategic solution to Russian hybrid threat revolves around the operation of Kremlin-friendly PBK in Tallinn. The topic of this debate is whether TTV – Estonia's television station based in Tallinn – should purchase programmes from PBK in order to adequately connect with its Russian-speaking population who usually watches the channel. This issue is particularly controversial in the

context of Russian hybrid threat as President Kersti Kaljulaid and Justice Minister Urmas Reinsalu unequivocally demurred against the idea, implying that Estonian singularity is at stake. The Justice Minister remarked that: "Estonia's public institutions should send a signal by not buying commercial time there anymore. The sums which public institutions have spent on airtime are not large, but it is a matter of principles" (The Baltic Times, 2018). Likewise, the President expressed her opinion that:

> The transfer of public money to the unfamiliar television channel – such as the PBK – should be stopped immediately. […] Tallinn Television could join ETV+. If we say that PBK is important for our country because we reach our people through this channel, what does this mean? (Postimees, 2017).

In a separate occasion, the President even encouraged that "one must have the courage to stand up for oneself when one suspects the other side of manipulating public opinion to serve its interests" (Hussar, 2017). The above prescriptive advice brings back one of the classic topics central to strategic culture scholarship, namely the perception of threat. Those opposing the purchase of PBK's television programmes by TTV consider that PBK is a source of propaganda which destabilises societal cohesion (Põld, 2018b). Moreover, former Minister Marju Lauristine noted that the operation of PBK is a "cultural influence" inducing Russophone population to support the Kremlin narratives (Velsker, 2017). Illmar Raag further commented that "any financial contribution to PBK means supporting Russian national media operations" (ERR, 2017e). The assumption on which the PBK sceptics rely reflects the counter-hegemonic national identity discourse. In other words, it exhibits Estonian elites' deeply rooted belief in the concept of Estonian singularity which is the only legitimate centre of political gravity. Unsurprisingly, "the idea of official bilingualism" (Estonian and Russian) was ruled out from the nation-building project (Danjoux, 2002, p. 245). Drawing on the national identity discourse, the PBK sceptics highlight the importance of Estonia's media sovereignty, reflecting the privileged right conferred on titular media outlets. Erik Roose – the Chairman of the National Broadcasting Board – even supported the idea that ETV+ – the Estonian-made television channel – should be the authoritative

communication channel (Randlab, 2017). In other words, they demand that a certain degree of nationalisation of Estonia's information sphere be achieved in order to improve societal psychological defence. However, there are those showing approval of PBK operation in Estonia. In response to the PBK sceptics, Vadim Belobrovtsev – the deputy Mayor of Tallinn – defended the purchase:

> It should be noted that Estonia has not done much of its homework for a long time and ETV+ was launched only a few years ago. Currently, it remains significantly behind PBK in terms of viewership and it is natural that the city uses the most visible channel to connect with the Russian-speaking population (Pealinn, 2017).

Moreover, Premier Jüri Ratas publicly responded to the Riigikogu that from his own experience, "PBK has not distorted the government's messages or spread disinformation" (Põld, 2018a). Vsevolod Jürgenson – the member of Tallinn local parliament – even opined that the criticisms against the affiliation between TTV and PBK show "misunderstanding amongst Estonians that Estonia's Russophones are under the influence of Russia" (Jürgenson, 2017). Jürgenson's argument particularly echoes the Kantian liberalist idea that "individuals possess a fundamental capacity for moral autonomy" (Crowder, 2013, p. 39). Therefore, the PBK defenders draw on the hegemonic political culture discourse and instrumentalise it to support the existing minimal security practice in the information sphere.

For those seeing PBK in a less problematic fashion, their arguments rely on the construction of PBK as a non-threat category. According to PBK defenders, the real threat is – as Premier Ratas said – "the essential and necessary information does not reach the local Russian-speakers" (ERR, 2017c). However, as illustrated above, the PBK sceptics consider the channel as a threat. These two contradictory perceptions of threat further unveil the disparity in domestic political attitudes towards PBK in particular and, by extension, towards Russia. Consequently, two preferences for strategic response are competing over the hegemonic position. For instance, the PBK sceptics generally agreed on a certain degree of nationalisation of information sphere in which priority is conferred on

Estonian media outlets such as ETV+. Therefore, TTV dissociating itself from PBK would improve the overall effectiveness of strategic communication, leading eventually to better psychological defence (see Aeg, 2018; Eilat, 2017). This argument again reflects the national identity discourse within which the concept of Estonian singularity is embedded. The argument pitched against PBK sceptics by the defenders reflects Saart's (2012) multicultural democratic model which is articulated by the hegemonic political culture discourse. In other words, the PBK defenders draw on the notion of multiculturalism carried by the political culture discourse to justify their claims. Their version of multiculturalism emphasises the cultural accommodation which, in turn, conditions strategic response by demarcating the limit of appropriate interpretations of threats. This further reinforces Estonia's Western democratic identity. Simply put, the framing of strategic response must accordingly accommodate, or at least take into account, the notion of multiculturalism. This framing creates an equivalential relation between the notion of media liberalism and multiculturalism which renders the partnership between PBK and TTV appropriate. Hence, more assertive response – such as the nationalisation of the information sphere – is excluded from the range of appropriate strategic response as it challenges Estonia's Western democratic identity. Moreover, the underlying liberal political force not only re-enacts the hegemonic articulation of Estonia strategic culture but also delegitimises nationalist sensibility articulated by the national identity discourse. For the defenders, societal psychological defence could be undermined if precluding the operation of PBK from Estonia's information sphere because it would foment distrust amongst the Russophone population (Jürgenson, 2017). In this respect, their multiculturalist gesture delegitimises the need to put pressure on Russian media outlets. Hence, the rearticulation of political culture discourse into the debate on PBK operation in Tallinn legitimises Estonia's multiculturalist information sphere[26] which rests on the privileged identity of Western democracy. Accordingly, Estonia's minimal strategic response to Russian hybrid threat has become legitimised and normalised.

