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Image Reflections, Gender, and the Power.
How global decision-makers' appearance shapes public opinion abroad, in
dependence on the different geo-territorial contexts?
Research, based on Bulgaria, Estonia, and Greece.

MA thesis

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to explore the influence of the external appearance, including gender distinction, of world decision-makers, in shaping perceptions abroad. Here, the theme of the appearance, or external presence, is considered as a component of the broader Image of a person. Image-making is an important tool in politics, especially when there is a state/entity representation behind it. Moreover, often, the national branding is closely related to the Image that maintains its respected decision-maker. By now, in the political, academic literature, the topic of external appearance has been analyzed mainly at a domestic level, regarding the relationship between candidates and voters. This thesis goes further and tries to explore how perceptions are shaped abroad, on an international level using real, current examples. Whereas, a crucial aspect is the Image of female heads of states, and how the public perceives the suitability for their governing posts.

The thesis is based mainly on the Constructivist theory, while there is an additional line build on the feminist approach. Appearance here is connected, principally, with the meaning of suitability for a particular post. Concepts like soft power and Image Bite are discussed further to approach the topic more analytically. Additionally, the role of the Media as a channel of communication in the Image-making process, and the positioning of a certain state vis-a-vis another, are supplemental aspects in this paper.

The thesis is an experimental one. Expectations are tested through the MDSD. Online focus groups, organized in three states, Bulgaria, Estonia, and Greece drove the conclusions. The participants were required to evaluate a set of two photographs of eleven world decision-makers and justify their opinions. Additional questions that approach the topic were also debated.

The thesis finds that: a.) Male decision-makers have an advantage in being perceived as more suitable for top positions of power.

b.) The bigger the state is, the more strict expectations are constructing the perceptions for the decision-makers' Image, especially for female leaders.

c.) Where the state is located, vis-a-vis another state, and the quality of their relations, matter in the Image perception, of both the state and the respected decision-maker.

d.) Finally, the more 'indifferent', or on the contrary 'bold', one's Image is, the most likely is this Image to be transformed to, and affect, the state or entity of representation.

Keywords: Appearance, Image, Decision-Makers, Constructivism, Gender, Perceptions, Public Opinion, Media, Soft Power

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List of Abbreviations

DV - Dependent Variable

EU - European Union

H - Hypothesis

IV - Independent Variable

MDS - Most Different System Designs

SU - Soviet Union

UK - United Kingdom

US - United States

1. Introduction

In the global system of international relations, the way that someone appears can seem like quite a small component to pay attention to it when the general picture is more than complex. However, states, as the main entities in that system are lead by individuals, and institutions, which again are composed by people. The human factor can matter. Especially, when there is an institutional representation behind a given post. Even so, how crucial is possible the appearance of a leader be? When an image is created, and perceptions are shaped, probably, sometimes, it can be paramount. If we take into account that occasionally humans connect, unconsciously, certain head of a state, with the country on behalf of which one acts, we can understand why the aspect is center. Furthermore, appearance, as one of the “ingredients” composing a person, is from interest for deeper research.

In the late autumn of 1985, the then American president Ronald Reagan meets with the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in Geneva, Switzerland (Apple Jr., 1985). Among other observations made by the press regarding the important meeting at the time, is the fact how the two men were dressed, as “Mr. Reagan was coatless and hatless [...], Mr. Gorbachev, [...] wore both coat and hat” (Ibid). To what extent these remarks were valuable can be negotiable for some. Nevertheless, it was a detail that was noticed, taking into consideration that other information was limited for the mass public, and presumably, photographs from the summit were one of the few things massively available for ordinary people around the globe.

Still, the appearance is not only the clothes that someone wears, though they are essential. In fact, for this thesis, the term contains a more broad meaning for a further general image that someone tries to present, using visible components of his/her own presence, even unintentionally. I will “unpack” the concept in detail, further in the text (see chapter 2).

The Geneva Summit example is showing how every detail matters in politics, especially when there is mass media coverage. Nowadays, that is even more accurate. Only if one

reflects on how much internet and social media, which are producing an enormous quantity of audiovisual materials, have an influence on the communications. State leaders acknowledge that. They have, usually, extensive groups of professionals that take care of their appearance and image presentation to the public, being a domestic or international one. For instance, Justin Trudeau, the current prime minister of Canada, has an official photographer which “is paid out of the PMO's¹ communications budget and reports to the director of communications” (Andrew-Gee, 2016). The image of Mr. Trudeau is carefully examined, while his external appearance is helping to cultivate positive perceptions in that matter (Ibid). As might be expected and mentioned previously, he is not the only world leader that is assisted by the expertise of photographers and image-makers. The German Chancellor, Angela Merkel has four photographers appointed to capture important moments while she is at the Office (Laurent, 2015), a fact that is showing how crucial is the display of the image to the public.

The personal teams assigned to be in charge of the image-making process, counting in it the physical appearance, can give a pivotal advantage to a leader, and the staff assigned can include diverse experts. However, they are not the only ones, along with the particular leader itself, of course, which shape the beliefs for the certain chief persons' personality, to the public. Media, from television programs, to newspapers and magazines, being online or in print, contribute to the building of these perceptions, as well. They broadcast events, deliver pictures and emphasize on various elements or dismiss others, by making comments or showing on repeat something specific. When it comes to appearance, the visibility of the subject is a theme used frequently on triggering attention. Moreover, as Garzia highlights, “leaders have in fact gained center stage with respect to political communication due to the intertwined effect of technological innovations in the media [...]. This has made in turn political leaders increasingly visible, and therefore subject to constant scrutiny by the public” (Garzia, 2011).

1 Prime Minister's Office

Numerous studies have explored the topic of a candidate's appearance and its effect on a domestic level when it comes to explaining election's results (e.g., Lawson et al., 2010; Lenz, and Lawson 2011; Lutz, 2010; Rosenberg et al., 1986). They have proved that voters often use shortcut judgments about a candidate's beliefs, character, and personality by only looking at images or videos (Ibid). These previous works will help in establishing a supplementary positioning of the current work on a later stage as a guiding string, on account of the fact that their general framework involves human perceptions of an individual's appearance.

The objective of this thesis is to go beyond the relation of candidate (leader) and citizen (voter) communication, on a domestic level. The aim of this thesis is to explore how global leaders' appearance can develop, favor or impede perceptions abroad, affecting also the image of their state of representation. More precisely my research question is: 'How does the appearance of global decision-makers affect public opinion's perception in different geo-territorial contexts?'

The process of globalization has contributed to the impression of people being closer to nations otherwise way distant. Therefore, the consciousness in the public about other states than their own is to be taken into account. Premier figures that lead and present a country is most likely to be connected immediately with that state. In addition, as outlined, on a national level appearance shapes perceptions and trigger outcomes. On that ground, a reasonable question comes, why not appearance to have an influence on public opinion outside the borders of a country? Certainly, other factors will matter in forming a mass opinion, as for instance the geopolitical positioning of a particular state or aspects concerning speech acts from the leading actors. Notwithstanding, for the analysis, the independent variable of 'appearance' will be tested through an experimental way, and the effect on the public opinion (which is our dependent variable) will be observed. Ergo, other factors will be minimized as much as feasible. Still, the geopolitical positioning is an element that cannot be dismissed and will work as an additional, supplementary variable.

This work is divided into five main parts. The structure of the thesis started with an introduction, which serves as the first chapter. The thesis will continue with the second chapter, which is dedicated to the theoretical framework. For the current research, a Constructivist approach has been selected as a general foundation, based on the essence of the topic. Besides, a supportive perspective as standpoint was adopted, also due to the suitability of the matter which involves a gender factor. In consequence, gender studies emerged also as appropriate to give an additional explanation on the examined phenomenon. Milestone ideas, from these schools, that correspond with the theme, will be reviewed.

In that, theoretical segment, key notions for the study, such as appearance, public opinion, and world leader, will be conceptualized. Finally, communication channel mediation will be discussed, based on the provided earlier investigation.

Next, in chapter three, the research design will be traced. The core findings of the thesis are based on experimental nature testing. More exact, online focus groups conducted in three states, Bulgaria, Estonia, and Greece, will serve as the core part of this thesis.

Therefore, a clarification of the methods and the case selections will be described.

In the empirical part, the findings from the focus group interviews will be carefully analyzed, based on the theoretical frameworks introduced earlier.

I will finish the thesis, with a summary of the main conclusions in the last, fifth section.

2. Socially constructed interactions on an International level

2.1 Research positioning: Perceptions, that construct relations

Despite the experimental character of the thesis, the theoretical background that it will frame the work is more than necessary to be outlined primarily.

A structure, shaped by a theory will, among else: (a.) prevent the chaotic presentation of the data gathered, while (b.) it will provide, the researched topic, with a sufficient explanation of what the pieces of information collected, otherwise distant, are revealing (Goes & Simon, 2012). In this, second, chapter of the text, the reader will be, also, familiarized with the main concepts that are important for understanding the investigated subject and the results.

For the analysis, a Constructivist approach is adopted as a major framework. Yet, a more narrow perspective is required on a further level due to the nature of the study. Thus, in the next sub-chapter, feminism (as inclusion of gender studies), will be discussed as part of the main theory. At the same time, we will concentrate on more specific aspects that fit, additionally and more precisely, the researched question.

The starting point, for constructivists, is the claim that the world is socially constructed because individuals are implementing meanings, caused by social relationships (Theys, 2017). There are commonly accepted social practices that are recognized by people in a society, and thus they exist as shared knowledge, that in consequence, guide behavior (Adler, 1997). Nevertheless, that shaped interaction among persons is not only with a narrow, limited scope inside spare small societies. Besides, “the relationships on an international level between people, are formed when people talk, follow rules and norms, [...], perform rituals, and engage in various social practices” (Locher and Prügl, 2001:114). Academics from this school agree “that the human capacity for reflection or learning has its greatest impact on the manner in which individuals and social actors attach meaning to the material world and cognitively frame the world they know, experience and understand” (Adler, 1997: 322). Furthermore, even objects, as “clothes construct a meaning and carry a message” (Hall, 1997:22).

The cultural context is from a substance, as different objects can be interpreted differently in different parts of the world (Hall,1997), despite the growing “closeness” caused by globalization. Yet, there are repeated, popular common applications and actions of what should be appropriate or not.

The main entities in the international relations system are the states and their structural institutions. It is pivotal, however, to note that they are not living beings, as a person is. They do not take decisions or take actions in essence. There is a human representation with power, through authorization mechanisms for that matter. Nicholas Onuf writes that “countries [...] are among the social constructions, or societies, that people make through what we do” (Onuf, 1998:59). In the constructivist approach, some individuals are agents regarding the general system, to an extent that the society has allowed that to happen, because of common, established rules (Ibid:59-60). These individuals can act “on behalf of social constructions” (Ibid:60). To summarize, in other words, particular people do commit certain actions, make choices, and represent defined entities, as states, but only because it is accepted by the social body, the public (Ibid). Presidents and prime ministers are examples, of such agents. While, in some cases, of course, kings, and queens, or other high posts holders, as commissioners or ministers, etc., have agent function. For this thesis, the agent structure, is a central notion, since personal attributions are the ones being under scrutiny.

Another dimension that is from a value to be taken into account, is the fact that states, sometimes, are personalized, ergo associated with a specific representative on a leading position. Social scientists have observed, that the average citizen does not have a strong desire, neither time, to research political topics, especially related to foreign, distant states (Balmas & Sheafer, 2013). Yet, typically through media channels, foreign leaders occupy a supreme part regarding projection, that is to be devoted to their country, and therefore an unconscious link between the decision-maker and the state of representation appears in people's minds (Ibid). State personalization via its leader is an expected trend, concerning also the massive use of social media, a way more fast and direct to spread messages, and reach audiences, domestic or miles away.

Aside from the stated so far, in a complementary demeanor, in international relations, concepts as 'identity' and '(soft) power' are frequently enunciated. They are also primary for the research here. "Social identities are sets of meanings that an actor attributes to itself while taking the perspective of others, that is, as a social object" (Wendt, 1994:385). Soft power on the same note can be connected to identity, in the sense that when there is proximity among identities, then common interest is most likely to appear (Feklyunina, 2016:777). Those interactions are a form of soft power since closeness at that socially constructed level could affect perceptions about shared interests (Ibid).

Besides, topics as the order in the agenda-setting issues, digitalization, recourse distribution, and others, have contributed, in recent decades, soft power to be more relevant as a valuable set of methods for use by the state powers (Nye, 1990). It is made so by the need of establishing a ground for wider, global cooperation (Ibid:164). Still, the influence with diverse means, further than military ones, on the direction of how a theme should be approached becomes an essential aim to be more beneficial for a certain actor (Ibid). In that "battle" of soft control, everything that builds perceptions matters. Especially, now when information of any kind flows faster than ever before, due to globalization and the modern scientific channels, that has turned into a currency worth investing in (Gallarotti, 2011).

We must add in the equation, the processes of branding identity for a country, by promoting a leader's image, as well (Bucić, 2016). National branding, simply stated, is the strategy within which "countries present themselves to the rest of the world" (Anholt (2013: 7) as cited by Bucić, 2016: 4). A display that is from a crucial matter in many aspects, with reference to quite a few features for sure, but towards a prime face of association, in particular. One can think of a simple example, about how the perception for the role of the United States of America (USA) in international relations, had changed after the election, of the previous, 45th president of the country, Donald Trump ² (Similarly questioned by Ingenhoff & Klein, 2018:4508). We can reflect on

² Whereas the writing of this thesis was proceeding, an article with a similar topic was discovered. It is written by Ingenhoff & Klein (2018).

how the general image statute was regarded before that, and what are the current assumptions after the presidency is lead by another principal. All in all, some potential shifts are noticed.

As claimed by some authors, the branding of a state image is another of the forms of power, of the soft power precisely, that it can be more important, in some cases, even than the military force (Bucić, 2016: 5). Since decision-makers are in the front row of the political arena it is an awaited effect, personal image to have an impact on the national image. To the heads of states, as individuals, quite a few qualities can be appointed, and automatically transferred to an identity of a country in a mass belief reproduction (Ingenhoff & Klein, 2018).

2.2 Appearance as a concept and its influence on politics

When speaking of how someone perceives someone else it is most likely that external appearance will play its role in shaping an opinion. Researches have shown that face impressions, e.g, are not merely a source of extra momentum information about a person, but they are also guiding points for attaining conclusions for parts of one's character, attributing to him/her qualities, as for instance competence (Todorov et al.: 2005). The head of states are human beings and institutionalized representatives at the same time. An investigation to what extent their physical presence has input on shaping opinion in others will be the axis of this study.

Accordingly, for this thesis my independent variable (ID), is the appearance of a certain leader. Although, a term used frequently on an everyday basis, it turned out to be a vague concept to be defined. The conceptualization created to be suitable for this work is encompassing a relatively wide specter of visible characteristics of the way how someone looks. This includes facial, and body structure and elements, also gender, style

In it the authors, posed a similar question, with regarding the 44th president of the US, Barack Obama in comparison to the 45th president, Donald Trump. They question: "But did this positive effect dissolve with the election of Donald Trump in November 2016?" (:4508).

This shows how crucial can be the image of a leading figure, as similar questions appeared, without an earlier acquaintance with the cited work.

NB! This article was referred later in the theoretical analysis and it is fully cited in the References.

of dressing, or even repeating gestures. More specifically, appearance is used in this analysis as, the full image that is generated by a person, based on the listed external indicators. This variable will operate, in the context as a nominal variable³.

The creation of smaller definitive categories of general image framing will help in the final summary of the findings. For instance, a decision-maker can be: credible, confident, powerful, smart, dangerous, etc., based on the external features of the individuals sampling. Of course, someone can be evaluated in public's eyes with an image containing more than one characteristic. Nonetheless, it is from an interest the justification of the reasons that shape the outcome that triggers examination, as well to what expand the characterizations are attributed to the states of governing of the sample. In the existing academic literature, when scholars discuss appearance, physical attractiveness, or similar based concepts, they usually do so by focusing on the domestic arena, where voters elect political candidates to govern and represent them (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2010; King & Leigh, 2009; Lawson et al., 2010; Lenz, and Lawson 2011; Lutz, 2010; Rosenberg et al., 1986). As these valuable works are revolving around perceptions of potential decision-makers where the mass public has the power to guide a sequel on national politics, it is a solid foundation for further discussion. That is why addressing some of the findings by scholars are valuable to be reviewed.

First, however, a note from a psychological depth is necessary to be indicated. We should touch on the fact, "that appearance-based personality judgments can be formed very quickly" (Bar et al., 2006:276) on an everyday communication level. Limited character knowledge about an individual, as we can assume generally, is the case with the world decision-makers in ordinary people's beliefs, can drive, the image for these figures, to be assembled by external details. Even so, leaders' exposition in the public eye happens not only grounded on appearance marks. There are actions taken, speeches delivered, and so on. Hence, a caveat of more prominent acts for opinion formation exists and should be taken into account. Still, for the research, they are minimized to the possible point.

