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POLITICAL COMMUNICATION THROUGH PARTY CHANNELS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF ESTONIAN POLITICAL PARTIES' COMMUNICATION DURING THE EUROPEAN REFUGEE CRISIS 2015 – 2016

Master's Thesis

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ABSTRACT

The refugee crisis that used to concern some European countries turned into a pan-European problem when the EU agreed that all member states should accept and take care of some refugees. In April 2015, Estonia was confronted with this reality and its political elite, organised in six different parties that are represented in the national parliament, started to discuss the issue at hand. This thesis employs a quantitative content analysis in order to map out the positions of the different parties, along with their argumentative style, general attitude towards refugees, and main topics that were connected with the refugee question. The different positions are also compared across two different platforms, first the respective party webpage, second the parliament faction section. The second aim of this thesis is to examine how the different parties would adjust their discourse according to internal and external events that happened between April 2015 and March 2016. Finally, there is a discussion on the validity of the party press release as an individual type of media. This model will then be juxtaposed to Hallin's spheres in order to find out whether the old paradigm still has some validity in the modern, interconnected world

Keywords: Estonia, Refugee Crisis, Quantitative Content Analysis, Political Communication

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INTRODUCTION

We should have value-based positions, and not political parties scoring points.

Kalle Palling, Chairman of the European Union Affairs Committee in Estonia
13.10.2015

The devastating civil war in Syria, ISIS' actions in the Middle East, and ethnic and religious strife in Africa have all contributed to a severe influx of refugees to the relatively safe neighbouring states and, eventually, to the European continent in the early months of 2014. Since then, the member states of the European Union discuss both within their own national parliaments and among each other about how to deal with the more than 1.2 million refugees that were registered in 2015 alone (Eurostat, 2016). Soon, the law known as the Dublin Regulation was put into question; Dublin III, the most recent version of the law at the time, stated that the first EU member state where a refugee sets foot would also be the state to examine the refugee's claims to asylum and potentially grant asylum to that refugee (European Union, 2013). Whilst the EU member states around the Mediterranean Sea had always been the ones to bear the brunt of refugee influx, within the context of the crisis at hand this imbalance was drastically increased and countries such as Italy soon started to incentivise asylum seekers to move northwards into other EU member states and register for asylum there instead (Spiegel, 2013).

One of the core principles of the European Union, namely the open border policy articulated in the Schengen Agreement (European Union, 2009), became a source of uncertainty for many countries, particularly for those that had been previously unaffected

by immigrants from the southern Mediterranean shores; even high EU Commissioners stated that Schengen has to be revised or temporarily suspended in the wake of unregistered refugees who could settle where they please while the respective host countries had little to no awareness of their presence (WDR, 2015). Within only a few months, in April 2015, the European Commission's Joint Foreign and Home Affairs Council published a press release containing a ten-point action plan that suggested an 'EU wide voluntary pilot project on resettlement' and, more broadly, to 'consider options for an emergency relocation mechanism' (European Commission, 2015).

Doubling down on the issue at hand, German Chancellor Angela Merkel proposed introducing an EU-wide quota for distributing asylum seekers across Europe in order to share the burden of the sudden influx of refugees (Telegraph, 2015). This proposal suggested to implement a mechanism comparable to the *Königsteiner Schlüssel* (Königstein key), a German framework that, largely on the grounds of tax revenue and population of the different German federal states, determines the distribution of joint funding for different endeavours and is now also used for distributing refugees among the federal states (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2016). In particular, Merkel's suggestion hit a nerve within most countries previously unaffected by refugee immigration because it was a compulsory distribution mechanism determined by a country's financial status and population size rather than by voluntary agreements and pledges by individual governments.

One of the countries that initially categorically opposed this compulsory quota system is the Republic of Estonia. While the debate on the technicalities of the quota were still ongoing, the Estonian *Riigikogu* and government rejected the proposed figure of 1,064 (ERR, 2015a). During the months following Merkel's initial proposals regarding the redistribution of refugees, several events both internationally and within Estonia shifted the discourse in different directions until, in March 2016, the first refugees from Iraq, Syria, and Yemen set foot on Estonian soil (Postimees, 2016a). It is beyond doubt that Estonian public political discourse has experienced and continues to experience changes.

The aim of this thesis is to examine how the different parties that have seats in the Estonian parliament stylise the discussion over the period of twelve months, from April

2015 until March 2016. In this thesis, the focus will lie on the communication channels that the parties fully control, namely their respective party webpages and the factions section on the webpage of the Estonian parliament. In the past, many research articles have attempted to utilise a holistic approach, however a number of them fall short because said approach includes many variables, some of which are incalculable or difficult to process through the data that is available to the researcher. This thesis is thus puts a strong emphasis on understanding what the parties and individual politicians say rather than how it is publicised by independent media outlets or how it is received by the public. This approach has been chosen by the author because it provides the reader with a clear understanding of what the different parties want their political messages to be without any adjustments or filters.

There are three main questions that will be addressed in this thesis: (1) How do the parties' statements across the two platforms differ regarding argumentation, rhetorical instruments, and prioritisation over other topics? (2) Do real-life events have any effect on the way the different parties communicate and, if so, what effects do they have? (3) Does this case study fit into the paradigm of Hallin's spheres of discourse? The first two questions will be addressed through quantitative content analysis in order to contribute to the existing research on political communication and the causal relationship between outside events and inside politics. The third question will employ Hallin's theorem in a completely new environment, namely party statements rather than independent media, and test whether its tenets are also usable outside of their usual realm. Finding the answers to these three interconnected questions will offer a valuable insight into how and why the various Estonian political parties communicated their policies regarding the European refugee crisis between April 2015 and March 2016 in the fashion in which they did. In order to answer this question, we will first outline the theoretical framework and elaborate on the methodological framework.

CHAPTER I. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Political communication is a vast field that has been developed over the past few decades and experienced an increasing degree of mixture with other theories, both of qualitative and quantitative, positivist and constructivist nature. It is thus of grave importance for this thesis to map out the theory which it treats as its foundation. We will first define what *doing politics* means in this context, then concern ourselves with the question of how the term *political communication* is treated in this thesis, and finally link the paradigm of *Hallin's spheres* into our theory.

1.1 Doing Politics

In the public eye, the mere term 'politics' leads many people to think of it as a largely biased field that, unlike physics, chemistry, or even other social sciences like history, cannot and perhaps should not be approached in an unbiased manner (Heywood, 2013: 2). Regardless of whether this is an appropriate understanding or not, what certainly holds true is the notion that people across the globe engage in it, be it intentionally or tacitly. 'Man', so Aristotle would claim, 'is by nature a political animal' (Perseus, 2016) because mankind has the ability to communicate through spoken and written language, as well as to grasp abstract moral concepts, though the formulation and discussion of such concepts is of course up for debate.

Politics can be understood as the process of negotiating compromise out of a state of disagreement; between humans, these negotiations are undertaken through language,

but also symbols, pictures, or even silence that all carry meaning and are thus subject to interpretation of the originator, the recipient, and the audience. Whatever the style of negotiation and whatever the outcome, we can conclude that 'communication is therefore central to politics' (Hague et al., 1998: 3-4). This appreciation for communication is also at the core of Ruth Wodak's concept of *Doing Politics* which she devised in her book *The Discourse of Politics in Action*. She elaborates on six dimensions of doing politics that play intrinsic roles in the perception and enactment of politics in the public sphere (Wodak, 2011: 24):

> 1. The staging/performance of politics (the 'field of politics' and the 'habitus' of politicians; front stage);
>
> 2. The everyday life of politicians/politics (the backstage; communities of practice; politics du couloir);
>
> 3. The impact of the personality of individual politicians on their 'performance' (active/passive politicians; proactive / reactive politicians; charisma / attraction / credibility / persuasion);
>
> 4. The mass production of politics and politicians ('making of politicians' through advisers, the media, spin-doctors and so forth); this dimension necessarily interacts dialectically with the first two dimensions;
>
> 5. Recontextualization of everyday politics in the media (fiction);
>
> 6. Participation in 'politics' (issues of power, ideology, gate-keeping, legitimacy, representation, etc.)

Of these six dimensions, especially number one, three, and six are important for this thesis. The performance of politics on the front stage is important to this thesis because it relates directly to the choice of sources, namely the party and parliament webpages. The importance of individual politicians versus their respective parties is also taken into account in this research and will be closely monitored. Finally, questions surrounding ideology and legitimacy are absolutely central to this thesis. On the other hand, it is very difficult to delve into the everyday life of politicians because most researchers can't get access to these types of information. The ideas stipulated in points four and five are beyond the scope of this research precisely because it chooses to ignore

the actions of the middleman – the media – and the audience and instead focus on the statements issued by the different parties. It would be equally hazardous to interpret how the politicians were 'made' by spin-doctors, and to put parties' statements into a context which they did not choose or to which they did not intend to be connected.

The first of the three dimensions of doing politics that are relevant to this thesis is the staging and performance of politics. As such, the medium of interaction is crucial because it decides the 'battle ground' for politics and the potential possibility of dialogue. As a first step, it is important to distinguish between, on the one hand, the rare occasions where dialogue is possible, for example in a question-and-answer setting or talk shows, and, on the other hand, non-interactive means of communication like press releases and speeches in parliament. The second step is to ascertain what the communication channel is; party websites, social media, and online newspapers tend to have comment sections in which the average citizen can express their opinion and interact with fellow citizens, but rarely with the politicians that uttered the respective political statements in the first place. These types of media are, by creating an illusion of interaction, all contributing to the establishment of a 'one-way communicative street' (Harvey, 2014: 1335). Online media is thus distinctly different from traditional print media and television because the latter do not pretend to be interactive; the audience watching a TV news broadcast has no means of interaction and the readers of newspapers only have the chance to write a letter to the editor which, firstly, has a very low chance of being published and, secondly, still only offers the chance of a one-time reply rather than a proper dialogue.

The second factor which we have mentioned with reference to political discourse is the choice of words. As was discussed in the paragraph above, 'the media, especially news formats in television, seem to be reducing complex processes into brief spotlights, snippets, or 'scoops' (Wodak, 2011: 18). Adjusting to these different types of communication is has been a crucial skill ever since and, of course, was soon picked up by the politicians and spin-doctors who would attempt to use the nature of the symbiotic relationship between the media and the world of politics to their advantage. There are two types of adjustments that have to be taken into consideration; firstly, all politicians who want to increase the likelihood of gaining airtime on television should be prepared to have key sentences that encapsulate their opinion as concisely as possible so the TV stations do not have to edit large parts of a long statement; secondly, as Svensson rightly points

out, the language used in political speeches has become more simplistic and emotionally, thereby leading to a less argumentative climate in which politicians address the public directly and much less frequently debate with one another (Svensson, 1993).

The second dimension of doing politics that is relevant for this thesis is the impact of the personality of the respective politicians. Personalisation in politics is by no means a new discovery; a certain degree of cult has always surrounded leaders of dictatorships, monarchies, and democracies alike, ranging from Caesar in Ancient Rome to Thatcher in the United Kingdom of the 1980's (Giddens, 1998). The personalisation of politicians in parliament, however, is a somewhat recent development which recently started attracting interest within the study of political science (Renwick & Pilet, 2016). This personalisation process within parliament is partially fuelled by particular electoral systems that encourage voters to connect with their local representative as much as they traditionally align with a particular party. Such structural traits then compete with a nation's 'appetite' for personalised politics; for example, one culture might be more prone to appreciating charismatic and vociferous politicians whereas another culture appreciates the epitome of the 'silent workhorse'. In this regard, Wodak's insistence on charisma and attraction is, generally speaking, going in the right direction but also shows a relative disregard for societies which are not just indifferent towards fanfare but even respond negatively to it.

Finally, the third dimension of doing politics that is relevant to this thesis is that of the style of participation in politics. Wodak refers explicitly to larger phenomena like 'power, ideology, legitimacy, representation, and gate-keeping' (Wodak, 2011: 24). Such concepts are often referenced in conjunction with mythologisation, exaggeration, understatement, or outright lies. What matters is thus not just the topic that is being referred to but also the way it is being portrayed. Thus, we cannot ignore the significance of language. Language is regarded by many as one of the most crucial parts of shaping political discourse because, for all the different types of medium and styles of discourse, language is the unifying factor on which, traditionally, all actors and members of the audience agree. Ideally, the language that is being used in political discourse is understood by the entire population. Even under such ideal circumstances it must be noted that language as a concept always produces the risk of creating ambiguity instead of the desired clarity.

In discourse, Huckfeldt contends, 'inaccurately perceived messages may also be influential, and for many purposes it is the perceived message that is most important for the choice that a citizen makes' (Huckfeldt, 1998: 998). With this, he takes a matter-of-fact approach and implicitly underlines the audience's responsibility to properly dissect the statements that they encounter. Hansson, however, is quick to remind us that this approach is, at best, naïve about the intentions of the political actors; 'officeholders may choose to represent their actions at high levels of generality and abstractness so that it becomes less clear what they actually did or are doing' just as much as the opposition can make claims unsupported by reality (Hansson, 2015: 303).

Legitimacy and the process of legitimation are also hotly contested in the quest for moral superiority; in order to achieve it, politicians often use rhetorical tricks such as reference to one's own importance, legitimacy, past track record of ethical decision-making, or even narratives that present the audience with a cautionary tale, a logic which infers that the actor's 'legitimate actions are rewarded and non-legitimate actions are punished' (Van Leeuwen, 2007: 92). Political communication is, of course, not only important for the link between politicians and their respective audiences, but also for the connection between the politicians and their advisors; flawed communication between the advisor team and a politician, Larocca is quick to remind us, can have an equally grave impact on that politician's interaction with the public, particularly when selective information is intentionally being withheld in order to divert a particular agenda (Larocca, 2004).

1.2 Political Communication

Political communication, in its most widely accepted definition, describes all acts that are 'purposeful communication about politics' (McNair, 2003: 4) which are publicly perceivable for an audience. This audience does not have to be physically present but may also seek to attain access to the aforementioned communication through recorded files or via the Internet. In the early 2000s, scholars concerned themselves with the question

whether the advent of the Internet would facilitate creating a new culture of educational exchange or if, in fact, the new technology might soon lead to 'a new cleavage emerging between the information-rich and information-poor' (Norris, 2003: 120). This sentiment of hesitation soon faded away and gave way for a new way of communication, facilitating information and goods exchange alike. This novel type of information exchange did not go unnoticed in the realm of politics and soon got exploited by party leaders and spin-doctors alike; online campaigning and political discussions are now a regular occurrence in our daily lives and have thus also become a part of how political communication is understood.
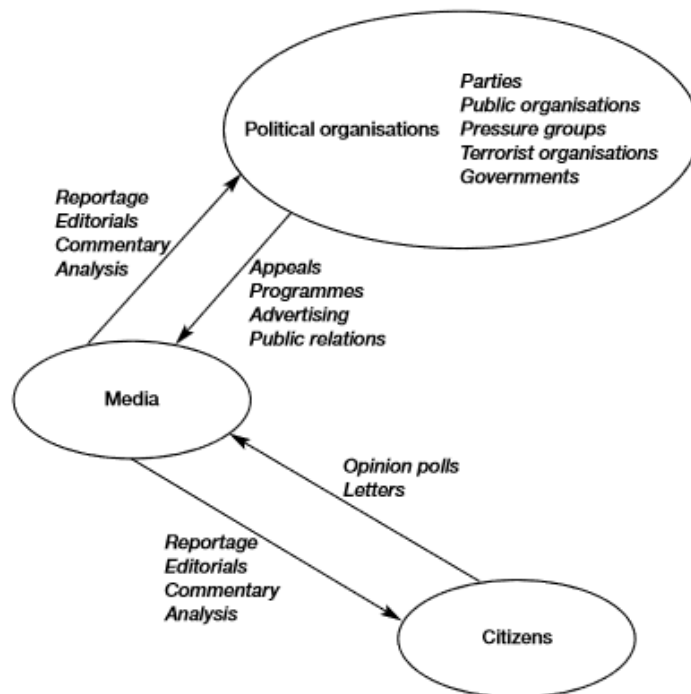

Figure 1: Elements of political communication (McNair, 2003: 6)

As we can see, political communication is based on roughly the same tenets as the six dimensions which are found in Wodak's conceptualisation of doing politics. All three main agents, political organisations, the media, and the citizens, act and react according to different stimuli which the political scientist hopes to discern. However, the link between the different agents can be fragile in itself; a media outlet can decide not to print a reader's letter, citizens often have a confirmation bias which shields them from reading newspapers with which they disagree. Similarly, political organisations such as parties are at times treated differently by different newspapers according to their own political

leanings, and in return a media outlet may often struggle to get proper interviews with straightforward and honest politicians. McNair's concept of how political communication works is, at best, rather optimistic and it would be even more fragile if one were to take into account individuals' character traits or even cultures and social practices in different countries.

Nonetheless, parties can, as Sartori suggests, 'best be conceived as means of communication' (Sartori, 1976: 28). Since the advent and widespread use of the Internet, however, political parties are no longer necessarily tied to the media outlets as the middlemen and propagators. Rather, they can set up own communication channels where they can directly channel information to the target audience. New ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) give a political party or an individual politician the opportunity to have more personalised contact with the population and tailor the content to what the citizens wish for (Römmele, 2003: 7).

In real life, this theory falls somewhat short because newspapers, while they by no means possess the monopoly on information as they used to for centuries, are still powerful actors. Thus, the websites of political parties are mostly frequented by party followers or, more generally, an audience with the suitable confirmation biases already in place. The audience is ultimately too small to make a tangible difference in, for example, an election and politicians still need to rely on Public Relations work and flamboyant behaviour to make headlines in traditional news outlets.

Regardless of this, party webpages with newsletters and archives continue to exist with good reason; it can be argued that, on a small scale, the different parties take on responsibility with all the rights and duties that are usually reserved for members of the media. The rights would include the ability to publish as often and lengthily as the party desires, but there would also be responsibilities; because there is no middleman in this scenario, blame for miscommunication can only be assigned to the party that posted the message. In practical terms, taking over the role of the media – on whatever scale – also means that there is a certain need to practice self-restraint and, in some cases, self-censorship. After all, the traditional media outlets still exist and frequent the parties' pages to look for misconduct that they can still decry in public with a much larger audience than the party page itself would ever have.

Thus, the modern era allows political parties to become media outlets themselves, albeit small ones, and interact with the electorate according to their own abilities. In the following section, this new understanding of who or what constitutes 'media' will flow into Hallin's spheres, a paradigm that has so far only been used for traditional media.