[26] See Kymlicka (1996) for the discussion on the relationship between multiculturalism and liberalism

In order to gain a complete understanding of this minimal strategic response, it is crucial to bring the dimension of domestic party politics into a spotlight because of the affiliation between the ECP and the political support from the Russophone population (Kund, 2018a). In particular, Samorodni (2017) and Eslas (2018) argued that the ECP – which is the most popular party amongst Russophone populations – has gained political benefits from Russian disinformation localised into Russia's media outlets in Estonia especially through PBK. The bearing of this political convergence on Estonia's security practices in response to Russian hybrid threat is significant because ECP's agenda can affect the decision on strategic response by reproducing the legitimacy of the existing minimal security practices, namely the non-restriction on PBK and TTV partnership and the non-nationalising of the information sphere. To sum up, drawing on Estonia's Western democratic identity, the PBK defenders successfully legitimise the partnership between PBK and TTV based on the idea of media multicultural-liberalism. This consequently filters out the more assertive strategic response the PBK sceptics have proposed. As the hegemonic operation renders the aforementioned minimal security practices appropriate, the illiberal alternative practices are excluded from Estonian strategic frontier.

Finally, the last set of security practices to be examined is debunking practice which is manifested through official's strategic communication outreach. Analysing the debunking practice is of crucial importance because such a practice is a site in which the hegemonic political culture discourse is reproduced. This entails constant normalisation of Estonia's limited response to Russian hybrid threat in the information sphere. Estonian official definition of strategic communication reaffirms this interpretation:

> Prerequisites for strategic communication in Estonia are democracy and freedom of speech, meaning that government communication is only one of many competing voices beside opposing parties, business organisations, citizens' associations, and foreign communication (Republic of Estonian Government, 2018).

Accordingly, the debunking practice is put in the range of appropriate strategic response to Russian hybrid threat as it conforms to the liberal democratic principles. Moreover,

strategic communication as a form of security practice rests on the concept of good governance and empowerment. Therefore, these two categories serve as nodal points stabilising the meaning of appropriate response in debunking practice discourse. Hence, the underlying political legitimacy of such a discourse further creates the conditions of *impossibility* for the strategic response that relies on the crackdown of Russian media outlets. Praks (2015) affirmed that in response to Russian hybrid threat, "good governance will decrease vulnerabilities" (p. 233). Regarding empowerment, it refers to the practice of debunking propaganda and providing official narrative. But it is still up to an individual person to choose which media outlets to rely on (personal communication, January 24, 2018). In other words, the objective is to improve media literacy and competence (Teperik, 2018) in both Estonian- and Russian-speaking community alike in order to achieve better societal psychological defence (see e.g., Mihelson, 2015; Kiin, 2017; Kund, 2018b). Anchoring itself in the Western democratic identity, the debunking practice discourse has become considered as one of the appropriate modes of strategic response to Russian hybrid threat in the information sphere. For instance, when asked about the support of Estonia's Russophone population for the NATO troops, the Minister of Health and Labour Jevgeni Ossinovski – a native Russian-speaker himself – said that: "Probably for the next years, so for the foreseeable future, this (reaching out to Russian speakers) will be more visible" (Scrutton & Mardiste, 2017). Recently, the Estonian government has also reached out to the Russian-speaking population to provide the official information especially in the issues that misunderstanding takes place such as the presence of NATO troops in Estonia. (personal communication, 2018, January 24). This strategic gesture has been constantly made especially in the past few years. In particular, Narva – an Estonian city with predominant Russophone population – has gained more space in the public discourses. Put differently, through the debunking practice, the hegemonic political culture discourse attempts to connect the sign "Narva" with the Western democratic identity. In this respect, the political culture discourse has provided a reference for such a semantic link as illustrated in Kasekamp's view who sees Narva as a part of Western democracy:

> Russia has been able to influence the under-developed societies in Crimea, South Ossetia and Abkhazia where basic human rights are still practically absent. In contrast, Narva can be considered as a Western European city with residents expecting rule of law and a full range of civil protections (Leivat, 2017).

This view is clearly advocated by President Kersti Kaljulaid (Pommereau, 2018). Moreover, the President's promise to relocate her office to Narva for a period of one month (Vahtla, 2017) underpins the equivalential relation between Narva and Western democracy. This political signal is in itself a strategic posture whose objective is to disconnect Russian-speaking population from the political periphery. Furthermore, this Western democratic representation of Narva simultaneously dislocates Russia as a frame of political reference on which Russophone population relies. This shows the intention of political restructuring to expand the horizon of the hegemonic articulation to include the antagonistic sign. Through the political culture discourse, "Narva" – once seen as an antagonistic sign – is rearticulated into the chain of equivalence by linking it to "the West" instead of "Russia".

The articulation of political culture discourse has further expanded the equivalent relation between "Narva" and "*Eu*rope."[27] This has grown apparent especially in the context of Russia/Europe binary opposition. Europe is thus presented as an opportunity for a better future vis-à-vis Russia. This strategic posture also targets the "hearts and minds" of the Russophone population by countering Russian psychological influence through the projection of a better alternative. Kasekamp (2014) commented shortly after the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea that: "People in Narva can, of course, see across the river and see that life is not better in Ivangorod in Russia, so they are happy where they are."

