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NORDIC-BALTIC COOPERATION FROM BALTIC
PERSPECTIVE IN THE CHANGING SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

Master thesis

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Authorship Declaration

I have prepared this thesis independently. All the views of other authors, as well as data from literary sources and elsewhere, have been cited.

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Abstract

The objective of the present research was to explore the role of Nordic-Baltic regional cooperation in the foreign policy strategies of the Baltic states. The changing political and security environment since February 2022 gave the Nordic-Baltic region a new relevance. To see how the external changes impacted Nordic-Baltic cooperation, Baltic foreign policy leaders' perceptions about their country's position in international relations were analysed. The analysis has used key concepts of constructivist and role theory to analyse motivations behind the foreign policy behaviour of a state. In the qualitative document analysis, the central elements of Baltic foreign policy leaders' perceptions about their countries' position and attitudes to regional cooperation were compared in a ten-year period. The analysis has shown a clear increase in Nordic-Baltic regional cooperation in the past two years, the support for Ukraine being a new focus of cooperation. Nevertheless, there are still considerable differences regarding the role of regional cooperation in the Baltic foreign policy agendas. Estonia is the most committed to the Nordic-Baltic cooperation while Lithuania appears to be the least interested in the Nordic-Baltic region. Differences in the communication of foreign policy leaders suggest that divergent perceptions and attitudes of individual policymakers affect the future perspectives of Nordic-Baltic cooperation.

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Introduction

The aim of the present research is to analyse the most recent trends in regional cooperation in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the context of the changing security environment since February 2022. The research aims to assess the role and function of Nordic-Baltic regional cooperation in the Baltic states' foreign policy strategies. Thus, focusing on regional issues from a Baltic perspective, the present thesis will analyse recent trends in comparison with previous trends, prior to 2022. Particularly, it aims to analyse the foreign policy priorities of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, assessing their engagement in and the effectiveness of regional cooperation. The analysis aims to find out more about the functioning of the cooperation between the Nordics and Baltics as a block of countries with shared interests and policies, focusing on the perceptions and attitudes of the three Baltic countries.

With the appearance of new regional cooperation formats around the world in recent decades, more and more attention has been devoted to research on regions, regionalism and regional security (Aris & Wenger, 2014). The Baltic Sea region is an outstanding example of an area of thriving multileveled and multidimensional regional cooperation frameworks, which enable countries to pursue regional integration, providing platforms for diverse social and political interactions (Tassinari, 2005, p. 398). Within the broader Baltic Sea region, the three Baltic states have been particularly actively pursuing the establishment of various cooperation frameworks in their neighbourhood. In the case of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, one of the key driving forces of both trilateral cooperation and engagement in the broader Baltic Sea region has always been the security issue (Jermalavičius et al., 2020). Another key aspect of the Baltic idea of cooperation is that it is based on a normative, value-oriented policy (Wood, 2024, p. 3).

There is also some contradiction in the literature regarding the practical results and the real commitment of the Baltic and the Nordic countries to cooperate with each other. While scholars outline clear similarities in the strategic goals, values, interests across the regions, it is also clear that every state has its own foreign policy priorities. Moreover, differences in threat assessment and foreign policy priorities between the Baltic and the Nordics have been visible (Kuusik, 2020; Mälksoo & Šešelgytė, 2013). Most importantly, the depth and effectiveness of Nordic-Baltic cooperation, as well as the engagement of member states in joint regional policy is assessed differently by various researchers. Many scholars have assessed regional cooperation as not comprehensive enough (Kuusik, 2020; Major, C., & Voss, A. V., 2016), others have seen the lack of common policy even among the Baltic countries (Jermalavičius et al., 2020, p. 281) as a huge problem. In order to examine this question, the present research aims to put Nordic-Baltic regional cooperation into a broader context of foreign policy priorities in order to assess its importance in Baltic foreign policies.

The security issues, value-driven and identity-based foreign policy, and close Nordic-Baltic relations got a new momentum with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, triggering substantial changes in the European security environment. Notably, Finland and Sweden deciding to join NATO has changed the context of security cooperation across the Baltic Sea region. In the current geopolitical situation, the threat assessment among the Nordic and Baltic countries shows a significant degree of convergence. In the meantime, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has cardinally changed the view on Russia, enabling the Baltic countries to raise their security concerns more effectively in the transatlantic community.

In the context of the war in Ukraine, the Nordic-Baltic cooperation in a broad range of fields is more relevant than ever. Yet, strategic partners from the Euro-Atlantic community and membership in a wide variety of international organisations offer the Baltic countries a choice of various foreign policy strategies to achieve their priorities. Therefore, the question is whether the Baltic states prefer to use the momentum by acting together on a regional level or, instead, by pursuing their own foreign policy purposes focusing on the improvement of bilateral relations with their strategic partners.

This being said, the present research aims to analyse the latest trends in the foreign policy priorities of the Baltic countries to find out in what fields, and to what extent they are committed to joint action on a regional level. The ever-changing geopolitical and security environment, notably the most recent changes within and around the Baltic Sea region, gives relevance to the constant observation of the trends. Since the changes triggered by the full-scale Russian invasion in Ukraine are very close in time or are still ongoing processes, there is still a gap in scholarly literature about its impacts on the Nordic-Baltic region, particularly regarding regional cooperation trends. Moreover, by comparing Nordic-Baltic relations with other strategic goals, the analysis seeks to assess the role and function(s) of Nordic-Baltic regional cooperation in Baltic foreign policy strategies in comparison with other issues and partnerships.

The present thesis aims to investigate new perspectives of Nordic-Baltic regional cooperation amidst the current geopolitical circumstances, compared to previous trends of inter-state cooperation between the Baltics and the Nordics. The study will analyse foreign policy visions of the Baltic states, focusing on the question with which other states they aim to cooperate the most. To this end, the study aims to analyse the foreign policy roles of the three Baltic states, assessing the extent of their engagement in regional cooperation. The research seeks to find out the main similarities and differences in foreign policy priorities of the three Baltic countries, particularly regarding regional cooperation frameworks.

The research is based on the assumption that the effective functioning of a regional cooperation formation depends on shared perceptions by states about threats and interests. Namely, foreign policy leaders' perceptions and interpretations about the state's position and possibilities in international relations have a huge impact on their choice when engaging in bilateral and multilateral cooperation. Therefore, the primary focus of the research is on policymakers' understanding of their countries' position in the international community. The aim of this research is to find out what kind of foreign policy strategies have been prevalent in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania during the last two years, and what is the role of Nordic-Baltic regional cooperation in these strategies. The research will examine the Baltic countries' perceptions of like-mindedness in relation to other Nordic-Baltic countries as well as their perceived role, position in the international community and possibilities to achieve their foreign policy objectives. All this will be analysed in comparison with previous trends since 2014 to distinguish the potential consequences of the changes after February 2022. This being said, the current inquiry seeks answers to the following research questions: *With which states and in what way do Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania seek closer cooperation? What changes occurred after 2022, and why? Where do these trends across the three Baltic states overlap or differ, and why?*

For the assessment of Nordic-Baltic cooperation, the research will rely on two closely connected theories. The first, namely, constructivist theory, provides an appropriate theoretical

framework to analyse self-identification, like-mindedness and sense of community between states. The second theory that provides valuable concepts for the present research purpose is role theory. The latter helps to conceptualize the self-positioning of foreign policy actors through the concepts of national role conception and role performance. Therefore, it is particularly relevant when analysing motivations behind the foreign policy behaviour of a state. Arguably, all these aspects have a direct impact on foreign policy leaders in setting foreign policy goals and choosing partners for closer inter-state cooperation. The contribution of both theories to the research will further be presented in the paper.

For the indicated purpose, qualitative content analysis was carried out, applying coding as a research method. Data was gathered by document analysis, using two types of sources. The first type of documents consists of security and foreign policy strategies of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, as well as annual reports of the respective Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The second group of documents analysed in the research consists of speeches and statements made by top foreign policy leaders, namely Presidents and Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the three Baltic countries having been in office throughout the examined period.

First, the thesis will introduce the wider context of the three Baltic countries' engagement in Nordic-Baltic cooperation, presenting an overview of the literature on this field. The literature review will be followed by the presentation of the theoretical background and the introduction of the main concepts applied in the analysis. The third section is dedicated to the presentation of the research design and the research method. In the fourth chapter, the findings of the document analysis will be described in detail. This section is divided into four subsections, three providing separate analyses of the three Baltic countries, and the fourth giving an overview of the main differences and similarities between three states. Finally, the conclusion and further implications of the analysis will be presented in the last section.

1. The Baltic states in regional cooperation

This chapter provides an overview of scholarly literature on regional cooperation in the Baltic Sea region, and, particularly, on Nordic-Baltic cooperation. The focus of the present research is not so much on the institutional framework as on the attitudes towards Nordic-Baltic cooperation within the region. Accordingly, this chapter will mostly discuss the political, geopolitical and societal context of regional cooperation during the previous decades. The aim of the literature review is to outline the dynamics of Nordic-Baltic cooperation, and the most significant factors behind them in order to provide a proper background for the analysis presented in this paper.

1.1. Shared perceptions and regional cooperation in the Nordic-Baltic region

Ever since the 1990s, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have had a clear intention to achieve closer cooperation with neighbouring countries in the Baltic Sea region. This was especially true in relation with the Nordic countries (Neumann, 1994). The ultimate purpose of forming regional blocks for the Baltic states is to represent their security interests together (Beržiūnas, 2020; Galbreath & Lašas, 2011). In addition, value-driven foreign policy also had an impact on the orientation of the Baltics (Wood, 2024, p. 3). In both respects, the Nordic countries, especially Sweden and Finland, have played an essential part, as role models, in the new regional self-positioning of the Baltic states ever since their re-integration into the Western alliances (Götz & Haggrén, 2009; Musiał, 2015).