3 For more information on the definition of the Categorical- Nominal Variables, please visit UCLA's website: <https://stats.idre.ucla.edu/other/mult-pkg/whatstat/what-is-the-difference-between-categorical-ordinal-and-numerical-variables/>

With this in respect, we are proceeding ahead. Stereotypes linked to the success of beauty are actually activated when people approach, grade, or interact with other people (Dion et al., 1972). These beliefs have a long history of construction, as it is visible by two phrases brought up in an article by scholars since they circulate as famous clichés: “ "What is beautiful is good . . . [Sappho, Fragments, No, 101]," and [...] "Physical beauty is the sign of an interior beauty, a spiritual and moral beauty . . . [Schiller, 1882] " ” (both references cited as it is seen here, by Dion et al., 1972:285). These sentences, and other similar adopted standards when repeated, often can build conventional images common for many people. The idea, that appearance is more than a set of visible components has its footprint in perceiving others (Dion et al., 1972).

Moreover, academics have expressed the view that on an average degree, in governmental structures people that are more appearing it is most likely to be nominated for executive posts (Stockemer & Praino, 2015). While, when it comes to elections’ results, better-looking candidates are more favored, when there are uninformed citizens, which are voting (Ibid). Although, a further image construction, and projection, with a spotlight on the beneficial aspects of the external body appearance, can shape the good, desired effect. Supplementary, a notable remark made by Olivola et al. (2012) is that external components are attached to a specific party affiliation, which gives shortcut details to the electorate. Besides, “people vote also according to the political attitudes that candidates seem to convey through their facial appearances” (Ibid:612).

Consequentially, we can state that very narrow judgments are formed through a merely viewed scrutiny.

Individuals tend to drive fast conclusions in shaping clear opinions for someone else in politics, in the same manner as in “more general types of social encounters” (Mattes et al.,2010:43). Furthermore, human beings, is proved, are easiest exposed to negative perceptions, due to a personal threat imaginary, while also these beliefs are lasting way longer, and are harder to be changed (Ibid).

Last but not least, image building in its general stance is depending on the visible appearance for the creation of certain reflections. More accurately, even in domestic affairs, when citizens have to make a choice among running candidates, people rely on what they see to a big percent, while researchers find a “growing dominance of image over substance” (Rosenberg et al.,1991:346). Once again, initial connections are made from the visual looks of a candidate, for its character and suitability granted the job (Ibid). Additionally, the theme has concerned analysts, since the increasing trend of image significance can seriously manipulate results, due to choices taken, not based on constructive information and policy-making agendas (Ibid:361-362).

However, in democratic societies big chances are that public dialogue over crucial topics helps to be crystallized stances, to some proportion, for individuals interested. Notwithstanding, we can argue about the image branding when foreign states, and, respectively, leaders, are located away. The exposure to audiovisual materials is conceivably to have a dominance over continual talks about policies. Balmas and Sheafer (2013), had hypothesized that the more distant a state from a foreign public is located, the most likely is a paramount position in the news coverage to be reserved for the showing of the leader, rather than other subjects matters.

In an extensive article, Dan Schill (2012), examines the visual symbols of all kinds in the political domain, namely, the image bite components. In spite of the fact, that he claims a further elaboration on visual aspects use in politics is crucially needed, Schill presents a substantial amount of academic work from the field (2012). Here, I will outline several supreme remarks that contribute to the theoretical positioning. To start, we should state the fact that in the political communication process construction, visuals have a dominant function, compared to textual information (Schill, 2012). Second, the image bite has numerous purposes. “Visual symbols have 10 important functions in politics: they serve as arguments, have an agenda setting function, dramatize policy, aid in emotional appeals, build the candidate's image⁴, create identification [, have a documentation function]⁵, connect to societal symbols, transport the audience, and add

4 I believe decision-makers image, as well.

5 In the referred quote the function in the brackets is missing from the sentence. However, when D. Schill (2012) discusses later all points separately, it is a function in which he elaborates equally with

ambiguity” (Ibid:122). Besides, the messages are reaching faster the targeted audience, which makes associations with someone (political figure) or something (event, situation) (Ibid). It is not a secret that politicians trust professionals to take care of their public image. Public Relations (PR) expertise is playing a key role in creating and polishing images. Hence, an easier achievement of certain goals for the interested leaders, through visual meanings, is observed since people operate with images, and the political world has adapted fast enough in those circumstances (Ibid).

2.3 The effect of gender and the world of politics

Gender is a notion that has been widely discussed in academia. The current study finds it necessary to address the matter, for a plurality of the theoretical framework, as a considerable subchapter. Throughout history, female leaders have taken governing positions (Watson et al., 2005). Yet, this was not a rule widely accepted (Ibid). In 1960, Sirimavo Bandaranaike (of Sri Lanka) was the first female prime minister, globally (BBC news, 2020). While in 1980, Vigdis Finnbogadottir (of Iceland) was the first female president of a country, elected democratically (France 24, 2020). Since then, many female politicians have come to power, however, with the male head of states being still dominant, as presented, in the political sphere, and global gender balance has not been achieved even till the present day. Gender belonging does have an influence on perceptions in the social world, and moreover “the persistent, dichotomous sex-typing characteristic of many institutions of the modern world would be a matter of intellectual curiosity if the consequences of being identified with a particular sex were not so dire” (Celis et al., 2013:2). Public talks that trigger attention are contributing to the shift of the status. However, more talks and more actions are required.

Scholars of gender studies have been highlighting the gender stereotyping in societies through factors that often trigger them “such as appearance, clothes, size, and emotional state” (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009:329). For instance, when in the US, Elizabeth Dole ran for the high governing nomination, voters were more interested about how she looked,

the others.

or what her character is, rather than her program stances (Ibid). That was not a single case, and today is still an issue. In the text by Carlin & Winfrey (2009), they explore woman candidates' stereotype positioning by Media in the 2008 presidential, party nomination US campaign. They take as cases Sarah Palin and Hillary Clinton and notice that "while the objectification of Sarah Palin and Hillary Clinton took very different paths, the fact that it existed is noteworthy" (Ibid:332), and moreover the society in high percentage does not want to admit the existence of a problem of categorization (Ibid:340). In another study, about the portray of Bulgarian political woman figures in the public space, Ibroscheva & Stover (2009), again confirm the observation, that Media coverage of female individuals is more negative, while it is usually focused more on the appearance and hence stereotypes are activated easier. Besides, in another research this time concerning countries from the post-socialist context and female political campaigns, Kaneva & Ibroscheva (2015), further points out that "the gendered patterns of political power" (:235) is a theme actually shaping opinions. According to them, it is an additional framework of perception that females often, at least from the scrutinized countries, are behaving in it, in order to fit in the cultural approach and gain positive outcomes that will maximize their benefits (Kaneva & Ibroscheva, 2015). In sum, no matter who is the political figure as long as is She, certain shifts on expectations are occurring, with external factors often taking the lead before the substance of the political ideas and actions.

The system of mentioned stereotypes operates with certain concrete beliefs appointed especially to female individuals. Schneider and Bos (2014), argue that stereotypes for women are certainly existing, placing 'woman' as a distinct category, but additionally, 'female politician' stereotyping is a subcategory with more firm aspects. As they specifically say: "female politicians are a subtype of women" (Ibid:260). Their research in the political field, is again tested on a domestic level, still with a piece of valid information how woman politicians are perceived, as regarding the matter that some qualities are seen as negative points for females in governance and positive for males, and in consequences there are cases when this stereotype bubble can have a negative effect, presenting an obstacle (Ibid:259-262). Besides, stereotypes, "appoint"

attributions more suitable for governing positions, on the basis of gender to persons, and act as a cognitive tool where knowledge is lacking (Turska-Kawa & Olszanecka-Marmola, 2016: 68-69). The often strong discrepancy comes, because of the general stereotype that females are more 'sensitive' beings, while political leadership is a more 'strong' quality (Ibid:74-75). Furthermore, stereotypes are not reserved explicitly for the national configuration's level, but rather it has been noticed that gender stereotypes are an issue in respect of leadership in the international relation system too (Post & Sen, 2020).

More practically we can think of where efforts are concentrated when creating a political image for a female leader. As we saw by now, in building the desired image, appearance plays its crucial role. Experts from political marketing, nevertheless, assert that "appearance is used to objectify and subordinate women politicians, and devalue their candidacies, often to the advantage of their male opponents" (Sanghvi & Hodges, 2015:1688). On that account, appearance can "weigh" more in spite of the gender of a specific leader, whereas his or her image can be more or less biased in the public expanse. "Looking at the increased attention given to appearance and style, [...] may suggest that a formerly particularly gendered phenomenon has become a general obsession now" (van Zoonen, 2006:297). From the presented examination till this point, a set line of comprise that crosscut judgment, of any kind regarding external signs, can touch on impressions that are hard to change, is manifested apparent.

Although women's rights, political participation, and gender equality in the final, has been widely in public attendance over the last decades, some myths are hard to be uncovered. It is still a necessity to understand how the celebrity politics approach is shaping mindsets, largely concerning female politicians (van Zoonen & Harmer, 2011). Celebrities are frequently under the spotlight for how they look or how they are dressed, and presumably, their general image reflects on their work. Politicians also try to allure attentiveness (Ibid) due to duties connected with their public action, as they proclaim programs and ideas. It is, nonetheless, arguably how beneficial the appearance traits are for bridging the gender gap (Ibid; Kaneva & Ibroscheva, 2015).

All in all, women in political life are still, “othered” in the public discourse (O’Neill et al., 2016). Yet, it is not all with a minor flavor. Many states have made a big step towards equality with a political nuance since it is accepted that the presence of women in governance makes societies to be regarded as more democratic (Karp & Banducci, 2008). That is a quite general assumption but could contain advantageous long-lasting implications. As academic argues, actually, we, people construct the notion of gender everyday with the way we interact, and through the process of implementing meanings in concepts as ‘female’ or ‘male’ (Gherardi, 1994). Likewise, in female and male political categorization, decision-maker suitability, and plurality in governance participation can be influenced on a similar every day vein. Gender can be discovered in appearance. Therefore, the inferences attribute to appearance, in total, the possibility to serve as a guide in perceiving individuals in the political sphere.

2.4 The role of the Media in shaping IMAGE

The average citizen gets information about political topics, in its majority, by different Media channels. These could include television, newspapers, magazines, radio, podcasts, and of course social media of any type, like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc., which reaches people across the globe within a very short amount of time. Socials can be used by ordinary people, and at the same moment, they are often managed by politicians (and their assigned teams) as well. When speaking about public presence the tools someone uses to create and support certain Image, are crucial for understanding more parameters about the process of shaping opinions. In the media environment, visual elements play a big part in introducing a piece of news or a statement, as we saw earlier. Appearance, as a set of such visual features, is most likely to be projected in mass media.

Social media are a relatively new arena in politics. Photographs are becoming front running shortcuts in many of them, as one has a limited space to write a caption in some apps. Moreover, the knowledge about a theme can be delivered in a very zipped format. An example of a world leader that has grasped the substance of social media, and uses them beneficially to a big extent, is the Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau

(Lalancette & Raynauld, 2019). As analysts observe particularly, “the emphasis on a positive political image allowed Trudeau to reinforce his credibility and likability, both as a politician and as an individual. Through the combination of images and captions, Trudeau conveyed traits that can be appealing to a large public, including honesty, sincerity, trustworthiness, friendliness, and leadership” (Ibid:916-917). Moreover, on an international level world leaders use progressively social media, since they are an instrument to increase citizens’ attention, even by influencing those individuals that are not politically interested (Barberá & Zeitzoff, 2018).

The combination of short texts and pictures incorporates many constituents. Images are making a difference also in the traditional media with the growing number of visual news that contributes to the creation of beliefs (Lobinger & Brantner, 2015). Besides, media tend to simplify complex issues for the public as much as possible, and diverse means for the presentation of themes are employed (Ibroscheva & Raicheva-Stover, 2009). Medias has a big proportion in the construction, of a broad, general image to a person, through selective reporting messages, based on actual facts, visuals included (Mayer, 2004). When speaking of the personal image of a leader, Mayer (2004), states that “it becomes easier to change policy than it is to change image” (:621), whereas physical attractiveness plays its crucial role (Ibid). By all means, social media, as well as the traditional ones are the first handed sources where citizens can turn for reference, and appearance is the most obvious component of human existence.

We can observe that audiovisual “screening” and broadcasting, either with personal means or through traditional media, has contributed to give to individuals, platforms for placing separate leaderships on a pedestal much more than ever. In fact, as Mendonça and Caetano (2021), shown in recent research about the Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro’s personal Instagram account, thoroughly populism can be practiced and strengthen via social’s media visual content. Moreover, people “experience politics by watching rather than actively participating” (Ibid: 211), and therefore politicians invest in visual image-making techniques that often take account of the body empowered (Ibid). It is especially the occasion for decision-makers abroad. Media coverage of any kind, reminding someone’s attendance in the political life is required nowadays, but also

it is opted out to be as much as positive, declare Valenzuela and Correa (2009), regarding leaders and domestic perceptions. Whereas, it can be assumed it is the case for international politics, as well.

Throughout media channels, people are exposed to political knowledge, in a more fast and unconscious way (Bode, 2016). Indeed, the barriers in that mediated environment, that could usually appear during other communication mediums, in a matter that political information can be considered as boring or difficult, are lowered (Ibid). Besides, in particular, the young world's population is using the social apps and the internet web in its broad sense, as a superior in order to get information, to connect with others, or express an opinion, these days more than ever. Technology has created a sense of proximity with other parts of the globe, as with distant political figures. Furthermore, "social media have become important instruments for political participation" (Storsul, 2014:26).

Currently⁶, due to the outbreak of the global pandemic, a rapid shift in direction of further use of online services in many levels is detected. We can presume, that the more societies become digital in their evolution, the more likely is online media, social or traditional to increase additionally their power of influence on the political awareness in the public. People are becoming more "fluent" in their use, while new skills are developed which the previous generations have not practice extensively.

In an experimental article, scholars have linked popular mass entertainment culture with the way individuals, young people in the examined case, view politics (Street et al., 2012). The authors, state that while the assumption can be challenged, it is one to be taken into account, also for citizens of all ages, and by the same token they "argue that popular culture serves not only as a source of political knowledge but also as a source of political morality" (Ibid:339). Therefore, there is another reason that the notion of visuals has its honorary position when speaking in political terms. With this in mind, another dimension from the mediated zone, the term of celebrity politics is significantly emerging. Some leaders have a more "celebrity" status, and people tend to perceive

⁶ This work is written in 2021

them as such, also due to technology projection, affected by the popular culture (Marsh et al., 2010). For instance, the Instagram platform, as the most visually centered app, promotes highly image branding on the individual leadership's aspect, and "style, looks and visual performativity are central features" (Ekman & Widholm, 2017:29).

Remarkably the imaginary world of effective pictures is creating beliefs, associations, and can possibly trigger emotions and why not actions.

All together, media does play its crucial role in the everyday perception of politics. Whether, there will be the old school media, that despite their main function to inform citizens about last news, has become a lot more than that. Or the lately urging social media, with their faster way of approaching politics. Media are a vehicle that forms consciousness to an extent. How big or small, that depends on many diverse factors, but nevertheless, their multiple ramifications should be acknowledged.

2.5 Public Opinion and the value of the research

Quite a few times have been specified by now, in this analysis, that public opinion (or public perceptions or what society in general believes) is influenced by some elements, as appearance (and gender as an undistinguished part from it), or (and) media framing. It is to be noted that many features that have an impact on public opinion in general, but are not from a particular interest of the study, have not been taken into account. It was also mentioned that this influence is important. Therefore, public opinion is my dependent variable (DV) in this thesis. However, a conceptualization of what public opinion is precisely, as well as why does it matter when we are talking about a leader's appearance abroad has not been explicit, in sum, displayed.

In a democracy, it is valuable what the mass of people thinks. Yet, this is a very vague framing of public opinion. "The orthodox contemporary view of public opinion, most clearly expressed by early pollsters such as George Gallup (1939) and Floyd Henry Allport (1937), is that it is nothing more than the cumulative preferences of individual citizens" (Anstead & O'Loughlin, 2015:205). As, the authors of the previously cited

quotation agree, the definition is very hazy (Ibid). Nevertheless, despite it is a term we hear even on a daily basis frequently, a short exact conceptualization of it is hard to be made. Nonetheless, for this work's purposes, the following vision is adopted: "Public opinion is, an aggregate of the individual views, attitudes, and beliefs about a particular topic, expressed by a significant proportion of a community" (Davison, 2020). In democratic societies what the masses believe can be expressed through certain actions, as elections being principal. Support or oppose of a topic, issue or leader can derive from public opinion and lead to outcomes, too.

Still, a reasonable question might be why world decision-makers (global leaders) perceptions formulated abroad matter in such specific aspect as it is appearance? Partially from the presented analysis is evident why. However, a more clear summary is needed. First things first, before answering comprehensibly this substantial question, a short explanation of who is a world leader is established. "A world leader is someone who is the leader of a country, especially an economically powerful country" (Collins Dictionary, accessed in 2021). Put in other words, it is the official, main representative of a major state.