Furthermore, President Kersti Kaljulaid's support for Narva's candidacy for the 2024 European Capital of Culture is a clear testimony to the de-peripheralising strategy through which the sign "Narva" is relocated to the political gravity of the West. For

[27] European Union's version of Europe. It should be noted that Russia also offers a vision of Europe in parallel. See further discussion on this issue in Morozov (2005).

instance, the President remarked: “I go to Narva to be with the people there. […] Narva is not a dispiriting place. Narva is a city that is caught in the typical post-industrial trap, and we will climb out of it together” (Cavegn, 2018). The President defined Narva in an economic term, connecting the city with the positive change towards a better future as a part of Estonia and Europe. This particular rearticulation dislocates Russia’s discourse which presents Narva as an isolated and maltreated region. In short, such a debunking practice through the public outreach has reinforced the minimalist strategic trajectory in countering Russian hybrid threat by reworking the sign “Narva” and rearticulating it into the hegemonic political culture discourse. The implication of this discursive dynamics is crucial because it reaffirms the position of Estonia at the centre of the Western democratic society (Mälksoo, 2013). In other words, with the sign “Narva” detached from “Russia”, Estonian’s subject position can accordingly be firmly posited in the centre of the West. Being at the core, in turn, ensures Estonia’s overall security as Riigikogu member Marko Mihkelson (2016) remarked:

> Estonia must belong to the centre of the Western allies. We have to improve the lobbying skills when solving problems and discussing security questions that are important to us, whether this involves shaping a common policy for the Western allies’ relationship with Russia or influencing the root causes of the migration crisis.

Moreover, former Estonia’s foreign minister Keit-Pentus Rosimannus along with Danish, English and Lithuanian foreign ministers came up with a non-paper calling for measures against Russian hybrid threat (Bruxelles2, 2015). This partly leads to the establishment of EU’s East StratCom Task Force which deals with Russia’s disinformation campaigns against EU member states. Hence, in response to Russian hybrid threat in its information sphere, Estonia also contributes to the work of the EU’s East StratCom Task Force in Brussels and NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Riga (personal communication, 2018, January 24). During its presidency of the EU Council, Estonia also pushed the agenda of combatting Russian disinformation onto the EU level (Mihkelson, 2017). At the EU Summit in 2016, former Estonian Premier Taavi Rõivas even raised the

issue of permanent funding for EU Strategic Communication Task Force (EU StratComm) to counter Russia's disinformation (ERR, 2016). In fact, Estonia has sent a national staff on its own budget to the East StratCom Task Force (personal communication, 2018, January 22). This Estonia/the EU/NATO triangle in the strategic response to Russian hybrid threat creates an all-embracing frame of reference within which a liberal-democratically informed code of strategic conduct – such as the aforementioned debunking practices – has become appropriate. Tapping into this discursive province, Estonia's hegemonic liberal political force can legitimately stabilise the equivalential relationship between the West and Estonia which re-enacts the hegemonic articulation of Estonia's minimal strategic culture. This further normalises societal experience of minimalism in strategic response to Russian hybrid threat in the information sphere (see e.g., Tuomela, 2002, pp. 40-77). In this respect, Estonia's limited response as such instantiates the very same discursive dynamics as constitutes the floating signifier "Western democracy" itself.

In theory, Estonia could tighten security practices to improve psychological defence rather than implementing the aforementioned debunking practices. For instance, it can establish certain criteria regarding the transparency of media ownership[28] or impose stricter monitoring of information flow on the information sphere (Sazonov, 2015). However, Estonia has not publicly entertained such proposals. Critics of this minimalist approach to strategic response nonetheless argued that the existing security measures in dealing with Russian hybrid threat are not sufficient. For instance, Vladimir Sazonov commented that:

> Raising awareness is not enough. […] It is also necessary for the Baltic countries to develop their own media and to pay more attention to the Russian television and press in order to better monitor what kind of information they give to the target audiences – the Russian-speaking residents of the Baltic countries (Sazonov, 2016b).

[28] This issue was discussed in a high-level conference on hybrid threat organised during Estonia's EU Presidency in 2017 (See European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2017, p. 3).

From a defence perspective, the concern is that "Estonia cannot protect itself from Russian hybrid threat without considering more assertive measures in its information sphere" (personal communication, 2018, February 6). Likewise, accepting that there are Kremlin sympathisers in the EU member states including Estonia, the former Foreign Minister Jürgen Ligi warned that "a very big issue is the capacity for psychological resistance" (Diplomaatia, 2015). However, as no uncompromising strategic response to Russian hybrid threat is prevailing apart from the significant increase of strategic communication budget to enhance psychological defence (ERR, 2018), it can be argued that there is no crucial shift in Estonia's minimalist strategic orientation. The endurance of this trajectory largely results from the reproduction of Estonia's Western democratic identity through the debunking practice as illustrated above.

To conclude this chapter, the empirical analysis yields significant insights into Estonia's strategic behaviour and, in particular, the way the hegemonic articulation of Estonian strategic culture mediates its strategic response to Russian hybrid threat in the information sphere. At the beginning of this chapter, the study has laid out three discourses which shape Estonia's strategic behaviour. It is argued that the hegemonic articulation of Estonian political culture discourse carries an imprint of the Western democratic identity which is, in turn, sustained by the concept of media liberalism. Referencing to the notion of media liberalism allows certain Estonian elites to justify the existing minimal strategic response to Russian hybrid threat. Therefore, the imposition of stricter security measures, the crackdown and ban of Russian media outlets, and the nationalising of the information sphere are deemed unsuitable and excluded from the hegemonic articulation as they challenge Estonia's privileged identity of Western democracy. Through such a hegemonic articulation, the floating signifier "Western democracy" is localised into Estonia's political culture discourse and provides legitimacy for the minimalist approach to strategic response to Russian hybrid threat in the information sphere. Estonia's appropriate response is manifested through a variety of security practices, namely the establishment of ETV+, the authorisation of Sputnik media portals to operate in Estonia, and the cooperation between PBK and TTV. The representations of these security practices resonate with Estonia's

Western democratic identity. Hence, they become a site in which such an identity is reproduced. The hegemonic political culture discourse further delegitimises certain security practices which carry the antagonistic signs, namely censorship, counter-propaganda-with-propaganda and media ban. Those signs are excluded from the hegemonic articulation since they challenge the principle of Western democracy. In this respect, appropriate security practices are formulated in compliance with the liberal-democratic standard of correctness. Furthermore, this pre-defined political correctness, too, shapes Estonia's strategic orientation by handcuffing it with the liberal universal values. In short, an appropriate strategic response must be liberal-democratically correct.