Sweden and Finland have been the most important partners for the three Baltic states due to geographical proximity and mutual interests in cooperating with each other (Jurkynas, 2014). Finland, and, even more so, Sweden actively supported the re-integration of the Baltic states into the Western cooperation frameworks after the restoration of their independence (Jurkynas, 2017, p. 214). During the last decades, various multilateral institutions have been created to enable regional cooperation between the Nordics and the Baltics, including the NB6 and NB8 (Breitenbauch et al., 2017). Nordic-Baltic Cooperation, also known as NB, is a regional cooperation format. Established in 1992, it brings together the three Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), and the Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark). In the framework of NB8, various regular high-level meetings are organized including the annual meetings of Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers. NB6 brings together the EU member states of the Nordic-Baltic region. Nordic-Baltic Cooperation provides platform to discuss not only regional issues but broader international matters as well (*Välisministerium*, 2024). In addition to political cooperation frameworks, Sweden and Finland, the two non-aligned countries of the region at that time, had also been participating in several NATO operations, joining NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) initiative (Brommesson et al., 2024; Wieslander, 2022; Ydén et al., 2019).

Still, security is the very field where policy priorities used to differ significantly between the Baltic and the Nordic countries. The main difference had been the perception of, and attitude towards Russia (Mälksoo & Šešelgytė, 2013). From the collapse of the Soviet Union till 2014, there was a general willingness in Europe, including the Baltic Sea Region countries, to enhance

cooperation with Russia (Major, C., & Voss, A. V., 2016). The different attitudes towards Russia before 2022 caused substantial disagreement within the Baltic Sea region, as well as in EU-Baltic relations, Western European countries aiming to build closer relations with Russia while the Baltics being repeatedly warning about the dangers of Russian foreign policy ambitions for the European security (Beržiūnas, 2020; Crowther, 2023; Zeöld, 2023). Such differences were also visible within NATO. While the Baltics (together with Poland) demanded “a clear deterrent message” and additional support from NATO, others, including Norway, aimed to achieve security through dialogue with Russia (Major & Voss, 2016, p. 4). In this particular question, they could not rely on support from the Nordics as well as in regional integration issues. While the three Baltic states have always regarded their Eastern neighbour as the main existential threat for their sovereignty (Crowther, 2023), it had not been the case in the Nordics (Friede, 2022, p. 524). The Finnish and Swedish foreign policy focus also differs from those of the Baltics. While the Nordic countries generally tend to “think globally”, development aid and humanitarian issues in remote regions being an essential part of their foreign policy, the Baltics tend to focus rather on their own region (Kuusik, 2020, pp. 5–6). This is even so if, through various international organisations, the three Baltic states also have been participating in development cooperations, and even NATO missions (Vilson, 2017). The clear differences in foreign and security policy priorities between the Nordic and Baltic countries (in addition to differences within these two groups of countries) had made Nordic-Baltic cooperation fragmented and less effective (Kuusik, 2020).

For many European countries, the first shock came with the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Vilson, 2017). Despite the diverse foreign policy priorities in the Nordic-Baltic region, the Ukrainian crisis proved to be a gamechanger in the Nordic security policy as well. After years of decreasing interest in the Nordic military defence cooperation in the early 2010s, the aggressive Russian foreign policy gave a new relevance to the issue (Bengtsson, 2020, p. 101). In fact, according to Bengtsson, it was due to the Ukrainian crisis that the Nordic defence cooperation became indeed a ‘threat-driven’ one, in contrast to the previous years when the lack of sufficient motivation had been the main obstacle of the Nordic countries from reaching a meaningful defence cooperation. “It was not until the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis that Russia’s increasing assertiveness was recognised as a shared problem across the BSR” (Ibid). In the NORDEFSCO Annual Report in 2019 it is stated that “Russia’s behaviour [continues] to increase international tensions” (Nordic Defence Cooperation, 2020, p. 24). All in all, there was a consensus that the Russian aggression in Ukraine had a heavy impact on the security situation in Europe, particularly in the Nordic-Baltic region.

As the aggressive Russian foreign policy increasingly turned NATO’s attention to the Baltic Sea region, close partnership with Finland and Sweden got a new significance given. The contribution of the two non-aligned Nordic countries was seen as crucial in order to secure the Baltics (Pyykönen & Forss, 2019; Wieslander, 2022). The Ukrainian crisis since 2014 clearly gave Finland and Sweden, too, a strong incentive to increase their security cooperation with NATO (Wieslander, 2019; Ydén et al., 2019). During this period, Finland and Sweden also pursued closer military cooperation with the Baltic states, participating in military exercises (Stoicescu, K., & Järvenpää, P., 2019). Security cooperation among the Nordic countries also increased (Brøgger, 2023, cited by Brommesson et al., 2024). Particularly Swedish-Finnish bilateral relations were regarded as increasingly important (Brommesson, 2016; Pyykönen & Forss, 2019). The changing security environment resulted in a new impulse to enhance closer cooperation within the framework of NORDEFSCO (Bengtsson, 2020). The NORDEFSCO

Vision 2025 highlights Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as states to continue and strengthen cooperation with (Nordic Defence Cooperation, 2018).

All in all, it is suggested that a considerable reorientation of foreign and security policy was triggered by the Russian aggression in Ukraine since 2014. Yet, the threat perceptions across the Baltic Sea region, primarily with respect to Russia, remained diverse (Crowther, 2023, p. 15). Among others, some substantial differences between the Swedish and Finnish foreign and security policy priorities versus those of the three Baltic states remained.

Firstly, there was still a remarkable gap in the opinions regarding the nature and the seriousness of the Russian threat. Although after 2014, Finnish and Swedish societies were also increasingly concerned about Russia (Winnerstig, 2013, p. 153), and the Nordic countries also repeatedly condemned Russia's war in Ukraine (Iso-Markku et al., 2018), they were still opting for maintain relations with Russia, mostly economic ones (Friede, 2022, p. 524; Ekengren, 2018). Finland had a more pragmatic view while Sweden had a more value-driven approach towards Russia (Iso-Markku et al., 2018, p. 20). By Swedish governmental officials the annexation of Crimea was assessed as "as an outright violation of the rules-based order" (Brommesson et al., 2024, p. 29), triggering a crisis that affected the whole regional security environment, and thus, impacted Sweden as well (Wieslander, 2022). While seeking to deepen partnership with NATO, Finland nevertheless, still tried to preserve their existing relationship with Russia (Brommesson et al., 2024). Till February 2022, in the view of Finnish policymakers, balancing between the West and Russia, preserving cooperation and good relations between Finland and Russia was, regarded as crucial (Ibid). In 2018, a Russia-US summit was held in Helsinki (Kuusik, 2020, p. 6). Throughout this period, Finland aimed to maintain dialogue with Russia, the Finnish president Sauli Niinistö even having proposed some confidence-building measures in the Baltic sea between Russia and NATO (Wieslander, 2019, pp. 215–216). It was due to Finland's traditional geopolitical position of in-betweenness during the previous decade, the roots of which go back the Cold War. Ever since then, Finland had been functioning as a bridge-builder between East and West, connecting and mediating between the Soviet Union, and later, Russia, and the Euro-Atlantic countries (Brommesson et al., 2024, p. 29). In the meantime, notwithstanding the repeated statements about the deterioration of the security situation in Northern Europe, the Nordic countries still did not perceive Russia as an immediate military threat, rather as a violator of core European norms and international law (Friede, 2022, p. 524; Wieslander, 2022, p. 41).

Secondly, due to the historical legacy, the traditional non-aligned status was largely regarded as an essential attribute of Finnish and Swedish foreign policy (Ydén et al., 2019). These countries, especially Sweden, still preferred to pursue an independent defence policy (Wieslander, 2019). After 2014, though the attitude of the Swedish society towards NATO membership became increasingly ambiguous, the majority still opposed it (Ydén et al., 2019). Therefore, while in practice, the increasingly close cooperation made Sweden's position in many respects very similar to that of a NATO member state, domestic political factors, notably the importance of the idea of sovereign defence policy (Wieslander, 2022, p. 51) did not allow policymakers to formally take the decisive step towards the alliance. As a result, despite the increasingly close cooperation between the two Nordic countries and NATO member states, Sweden's and Finland's non-aligned position was a crucial barrier of a more comprehensive regional cooperation. Notably, it resulted in an ambiguous situation where NATO's ability to provide

effective security guarantees to the Baltics depended on non-NATO member states (Major & Voss, 2016, p. 4).

Consequently, due to the lack of an “overarching Nordic–Baltic cooperation framework” gathering every country of the region, the regional defence cooperation was largely seen as fragmented, (Major & Voss, 2016, p. 4). While the Nordic-Baltic region, notably thanks to CBSS, was one of the most institutionalised regions in the world (Wood, 2024, p. 6), it was assessed as having “high socialisation, but little strategic cooperation” with minor influence on policy and relatively little outcome (Kuusik, 2020, p. 9). The fragmentation of regional cooperation in this period was caused not only by membership questions across the region but also due to the still existing differences in foreign and security policy goals between Baltics Sea region countries (Major & Voss, 2016, p. 4). Others also claim that “the Nordics and the Baltics are not like-minded countries” (Borowicz et al., 2020, p. 16). Most importantly, the role and the importance Nordic-Baltic cooperation itself had been assessed differently by various members. It had been regarded as a strategic foreign policy priority by Estonia as well as Sweden while it had been somewhat less prioritized in Latvia and Lithuania, or Finland (Kuusik, 2020, p. 9). Some scholars argue that being a geopolitical buffer zone, the Nordic and Baltic countries “have traditionally been looking outside the region – not least to the US – for security guarantees” while internal security cooperation has been of secondary importance (Breitenbauch et al., 2017, p. 4). Others, however, emphasize the significance of cooperation within the region (Jurkynas, 2014; Kuusik, 2020; Petrikkos, 2023; Wood, 2024).

1.2. Cooperation – with whom?

This paper aims to analyse foreign policy preferences of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania regarding regional cooperation. It was suggested that scholars often view a lack of common policy even among the Baltics (Jermalavičius et al., 2020, p. 281). Given that various internal and external factors induce different foreign policies in every country, there always might be differences in foreign policy priorities and partnership preferences even within a such a well-connected region. The foreign policy of three Baltic states have been shaped by different, though overlapping relations with their respective neighbours and other countries. In the case of Lithuania, the essential relationships are those with Poland, Belarus, or Ukraine, in the case of Latvia, with Germany and Sweden whereas for Estonia the major influences come from Sweden, Denmark and Finland (Donskis, 2015, p. 389).