From there on, the researched topic (ergo, the appearance of global decision-makers and public opinion) is important, because of a) the personalization in politics, b) the celebrity politics trait (appearance is scrutinized as an element here), and c) the power of the domestic public opinion. "Personalization in this broader perspective refers to a development in which politicians become the main anchor of interpretations and evaluations in the political process be it as individuals with political or non-political traits" (Adam & Maier, 2010:213). Because the individual becomes centralized, in addition to the fact that leaders can receive an imaginary status of celebrities in people's perceptions, their broad image is crucial. It is proved that the public finds in the face of a leader through his/her image, associations with the state of origin (Ingenhoff & Klein, 2018). This happens throughout image transfer from the leader to the state, or as scholars have named it with a "spillover effect" (Ingenhoff, Buhmann, White, Zhang, & Kiouisis, 2018 as cited in Ibid:4510).

Political leaders are part of the national brand, and with the growing globalization phenomenon, their figures concern the global population, as authorities of power (Peres et al.,2020). With the existence of huge global issues, now more than ever global head of states, the frontiers decision-makers are becoming important (Ibid). The understanding of foreign countries can have an effect on the public's interest, with media often placing the emphasis on the person, rather than the state (Balmas & Sheaffer, 2013; 2014). Whereas, public-opinion “may decide the outcome of the base nation's foreign policy” (Balmas & Sheaffer, 2014:1007). The significance of everyday perceptions is from a huge substance on topics that seems specific.

Ingenhoff and Klein (2018), have conducted related research on the topic discussed in this thesis. However, they are interested in the general image of a national decision-maker, in a broad sense, constructed by many factors, including personal characteristics implemented by short text or particular regulated information (Ibid). In their work, the appearance or charisma of a leader is a small component (Ibid). Yet, in this thesis, this element is taken as leading. As discussed in the previous sub-chapters, appearance can construct the image, and perform the function of a shortcut road for personal characteristics.

2.6 The Geopolitical aspect

A final dimension that should be acknowledged in this analysis, is the geopolitical context. That geopolitical aspect will operate as a supplementary variable (SV) in this work. Below, a short elaboration of the reasoning is presented. Moreover, the empirical part of this experiment is based on real, global decision-makers presence and therefore it is awaited that the country of origin, as well the home state of the sample vis-à-vis one another can influence the conclusions. Hence, the nexus of the ally/enemy/neutral state is one not to be neglected.

There have been identified a strong connection between ‘visuality’, in terms of a variety of visual features, being photographs/videos of leaders shaking hands, troops

manifesting, etc., as well as movies, or other visual products, and the geopolitical positioning, culture, and context in general (Hughes, 2007). When the notion of geopolitics was invented, at first it referred to the geographical peculiarities of a certain state in a dependence also to others, as resources, the distance between countries or even the population distribution, etc. (Ibid:979). They, in fact, have enormous weight. Nonetheless, the modern take on geopolitics, namely ‘critical geopolitics’, involves more popular cultural exposure (Ibid). “Such work considers geopolitics to be a social and cultural process by which leaders and ordinary citizens make sense of the world” (Ibid:983). Visual elements do not simply give us information, “they are the products of cultural histories and the cognitive resources we use to create meaning” (Goransson & Fagerholm, 2018:47). Besides, states as constructions can implement, historical-cultural connotations to their population, and shape realities (Downing, 2013). In fact, it is most likely individuals from different parts of the world to notice and interpret certain projections in different ways. Whereas we talk about states, the geopolitical culture in within one society is placed has its effects on understanding the surroundings.

2.7 Expectations

With the theoretical analysis being made, the aim of the thesis should be expressed and formulated explicitly once more. First, my universal expectations comprised, that the external appearance (gender subject included) of a world decision-maker has, indeed, an impact on what qualities are embodied to that person, as discussed.

Furthermore, that characteristics will be appointed to the state of representation, with a matter of which country is examined vis-à-vis the others, as the observed shifts can be enhanced or reduced. More merely stated, the formation of a state’s image will depend, among other things on the way its leader appears.

For a better understanding, I will break the expectations into four narrower hypotheses.

Hypothesis number 1:

The more 'masculine' Image one has, the more likely is he/she to be perceived as a powerful leader, suitable for the position appointed.

With this in mind, hypothesis number 2 is the following:

The Image, that relies among else on appearance, is navigated by stereotypes. Especially, gender stereotypes. The bigger, and powerful the state is, the less "suitable" will be perceived, a female head of state to be in office, particularly when feminine characteristics are visibly declared in her presence.

My 3 hypothesis is that:

In accordance, with the diverse geopolitical context, public opinion will shift slightly on a nexus of an ally/enemy/neutral state decision-maker.

My final, 4, hypothesis is that:

If a decision-maker appears without a strong Image performance, the most likely is the public to observe the origin of its representation (state or other international entity) as a weaker actor in international relations.

3. Research Design, Methods and Data

This thesis will test its expectations on a basis of an experiment, released through the conduction of online focus groups. For the purposes of this work, the collection and analysis with this method of the public opinion is more relevant to be made. Reasons, for the method selection will be described in the next sub-chapter.

This section will start with the reasoning behind the case selection of the three countries, through within the expectations are tested.

3.1 The case selection

The research design that it will be used for this thesis, is a few-N comparative study in regarding the perspective of the public perceptions abroad. More specifically, the topic will be scrutinized through the Most Different Systems Design (MDSD). I found it better at least three cases to be taken, because a single case would not be enough to test the expectations. It would be one-sided explanation. On the other hand, if they are more cases, the research will be prolonged way too much, and the scope will be more suitable for a later dissertation. MDSD, is chosen since it “compares cases that are maximally different on all but the variable of interest” (Mills et al., 2010:2). As introduced, my independent variable of interest is ‘appearance’. The cases have diverse components that differ from each other, yet the existence of the factor of appearance as a variable does not change, as such. ‘Public opinion’, as dependent variable will vary, influenced to an extend of the supplementary variable of ‘geopolitical context’. Still, the variable of ‘appearance’ will, I hypothesize, affect perceptions in all the targeted cases.

Three countries, Bulgaria, Estonia, and Greece are selected as case studies. The grounds for this decision are few.

First, the geographical positioning of these states, does have influence on their cultural and political attitude. Bulgaria and Greece are located on the South of Europe, as well as on East for the latter. They are positioned in the Balkans. While, Estonia, on the other hand, is placed to the North-East, and it is one of the three Baltic countries.

Second, the two Balkan states may be neighboring, yet one can think, that only a few decades back, they were parts of two distinct, politically ideological blocks. Bulgaria was integrated in the Eastern, Soviet bloc, whereas Greece was affiliated with the Western world. Estonia, was part of the Soviet Union (SU). All of that geographical and historical context, impacts the way that the states, their executive powers and their citizens view the world. The three cases have many common values, but nevertheless they cultures are somehow diverse.

Third, today, Bulgaria and Greece, are bordered on by Turkey, and Estonia by Russia. As big powers Turkey and Russia, has an effect on their neighbors in many aspects, including how the population will perceive other state actors.

Fourth, as of 2021, Estonia has both female Prime Minister and President (Hankewitz, 2021). Bulgaria's both Prime Minister and President are males. The Greek Prime Minister's post is held by a man, and the Presidential seat is represented by a woman. As stated in the theoretical part, the gender notion is important, and therefore the domestic affairs representation is crucial of how the society will see foreign relations in that matter as well. To be noted that political system formation in the selected cases are identical with small divergent points, that are not of this paper's interest.

Moreover, one additional fifth, small aspect is contributing to the plurality of the picture. This is the size of the countries selected. Estonia is a small country, whereas Bulgaria and Greece, are not much bigger, but are more of a medium size states. How subjects inside their border observe things can be impacted also by this dimension.

Final feature that does not have to do with the states as of methodological sense, but I believe it is supreme to be mentioned in this chapter of justification of the case selection, is from a personal driven reasoning. Sample from the targeted countries is more easy accessible during the current circumstances of global pandemic. Furthermore, the languages of communication, which are a crucial component, do not present an obstacle to grasp the nuances, except to a point in the case of Estonia. Yet, Estonians in their majority are fluent speakers not only in their native language but in English as well. Besides, assistance from an Estonian colleague of mine is gonna be provided in the organization of the discussion. Therefore that main barrier is lifted. That is a benefit

that will make the approaching of people, and of course the analysis of the results more exact and reliable.

3.2 Methods

The empirical part will be based mainly on the online focus groups' discussions. However, a preliminary exposure of numerous evidence instances for an empirical support it is found necessary to be inserted as initial point. Examples of real state leaders' appearance being publicly debated, or presented, for some reason will be explored for a plurality of the research. It is important to be shown that the topic is circulating in the political and social space. In that part of the empirical analysis examinations of concrete leaders and instances will be demonstrated explicitly. That part does not equate with the focus groups outcomes per se, as these are observations made by the author.

The core part will be occupied by the online focus groups' outcomes. A starting idea was a survey conduction with short, brief text answers, or ready answers for the participants to set, taking into consideration that with this type more people would have the ability to participate. Nevertheless, the bigger amount of participants would give a taste of the public's views, but not a sufficient reasoning why these results do prevail. That is why that method was not used.

The qualitative method that suited the purposes better, became the realization of focus groups. They are selected as a method, because: "focus groups provide a rich and detailed set of data about perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and impressions of group members in the members' own words" (Stewart et al., 2009:2), and moreover, "visual stimuli [...] maybe used within the context of a focus group to provide a basis for discussion" (Ibid). The topic of appearance includes visual elements as have been outlined, while public opinion encompasses people's beliefs, as expressed already. More opinions, at a time can be verbalized, whereas the interaction among the participants can lead to the emerging of additional points useful to the research, that otherwise could remain silent (Ibid). Focus groups method was, also, more appropriate for accumulating

the public opinion, as presumably opinions can be expressed clearly and debated further at the moment with a proper justification. Moreover, the online environment prevailed in the current situation, so as not to endanger the health and the lives of the people who are taking part in the study. Online or virtual focus groups, follows the traditional methods, with the need for technological skills, although it is favorable that participants is possible, to join the group conference from diverse places within a single state territory (Ibid).

In a more detailed manner about the specific organization and conduction of the particular focus groups, the preliminary plan goes as it outlined further. As a beginning, after the sample (See sub-chapter 3.3) is defined and a ready group is formed, a concrete time is announced for the group discussion. People does not have to prepare anything in advance, as this is researched based on their perceptions without refining. They do, however, have an opportunity to ask general questions from an organizational significance. At the launching of every meeting, participants are again informed, briefly, about the researcher, the topic of the thesis and how their answers will be used. They are reminded about a few universal points, as to how they can engage in the conversation without creating any obstacles for the others to express their point of view, as well what they can expect as a wider plan ahead. As an author of this work, I found it more suitable to be also the moderator of the groups. While in the case of Estonia, a second moderator's assistance as an observant was from a big help.

We can say that there are two parts of this discussions, with them both merging at times. First, after the instructions presentation, the participants are asked to introduce themselves as simply with no more than one sentence. Next, a set of two photographs for every decision-maker, in one slide for each of the objects (See sub-chapter 3.4, and Appendix 2) are displayed and people are asked certain questions about what they observe (See Appendix 1). Everyone, than wants to say something can do so, with respect on others, while the main goal is the interaction among the participants. Moreover, additional questions (See Appendix 1) in the second stage are posed that are of a more wider spectrum regarding the topic. The structure is design that way, since the aim is people to be stimulated visually and afterwards a greater cover of the topic to be

made. Finally, the participants have a chance to conclude and add remarks that they believe are important but for some reason has not been expressed.

All the group discussions are transcript, while only the used quotations are translated in English.

Ultimately, it was defined what the concepts of 'appearance' and 'public opinion' are, from an academic scope in that research. How they will be measured respectively is essential, too. Considering that both variables can not be measured based on quantity criteria, an exploratory categorization has pertained. The appearance, of someone, can be categorized in diverse ways. For instance, an individual can look competent, incompetent, smart, clever, threatening, masculine, feminine, powerful, strong, weak, etc, or even a collection of a few characteristics at once.

At the same time, public opinion will be expressed with the formation of verbally expressed assessments. In the conclusion, at last, the public mood will as well conveyed in a rated tone. Hence, it will be manifested as support, oppose, as a positive or negative attitude against someone. Besides, gender, as quality (in this case) of the appearance term, can shape and trigger positions, in a sense of more/or less suitable for a certain position. States of representations and respectively their favorable or critical appreciations by the public, regarding leaders image is a further course of evaluation that is main in understanding the importance of the topic.

3.3 The sample

Usually, scholars advise focus groups to have some kind of homogeneity with a variety of opinions (Ibid). Still, due to the essence of the examined topic, the element of diversity in many levels is more desired in that experiment, as a try of society representation is aimed to be achieved. I fully acknowledged that there are obstacles, as societies can include enormous different types of individuals, and the scope of a focus group per country is strongly limited, as it contains 8 to 10 people (Ibid). Even so, I believe that a considerable conclusion for the researched theme will be made, as again it

is not an overall specific topic in which prior knowledge is required. It is a rather general perception that society have and influences its citizens, and vice versa.

A preliminary plan of participant's profiles here, includes points as gender, age, level of education and area of residence to have a range. To the degree that is possible, taking into account some restrictions that could arise, counting in the coordination expertise needed, and the technological capability. Starting with an initial circle of acquaintances, having the parameters set, through a snowball sampling, of people that can recommend other people (Ghaljaie et al., 2017), the focus groups sample was generated. Actions, towards a wider extent for complementing the sample were additionally taken. As creating an informational emails forwarded to a few, diverse related NGO's, such as platforms that could possibly reach out bigger amount of individuals.

A free, online platform, as Zoom or Skype was determined to be used, because a) they are easy to work with, even by beginners participants, and b) audio/visual recording is available option.

One focus group, per state may seem little, yet due to the organization matters, limitation of resources and time, a single focus group for every case organized properly is much more preferred than a bigger quantity with no satisfactory outcome.

3.4 Experiment and object selection

The experimental character of the study is tested not only with the questionnaire designed specifically for the thesis purposes (Appendix 1). A big part of it is based on current, real, world leaders. More accurately this means, that the online focus groups discussions includes evaluation of the appearance, characteristics involved and state connection of representation, through the presentation of photographs, of the selected world decision-makers.

The decision-makers that will be assessed in this work are 10+1, and are the following: Angela Merkel - Chancellor of Germany, Boris Johnson - Prime Minister of the United

Kingdom, Emmanuel Macron - President of France, Jair Bolsonaro - President of Brazil, Joe Biden - President of US, Justin Trudeau - Prime Minister of Canada, Narendra Modi - Prime Minister of India, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan - President of Turkey, Vladimir Putin - President of Russia, Xi Jinping - President of the People's Republic of China, and Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission. They are selected, because are the leaders of major economies, part of the G20 format (G20 Forum, 2021). These countries, and respectively their leaders, have an impact in the world we can assume. Therefore are most suitable to trigger reactions in the public. There are nine more states part of this worldwide forum that has not been included, due to the fact, that the object selection would become too big. The EU, is however, added despite that is a different international entity, since the case selection encompasses EU states, and moreover, the EU is a strong player in the global arena. The President of the EU is compared to the others as it is the equivalent of a head of government, while also it is only the second female leader in this configuration of world powers, right now.

The photographs selected for the matter are two per decision-maker, one more customary of the persons in office, and one with a daily flavor of duty performance. They are presented in Appendix 2. Throughout the selection, into consideration was taken as much as feasible, the presented leaders to be picture in a "classic" light. Hence, pictures with a narrow personal sense, or the ones with unfavorable atypical moments were avoided. Additionally, recent photographs were preferred, while other persons in the pictures were eluded too, as that could effect the sample. Due to all of that, for some leaders, a full length photos was not able to be displayed. Nonetheless, the selection was designed in such a way not to be affected dramatically by that.

In fact, it has to be noted, that in the photograph selection, quite a few parameters were carefully taken into account. Yet, to avoid eventual biases, more accurate diversification in one of the object selections was decided to be followed for one of the groups. In the presentation of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to the Greek participants (Appendix 2, Version 1 of Erdoğan's photo selection), the photographs discussed are up close, and not as in the cases of the Bulgarian and Estonian groups, where the photos correspond with that of the other leaders, as presence (Appendix 2, Version 2 of Erdoğan's photo selection).

This diversification was necessary since in the second version, some symbols, eventually, could affect the Greek sample, in their perceptions of evaluating the decision-maker. As it is known, tensions between the two countries appear sometimes, and small, visual elements could impact the opinion. Additionally, not other more suitable pictures were found in order to cover the other set parameters. Furthermore, a comparison also upon the change of the pictures will give a supplemental aspect to the visual features and their influence on the public.

A final, second, disclaimer on the matter, should be included for the selection of the photographs, regarding, the President of China, Xi Jinping. He is also pictured up close in the presentation, due to the fact that no other suitable photographs were found. In that case, the lack of official social media profiles, like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram made the choice limited. Access, to the respective government web page at the moment, was also denied.