In addition, the concept of multiculturalism which is (re)produced through the hegemonic articulation of political culture discourse facilitates a discursive reworking of the category "Russian-speaking population" and "Narva". Both signs – once being considered as antagonistic signs – are projected into a new chain of equivalence centred on the privileged identity of Western democracy. This leads to a new perception of threat in that Estonia's Russophones are not necessarily a threat to the societal cohesion. Thus, the need for stricter security measures has become significantly less urgent. By tapping into the discursive resource underlying the EU and NATO's liberal strategic response to Russian hybrid threat in the information sphere, Estonia's debunking practice has become legitimised. This further normalises the minimal strategic response. Another discourse underlying Estonia's minimal strategic response is the hegemonic historical experience discourse which is articulated in tandem with the political culture discourse. The historical experience discourse has constructed a strategic reality in which strategic response occurs. This reality is characterised by the condition of normal unpeace within which the never-ending circulation of conflicting and hostile narratives from Russia in Estonia's information sphere persists. This makes the distinction between wartime and peacetime impossible. This strategic reality articulated by the hegemonic historical experience discourse adds another discursive layer onto the strategic consideration. Consequently, neither decisive security measures nor inaction gains momentum. Eventually, the articulation of normal unpeace strategic reality rather steers the response towards a middle ground in a strategic

spectrum. Although Estonia's minimal strategic response to Russian hybrid threat is currently a dominant mode, there exist challenging political forces amplified through the counter-hegemonic national identity discourse. This discourse embraces the notion of Estonian singularity which is the basis of the nationalising approach to strategic response. Those subscribing to this orientation champion more restrictive strategic response and justify their demand by referencing to the concept of media sovereignty. However, the prevailing minimal strategic response suggests that the counter-hegemonic national identity discourse remains at the border of the strategic spectrum. The absence of the public deliberation about extraordinary security measures in the information sphere – such as a temporary ban on Russian television broadcast or censorship of Russian media – further reaffirms that the illiberal security practices are currently beyond the acceptable range of strategic response.

Finally, Estonia's adoption of minimal strategic response does not necessarily suggest that the country could achieve less security. In contrast, such a limited response locates Estonia's subject position at the ideational centre of European security architecture and thus enhances Estonia's overall security. President Kersti Kaljulaid's remark nicely summarises this point:

> Democracy, personal freedoms and respect towards the principles of a state based on the rule of law are the cornerstones not just for the security architecture of our countries, but for the international community in general (Office of the President, 2018).

Echoing the President's opinion, Mölder (2016) reiterated that "democratic values will mitigate the impact of security threats Estonia is currently facing." The constellation of Estonia's minimal security practices outlined above is subsequently consolidated within and simultaneously constitutes the hegemonic strategic culture. The hegemonic articulation of this strategic culture of minimalism mediates the country's strategic response to Russian hybrid threat in its information sphere in that the restrictive security practices are filtered out. At the same time, the minimal response is rendered appropriate and normal as it resonates with Estonia's privileged identity of Western democracy.

CONCLUSION

The research has studied Estonian strategic response to Russian hybrid threat with a focus on the mediating effects of the hegemonic articulation of Estonian strategic culture. It utilises the poststructuralist discourse theory and the concept of strategic culture as a theoretical framework. This line of inquiry rests on the how-possible scheme of thought which has guided the research towards the investigation of a range of perceivable appropriate response which depends on the hegemonic articulation of certain discourses. In the light of such an intellectual enterprise, the study has developed an interpretive frame by conceptualising strategic culture as a discursive context through which certain security practices have gained momentum and are considered to be the appropriate and "normal" response. Given an ongoing discussion on an appropriate response to Russian hybrid threat in the West (see e.g., Weitz, 2014; Pawlak, 2017), the case of Estonia offers a fertile ground for the empirical analysis precisely because the domestic debate on this matter draws special attention to the ideational aspects of strategic behaviour, hinting at the underlying discourses at work.

In this study, three essential aspects are highlighted, namely political culture, historical experience and national identity. For Estonia, the presence of Russia's media outlets in its information sphere has become perceived as a hybrid threat because the representations within which Russian media are embedded are discursively constructed and articulated as a threat to the cohesion of Estonian society. In this respect, the study shows that the concept of Russian hybrid threat is not an independent category which can be objectively identified. Instead, it comes into existence as such as a result of the meanings ascribed to it and the impression with which it is discursively attached (see Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 3). Moreover, as the study specifically examines Estonia's information sphere which is discursively linked with the nonmilitary dimension of Russian hybrid threat, the concept of strategic culture – traditionally confined to the politico-military domain – need be refashioned in order to better capture the dynamics of the phenomenon under study. This brings about two disciplinary critiques of the study of strategic culture. The study not only reconceptualises the approach to the enquiry of strategic culture but also

underscores the need for the broadening of the concept itself. The reframing of such a concept has reinvigorated its instrumentality in the empirical analysis in that it helps to single out the historico-cultural dimension of nonmilitary security practices under investigation.