In certain cases where cooperation in foreign policy is in the interest of the Baltic countries, especially concerning defence capability and NATO integration matters, trilateral Baltic cooperation has been successful and effective (Jermalavičius et al., 2020). In some other cases, the three Baltic countries have pursued their own political interests, as Lithuania’s ambitious foreign policy and regional leadership aspirations have shown (Park & Jakstaite-Confortola, 2021, p. 1279), to give just one example. Seeking to improve bilateral relations with Western powers (US, Germany) or the Nordics (Sweden, Finland), they often even compete with each other (Jermalavičius et al., 2020, p. 282). This was especially so regarding their bilateral relationships with the US (Park & Jakstaite-Confortola, 2021).

The Baltic states have always been seeking to strengthen and secure their relations with the US as the main security guarantor of NATO (Banka, 2023; Bankauskaitė & Šlekys, 2023; Kuusik, 2020, p. 5). In fact, it is also true for Finland and Sweden (Brommesson et al., 2024; Pyykönen & Forss, 2019). Arguably, building relations with other Western allies in order to represent their national interests more effectively in the EU (Beržiūnas, 2020, p. 179) should equally be prioritized in all the three countries' foreign policy agenda. Due to geographical location on the Eastern border of NATO, and the common security interests in increasing NATO defence capabilities as well as US engagement in the region (Gajauskaitė, 2020), the Baltic states are all interested in cooperation with Poland. It is especially important for Lithuania, given the geographical proximity and the long history of complicated Polish-Lithuanian relations. In 2018, Poland, along with Germany and Estonia, were considered to be “the most desirable partners in defence and security” for Lithuania (Murauskaitė, 2020, p. 159). As a result of the Russian aggression in Ukraine, bilateral cooperation between Lithuania and Poland increased (Gajauskaitė, 2020). It has been improved further since 2022 (Bankauskaitė & Šlekys, 2023, p. 61). Nevertheless, the Polish-Lithuanian cooperation is still hindered by conflicts between the two states, mostly due caused by on internal factors (Gajauskaitė, 2020). In the meantime, during the last two decades, Lithuania has also shown an increasing orientation towards the Nordics (Jurkynas, 2017, p. 214).

All in all, there are still considerable similarities between foreign policy goals and orientations across the Baltics, and even in the Nordic-Baltic region, which provide a basis for joint action (Jermalavičius et al., 2020, p. 281). It was suggested that the abundance of regional cooperation frameworks gives a good institutional background for common policy. However, more practical cooperation would be important between the Nordics and the Baltics, defining shared interests and reacting to new challenges (Kuusik, 2020, p. 10). Concerning these challenges, the deterioration of the security situation in the Baltics since 2022 places practical cooperation into a new context, and it might be expected to provide additional incentives for such a cooperation.

1.3. New security context in the Baltic Sea region

As a result of the Russian aggression, the security environment in the Baltic Sea region has fundamentally changed. The cardinal change of Finland's attitude regarding its relationship with Russia has since February 2022 has been particularly remarkable. As a result of the full-scale war in Ukraine, it was no longer possible for Finland to maintain its former relationship with its Eastern neighbour, and the Finnish attitude to Russia has changed cardinally (Brommesson et al., 2024, p. 34). The invasion of Ukraine forced Finland and Sweden to seek NATO accession, renouncing their traditional non-aligned status (Alberque & Schreer, 2022; Wittmann, 2022). The decision of Sweden and Finland to join NATO meant a sharp turn in the security policy of the two Nordic states, which might change the overall security situation in Europe (Kaynak, 2023). Although the process was not finalised at that time yet (Wintour & Bayer, 2023), it was already clear in 2022-2023 that Finland and Sweden's NATO membership would be a “major shift in European security” (Alberque & Schreer, 2022, p. 68), creating an entirely new situation and enabling a significantly higher level of defence in the whole BSR. Thus, the perspective of enlargement changed the security context immediately in 2022, well before Finland and Sweden got finally accession to the alliance on 4 April 2023 and on 7 March

2024, respectively (Lawrence & Jermalavičius, 2024). As it was put by Wittmann (2022, p. 14), the “strategic hole that characterises the North is plugged and replaced by a depth that facilitates the defence of the Nordic and Baltic states”. The two Nordic country’s changed status has ended the geographical isolation of the Baltics from other NATO allies, thereby diminishing the vulnerability of the region (Lawrence & Jermalavičius, 2024, p. 5). In addition to NATO enlargement, other external factors also might impact the security environment in the Baltic Sea region as a result of the global political changes. Among others, it has been argued that on the long run, the US presence might decrease in Europe, leaving the security of the continent to European NATO members (Zeöld, 2023, p. 239). According to Kuusik (2020, p.6), in the context of the changing US foreign policy, Nordic-Baltic joint action might have particular importance.

Since February 2022, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have had a very firm position as the most devoted supporters of Ukraine (Lawrence, 2023), demanding determined responses from the EU and urging Western allies to strengthen the defence of NATO’s eastern flank (Bankauskaitė & Šlekys, 2023, p. 60). Moreover, all those concerns they had been constantly articulating in Europe about Russia has now proved to be justified. Such a dramatic turn in EU-Russian relations increased the influence of the Baltics within the EU (Wood, 2024, p. 4). By certain analysts, it was even referred to as a sort of ‘balticanization’ (Banka, 2023, p. 380) of the European foreign policy. It is suggested that the new security situation brought an important momentum for the Baltic states to influence EU and NATO policy, representing their own interests and their views on common European interests more successfully. The question is whether the Baltic states will use this momentum by acting together on a regional level or, instead, by pursuing their own foreign policy purposes focusing on the improvement of bilateral relations with their strategic partners. The analysis of the role of these two different strategies regarding the foreign policy behaviour of the Baltic countries is in the centre of my research. My inquiry is based on the assumption that the effectiveness of regional cooperation requires similar understanding of the function of regional cooperation, and a similar approach to joint action across the Nordic-Baltic region. This being said, my research aims to analyse the attitudes of the three Baltic countries to regional cooperation frameworks, notably by examining to what extent these preferences diverge or coincide in the period under review. In the following chapter, I will provide the key concepts applied in my analysis, and I will explain the meaning and significance of these concepts in more detail.

2. Self-perception and like-mindedness in regional cooperation

This chapter provides theoretical background applied by the following analysis. For the assessment of Nordic-Baltic cooperation, this research will rely on two theories that are closely related to each other and offer useful concepts for the analysis. Constructivist theory enables the researcher to conceptualise the like-mindedness of states, which is claimed to be an essential precondition for meaningful inter-state cooperation. Therefore, the constructivist approach seems to be the appropriate framework for my research. Still, there is another theory I also consider beneficial for this inquiry. Role theory enables the researcher to conceptualize the self-positioning of foreign policy actors, and those of states, thus helps to analyse in depth the motivations or reasons behind the foreign policy behaviour of a state. As it will be argued in this section, these two theories provide my research with some particularly relevant concepts to investigate the foreign policy behaviour of the Baltic states in terms of regional cooperation. The presentation of the theories will be followed by providing some important implications of the perceptions, national roles and sense of community with regards to the Baltic states' foreign policy priorities.

2.1. Constructivist Theory

Constructivist theory analyses foreign policy of states from the aspect of identities and norms. According to this approach, norms and identities play a key role in national security and defence policy as well, given that they influence foreign policy actors in decision-making (Brøgger, 2023). Referring back to small state literature, Lamoreaux (2014, p. 567) pointed out the particularly important role of societal values including identity as a central element of sovereignty for small states. Moreover, constructivist theory implies that regions and regional cooperation also might be studied from the same approach. From a constructivist perspective, regional identity and regional awareness means a “sense of community”, a certain “we-feeling” (Wood, 2024, p. 3). It requires a sense of belonging to a certain region (Aggestam, 2018). This sense of belonging is based on shared principles and norms, mutual trust and “cognitive interdependence” (Hurrell, 1995, p. 352). These are the key criteria not only for the formation of regions but also their functioning (Väyrynen, 2003). The sense of community implies mutuality in various respects including decision making, communication, predictability as well as awareness of and attention to each other's requirements (Wood, 2024).

According to the constructivist approach, the emergence of new communities or new ways of mutual relationships as a result of evolving interests and identities can be explained through the observation of intersubjective structures. Thus, constructivists advocate the importance of individual worldviews and perceptions of belonging as well as the historically, politically, and culturally determined nature of identities and interests, which involve factors that go beyond mere materialism, such as shared social structures and a shared cognitive heritage (Hurrell, 1995, p. 353). Such perceptions enable societies as well as individual foreign policy actors to establish “a system of orientation for self-reference and action” (Aggestam, 2018, p. 82).

Thus, the constructivist approach emphasises the cognitive character of a region based on norms and identities. Arguably, such concepts like 'regional awareness', 'regional identity' and 'regional

consciousness' are blurry and "fuzzy notions" which "are constantly defined and redefined"(Hurrell, 1995, p. 335). However, such an approach highlights the importance of like-mindedness and the similarity of perceptions between states which, as I have argued, is a key condition for an effective Nordic-Baltic cooperation. Similarly, Brøgger (2023) points out the particular relevance of the constructivist theory in the case of the Nordic countries where identities and roles tend to have an especially huge impact on political actors in decision-making. Hurrell (1995, pp. 357–358) also emphasises that the constructivist approach is a way for "conceptualizing the interaction between material incentives, inter-subjective structures and the identity and interests of the actors".

Narratives encouraging a regional group identity by means of shared ideas, visions and perceptions are often the source of mutual feelings of understanding between states regarded as closely connected and comparable in many respects (Jurkynas, 2017, p. 216). Analysing the perceptions of policymakers, it is argued that shared threat perceptions are the most crucial factors in a functioning inter-state cooperation. Foreign policy actors respond to various levels of threats depending on how they perceive them, which determines, to a large extent, their decisions regarding interstate relations (Brommesson et al., 2024, p. 24). Most importantly, shared threat perceptions enable states to reach practical cooperation.

The importance of shared principles and norms, and mutual trust as key drivers of Baltic and Nordic-Baltic cooperation throughout decades has been repeatedly stated by scholars (Götz & Haggrén, 2009; Jurkynas, 2014, 2017; Wood, 2024). The role of similar norms and principles is well represented by the case of the Baltic states where shared threat perceptions induced similar foreign policy priorities (Jermalavičius et al., 2020, p. 284). Accordingly, the lack of such a sense of community and mutuality, however, is likely to hinder meaningful regional cooperation to a great extent, a problem which has also been pointed out by various analysts in the context of Nordic-Baltic cooperation (Eamets & Nuder, 2022; Janeliūnas, 2020).