1.3 Hallin's Spheres

Daniel C. Hallin wrote the book *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam* which concerned itself with the media's role and how it developed during the United States' war against North Vietnam (Hallin, 1986). It became the point of reference for many scholars who conducted research in media discourse (Mindich 2000, Zuckerman 2013), particularly due to a model that is known as *Hallin's Spheres* (see Figure 2).
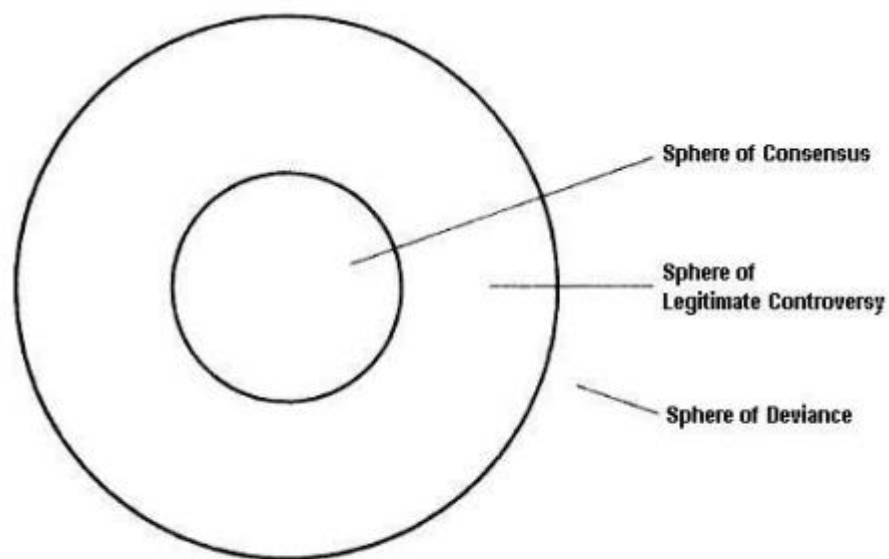

Figure 1 Spheres of consensus, controversy, and deviance.

Figure 2: Hallin's Spheres (Hallin, 1986: 117)

Moving from the core towards the outer layers, we first find the sphere of consensus which Hallin seems to be 'those social objects not regarded by the journalists and most of the society as controversial' (Hallin, 1986: 116). Relating this to general

discourse, we will treat the sphere of consensus as 'the sphere where a culture's main values reside' (McGrail, 2008: 70). Next, there is the sphere of legitimate controversy which is the main arena in which media and politicians discuss controversial issues that are 'recognized as such by the major established actors of the American political process' (Hallin, 1986: 116). Beyond that lies the sphere of deviance which consists of voices 'which journalists and the political mainstream of the society reject as unworthy of being heard' (Hallin, 1986: 116).

Arguably, Hallin's spheres do not concern themselves with the analysis of identity, how it is being created, how it is maintained, or how it is changed. Rather, they construct a rudimentary framework for how societal discourse is usually built up, from the values upon which everyone can agree to those that are highly disputed. In *The Uncensored War*, Hallin used these three spheres as a way to present his data on journalism during the Vietnam War; in essence, he conducted content analysis of various newspapers, categorised the assembled articles among topical lines, and plotted them across a positive-neutral-negative spectrum.

From this he was able to draw several conclusions; those categories in which most articles were situated must by default be in the sphere of legitimate controversy. Topics that are part of the sphere of consensus need not be debated as they are taken for granted, whereas topics that are part of the sphere of deviance are shunned and banned from mainstream political discourse. Still, the framework allows for an assessment of which discourses and disputes are the most contested with regard to their dominance. Through the juxtaposition of what is being contested and what is not we can deduce which topics are the pillars of Estonian self-understanding and which are out-of-bounds. As Olick suggests, the discourse that establishes itself as the dominant one creates the normalcy which 'is as much an endogenous feature of collectivities as it is an external standard' which we can thus assess (Olick, 1998: 382).

Furthermore, it is logical that politicians, due to their desire to garner popular support, will have to conduct themselves in accordance with the rules of discourse that are acceptable to the population or otherwise have their remarks rejected by the audience. Communication within the context of politics is thus 'based upon a set of conventions, which are observed by both discourse partners if they want to orient their interaction

towards a face-saving discourse' (Grillo, 2005: 90). Traditionally, this is particularly the case when the topic of discourse is about a certain minority, be it religious, ethnic, sexual, or social (Grillo, 2005: 91).

Originally, Hallin's spheres were exclusively created as a leitmotif for how traditional media outlets construct discourse. Hallin explicitly views journalists as the gatekeepers and middlemen of discourse, who mediate conflict and exclude unnecessarily cruel and undesirable groups of society from the discourse. In his opinion, the media is supposed to show awareness of occasions that require no discussion, for example 'the journalist does not seek opposing points of view on a firefighter risking his life to save an infant from a burning house (McGrail, 2008: 70). At the same time, the media must also serve as the defender of the outer boundaries of valid political discourse and thus has a distinct interest in maintaining the border between what can be said and what can't be said because it is inacceptable (Hallin, 1986: 117). He thereby implies that the journalist, being the third party, is required to make communication between two parties reliable, understandable, and 'civilised', to decide what can be taken for granted and what must be rejected. The third research question, stipulated both in the introduction and the following chapter, aims to take out the middleman and see whether communication between the two original parties, the politicians and society, is feasible or not.

Hallin's spheres are also constructed to most appropriately mirror a society which has past experience with a certain topic. In its original conception, the Vietnam War was the reference topic and, arguably, sacrificing and fighting for their own freedom or the freedom of others had been part of American conscience and patriotism for a long time. Thus, an insult to a war veteran would automatically be rejected by society. Estonia, on the other hand, had never had any noteworthy interaction with immigrants with the exception of forced migration under Soviet occupation which is an entirely separate topic. Thus, the question presents itself whether Hallin's spheres can persist in an environment in which there may be no rules with regards to what can and can't be said.

We have established that content analysis can be a helpful approach when employed with the right tools at hand. Hallin's spheres offer us a vantage point from which we can, while acknowledging blurred boundaries, distinguish between different types of values that may or may not be worth discussing in a given society. Following the

content analysis, on which this thesis will elaborate in the third chapter, we will be able to deduce, both from the topics that were discussed and from the ones that were not, how the Estonian political parties treat the topic of the European refugee crisis and whether Hallin's spheres still apply in this new media framework.

CHAPTER II. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The topic choice for this thesis emerged during the author's first months of living in Estonia, while the various European countries were just starting to realise the scale of the challenge which the refugee crisis posed. This chapter contains elaborations on the research questions, a discussion on whether press releases constitute as a separate genre, an overlook over the selected empirical data, and an explanation with regards to the quantitative content analysis and qualitative discourse analysis methods employed in this thesis.

2.1 Research Questions

The research puzzle is deeply entrenched in the thesis title, namely 'Political Communication Through Party Channels: A Content Analysis of Estonian Political Parties' Communication During the European Refugee Crisis 2015 – 2016'. This thesis seeks to shed light on why the Estonian parties behave the way they do and whether the resulting type of discourse can be subsumed in Hallin's spheres, an old framework that could be brought to new life. In order to solve this puzzle, there are three questions which need to be addressed in order to come to a meaningful conclusion.

1. How do the different parties frame the refugee debate within their press releases regarding across the two platforms and how do they differ in terms of argumentation, rhetorical instruments, and prioritisation over other topics?

This question lays the foundation for the reader to understand what the different parties' positions were at the start and how they have since developed. As part of the methodology

this thesis will dissect differences in attitude towards refugees, argumentation style, the choice of platform, and the topic which the parties tie to the refugee crisis.

2. How do real-life events related to the refugee debate affect discourse in Estonia?

The second question concerns itself with the relationship that Estonian parties have with the different layers of the outside world – local, regional, national, and international – and whether they are more or less responsive to different types of events. In this part of the thesis, all questions related to real life events and their causal connections to political parties' behaviour will be disseminated. These questions will be answered through thorough coding, categorisation, and examination of the press releases and opinion pieces from various webpages and newspapers.

3. Does the discourse constitute a deviation from Hallin's spheres and, if so, how can this deviation be explained?

This question will be answered mostly with the help of Critical Discourse Analysis which will be employed to go through seven opinion pieces by different politicians and intellectuals. As was explained in Chapter I, the nature of the discourse – what is one allowed to say and what not? – helps us deduce where Hallin's spheres are situated in Estonian discourse. Finding the core that everyone can agree upon further implies what cannot be said, thus constituting the line to the sphere of deviance.

2.2 Press Releases as a Separate Genre

Over the past four pages we have established that there are a number of ways in which information can be, intentionally or unintentionally, distorted by the political actor, misrepresented by the media, or misunderstood by the audience. It has also been made clear that it is very hard for political scientists to calculate the reasons for each misunderstanding because of a grave lack of information and transparency within political parties, particularly within their elite circles, as well as the lack of resources to analyse which members of the audience misunderstood what part of the politician's

message for what reason. The only way of eliminating at least a few of these sources of misunderstanding is thus to exclude the various media outlets and their editorial boards from the chain of information. With this, we experience a significant drop in the number of sources we can use, but at least those are edited and published by the respective party, thereby ensuring that speeches and opinions are not unjustifiably cut into soundbites and ten-second clips. At this point, some political scientists rightly ask the question whether press releases should be regarded as a media genre in its own right.

Critics of this suggestion put forward that 'the raison d'être of the Press Release is to be retold (…) as accurately as possible, preferably even verbatim, in news reporting' and that it is thus not a separate entity with its own style and merits (Jacobs, 1999: xi). Furthermore, it is pointed out that press releases tend to be lengthier than journalists appreciate and thus have to be revised quite heavily in order to be featured in the news, be it on television or in print (Walters et al., 1994). Whilst both of these points are certainly true, they speak more in favour of regarding press releases as a separate media genre than Jacobs and Walters et al. would like to admit. The sole purpose of the press release, indeed, used to be a direct link to journalists with the hope that they would report on it as much as possible, if possible in its original form. Especially through the spread of the internet, however, the media landscape is now greatly diversified; both Facebook pages and dedicated webpages of political parties can attract thousands of followers and channel original statements without any interference straight to the target audience. The interaction with the media certainly still exists, however parties are no longer as dependent on them for the publishing of press releases as they used to be. Furthermore, the impact of confirmation bias is completely omitted in the argumentation of Jacobs; it is very natural for most citizens to follow those media channels, be they on television or in print, which reinforce their views rather than challenge them (Wittkopf & Jones, 2008: 311).

This means that people who strongly identify with right-wing values will likely avoid left-wing media and vice versa; more succinctly, even if a right-wing citizen were to read a centrist newspaper, there is the obvious possibility that they would likely avoid articles about left-wing parties unless they are being portrayed in a negative light. The second argument, put forward by Walters et al. supports the legitimacy of press release as an independent media genre even further; if press releases were only made for

journalists to dissect, then this would indeed make press releases just another part of journalism and regular media coverage, but now the political parties are in a much more comfortable position in which they can produce both soundbites for the traditional media outlets and longer opinion pieces for their own targeted audiences, perhaps elaborating and offering context to the soundbites that initially garnered attention.

Moreover, parties can choose to what extent they want to rely on external coverage and for what purpose it should be generated; this means that press releases have emancipated themselves from being an inconvenient plague for journalists to acting as a party-controlled source of information which, for better or for worse, directly reaches its desired audience. Press releases can by no means replace media coverage because of the much wider circulation of the different media outlets, but they can now be read by the interested audience without any filters or unwanted intervention.

2.3 Empirical Data

Before German Chancellor Angela Merkel put forward the motion to create an EU-wide burden-sharing mechanism, there was virtually no discussion of the refugee crisis, neither between political parties nor as part of public discourse in general. Thus, the empirical data with which this thesis concerns itself spans from April 2015 until March 2016.

Within this time frame, there were many occurrences both inside Estonia and abroad. First and foremost, the events which act as markers where the political attitude or line of argument might shift, emerged inductively. Upon the first thorough sighting of the sources, the author of this thesis compiled a list of events that were generally regarded as meaningful either abroad or in Estonia, both by politicians and media outlets. For example, the two most prominent refugee debate-related events in Estonia were arguably the torching of the *Vao Pagulaskeskus*, Estonia's only accommodation centre for asylum seekers, on 3 September 2015 as well as the assembly of the *Odini Sõdalased*, the Estonian arm of the originally Finnish Soldiers of Odin, in February 2016. Outside of Estonia, the events that received noteworthy press coverage are the EU-wide quota debate

that went from April until June 2015, the death of Aylan Kurdi, a three year old refugee child who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea on 4 September 2015, the terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015, and the Brussels bombings on 22 March 2016. The distribution of these events over the various months will give us the opportunity to dissect whether different events had any effects on the frequency, tone, or arguments in the various parties' press releases.

There are two main sources of empirical data that will be used within this thesis. First, we will use files sourced from the archives of the various parties represented in the Estonian *Riigikogu* amounting to around 600,000 words. The parties' webpages constitute the 'ideal platform' because they are fully under party control; in this realm, the parties are the sole agenda and discourse setters in this environment and they can thus speak rather openly about any topic. In total, 135 posts from party webpages and 46 posts from the Riigikogu webpage, all of which were published between April 2015 and March 2016, were chosen for this research.

The environment serves as a type of open laboratory where opinion pieces, discussions, press releases, and invitations for interaction between politicians and the public are shared. For this research, we will take into account everything that is posted on the website regardless of classification in order to display the as much of the discourse within the different parties as is possible for an outsider. When we speak of outsiders, however, we need to note that these outsiders are assumed to be few in number, representing only a fraction of the population; the party webpages are usually only frequented by those who are interested in the party while most of the public excludes itself as an audience for lack of interest and time.

Corresponding with this assumption, the estimated website traffic for the Estonian parties is comparably low: the Conservative People's Party's webpage has an estimated 35 visits and 57 page views per day (2Compete, 2016a); the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union's webpage has an estimated 28 visits and 50 page views per day (2Compete, 2016b); the Centre Party's webpage has an estimated 74 visits and 171 page views per day (2Compete, 2016c); the Reform Party's webpage has an estimated 56 visits and 336 page views per day (2Compete, 2016d); the Social Democratic Party's webpage has an estimated 33 visits and 43 page views per day (2Compete, 2016e); and, finally, the Free

Party's webpage has an estimated 27 visits and 79 page views per day (2Compete, 2016f). Even when taking into account that Estonia's population is comparably small at 1.3 million, this is a rather low number of daily visits. We also need to bear in mind that oftentimes it will be content editors and politicians of the respective parties as well as journalists checking the webpages for their latest press releases. It has to be borne in mind that these numbers can only give an indication of the daily traffic and that it is not possible to determine how much of the traffic comes from the general public.

Nonetheless, as it has been justified in the theory section (particularly Chapter 1.2 and 1.3), what matters is the nature of these outlets. Analysing how the different parties handle their own communication channels can give us a direct insight into how the respective parties deal without the media as the middleman.

Second, we will draw upon the archives of the press releases via the webpage of the *Riigikogu*. This webpage is no longer 'party territory' and offers us a direct insight into how much more or less frequently the different parties use the more public channels for communication and whether there is any restraint in terms of content publications. It is important to note that this is a proper comparative case because it is still up to the individual parties to decide what they want to publish and what they want to withhold – the crucial difference is the potential audience and thus our research could reveal a difference in behaviour. The *Riigikogu* webpage does not only host press releases and general political news, but also offers sections informing its visitors about the parliament's history and current committee meeting schedules.

The press release and news section is the most sophisticated part of the webpage with a proprietary search engine and many search criteria that one can enable. The webpage of the parliament experiences far greater daily traffic with an estimated 1,155 visits and 3,235 page views per day (2Compete, 2016g). It can be assumed that the parties' communications officers will be fully aware of the fact that a press release published on the *Riigikogu* webpage will reach a significantly larger audience than one that is merely published on the party webpage – with all the good and bad consequences.

2.4 Quantitative Content Analysis

Content analysis is very much a positivistic approach by definition because it is based on the assumption that the knowledge is 'out there' waiting for researchers to be grasped and categorised, much like in the natural sciences. It also incorporates the norm of non-reactiveness which means that it only allows the researcher to use data that is already 'out there'; all sources that are used in this thesis were readily accessible without interference of the author and the research is thus non-reactive. This raises the necessity for us to distinguish between idealism and empiricism and elaborate on their respective merits. While proponents of idealism argue that thoughts and interpretations lie at the foundation of everything we call knowledge, empiricists contend that observation and validation of other observers, thereby ensuring that the experiment is reproducible, offer us objective and verified knowledge (Creswell, 2003). Formulating it more succinctly, quantitative content analysis concerns itself with the 'systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those categories using statistical methods' (Riffe et al., 2014: 3).

As was outlined in the theory section, McNair's understanding of political communication initially included three agents that were all interconnected. In this original setting, his model is very much compatible with Lasswell's model of mass communication which poses the question 'who says what to whom and with what effect' (Lasswell, 1948: 37). The model can be divided into five different steps, of which three will be covered throughout this thesis; first, control analysis asks who is the *communicator*; second, content analysis asks what *message* the communicator is forming; third, media analysis asks via which *medium* the communicator sends the message; fourth, audience analysis asks to which *audience* the communicator sends the message; and, finally, effects analysis asks which *effects* this process ultimately has. These five steps will be elaborated upon in the following paragraphs and, as we will discover, the first three of these steps also clarify the operationalisation of our data. Indeed, the steps four and five are irrelevant to this thesis because they concern themselves with the recipient and the interpretation of what happens during the transmission of the message. In this part

of the thesis, we will focus entirely on the agents that send the message, how they send it, and what the message contains.

2.5 Operationalisation of Data and Quantification Table

In order to properly understand how we seek to examine the collected data, we need to operationalise our five dimensions: Time, party, actor, attitude, and topic. Time is codified in months, ranging from April 2015 until March 2016. This offers us exactly one year for the assessment of how the refugee debate develops in Estonia. The second dimension of our operationalisation is the actor – for the mode of content analysis employed in this thesis we classify the party elite as the communicator rather than a particular person because all content that is being published both on the parties' webpages and on the *Riigikogu* webpage is supposed to be in the respective party's interest. A mere promotion of the values of an individual candidate would most likely be posted either on a personal blog or through opinion pieces in newspapers in which the politician in question can use their charisma and popularity to further their own agenda. Because 'party elites have a vastly more constrained and stable set of political preferences' (Jennings, 1992: 419) we might expect the messages on both the parties' webpages and the *Riigikogu* webpage to be more toned down than in newspapers' opinion pieces although they are written by members of the same parties. In terms of operationalisation, we thus have two dimensions reserved of our analysis is thus 'communicator', namely (1) which party is making the press release (2) whether it is the entire party or a particular person who makes that statement. Either way, it is understood that it is the party elite that decides to publish the article in question on the party webpage, the *Riigikogu* webpage, or both. We take into consideration only the elites of parties which are currently represented in the Estonian parliament, namely the Estonian Central Party (Eesti Keskerakond), the Conservative People's Party of Estonia (Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond – EKRE), the Estonian Reform Party (Eesti Reformierakond), the Estonian Free Party (Eesti Vabaerakond), the

Pro Patria and Res Publica Union (Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit - IRL), and the Estonian Social Democratic Party (Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond - SDE).