3.5 Limitations

The flaw of the low numerical sampling was already mentioned and discussed. Nevertheless, the outcomes are reliable as three diverse cases and attentive analyses will be implemented. Another obstacle, is that low technologically educated individuals, older people or citizens without access to the web can not easily, as others, take part in the online format. That exclusion is somehow minimized for the reliability of the conclusions due to the colorful sample selected.

Finally, one can say that people could be biased in their opinion, as raised earlier, or affected by other aspects of the leaders persona. Still, that is why the case selection is diverse, and alongside comes the questionnaire applied. In fact, in the actual political affairs, people are not limited concentrating only in the appearance feature, but as usually, someone can to not know anything, or much, or on the contrary can be better educated on a topic. However, the external factor has its importance on influence, since it is an element visible with a glance and involves unconsciousness.

3.6 Ethical aspect

As working with people, respect and protection over the individual and its personal data is highly aimed, despite that the topic is not sensitive. All of the participants are kindly asked to sign consent forms, available in Bulgarian, English or Greek (See Appendix3). Whenever that is not possible, an opportunity for obtaining a permission becomes the oral consent (at the beginning of the online focus group interviews) or through a clearly stated written message. Everyone that has engaged in this project, has the possibility to ask as many as needed questions before agreeing to take part. All of the participants were notified, and reminded that the conversations are recorded. All participants were instructed to respect others. Since, it is not of a particular interest for the results, the names of the participants will not be announced, but rather their initials will be used in the presentation of their opinions, along with the age, educational level, gender, and area of residence.

4. Empirical Analysis

4.1 Evidences from the world (of politics)

Before the presentation and analysis of the results from the focus groups, a brief retrospection of some real examples discussed in the public sphere will be outlined in this section. These are cases of world leaders or individuals related to them (and with some kind of power relation) that have used, in one way or another, their appearance as a component that shapes their Image in the eyes of the public, domestic and abroad. Some contemporary decision-makers, that later are evaluated by the people in this thesis, are also included. One should grasp that there is an actual existence of the topic with extant implications, although they are not visible sometimes.

One of the most prominent figures in British politics, of all time, is the “iron lady” Margaret Thatcher. In an interview for a popular magazine, she states that: “[...] women in public life tend to wear classic or ‘quiet’ clothes because the clothes are the background for the personality. The essence of the well-dressed woman is never to be exaggerated. Appearance is the first impression people get of you. And it does matter. It matters tremendously when you represent your country abroad” (Thatcher for Vogue Magazine, 1985). She was a Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990 and among other political techniques, clothes, style, and appearance, in general, were used by her as a tool of maintaining a particular power Image (Menkes, 2013). Indeed, power dressing is a term often connected with her personality (Conway, 2016). Moreover, Conway (2016), expresses the opinion, that Thatcher wanted to represent successfully the power of her country abroad through her own Image, a goal that among else she accomplished with the choices she made regarding her appearance. The importance of appearance could prove crucial in crafting lasting perceptions.

On the same note, Emmanuel Macron, the current President of France seems to acknowledge the weight of a suitable Image, in the eyes of the public, at home but also in international affairs. As a contemporary leader of France, he has adopted a style that

is formal, but casual at the same time. An identity that embodies someone serious enough to trust without the visibly of a redundant extra effort for this to be achieved. Hence, a face of power that is more “friendly”. A perception that also could apply to France, as a big power with a less aggressive manner in its global positioning. In a personal interview with a public relations expert from a big, prominent PR agency in Estonia⁷ on how style and appearance can influence preferences, Emmanuel Macron is referred to as a fine demonstration of a person in Office that uses its external presence to shape perceptions in others (V. Päi, personal communication, April 15, 2020). Especially when it comes to its choices on the way of dressing (Ibid). More accurately as my interviewee has observed through his expertise: “A good example of how appearances can be adjusted in order to look representable, yet not overly festive and somewhat approachable, is the turtleneck pullover which has become a part of Emmanuel Macron’s image. While in the past, as a banker and minister – he rather wore classical suit-and-tie combo, in recent years we can notice him wearing turtlenecks instead of white shirts and ties. This solution is still elegant and representable, but it is also very practical, protects your throat and voice from getting cold (and politicians obviously need to protect their voice). Meanwhile, such style is very quintessentially French – many actors, writers, philosophers, and “everyday” professionals wear that style so in a way this is a statement piece of intellect, French casual style and practicality which makes him more relatable to his target audience” (V. Päi, personal communication, April 15, 2020). Traditional and social Media, alike, frequently notice Emmanuel Macron’s French, “sartorial face” in public events (Dallison, 2019).

European leaders, however, were and are not the only ones concerned about their presence. A decision-maker that has been in power for many years is Vladimir Putin, the president of the Russian Federation. Repeatedly he has demonstrated very active, masculine, and strong aspects of his political personality. Furthermore, these aspects are highlighted by the presentation of his appearance. Despite the common, official suit and tie, the public has seen the leader in a very different light, quite a few times, as for

⁷ Corpore. EE, <http://corpore.ee/en/>

instance, with photographs released by the Kremlin that display Putin shirtless in 2017 (Haltiwanger, 2018), without this being a precedent. Earlier, in 2007, he again was pictured in the same manner, despite him being accompanied by a high guest as Prince Albert of Monaco (The Guardian, 2007).

These two examples are not the only cases that show that particular, exposition of the leader. According to Iulia Demidenko, a costume historian, Vladimir Putin is not at all a traditional head of state in his appearance (Demidenko, 2020: 32:55 - 34:11min).

Moreover, she claims that “the absence of a suit is also a suit in a certain sense, while this Image and this influence are certainly very strong. [...] As when the ruler [...] demonstratively for the cameras, more than once or twice, shows a naked torso in general, there he says 'I do not care about your rules' ” (Demidenko, 2020: 32:55 – 34:11min). Russia, on the other hand, itself has a status of a strong and powerful state based on many diverse factors. However, the link that correlates between the country and the head of the state in people’s perceptions makes Russia’s Image stronger.

The list with diverse cases of evidence from the world, about self-image making, is long and its enumeration can continue. Still, as for now, these samples are ample to understand the significance of it. Appearance is part of the Image, and Image is crucial for a power structure and its agents, as by now we have shown.

Yet, on some occasions though, the appearance of governors has become the spark that fuels many conversations about topics, like gender equality or political appropriateness (Woodyatt, 2020; Elan, 2021). Last year (2020), in Finland, prime minister, Sanna Marin was photographed for a popular magazine wearing a blazer without any blouse underneath (Woodyatt, 2020). That led to criticism by some, who claimed that a person in that position can not allow herself to look so revealing, and huge support from others, with thousands of users on Instagram posting photographs with the hashtag 'ImWithSanna' pictured similarly, manifesting that a woman can look and wear whatever she wants (Ibid).

On the other side of the Atlantic ocean, in the US, the newly elected vice president's

Kamala Harris cover photoshoot for another fashion magazine also sparked big debates in social channels, about how a woman in a high governing position should be portrayed (Elan, 2021). This time, the disapproval was mainly directed to the publishing media, as the vice president was styled with sneakers, an item that shows frivolity according to the critics (Ibid).

Nevertheless, these conversations are easier accessible and understood by the mass public as everyone can form an opinion about them. Closely, other themes as what is appropriate and what it is not regarding gender and, or the position of representation, are making their way for wider discussions around the world. In consequence, it is not simply about how someone appears. It is more about how societies perceive what is allowed and what is not when taking a certain role. Furthermore, who is authorized and who is not to do so and on what criteria the evaluation is based are crucial too. Certainly, people are more than appearance, and of course, there is a complexity in the structure of international relations. Even so, the visual elements, of the Image making should be considered.

4.2 Results from the online focus group interviews

In this section, highlights from the discussions will be analyzed. The cases are presented in the order of their conduction. The Greek group was first, followed by the Bulgarian and Estonian groups. Later, a brief comparison will be made between the selected countries. While in the end, some implications will be outlined.

For anonymity to be achieved, as agreed with the participants, all the quotes or opinions that are used here will be introduced only with the initials of the participant cited, along with his or her age.

A total number of 24, diverse people participated in the study.

Finally, to be considered, that was expected some people to have a pre-existing feeling about the public Image of most of the decision-makers. Along with the general perceptions that are from a value to be investigated it was interesting to observe how those feelings are affected by the visuals. Otherwise stated, how the Image that is already created correlates with the actual photographs selected. The distinction between the official pictures and the informal ones was outlined so the participants can have the opportunity of a broader Image construction. A collective concluding Image, as a result of summing the perspectives, was mainly awaited. Certainly with the perceptions to be strengthened or weakened if they were pre-existing, but not change completely.

4.2.1 Findings from the Greek group

As a starting point, for all three cases, a short observation should be noted. Like it was defined earlier participants had to assess, as a first step, a set of two photographs of 11 decision-makers. However, not all the participants did know all of the presented state leaders, a consideration that it was of a favor regarding the dynamics in the group's ratings. Everyone had a chance to make evaluations in respect of appearance, competence, suitability for a certain position, concerning also the states of representation, and personal traits. Through this way, a more complex, but accurate broader picture could be drawn.

The introduction of the results follows the way the conversations were released. Primary for each of the decision-makers in this study, the most outstanding and summarizing opinions are included. Additionally, the activity in the discussions is, as much as possible, delineated.

The assessment began with Emmanuel Macron, the President of France.

A.F., 22, for instance, said in relation to him:

“He appears very dynamic, as he seems like a man that you can trust to be, let's say, the prime minister of your country. But at the same time, his appearance shows that he is a

very intimate and approachable man. It paints a picture that is, at least for me, balanced.”⁸. Other participants agreed with that opinion, attaching also characteristics to Macron like young, ambitious, as well a person who ‘has his eyes set on the future’.

In comparison, Justin Trudeau, the Prime Minister of Canada, was viewed as more conservative, although still quite approachable according to **A.H.**, 38, while some others perceived him as the most contemporary figure among the decision-makers displayed. Furthermore, **E.S.**, 51, stated that “he brings out a certainty (in the way he looks), in what he does, and in what he has!”⁹.

Boris Johnson (Prime Minister of the UK), on the contrary, was mostly described, by the Greek participants, as ‘an unkempt person’ due mainly to his haircut, but also because of his weight. **A.P.**,39, argued that the fact that he is overweight correlates in people's minds with someone being unhealthy, especially in the Western world's approach. That, **A.P.**, believes prevents him from becoming a so-to-say role model as a leader, abroad. Additionally, for **O.S.**, 25, Johnson's Image, in general, has a rather negative connotation due to media's coverage. Hence, his external presence simply supports Media's judgments, the participant argued.

When asked about their thoughts on Vladimir Putin (President of Russia), ‘strict’, ‘distant’, and ‘a true leader’ were words used repeatedly by the participants to express their judgments on the images presented. **D.I.**, 26, said illustratively: “In his expression, as external characteristics, etc., he seems very strict, as he is reflecting: ‘I have a certain route’, ‘I know where I am going’ !”¹⁰.

Joe Biden, the current U.S. President, was described as a ‘typical American’ by the majority. Participants saw in him an open and communicative person. His smile and

8 The quotes in their original variant: “Εμένα μου βγάζει αυτόν τον δυναμισμό, ότι είναι ένας άνθρωπος που μπορείς να τον εμπιστευτείς για να είναι, ας πούμε, ο πρωθυπουργός της χώρας σου. Αλλά ταυτόχρονα βγάζει ότι είναι ένας άνθρωπος πολύ προσηνείς και ευπροσήγορος. Βγάζει μια εικόνα η οποία είναι, για μένα τουλάχιστον, ισορροπημένη.”

9 “Βγάζει μια σιγουριά, σε ‘αυτό που κάνω, και σε αυτό που έχω!’”

10 “Εκφραστικά, σαν χαρακτηριστικά κτλ. φαίνεται ότι είναι αυτό το πολύ αυστηρό, “έχω μια πορεία συγκεκριμένη”, “ξέρω που βαδίζω!” ”

older age have become aspects that implement to him such qualities, commented **A.F.**, 22¹¹.

Narendra Modi was the least known leader of the ones presented. Nonetheless, opinions were united in the idea that Modi suits India, as in his external image, being a fine representation of the Indian culture. This, once again, refers only to his appearance and the Image people have constructed. More precisely, **A.F.**, 22, characterized him as a “philosopher, an individual who transmits, gives a sense of, wisdom and mysticism”.¹²

Ursula von der Leyen (the President of the European Commission), was one of the two female decision-makers included in the research. Even though she is not a head of state, she has a very prominent position in an institution that acts on behalf of all the European citizens. All the participants in the focus groups are European citizens. Therefore they had to evaluate someone that is not a domestic leader and at the same time represents them. EU is a big player in the International Arena, a member of the G20 forum, and the project could not lack at least one of its officials. As women are underrepresented in governance, on a global scale, von der Leyen was the most suitable choice. Yet, she was not identified as a dynamic politician, but rather as a ‘conservative, classical female public servant’, by the Greek group. Not very bold or different. According to **D.I.**, 26, this Image is the most appropriate for her to have. The participant said: “I think that, in this way, a woman can be promoted to the leadership (without questioning her appearance). It is a difficult step to be in a leadership position (for women). She maintains it with conservatism because if she was more cool or fashionable, I think it will be more difficult for her career”¹³.

A.H., 38, continued, in the same manner, and added that: “Her way of dressing is conservative. From her haircut to her blazer-suit, which has power-shoulders, something

11 “Αντιπροσωπεύει αυτό το επικοινωνιακό. Αυτό το ανοιχτό που έχουν οι Αμερικανοί, δηλαδή νομίζω είναι ένα άτομο που τους αντιπροσωπεύει πλήρως προς αυτό τουλάχιστον. Είναι αυτό το χαμογελαστό και είναι έτσι πιο μεγάλος σε ηλικία.”

12 “Εμένα μου θυμίζει λίγο φιλόσοφο [...]. Μου βγάζει μια σοφία, κάτι το μυστικιστικό.”

13 “Νομίζω πως, με αυτόν τον τρόπο μπορεί και όλας να ανέβει μια γυναίκα στην ηγεσία. Είναι δύσκολο βήμα να ανέβει, στην ηγεσία. Το διατηρεί με μια συντηρητικότητα, γιατί αν έρθει και κάτι πιο ανανεωμένο, πιο μονάδο, νομίζω θα είναι πιο δύσκολη η πορεία της.”

that means she wants to show bigger shoulders, like men. Probably to stand tall! Imagine how difficult it is for a woman to be in such an institution, where there are mostly men. And that is why her outfit is more conservative, more restrained”¹⁴. Even though von der Leyen was not described as a very attention-catching appear, participants acknowledged that there are certain biases and expectations about how a woman in politics can allow herself to be introduced to the public gaze.

Jair Bolsonaro, the President of Brazil, was another unfamiliar leader. Participants found in him more of a person ‘fit to be a football team's owner, rather than a head of state’. An interesting conclusion that the participants agreed on, was the fact that, according to them, ‘he looks like a person who does not want to do what he is doing’, and moreover, ‘as he is forced to be a President’. As **O.S.**, 25, stated, “he appears like he is saying ‘I do not want to be here!’”¹⁵. Moreover, he also gave them a feeling of a “layperson”. Those inferences were based on his facial characteristics in both pictures and “unfitting” official suit.

On the point of being asked to express their opinion about the second female decision-maker in this study, Angela Merkel, the Chancellor of Germany, the discussants did not have much to say. Regardless of the statements that she as well seems ‘strict and conservative’, with ‘visible attempts to be more “sweet” in her image presentation’. Attempts that, the group believes, do not have actual results. **E.S.**, 51, believes that this is due to very visible stress signs, displayed in Merkel’s external appearance¹⁶, without the participant specifying where exactly they are observed.

Besides Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, the President of the People's Republic of China, was only the second decision-maker among the presented to be characterized as a true leader over a common agreement of the group, based on his appearance.

14 “Το ντύσιμο της όπως είπατε είναι συντηρητικό. Από το κούρεμα της μέχρι και το σακάκι της, το οποίο έχει βάτες, που σημαίνει ότι θέλει να δείξει μεγάλους ώμους, όπως οι άντρες. Θεωρητικά να σηκώνει ανάστημα! Φανταστείτε, σε πόσο δύσκολη θέση είναι σαν γυναίκα να προσπαθεί να είναι μέσα σε ένα τέτοιο θεσμό, στον οποίο κυρίως είναι άντρες οι περισσότεροι. Και για αυτό κιόλας το ντύσιμο της είναι πιο συντηρητικό, πιο μαζεμένο.”

15 “Βγάζει, ‘δεν θέλω να είμαι εδώ’ !”

16 “Εγώ πιστεύω ότι αυτή η γυναίκα είναι πολύ στρεσαρισμένη αυτό μου βγάζει!”.