To sum up, identity and shared norms matter when analysing cooperation frameworks given that self-identification largely affects the affinity of a state to cooperate with another, as well as the extent to which a state is willing to make compromises for a closer cooperation with its strategic partners. Given the significance of this aspect, the constructivist theory provides us with a suitable starting point for an inquiry on Nordic-Baltic regional cooperation. Nevertheless, as it was pointed out by Hurrell (1995), identity is a rather abstract notion, which, though important, is still difficult to grasp when analysing the foreign policy behaviour of a state. Therefore, I would like to broaden the scope of my conceptual framework with the concepts offered by role theory.

2.2. Role theory

The paper of Brommesson et al. (2024) analyses the Nordic countries' altering threat perceptions as well as their changing foreign and security policy role, using the concept of national role conceptions (NRC), which is based on role theory. This theory seems to be an appropriate tool to analyse foreign policy priorities in the Baltic states as well. According to role theory, the function of a role is "to link identity and action through motivational dispositions" (Wehner & Thies, 2014, p. 418). As Aggestam (2018, p. 82) argued, role

conceptions “provide us with an analytical and operational link between identity constructions and patterns of foreign policy behaviour”. Thus, although role theory has a somewhat different approach to the concept of ‘identity’, it has, nevertheless, strong connections with constructivism (Wehner & Thies, 2014, p. 418). Indeed, taking identity into account without claiming it to be the only decisive factor behind foreign policy behaviour, role theory enables the researchers to broaden the scope of analysis, using, nevertheless, the above presented concepts of constructivism.

National foreign policy role is a complex phenomenon that has multiple aspects. Among the key concepts of role theory, national role conception and role performance are the most relevant in the context of this paper. Brommesson et al. (2024, p. 23) define national role conception as “the foundation for a state’s understanding of itself and how it relates to other states in the international system”. Role conceptions are based on norms and values which prescribe a certain foreign policy behaviour (Aggestam, 2018; Holsti, 1970). Thus, ‘role conception’ refers to “normative expectations” regarding foreign policy behaviour (Aggestam, 2018, p. 88). Thereby it is distinguished from ‘role performance’ which is related to the foreign policy behaviour, that is, concrete decisions and the overall conduct of foreign policy actors based on attitudes, rules, and expectations (Holsti, 1970).

It is suggested that national foreign policy roles are derived from a variety of sources. Most importantly, while these roles do not entirely originate from the international distribution of power (Elgström & Smith, 2006, p. 13), nor are they completely independent from it. On the one hand, national role conceptions, to a large extent, originate from “the collective understanding of a state’s history, values and place in the world” (Brommesson et al., 2024, p. 23). Thus, they are based on such internal factors as norms and identities rooted in history, culture and “societal characteristics” (Elgström & Smith, 2006, p. 21). On the other hand, national role conceptions also result from external factors such as intentions and expectations of others in the international community (Wehner & Thies, 2014, p. 419). In other words, national foreign policy roles are influenced by how other states perceive that particular state and what position is allocated to it in the international system based on the state’s capabilities (Brommesson et al., 2024, p. 23) Such external factors might impact a state’s national role conception in various ways and to different extents (Holsti, 1970, p. 246). Still, the external factors are claimed to be weaker than domestic norms and demands coming from the society (Holsti, 1970, p. 243).

Last but not least, national role conceptions and role performance also largely depend on the foreign policy actors’ understandings of the state’s position (Wish, 1980), the challenges, interests and possibilities based on which they make decisions (Holsti, 1970). This also implies that national role conceptions are not static. National foreign policy roles are not pre-existing ones, essentially pre-determined by external factors. Instead, they depend on how policy makers perceive and define them (Elgström & Smith, 2006). Such an approach considers political reality from the perspective of policy makers who have to adapt their behaviour to the expectations and possibilities, according to their understanding of the situation. Thus, role theory offers an appropriate framework to analyse the connection between structure and agent, highlighting the dynamics between structural forces (institutions) and foreign policy actors’ own purposes and choices (Aggestam, 2018, p. 82). As we can see, role theory applies the core analytical concepts of constructivism, focusing on policymakers’ understanding of their position, their interpretations of their state’s position and the expectations towards them.

Therefore, as Wehner and Thies (2014, p. 420) argue, “role theory can be placed in the constructivist tradition within IR theory”, while it also enhances the constructivist approach with additional factors that allow us to analyse foreign policy behaviour even more thoroughly.

2.3. Acting as a small state?

The foreign and security policy of the Baltic states is often analysed in the framework of small states theory (Wrange & Bengtsson, 2019). Whether smallness means geographical, economic or other characteristics of a state (Archer et al., 2014; Lamoreaux, 2014), it refers to a “deficit of power”, to the inability “to coerce others and resist coercion” (Bailes et al., 2014, p. 32). Consequently, small states have to compensate their vulnerabilities towards larger states and exposure to external influence. It is usually done through alliance with large states and membership in regional and international organizations (Thorhallsson et al., 2018, p. 541). This strategy, called “shelter seeking” in small state literature (Bailes et al., 2014; Thorhallsson, 2018) is applied in various (political, economic, societal) fields. Shelter seeking also implies the promotion of norms and rules that enable small state security and prosperity (Thorhallsson & Steinsson, 2018, p. 25). It is suggested that the social and cultural relations of the small state with other states also might play an essential role in avoiding isolation from and marginalization in the international system (Bailes et al., 2016, p. 14). Regional and international organizations, and the rules and norms they are based on considerably decrease disproportion in power and influence among states (Thorhallsson et al., 2018, p. 541). In other words, in the framework of international organizations, the established rules and norms eliminate “pure power” in disputes with others states (Thorhallsson & Steinsson, 2018, p. 30). Therefore, rules also applying to larger states provide security guarantees for small states. They ensure a stronger position for small states to advocate their own interest.

As we can see, advocating norms and values, especially those related to sovereignty, and calling for the protection of those norms and values internationally (Lamoreaux, 2014, p. 571) is a recurring element of small states’ foreign policy strategies. The appealing for the respect of such norms and values on various international fora is also a key aspect of the Baltic foreign policies. It is closely connected to another strategy often applied by small states to compensate for their limited resources and leverage internationally. It is generally referred to as ‘status-seeking’ (Park & Jakstaite-Confortola, 2021). A higher status can be achieved by states that can call attention to themselves with regard to international peace and security issues by “punching above their weight” and thereby are “acknowledged as a good power” or a useful one to great powers (de Carvalho & Neumann 2015, p. 2, cited by: Park & Jakstaite-Confortola, 2021, p. 1281). It essentially means small states focusing on and allocating more resources to a specific issue (often based on the above mentioned norms and values) to increase their weight internationally (Janeliūnas, 2020, p. 15).

To sum up, one of the main arguments of small state literature is that, due to their limited capabilities, small states need to engage in multilateral (regional) cooperation which enables them to participate in global policy-making (Kuusik, 2020, p. 3). Thus, since the Baltics consist of small states with limited capabilities to influence external factors (Petrikkos, 2023, p. 59), making regional cooperation is indispensable to ensure their security. In other words, the smallness of a state can be counterbalanced by effective cooperation with like-minded states,

especially neighbouring ones (Jurkynas, 2014, p. 116). This is part of a general trend in Europe. During the last decades, diverse security challenges have triggered small European states to strive for the “deepest available forms of regional integration” (Bailes et al., 2014, p. 41).

Nevertheless, it is suggested that small states also have the choice to act in various ways in a certain situation. Among others, shelter-seeking and status-seeking policies sometimes prove to be two opposite strategies, which are either mutually exclusive or hindering each other. Consequently, it always depends on political actors’ choices whether, and in which field to cooperate with other states, and in which cases to act more individually. Notably, the three Baltic states are a case in point. In general, the Baltic states have been following typical shelter-seeking strategies ever since the restoration of their independence (Janeliūnas, 2020). Yet, analysing Baltic foreign policy, researchers have pointed out various cases where each of these states has pursued different foreign policy strategies (Janeliūnas, 2020; Wrangé & Bengtsson, 2019).

While the Baltic states, during the last decades, have shown a keen interest in region-building and acting together as a block (Jermalavičius et al., 2020), in many cases, concerning particular issues, they have chosen alternative strategies (Janeliūnas, 2020; Lamoreaux, 2014). For example, in the 2000s and 2010s, Lithuania, in order to shape EU policy, pursued a very active, in some views, even “irrational” foreign policy (Park & Jakstaite-Confortola, 2021, p. 1279) seeking higher status than, as a small state, it was expected to have. Analysing Baltic foreign policy, other scholars also have argued that even small states have the choices between several alternative foreign policy strategies (Janeliūnas, 2020; Wrangé & Bengtsson, 2019). Moreover, there is a general trend in Baltic cooperation from the same period. On the one hand, in hard security issues, the Baltic countries tended to be more willing to compromise and cooperate, and, as a result, security cooperation was successful. On the other hand, the other typical small state foreign policy strategy, namely prestige and status-seeking, had, at least during the last decade, entailed a tendency for competition and rivalry among each other, resulting in tensions in their relations with each other. For example, during Dalia Grybauskaitė’s presidency, the cooperation with Latvia and Estonia was not among Lithuanian foreign policy priorities (Janeliūnas, 2020, pp. 73–74).

As we can see from this example, Baltic (and as a matter of fact, any kind of) regional cooperation largely depends on how foreign policy leaders view the status of their country, and, based on the perceived vulnerabilities and possibilities of the state, which other states they aim to seek closer relationships with.