Another distinction that is important for one of the research questions is that of the 'agent'. There are two options; the first option, 'press release' is a closed variable in the sense that it can only mean that the respective party is regarded as both the author and the publisher of the post; the second option is 'individual politician' and it is an open variable in the sense that it does not refer to one single politician across all sources, but rather 'any single politician within the respective parties'. This is to ensure that, in the chapter on the analysis of empirical data, we will be able to distinguish between different vocal politicians within one party as well as press releases rather than just have a graph telling us in what ratio parties post press releases and individual politicians' posts. Ultimately, this measure was undertaken to facilitate observing the possible importance of personalised politics in Estonia.

One of the more ambiguous steps of content analysis is to categorise the messages expressed by the communicators. This third and fourth operationalisation variables concern themselves with the categorisation of attitude and argument. Attitude describes the actor's general stance not towards refugees per se but the refugee debate as a whole. There are three different attitudes in this dimension, namely 'positive', 'negative', and 'neutral'. A positive statement could, for example, be that 'the government is doing its job satisfactorily'. In this instance, the communicator does not make a reference to how they view the issue of immigrants but how it is being dealt with in different aspects which would ultimately lead to an improvement of the treatment of refugees. A negative statement could be that 'tolerance has gone too far in this country'. Again, there is no direct reference to the refugee debate but rather an evaluation of the situation at hand.

Both positive and negative statements, however, are still evaluations and thus represent the subjective assessments of the different parties. A neutral statement could be a comment on legal procedures for immigration into Estonia without any evaluation or opinion attached to it. Another example for a neutral statement would be an expression of condolences regarding the Paris bombings without making any reference to refugees in a positive or negative manner. The distinction between general positivity, negativity, and neutrality will thus serve as the second operationalisation variable.

The third operationalisation variable used in this thesis is 'style'. The three different options for this variable are 'Emotions', 'Facts', and 'Inaccessible'. As was argued in the theory section, distinguishing between different ways of argumentation says a lot about both how a party portrays itself – appealing to values, logic, reason, or emotions – and how it wants its messages to be perceived by the audience. This explicitly excludes the question of how the audience perceives the statements because it is very difficult to properly trace what kind of influence a party statement may have on the audience and how it is being perceived. The classification 'Inaccessible' is used solely for the early postings on the EKRE webpage of which one can only read the first two sentences.

This relatively loose definition of what constitutes a 'Positive', 'Negative', or 'Neutral' comment provides us with a great deal of flexibility in terms of the categories for the fourth operationalisation variable: 'topic'. For the purpose of this research, there will be seven different categories on which the article in question is based; 'European Union', 'Government', 'Economy', 'Culture', 'Security', 'Liberalism', and 'Multiple'. In the following paragraphs the seven different categories will be explained with comparative politics-related annotations as well as examples of search words. The different categories arose during the thorough sighting of all sources present in this quantitative content analysis. Said categories emerged because they describe all concerns brought up by the different politicians and parties in the pool of sources. As such, the following paragraphs describing the various categories were inductively created by the author and do not follow a set pattern taken from other sources.

European Union-related articles concern themselves with the role and impact of European Union policies or politicians. Search words for EU-related articles could range from 'Euroopa Liit' (European Union) over 'Juncker' (the President of the European Commission) to 'kvoot' (quota). While the connection to the EU is fairly obvious for the first two terms, the third one is rather subtle but no less important; when Estonian parties talk about the quota they directly refer to the quota which would redistribute 160,000 refugees already in European Union member states. This quota was debated in the EU's institution over the summer of 2015 and sparked a great number of reactions across Europe. In this sense, it is important to recall Durkheim's main realisation that 'we all use the same words without giving them the same meanings' and that the researcher thus has

to 'go beyond fleeting representations he owes to sense experience and in the end to conceive a whole world of stable ideals, the common ground of intelligences' (Durkheim, 1995: 437). Whilst it may be criticised that this could be seen as a deviation from a truly empirical data selection process, it must be argued that, in fact, many articles that are crucial to the debate would be ignored if we were only looking for articles that make direct references to the European Union. It is precisely this expansion in search terms that sheds light on the various modes of speech with which different parties communicate their opinions to the audience.

Government-related articles deal with references to the government of Estonia which is currently formed by a coalition of the Reform Party, the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union, and the Social Democratic Party. Indicators of a government-related article are search terms like 'valitsus' (government), words for individual government positions such as 'peaminister' (Prime Minister), or names such as 'Rõivas' (the surname of Taavi Rõivas, the current Estonian Prime Minister). Some party politicans are *éminences grises* who are very influential within their party but largely unknown to the public, there are also *party orchestration* politicians who have a lot of public name recognition but little power within the party, and finally there are *personalised leaders* who enjoy substantial public support and exercise power within the party because of how crucial they are to the party's attractiveness in elections – a prime example would be Edgar Savisaar (Blondel, 2010). As a result, parties at times resort to personalised press releases which criticise a particularly important or popular politician in order to destabilise said politician's public standing. It is thus imperative for us to include names in particular because the personalisation of politics plays a powerful role. As a final part of this section, there are also specific demands that the government has either fulfilled or failed to fulfil, for example the demand for a referendum – thus, words like 'rahvahääletus' (referendum) and 'mandaat' (mandate) are also included in the list of search words for government-related articles.

Economy-related articles refer to the economic situation of Estonia and how a certain event or decision could positively or negatively affect that situation. As an example, terms such as 'majandus' (economy) or 'majanduslik' (economical) are words clearly connected to the economy. There are, however, also other topical words that are

used frequently such as 'eelarve' (budget) which could be used to refer to refugees that either improve the economy or are a drain on the economy.

Culture-related articles span a very wide spectrum of things that concern society or groups within society - everything which 'includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (Tylor, 1974: 1). For the purpose of this research, most articles describe customary and moral-related instances such as the compatibility or incompatibility of certain 'Estonian values' with 'Muslim values', but there are also references to religion. Immediately related keywords are 'väärtused' (values) and 'kultuur' (culture), others are more distant such as 'kristlik' (Christian) and also terms that concern themselves with the plainly biological necessities for culture to survive, for example 'vananemine' (aging of society) and 'lastetu' (childless).

Security-related press releases concern themselves with a relatively narrow field of issues because of the nature of the discourse which we seek to analyse. The traditional understanding of security assumes that the international system is inherently anarchical and thus revolves around inter-state conflict with national industries and armies rushing to prepare and defend the country by military means (Waltz, 1979). The modern, multi-faceted understanding of security helps us grasp the things that concern the Estonian parties regarding the refugee debate; it is not the security of the 'state' as an abstract as much as it is about 'the pursuit of freedom from threat and the ability of states and societies to maintain their independent identity and their functional integrity against forces of change which they see as hostile' (Buzan, 1991: 432). This understanding of security, admittedly, goes too far because with this concept large parts of the other topics, particularly economy and culture, would also be part of 'what ought to be free from threat'. For this thesis, thus, we will employ a middle-grounds approach that emphasises on each individual's physical inviolacy from wanton interference by other parties. This view of security allows us to take into account violence both from state actors, particularly military forces, as well as non-state actors such as terrorists or violent protesters. With regards to this research, key words are 'julgeolek' and 'turvalisus' (security) as well as 'terror' and 'ususõdalane' (warrior of faith / religious warrior), thereby encompassing not just the tools to describe what concerns the parties – security – but also what they see as the threat to that security.

Liberalism-related press releases are perhaps the most crucial because liberal values are the most obvious battleground in Estonian discourse. In the context of the refugee debate in Estonia, the liberal values which are the most strongly debated are those of tolerance towards foreigners as well as the international sense of solidarity, both in the humanitarian sense towards the refugees themselves, but also towards countries who struggle with the refugee influx and are pleading for burden-sharing in order to deal with the great numbers of refugees. The key words for this category are thus oriented towards those two values; for example, there are 'solidaarsus' (solidarity), and 'inimlik' (humane) as examples of what liberals would expect the treatment of refugees to be like, and on the other side of the debate there are terms such as 'vihakõne' (hate speech), 'liberast' (dysphemism for a liberal person) and 'tolerast' (dysphemism for a tolerant person). For the other words one would still have to ascertain the exact context in which they are being used. Especially in this category it can be seen very clearly why it is necessary to expand the traditional understanding of content analysis and the employment of basic and orthodox search words; similar to scholars who use discourse analysis, we must realise that 'people of a given culture use language to reflect their attitudes toward the world in general and the life of their community in particular' (Al-Zoubi Mohammad et al., 2007: 231). Vernacular like 'liberast' is certainly crucial to understanding the nature of the debate beyond formalities and regular dictionary words and thus it needs to be included if we want to discover all appropriate sources for our research.

Finally, some postings are labelled as *Multiple* in order to take into account the stark contrast between different parties' press releases for our evaluation because otherwise there would be a very strong imbalance in assessment. Regarding the length of press releases on party webpages, the Centre Party's posts contain an average of 228 words, the Conservative People's Party's press releases have an average length of 213 words, the Reform Party's posts have an average length of 684 words, the Free Party's releases have an average length of 377 words, the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union's press releases have an average length of 383 words, and the Social Democratic Party's press releases have an average length of 251 words. If we also consider the median length of parties' press releases, the word count grows further for some of the parties because some of the postings are short acknowledgements of events, for example regarding the attacks in Brussels, can obscure the notion that most press releases are around 300-400

words long. The label 'Multiple' is thus used in order to take the potential complexity of press releases with an unusually high word count into account. This labelling exists because it simplifies the coding process and evaluation while still accepting longer essays as a viable option for a party to publicise its policies. In the case of the 1,027 words long contribution by Urmas Paet which was posted on the webpage of the Reform Party, the author could have noted three categorisations, but attaching three labels was not an option because it would have given this posting the value of three postings by other parties (Reformierakond, 2015a). Rather, it is appropriate to acknowledge that some parties and individual politicians prefer to create a larger posting that ties several concerns into one holistic narrative. This concludes the explanation section for the different categories that are used for the third operationalisation variable, namely 'topic'.

To sum up, the quantification table which will help us classify the press releases has four variables that are plotted between April 2015 and March 2016. The first variable is 'Party' with the options 'Estonian Central Party' (Eesti Keskerakond), 'Conservative People's Party of Estonia' (Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond – EKRE), 'Estonian Reform Party' (Eesti Reformierakond), 'Estonian Free Party' (Eesti Vabaerakond), 'Pro Patria and Res Publica Union' (Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit - IRL), and 'Estonian Social Democratic Party' (Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond - SDE). The second variable is 'Author' with the two options 'Party' or 'Individual' – in the case of the latter, this thesis will also take note of and quantify individual politicians within the party to ascertain the ratio between party- and individual statements as well as the dominant figureheads of the respective parties. The third variable, 'Attitude' will utilise the aforementioned differentiation between a 'Supportive', 'Critical', and 'Neutral' stance. The fourth and final variable concerns itself with the topic that is most prevalently used in the respective press releases, and the different options are 'European Union', 'Government', 'Economy', 'Culture', 'Security', 'Liberalism'. These four variables will form the backbone of this thesis in order to ascertain whether the traditional boundaries of the Spheres of Discourse exist in the Estonian debate on the European refugee crisis and, if so, how they have developed over time.

2.6 Qualitative Discourse Analysis

Qualitative Discourse Analysis has become increasingly important in social scientific research and arose in conjunction with other important theories, such as constructivism and securitisation theory, which also opposed the positivist stance which claims that reality is 'out there' to be discovered and instead suggested that every individual's 'development is socially situated and knowledge is constructed through interaction with others' (McKinley, 2015: 184). Indeed, social constructivism laid the foundation for linguistic constructivism regards language as a social practice, as an 'intervention in the social and economic order, and one which in this case works by the reproduction of socially originating ideology' (Caldas-Coulthard & Coulthard, 1996: 3). The current standard of linguistic constructivism is critical linguistics which has the explicit goal of 'changing or even removing the conditions of what is considered to be a false or distorted consciousness' and rendering 'transparent what had previously been hidden, and in doing so it initiates a process of self-reflection (…) designed to achieve a liberation from the domination of past constraints' (Connerton, 1976: 20).

It is indisputable that qualitative content analysis and critical discourse analysis are overlapping in their understanding and that 'the actual procedures of analysis can be very similar' (Hjelm, 2013: 878). Ultimately, this thesis will utilise critical discourse analysis which is defined as 'having distance to the data, embedding the data in the social, taking a political stance explicitly, and focus on self-reflection as scholars doing research' (Wodak, 2001: 9). What sets Critical Discourse Analysis apart from more traditional approaches is thus that it is not as much method-based as it is problem-based (Wodak & Chilton, 2005: 3). The key benefit of Critical Discourse Analysis for the second part of the thesis's analysis part is that it allows the researcher to contextualise the situation at hand, and thus grasp implicit meanings and traits of social phenomena that would be untraceable for a more detached observer.

Critical Discourse Analysis also discerns the 'construction of the relationship between discourse participants (…) looking at the use of we, you, of relationally relevant vocabulary items and at assertions' that one actor makes about the other (Fairclough, 2003). However, it is not the contextualisation of the current situation that sets Critical

Discourse Analysis apart, but rather the quest to discover 'how the socially produced ideas and objects that populate the world were created and are held in place' (Herrera & Braumoeller, 2004: 19). Critical Discourse Analysis ultimately insists that there is a sedimented core to language, identity, and discourse respectively and that the respective cores are strongly, but not insurmountably, inert and can slowly change in the face of evolving patterns of interaction.

While Critical Discourse Analysis serves as the general approach for our qualitative content analysis, it needs to be supplemented with several paradigms that help us establish the meaning and significance of the selected texts. For example, it is difficult to overstate the value of metaphors because the use of particular metaphors gives us an insight into what ideology and cultural background a particular actor has (Charteris-Black, 2005: 97). Not only do metaphors tell us more about the actor but also about the audience because it is in any political actor's best interest to tailor their message to the audience that they want to reach. The second important complementary paradigm is the world of verbal transgressions and insults; a verbal transgression in general carries 'a source of energy so volatile that it demolishes some standard of propriety' in a given discourse (Kertzer, 1994: 64). Insults in particular are 'powerful because, in different ways and degrees, they violate linguistic, psychological and social decorum' (ibid.: 65). For our Critical Discourse Analysis regarding the refugee debate in Estonia, insults will turn out to be one of the most important factors because they reveal the existence of binary structures in the 'us' versus 'them' thinking and thus also tell us more about the characteristics of the two (Stallybrass & White: 1986: 18). Furthermore, they can reveal strengths or weaknesses in our use of Hallin's spheres in an environment where the journalist, as the middleman, who supposedly would be the gatekeeper of good public conduct, plays no role and the politician can optionally show self-restraint and -censorship in his/her communication with the audience.

As we have established, it is usually the media's responsibility to hold politicians accountable by covering their transgressions, insults, and misconduct (Fogarty, 2008: 463); in this thesis, however, we will exclusively conduct Critical Discourse Analysis on opinion pieces that the actors themselves submitted to media outlets.

2.7 Research Limitations

A general problem with research that is interested in establishing causal links that are not mathematically provable is that the causal relationship can never be fully ascertained. Of course the research design takes greatest precautions to shield against that; seeing a spike in party post activity on a particular date could be coincidental and not related to the event that the researcher had in mind, so text and reference control can erase that risk. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that the best this research can do vis-à-vis this limitation is to elucidate the different strands of cause and effect and evaluate whether they are adequate or not.

The second important limitation is a matter of temporality which is plainly due to the time constraints with which the researcher has to deal; Estonian discourse on refugees as well as, more broadly, the refugee crisis in Europe and the Middle East are ongoing situations which will continue to evolve over time, constantly changing with the emergence of new political actors and the occurrence of further crucial events. Until March 2016, Estonian refugee discourse was based almost entirely on other countries' experiences with the refugee crisis, seeing as the first seven refugees from Iraq, Syria, and Yemen only set foot in late March 2016; it is thus beyond doubt that the debate will take a few more turns over the next months as Estonian citizens start to interact with their new neighbours. Nonetheless, offering an overview from the start of the Estonian discourse on refugees in April 2015 until March 2016 should be helpful for scholars who seek to conduct further research on the topic. What this thesis can offer, then, is the analysis of different parties' stances and the development of public opinion in order to lay the important groundwork for further research that will undoubtedly take place both within the realm of Estonian, Baltic, and Eastern European researcher communities.

As discussed in the methodology section, this research relies on three types of sources for analysing discourse; press releases on party webpages, opinion pieces of leading political actors, and opinion polls. It should be conceded that they all come with different problems. The official party webpages vary drastically in quality; the Conservative People's Party has a very detailled archive which, regrettably, only gives access to statements from 9 September 2015 until the present day whereas one can only

access the headlines without the full article of older articles; the archives of the Social Democratic Party were inaccessible due to technical failures and the author was only given the main refugee-related press releases upon e-mail enquiry; The archives of the Reform Party had faulty timestamps, which means that many files had to be put back into the order in which they were published. The opinion pieces of the most prominent Estonian political actors were hand-picked by the author in order to find the most explicit examples of how the actors illustrate their beliefs. This is done in order to display the use of metaphors, implications, and connections that the actors make to underline their position in favour of or in opposition to refugees; while all precautions have been taken to pick the most explicit examples of each political actor, it is possible that the author did not find the most suitable examples for some actors. Finally, it was difficult to find polls and surveys that had a high number of participants (n) and did not have implicatory or biased questions that would have an impact on the participants' responses.

Another research limitation is the partial exclusion of the Russian minority in the different parts of analysis. Traditionally, the Centre Party is seen as a party that tries to garner the Russian vote and while its webpage is exclusively in Estonian, it could be said that the party statements at least take the Russian minority's interests into account. The same cannot be said for the qualitative content analysis section because here the various actors express their personal opinions; the selected articles have all been published in Estonian-language newspapers and thus, to an extent, exclude the Russian minority from the discourse. This thesis does not take into account how many and which articles are also translated for and published in Russian-language newspapers in Estonia.

Furthermore, the author is not a native Estonian and has a written comprehension level amounting to B2 in the Estonian language. Whilst this level is certainly sufficient to peruse and analyse the texts within the framework that is being used – finding word patterns and connections – it cannot be fully guaranteed that no translation or comprehension mistakes were made over the course of this research.

CHAPTER III – ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL DATA

Having elaborated on the theoretical and methodological framework in the first two chapters, this part of the thesis will analyse the empirical data that has been selected.