As regards the discursive analysis, the study has yielded significant insights into the understanding of Estonia's strategic response to Russian hybrid threats in the information sphere as follows. First, the triad discursive nexus between the hegemonic political culture discourse, the counter-hegemonic national identity discourse and the historical experience discourse as a strategic context has enabled the hegemonic articulation of Estonian strategic culture. In the light of the debate about the appropriate response to Russian hybrid threat in Estonia's information sphere, the concept of media liberalism embedded in the political culture discourse is used as a point of reference for those who champion the minimalist approach to strategic response. For them, restrictive security measures imposed on the country's information sphere are deemed as incompatible with Estonia's privileged identity of Western democracy. On the contrary, the counter-hegemonic national identity discourse produces an antagonistic force attempting to dislocate the political culture discourse by articulating the notion of media sovereignty. The argumentation based on such a concept accentuates the need to secure Estonia's information sphere by adopting more assertive security practices which prioritise titular media outlets at the expense of Russia's ones. At the radical end of the assertive spectrum, there is a call for the restriction on certain Russian media outlets. However, the supporters of this response are extremely marginal.

Second, in response to the main research question, this study has found that the hegemonic articulation of Estonia's strategic culture has mediated its strategic response to Russian hybrid threat in the information sphere by defining a range of appropriate strategic response through which the minimal security practices become legitimised. In other words, it is a practice of delimitation which demarcates the frontier of the possible response. In response to the supplementary research question, this study has found that Estonia's limited response has become considered as a normal response because it resonates with the country's privileged identity of Western democracy. Therefore, the theoretical expectation

of this study is confirmed. Minimalism in Estonia's strategic culture rests essentially on the country's Western democratic identity. Accordingly, the hegemonic articulation of Estonian strategic culture simultaneously reproduces this privileged identity. This attests to the mutually constitutive relationship between the two concepts. The reiteration of Western democracy ultimately shows that it has constituted the cornerstone of appropriateness in Estonia's strategic response. Otherwise stated, Estonia's strong Western democracy identity has significantly influenced its strategic response. Through this particular lens, security practices that conform to this standard of appropriateness are further constructed as the "normal" response. The prominent evidence is offered by the debunking practice through which the minimal strategic response becomes institutionalised. Interrogating Estonian strategic response additionally reveals that Estonian strategic culture has a disciplinary power in that it regulates Estonia's subject position as a Western democracy (see Dunn, 1997, pp. 690-693). Otherwise put, it forbids certain illiberal security practices that are *not* in synchrony with liberal-democratic correctness. From the analysis, such practices include the ban on politicians giving an interview to Russian media, the restrictions on Russian media outlets and the extreme preferences bestowed to titular media outlets. In this respect, the hegemonic articulation of Estonian strategic culture keeps the country's strategic horizon under the minimalist approach. The implication of such a strategic posture for Estonia is significant because it shows that presenting itself as a quintessential Western democratic country is not only resulted from the historical experience which posits Soviet/Russia as a significant Other (Mälksoo, 2013) but also the strategic self-positioning at the normative centre of the Euro-transatlantic security architecture. This demonstrates that strategic response can be considered simultaneously as a part of the identity-reproducing process in the context of the incessant fluctuations of meanings and the inherent unstableness of the hegemonic articulation of Estonian strategic culture. Therefore, Estonia's strategic response itself has provided a meaning for the floating signifier "Western democracy". In the light of such a process, Estonian strategic culture is nonetheless subject to constant alterations. Thus, the dominant liberal political force sustaining it is compelled to police the resistance from the competing forces which in this case are the illiberal forces.

Third, the absence of articulated alarmist discourses urging for immediate restrictions imposed on the country's information sphere reaffirms Estonia's adherence to the minimalist approach. In particular, this absence can also be accounted for by the articulation of Estonia's historical experience discourse as a subtext shaping the perception of war and peace. It creates a strategic milieu of normal unpeace in which the hostility between Estonia and Russia is constructed as a reality. Therefore, inasmuch as the discourse of mutual fear is articulated, the condition of unpeace will be reinforced. Taking Estonia's information sphere into consideration, the response to Russian hybrid threat is thus guided by the logic of normal unpeace through which neither extraordinary measures nor inaction is considered to be appropriate.

Fourth, the scrutiny of the rearticulation of Estonian strategic culture into different political domains discloses the instrumentalisation of the hegemonic discourse in the formal political arena. This means that certain actors may draw on such a discourse to achieve their political goal. In this respect, Estonia's limited response to Russian hybrid threat is also influenced by the strategic preference of the ECP party whose political vindications establish an equivalential relation between the concept of multiculturalism and Estonian political culture. The rearticulation of Estonia's political culture discourse into the domain of party politics has thus discredited the challenging political forces which advocate the concept of Estonian singularity. From this angle, the political vindications exemplify the political struggles underlying the hegemonic articulation of Estonian strategic culture. This only confirms the study's finding that the Western democratic identity is a point of reference for political legitimacy as it provides a discursive resource for not only political claims but also strategic culture.

With regard to the theoretical implications, the findings of this study challenge the claim that small states are generally expected to enhance security to ensure their survival (see e.g., Veselý, 2007; Browning, 2006). In particular, it challenges the view that Estonia's historical experience during the Soviet occupation leads to the assertive security policy towards Russia (Jurkynas, 2014). The argument drawn from the insight of this study is that small states are still leaning towards the maximisation of security but strategic culture as a

discursive context also influences strategic behaviour. To put another way, security is not always the overarching goal since identity and strategic culture can also override security concerns. Therefore, this study provides a more nuanced and balanced understanding of states' strategic response to the perceived threats. However, as the study relies solely on Estonian strategic texts, the insights obtained in this study are specific to the case of Estonia. It does not offer a generalisable explanation. Nonetheless, the poststructuralist approach to the study of strategic culture developed in this study can potentially be applied to a variety of other cases in which the debate on the appropriate response to Russian hybrid threat has emerged such as Latvia (Rislakki, 2014). The analytical vantage points of this study's interpretive frame are its sensitivity to the context and clear discursive markers which inform the relationship between each semantic category and its location in the discursive structure.