2.4. Perceptions, foreign policy actors and regional cooperation

It has already been argued that regional security cooperation requires a common understanding of shared interests to develop a unified policy (Petrikkos, 2023). This argument is based on the fact that political actors, and, ultimately, states react differently to similar challenges and act differently in similar situations. This implies that the foreign policy of a state cannot be explained merely by external or domestic factors, nor by laws and institutions of the state. Therefore, the perceptions of political actors also need to be examined (Jervis, 2017). It also implies that shared perceptions and interpretations of policymakers about their position and interest (Wrangé & Bengtsson, 2019), as well as those of their neighbours, are crucial for a

successful cooperation. On the one hand, policymakers' decisions, interaction with other political actors, and, consequently, a state's foreign policy behaviour largely depend on the policymakers' perceptions of their positions (Jervis, 2017; Wrange & Bengtsson, 2019, p. 451). On the other hand, the other decisive factor is their understanding of the "identity and cultural heritage" and "place and possibilities within the international system" (Breuning, 2011, p. 26) of the state they represent. In other words, perceptions in international relations "work as intervening variables between material/structural conditions and policy outcomes". Consequently, perceptions "form images that states have of themselves and other states in the international system (such as leader, ally, subordinate, enemy), which in turn correspond to role conceptions" (Wrange & Bengtsson, 2019, p. 451). The perception of like-mindedness (common values, perceptions and interests) has a particular significance in this context since regional security constructions are based on shared perceptions of the 'Self' and the 'Other' (Petrikos, 2023). A shared perception of the 'Other' increases the "potential of cooperation" (Neumann, 1994, cited by: Jurkynas, 2014, p. 115). Thus, it is a similar understanding of potential threats and benefits, as well as shared norms and values, that induces states to cooperate with each other.

It is suggested that role theory and the analysis of perceptions might be especially helpful to analyse cases when a state's foreign policy strategy differs from the expectations. For example, as it was already mentioned, small states' orientation towards status seeking foreign policy instead of "safe choice" strategy (Janeliūnas, 2020) largely results from foreign policy officials' perceptions and decisions. Referring back to Baltic and Nordic-Baltic regional cooperation trends, the self-positioning of a state in the international system might be a decisive factor behind successful versus less successful instances of bilateral and multilateral cooperation. Thus, the self-image of a state and the political leaders' understanding of their overall possibilities largely determine their choices regarding which state they prefer to strengthen relations with. Research on Baltic cooperation during the last decades concludes that the Baltic states have successfully articulated common hard-security interests. However, they have been less successful when cooperating in soft-security issues which were dominated by more complex national interests (Janeliūnas, 2020). As it has already been mentioned, Janeliūnas (2020, p. 59) argues that the foreign policy of Lithuania during the presidency of Dalia Grybauskaitė (2009–2019) was characterized by relatively low level of cooperation with Latvia and Estonia, and a certain rivalry among the presidents of the other Baltic states at that time which, in some cases, was manifest even in hard-security issues (Janeliūnas, 2020, p. 65).

Similarly, differences in attitudes and perceptions are also assessed as important factors in a recent report on Swedish-Estonian cooperation (Eamets & Nuder, 2022). According to a report, the Swedish society still lacks the 'we-feeling' with respect to the Baltic countries including Estonia. Among the weaknesses and threats for the future cooperation, the analysis outlines that Estonia and the Baltics are still regarded as smaller country that need Sweden's help, and that Sweden has a certain 'big brother feeling' in this relationship. The report also states that the "idea that Estonia and Sweden have common values and a shared future in the Northern part of Europe is not very popular" (Eamets & Nuder, 2022, p. 19) in Sweden. This attitude, in turn, is regarded by the analysts as one of the most important obstacles of a real sense of community between Sweden and the Baltics. It is stated that such attitude considerably hinders closer cooperation between the Nordic and Baltic countries (Eamets & Nuder, 2022).

As these examples show, narratives of a state identity, the perceptions and interpretations about the state's position and possibilities in international relations (those of policymakers and of the society) are key aspects of both constructivism and role theory. These are going to be in the focus of this research as well. The aim of this research is to find out what kind of foreign policy strategies have been dominant in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania during the last two years, and what role regional cooperation has in these strategies. For this purpose, I will examine the Baltic countries' perceptions of like-mindedness in relation to other Nordic-Baltic countries as well as their perceived role, position and possibilities in the international community. All this will be analysed in comparison with previous trends since 2014. With the help of the above defined concepts of constructivism and role theory, I hope to find out more about the perspectives of regional cooperation. Namely, to what extent, in what ways and in what areas the Baltic countries, based on their self-positioning in international relations, prioritise Nordic-Baltic joint action to reach their foreign policy goals.

Petrikkos's recent study (2023) briefly reflects on regional security cooperation in the new, post-February 2022 context. Still, in this analysis, regional cooperation is based on shared narratives of past traumas and collective memory, referring to the whole Nordic-Baltic region as one entity. Such a framework, as I have argued, ignores the clearly existing differences in terms of historical background and geopolitical position between (and even within) the Baltics and the Nordics. On the other hand, after February 2022, a significant turn in threat perceptions and security policy in the Nordics created a new context of regional security cooperation and brought an increasing convergence between the positions of Sweden, Finland and the Baltic states. The changing security environment gives the relevance of conducting such research which compares recent trends with those prior to 2022. Being close in time, there is still a gap in literature on Nordic-Baltic cooperation in the new security environment.

3. Methods and research design

This chapter provides an overview on how the present research has been carried out. First, it will provide the description of the research design, providing the key research questions. Following the presentation of the research design, the method applied in the framework of the research is going to be presented in detail.

3.1. Research design

The foreign policy roles of the Nordic countries have already been studied by Brommesson et al. (2024). They closely examined the elite's threat perceptions and self-identification in these countries to analyse the Nordic national role conceptions in the context of the changing security environment. The present research has similar purposes with regard to the three Baltic states. As I have argued, the changing security situation also opened new perspectives in Nordic-Baltic security cooperation. The aim of my research is to assess these new perspectives, given by the changing circumstances, in comparison with previous trends of inter-state cooperation between the Baltics and the Nordics, and, particularly, to analyse the foreign policy roles of the three Baltic states, assessing the engagement in and the overall effectiveness of regional cooperation in the current security situation.

The present research aims to analyse the Baltic countries' perceptions and reactions to the new security situation, their choices and, notably, their perceptions of the ongoing changes within the region as a result of the changing Swedish and Finnish security policy. While bilateral and multilateral relations are complementary to each other, and it might be challenging to compare them to each other, it is, nevertheless, important to pose the question how these two kinds of foreign policy relations are related to each other. Moreover, it is worth considering which one gets more emphasis in a state's foreign policy in practice. Although, in general, none of them can be substituted with the other, strategies of bilateral versus multilateral cooperation can, in practice, affect one another depending on a state's foreign policy priorities. The effectiveness of regional cooperation is affected by the willingness of all countries in the Nordic-Baltic region to joint action. Conversely, if one or another Baltic country is more enthusiastic about seeking a higher profile alone or engaging in cooperation with other cooperation formations outside the region, the whole region may be less efficient when acting as a regional bloc. Thus, I assume that, if the perception of their position, including those about threats and possibilities, as well as the roles they aim to pursue, are approximately identical, the states will be more willing to strengthen relationships with each other within the region.

Regarding the current situation in the Baltic Sea region, as it was already argued, the growing security threats and the need for effective defence, in theory, should push states towards closer security cooperation. Firstly, the hybrid warfare makes joint efforts necessary not only in military defence but also in dealing with insecurities of various other fields (e.g., energy security, information warfare, etc.). Secondly, the increasing like-mindedness of the Baltic and Nordic countries regarding the evolving political and security situation of the Baltic Sea region should also lead to improving cooperation. Last but not least, the NATO integration of Finland

and Sweden also requires assistance from other allies of the Baltic Sea region, which leaves additional room for cooperation between the Nordics and the Baltics.

While it is suggested that status-seeking might cause rivalry, arguably, it might also provide an additional incentive for like-minded states to engage in joint action. Notably, as it has been argued, threat perceptions and priorities in the current geopolitical situation are showing more resemblance across the Nordic-Baltic countries than it had been the case before the full-scale war in Ukraine. In addition, the attitude of other European countries towards Russia as a security threat has changed cardinally. Conversely, there is a momentum to represent the policy promoted by the Baltics (increasing military defence capabilities on NATO's Eastern border, supporting Ukraine, isolating Russia) successfully in the broader transatlantic community. Therefore, in the current context, small states of the Baltic Sea region might choose to raise their profile together as a strong, unified Nordic-Baltic bloc. However, depending on how the Nordic-Baltic countries perceive their situation and new possibilities, they also might seek to raise their profiles individually.

To sum up, there are strong arguments for states across the Nordic-Baltic region striving for closer relations with each other. Nevertheless, every state has its own interests, and several other factors might lead to different considerations when setting up foreign policy priorities. Therefore, the present research attempts to assess the willingness of these countries to act together and their success in doing so. That is, it examines which state(s) have Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania been regarding as important partners during the selected time period and what trends, changes can be observed throughout this time period. The functioning of regional cooperation also depends on the consensus within the Baltic states regarding neighbourly cooperation, in other words, whether the three countries seek to enhance closer relations with the same neighbouring countries. Do the Nordics, for example, constitute a reference point equally important for Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania? Or are there other, equally or even more significant partners for any of the Baltic states (e. g., Poland for Lithuania)? Thus, similarities and differences among the three Baltic states have to be analysed from the above-described aspect. The research will compare recent trends in the three countries amidst the changing security situation over the past decade. Comparing such trends enables the assessment of future perspectives of the regional security cooperation. Therefore, the analysis was built on the following research questions:

- *With which states and in what way do Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania seek closer cooperation?*
- *What changes occurred after 2022, and why?*
- *Where these trends across the three Baltic states overlap or differ, and why?*

The research method, applied to answer these questions, will be presented in the following section.

3.2. Research method

The study of the official communication of top foreign policy leaders of the three Baltic countries might bring us closer to their perceptions of their states in relation to other states in the region, giving a better understanding of mechanisms in inter-state cooperation within the

region. To this end, qualitative content analysis was carried out. In the framework of the qualitative analysis, coding was used to compare similarities and differences among the three countries.

For the above-described research purposes, data was gathered by document analysis. Materials utilized for the present document analysis can be divided into two types. The first type of documents consists of officially adopted security and foreign policy strategies of the respective states as well as annual reports of the respective Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The second group of research materials consists of the speeches and statements made by top foreign policy leaders. Out of the second group, the research included the speeches and statements of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Presidents of the Baltic countries having been in office throughout the time period examined. The analysis first outlined some key elements of the officially adopted foreign and security policy strategies and annual reports of the respective Ministry of Foreign Affairs about achievements and further foreign policy purposes. The presentation of the main findings was followed by the analysis of speeches and statements made by the state's top foreign policy leaders about their country's position and relations with other states.