3.1 Results of Quantitative Content Analysis

The first question that presents itself for our analysis is to what extent the parties use their webpages and parliament websites. As we can see in Figure 3, most parties use their own webpages more than their section on the parliament website, the only exception being the Centre Party which posted four and five times respectively. In general, we can see a clear bias for parties to use their own websites to communicate their ideas.
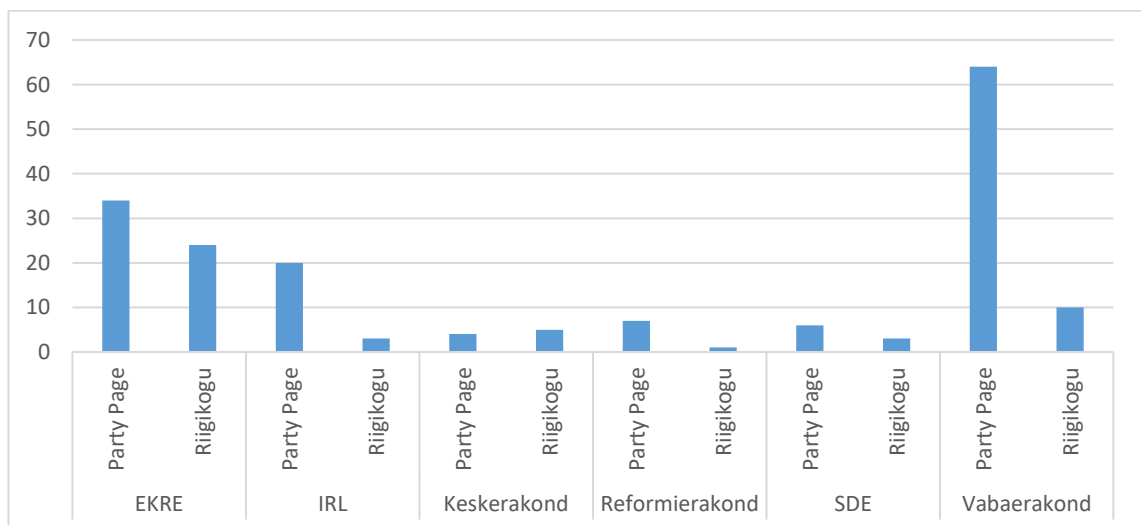
Figure 3: Political parties and the total number of posts per platform

Particularly the Reform Party, the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union, the Social Democratic Party, and the Free Party use their own party pages disproportionately often, whereas with the Conservative People's Party we can only see a 40% difference between the parliament and the party page. At the same time, it is worth noting that the Conservative People's Party still has a much greater output with reference to the refugee crisis than all parties except for the Free Party. Throughout the next pages we will continue to map all sorts of differences between the parties, how they post, and with which topics the posts concern themselves.

Comparing the Attitudes of the Different Parties
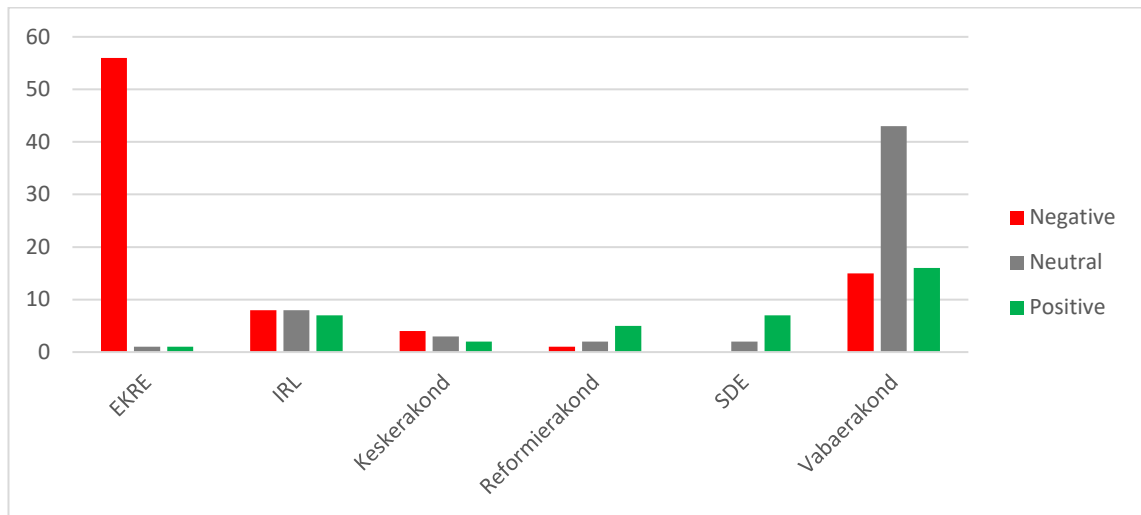
Figure 4: Political parties and the attitudinal nature of their posts

Leaving the differentiation between the two platforms behind us, it is first and foremost important to understand what the general attitude of parties towards refugees is. As was explained earlier in the methodology section, this thesis has three categories for the determination of attitude, namely 'Negative', 'Neutral', and 'Positive'. As can be seen in Figure 4, the parties' general stance towards refugees is sometimes unmistakeably clear and sometimes rather ambiguous. The graph combines posts on both party and parliament webpages because there was no distinguishable difference in the tendency towards a negative, neutral, or positive attitude towards refugees by any party between the two platforms.

In different ways, all parties stand out in this comparison; the Conservative People's Party has an almost exclusively negative attitude towards refugees regardless of

the topics which they connected to refugees; the Social Democratic Party and the Reform Party have, by a great margin, a positive attitude towards refugees; the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union as well as the Centre Party are more or less equally in favour, in opposition, and neutral; and finally, the Free Party has a quite pronounced share of both negative and positive posts, but a nonetheless strong majority of neutrality towards refugees.

Comparing the Style of the Different Parties

The degree to which politicians rely on emotionality or factual reasoning to share their arguments and garner support among the public cannot be underestimated. As it has been argued before, how politicians frame their arguments and opinions partially depends on the political culture; a society that rejects grandeur and prefers calm representatives may not be attracted to a populist party unless it shares its arguments in a language that large parts of society find more appealing. To recap the stipulations made in the methodology section, the difference in style between emotions and facts is not about who is right and who is wrong – even if it were possible. Rather, it is about how much the different parties feel the need to appeal to emotions or rationality in general.
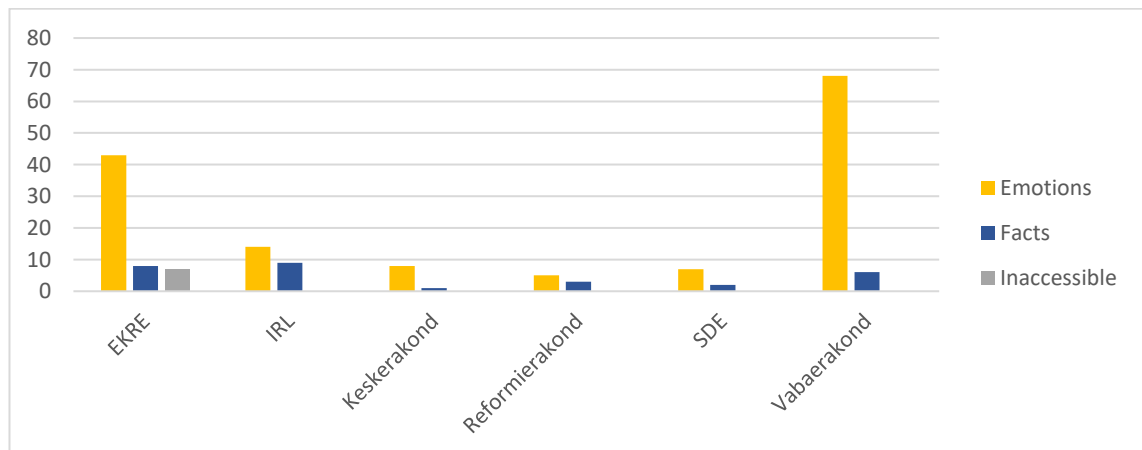

Figure 5: Political parties and the number of emotions- and fact-based arguments

Of course, most politicians are fully aware of what their fellow citizens respond to the most, but perhaps there are also topics where, even in a rational society, emotions are preferred and vice versa. As can be disseminated in Figure 5, with the exception of the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union, there is a clear dominance of emotions over facts across all parties. Overall, a mere 16% of all posts made reference to facts and calculations,

whereas 80% related to emotions, speculation, fear, and hope in one way or another. The remaining 4% are the files that were found to be inaccessible on the Conservative People's Party's page.

Comparing the Topics Used by the Different Parties

It is not unreasonable for any political scientist to hypothesise that different parties have different focuses; after all, one party may focus very much on green issues but lack a proper defence policy, whereas another could be dedicated to religious issues or nationalism without a clear vision for the economy. What is striking, however, is that the parties relate the refugee question to all different categories that were inductively selected for this thesis.
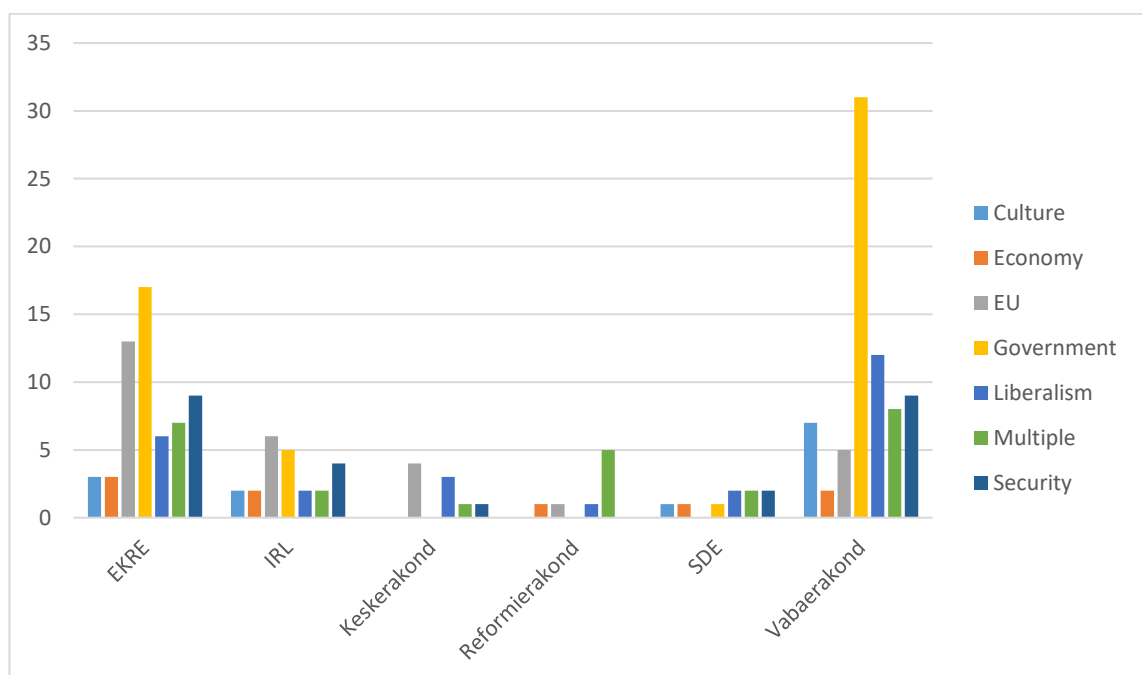

Figure 6: Political parties and their references to the various topics

As can be seen in Figure 6 above, all parties have at least one post touching upon multiple issues, and there is also a basic stock of references connecting refugees to the economy, culture, and liberal values. However, for each party there are also one or two topics that are particularly dear; most of the Conservative People's Party's posts concern themselves with the government and the EU, the same is true for the Pro Patria and Res

Publica Union; the Centre Party refers mostly to the EU and liberal values; the Reform Party, as pointed out earlier, mostly touches upon all topics within its rare posts; the Social Democratic Party has no topic that stands out; and, finally, the Free Party's posts overwhelmingly often concern themselves with the Estonian government but also have a fairly high and even distribution across culture, liberal values, security, and combinations of the above. As for the previous figures, it is important to mention that there is no distinct difference between the prioritisation of topics on the party and parliament webpages.

Comparing the Parties' Use of Press Releases and Individual Politicians' Posts

This section will utilise one graph per party in order to arrange a more easily discernible overview of how the different parties fill their webpages with press releases and individual politicians' posts. Just like in the previous figures, the graphs show the combined results from the party and parliament webpages; again, there was no major difference or deviation in the two samples. Broadly speaking, the six parties fall into three categories in terms of the distribution between the two options:

(1) Press releases are in the outright majority

(2) One party figurehead posts the majority

(3) All individual politicians combined severely outweigh the press releases

These three categories seem very obvious but this is not necessarily the case; for example, there could also have been a scenario in which all parties have one figurehead that wants to strengthen his/her profile with regards to the refugee crisis. More surprisingly, there is no party in which the total number of individual politicians' posts is roughly equal to the number of press releases.
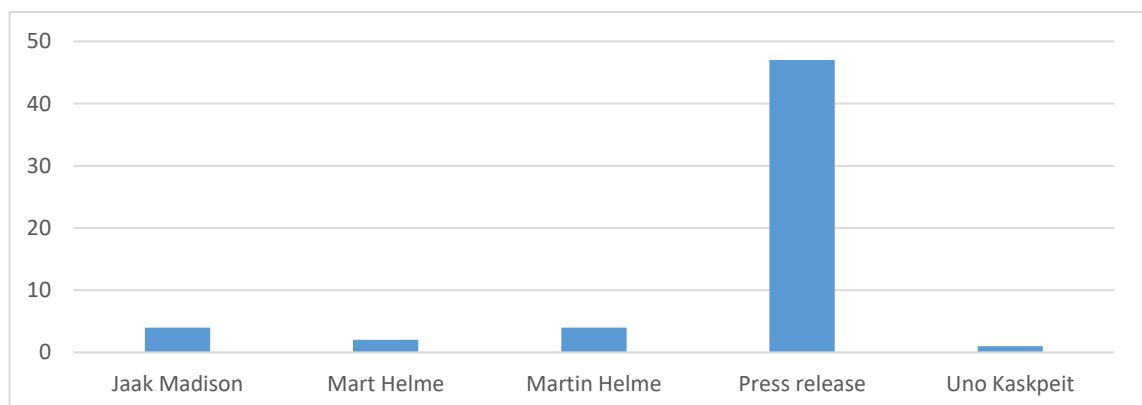

Figure 7: The Conservative People's Party's posts sorted by 'agent'

The Conservative People's Party, shown in Figure 7, is the only party that falls into the first category. Even though Martin and Mart Helme are quite popular, or at least well-known, figureheads of the party, the press releases represent just over 80% of all posts on the two outlets under direct EKRE control. There is also no recognisable trend among the few politicians that do publish, under their own name, on the webpages.

Following this minor surprise, there are two parties that fall into the second category, albeit under vastly different circumstances. The first party, the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union, can be seen below in Figure 6, and shows quite a mixed picture indeed.
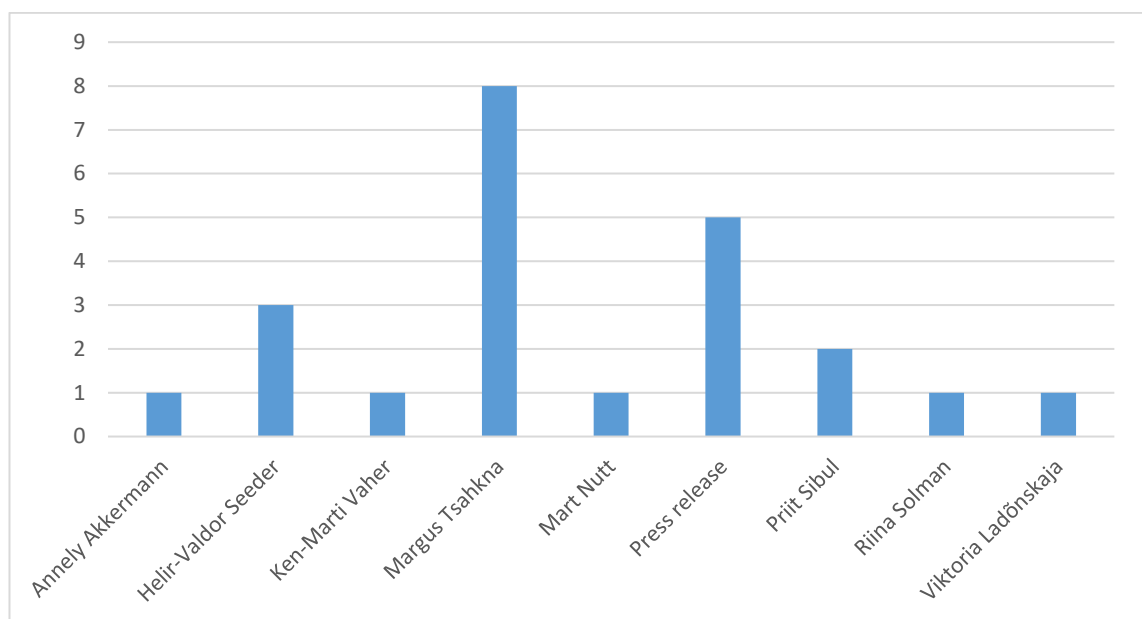

Figure 8: The Pro Patria and Res Publica Union's posts sorted by 'agent'

Whilst Margus Tsahkna certainly stands out as the most prominent individual politician, he only reaches eight posts out of a total of 23, whereas there are only three fewer press releases and ten posts by other individual politicians. The Pro Patria and Res Publica Union is a curious case because it has a discernible figurehead although, still, all other individual politicians combined overpower both him and the press releases, separately.
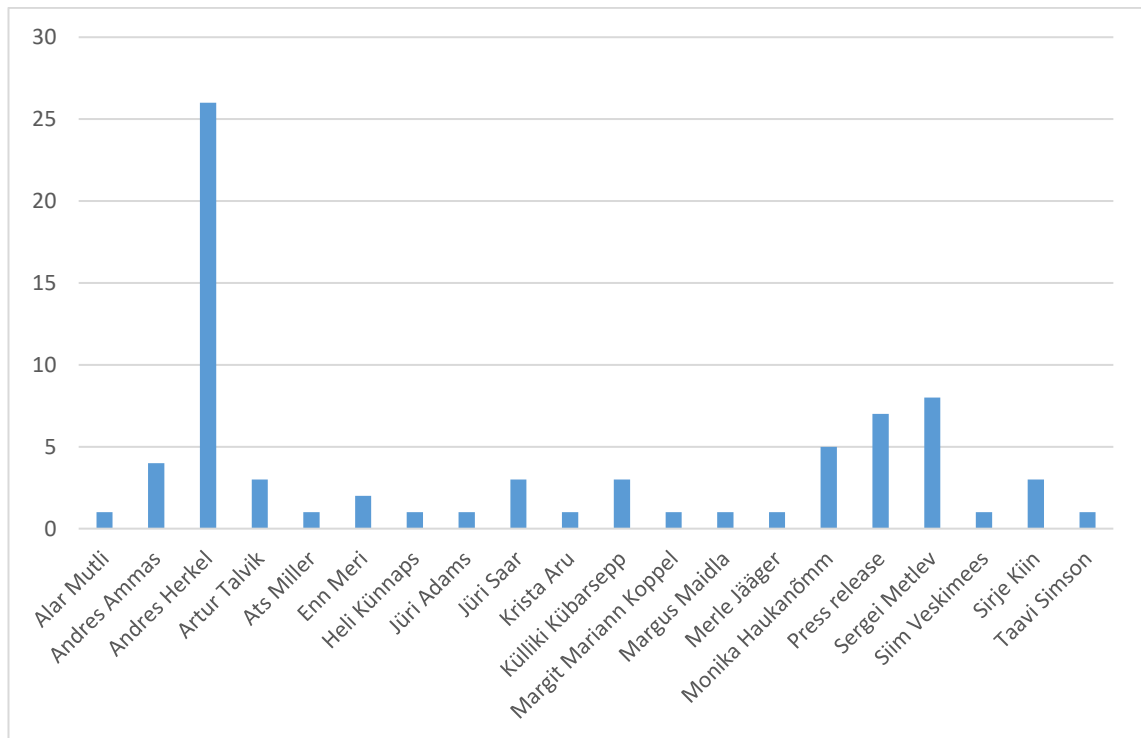
Figure 9: The Free Party's posts sorted by 'agent'