Despite the discursive analysis has confirmed that Estonia's minimal response is mediated by the hegemonic articulation of the strategic culture, it is necessary to reflect on the alternative explanations. They should be understood in the light of this study's limitations. As a small state, Estonia's limited resources can be factored in (Veebel, 2015). However, as shown in this study, Estonia has refrained from employing the existing capabilities in its information sphere since they are interpreted as illiberal/non-Western democratic security practices. The external discursive pressures either from the EU or Russia on the domestic interethnic politics between Estonian- and Russian-speaking population may, too, indirectly influence Estonia's response to Russian hybrid threat (Schulze, 2018; Hoffman & Makarychev, 2017). Nonetheless, as this study has demonstrated, the strong mediating effects of strategic culture are produced by the domestic discourses. Hence, the impact of exogenous discursive pressure can be limited. In addition, Estonia's neoliberal economic trajectory (Notermans, 2015, p. 103) may constrain the imposition of regulations on the country's information sphere. However, it can still be interpreted as a result of the diffusion of Estonia's Western democratic identity into the economic sphere. All in all, drawing on the empirical analysis, the study reaffirms its findings as well as the theoretical expectation.

Finally, regarding the avenue for future research, the insights gained in this study can be put into the comparative perspective. A comparison with other Baltic countries or Poland can potentially produce a comprehensive regional strategic outlook. Positing the concept of strategic culture on the ground of practice theory is another viable prospect because it could yield a thick description about each security practice under study. Practice theory which focuses on the day-to-day security practice as an object of analysis may provide a deeper analysis of states' strategic response vis-à-vis textual analysis.

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APPENDIX I – The Corpus of Estonian Strategic Texts			
Author/Organisation	**Text**	**Year**	**Category**
Riigikogu	National Security Concept of Estonia	2010	Official document
Ministry of Defence	National Defence Strategy	2010	Official document
Estonian Internal Security Service	Estonian Internal Security Service Review	2014	Official document
Estonian Internal Security Service	Estonian Internal Security Service Review	2015	Official document
Raivo Vetik et. al./ Ministry of Culture*	Estonian Society Monitoring 2015	2015	Official document
Estonian Information System Authority	Annual Report of the Estonian Information System Authority's Cyber Security Branch.	2015	Official document
Juhan Kivirähk/Ministry of Defence *	Public Opinion and National Defence	2015	Official document
Juhan Kivirähk/Ministry of Defence *	Public Opinion and National Defence	2016	Official document
Juhan Kivirähk/Ministry of Defence *	Public Opinion and National Defence	2017 (Mar.)	Official document

Juhan Kivirähk/Ministry of Defence *	Public Opinion and National Defence	2017 (Oct.)	Official document
Republic of Estonian Government	Strategic communication	2018	Official document
-/Reuter	Disquiet in Baltics over sympathies of Russian speakers	2014	Official document
Kersti Kaljuliad/ President of Estonian Republic	Presidendi kõne inimõiguste konverentsil: kui me tahame, et meid kuulataks, peame end arusaadavaks tegema	2016	Official speech
Kersti Kaljuliad/ President of Estonian Republic	President of the Republic at the Opening of the Riga StratCom Dialogue	2017	Official speech
Office of the President	President Kaljulaid in the White House: the Baltic states and USA are on the axis of good	2018	Official press release
Taivo Tänavsuu/Eesti Ekspress	Ants Laaneots: mina küll ei käi Moskvas „Ameerikat avastamas“	2011	Journalistic report
Helen Mihelson/ Postimees	Ümarlaud: Vene propaganda vastu võitlemise asemel tuleb pakkuda alternatiivi	2015	Journalistic report
Isabelle de Pommereau/ Deutsche Welle	Estonia woos Russian speakers with local TV	2015	Journalistic report

Ott Ummelas/ Bloomberg	Estonia Must Counter 'Hostile' Russian Propaganda, Adviser Says	2015	Journalistic report
-/ERR	Estonia calls for permanent funding for task force countering Kremlin propaganda	2016	Journalistic report
-/The Baltic Times	Kremlin-backed Sputnik News Agency Opens Estonian Branch	2016	Journalistic report
Lally Weymouth/The Washington Post	'Russia is a threat': Estonia frets about its neighbor	2017	Journalistic report
Otti Eylandt/Delfi	Narva ja Sillamäe referendum näitas, et Ida-Virumaad ei tohi unustada	2017	Journalistic report
-/Postimees	President Kaljulaid: Tallinna Televisioon ja ETV+ võiks liituda	2017	Journalistic report
Vesker Liis/Postimees	Marju Lauristin: Eesti uudiste näitamine Vene telekanalis omab palju sügavamat kultuurilist mõju	2017	Journalistic report
Riho Nagel & Karoliina Vasli/Delfi	Jüri Ratas kutsus Olga Ivanovat korrale: Sputnik on propaganda tööriist	2017	Journalistic report
Mirjam Mäekivi & Helen Mihelson/ Postimees	Keskerakond Ivanovale: Sputnikuga ei räägita	2017	Journalistic report
Aili Vahtla/ERR	Kaljulaid, President's Office to relocate to Narva for one month next fall	2017	Journalistic