The officially formulated foreign and security policy priorities adopted by the legislative branch, and the Foreign Minister's reports of the Ministry's annual goals and activity represent a more objective category. Thus, it refers to what was called by scholars 'role performance' (Holsti, 1970). Speeches and statements by foreign policy leaders, on the other hand, provide information about the national role conceptions. Therefore, they might reveal decision-making mechanisms behind the actual outcome of foreign policy. Therefore, it is particularly intriguing to examine to what extent these two categories of foreign policy statements are in line with each other.

The scope of the research does not allow the consideration of any potential factors rooted in domestic politics, for example, Presidents and Ministers belonging to different political parties and thus, having different political programs and views. This research focuses on how the actual foreign policy leader assessed the situation. Moreover, it analyses trends of communication, not action. Consequently, the statements and the frequency of referring to a certain foreign policy issue or partner country might not always reflect the entire picture regarding the practical outcomes in regional cooperation. Foreign policy officials might bring some achievements to the fore and marginalise other, no less important ones. In fact, the purpose of the analysis is to detect the mechanisms of a state's self-positioning in the world, and to grasp certain foreign policy actors' visions about their country in the international community. In the meantime, as it was pointed out, the comparison of rhetoric with official reports about the activity of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was chosen to verify the validity and reliability of the findings.

Among foreign policy officials, the inclusion of Presidents and Foreign Ministers in the analysis is justified by their visibility. Though their functions and authorities differ from country to country, Presidents and Foreign Ministers, as the highest-ranking officials representing the interests of their states in international relations, arguably, are the most visible state officials related to foreign policy. The analysis of presidential speeches is particularly promising in the case of Lithuania, where the President has a stronger position than in classical parliamentary systems. The Presidents of Lithuania have significantly more political authority than their colleagues in Latvia and in Estonia (Janeliūnas, 2020). It implies that, while the statements

made by the President of Lithuania are especially important in the current research, the way of analysing presidential communication should be slightly different in the case of the two other countries. The statements by the Presidents of Estonia and Latvia, nevertheless, are also telling about the country's self-image and the role it aims to play, and thus, may provide very valuable information. Therefore, the above-described document analysis can be considered a useful method to investigate the self-perceived identities and roles of the Baltic countries.

Data was gathered from the online archives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and the official websites of current and former presidents of the respective states. When choosing statements for the analysis, the main criterion was relevance: To start with, I sampled speeches that reflect on foreign relations in general, not focusing on a special issue or country. Therefore, mainly annual reports were chosen, or speeches made at international organizations, notably, annual speeches of presidents before the UN General Assembly. Next, I further narrowed down the scope of speeches to the ones that reflect on the respective country's position, role in the international community, and where the most important foreign policy priorities and strategic partners are enumerated. I also aimed to sample approximately the same amount of research materials from the three countries, and proportionally of each type. However, this aspect of the selection process was also affected by the availability of the indicated types of sources during the time of data gathering. Data was gathered between January and April 2024. With this method, I collected a corpus of approximately 30 speeches from each country including speeches by both Presidents and Foreign Ministers, which I analysed in detail.

The foreign policy documents analysed in the framework of the research covered the period between 2014 and early 2024. The study compares trends before and after February 2022 in the security situations of Ukraine and the Baltic Sea region, covering trends of the past decade. This allows the researcher to take longer processes into account when studying key security and foreign policy issues from the Baltic countries' perspective. The aim of the analysis is to examine Baltic perceptions of other countries in the region as well as attempts at closer cooperation with one or another partner within or outside the region. I focused on which states tend to be represented as important, close partners or like-minded ones in foreign policy documents of these three countries throughout the sampled time period.

During the examined time period, three consecutive Presidents served in Estonia: Toomas Hendrik Ilves (2006 – 2016), Kersti Kaljulaid (2016 – 2021) and the incumbent President Alar Karis. Throughout this period, Estonia had nine consecutive Ministers of Foreign Affairs. In Latvia, the study covers the presidency of Andris Bērziņš (2011–2015), Raimonds Vējonis (2015 – 2019), Egils Levits (2019 – 2023) and the incumbent President Edgars Rinkēvičs. In addition, Edgars Rinkēvičs also served as the Foreign Minister of Latvia between 2011 and 2023, followed by the incumbent Minister Krišjānis Kariņš. In the case of Lithuania, the first part of the time period covered by the present research was during Dalia Grybauskaitė's presidency, followed by the term of the incumbent President Gitanas Nausėda. During this period, Linas Linkevičius served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs from till 2020. He was succeeded by the current Minister, Gabrielius Landsbergis.

Considering the purpose of the study and the materials used in the research, qualitative content analysis and coding seem to be the most appropriate method for the present document analysis in order to ensure objectivity and reliability. When analysing the content of the foreign policy

documents, codes were allocated to the most characteristic, recurring elements of foreign policy goals and activity represented in the text. The majority of the codes consist of the names of states, regional and international organizations, or key words applied in the analysed documents. A few of the codes describe more general foreign policy goals, ideas, phenomena (e.g., 'values', 'international order') and aim to grasp recurring foreign policy elements expressed in various ways. After the identification of the relevant codes, the closely connected codes were grouped into wider categories. Finally, the most important trends regarding the frequency and the typical configuration of the codes and categories were explored.

The countries in question (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) on the one hand, and Nordic-Baltic cooperation (NB8) on the other hand, were in the centre of the coding. The analysis examined the frequency of the various codes figuring together with these central codes (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, NB8). Thus, it outlined the codes appearing most frequently together with the respective country or the NB8. In addition, other regional cooperation formations, international organizations and individual states were represented as separate codes in order to outline the recurring combinations of foreign policy relations. Thus, the 'US' (referring to bilateral relations with the US), 'transatlantic relations' (multilateral cooperation between Europe and the US, the US presence in Europe, NATO), 'EU', the 'UN', 'Baltics' (the trilateral Baltic cooperation), 'Eastern Partnership' were among the most frequently appearing codes. In addition, 'cooperation' and 'foreign policy priority' were also central categories in the analysis. Similarly to states, foreign policy priorities and cooperation with states and organizations were analysed through the allocated codes and the recurring contexts (codes standing together with them) they appear in. The codes gave an overview on the self-positioning of the respective country in relation to other states in the international community.

One of the key categories of the analysis was named 'foreign policy priority'. It consists of foreign policy purposes either explicitly claimed to be priorities or put forward as "national interest" or "goal". The two central codes often figuring together with 'foreign policy priority' were 'values' and 'international order'. These were central codes in every document and were connected with a wide variety of issues. The former code refers to the norms and rules that the Baltic states seek to protect and promote internationally. They include fundamental principles of Western societies, democracy, freedom, rule of law, national self-determination, human rights and compliance with international law. The 'value' category is closely related to another central code of Baltic foreign policy, namely 'international order' based on democratic rules and norms, and the enforcement of international law. Throughout the examined period, one of the ultimate foreign policy purposes of the Baltic countries is to preserve the (rule-based) international order. As it was pointed out earlier, small states tend to follow value-driven foreign policy strategies, advocating international norms and values. This commitment is connected to the vulnerable position of small states, the security and sovereignty of which are the best protected by international treaties and norms (Lamoreaux, 2014). Consequently, it is the Baltic states' elementary interest to preserve and expand the global influence of what is referred to in foreign policy communication as the democratic, European 'values space' based on treaties and the adherence to international law.

Analysing which codes are figuring together frequently or less frequently, the recurring elements of foreign policy priorities, threats, goals, and relations to states, regions, organisations were outlined. In addition, similarities and differences of the related codes were analysed over the time period and across the three countries. Consequently, recurring patterns

of various codes appearing together should reveal the key characteristics/elements of national foreign policy role conceptions and foreign policy role performance in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

The coding focused on foreign policy issues in areas that are relevant for the Nordic-Baltic region, or cooperation formations in general. The latter was especially important with the view to examining the role of NB8 cooperation frameworks compared to alternative cooperation formations in the eyes of Baltic foreign policy leaders. The analysis focused on areas that are primarily connected to security issues. Thus, statements on economic cooperation, though an important aspect of regional cooperation in the Baltic Sea region, were deliberately left out of the scope of the analysis. Similarly, foreign policy relations and activities outside the Euro-Atlantic region were considered mostly from the perspective of the Baltic states' participation in the activities of Western cooperation frameworks and organizations.

Through the recurring configuration of the codes, the content analysis aimed to reveal the most typical patterns of regional cooperation. Such method enabled the comparison of trends in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, regarding the overall patterns in foreign policy priorities, national role conceptions and role performance of the respective states. The codes and categories reflect the most typical contexts where Baltic, Nordic-Baltic, or other frameworks of regional cooperation are put forward by the foreign policy leaders of the respective state. Frequently appearing codes revealed the most characteristic elements of foreign policy roles and strategic objectives in Baltic policymakers' perceptions. The codes frequently figuring together with the main categories of the Baltic countries, and with the category of 'Cooperation' reflect the central ideas of foreign policy leaders about the most important strategic partnerships for their country. Similarly, recurring codes also reflect the areas or issues that are connected with one or another regional partner or cooperation framework in the Baltic foreign policy strategies.

4. National role conception and cooperation across the Baltic states

This chapter aims to present the findings of the document analysis. It will outline the most characteristic trends of perceived roles and foreign policy priorities of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The chapter will provide three separate analyses of the Baltic countries' foreign policy priorities, and their orientation concerning bilateral and multilateral relations. The analysis of the three cases will be followed by a fourth section for outlining the main similarities and differences among the three countries, and a conclusion of the most important findings. In each subchapter, trends prior to and after February 2022 will be compared.

4.1. Estonia

4.1.1. Foreign and security policy strategies and annual foreign policy reports

Among the foreign policy priorities of Estonia, security is the most often recurring element. It involves the aim of strengthening defence capabilities on a national level and seeking to strengthen NATO defence capabilities in the Baltic Sea region and Europe. In the context of both national and transatlantic security, cybersecurity appears particularly frequently in the foreign policy strategies and is often referred to as a prioritised area. On the one hand, cyber sphere is considered to be an increasingly important field to counter hybrid threats, thus, a field that every state should put forward in its national security strategy. Digitalisation, e-governance and cyber security, on the other hand, are presented as the most promising fields where Estonia can stand out with its expertise on an international level. Thus, in these areas, Estonia sees its role as the driving force in countering hybrid threats globally and to present the image of a valuable partner for other countries. Therefore, as it will be argued further, digital and cyber spheres are closely connected to the rest of the foreign policy priorities. In addition, strategic communication and the fight against disinformation also belong to the strategy of countering hybrid threats on both national and international level. Yet, information warfare figures in Estonian strategies relatively rarely, compared to other hybrid threats, or, as we will see, compared to Latvia and Lithuania.