This previous, rather ambiguous case stands in stark contrast to the situation of the Free Party. As can be seen in Figure 9, Andres Herkel is the undisputed figurehead when it comes to posts about the refugee crisis although he only wrote just over a third of all posts. What matters in this case, however, is not the relative percentage of posts, but rather the total number: At a mere seven posts, press releases are rather scarcely found, and there is a veritable wealth of other politicians contributing so that there is no other individual coming remotely close to Herkel's number. In the following chapter there will be a greater discussion as to what the curious case of the Free Party may mean.
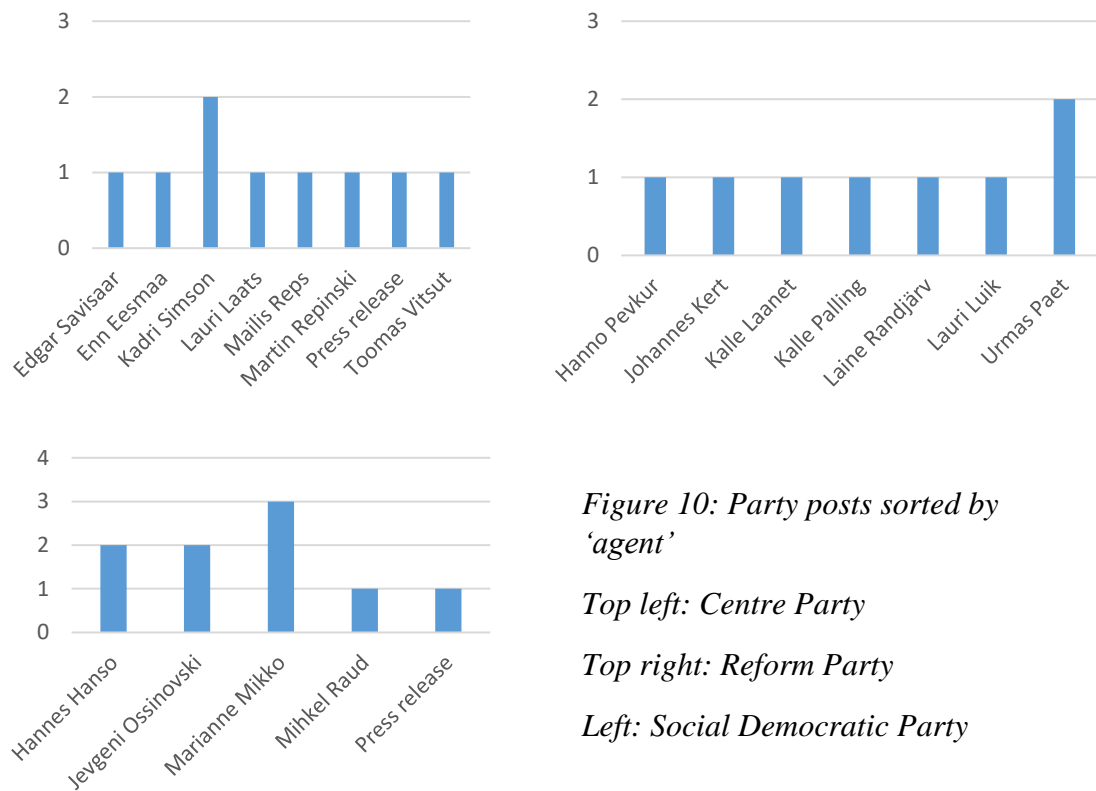
Figure 10: Party posts sorted by 'agent'

Top left: Centre Party

Top right: Reform Party

Left: Social Democratic Party

The third category has the Centre Party, Reform Party, and Social Democratic Party as its members. All three parties have very similar outlooks, with all individual politicians having roughly the same output. Furthermore, all individuals have either the same or a higher output than the general party under the label 'press release'. It is worth adding that these three parties are also the least communicative ones in terms of the total number of posts, as we can see in Figure 11.
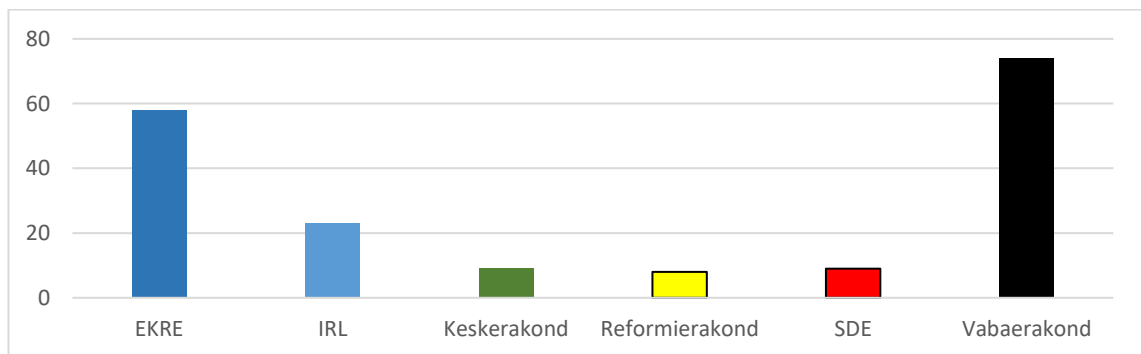

Figure 11: Total number of party posts

Examining the Influence of Events and Comparing the Parties' Responses Over Time

So far this thesis has concerned itself exclusively with the first research question about how differently the parties act with regards to their choice of platform, general attitude towards refugees, argumentative style, choice of topics, and agent behaviour. This focus will now shift to the second research question: Do real-life events have any effect on the way the different parties communicate and, if so, what effects do they have? Occasional reference will be made to the full-page graph that shows the political parties and their number of combined posts and can be found in Appendix 1, as well as several graphs that are spread across the next few pages.

Above all, this part of the thesis will make use of contextualisation in order for us to be able to causally connect a change in party behaviour with any events that have occurred. Figure 12 below shows the total number of posts per month with all parties and all media platforms combined. Without contextualisation, we would be left clueless as to what might have caused the spike of 39 postings in September and the sudden drop between November and December. For this matter, we will go through the various months one by one to disseminate from where the shifts may originate.
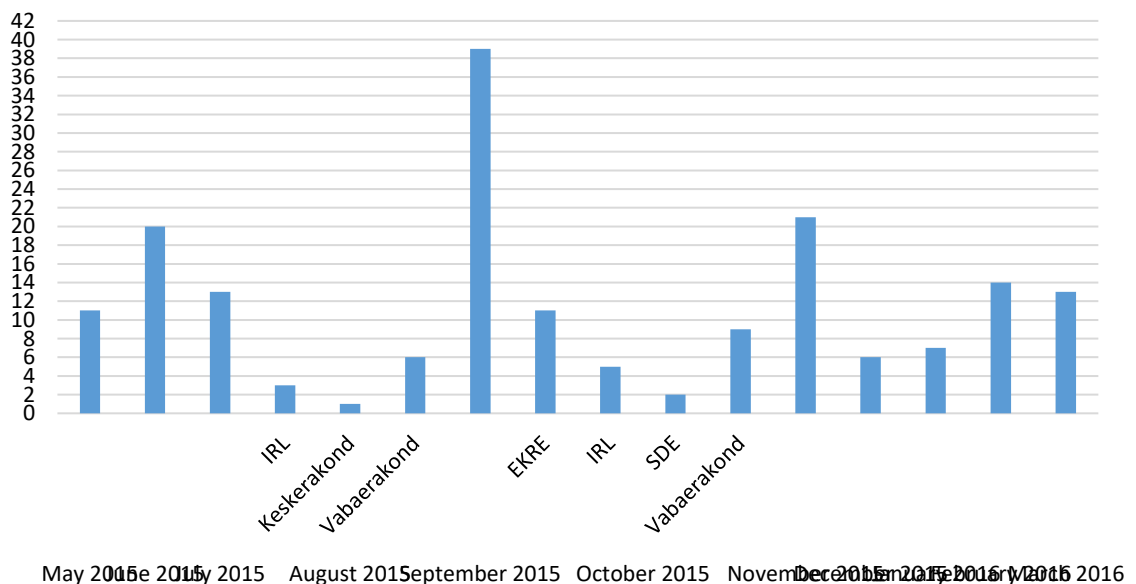

Figure 12: Total number of posts per month

April 2015 – The Quiet Before the Storm

The attentive reader will have noted that, in the methodology section, the thesis set out to start the content analysis from April 2015, yet all of the graphs only start with May 2015. With the best of intentions, this is not a design flaw but rather due to the relative inertia of political parties. Whilst the European Parliament had already passed the resolution regarding the refugee crisis on 23 April 2015, the Estonian translation only became available on 27 April 2015 (Euroopa Parlament, 2015). As a result, followers of international media were informed slightly earlier than people who relied on Estonian news. While Estonian newspapers took a few days to pick up on the refugee quota debate which now directly concerned Estonia, they easily outmatched the number of party reactions; neither the party webpages nor the Riigikogu webpage saw a single press release concerning the topic at hand. A potential reason for the slow reaction could be that all parties realised that this issue will play a major role in Estonian politics for the next few years and thus carefully constructed their policy in order to best cater to the demands of the respective electorates (Budge, 1994: 443). This is particularly likely because all parties were equally fast to react to other events which we will cover in this thesis; parties usually responded on the day of specific events or, in the worst case, a day later.

May 2015 – The Discussion Unfolds

The political parties remained silent until the middle of May 2015, when the Conservative People's Party published the first press release on 15 May. This month's main debate regarding the refugee crisis revolved around the European Commission which published first calculations for the number of refugees that the different member states would have to accept. The quota would have meant that Estonia would have had to accept 738 refugees who had already arrived in Greece and Italy, and 326 further refugees who enjoyed international protection under the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (Postimees, 2015a).

The initial reaction of the government was a complete rejection of any quota system; instead it proposed a focus on bilateral agreements for more effective burden-sharing (Postimees, 2015b). As can be seen in Appendix 2, the European Union is by far the greatest target of the various parties; the Conservative People's Party, the Free Party,

and the Centre Party all criticise the EU decision-makers because of the looming mandatory refugee quota. A second post by the Free Party criticised the economic hardship that would come with accepting any number of refugees and also warned that some refugees could be members of sleeper cells, be it voluntarily or through financial incentives. The only positive press release came from the webpage of the Reform Party and described the positive economic impact that refugees may have in the medium- and long term. Meanwhile, we cannot fail to notice the glaring absence of both the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union, being one of the government coalition parties since April 2015, and the Social Democratic Party, being another part of the government coalition since March 2014.

The Riigikogu webpage shows a slightly different pattern with two posts from the Conservative People's Party, one post from the Free Party, and one from the Centre Party. Three of these four articles are the same ones as those posted on the party webpages; the outlier here is the Conservative People's Party's post from 21 May. Beyond this, we see that neither of the three parties in government felt compelled to make a statement on behalf of their party's faction in parliament. This may indicate general agreement with the party line. Finally, it is striking that all three government parties maintain complete silence on the webpage of the Estonian parliament.

It is beyond doubt that May 2015 constitutes a very slow start for the Estonian parties in both media outlets over which they have editorial control. However, it is very remarkable that the topical distribution was very similar on the party webpages and the Riigikogu webpage – the EU was the number one topic with more than two thirds of the contributions respectively, and the other two topics that were being discussed, namely the economy and security concerns, were exactly the same. The European Union is the main focus of the discussion and there are two reasons for this state of affairs; first of all, two of the three most vocal parties, the Conservative People's Party and the Centre Party, are relatively sceptical of the European Union as a whole; the Centre Party is organised in the conservative wing of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDE) in the European Parliament, while one of the more popular figureheads of the Conservative People's Party, Jaak Madison, is the vice chairman of the European Union Affairs Committee of the Estonian parliament and thus makes some claims to expertise, however little they may be founded in reality.

Especially with the development over the next few months it is important to note now that the Free Party has positioned itself as critical of the decision-making process within the European Union. In effect, criticising the European Union was the only option for the opposition parties because, even without their partially Eurosceptic tendencies, the government was effectively on their side of the debate. The aim was thus to reach a narrative that would pit Estonia against the European Union in order for the opposition parties to at least *seem* as if they differentiated themselves from the norm. At this point, however, the combination of two factors makes it very hard to draw particularly meaningful conclusions from our May analysis; firstly, the very low output in press releases means a small sample size which could easily be completely different to that of the next few months without the impact of any events; secondly, even if we disregard the low output, we still need to consider that all parties continue to be in the phase of developing their policies regarding this topic and thus can't be expected to keep their priorities the same way.

June 2015 – A Shift Towards Discourse of Values?

While the discussions in the previous months were mostly about facts and figures, the debate took a noticeably different shape in June. As the discussions in the various institutions of the European Union continued behind closed doors, discussions about the European Union dropped by roughly one third and gave way for a more equal distribution of attention to different topics. First of all, we see the emergence of articles making reference to multiple topics, secondly there is an increase in conversation about the government, culture, and liberal values. Throughout the entire month, however, there has been no reference to the economic impact that the refugees may have as well as a notable absence of security concerns.

What is most important, however, is the notion that the refugee crisis got more public attention in general, as regular readers started contributing opinion pieces to newspapers (Postimees, 2015c). As is the case with many topics that suddenly spark public attention, political parties swiftly adjust and focus on creating opinion-shaping content on their respective webpages. This very much explains why there is a sudden jump from a total of 11 posts in May up to 20 posts in June. Meanwhile, as is shown in Appendix 3, the number of press releases on the Riigikogu webpage, remained precisely

the same at five posts. However, the content of the posts focuses much more strongly on government behaviour, thereby introducing a topical trend that we will continue to see over the next few months on both the Riigikogu webpage and the parties' webpages.

How can we explain that criticism formerly directed towards the European Union is now being towards decisions by the Estonian government? The main reason for this shift is the notion that the institutions of the European Union, particularly the European Commission, largely negotiated behind closed doors which meant that it was impossible for the opposition to criticise them. This meant, conversely, that the opposition parties could condemn the lack of communication between the government and the public; this is precisely what two of the three government related posts did. To cite an example of a combined topic article, the Conservative People's Party managed to complain about the financial burden that the maintenance of the Vao refugee centre meant for the Estonian budget and tie it in with EU-related criticism for the lack of satisfactory financial support.

Looking at the most frequently discussed issues, the relative decline of discourse about the European Union is the most obvious change from the previous month. It is also a significant symptom of the internalisation of the refugee debate, a process which will take place over the next few months as well. In this context, issue internalisation describes the process of a given society turning their scope from looking outwards to looking inwards. Many of the questions that the articles of this month raised tended to ask 'can *we* handle this immigration?' rather than 'can *they* handle this immigration differently?'. As an example, the post published by the Free Party on 10 June asks about refugee-related questions like the potential financial burden and cultural implications such as language and culture courses. In June, the Conservative People's Party focused its attention on the European Union, lack of government communication, and the supposed dominance of liberal values that hinder free public discourse. The Free Party, meanwhile, posted several long articles which were, at best, very diverse and, at worst, lacked direction; one article described government policies and argued in favour of displaying European solidarity, while another criticised the EU for the bad crisis management and the lack of economic support.

To illustrate the disparity in press release output of this month, the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union, the Centre Party, the Reform Party, and the Social Democratic Party

have published six press releases – that is three fewer than the Conservative People's Party alone. Beyond these numerical matters, the most important realisation is that June saw the initiation of the internalisation process, a trend that we will continue to witness over the next few months.

July 2015 – Sunshine, Holidays, and Governmental Miscommunication

July marks several milestones which we need to address over the next few paragraphs. The most obvious change that we can see is the strong increase of discussion about government behaviour; whilst in June government-related posts made up 25% of all press releases, this jumped up to more than 60% in July. The main reason for this steep rise is one lone party that fully dedicated itself to the cause of criticising government miscommunication: The Free Party. Out of the 13 posts that were released during July 2015, 11 were made by the Free Party, eight of which were focused on governmental conduct and four of those specifically criticised the government for not communicating properly with the population. The Free Party's three other government-related posts praised the government for nominating Marina Kaljurand as the new Minister for Foreign Affairs and restoring public confidence in the office[1].

In a rare display that we will only see one more time over the period of our research, the ruling Reform Party has published two relevant press releases which praise the government's decisions regarding the refugee crisis in several ways, for example by contending that some of the refugees could teach Estonian children French, thereby contributing to Estonian cultural development, or suggesting that refugees may be able to open their own restaurants, thereby improving the quality of life in their environment as well as contributing to the economy (Reformierakond, 2015b). Meanwhile, we register complete silence on the webpages of four of the six parties with regards to the refugee crisis.

Indeed, we can see that the picture is even more bleak on the webpage of the Estonian parliament where the Free Party is the only active faction in July. Of course, one

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[1] This previous drop in confidence came about because the previous Minister for Foreign Affairs, Keit Pentus-Rosimannus, stepped down from office after she allegedly took money out of her father's company to finance the construction of her new house, thereby contributing to the company's bankruptcy (ERR, 2015b)

of the party's three posts is about lack of government communication and another one praises the positive impact that refugees could have on Estonian society. Most importantly, however, the third one expresses relief over European Union decision-making, namely the decision to scrap the previous quota for the distribution of refugees. The revised quota system, as agreed upon by the interior ministers of all EU member states on 20 June, altered the number of refugees that Estonia would have to accept down to 150-180 over the next two years (ERR, 2015c). However, there were no reactions on the Riigikogu webpage by any party apart from the Free Party.

Taking into account that this fundamental event occurred, we need to ask ourselves the question what could possibly justify the relatively steep decrease in the number of press releases on the parties' webpages, from 20 down to 13, and on the Riigikogu webpage, from five down to three. The answer is one that we could not have anticipated without any context: summer holidays. As the regulations stipulate, the spring session of the Riigikogu shall last until the third Thursday of June and the next fall session shall commence on the second Monday of September (Riigikogu, 2016). Thus, the Estonian parliament had already been out of session since 18 June and would remain so until 14 September 2015 and as a result we can expect a similarly low output in the following month. Nonetheless, it must be pointed out that this month still was no waste for our research because we slowly see how the Free Party's understanding of the refugee debate, a mixture of communication, societal well-being, and the promotion of liberal values, emerges and solidifies.