			report
-/Pealinn	Belobrovtsev: opositsiooni kritiseerib linnavalitsust seoses PBK-ga valeväidetega	2017	Journalistic report
-/ERR	MP Ivanova flouts Center Party ban, gives Russia's Sputnik interview	2017	Journalistic report
-/ERR	Ratas ja Ossinovski toetavad koostööd PBK-ga	2017	Journalistic report
Taavi Eilat/ERR	Janek Luts: PBK-lt reklaami ostmine annab legitiimsuse ka kanali muule infole	2017	Journalistic report
Propastop.org/Postimees	Propastop: Sputnikut võib Eestis teatud tingimusel läbikukkunuks lugeda	2017	Journalistic report
Sven Ranlab/Postimees	ERRi juht toetab presidendi ideed liita Tallinna TV telekanaliga ETV+	2017	Journalistic report
Sverre Lasn/Delfi	Sõduri intervjuu kaitseministriga: Eesti ei tohi kunagi enam üksi jääda	2017	Journalistic report
Alistair Scrutton & David Mardiste/ Reuters	Wary of divided loyalties, a Baltic state reaches out to its Russians	2017	Journalistic report
Hussar Lauri/ Postimees	President Kaljulaid: the most important thing is to notice and talk	2017	Journalistic report
Oliver Kund/ Postimees	Russian network could have determined winner of Tallinn election	2018	Journalistic

			report
Oliver Kund/ Postimees	Stratcom to be strengthened	2018	Journalistic report
Anna Põld/Postimees	Ratas finds PBK has not distorted messages	2018	Journalistic report
Anna Põld/Postimees	Vabaerakond tahab keelata maksumaksja raha eest ajakirjanduslike saadete ja reklaami ostmise	2018	Journalistic report
-/The Baltic Times	Estonian justmin: State shouldn't buy air time from PBK	2018	Journalistic report
-/The Baltic Times	Estonian MEP Paet: EU should be less naive regarding Russian propaganda	2018	Journalistic report
Isabelle de Pommereau/The Christian Science Monitor	As Estonia turns 100, a new embrace of its Russian speakers	2018	Journalistic report
Dario Cavegn/ERR	President visits Narva for introduction of 2024 culture capital campaign	2018	Journalistic report
Anneli Ammas/ Postimees	Taking offence is not only Estonia's problem	2018	Journalistic report
Laas Levas/Estonian	Any parallels between Catalonia and Ida-Virumaa?	2017	Non-official

Life			opinion
Laas Levas/Estonian Life	Military Technology – tanks, cannons, rockets, helicopters etc. What about information?	2017	Non-official opinion
Sirje Kiin/Estonian Life	Kommentaar: Meedia Vastutus Infosõja Olukorras	2017	Non-official opinion
Urmas Sutrop/ University of Tartu	Urmas Sutrop: Russia launches propaganda in Estonian	2014	Expert's opinion
Andres Kasekamp/ University of Tartu	Why Narva is not Next	2015	Expert's opinion
Viljar Veebel/Baltic Defence College	Russian Propaganda, Disinformation, and Estonia's Experience	2015	Expert's opinion
Ilmar Raag & Aleksei Günter/ Estonian government communication office**	Eesti strateegilise kommunikatsiooni kilde 2016	2016	Expert's opinion
Henrik Praks/ICDS	NATO Warsaw Summit – Implications for Estonia	2016	Expert's opinion
Holger Mölder/ Tallinn University of Technology	Rohkem Julgeolekut ≠ Julge Olek	2016	Expert's opinion
Vladimir Sazonov/	The Kremlin's Total Information Warfare with No Moral Boundaries	2016	Expert's opinion

Estonian National Defence College			
Vladimir Sazonov/ Estonian National Defence College	Kremlin's infowar in the Baltics	2016	Expert's opinion
Vello Pettai & Pille Ivask/ University of Tartu & Äripäev	Nation in Transit Country Report 2017: Estonia	2017	Expert's opinion
Dmitri Teperik/ICDS	Countering Disinformation: The Danger of Hype—and Ignorance	2018	Expert's opinion
Ilmar Raag/Former Government Advisor	Ilmar Raag: sõna "propaganda" on muutunud sünonüümiks kõigele, mis ei meeldi	2018	Expert's opinion
Merle Maigre/security policy adviser to the president	Nothing New in Hybrid Warfare: The Estonian Experience and Recommendations for NATO	2015	Official's opinion
Jürgen Ligi/Former Minister of Foreign Affairs	On Russia, Shelters and Female Conscripts—The Big Election Debate in Diplomaatia	2015	Official's opinion
Marko Mihkelson/ Member of the	Successful Foreign Policy: The Battlefront of Estonian National Security	2016	Official's opinion

Riigikogu			
Liis Lipre-Järma/ Adviser, Office of the President	Communication at times of Hostile Propaganda: Case of Estonia	2016	Official's opinion
Marko Mihkelson/ Member of the Riigikogu	Disinformation: Russia's Old but Effective Weapon of Influence	2017	Official's opinion
Vsevolod Jürgenson/ Member of Tallinn City Parliament	Keskerakondlane: PBK ja ETV+ ei ole süüdi, et paljud meie kaasmaalased saavad oma informatsiooni idast	2017	Official's opinion
Raivo Aeg/ Member of the Riigikogu	Raivo Aeg PBKst: teavituskampaaniate ostmine mõjutuskanalilt on lühinägelik ja ohtlik	2018	Official's opinion

*The report is commissioned by the Ministry but the author is not the Ministry's official.

**The paper was written when the authors were officially working for the government communication office but it does not necessarily reflect Estonian government's position.