Some opinions as **A.P.**'s, 39, asserted that “With his face, he brings out a sternness and a profile of a true leader. [...] Well, his face is such that it inspires fear”¹⁷. Important to mention is, that as a moderator and author, I was curious till what point this description has become synonymous with authoritarianism. Does leadership have to correlate with fear? In **A.P.** view's, I grasped that the cultural background is more than crucial when it comes to Image making, appearance, and state ruling. “For their culture, his Image is not perceived as authoritarian. The others (i.e. the other decision-makers) formed this “mask” because they have to address us, the westerners. He, however, needs something different, he has an eastern culture, so he inspires fear. This, one can see it in his face!” (**A.P.**, 39)¹⁸. Other participants, that voiced their opinions agreed by expressing thoughts in a similar vein.

Lastly, as for the first part of the interview, participants had to comment on Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's (the President of Turkey) appearance and Image perceptions that are receiving from it. They recognized that they might be more biased on his evaluation, than on the other decision-makers, due to the relations between Greece and Turkey. Nevertheless, the participants described him as a ‘traditionalist’, that follows certain cultural rules. While also they saw in his glance ‘instability and uncertainty’. For instance, **D.I.**, 26, said: “For me, he feels indifferent. One does not pay attention to him. I don't think it occurs to you that he would be someone to rise to a leadership position (based on his external appearance)”¹⁹.

While **A.P.**, 39, added that he “does not inspire the confidence that all the previous ones had”²⁰. Also, **A.F.**, 22, stated further on alike note: “I would say that his look gives me a

17 “Στο πρόσωπο του βγάζει μια αυστηρότητα και ένα προφίλ πραγματικού ηγέτη. [...] Ε, το πρόσωπο του είναι τέτοιο ώστε να εμπνέει φόβο.”

18 “Για την κουλτούρα, τη δικιά τους δεν γίνεται έτσι αντιληπτό. Οι άλλοι σχημάτισαν αυτό το προσώπειο, γιατί έχουν να απευθυνθούν σε εμάς, σε δυτικούς. Ο συγκεκριμένος όμως, χρειάζεται κάτι διαφορετικό, έχει την ανατολίτικη κουλτούρα, οπότε εμπνέει φόβο. Και φαίνεται στο πρόσωπο του πιστεύω αυτό!”

19 “Να προσθέσω ότι μου βγάζει κάτι αδιάφορο. Δηλαδή, δεν τον προσέχεις. Νομίζω δεν σου περνάει από το μυαλό ότι θα ήταν κάποιος για να ανέβει σε ηγεσία.”

20 “Δεν εμπνέει την σιγουριά που είχαν όλοι οι προηγούμενοι.”

feeling of authoritarianism. As he is declaring 'you will do what I am telling you to do!' This may have to do with the insecurity you all mentioned”²¹.

All in all, participants did not have big discrepancies in the way they perceive the decision-makers discussed, among themselves. Everyone agreed when asked if the decision-makers presented, seem like typical nationals of their countries of representation, as well. The “faces” and the general presence of each of the leaders “matched” with the Image of how citizens from the countries discussed look.

A substantial controversy throughout the conversation in the opinions was regarding the question “Who would you choose, based on his/her appearance to represent your country (Greece, in that case) abroad, from the discussed decision-makers?”. A few participants hesitated in their selection between Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping, as they both, according to them, look more serious, strong, and powerful. **A.P.**, 39, justified his choice in the following way, “They are the only ones who seem to implant strictness. When it comes to ruling my country, I want the ones who reflect experience and seriousness. We are judging only by appearance, right? We judge as if we do not know them and for this, I would say that they seem to have overcome many hard times in life, as their face is “carved” by the difficulties and experiences. This is what they are showing to me”²².

D.I., 26, had a similar opinion. “I think I agree. I would choose them, as well. They bring me a sense of someone who is serious enough. One that you can trust your

21 “Θα έλεγα ότι το βλέμμα του, μου βγάξει έναν αυταρχισμό. Ότι 'θα κάνεις αυτό που σου λέω! Που αυτό ίσως έχει να κάνει και με την ανασφάλεια που είπατε.”

22 “Είναι οι μόνοι που δείχνουν να εμπνέουν μια σοβαρότητα. Όταν πρόκειται κανείς στα σοβαρά να αναλάβει την χώρα μου θέλω αυτούς τους ανθρώπους που εμπνέουν εμπειρία, σοβαρότητα. Κρίνουμε μόνο με την εμφάνιση έτσι? Κρίνουμε σαν να μην τους ξέρουμε και για αυτό λέω ότι φαίνεται να έχουν "σηκώσει τη ζωή στους ώμους τους". Το πρόσωπο τους είναι "σκαμμένο" από δυσκολίες και εμπειρίες. Αυτό μου δείχνουν.”

country to”²³.

In contrast **A.F.**, 22, expressed another point of view of preference: “I agree that I would like it to be a person who looks serious, but I think that at the same time I would like someone who seems compromising”²⁴.

A.H., 38, furthermore voiced the thought that: “I would prefer a leader who has mixed characteristics from the Canadian Prime Minister and Vladimir Putin. I think Merkel is closer to that idea (as in her appearance). I think it is closer by the fact that she seems serious, but also as she declares 'I do care about my country.' [...] It seems as it is right in the center of being balanced in her look”²⁵.

The underrepresentation of women in top positions on a global level was a theme that participants recognized as a problem existing.

O.S., 25, for instance, preferred another type of leader in comparison to the firstly expressed opinions. “Well, I am tired of seeing old, white men in power. I want a woman or someone younger to be in power representing me. So far we have not seen the best of all those who are in office. I would like something new, something fresh. I'm not saying it will be a success, but I would surely like something new and yes definitely a woman”²⁶. However, the two female politicians included in that research were not a choice the participant would make to represent Greece. It was rather a preference to be a person with a completely new vision of its presence.

23 “Νομίζω θα συμφωνήσω. Και εγώ έτσι σε αυτούς θα, τείνω. Μου βγάζουν κάτι πιο έτσι σοβαρό που μπορείς να εμπιστευτείς την χώρα σου.”

24 “Εγώ, θα συμφωνήσω ότι θα ήθελα να είναι ένα άτομο που να εμπνέει σοβαρότητα, αλλά νομίζω ότι ταυτόχρονα θα ήθελα κάποιον ο οποίος να φαίνεται και διαλλακτικός.”

25 “Εγώ θα προτιμούσα μια μιξ με τον Καναδό και τον Πούτιν. Πιστεύω ότι πιο κοντά σε αυτό το μίξ είναι η Μέρκελ. Είναι νομίζω πιο κοντά σε αυτό το ότι φαίνεται να μεν σοβαρή, αλλά και να μεν νοιάζομαι για την χώρα μου. [...] Είναι ακριβώς στο κέντρο.”

26 “Λοιπόν, εγώ, έχω βαρεθεί να βλέπω λευκούς, ηλικιωμένους άνδρες, στην εξουσία. Θέλω, δηλαδή και γυναίκα ή κάποιον νεότερο. Γιατί μέχρι τώρα εντάξει δεν έχουμε δει και τα καλύτερα, από όλους αυτούς που είναι ηγέτες ουσιαστικά. Θα ήθελα κάτι καινούργιο, φρέσκο. Δεν λέω ότι θα πετύχει, αλλά θα ήθελα και κάτι καινούργιο και να σίγουρα και γυναίκα.”

Yet, participants argued and conclude that if a woman is in a leading position, she can not allow herself to have a complete free vision of how she looks like. They believe that to be an official in governance, requires to some extent, women, but also men, to follow certain, even non-written rules, as for their appearance. According to the group, women are in a far better course in the politics of whether they have been. Still, a double standardization exists. As one discussant, **A.H.**, 38, mentioned: “To be a politician is a job and as a job, it has its dress code”²⁷.

A crucial theme discussed in that group included how dominant appearance is when approaching and evaluating people on an everyday basis. These judgments play a role also when someone forms an opinion about an individual that one does not know personally, since other traits of information complete the picture. When speaking about public figures, sometimes information is lacking.

Participants agreed that appearance matters notably in their everyday communications, although they admit that some first impressions can not always be correct. Most interesting was the part of the conversation about why people rely upon their perceptions based on the external presence. **E.S.**, 51, stated, “I believe that we were taught to do this. It is not something we do on our own. They taught us, to judge people by their appearance”²⁸.

The group was divided in their opinions. Some claimed that this reflex comes from a biological matter since humans are created to judge others by their appearance to protect themselves from threats. **A.P.**, 39, said: “We are genetically programmed to assess the external appearance. After so many years of evolution now we are programmed like

27 “Η πολιτική είναι δουλειά και σαν δουλειά έχει το dress code της”.

28 “Πιστεύω ότι αυτό μας το έμαθαν να το κάνουμε. Δεν είναι κάτι που κάνουμε από μόνοι μας. Μας έμαθαν, δηλαδή να κρίνουμε ανθρώπους από εξωτερική εμφάνιση.”

this. What you said, "They taught us", is not just social learning acquired after so many generations. It is a biological concept"²⁹.

While others supported the idea that those actions of instant judgment and image formulation are mostly a construction, driven by the cultural and social background one lives in: "I would like to say that how the external appearance is perceived and what meaning is implemented, is a social construction. Indeed, people focus on the appearance, and on what they see, but how they interpret this appearance, what they "read" in that appearance is a socially constructed concept"³⁰(A.F., 22).

Ultimately, a consensus was reached among the participants, as both of the versions being relevant. Nevertheless, the two beliefs are complementing each other in an attempt for a better illustration of answering the question, why appearance is supreme. There is a mixture of these factors that gives the outcome of appearance working as a component that matters in our social interactions. In addition, to being important when speaking about political representation. Like V.D., 54, mentioned: "For sure, someone who has a beautiful image wins more easily, in the beginning, the sympathy of the public"³¹. Beautiful, however, is a term difficult to be explained, as for everyone can mean different things. Assumably it does depends on the target public, and the positive sense.

A final topic explored was regarding the use and role of the Media. Participants admit that they do watch, read, and listen to the news. They consider it essential to know what is happening in their country or abroad.

29 "Είμαστε γονιδιακά προγραμματισμένοι να εκλαμβάνουμε την εξωτερική εμφάνιση. Μετά από τόσα χρόνια εξέλιξης. Πλέον έχουμε προγραμματιστεί έτσι. Αυτό που είπατε , "μας το μάθανε", δεν είναι μόνο κοινωνική μάθηση που αποκτήθηκε μετά από τόσες γενιές. Είναι βιολογική έννοια."

30 "Εγώ θα ήθελα να πω ότι το πως όμως εκλαμβάνεται η εξωτερική εμφάνιση και πως νοηματοδοτείται είναι μια κοινωνική κατασκευή. Δηλαδή ναι μεν οι άνθρωποι εστιάζουν στην εμφάνιση, και τι βλέπουν, όμως το πως αυτή την εμφάνιση την ερμηνεύουν δηλαδή ποια ανάγνωση δίνουν στην εμφάνιση είναι μια κοινωνικά κατασκευασμένη έννοια."

31 "Οπωσδήποτε ένας άνθρωπος που έχει μια όμορφη εικόνα κερδίζει στην αρχή την συμπάθεια του κοινού."

“I believe there are a lot of diverse sources of information, and it's good because it helps us gather different facts. It is definitely, important to be informed in general, so that to know what is happening in the world.”³², said **V.D.**, 54.

However, sometimes the news is approached only as headlines by them and is not carefully examined. Some people do follow different politicians on social media, while others do not. Participants expressed their concerns about how the information is delivered to the audience since many techniques, as sound or image effects are used. Hence, people were worried that the news “does not have an objectivity”³³(**A.F.**, 22).

That being stated, we can see that the Media as a major channel of information has its part of the responsibility in forming perceptions. Yet, as the internet has expanded in its functions and influence, individuals tend to rely on diverse sources and “extract” information through a variety of features (audio, visuals, or combination) sometimes even unconsciously.

4.2.2 Findings from the Bulgarian group

The second focus group, the Bulgarian, started again with evaluation and discussion of the selected decision-makers. In this group, some contradictions in the opinions were observed even when similar characteristics were appointed to the heads of the states.

For example, regarding Emmanuel Macron, **F.P.**,45, saw “A nice, young man!”³⁴. While **L.K.**, 53, stated that: “He would feel better in the cinema sphere! That is how it looks to me. A nice, intelligent man, but I think he is good for Hollywood”³⁵. **A.G.**, 47, on a similar note, confessed that “He can not inspire confidence in me! Not only because he

32 “Πιστεύω υπάρχουν πολλοί φοροίς ενημερώσεις και είναι καλό αυτό γιατί βοηθάει να συλλέξουμε πληροφορίες. Είναι οπωσδήποτε σημαντική η ενημέρωση γενικά έτσι ώστε να ξέρουμε τι γίνεται στον κόσμο.”

33 “Δεν έχουν αντικειμενικότητα.”

34 “Симпатичен, млад човек!”

35 “В кино сферата по-добре щеше да се чувства ! Така ми изглежда на мен. Симпатичен, интелигентен мъж, но според мен е добре за Холивуд.”

is young, but it is also visible that he is not decisive”³⁶.

Again, as in the first group, here also some leaders were not familiar to the public. However, opinions about Justin Trudeau seemed more overlapping. Participants characterize him as “A very elegant man!”³⁷(F.P., 45), and as an individual who seems as “He has a vision for the future, that sees things! He has confidence! It evokes confidence and sympathy.”³⁸(P.V., 68). Yet, according to another participant: “He looks good and nice, but as if this is intentional. I see an attempt to be a man for the modern people, so to say.”³⁹ (M.V., 26).

Boris Johnson's hair and more informal Image provoked mostly comments as: “He does not look serious as a politician.”⁴⁰(F.P., 45), and “I do not like him very much.”⁴¹(L.K., 53).

Nonetheless, quite a few participants, still, connected his external presence with a purposeful campaign on the political scene. “In my opinion, he is looking for the style that the average voter likes. [...]. In terms of what he has and what the audience “consumes”, it is proved that this strategy is attractive. He represents such a casual style with which he says, ‘I am part of the people. Yes, I wear a suit because I have to, but I am an ordinary Briton’.”⁴² explained S.S., 47, for example.

As in the first group, in that case, too, the opinions about Vladimir Putin's appearance coincided around one approach. The evaluation that he is an example of a real leader and suitable power representative of a big state was dominant. Some of the comments

36 “Не може да ми вдъхне доверие! Не само заради това, че е на млада възраст, но просто се вижда, че не е решителен.”

37 “Много елегантен мъж!”

38 “Има поглед в бъдещето. Вижда нещата! Има увереност! Предизвиква увереност и симпатия.”

39 “За Трюдо по скоро аз виждам, че изглежда добре, симпатичен, но все едно това е преднамерено. Тоест аз виждам един опит наистина да е човек за модерния народ, така да го кажем.”

40 “Не ми стои сериозен като политик.”

41 “На мене ми е изключително НЕ симпатичен.”

42 “Според мен точно търси стила който да допадне на избирателя. [...] Смисъл това което има, което се харчи, установено е че това нещо привлича. Такъв небрежен стил, с който той в момента казва, ‘ аз съм част от народа. Да, нося костюм, защото така ми се налага, обаче аз съм си един обикновен Британец’.”

regarding his presence included: “Looking at him, he indeed seems as a ruler with power. One that uses that power.”⁴³ (P.V., 68). Another participant replied that: “In the picture with the suit, he shows, who he is. He is an erudite person. A man who knows what he is doing.”⁴⁴ (L.K., 53), and S.S., 47, added: “There is determination in the way he looks. Literally a steely gaze!”⁴⁵. M.V., 26, continued further responding to the question: “He is the embodiment of a leader! Beyond the assessments of what, how, and why?! Whatever he wears, just his aura, his very energy is absolutely embodied in his personality. [...] Here, the Image, the needs, the PR team, and everything is just in absolute synchrony. And in the end, this is a successful leadership campaign.”⁴⁶ Power Image was considered as the most suitable for representing a big state.

Thoughts on Joe Biden's images consisted of more restrained statements. For instance, R.E., 22, said that: “He looks extremely confident to me, in his appearance! Maybe a little bit more than is necessary”⁴⁷. While, V.K., 65, added that: “He looks very good to me. Very well maintained. He is a very vain man”⁴⁸. In general, however, he as well was perceived, as a figure suitable to be a President, by the majority of the group.

Narendra Modi was the most different-looking decision-maker in that study in terms of dressing. The cultural differentiations among the participants and the leader that they were evaluating were most visible in that case. India, even geographically is far from Europe. Therefore most people did not know much about the leadership of the state. All the participants had a very positive approach to his images presented. They especially agreed that his country of representations suits him perfectly as an external Image. For

43 “Аз като го гледам, наистина, е властващ човек с власт. И властта я употребява.”

44 “Изключително показва, с костюма където е, една ерудирана личност. Човек, който знае какво прави.”

45 “Има решителност в погледа. Буквално стоманен поглед!”