August 2015 – July Redux or a Change of Direction?

The summer break continues and, shown in Appendix 4, party webpage press release output reaches one of its greatest lows, dropping from ten posts in July to nine in August. This time, the Free Party and the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union tie with three press releases each. In the Free Party's camp, we see tendencies similar to those of the previous two months, specifically a two out of three focus on criticising government communication, but also a very long article in form of a tale which is also underlining the potential beauty of Estonia becoming a melting pot for different cultures (Vabaerakond, 2015a). The great surprise of the summer, however, is the sudden reawakening of the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union which shared three articles throughout the month with,

generally, very refugee-positive connotations. The first article is shared by IREN, the women's association of the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union, and is a stirring appeal in favour of liberal values, human empathy, and peaceful discourse (IRL, 2015a). What all three articles shared was a fundamentally positive sentiment in support of shared responsibility as well as some neutral remarks about how the refugee crisis affects other countries within the European Union and how they deal with that challenge.

In the Riigikogu, the stream of communication almost ran dry as the number of press releases fell from three posts in July to only one in August. Surprisingly, this lone commentary was published by the Centre Party which had not voiced any refugee-related opinions on the Riigikogu webpage in more than two months. This post, however, was not a statement of the Centre Party's policy objectives as much as it was a response to a comment made by Urmas Reitelmann, a specialist of the Estonian paramilitary forces (Kaitseliit). In this comment, Reitelmann made very derogatory and explicit remarks about refugees, such as that they are nothing but scum and human trash, and that Estonia already has 300,000 Russian parasites that should not have a place in Estonia (Õhtuleht, 2015). In his commentary, one Centre Party politician asked the Estonian Defence Ministry to take action against these comments which he perceived as clear incitement to inter-ethnic hatred (Riigikogu, 2015). This was an important step because, although it is not a statement of policy suggestions, it meant that the Centre Party publicly embraced liberal values for the first time[2].

August was, overall, a rather uneventful month in terms of numbers but nonetheless two parties which were traditionally among the more silent parties voiced their opinions while others stood silence. At moments like these it should be pointed out that any party could have made a similar statement, discrediting racists and criticising illiberal stances. Maintaining a steady flow of information to journalists and the broader public help parties create a certain public image but also frame the debate according to their respective preferences.

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[2] The cynical observer may also, perhaps not wrongly, interpret this as a move to show solidarity with the ethnic Russian minority, a crucial voter demographic of the Centre Party.

September 2015 – The Fallout of the Arson of Vao Pagulaskeskus

The most significant month of the period on which we conduct our research is September 2015. Although there are several reasons upon which we will elaborate in the following paragraphs, the immediate and obvious cause is the arson of the Vao refugee centre, Estonia's only refugee centre that currently houses 51 asylum seekers and seven refugees with a residence permit from 17 different countries, most notably Ukraine, Armenia, Iraq, Albania, Dagestan, and Georgia (Valitsus, 2016a). The refugees that lived there at the time had no connection to the Syrian civil war or other civil strife in the Middle East and North Africa.

With this core information, let us delve into the statistics. Following only ten posts on the party and parliament webpages in August, September marks the peak across the twelve months which we have analysed with a total number of 39 published articles. It is also important to point out that all statements were released on the day of the arson, on 3 September, or after it. Effectively, this meant a premature breaking of the relative silence caused by the summer break between parliamentary sessions. Of the 39 posts, 15 were published by the Conservative People's Party with a focus that might come as a surprise for many people; they key words that were the most frequently used for this month were 'quota' and different variations of the word 'sovereignty', thereby mostly establishing a link to the European Union and criticising its supposedly failed refugee policies. Other points of criticism involved questions of security such as border control and also economic concerns about the previously mentioned 'mugavuspagulased', refugees exploiting the welfare state (EKRE, 2015).

Similarly, the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union decided to refrain from discussing the perpetrators and instead contended in its two press releases that the European Union has engaged in a wide-spread disinformation campaign while simultaneously conducting 'jaanalinnupoliitika', ostrich politics, thereby implying that the leaders of the European Union, much like the ostrich in the proverb, preferred to stick their heads in the sand rather than solve the problems at hand (IRL, 2015b). The Free Party formed a diverse and balanced response over 19 press releases – the first four reactions, posted between 3 September and 10 September, included praise of how the government handled the situation, criticism towards the EU, but also a renewed commitment to liberal values and

the responsibility to help those in need. Following this wave of verbal support, the Free Party went back to what it does best; excoriating the lack of information flow between the government and the general public. Members of the Free Party, while not establishing direct links, insinuated that better management of information channels could have prevented the arson of the refugee centre.

The Social Democratic Party released one statement in which it confirmed its commitment to solidarity with friendly nations as well as universal human rights. The two most exceptional cases in this debate are the Reform Party and the Centre Party, albeit for completely different reasons. The Reform Party's reaction was a mixture of describing regular positive government practices and defending the government's policies regarding the refugee crisis in general, but also expressing support for what we have classified as liberal values in the methodology section. The exceptional trait of this post is that it is the only one that makes reference to Aylan Kurdi, the three-year-old Kurdish refugee who tried to cross the Mediterranean Sea, drowned in the process, and was washed ashore, causing headlines around the world.

Meanwhile, the absence of Centre Party posts can be justified by the focus on a completely different topic, namely the corruption scandal surrounding Edgar Savisaar. Saving the honour, integrity, and reputation of their party leader thus became the most important objective for Centre Party officials[3].

In the Riigikogu, the number of press releases was naturally smaller but still reached its peak across our observation period with a total of 10 posts. Out of these, six were posted by the Conservative People's Party and most of them offered a broader collection of criticisms compared to the tone of the party's press releases on their own webpage. The six posts covered an attack on liberal values, criticism directed at the European Union and the Estonian government alike, and also a reiteration of the financial burden that refugees would place on Estonia. The most noteworthy change is the use of

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[3] Savisaar, being the *personalised leader* of the party, was accused of playing a pivotal role in a big corruption scandal in which he abused his office, being the mayor of Tallinn, and accepted bribes in exchange for favourable real estate contracts, building without permit, and even influencing a procurement (Postimees, 2015d).

the word 'liberast', a very derogatory term describing a person with liberal values, in the party's initial reaction to the arson of the refugee centre in Vao dating back to 9 September.

The Free Party published the same three posts that were released on the party webpage on 3 September; again, they support the way the government is handling the situation and also underline the Free Party's commitment to liberal values and the responsibility to help people in need. The Centre Party published a *very* short note of precisely 76 words on the Riigikogu webpage, explaining that a difference in opinion must under no circumstances lead to atrocities like arson or even attacks on people. Beyond that, the author was unable to find reactions from the remaining parties; the lack of a press statement by the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union, the Reform Party, and the Social Democratic Party is, however, most likely due to the fact that they have issued a joint government statement.

In late September, there were two more events that sparked reactions by some of the parties which we need to mention. On 22 September, the interior ministers of the EU member states have finally agreed to the refugee redistribution plan, thereby contractually obliging Estonia the 150-180 refugees it had promised to take (BBC, 2015). The next day, on 23 September, the Estonian parliament passed the long-discussed amendment to the Aliens Act ('Välismaalaste Seadus') in which the new chapter 2 stipulates conditions for temporary stay in Estonia as well as short-term employment (Riigiteataja, 2015).

Ultimately, there were several events in September that have led the various parties to develop into vastly different directions. Especially the posts on the party webpage of the Conservative People's Party indicate an outward focus that engages the audience in a discourse between 'us, the Estonians' and 'them, the European bureaucrats who try to spread their liberal propaganda'. The spreading metaphor was very appropriate for the legal changes towards the end of the month, where one piece of European Union legislation was quickly followed by the corresponding Estonian amendment to accommodate the changes.

At the same time, the Reform Party most strongly displays liberal qualities in the sense that it, too, has an outward focus but not as much for the construction of the self but rather the maintenance of the self. Liberalism is often portrayed as a reasonable approach which is based on a certain admiration for existing structures as well as the universality

and omnipresence of the reasonable values that it promotes (Laden, 2001: 2). Apart from being the party in power, it is very likely this belief in universality and the feeling of responsibility that motivated the Reform Party to look outwards not in order to distinguish itself or Estonians from the rest, but in order to *be a part* of a European community whose members help each other in times of need.

This is also revealed in the distribution of topics throughout September: out of a total of 39 topical emphases, 7 concerned themselves with the European Union and another 14 dealt with government performance, meaning that more than 50% of all references looked at either the European Union or the government as the actor that had to do something differently about the refugee crisis. The Free Party was shaken at the beginning of September and rallied behind the Reform Party as a sign of standing-together, but soon resumed its routine of criticising government communication. Finally, one has to question the Social Democratic Party and the Centre Party on their conduct which is, at this point, bordering on complete silence; whilst the former can point to the fact that it is part of the government coalition, the latter appears to be careful to *not* commit to a particularly strong position vis-à-vis the refugee crisis in order to maintain support by their core electorate, the Russian minority.

October 2015 – Return to Old Form?

The output of posts across both party platforms dropped from 39 to 27, which still is the second highest mark over the period with which we concern ourselves here. October was the first month where there was a relative calm on both the national and international stage and the parties were allowed to turn against each other in the quest for assertion and public recognition. As a result, we can immediately see the effects of this shift on how frequently the various discussion topics dominate the respective articles; after the temporary but nonetheless heavy focus on the EU and the Estonian government in September, the topics are spread much more widely again in October. Instead of two topics sharing more than 50% of the parties' attention, we now have a much more even spread with the exception of government-related comments in 10 postings. Not only does the economic situation return from its relative absence from discourse back to old heights but it is also discussed by several parties, namely the Conservative People's Party, the Free Party, and the Social Democratic Party.

Meanwhile, the two usual suspects, both the Conservative People's Party and the Free Party criticise different behaviours of the government throughout October. Further, the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union appears to have recovered from its pro-liberal praise in August and is fully back in the culturally conservative realm. In its five posts it mostly worries about the survival of Estonian culture as it stands right now and also criticises the European Union. The Reform Party falls back into silence and joins the ranks of the Centre Party which, for the fourth consecutive month, has not shared a single refugee debate-related press release on the party webpage.

Just like on the party webpages we register only a small decrease in party activity on the Riigikogu webpage, going from 10 down to six contributions. Again, the Conservative People's Party is the most active, posting four out of the seven press releases with an emphasis on government critique and economic references. Three out of these four posts are original to the Riigikogu webpage and cannot be found on the party webpage. The Pro Patria and Res Publica Union also shared a commentary putting forward the motion to increase the expectations that the state should have towards immigrants and their advancements in the Estonian language, demanding at least level B1 for improved social and cultural interaction (Riigikogu, 2015c).

While the Free Party shared the usual criticism of flawed government communication, the big surprise of the month was the Social Democratic Party which posted its first refugee debate-related press release on the Riigikogu webpage. It was essentially a call for calm on both sides of the debates, remarking how both sides only call each other 'tolerastid', a derogatory term for a tolerant / liberal person, FSB agents, and 'natsid', Nazis. The second half of the commentary contained a plea for a metaphorical ceasefire for the refugee debate in Estonia in order to find answers for pressing topical questions; the commentary then asks six of these questions and ends without giving any answers to them (Riigikogu, 2015). At the same time, the Centre Party as well as the Reform Party remain completely mute on the discussion.

The main conclusion that we can draw from our analysis of October is that an absence of drastic events both on the in- and the outside allow the parties to reach a degree of consolidation in how they discuss the refugee crisis and, if one wants to use this term

already, *normalcy*. Both the absolute number of press releases and the topical focuses and distributions within those press releases return to the realm of the familiar.

November 2015 - Do Outside Events Equal Outside Attention?

The November 2015 Paris attacks created an atmosphere of insecurity across the Western hemisphere including Estonia. Recalling the 7/7 London bombings and the 2004 bombings in Madrid, terrorist attacks in Europe were by no means a new phenomenon. What changed the equation for many countries in Europe, particularly the traditionally more ethnically and religiously homogenous ones, was that the refugee quota meant that they either already had or would soon have Muslims living among them. Looking at the number of overall party releases, we see a slight drop from 27 in October to 21 in November.

As we can also see in Appendix 2, in these 21 posts, the political parties focused a great deal, in fact more than 50% of all posts, of their attention on security-related matters. This is a radical development because, in the previous six months, security concerns had only been raised seven times in total across all parties and all media outlets at their disposal. This occurred across the party spectrum, indeed the Conservative People's Party, Pro Patria and Res Publica Union, the Free Party, the Centre Party, and the Social Democratic Party all made references to the Paris attacks and the state of national security in Estonia; the main difference is that the Conservative People's Party contended that Muslims in general can pose a threat to security whereas all the other parties suggested that these are isolated incidents that will not happen in Estonia.

The attentive reader will no doubt have noticed that, again, the Reform Party did not feel incentivised to publish a statement, potentially because they deemed Prime Minister Rõivas' speech sufficient. The remaining references were usually mentioned as side notes to the potential security risks, for example some parties pointed out that Muslim culture per se does not threaten or impose anything on Estonian society and should thus not be regarded as a threat to security.

Activity on the Riigikogu webpage also died down slightly with a decrease in total contributions from six to five. The most notable occurrence is the absence of Free Party statements which single-handedly led to the decrease in total contributions. Conversely

to the developments on the party webpages, however, the spread of topics was completely different; while there was one post concerning itself exclusively with security matters, two other posts dealt with multiple issues and the other two had an economic perspective. What could explain the noticeable difference in topical distribution between the party and Riigikogu webpages? The most glaring difference is plainly the lack of activity of two of the parties, particularly the Reform Party which uses governmental communication channels to voice party statements.

November presents us with a remarkable lesson; contrary to our first assumptions following the lack of reaction at the photos of Aylan Kurdi being washed up dead on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, we can now confirm that international events influence Estonian discourse despite its geographical distance. The only previous international event of magnitude was the debate on the refugee quota which, while having its source outside of Estonia, has a direct influence on life in Estonia because once there would be an agreement, said refugees would come to Estonia with absolute certainty. The Paris attacks were more nuanced in the sense that the attack did not imply anything for any other country with absolute certainty; rather, it was up to the Estonian parties to fill in the gaps and either make or deny links between Islam, refugees, and threats of terrorism.

December 2015 – Hibernation Part I

With the advent of December, the frequency with which party posts were published slowed down just as much as political discourse as a whole. The autumn session of the Riigikogu ended on 17 December and the next spring session would resume on 14 January. Throughout December, only six political statements were made linking the refugee crisis to the EU, the government, and liberal values. The Conservative People's Party reported about an anti-EU demonstration in Haapsalu which was supported by the party, whereas the Reform Party published a partially very critical press release arguing that, while maintaining open borders as agreed upon in the Schengen Agreement, the European Union and Frontex in particular had failed in securing the EU's outside borders.

This is the only time that the Reform Party openly criticises the European Union or the effects that refugees could possibly have on Estonian society. It is also the final time that the Reform Party uses its party webpage channel to propagate their opinion regarding the refugee debate.

The sole refugee-related post on the Riigikogu webpage was published by the faction of the Conservative People's Party, harshly lambasting liberal values and again using the word 'liberast' to attack liberally-minded people. Because of this low-point in press release output, this month shows a completely distorted 100% focus on liberal values and is thus not statistically relevant for our overall assessment of the topical distribution in the refugee debate.

January 2016 – Hibernation Part II

In terms of output of press releases, the beginning of the new year seemed very much like a continuation of the previous year. The only contribution on the parliament webpage was posted by the Conservative People's Party and shared information about a petition, arguing that the government had failed to take popular opinion into account, forced multiculturalism on the Estonian people, and thus made it more likely for terrorist attacks or mass rapes – like in Cologne, Germany – to occur in Estonia as well (EKRE, 2016a). We can see, thus, that the link that was established between events that occurred outside of Estonia on the one side and the situation in Estonia itself on the other has prevailed in the discourse of the Conservative People's Party over the past few months. Furthermore, the Conservative People's Party criticised the European Union for its inconsistency with the Dublin III Regulations and also promoting the view that, before Estonia can offer aid to anyone else, the state should first care for its Estonian citizens more properly. This remark is categorised as a reference to liberal values with a negative connotation for refugees because Jaak Madison, member of the Conservative People's Party, openly stated that an Estonian's life must be prioritised over other people's lives. This attitude of 'everyone fends for themselves' goes directly against universality and equality.
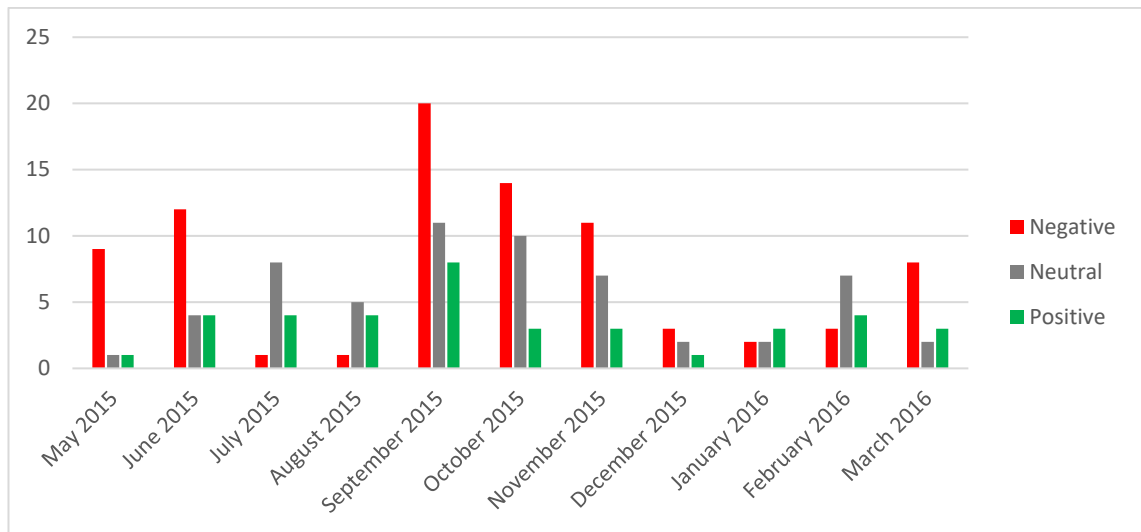
Figure 13: Attitude towards refugees of all posts combined per month

Nonetheless, January also brings some good news – as can be determined in Figure 13, January 2016 is the only month in our period of analysis in which the number of posts expressing a positive attitude towards refugees is greater than those expressing a negative or neutral view. This fact should, however, be enjoyed with some caution because it is merely three positive posts versus two neutral and negative ones respectively.