APPENDIX II – Semi-structured interview questions

Disclaimer

1. These semi-structured interview questions are part of Master's Thesis to be submitted to Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu and School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London.
2. In order to comply with University College London's ethical requirement, the interview will be completely anonymous and confidentiality will be fully guaranteed.
3. The interviewer will not collect any personal and identifiable information.
4. The interview will be recorded and strictly used for academic purpose only.

Questions

1. How do you understand Russia's hybrid war strategy?
2. Is there any other hybrid warfare strategy that Russia uses against Estonia?
3. To what extent do you think Estonia's information sphere is affected by Russia's hybrid threat?/To what extent it destabilises Estonia's societal cohesion?
4. Before Crimean annexation in 2014, what were the Russian threats Estonia concerned most?
5. After the Crimean annexation in 2014, has Russia's hybrid strategy become more intensified in Estonia?
6. What kind of disinformation is being/was articulated?
7. Which channel does Russia use to spread disinformation?
8. What does your organisation do to improve Estonia's security in the context of Russia's hybrid warfare?
9. What are the counter-measures already taken in order to respond to Russian hybrid threat?
10. Are there any countering disinformation measures before the Crimean annexation in 2014?
11. In your opinion, how should a democratic country respond to Russia's hybrid threat?
12. What should have been done in order to improve Estonia's psychological defence?

APPENDIX III – List of interviewees

Interviewee	Organisation	Date
Anonymous, state official	Estonian Information System Authority	22 January 2018
Anonymous, security expert	International Centre for Defence and Security	22 January 2018
Anonymous, state official	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	24 January 2018
Anonymous, security expert	Baltic Defence College	6 February 2018
Anonymous, security expert	University of Tartu/Estonian National Defence College	22 February 2018
Anonymous, media expert	University of Tartu	23 February 2018

APPENDIX IV – Propaganda and disinformation case against Estonia

Propaganda and disinformation cases from 2015 to February 2018 are compiled from the following sources.

1. EU's East StratCom Task Force, https://euvsdisinfo.eu/
2. Propastop's, https://www.propastop.org/eng/
3. CEPA's StratCom Programme, http://infowar.cepa.org/Countries/Estonia

Date	Title	Source of Origin
4 February 2018	Baltic countries don't oppose Nord Stream 2 anymore	Vesti nedeli s Dmitriem Kiselyovym @Rossiya 1, 01:23
23 January 2018	Maarjamägi, military planes and sprats	Rubaltic and Izvestija
21 January 2018	Economies of the Baltic countries can't make progress in the EU	Sputnik Lithuania, Vesti
18 January 2018	All three Baltic states are disappearing	Rubaltic.ru
18 January 2018	Censorship in the Baltic states	Rubaltic.ru
16 January 2018	Putin turns out to be the most popular politician on the Latvian TV in 2017	Sputnik Latvia, Sputnik Estonia, RIA Novosti, Telegraf.lv, Baltnews, Life.ru
25 December 2017	Estonia and Lithuania seek to improve relations with Russia without preconditions	Argumenti y fakti, Ukraina.ru
1 December 2017	Europe will become Muslim	Utro.ru, Rosbalt, RIA Novosti, Sputnik Estonia

30 October 2017	Estonia has opened a new military base in the town of Tapa under the pretext of fear of a Russian attack.	cz.Sputniknews
17 October 2017	Since 1991, the leaders of Latvia and Estonia have constantly been threatening Russia, and now the same threats are heard from Poland	Vremya pokazhet @Pervyi kanal, 26.54
25 September 2017	Finland, Estonia and Hungary are pushing Russia's Finno-Ugric peoples to separate from Russia	Komsomolskaya Pravda
21 September 2017	Latvia and Estonia have claims for Russian territories, Poland wants to seize Ukraine and Belarus, Romania Transnistria	Pravo Golosa @TV Centr, 24:30
16 July 2017	During World War II, most of the Baltic Forest Brothers were members of Waffen-SS. They are responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Jews.	Vesti nedeli @ Rossiya 1
16 July 2017	The presidential elections in Estonia are not at all a democratic procedure.	sputnik.com

13 July 2017	A NATO film glorifies the Baltic Nazi collaborators known as the “Forest Brothers.”	rt.com
6 July 2017	Russophobe and fascist Estonia persecutes the participants of the “Immortal Regiment” procession.	rusvesna.su
31 May 2017	Kersti Kaljulaid, President of Estonia, has informed “Deutsche Welle” that she strictly follows orders that are dictated by Brussels and Washington when dealing with Russia.	“Mesto vstrechi” (55:48, 56:09)
19 February 2017	The Baltics and Ukraine belong to the “Russian world”, so Moscow would make a pre-emptive strike against Europe if NATO puts its troops there.	“Voskresnyi vecher s Vladimirom Solovyovym” (2:13)
23 January 2017	Trump will no longer take care of the Baltic states and other U.S. allies in Europe.	RuBaltic.ru
7 January 2017	Estonian President refused to congratulate Orthodox Christians on Christmas	Baltnews.lv
19 October 2016	Estonia (and all three of the Baltic states) are preparing	NTV

	for war with Russia.	
25 September 2016	The US ambassador to Estonia, James Melville, criticised the Estonian presidential election system, saying that it does not reflect the views of the population.	baltnews.ee
17 March 2016	Estonia is building a concentration camp for its Russian-speaking citizens	politobzor.net
12 November 2015	Estonian tax-payers are covering medical costs of the Ukrainian “effaceurs soldiers”	kompravda.eu
9 November 2015	Estonia is a racist country, where people are discriminated based on their ethnic and racial background.	rg.ru
7 November 2015	Estonia is infringing on media freedom with the ban of Rossiya Sevodnya and that this is not the first time Estonia is breaking the rules and preventing Russian media from broadcasting in Estonia.	sputniknews.com