46 “Той е въплъщение на лидер ! Сега извън оценките какво, как, защо? Каквото и да облече, просто самата му аура, самата му енергия абсолютно е въплътена в личността му. [...] Тука имиджът, нуждите, P.R. екипът и всичко е просто в абсолютен синхрон. И в крайна сметка това е успешна лидерска кампания.”

47 “На мен ми изглежда изключително самоуверен! Чисто на външен вид. Може би малко повече от колкото е необходимо.”

48 “За мен е много добре изглеждащ. Много добре поддържан. Много суетен мъж.”

example, **R.E.**, 22, commented: “He looks like a wise man to me! In my opinion, he represents his country and culture quite well. He radiates some purity, really, and goodness”⁴⁹. Whereas **F.P.**, 45, concluded that “He is (he seems as) a wise man! (As) He has some experience gained!”⁵⁰.

Ursula von der Leyen, on the other hand, was the leader that is more “close” to the groups, as it is an EU representative. She, however, here as well, was seen mainly as a strict person, with a conservative and bureaucratic presence.

Some opinions that sum up the main thoughts about her appearance include statements as: “She is a beautiful woman, but there is a lack of that sense of a President. She rather seems like a spokesperson. All in all, her vision is very clear, of course, for such position.”⁵¹ (**S.S.**, 47). Whereas **M.V.**, 26, said that: “Somehow she does not leave any impressions in me. There is no specific irradiance, but as it is intended to be shown in the role of a mediator in a way.”⁵². The general reflection of her Image was more indifferent one could say. Despite the connection with her in terms of representation, she was seen as an administrator with no actual power, although acting on behalf of the EU in a very prominent position.

Jair Bolsonaro was perceived, by the participants, here as well, mainly as a sportsperson and not as a head of state. **R.E.**, 22, noted, “He does not look like a president of a country, but rather as a president, maybe, of a golf club!”⁵³. **P.V.**, 68, moreover pointed that in Bolsonaro's presence he finds “A typical Latin American representative. He seems like a football fan and a sports fan in general. He shows (in the picture) his love for sports, for these kinds of events, which are in the blood of all these people.”⁵⁴.

Additionally, other participants identify in his appearance a person that feels

49 “На мен ми прилича на мъдър човек! Според мен доста добре репрезентира държавата си и културата най-вече. Излъчва някаква чистота, найстина, и доброта.”

50 “Мъдър човек е! Има някаква опитност натрупана.”

51 “Красива жена, но някак няма излъчване на председател, а по скоро на говорител. Иначе визията е много изчистена, естествено за такава позиция.”

52 “Някак не оставя впечатление в мен. Няма конкретно излъчване, а все едно така преднамерено има за цел да излъчва по някакъв начин ролята на медиатор.”

53 “Не ми прилича на президент на държава, а на президент на някакъв може би голф клуб!”

54 “Типичен латино – американец. Любител на футбола, на спорта. Показва любовта си към спорта, към тези събития, които са в кръвта на всички тези хора.”

uncomfortable doing his official duties, especially with a reference to his official picture.

The second female politician Angela Merkel was better known for her career than Ursula von der Leyen. Some participants agreed that Merkel is a successful Chancellor, but does not seem ladylike. People voiced opinions that she does not have many typical female characteristics. Some stated that she does not seem delicate. She was rather portrayed as conservative. **M.V.**, 26, believes that her Image is maintained following her position of power. “I think it is an intended move that her femininity is suppressed. Because there are still quite strong feelings on gender perceptions. Due to a more masculine radiance, somehow, she inspires bigger respect. Unfortunately, this is still the belief. So, I see that this Image is a role so that she can embody and present her policies.”⁵⁵ (**M.V.**, 26). To be in power is seen, even now, that requires a more masculine depiction. To be a ruler implements a strong hand. The Image therefore should be in accordance with the outcomes desired. As later in the conversation was agreed, for women it is harder to be in power due to that. Female politicians, the group thinks, need more time to prove to the audience that they deserve their posts, not only because of their governing qualities. Women are perceived as weaker rulers, with a smaller will to stand up for their ideas. **K.G.**, 75, thinks that “most women are more performative in their duties, rather than initiative!”⁵⁶. Even though on a global level has been proved that this is not in all cases true. That could explain why quite a few female leaders prefer a more masculine Image of presentation, as the participants have noticed.

The observations around Xi Jinping revolve around the belief about a strong, leading personality. Furthermore, the cultural representation of the state was another point commented. As **F.P.**, 45, concluded, “He (seems like it) is a very strong person”⁵⁷. While, **P.V.**, 68, noticed that, “Both the Prime Minister of India and Xi Jinping (the

55 “Аз по скоро смятам, че е предназначено да се подтисне женствеността ѝ. Тъй като все още има доста силни настроения спрямо възприятията. Има по - мъжествено излъчване някак, така всява повече респект. За съжаление все още е така. Така че аз виждам, че това е някакво амплоа, за да може да се възплъти и представи самата си политика.”

56 “Мисля, че жените са по - изпълнителни в задълженията си, а не инициативни!”

57 “Самият той (изглежда) е много силен като личност.”

President of China) express their philosophy with their appearance. They are people who profess a different philosophy, have different religions (i.e. from us, the participants)”⁵⁸.

The case of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was interesting in the sense that as explained earlier, in the previous chapter, the image selection was different compared to the Greek case. Indeed, the diverse symbols presented in the pictures provoked discussion that was not regarding the appearance of the Turkish President per se. Moreover, at the beginning participants had hesitations in expressing their thoughts. Nevertheless, some opinions consisted of statements as: “With his general appearance, he shows that he is the father of the nation!”⁵⁹ (S.S., 47), as well as observations on his traditionality-oriented Image: “So he has a strictly defined style of appearance! When you take a look at the tie you see how it is combined with the flag! This is a combination that also shows symbolism.”⁶⁰ (V.H., 69). As a whole, he was seen as a stronger decision-maker than in the case of the Greek group, but without a completely positive connotation regarding his evaluation.

Appearance, in the everyday interactions, was agreed by the group, that is important. For politicians even a bit more. However, the leadership profile that the majority supported as fitting for a ruler of a big state, was dominant, indeed, by most traditional, masculine, and strongly related qualities, visible in someone's presence. “Countries like India and China have a strict hierarchy that is based not only on the state system but also on religion, on traditions, and on everything else that facilitates governance.”⁶¹ (P.V., 68) Whereas, it was specified that the external presence matters as well in that sense.

58 “Както Премиера на Индия, така и Си Джин Пин изразяват тяхната философия. Това са хора, които изповядват друга философия, друга религия.”

59 “С външния си вид показва това, че е бащата на нацията!”

60 “Значи той има един такъв, някакъв стил, който е строго определен! След това като вземеш да погледнеш вратовръзката, как му пасва и към знамето! Това е едно съчетание такова, което показва също някакъв символволизъм.”

61 “Държави като Индия и Китай имат строга йерархия, която почива не само на държавното устройство, а почива на религията, почива на традициите, почива на всичко останало, което улеснява управлението.”

Still, in their opinions, the group agreed that the selected decision-makers suit their states of representation, as in the case of the Greek participants.

On the topic of Media, the participants again were not convinced that the traditional news-makers are objective in the presentation of information to the public. The impression that the Media are biased in their coverage, not only on a domestic level but abroad too, was dominant. However, the majority still relies on them to be informed. Besides, for the participants, the visual aspect of how a piece of news is presented and perceived is supreme. Nevertheless, during the discussion, it became clear that mass broadcasting and distribution of particular images do create lasting beliefs. **V.K.**, 65, stated that: “It is much easier to detect manipulations in words than in images! Comparing two texts, one can see what words were used, why they were used, which word replaced the other, and so on. I wanted to say that the photos matter, but almost like the appearance itself, which impresses and attracts and you can be deceived, is not enough! And we need to think more.”⁶². There was an acknowledgment that visual exposure has an impact on the public, and recognition that often, the informational direction is not reliable.

The Image(s) of each of the decision-makers is a multilayered construction that derives from diverse factors. One of them the appearance, the most visible one, creates and later supports the beliefs appointed to the people assessed. Since people can be biased in one way or another what others indicate to them as a visual presence can strengthen or weaker their interpretation in matters such as who suits what position, and why. Stereotypes, that individuals are holding, play their role in viewing global affairs. Women are seen as capable to hold executive positions, but men are perceived as more capable to be in the top governing position, as heads of states.

62 “В словото е много по-лесно да откриеш манипулациите от колкото в изображението! Съпоставяйки два текста какви думи са използвани, защо са използвани, коя дума е подменила другата и така нататък. Това исках да кажа, че наистина снимките имат значение, но почти като външността, която впечатлява и привлича и можеш да бъдеш подлъган, не е достатъчна! И трябва повече да се мисли.”

4.2.3 Findings from the Estonian group

The last group, in terms of conduction, was the Estonian. The conversation was carried out mainly in English. Additional assistance with a direct translation by a native speaker was provided when needed. For the Estonian participants most of the leaders were familiar, but not all of them to everyone. The interview proceeded as in the other groups. The discussion started with assessments of the decision-makers presented, and later additional questions were answered. In that group, the distinction of formal and informal photographs, the selection of the pictures in general, was most visible as many participants commented separately on each of them. When participants comment on the 'left picture' that is the official one, or the first photograph of every decision-maker as seen in Appendix 2. The 'right picture' is the "informal" one.

However, a common conclusion on the leaders' Image(s) was also expressed. As that was already the third focus group, many identical patterns of opinions and feelings appeared regarding the decision-makers.

For Emmanuel Macron, the perspective of the group was a positive one. Participants saw in his presence a professional, approachable, young man. Most opinions were similar to each other, like for example **A-M.H.**'s, 20: "He looks friendly and loving person. In the right picture, he seems like he will get along well with his "followers", or like people in general. And on the left, he is well dressed. He has a good outlook". Whereas, **H.T.**, 25, built on this statement and said: "I would just add that he kinda always looks put together. [...] And, yes he seems more easily approachable than some other leaders do" (**H.T.**, 25).

The Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, in a similar note was considered a friendly person, but also suitable to be in such a powerful position. **A.J.**, 50, commented that: "On the left side he looks very solid and nice for a person who is obviously set somewhere in Office. While on the right side you see a picture that represents a person who is, just kind of laid down and it is doing his thing". **H.T.**, 25, continued with the observation that: "In both pictures, he looks in control. Even though the one is kinda

more relaxed and the other is more professional. But yes, for him it seems like in both situations it is related to work somehow. So, it is still conveyed some sense of confidence”.

Boris Johnson was another case where the thoughts from most of the participants from all of the groups overlapped. L.L., 24, expressed the following viewpoint: “In comparison to the previous two leaders that we saw, even when he is looking nice like in a suit, something about his appearance still seems not as nice as for the others. Just like for example, how his suit is fitting or this always messy hair. This makes him look like he is not being so well dressed, even while he is actually wearing the clothes that should show him as being official. [...] Maybe he does it on purpose because that would perhaps, make him feel somehow closer to the wider public. Regular people will feel like he is, also one of them. Not like the higher leader who is somehow better than the rest”. He was also characterized as messy, but probably cool in his Image by the group, as the profile that he maintains seems to work as a benefit, at least on a domestic level.

Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia, (along with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan) was the leader(s) where presumably the bigger dissimilarity in the statements, in comparison with the previous two cases, will be observed. As was hypothesized there is a nexus of states who are allies, and their leaders can be seen as positive ones, and states that are perceived as a threat and so their representatives can be recognized as such. Of course, that can often work the other way around. Hence, the head of state can be the threat in its general presence and therefore the state becomes more hostile, as well.

Indeed, the most visible gap in the beliefs across the three cases compared was found for these two decision-makers. “Usually as much as I have noticed, Putin tries to be portrayed like a father-figure role. He tries to look like someone really relatable, but kind of like the cool uncle at the family gatherings, you know?! So when he needs to be official, he has to take businesses, he has to work, he wears a suit and he looks very well put together. But at the same time, he can go in the other direction, pose. He tries to endear himself to the people with his looks, a lot. Probably more than many other

leaders” (M.L., 19). Over the case specter, however, in that example similarities occurred. Despite being seen as aggressive by a few, Vladimir Putin was identified as a leader. “On the right picture, probably we can see some propaganda. I am not sure. On the left side, he seems like a very strong leader. A working person doing his job” (M.T.,50).

For Joe Biden, the exchange of view was on the positive axis. His age and very formal way of dressing were the two main details considered in his Image evaluation. “I would say that considering his age he looks very, very good in both of the pictures. His style, how good the suit fits on him, in both of the pictures is quite impressive!” (L.L., 24). Another participant, M.L., 19, continued with some personal remarks: “As far as I have noticed Biden, usually seems to go for really simple and classic looks. Like he never has something that sticks out. He does not have extravagant suits or he does not dress like a common citizen perhaps would. He constantly wears simple black or dark blue suits and makes minor modifications to them. You will never see him with some bright colors suit or casual wear”. As the United States, is a big power, the person that represents it, contributes significantly to the Image of the country abroad. The public expects certain actions and behavior that sometimes can be affected by the presence of a certain leader itself. Joe Biden is looking more serious in his general status, among else he supports it with his classical style, we can say. No surprises in his style are identified that can correlate somehow to a more consistent policy manner, too.

Further, Narendra Modi was personate by the group as wise and spiritual looking. A.N.,21, justified it that way: “Because of his hair and beard, they are white and that like indicates that he is an old person. I personally, see in this a man of life experience, you know. He knows what he is doing!”. It was mentioned again, that he is by far the most different-looking leader, though he looks characteristically to suits India.

The perceptions about Ursula von der Leyen, provoke several interesting thoughts, quite similar to the ones in the other groups when the commentary was regarding some of the two female leaders in this study.

“Her dressing looks very conservative and it fits for a person who is representing, you know, anything” (M.T., 50). That comment leaves a sense that she looks acceptable to be a representative but not as a powerful leader. H.T., 25, recognized an analogous aspect, of Image construction, in many women politicians. “She seems to be following as many European, female leaders do, the hairstyle of having short hair, the kind of the boyish haircut. You do not usually see female leaders, with long, flowing hairs on the pictures, so that seems to be a "stamp" of some sort. In Europe at least, the leaders seem to follow that. I totally agree that the clothing is quite conservative, but again seems to follow the same line of clothing that a lot of female leaders in Europe decide to wear, to keep a straight line.” (H.T., 25). The establishment of an identity that is “appropriate” for governance, appears even unconsciously for female politicians often, to be connected with a more masculine statute. A.N.,21, pointed additionally on that. “She is not wearing clothing items that you would usually assume that women wear, like a dress or skirt. Also, she is not wearing a lot of accessories. Like, I do not see any earrings, or necklaces or something. The only accessory I guess it is the belt.” (A.N., 21). The absence of many ‘typical’ ladylike features, were legitimized by the group, here as well, as a more preferred way for women to appear. Since, otherwise, they can be categorized as unsuitable for a position in politics. “I have noticed about her before as well that she always wears a pantsuit. She never goes for a skirt or a dress. And the same thing that was mentioned that she is not wearing any jewelry, not a lot of make-up. I feel like she is trying to not so much emphasize the fact that she is a female leader, because she is one of the few among many male leaders in Europe, and maybe that helps her to, you know, combine as much as more of a strong leader, than would, if she emphasized these feminine traits more through her clothing as well”. (L.L., 24). Gender distinction in the political sphere does have an impact on perceptions. The participants certainly acknowledged that.

Women, moreover, participants agreed, are less represented in the political sphere, than men. Besides, females are a preliminary target when it comes to stereotyping one's suitability for a governing position, concluded the participant L.L., 24. Gender diversification does create impressions that last longer than some political moves do.

Corresponding opinions were expressed for the other female politician, Angela Merkel. She was described as conservative. “Her style is quite similar to von der Leyen's style, basically. Like no skirts, no dresses. Even the hairstyle is the same. In the picture on the left, the more official one, she at least tries to be somewhat approachable, as she is smiling. Seems like a try to be more of a people’s person” (A.N.,21). Angela Merkel is a leading politician in Germany, whereas it is internationally famous as well, being in politics for many years now. One of the participants summarized her characterization in a very illustrative manner saying that: “She looks like Angela Merkel” (M.L., 19).

On Jair Bolsonaro's photographs, participants discovered, once more, a 'laid back' person, who is visible that loves sports. H.T., 25, commented that: “He wants to portray himself more as a father figure, as well. Being closer to the public. In a sense, he does not seem much to like the political side of the stuff. [...] He appears to want to do it in a more leisurely or fun way. That is the sense that he actually leaves behind”. In the eyes of the group, he did look more like an individual who tries to be in power with some populist manners. Yet, he was not seen as a competent figure.

The last two leaders were the less commented ones in that group.

The decision-maker where the interpretation of the images, widen, was Xi Jinping. To some, he seemed polite and nice. “He looks nice and friendly, and approachable because he is smiling in the left picture. On the right one, he still looks friendly” (A-M.H., 20). Others, based on prior knowledge admit that do not admire him. All in all, his external presence, was seen rather as a classic choice of appearance for a politician.