February 2016 – The Advent of the Soldiers of Odin

The Soldiers of Odin are an originally Finnish anti-immigrant group which started patrolling Finnish cities in late 2015. On 28 January 2016, the Estonian division of the Soldiers of Odin formed and planned on patrolling the streets of Estonian cities (Postimees, 2016). The first meetings took place in the middle of February and culminated in the participation of a parade together with many supporters of the Conservative People's Party on Estonian Independence Day, 24 February (International Business Times, 2016).

The magnitude of political reactions showed how seriously the various parties took the issue: Only 14 party press releases were posted in February, but half of them concerned themselves with the Soldiers of Odin. While the Social Democratic Party and the Free Party unequivocally declared their objection to the ideology and practices of the Soldiers of Odin, other voices were more cautious and restrained. The Centre Party attempted to walk the thin line between making clear that these almost paramilitary

developments were unacceptable, and justifying that the discontent with the recent political developments were understandable and had to be channelled somehow. Unsurprisingly, the Conservative People's Party interpreted the expansion of the Soldiers of Odin into Estonia as a positive development that arose out of the disenfranchisement of the Estonian people with the supposedly super-liberal and anti-Estonian policies of the government.

As a side note, Prime Minister Rõivas responded to the situation at hand shortly after it arose and maintained that 'self-proclaimed patrol gangs do not increase the Estonian people's sense of security in any way, rather the opposite' (Reuters, 2016). Apart from this situation that was ultimately defused, the Free Party posted several more press statements which embraced liberal values and the European Union as a whole while also criticising government communication.

The debate in the Riigikogu went largely along the same lines; two of the four posts concerned themselves with the advent of the Soldiers of Odin and the sense of insecurity because of them, while the other two voiced governmental and societal criticisms.

At this point in time, it seems like the Estonian political parties have discursively found some of the core values upon which they can agree. While the Conservative People's Party, as opposed to all other parties, did not go so far as to fully embrace the Soldiers of Odin publicly, all parties explicitly or implicitly agreed on the sovereignty of the Estonian state and its monopoly with regards to the exertion of power.

March 2016 – A Renewed Shift Towards Security?

In the final month of our analysis, Estonian political parties reacted to another international event, namely the Brussels bombings on 22 March. The total number of posts published across all party channels went down from 14 to 13 and, more importantly, only a small number of them were posted after the Brussels bombings. The attacks on the Belgian capital were exploited exclusively by the Conservative People's Party as part of the criticism they leveraged towards liberal values and the impact of Muslim immigration on Estonian culture. The remaining four press releases were very diverse in their focus; the Conservative People's Party voiced concerns about the economic outlook, an article

published by the Free Party worried about security concerns in connection with EU policies two weeks prior to the Brussels bombings, and the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union appeared to have rediscovered its appreciation for liberal values and shared responsibility in two separate articles.

The Riigikogu webpage shows almost the exact same picture; the Conservative People's Party voiced its doubts about matters of security, the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union published one of the two articles that we also found on the party webpage, and the Free Party publishes the same critical article as on the party webpage in addition to an expression of condolences to the people of Brussels while maintaining that this attack does not alter the degree of safety and security in Estonia.

There are two things that are particularly remarkable about our findings from March 2016; first, it is curious that the reaction to the Brussels bombings did not match or even excel the reaction to the Paris attacks, particularly when taking into consideration that March was the month when the first EU-quota refugees would arrive; second, the complete wordlessness of the three biggest parties in parliament both on their own webpages and on the Riigikogu webpage was truly confusing – no party would have lost a single vote by expressing condolences and reiterating already existing policy points.

3.2 Results of Qualitative Discourse Analysis

Insults and Derogatory Terms

In chapter 2.6 of this thesis, reference was made to the importance of insults and other derogatory terms in order to determine how well Hallin's spheres work without the journalist as the middleman. Of course, it would be no novelty for a media outlet to report on the transgression of a politician, but it is very unlikely that said outlet would quote the politician, thereby reiterating the insult; a practical example is the bleep censor in American television which masks profanities or severe insults. This rather short section of the thesis will concentrate on the question whether politicians and parties are willing

and able to refrain from using insensitive language although no one would hinder them to use it.

On 27 March 2016, the Conservative People's Party published a post wishing everyone happy Easter celebrations connected with a reference to 'Maurid' and 'Homoapologeetid' (EKRE, 2016). The most direct translation in the English language would be the equally archaic and insulting 'Moor', describing black people, and 'homoapologists', describing supporters of the civil partnership act and gay rights in an insulting fashion. What is perhaps just as important as the insults themselves is that this was posted on the party webpage in the name of the entire party. In this particular instance, the transgression appears to have been either fully intentional or completely unintentional and without any thought of wrongdoing.

On 23 September 2015, the Conservative People's Party posted another press release decrying the 'Mugavuspagulased' (EKRE, 2015). The closest translation into English would be 'comfort refugee'. In some contexts, it can be a derogatory term describing Estonians who live abroad in wealthier countries. In this case, however, the press release warns economic refugees of using Estonia as a transit country en-route to Finland and Sweden, where the refugees would then exploit the social welfare system.

On 18 September 2015, one of the Free Party's members, Merle Jääger, wrote about an Estonian folklore character, the 'Ahjualune' (Vabaerakond, 2015b). In the folklore, the character keeps exploiting other protagonists and always finds another excuse to, among other things, take their food. Jääger writes in her article that now, hordes of 'Ahjualused' are arriving in Europe and something has to be done about this problem. This post was in part unexpected because it was posted by a Free Party member.

CHAPTER IV. DISCUSSIONS

Following our analysis of the sources in the previous chapter, this part of the thesis contains discussions on the most prevalent questions that have arisen over the past sixty pages. The first of our three research questions enquired about how differently the parties communicate and construct their arguments.

Commonalities of the Various Parties

The first point that the parties share is the predominant reliance on emotions rather than fact-based argumentation. This is rather understandable for several reasons:

(1) The European refugee crisis presented Estonia with a situation in which it had never found itself before, so there were no previous experiences upon which the political elite could have built;

(2) The very phenomenon of non-white immigration is a new occurrence for Estonia and the only comparison that some compatriots can draw is that to the time under Soviet occupation which came with many hardships;

(3) Immigration as a concept mostly touches upon values and emotions, particularly national sentiment and fear of the unknown;

(4) Even those factors of immigration that could be dealt with on a factual basis are hard to calculate because estimations of, for example, future budget costs are dependent on many unknown variables;

(5) There was little appetite in the population for fact-based arguments and most parties did not want to give the stage to the populists of the Conservative People's Party, thus they had to appeal to the electorate's emotions as well.

Beyond this, the different political parties share a preference for publishing posts on their own webpage rather than on the parliament webpage. One of the reasons for this situation is likely the branding and accessibility that comes with the own party webpage; if any voter would want to find out something about a particular party, he/she would very likely go to that specific party's webpage rather than search on the *Riigikogu* webpage to find only a fraction of the overall body of posts and press releases. If these two reasons hold true, however, then we have to ask the question why all parties still use the Riigikogu webpage. There is clearly no minimum quota per month that must be met, seeing as parties occasionally did not post anything for several months in a row. Another question that arises under these circumstances is how the parties justify sharing some posts on their party webpage and others – albeit fewer – on the parliament website; it would be understandable if there would be a strong overlap of articles across the two platforms but the overlap is rather small. Again, this is not the habit of one rogue party, this behaviour can be observed with all parties.

As we recall from Figure 6 on page 37, the different parties are also comparably homogenous in their choice of topic. One might have expected the Conservative People's Party to create fear over loss of Estonian culture and the security of the nation, or the Free Party to be particularly vocal on the economic impact that refugees might have. However, with the exception of the Free Party's constant criticism regarding the lacking communication of the government, the distribution is relatively even across all parties.

The Differences Between the Parties

First of all, particularly the Conservative People's Party and the Free Party have proven to be extraordinarily communicative in comparison to the other parties. This activity appears to exist for different reasons in the two parties, though: While the Conservative People's Party mostly writes articles directed towards its audience and membership, the Free Party seems to use its website for a rather different purpose. Many of the contributions that are published on the website are written in a style that makes it sound like the author tries to convince his/her own party members just as much as the general public. The Free Party's website has the character of an opinion bazaar, a discussion forum in which the party line is still being openly discussed. This is a very plausible suggestion; the public's main criticism towards the still very young Free Party is that it

appears to be completely undecided on some issues and openly contradictory on others. Without such a foundation it would not have been possible for one party member to write the exploitative ahjualused-refugee analogy right next to a lengthy post on how refugees may benefit the nation. This phase of determining-the-party-line is paired with a rather flat hierarchy style within the party; this stands in stark contrast to the Conservative People's Party which has a rather rigid system of operationalisation and also a very strong party line from which party members would neither be willing nor allowed to deviate.

The Effects of Events on Party Conduct

The second question which we raised at the very start is whether events have any effect on how the different parties communicate and, if so, what effects they have. Within this section, there are three main points that we were able to disseminate within this thesis;

(1) Gruesome terrorist attacks in Europe appeared to create a stronger feeling of belonging and connectedness among the Estonian political parties than the more emotionally charged pictures of drowned children like Aylan Kurdi;

(2) Even this reactiveness to terror attacks appears to wear off very quickly – there was a detectable drop in expressions of commiseration and compassion between the Paris attacks and the Brussels bombings although both were arguably horrible atrocities;

(3) Events in the home country mobilises the political parties the most. After the arson at the Vao refugee centre, politicians of all parties rallied to express their causes and also push their respective agendas.

For a political scientist, the natural and intuitive reaction at this point would be to continue researching until a proper correlation can be established. A sample size of two terrorist attacks on European soil within one year is already disproportionately high, but it still is not sufficient for us to draw dependable conclusions from this. Moreover, comparing the reactions of Estonian politicians to those of other European politicians would completely change the framework, because different cultures react differently to the same event and different political systems might not provide us with the same number of parties. Overall, these three realisations are very important; having quantifiable and verifiable data on any nation's parties' reactiveness to certain events can provide a valuable basis for future research.

Estonian Parties and Hallin's Spheres

The main question about the topic of Hallin's spheres was whether this paradigm could be transformed into a more modern understanding of media in which the middlemen, the journalists who are supposed to make sure that the discourse stays within reasonable boundaries, are cut out. Admittedly, taking the journalist out of Hallin's spheres effectively also means taking the core out of the paradigm. This, however, was necessary in order to underline that Hallin's understanding of how discourse is built up is mistaken in its very foundation. Hallin's visualisation is that journalists are somewhat akin to gatekeepers but that gives them more power than they arguably have in an era in which print media is faltering under the pressure of internet news services and independent reporters who sometimes enjoy more trust than some of the best traditional news agencies.

It must also be granted that, when Hallin wrote this book in 1986, global Internet and instant connectivity were still a distant dream. This does not mean, however, that the spheres of deviance, legitimate controversy, and consensus have no academic merit; after all, they are still very valuable in the explanation of how sedimented identity can inform discourse.

The political parties who control their own webpages, distribute their own information and independently target their audience, are testament to the notion that, on the whole, discourse can occur without the journalist-middleman. At the same time, this relative independence comes with one trade-off: the party webpages, while they can act freely, are still struggling because of very little Internet traffic and if a post contains something outrageous, the few traditional journalists that do visit the party webpage on a regular basis will still publish articles about the posts that should have stayed hidden from the public eye. Ultimately, the Estonian party webpages have developed into a mixed blessing where politicians still rely on traditional newspapers for big publicity, but can also communicate with their party members and core electorate in a more direct and unfiltered fashion. Nonetheless, they are definitely proof that political communication can also work without consideration for any middlemen and the target audience in exchange for the opportunity to publish straightforward and unabridged opinion pieces about which the traditional media outlets can still report as much or little as they desire.

CONCLUSION

The refugee crisis that used to concern some European countries turned into a pan-European problem when the EU agreed that all member states should accept and take care of some refugees. In April 2015, Estonia was confronted with this reality and its political elite, organised in six different parties that are represented in the national parliament, started to discuss the issue at hand.

This thesis set out to map out the positions of the different parties, along with their argumentative style, general attitude towards refugees, and main topics that were connected with the refugee question. These positions were analysed within a rigid framework of quantitative content analysis on two different platforms, first the respective party webpage, second the parliament faction section. In this section, the main findings were that the refugee crisis evoked a broadly emotional rather than fact-based response and that the parties did not focus on their respective expertise, but tied the refugee question into different contexts and topics somewhat evenly.

The second aim of this thesis was to examine how internal and external events would affect the discourse among the parties. Through strong contextualisation we were able to see that Estonian political parties reacted the more strongly the closer the event was to Estonia culturally, but also that compassion and expression of commiseration died down quite rapidly between the two terror attacks in Paris and Brussels. Furthermore, the topics that were chosen before and after the eventful months between September and November showed some differences, proving an internalisation over time. Signs of internalisation are worry about one's own culture and security rather than potential matters of interest in outside of one's own country.

In the final part of the thesis, we discussed the party press release as an individual type of media and juxtaposed it to Hallin's spheres in order to find out whether the old paradigm still has some validity in the modern, interconnected world. The main finding was that, because the Internet enables end-users such as political parties to interact with other end-users without outside interference, the journalist has lost his standing as the gatekeeper of public discourse.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. Source Table

Quantitative Content Analysis by Article
A – Party: (1) EKRE (2) IRL (3) Keskerakond (4) Reformierakond (5) SDE
             (6) Vabaerakond
B – Platform: (1) Party page (2) Riigikogu
C – Attitude: (1) Positive (2) Neutral (3) Negative
D – Style: (1) Emotions (2) Facts (3) Inaccessible
E – Topic: (1) Culture (2) Economy (3) EU (4) Government (5) Liberalism
             (6) Security (7) Multiple

Pattern:
Surname, Name. (Date). *Original Title*. [Translation]. Source.
Classifications.

Ekre Riigikogu Page

15.05.2015. *EKRE vastus ümberasustamise sundkvootidele on kindel ei.* [EKRE's reply to compulsory migrant quotas is a firm no]. http://www.riigikogu.ee/fraktsioonide-teated/eesti-konservatiivse-rahvaerakonna-fraktsioon/ekre-vastus-umberasustamise-sundkvootidele-on-kindel-ei/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2015].
A1. B2. C3. D1. E3.

21.05.2015. *Konservatiivide fraktsioon ei tolereeri ei sundkvoote ega ka „vabatahtlikkuse" meetodit.* [The Conservative Party does not tolerate compulsory quota nor "voluntary" method]. http://www.riigikogu.ee/fraktsioonide-teated/eesti-konservatiivse-rahvaerakonna-fraktsioon/konservatiivide-fraktsioon-ei-tolereeri-ei-sundkvoote-ega-ka-vabatahtlikkuse-meetodit/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].
A1. B2. C3. D1. E3.

09.06.2015. *Konservatiivide arupärimine pagulaste teemal lõi Riigikogu saali elevile!* [The Conservative Party's interpellation about refugees got the parliament hall excited]. http://www.riigikogu.ee/fraktsioonide-teated/eesti-konservatiivse-rahvaerakonna-fraktsioon/konservatiivide-aruparimine-pagulaste-teemal-loi-riigikogu-saali-elevile/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].
A1. B2. C3. D2. E7.

10.06.2015. *Konservatiivid esitasid massimmigratsiooni ennetava eelnõu.* [The Conseravtive Party proposed a legislation preventing mass immigration]. http://www.riigikogu.ee/fraktsioonide-teated/eesti-konservatiivse-rahvaerakonna-fraktsioon/konservatiivid-esitasid-massimmigratsiooni-ennetava-eelnou/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].

A1. B2. C3. D1. E3.

15.06.2015. *Konservatiivid esitasid arupärimise seoses valitsuse vassimisega uusimmigratsiooni küsimustes.* [The Conservative Party proposed an interpellation regarding the lies about immigration]. http://www.riigikogu.ee/fraktsioonide-teated/eesti-konservatiivse-rahvaerakonna-fraktsioon/konservatiivid-esitasid-aruparimise-seoses-valitsuse-vassimisega-uusimmigratsiooni-kusimustes/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].
A1. B2. C3. D2. E4.

16.06.2015. *Konservatiivid umbusaldasid Rõivase valitsust.* [The Conservative Party distrusted the government led by T. Rõivas]. http://www.riigikogu.ee/fraktsioonide-teated/eesti-konservatiivse-rahvaerakonna-fraktsioon/konservatiivid-umbusaldasid-roivase-valitsust/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].
A1. B2. C3. D1. E4.

08.09.2015. *EKRE fraktsioon päris aru selguse saamiseks.* [EKRE made an interpellation to get clarity]. http://www.riigikogu.ee/fraktsioonide-teated/eesti-konservatiivse-rahvaerakonna-fraktsioon/ekre-fraktsioon-paris-aru-selguse-saamiseks/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].
A1. B2. C2. D1. E5.

18.09.2016. *Konservatiivid pärisid kolmapäevases infotunnis aru migrastiooniprobleemide ja minister Ligi "popitegemise" kohta.* [The Conservative Party made an interpellation about migration problems and minister J. Ligi's "truancy"]. http://www.riigikogu.ee/fraktsioonide-teated/eesti-konservatiivse-rahvaerakonna-fraktsioon/konservatiivid-parisid-kolmapaevases-infotunnis-aru-migrastiooniprobleemide-ja-minister-ligi-popitegemise-kohta/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].
A1. B2. C3. D1. E4.

23.09.2016. *Immigratsiooni üle otsustamine jäi edasi kitsa ringi inimeste kätte*. [Immigration decision was left to a narrow circle of people]. http://www.riigikogu.ee/fraktsioonide-teated/eesti-konservatiivse-rahvaerakonna-fraktsioon/immigratsiooni-ule-otsustamine-jai-edasi-kitsa-ringi-inimeste-katte/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].
A1. B2. C3. D1. E4.

24.09.2015. *EKRE päris 23.09 infotunnis aru migratsiooni teemadel.* [EKRE made an interpellation about migration]. http://www.riigikogu.ee/fraktsioonide-teated/eesti-konservatiivse-rahvaerakonna-fraktsioon/ekre-paris-23-09-infotunnis-aru-migratsiooni-temadel/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].

A1. B2. C3. D1. E7

24.09.2015. *Konservatiivid esitasid siseministrile arupärimise seoses Eestisse toodavate pagulaste arvu ootamatu suurendamisega.* [The Conservative Party proposed an interpellation to Minister of the Interior regarding the unexpected increase of the figure of refugees coming to Estonia]. http://www.riigikogu.ee/fraktsioonide-teated/eesti-konservatiivse-rahvaerakonna-fraktsioon/konservatiivid-esitasid-siseministrile-aruparimise-seoses-eestisse-toodavate-pagulaste-arvu-ootamatu-suurendamisega/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].
A1. B2. C3. D1. E3.