Another key objective in Estonian foreign policy strategies is to preserve the global position of the European 'value space' and international law. The ongoing geopolitical changes, notably Russia's aggressive foreign policy, breaching these norms in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, as well as China's rise are perceived as threats to the democratic international order. In this context, the main threat of the Russian aggression for the Euro-Atlantic region is a dangerous precedent for using force, and, as a result, international law losing its power. Thus, one of the most crucial objectives for Estonia is to maintain the existing international order inside Europe, and to expand these values outside the Euro-Atlantic area, against the opposing autocratic ideologies. This value-based national role conception includes promoting reforms in the UN, drawing attention to violations of human rights and freedoms, urging more effective action in international organizations and seeking to ensure accountability for the violation of international law.

The third characteristic element of Estonian national role conception is seeking visibility which, in turn, enables Estonia to successfully represent its views and interests internationally, and to keep its prioritised issues on the agenda in international organizations. Seeking global presence means active engagement in the EU and other international organizations, including non-permanent membership in the UN Security Council, and seeking visibility in NATO. Active contribution to global security includes participation in development cooperation and international missions led by the above-mentioned organizations. Another important means of achieving international reputation is Estonia's expertise in certain fields, notably the already mentioned cybersphere and e-governance.

In terms of international cooperation frameworks, NATO and transatlantic relations are in the first place. The NATO presence and US engagement in European security are regarded as the most crucial conditions for European, and particularly, Baltic regional security. Similarly, bilateral relations with the US in various fields, from security to science and development cooperation, are the most often recurring elements in the context of cooperation. Cooperation with the EU is also significant since active participation in European politics provides Estonia with a higher status. The most frequently outlined objective regarding the EU is to enhance the effectiveness and global influence of the union. All in all, protecting and promoting democratic values figures as the key function of the European Union in Estonian foreign policy strategy.

Nordic-Baltic, and, though to a lesser extent, Baltic cooperation are also regarded as defining elements of Estonian national role conception. The typical cooperation areas named in the documents are military defence cooperation, energy and transport infrastructure projects, and environmental issues. Energy security has been one of the central topics of regional cooperation in all the three Baltic countries throughout the entire period. Energy infrastructure projects over the past ten years have played a crucial role in decreasing hybrid threats across the Baltics. The main objective of the energy projects in the Baltics has been to eliminate the dependence on the Russian gas and oil import, and, ultimately, to become independent from it, integrating the Baltic electricity system into the continental network (Janeliūnas, 2020). Among the environmental issues, coping with marine pollution in the Baltic Sea region and realising the green transition are the most significant ones. Also, Estonia aims to promote joint Nordic-Baltic policy towards Eastern Partnership.

Another regional cooperation format playing an increasingly important role in Estonian foreign policy strategy is the Three Seas Initiative. The realisation of some key foreign policy objectives, namely energy and transport infrastructure projects, and digitalisation, are partly envisaged in the framework of the Three Seas Initiative. These projects aim to increase connectivity in Central and Eastern Europe. The Three Seas Initiative is also envisaged to enhance EU-US relations. In addition to multilateral cooperation, bilateral relations with the UK, the Nordic countries, Germany, France, Poland, Latvia and Lithuania are frequently mentioned. Finally, Estonia shows an increasing interest in participating in cooperation frameworks targeting the Arctic.

Eastern Partnership countries, on the other hand, appear relatively rarely in the context of cooperation. In such cases, rather than cooperation partners, Eastern Partnership countries usually appear as the recipients of joint support on a Nordic-Baltic or EU level. Eastern Partnership is typically presented as another means to increase Estonia's visibility and to mobilise other allies to stabilise the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood. For Estonia, the most

essential means to support Eastern Partnership countries is providing expertise in carrying out democratic reforms on the one hand and supporting digitalisation and e-governance on the other hand. Within Eastern Partnership policy, most of the assistance provided by Estonia is aimed for Ukraine. The main goal is to support democratic reforms, based on Estonia's own experience, for the long-term purpose of Ukraine's EU and NATO integration.

Starting from 2022, in the context of the full-scale war in Ukraine, foreign policy strategies and reports have assessed the situation as opening a new window to advocate Estonia's views in the transatlantic community. In the new security context, the threat assessment of other EU and NATO members is claimed to be closer to the Estonian viewpoint than ever. Thus, Estonia perceives the situation as favourable to enhance its visibility and effectively shape common European foreign policy. On the other hand, Estonia considers it a duty to raise awareness in Europe of the war in Ukraine and the threats of Russian foreign policy, to call for collective defence on both European and NATO level, and to set an example in measures against Russia. As a result, Estonia's role is seen to be a driving force behind Western support for Ukraine, as well as behind strengthening European defence capacity. "Estonia's influence on the international arena has grown, inter alia as a vocal advocate of helping Ukraine" (National Security Concept, 2023, p. 7). After 2022, advocating assistance to Ukraine, supporting Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration and demanding countermeasures against Russia appear as a new priority area. Notably, raising the issue of Russia's accountability for crimes committed in Ukraine and contributing to the creation of a special international court for this purpose are seen as a mission where Estonia has a leading position and sets an example to its allies.

Since 2022, Nordic-Baltic cooperation, as well as trilateral Baltic cooperation have shown an increase, becoming the most important multilateral cooperation frameworks for Estonia. After the full-scale Russian invasion, Nordic-Baltic regional cooperation formations became significantly more prominent in the Estonian foreign policy agenda, and they are mentioned in foreign policy strategies and reports more often, in connection with various cooperation areas on both bilateral and multilateral level. Nordic-Baltic cooperation appears for the first time among the explicit foreign policy priorities. Both Baltic and Nordic-Baltic security cooperation received a new basis in the context of Finland and Sweden's recent NATO membership. Moreover, securing energy supply and enhancing European energy independence, which had been in the centre of regional cooperation already before 2022, also have a new significance in the light of Russia's isolation and the emerging energy crisis.

Bilateral cooperations with the UK, Germany, France, the Nordic countries and Poland have also intensified in the past two years. Likewise, the aiding of Ukraine and Eastern Partnership countries is carried out partly in cooperation with the US, the United Kingdom, the Nordic countries and Poland. Last but not least, the increasing of Nordic-Baltic cooperation in Eastern Partnership policy continues to be a strategic goal for Estonia. By joint action of the Baltics, as well as with Nordic-Baltic countries, Estonia aims to keep Eastern Europe and Central Asia on the EU agenda. In the meantime, the Estonian foreign policy seems to pay growing attention to the EU's Southern Neighbourhood. Amidst the more and more intensive competition between democratic and autocratic forces for influence in the Global South, the preservation of the global position of transatlantic allies is regarded even more crucial than before. Therefore, the Estonian diplomacy aims to make additional efforts to ensure dialogue with global partners. In NATO, Estonia aims to raise awareness of the need for coordinated strategic communication to counter Russian influence in the Global South.

4.1.2. Speeches and statements

Overall, the communication of Presidents and Foreign Ministers show similar trends to the already presented foreign policy documents. The value-based foreign policy as well as Estonia's interest in protecting freedoms and the rule of law internationally get even more emphasis. During its presidency in the Council of Europe, one of Estonia's key objective was to draw attention to the Eastern Partnership countries. Based on Estonia's earlier experience in EU integration, it is considered as a moral obligation to support the same process in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. Raising the issue of territorial integrity of these countries and reminding the international community of the aggressive Russian foreign policy is a central element of national role conception and role performance in the entire period. The protection of human rights and international law also were in the centre of Estonian's program during its membership in the UN Security Council. It included drawing attention to the dysfunction of the organization, unable to guarantee the enforcement of its own fundamental principles and calling for institutional reforms. Enhancing global visibility and influence, creating the image of a responsible and trustworthy partner, Estonia aims to show its allies that the country is worthy of protection.

'Historical memory' is a key category in Ministerial and Presidential speeches, regardless of the context or the occasion. Drawing historical parallel with challenges of international security in the present is a regular element of foreign policy communication. The historical experience in the communication of Estonian Presidents and Foreign Ministers is mostly connected either to World War II and the Soviet occupation, or to the restoration of independence (the key word being the 'Baltic Way', which is particularly often referred to). The most typical message when evoking historical events is to raise public awareness internationally of the Russian aggression in the past and in the present. Historical experience gives the basis for solidarity with Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, giving them assistance in European integration and standing up for their territorial integrity in the international community. In addition, a more and more relevant issue connected to historical memory is countering the Russian narrative about the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and the Soviet occupation. Thus, rebutting Russian historical narrative is the focus of the fight against disinformation. Against the Russian propaganda, Estonia is to work together with Latvia and Lithuania to increase awareness in Europe of disinformation and historical narratives.

In terms of regional cooperation with the Baltic and Nordic-Baltic countries, apart from the already presented security and energy infrastructure issues, Eastern Partnership program and closer transatlantic relations are the typical fields where joint action is envisaged. The importance of transatlantic relations is a central message of speeches and statements, Estonian Presidents and Foreign Ministers often calling on the EU to strengthen relationship with the US. Among Estonia's bilateral relations, the US and the UK are presented as the most important allies. Relations to the other Baltic countries, as well as bilateral relations with the Nordics, are mostly referred to in the context of some specific issues. The Baltic states are mostly mentioned in the already presented historical contexts, or as a region targeted by the Russian propaganda. Interestingly, while in foreign policy reports, neither the Baltic or Nordic countries are among the most frequently mentioned partners, Presidential and Ministerial speeches refer to the Nordic countries more regularly. Most of all, bilateral relations with Finland are mentioned while there is only one or two references to Latvia and Lithuania.