For the last decision-maker, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Estonian participants did perceive him, somehow different than the other groups, but not completely. M.T., 50, view him as a “Grandfather of the nation”. The element of traditionality was key again in his evaluation. A.N., 21, identify, “that, in both pictures, he is wearing a red tie, which I am guessing is his way of showing patriotism. Like since the flag of Turkey is also red”. In general, the group did not have many observations to make in that case.

Regarding the topic of appearance in their everyday interactions, participants discussed

the theme on two levels. The way of dressing, usually, some commented will not matter per se. For instance, **M.T.**, 50, explained: “I do not pay attention to what people are wearing because it comes to the normality that people wear what they want but in case if they wear something very extreme, for example, a man wearing a skirt or something from the fashion shows then it will obviously, you know, make our heads turn. But overall, does not make any difference what they wear”. Nevertheless appearance as presence, the group agreed it is important. “When you are in a setting where there are a lot of unfamiliar people then definitely from the side of being approachable, people’s appearances tend to matter. Even biological, if someone seems kind of grumpy or distant [...]. In the sense of knowing how people react then it does matter, but a lot of the times things change after you get to know the person”, **H.T.**, 25, clarified.

Finally, on the topic of Media, most participants admit that do watch and follow the news. Those who do, like to be informed on topics, not only concerning their own country but about affairs happening abroad as well.

The visual elements shaping a piece of news are frequently noticed by the people. “I usually, pay a lot of attention to the visual side of the news. Generally, I read news from the internet and there is always a picture next to the news. I think that often, this specific picture is chosen for a specific purpose, and it is also carrying a message.” (**L.L.**, 24).

As for social media, the opinions were diverse. Some participants do follow various politicians on them, others, do not. However, social media hygiene should be implied on a few political accounts according to the group. As being politicians, in power, have responsibilities in what one shares on the social channels, more than the average person.

All things considered, participants seemed to recognize many aspects when getting informed. The visual side of a topic can have imbalances and variations to what extend influences perceptions. In the case of an Image of someone, that implies many other non-visual characteristics, the optical support is crucial in its nature.

4.2.4 Case comparison

The participants drew conclusions based on diverse factors, general presence, facial appearance, gender, clothing, posture, gestures, accessories, country of representation, etc.

Among the cases, many aspects overlapped. Of course, they were a few minor discrepancies in some decision-makers' assessments. For example, in two of the groups, Emmanuel Macron was seen in a more positive light. Whereas, in the Bulgarian group, his younger age and external presence seemed less suitable for his position.

Nonetheless, as the sample is random, it was expected shifts to occur. In that group, the average age was higher than in the others. Therefore, we can assume that this factor also influenced opinions. For a more detailed presentation of the findings of personal Image evaluation (per group) of the decision-makers, please see **Table 1**, on the next page.

Additionally, in the case of the President of Turkey, the perceptions were diverse, in dependence, on the country. That shows more of how the countries Image and status affect the evaluation. While at some point when beliefs are established, reciprocity could be observed. Hence, the Image of the leader dictates views for the state of representation.

However, beliefs converged on topics as woman representation, and power Image. Also, similar thoughts occur on appearance and Media importance in the everyday interactions and the perceptions that are constructed and maintained. For further, detailed aspect positioning, please see **Table 2**.

In all three groups, participants recognized, that women are still in a disadvantaged position in governance, compared to men. Still, both Angela Merkel and Ursula von der Leyen were mostly seen as conservative and strict (See, again **Table 1**). According to the groups' evaluations, the two decision-makers intentionally are suppressing some of their female traits that could lower their credibility, as representatives of big, powerful entities. They are not the only ones on a global scale doing that. Even though in recent years, "Image rules" in that matter are breaking slowly, the higher posts are still dominated by men. There is a silent belief that power is not "delicate". Many

participants agreed that to be a female politician requires bigger attention in the Image construction, as it is expected women to be further judged by their looks. Although there was an agreement that women should be further presented, participants did not identify “a leader” in the characterization of any of the female decision-makers.

Contrastingly, Vladimir Putin was the only head of state, that in two of the groups, the Bulgarian and the Greek, appointed him the quality of a “real leader” unanimously in the way he appears. While in the Estonian group there was also evidence for such a statement. Xi Jinping was the other “powerful leader” in the categorization made by the majority of the participants. There can be internal qualities that drive these responses. Nevertheless, we observed that these characteristics are “seen” in the presence of an individual (See again **Table 1**).

Table 1. *Image Evaluations of the Decision-Makers by Groups: Summary*

Decision-Maker:	Greek Group’s Main characterizations	Bulgarian Group’s Main characterizations	Estonian Group’s Main characterizations	General Image, based on the appearance
Emmanuel Macron	Approachable, Young, Balanced	Nice, Young, Not inspiring confidence	Friendly, Put together, Approachable, Young	Somehow similar Image perceptions. Somehow positive Image.
Justin Trudeau	Conservative, Friendly, Confident	Elegant, Confident, Contemporary	Confident, Solid, Nice	Similar Image perceptions Positive Image
Boris Johnson	Unkempt, Negative Image in general	Unserious, Informal, Image close to the crowd	Intention to be close to the people, Messy	Somehow similar Image perceptions. Somehow negative Image
Vladimir Putin	Strict, Distant, ‘A true leader’	Ruler with power, Embodiment of a leader, Erudite person	Leader, Aggressive, Attempts of being liked by the public	Mostly similar Image perceptions. Mostly positive Image. Power Image. Suitable Image.
Joe Biden	Communicative, Open, 'A	Confident, Well	Serious, Good looking	Mostly similar Image perceptions.

	typical American'	maintained person	despite his age, Classic	Positive Image.
Narendra Modi	Philosopher, Wise man, Representative of his culture	Wise man, purity, Good representation of his culture	Wise, Spiritual, Good representation of his culture	Overlapping Image perceptions. Positive Image.
Ursula von der Leyen	Conservative, Classical, female public servant	Spokesperson, Conservative and bureaucratic presence, Indifferent	Conservative, Absence of some 'typical' ladylike features	Overlapping Image perceptions. Indifferent Image.
Jair Bolsonaro	Layperson, Uninterested, Sports-person	Sportsperson, Unconcerned	Layperson, Sportsperson	Overlapping Image perceptions. Somehow negative Image
Angela Merkel	Strict, Conservative, Stressed	Conservative, Lack of female traits	Conservative, strict	Overlapping Image perceptions. Somehow indifferent Image.
Xi Jinping	Leader, Strict, Fearsome	Strong, Leader	Classical, friendly	Somehow similar Image perceptions. Somehow positive Image. Somehow power Image
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	Traditionalist, Instable, Uncertain	Father of the nation, Traditionalist	Grandfather of the nation, traditionalist	Somehow similar Image perceptions. Somehow indifferent Image.

The component of appearance was acknowledged, by everyone, that has an impact on the Idea that we form for someone. Other qualities are important as well, but the impressions when information is limited are to be taken into account. As the Greek group concluded, probably, the way one “reads” appearance is a combination of a biological sense and constructed abstractions.

Finally, the largest number of participants get informed by the media, yet they are skeptical about their reliability. People shared that they do feel that can be manipulated in one way or another by these channels (See, again **Table 2**).

Table 2. Aspect positioning (Group/Summary)

Aspect Discussed:	Greek Group	Bulgarian Group	Estonian Group	General
On Appearance	Matters importantly. Based on biological and socially constructed traits.	It matters. Based on culture (constructed perceptions). Could be also biologically.	Somehow matters. Based on biological matters. Could also be on cultural (constructed) basis.	Opinions almost overlap.
On Gender	Agreement that women are underrepresented. However, from the discussed decision-makers, men are perceived as more suitable for high power positions.	Women are underrepresented. Men are perceived as more suitable for a high power positions.	Women are underrepresented. Both men and women are somehow perceived as suitable for high power positions.	Opinions somewhat overlap.
On Media	General source of information for the participants.	General source of information for the participants.	General source of information for the participants.	Opinions overlap.
On Social Media	Partial engagement with political actors.		Partial engagement with political actors.	Opinions overlap.
On Media's Reliability	It is not sufficient.	It is not sufficient.	It is not sufficient.	Opinions overlap.
On Visuals in Media	They make a difference on influencing perceptions.	They make a difference on influencing perceptions.	They make a difference on influencing perceptions.	Opinions overlap.
On Geopolitical positioning	A deviation in one expected case was observed.	A somewhat deviation in one expected case was observed.	A somewhat deviation in one expected case was observed.	Expectations in the cases overlap.

4.3 Implications

Image-making is an influential tool in politics. It can allude to the Image of a state, an institution, a person, etc. Image, however, encompasses numerous elements. For instance, the appearance of an individual per se, or of a representative included.

Several hypotheses were made.

H.1: The more 'masculine' Image one has, the more likely is he/ she to be perceived as a powerful leader, suitable for the position appointed.

This statement proved to be correct. Indeed, the majority saw better suitability for male leaders, especially if they look more decisive, to be in a position of power. While female leaders seem to prefer following a masculine Image approach in order to be more competitive. This judgment has its base on the theory (e.g. Carlin & Winfrey, 2009; Ingenhoff & Klein's, 2018; Schneider and Bos, 2014; Turska-Kawa & Olszanecka-Marmola, 2016;), and additionally was empirically proved by the results from the groups.

As an outcome of the study, an observation that occurs is that people do not necessarily like a particular decision-maker, as such, who looks powerful, but they find that appearance suitable for governance.

H.2: The Image, which relies among else on appearance, is navigated by stereotypes. Especially gender stereotypes. The bigger, and powerful the state is, the less "suitable" will be perceived, a female head of state to be in office, particularly when feminine characteristics are visibly declared in her presence.

That statement proved again correct, in the sense that participants observe unequal gender perceptions. Furthermore, the bigger the state of representation is the more female traits are visibly suppressed.

Women's underrepresentation is one of the major aspects that this thesis addressed. The topic is not only conceptual. To illustrate the non-abstract nature of it, one can think of a recent case famously known as 'sofagate'. It refers to a diplomatic episode involving the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen. During a visit to Turkey, for a talk on a high level on women's rights, she was not offered an equal positioning as

her male colleague Charles Michel, the President of the European Council, despite them being equal as a professional rank (Boffey, 2021). This triggered many reactions in the EU from diverse political figures, and from the public as well. Gender inequality continues to be a theme even on the highest level. Von der Leyen, delivered a speech in front of the European Parliament on the topic, pointing out how crucial is the discussion of the subject. Among else, she said: "I am the first woman to be President of the European Commission. I am the President of the European Commission. And this is how I expected to be treated when visiting Turkey two weeks ago, like a Commission President, but I was not. I cannot find any justification for the way I was treated in the European Treaties. So, I have to conclude, it happened because I am a woman. Would this have happened if I had worn a suit and a tie? In the pictures of previous meetings, I did not see any shortage of chairs. But then again, I did not see any woman in these pictures, either. [...] Because this is not about seating arrangements or protocol. This goes to the core of who we are. This goes to the values our Union stands for. And this shows how far we still have to go before women are treated as equals. Always, and everywhere" (von der Leyen, 2021). Protocol and public appearance, quite often, are the construction of the rules, being visible. Therefore, equality should be discussed and researched on every level.

The H.3, that: *In accordance, with the diverse geopolitical context, public opinion will shift slightly on a nexus of an ally/enemy/neutral state decision-maker*, was proved right too. There was a differentiation in how some decision-makers were perceived when moving on the case spectrum as it was already discussed.

H.4: *If a decision-maker appears without a strong Image performance, the most likely is the public to observe the origin of its representation (state or other international entity) as a weaker actor in international relations*. This view, again was proved somehow correct. As people tend to connect unconsciously representatives with respected entities.

However, as one of the participants (V.K., 65), reminded there is an old Bulgarian proverb that goes "By your clothes, they gonna welcome you, but by your mind, they

will dispatch you”. It means that people will judge and approach someone through his external appearance, while this can create very lasting perceptions in the end. Still, one's work's results are not to be underestimated, since that aspect matters even more.

Nonetheless, appearance can contribute to a big part in Image creation, and Image can lead to instant conclusions. While the “mind” needs more time to be assessed. That can incorporate gender stereotypes or views. Sometimes on a global scale, in international relations, developments are happening way too fast. Besides, a “good”, in the meaning of a suitable, Image can give further advantages to the one maintaining it. “Clothing” the personality is possible to controls, to some extent, the outcomes desired, as the work is presented in a favorable light. By now we can say that in politics, quite frequently details matter.

Eventually, all of the decision-makers, execute with their appearance, a message of what position and entity they represent. For the public abroad that is evident. For instance, Emmanuel Macron is discerned as 'French' in his appearance. A person that is strong, but open and negotiable at the same time. Due to his age, lacking the credibility of a powerful leader in full, in some instances. While Justin Trudeau looks, seems very 'contemporary', in the same manner, that Canada appears like an example of a contemporary state. Russia's Vladimir Putin and China's Xi Jinping were perceived as powerful leaders to powerful states.

Therefore we can conclude from the study experiment, that the correlation of the personal Image to the state (entity) Image is usually a frequent tactic of influence when it is intentional.

5. Conclusion

The objective of this thesis was to explore the influence of the external appearance, including gender distinction, of world decision-makers, in shaping perceptions abroad. Furthermore, it was investigated how the Image is created within the framework of one's presence, and how gender impacts it, especially when considering a representation. The centered, broader, research question was: “How does the appearance of global decision-makers affect public opinion's perception in different geo-territorial contexts?”.

This thesis had an experimental nature. The theoretical approach, however, was important to position the study. The main theoretical perspective that was followed was Constructivism. The independent variable of 'appearance' was connected to meanings as suitability or competence and concepts like power and Image. It drove on its visuality. Precisely on the idea of the 'image bite' (Schill, 2012). The personalization in politics (of states or institutional entities) and their further unconscious connection with respective, representative decision-makers were considered as a form of branding (Adam & Maier, 2010; Ingenhoff & Klein, 2018), (Peres et al.,2020). Consequently, that is, also, a form of soft power in international relations (Anholt, 2013, cited in Bucić, 2016; Bucić, 2016).

Additionally, a feminist line (part of gender studies) was implemented. In this thesis, the distinction between female and male was regarded as appearance categorization. Besides, the role of the Media and the geopolitical positioning of a particular country were analyzed. The dependent variable of 'public opinion' proved to be impacted by these factors.

Based on that, four related hypotheses to the main research question were made for a better understanding of the topic, which proved correct and was discussed in the previous subchapter, substantially.

To test the expectations, the model of MDSD was applied. Three states were selected as case studies, Bulgaria, Estonia, and Greece. The experimental part of the study consisted of the organization and conduction of online focus groups. These groups included a random sampling of diverse individuals, nationals of the case selected states. Participants were asked to evaluate current, world decision-makers, and answer questions, related to the topic in an online format through discussion. Later, the results were analyzed and compared to each other.

Appearance, the most visible part of one's presence seems to be neglected in the wider discussion of politics. In our interactions, we tend to consider that aspect of human existence importantly. Therefore, in a political representation, is more than expected to also have influence. In this work, an Image construction on an appearance-based categorization was presented.

Furthermore, there is a link between the Image of the decision-maker representing a particular entity and the entity itself.

The main, preliminary conclusions, from the thesis, proving the hypotheses, are:

- Male decision-makers have an advantage in being perceived as more suitable for top positions of power. Especially, the ones who look 'stronger'. However, a 'masculine' appearance profile is adopted by many female leaders, as a model of creating an “acceptable” Image.
- The bigger the state is, the more strict expectations are constructing the perceptions for the decision-makers' Image, especially for female leaders. These kinds of rules are breaking very slowly. Although, as we can observe, many women are now in top positions, leading states. Yet, in the G20 format, they are only two. Therefore, women in prominent positions, representing big entities have limited some of their female traits, probably to be more relevant for their posts, the participants from the three focus groups had noticed. Additionally, the

female Image's stereotyping in that theme prevents gender equality. Therefore that concept had to be addressed further.

- Where the state is located, vis-a-vis another state, and the quality of their relations, matter in the Image perceptions, of both the state and the respected decision-maker.
- Finally, the more 'indifferent', or on the contrary 'bold', one's Image is, the most likely is this Image to be transformed to, and affect, the state or entity of representation. If one's Image is neutral without leaving any impressions the state or entity, is most likely to be perceived as a weaker actor in international relations. Opposite, if a decision-maker can maintain a visible, personal, strong Image the most likely is the state/entity to be perceived as a powerful player in the global scene.

This study supports that other components matter significantly in political representation and state/entity positioning. However, there are big advantages in a suitable Image branding, as lasting perceptions influence politics.

By now, the literature has approached the correspondence between appearance and public opinion, mainly through the axis voter-candidate at a domestic level (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2010; King & Leigh, 2009; Lawson et al., 2010; Lenz, and Lawson 2011; Lutz, 2010; Rosenberg et al., 1986). Notwithstanding, not much research has been done in connection to how the appearance, and the broader Image of a public figure in power, affect the perceptions of the public abroad. Ingenhoff & Klein's (2018) research is one of the few academic studies about the leader's profile and the national branding of a certain state. However, their conclusions are regarding many components of a leader's Image and the state branding, with appearance being mentioned only as part of one of the dimensions that construction has (Ibid:4513). Hence, appearance occurred as an additional niche for investigation.