29.09.2015. *Konservatiivide fraktsioon võõrustas Riigikogus Ungari kõrget diplomaati.* [The Conservative Party hosted a Hungarian high diplomat in the Parliament]. http://www.riigikogu.ee/fraktsioonide-teated/eesti-konservatiivse-rahvaerakonna-fraktsioon/konservatiivide-fraktsioon-voorustas-riigikogus-ungari-korget-diplomaati/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].
A1. B2. C3. D1. E3.

13.10.2015. *EKRE fraktsiooni arupärimine migratsiooni ja pagulaste küsimuses.* [EKRE's interpellation about migration and refugees]. http://www.riigikogu.ee/fraktsioonide-teated/eesti-konservatiivse-rahvaerakonna-fraktsioon/ekre-farktsiooni-aruparimine-migratsiooni-ja-pagulaste-kusimuses/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].
A1. B2. C3. D1. E4.

21.10.2015. *Konservatiivid pärisid infotunnis aru Kaitseväe võimekuse, immigrantidele kuluva raha ja tervisekaitse ning Võru-Valga reisirongiliikluse kohta.* [The Conservative Party made an interpellation about the capability of Estonian Defence Forces, the money spent on refugees and the train traffic between Võru and Valga]. http://www.riigikogu.ee/fraktsioonide-teated/eesti-konservatiivse-rahvaerakonna-fraktsioon/konservatiivid-parisid-infotunnis-aru-kaitsevae-voimekuse-immgrantidele-kuluva-raha-ja-tervisekaitse-ning-voru-valga-reisirongiliikluse-kohta/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].
A1. B2. C3. D2. E7.

26.10.2015. *Peaminister ei adu Euroopat tabanud kriisi suurust ja tõsidust.* [The Prime Minister doesn't understand the magnitude and severity of the European crises]. http://www.riigikogu.ee/fraktsioonide-teated/eesti-konservatiivse-rahvaerakonna-fraktsioon/peaminister-ei-adu-euroopat-tabanud-kriisi-suurust-ja-tosidust/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].
A1. B2. C3. D1. E4.

29.10.2015. *EKRE fraktsioon tegi välismaalaste kaitse muutmise seaduseelnõusse 28 parandusettepanekut.* [EKRE proposed 28 improvement motions to the legislation of changing foreigners defence]. http://www.riigikogu.ee/fraktsioonide-teated/eesti-konservatiivse-rahvaerakonna-fraktsioon/ekre-fraktsioon-tegi-valismaalaste-kaitse-muutmise-seaduseelnousse-28-parandusettepanekut/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].
A1. B2. C3. D2. E2.

Madison, Jaak. 06.11.2015. *Rootsi rändeolukord on katastroofiline.* [Swedish migrant situation is critical]. http://www.riigikogu.ee/fraktsioonide-teated/eesti-konservatiivse-rahvaerakonna-fraktsioon/jaak-madison-rootsi-randeolukord-on-katastroofiline/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].
A1. B2. C3. D2. E2.

16.11.2015. *Konservatiivide fraktsioon viis pärja Prantsuse saatkonna juurde*. [The Conservative Party took a wreath to French Embassy]. http://www.riigikogu.ee/fraktsioonide-teated/eesti-konservatiivse-rahvaerakonna-fraktsioon/konservatiivide-fraktsioon-viis-parja-prantsuse-saatkonna-juurde/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].
A1. B2. C3. D1. E6.

17.11.2015. *Konservatiivide arupärimine Vao keskuse põlengu uurimise ja massimigratsioonivastaste aktivistide ahistamise kohta.* [The Conservative Party's interpellation about the fire in Vao refugee centre and the harassment of the immigration opponents]. http://www.riigikogu.ee/fraktsioonide-teated/eesti-konservatiivse-rahvaerakonna-fraktsioon/konservatiivide-aruparimine-vao-keskuse-polengu-uurimise-ja-massimigratsioonivastaste-aktivistide-ahistamise-kohta/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].
A1. B2. C3. D1. E7.

07.12.2015. *Kaitseminister jättis kõrgete sõjaväelaste päevapoliitilised väljaütlemised hukka mõistmata.* [The Minister of Defence didn't condemn the daily political statements of the army officers]. http://www.riigikogu.ee/fraktsioonide-teated/eesti-konservatiivse-rahvaerakonna-fraktsioon/kaitseminister-jattis-korgete-sojavaelaste-paevapoliitilised-valjautlemised-hukka-moistmata/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].
A1. B2. C3. D1. E5.

Madison, Jaak. 28.01.2016. *Esimesena peame kaitsma oma inimesi ja rahvaid!* [Firstly we have to defend our people and nations!] http://www.riigikogu.ee/fraktsioonide-teated/eesti-konservatiivse-rahvaerakonna-fraktsioon/jaak-madison-strasbourgis-esimesena-peame-kaitsma-oma-inimesi-ja-rahvaid/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].
A1. B2. C3. D1. D7.

18.02.2016. *Eesti on demograafilise kriisi lävel ja selle ärahoidmine nõuab kiiret tegutsemist.* [Estonia is standing on the edge of a demographic crises and it takes quick action to prevent it].
http://www.riigikogu.ee/fraktsioonide-teated/eesti-konservatiivse-rahvaerakonna-fraktsioon/eesti-on-demograafilise-kriisi-lavel-ja-selle-arahoidmine-nouab-kiiret-tegutsemist/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].
A1. B2. C3. D2. E1.

Kaskpeit, Uno. 15.03.2016. *Pevkuri muretus piirikaitse osas teeb murelikuks.* [The unconcern of H. Pevkur towards boarder control is concerning].
http://www.riigikogu.ee/fraktsioonide-teated/eesti-konservatiivse-rahvaerakonna-fraktsioon/uno-kaskpeit-pevkuri-muretus-piirikaitse-osas-teeb-murelikuks/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].
A1. B2. C3. D2. E6.

Helme, Martin. 17.03.2016. *Pagulasi puudutav seadusemuudatus sai võimalikuks tänu konservatiivide tööle.* [The legislative amendment concerning refugees was possible thanks to the work of the Conservative Party]. http://www.riigikogu.ee/fraktsioonide-teated/eesti-konservatiivse-rahvaerakonna-fraktsioon/martin-helme-pagulasi-puudutav-seadusemuudatus-sai-voimalikuks-tanu-konservatiivide-toole/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].
A1. B2. C3. D1. E4.

EKRE Party Page

03.09.2015. *Vaos toimuv on valitsuse ignorantse poliitika paratamatu tagajärg.* [The happenings in Vao are the result of the ignorant politics of the government].
https://ekre.ee/vaos-toimuv-on-valitsuse-ignorantse-poliitika-paratamatu-tagajarg/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].
A1. B1. C3. D1. E4.

04.09.2015. *Vao põlengu varjus plaanitakse eestis vaikivat ajastut.* [The silent era in Estonia is planned under the shade of the fire in Vao refugee centre].
https://ekre.ee/vao-polengu-varjus-plaanitakse-eestis-vaikivat-ajastut/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].
A1. B1. C3. D1. E4.

09.09.2015. *Kontroll pagulaste vastuvõtu üle peab jääma liikmesriikidele.* [The Member States must remain the control over acceptance of the refugees].
https://ekre.ee/kontroll-pagulaste-vastuvotu-ule-peab-jaama-liikmesriikidele/ [Accessed 27 Aug 2016].
A1. B1. C3. D1. E3.

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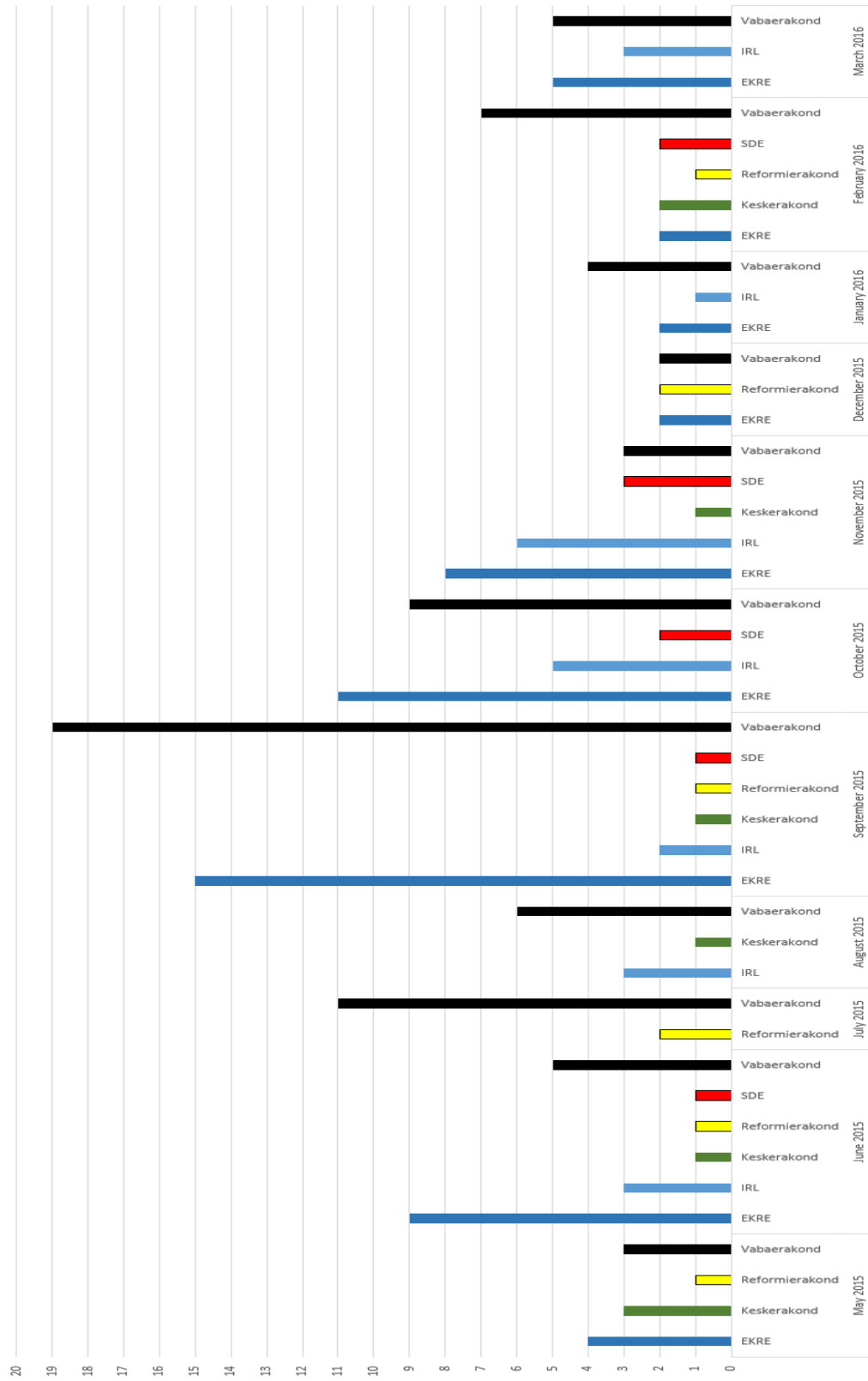A6. B1. C3. D1. E6.

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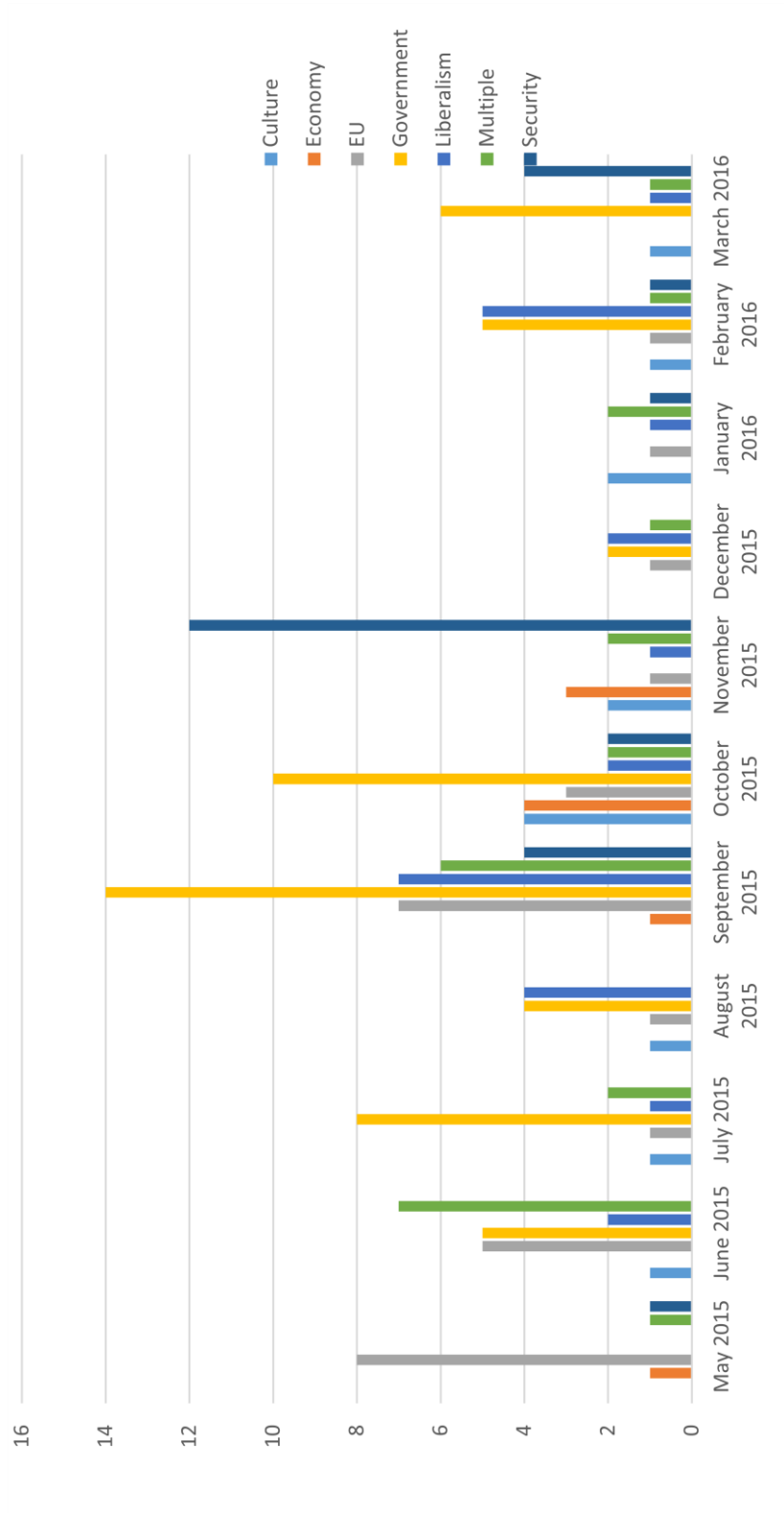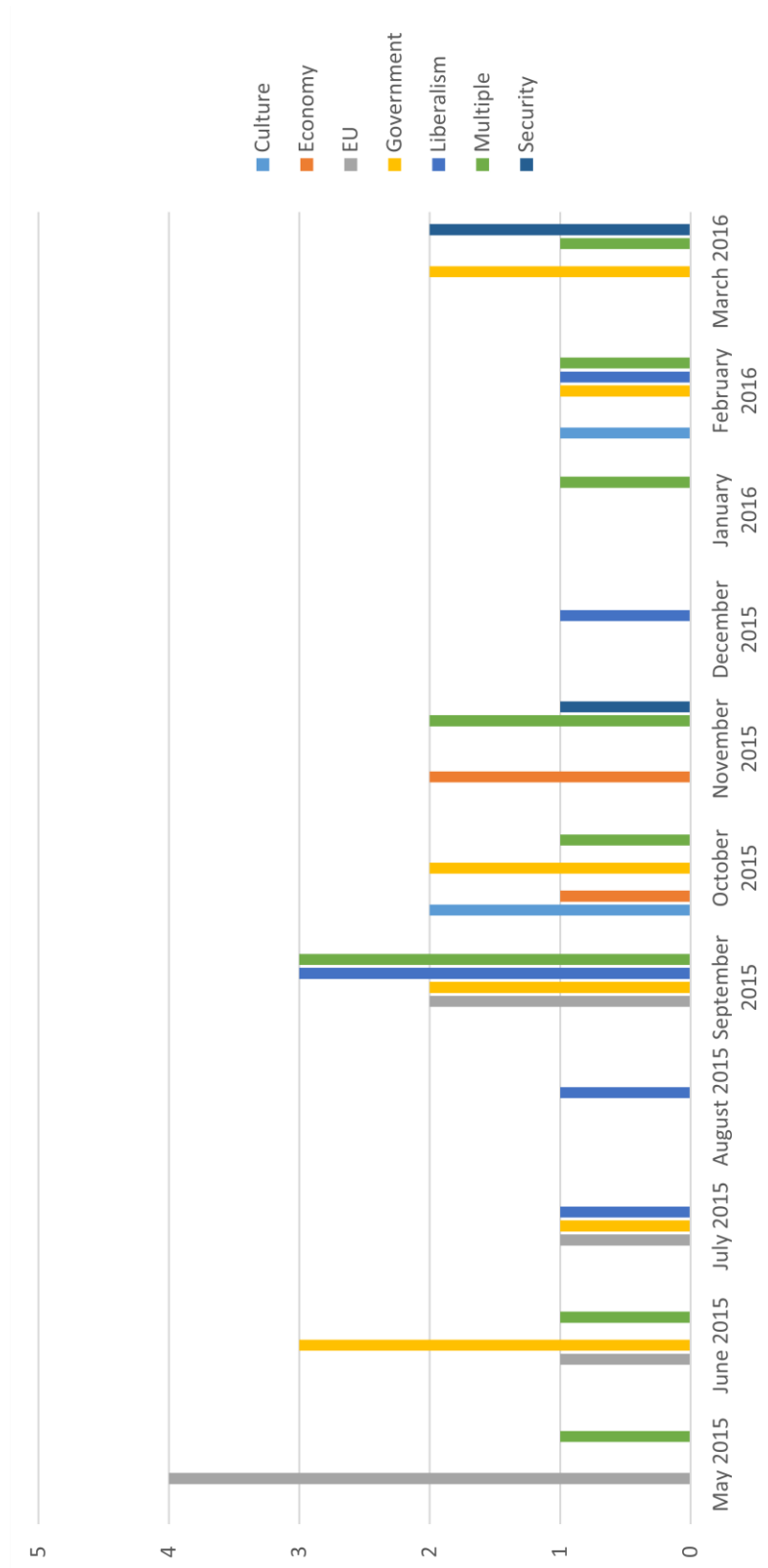A6. B1. C2. D1. E4.

Appendix 1: Political parties and their number of combined posts over the year

Appendix 2: Topics posted by all parties combined over the year

Appendix 3: Topics posted by all parties combined on the Riigikogu webpage

Appendix 4: Number of party posts
on both platforms