They (Ibid), as well as other scholars, have explored how gender distinction shapes perceptions in public according to power position, mainly due to the stereotyping that prevails women being assessed as suitable high representatives (e.g. Carlin & Winfrey, 2009; Schneider and Bos, 2014; Turska-Kawa & Olszanecka-Marmola, 2016;). As it is awaited, the expectations were based on the theory and further tested through the discussions.

In conclusion, this thesis contributes with the empirical verification that female leaders are indeed found to be less suitable rulers. Not only in high posts in a certain state, but also as heads representing powerful entities.

Moreover, as outlined earlier, the public does not necessarily like a particular decision-maker who looks powerful, per se, but it does find that power-image appearance, is suitable for governance. Therefore, the Image becomes more positive regarding governmental structures.

The public beliefs, in their majority, were pre-structured. Especially, in cases with a specific type of relations concerning a certain foreign state. The observations drew on the supplemental activation of the visual elements. Those elements strengthened or weakened the Image perceptions. Nonetheless, the geopolitical positioning, proved influential in the Image structure, even considering personal evaluation. Even so, the Image of a decision-maker can direct the course of the relations distinctively.

Lastly, the unconscious correlation among the visual presence of a decision-maker proved to be projected to the state branding accordingly. The visual “messages” of the decision-makers seem to be transmitted in the power positioning of a certain country.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Preliminary Questions for the Focus Group Discussions

Welcome notes:

-Researcher Introduction

-Researched Topic Presentation

General Instructions

First Part: Evaluation of the photographs and related questions

Second part: Additional questions related to the topic studied

Who is who? (Please introduce shortly yourself)

Photographs of world decision-makers presentation (See Appendix 2)

Who is in the picture?

What do you think of that person? What external characteristics are more visible to you?

What can you tell about the character of this person by looking at him/her?

What else can you tell about this leader by looking at him/her?

Mention real person as good leader! Why? How he/she appears?

Is Biden/Trudeau/Erdoğan/ Putin etc. a leader(s) you can trust?

Can you characterize {this} leader with only one word? Competent, strong, weak, smart etc? More positive or negative vibe do you have against him/her?

How much competence do you think he/she has? Why?

Who looks more friendly from these leaders / who more distant? Why?

Which world leader would you like to be your own national leader? Why?

Can you recall a particular saying or policy especially related to your state by some of the leaders presented?

About appearance

When we say Russia, U.S., or India (for example) does a specific person comes to your mind? Who? Why?

How a typical Russian/American/Indian (for example) looks like?

Appendix 1 (Continued)

Is there a particular set of external attributions that correspondent to personal characteristics linked to a particular national ones?

Do you believe that there is any correlation or link between look and behavior?

Have you ever caught yourself discussing with friends/ family/ colleagues etc. the appearance of someone in your daily life? How about politicians / or world leaders? Can you give me specific examples if so?

Is appearance important in general? Does it build the image?

Tell me a stereotype that comes to your mind about appearance! Do you think it is true?

Is it important how a decision-maker looks like? Why?

Do you believe that other citizens pay attention to the appearance of someone in general / of a world leader in particular?

About Gender

Does gender matters in politics? Let's discuss!

The EU has both female and male representatives. What do you think about it?

Are women enough represented politically in your country?

Are women represented politically in EU?

Are women represented politically in the world?

If there were more women in politics will it make any difference? Why?

Do you think that if a woman was leading Russia/USA/Turkey (for example) things would be any different in general? Why?

Media channels

From where do you get your main information?

Do you pay attention to the images in a news? Does they trigger your attention?

Are social media important in political sense? Do you "follow" any leader on Facebook/ Instagram or other social media? Why?

Appendix 1 (Continued)

What kind of information do you get from there?

Do you prefer sources that provide also images or videos (audiovisual materials) or text is enough? Do you read the whole text in a new usually?

Any news that you are particularly concern this period?

Last new about foreign state that comes to your mind?

Last new about foreign leader that comes to your mind?

Is it important to know things about other states and leaders? Why?

Are political cartoons something you read /enjoy? Do you believe that in them is showed the link between appearance characteristics and the character of someone?

Are political news more from an interest to you than other type of news? What other news you read?

Are media important at last?

Any final remarks that you want to share?

Thank you!

Decision-Makers Photographs Used In The Focus Groups

Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany

Photograph 1



Source For Photograph 1:

German Federal Government;

Photographer: Steffen Kugler

Available at:

<https://www.bundestkanzlerin.de/bkin-en/angela-merkel/a-profile>

Photograph 2



Source For Photograph 2:

Getty Images / Politico.eu, 2021

Photographer: Christian

Marquardt

Available at:

<https://www.politico.eu/article/trapped-in-germany-covid-coronavirus-nightmare/>

NB: This image is cropped

Boris Johnson, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

Photograph 3



Source For
Photograph 3:
Boris Johnson's
Official Facebook Page,
2020
Available
at:<https://www.facebook.com/borisjohnson/photos/a.238842266316/10157730436426317/?type=3&theater>
NB: This image is
cropped

Photograph 4



Source For
Photograph 4:
Boris Johnson's
Official Facebook Page,
2021
Available
at:<https://www.facebook.com/borisjohnson/photos/a.238842266316/10158100193216317/?type=3&theater>

Emmanuel Macron, President of France

Photograph 5



Source For Photograph 5:

Elysee

Présidence de la République

Photographer: Soazig de la Moissonnière

Available at:

<https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron>

Photograph 6



Source For Photograph 6:

Photographer: Soazig de la
Moissonnière

Available at:

<https://www.soazigdelamoissonniere.com/politics-portraits>

Jair Bolsonaro, President of Brazil

Photograph 7



Source For Photograph 7:

Getty Images / NBC News

Photographer: Brendan Smialowski

AFP, 2019

Available at:

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/trump-praises-brazil-s-far-right-president-white-house-n985116>

NB: The image is cropped

Photograph 8



Source For

Photograph 8:

Jair Messias Bolsonaro's

Official Facebook Page, 2020

Available

at: <https://www.facebook.com/jairmessias.bolsonaro/photos/a.250567771758883/2221082311374076/?type=3&theater>

Joe Biden, President of the United States

Photograph 9



Source For
Photograph 9:
President
Joe Biden's
Official
Facebook
Page, 2021
Available
at:<https://www.facebook.com/POTUS/photos/a.107570957986108/13281156212>

[8714](#) Photographer: Adam Schultz

Photograph 10



Source for
Photograph
10:
President
Joe Biden's
Official
Facebook
Page, 2021
Available
at:[https://www.facebook.com/POTUS/photo](https://www.facebook.com/POTUS/photos/a.107570957986108/156028769806993)

[s/a.107570957986108/156028769806993](https://www.facebook.com/POTUS/photos/a.107570957986108/156028769806993) Photographer: Adam Schultz

Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada

Photograph 11



Source For Photograph 11:
Canadian Prime Minister's
Office

Photographer: Adam Scotti

Available at:

<https://pm.gc.ca/en/about>

Photograph 12



Source For Photograph 12:

Justin Trudeau's Official
Facebook Page, 2021

Photographer: Adam
Scotti Available at:

[https://www.facebook.com/
JustinPJTrudeau/photos/10
159760408150649](https://www.facebook.com/JustinPJTrudeau/photos/10159760408150649)

Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India

Photograph 13



Source For Photograph 13:

Narendra Modi Official Facebook
Page, 2020

Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/narendramodi/photos/a.10150164299700165/10164676133485165/?type=3&theater>

Photograph 14



Source For

Photograph 14:

Narendra Modi
Official Facebook
Page, 2021

Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/narendramodi/photos/a.10150164299700165/10164947668745165/?type=3&theater>

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President Of Turkey

Photograph 15 (Used for the Greek Focus Group). Version 1



Source For
Photograph 15
(Version1):
AFP - Getty Images /
Politico, 2020
Photographer: Pavel
Golovkin, AFP
Available at:
[https://www.politico.eu/
article/recep-tayyip-erdogan-
to-visit-brussels-amid-turkey-](https://www.politico.eu/article/recep-tayyip-erdogan-to-visit-brussels-amid-turkey-)

[migration-standoff/](#)

Photograph 16 (Used For The Greek Focus Group). Version 1



Source For
Photograph 16
(Version1):
DHA via AP /
Montreal City News,
2020
Photographer: Can
Erok/DHA via AP
Available
at:[https://montreal.citynews.ca/2020
/11/29/turkeys-new-virus-figures-
confirm-experts-worst-fears/](https://montreal.citynews.ca/2020/11/29/turkeys-new-virus-figures-confirm-experts-worst-fears/)

VERSION 2

Photograph 15



Source For Photograph 15. VESRION2:

Presidency of the Republic of Turkey

Available at:

<https://www.tccb.gov.tr/receptayyiperdogan/portreler/>

Photograph 16



Source For Photograph 16.

VERSION 2:

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Official
Facebook Page, 2019

Available

at: <https://www.facebook.com/RErdogan/photos/a.10155512791238577/10157034641433577>

Vladimir Putin, President of Russia

Photograph 17



Source For
Photograph
17:KREMLIN,
2021
Available at:
[http://](http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/65173/photos/65370)
[en.kremlin.ru/](http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/65173/photos/65370)
[events/president/](http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/65173/photos/65370)
[news/65173/](http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/65173/photos/65370)
[photos/65370](http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/65173/photos/65370)

Photograph 18

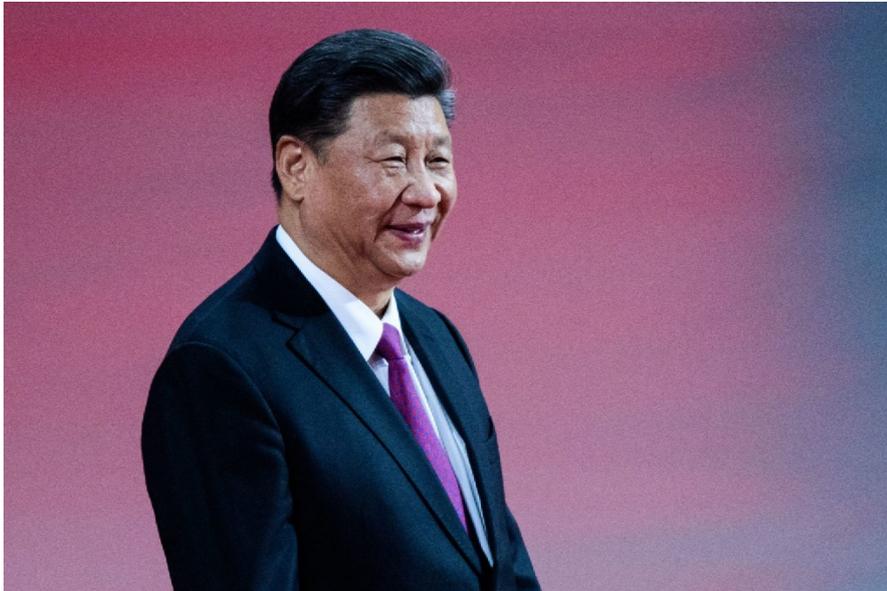


Source For
Photograph 18:
TASS /
KREMLIN,
2021
Available at:
[http://](http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/65174/photos/65373)
[en.kremlin.ru/](http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/65174/photos/65373)
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[65174/photos/](http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/65174/photos/65373)
[65373](http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/65174/photos/65373)

NB: The image is cropped

Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China

Photograph 19



Source For
Photograph 19:
AFP via Getty
Images / Politico
Photographer:
Anthony Wallace,
AFP
Available
at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-xi-jinping-china/>

Photograph 20



Source For Photograph
20:
Picture –
Alliance/Photoshot
AFP, ARD / DW.com
Available
at: <https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-china-detains-professor-who-criticized-president-xi-jinping/a-54065423>
NB: The image is cropped

Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission

Photograph 21



Source For Photograph 21:

EU Commission → ec.europa.eu, 2020

Photographer: Claudio Centonze

Available at:

<https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/album/M-003267/P-042322~2F00-01>

Photograph 22



Source For Photograph

22:

EU; EC - Audiovisual
Service

EU Commission →
ec.europa.eu, 2021

Photographer: Etienne
Ansotte

Available at:

<https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/photo-details/P-050232~2F00-43>

NB! Whenever the picture was retrieved from a news web site, the image does not correspond with the news itself. Also people, who took part in the focus group discussion, does not have any information from what events/occasions the pictures are from. They evaluated them as they are presented here.

NB 2! Whenever a year is not indicated it was not an available information to the picture presented.

Image Gallery References

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<https://www.facebook.com/narendramodi/photos/a.10150164299700165/10164676133485165/?type=3&theater>

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Focus Group Interviews: Consent Form Templates

The template is available in English, Greek and Bulgarian

INFORMED AND VOLUNTARY CONSENT

- I have been told about the purpose and topic of the focus group interview / discussion, and how my responses will be used.
- I have been able to ask questions about the focus group interview / discussion and they have been answered.
- I understand that any attributed quotes from the interview / discussion will be used for published academic purposes.
- I understand that I am not required to answer any of the questions and I can withdraw from the interview / discussion at any time.
- I agree to respect the other participants during the interview / discussion.
- **I agree to participate in this interview and to it being digitally recorded.**
- **I have allowed the initials of my name, as well my age, gender, level of education, and area of residence⁶³ to appear next to quotations, said by me during the focus group interview / discussion, for the purposes agreed in this Consent Form.**

Name: _____

63 The following refers not to an exact address, but to whether the participant resides in a big, small city or village.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

The consent form in Greek

Έντυπο Συγκατάθεσης Κατόπιν Ενημέρωσης

- Έχω ενημερωθεί για το σκοπό και το θέμα της συνέντευξης / συζήτησης της ομάδας εστίασης και επίσης έχω ενημερωθεί πώς θα χρησιμοποιηθούν οι απαντήσεις μου.
- Είχα την δυνατότητα να κάνω ερωτήσεις σχετικά με την συνέντευξη / συζήτηση της ομάδας εστίασης και οι απορίες μου έχουν απαντηθεί.
- Κατανοώ ότι τυχόν αποσπάσματα από τη συνέντευξη / συζήτηση θα χρησιμοποιηθούν για ακαδημαϊκούς σκοπούς.
- Κατανοώ ότι δεν είμαι υποχρεωμένος/ή να απαντήσω σε καμία από τις ερωτήσεις και μπορώ να αποχωρήσω από τη συνέντευξη / συζήτηση ανά πάσα στιγμή.
- Συμφωνώ να σεβαστώ τους υπόλοιπους συμμετέχοντες κατά τη διάρκεια της συνέντευξης / συζήτησης.
- Συμφωνώ να συμμετέχω σε αυτήν την συνέντευξη και γνωρίζω πως ηχογραφείται / βιντεοσκοπείται ψηφιακά.

- Έχω επιτρέψει τα αρχικά του ονοματεπώνυμο μου, καθώς και η ηλικία, το φύλο, ο βαθμός εκπαίδευσης μου και η περιοχή διαμονής⁶⁴ μου να εμφανίζονται δίπλα σε αποσπάσματα, τα οποία είπα κατά τη διάρκεια της συνέντευξης / συζήτησης της ομάδας εστίασης, για τους σκοπούς που συμφωνήθηκαν σε αυτήν τη φόρμα συναίνεσης.

Όνοματεπώνυμο: _____

Υπογραφή: _____ Ημερομηνία: _____

The consent form in Bulgarian

Формуляр за съгласие за информирано участие

- Осведомен/на съм за целта и темата на интервюто / дискусиата във фокус групата и знам как ще бъдат използвани моите отговори.
- Имах възможност да задам въпроси относно интервюто / дискусиата във фокус групата и на тях беше отговорено.
- Разбирам, че всички мой цитирани мнения от интервюто / дискусиата ще бъдат използвани с академични цели.
- Разбирам, че от мен не се изисква да отговарям на нито един от въпросите, ако не желая и мога да се оттегля от интервюто / дискусиата по всяко време.

64 Το συγκεκριμένο αναφέρεται όχι σε συγκεκριμένη διεύθυνση ή περιοχή καθεαυτή, αλλά εάν ο/η συμμετέχων διαμένει σε μεγάλη πόλη, κωμόπολη ή χωριό.

- Съгласен съм да уважавам останалите участници по време на интервюто / дискусията.
- **Съгласен съм да участвам в това интервю и то да бъде дигитално записано.**
- **Разрешавам инициалите на моето име/фамилия, както и моята възраст, пол, степен на образование и район на пребиваване⁶⁵, да се появяват до цитати, казани от мен по време на интервюто / дискусия във фокус групата, за целите, договорени в този формуляр за съгласие.**

Име и Фамилия : _____

Подпис: _____

Дата: _____

⁶⁵ Отнася се до това дали участникът пребивава в голям, малък град или село.

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16/05/2021