Since the Russian invasion, Estonia has been presented as a leader of the international support for Ukraine, based on the huge aid provided by Estonia proportionally to its resources. Taking the initiative, being the driving force behind the sanctions against Russia and showing an example to other European states are also seen as giving the momentum to Estonia to raise its profile in international politics (Tsahkna, 14.09.2023). In the context of the Russian aggression, the dysfunction of the UN and the need for institutional reforms is regularly highlighted. Estonia, in turn, seeks to play an active role in the UN. The prioritised issues promoted in the framework of the UN are human rights, digitalisation and cybersecurity. In terms of EU policy, Estonia's contribution to the common European security focuses on the energy crisis and reducing energy dependence, building resilience, fighting against disinformation and increasing social cohesion. The perspective of NATO and EU enlargement is regarded as an opportunity to expand the Western democratic "value space" in the neighbourhood of the EU. "It is in our interest that the zone of democracy, stability and security in Europe expands" (Tsahkna, 14.09.2023). After 2022, the communication of Estonian foreign policy leaders reflects intensifying cooperation with Nordic-Baltic countries. Furthermore, the topic of joint action among the Baltic states also appears more often than earlier. Last but not least, strategic partnership with Poland has also gained momentum. The Baltics, Poland and Finland are seen as the leading countries taking the initiative in the sanctions to isolate Russia, thereby showing an example to the rest of Europe.

To sum up, the new security context in Europe includes more visibility for Estonia in European politics. Moreover, the political changes and new security challenges in Europe have brought other countries of the Nordic-Baltic region closer to Estonia. The new focus of Nordic-Baltic regional cooperation is the support for Ukraine and the enhancement of European resilience against hybrid threats.

4.2. Latvia

4.2.1. Annual foreign policy reports of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

For Latvia, the protection of democratic values in the international community is both a key foreign policy purpose and an important means for Latvia, as a small state, to raise its profile. To this end, Latvia, in accordance with its capacities, aims to actively contribute to international security and stability in the framework of the NATO, UN, and EU. Indeed, international cooperation in Latvian foreign policy strategies is set as a goal mostly in the framework of the EU and NATO. Similarly, security is connected mostly with the European Union. Close relations with the EU and NATO, presented as the key conditions of Latvia's security, are central elements of Latvian national role conception. The importance of the Baltic and the Nordic-Baltic cooperation frameworks is also highlighted by frequent reference to them as foreign policy priorities.

For the sake of national security, one of the most persistent foreign policy priorities for Latvia is the EU's internal unity, stability and global political influence. To this end, Latvia aims to contribute to European resilience by its expertise in certain fields, including digitalisation, cybersecurity, fighting against disinformation, as well as by participating in EU, NATO and

OSCE missions, and giving assistance to Eastern Partnership countries in their reforms. Another recurring foreign policy purpose is to promote closer US-EU relations and to enhance US presence and engagement in European affairs. Close bilateral partnership between the US and Latvia is also frequently outlined in the documents, as well as the like-mindedness and commitment of the two states to fight together for democracy and human rights. The active participation in enhancing international peace and security is also connected with the aim of raising Latvia's profile and ensuring its visibility in international politics. An example of that is Latvia's candidacy to the UN Security Council in pursuit of Latvia's foreign policy interests and active participation in global politics.

As for Latvia's relations with countries, regions and organisations other than the EU, NATO and the US, close cooperation with the Baltic and NB8 countries is frequently among the foreign policy priorities. Regarding these two formations, the reports clearly suggest that both cooperation formations are essential for the Latvian national role conception. They are mentioned with approximately the same frequency and often in the context of the same issues. Mostly the Baltic countries, the Nordics, and the US are presented as like-minded states in Latvian foreign policy documents. Therefore, we can conclude that, along with NB8, the Baltic regional awareness is also a prominent element of Latvia's self-identification.

The cooperation with the other Baltic countries is usually connected to regional security issues. Apart from military and defence cooperation, transport and energy infrastructure projects (namely, the Rail Baltica and the synchronisation of the Baltic and European power systems) and fighting against disinformation are the core issues addressed on a Baltic level. The sense of community based on shared values and interests among the Baltic countries are often emphasised. Over time, facing hybrid threats in common provides additional and increasingly important areas of cooperation. Baltic cooperation appears more and more often in the context of cybersecurity and fighting against disinformation. The latter includes countering the Russian propaganda in Europe. Among others, fighting against the Russian revisionist historical narrative makes strategic communication on a regional level a shared interest of the Baltic countries. With the outbreak of the illegal migrant crisis on the border with Belarus, joint border management and coordinated standpoint regarding the EU's migration policy also appear as a new cooperation area with Lithuania and Poland. Last but not least, a significant function of the Baltic regional block in the Latvian foreign policy strategy is to keep the attention of the international community on the threat posed by Russia.

In the case of the Nordic-Baltic cooperation formation, military cooperation, cybersecurity, strategic communication, digitalisation, and energy security are the typical areas outlined. The NB8 formation also provides Latvia with additional visibility. Nordic-Baltic regional cooperation is regarded by Latvian foreign policy documents as an opportunity for its members to represent shared interests together on a regional level in the EU and NATO, as well as to engage in partnerships with other countries (notably, the US, the UK and Germany) in an NB8+ formation. Shared identity, shared values and visions of the future, and mutuality between Latvia and the Nordics are frequently emphasised. Therefore, NB8 also allows for value-driven policy on a regional level. On the other hand, Latvia is also committed to representing common regional interests in its foreign policy. For example, Latvia's candidacy for the UN Security Council for the term of 2026–2027 is presented as an opportunity for Latvia to become the voice of the Nordic-Baltic region, standing up for Baltic and Nordic-Baltic interests in the UN.

Other important partners are the United Kingdom, Canada, Poland and Germany, (primarily due to their key role among NATO allies in the military defence of the Baltics), and the Eastern Partnership countries. In addition, defence cooperation with Finland and Sweden is pursued in the framework of NATO. Finland appears as an important partner both in defence cooperation and in energy security, due to its participation in the energy infrastructure project. Similarly, Poland appears as a strategic partner in military defence, border management, as well as in energy and transport infrastructure projects. However, none of these relations are nearly as central in the Latvian foreign policy strategy as joint action on Baltic or Nordic-Baltic regional level.

In some cases, Eastern Partnership appears in the context of Baltic, or Nordic-Baltic cooperation, but Latvia mostly regards it as its own mission, or considers it in the framework of the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood Policy. Among Eastern Partnership countries, the most important partners for Latvia are Ukraine, Belarus (before 2020), Moldova and Georgia. The cooperation with Eastern Partnership countries reflects how Latvia perceives its role in the international community. In such context, shared history with Eastern Partnership countries and the value-driven character of Latvian foreign policy is frequently outlined. They give Latvia a certain responsibility to help these countries implementing democratic reforms and to keep their issue on the EU agenda. At the same time, engagement in Eastern Partnership also means for Latvia active contribution to European stability and the promotion of fundamental values and norms outside the EU. All in all, Eastern Partnership serves as a good example for how Latvia seeks to raise its profile and participate in global political processes.

“The common historical experience of Latvia and the Eastern Partnership countries and support from Latvia as an EU and NATO Member State for those countries enables Latvia to successfully engage in global processes, assume an appropriate place in discussions and promote the role of Latvia as a responsible regional and international player in the introduction of democracy and the rule of law standards” (Annual Report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2018, p. 11).

From 2022, the cooperation with like-minded countries and international organizations gets an additional importance in Latvian foreign policy strategy with new priorities in the focus. These are primarily connected to the support of Ukraine both directly and indirectly. Among others, Latvia sees its responsibility to assist Ukraine in institutional reforms and in resilience building, based on Latvia's own experience in European integration. Measures against Russia represents a key category of issues addressed by Latvia both on an individual level and in cooperation with like-minded regional partners. Apart from calling on EU member states for sanctions against Russia (and Belarus), Latvia, together with like-minded states, mostly Estonia, Lithuania and Poland, constantly demand the accountability of Russia for the violation of international law. They pursue the investigation and persecution of war crimes, and demand measures from UN to protect human rights more effectively.

The Baltic countries and the NB8 cooperation framework are more frequently referred to as foreign policy priorities in 2022-2023 than before. The NB8 as a regional bloc is mentioned increasingly frequently as a means of achieving foreign policy goals. With Finland and Sweden's NATO membership, their integration into the alliance brought a new aspect for NB8 cooperation. Apart from military defence, energy independence and cybersecurity appear to be more important than ever. In addition, the protection of critical infrastructure appears as a new

priority (in the context of sabotage actions against infrastructural objects in the Baltic Sea region). The importance of Poland in regional military and defence cooperation also increased. The cooperation with Poland is emphasised mostly in NB8+ context. Common values and promotion of common goals in EU also appears in relation to Poland.

All in all, the codes in the foreign policy reports suggest that, apart from the EU and NATO, Latvia considers the Baltic and Nordic countries as its closest strategic partners. In addition, the full-scale war in Ukraine has increased the role of NB8 cooperation in Latvian foreign policy. For Latvia, the primary purpose of joint action on a regional level is to address other members of the EU, NATO and UN together, and to keep issues important for Latvia constantly on the agenda.

4.2.2. Speeches and statements

Throughout the examined period, Latvia is presented in presidential and ministerial speeches as a country which is actively engaged in maintaining international order. It is regularly emphasised that, as a small state, Latvia has to prove its responsibility and capability to actively contribute to international stability, in order to be regarded as a reliable partner. Among others, Latvia's candidacy for non-permanent membership in the UN Security Council between 2026–2027 is regularly presented as a means of enhancing global visibility. In presidential and ministerial communication, it is seen as an opportunity to protect international law, but also as a proof of sovereignty and maturity and responsibility for Latvia to address global issues (Rinkēvičs, 24.01.2019). A further aim of candidacy for UN Security Council membership is to establish new international relations in remote regions.

Similarly to Estonia, Latvia is often presented by its Presidents and Foreign Ministers as a leading country in cybersecurity. In addition, fighting against disinformation is being even more in the focus of Latvian security and foreign policy. “Latvia is a leader in several areas of countering disinformation and of cybersecurity” (Rinkēvičs, 23.01.2020). These are the two fields where Latvia aims to contribute to European resilience and international stability by its expertise. Consequently, cybersecurity and information security are also crucial parts of Latvian assistance to Eastern Partnership countries and other unstable areas supported through development cooperation. For the same purpose, Latvia participates in various international cooperation frameworks that aim to maintain global peace and stability. The most outstanding example of specific projects is enhancing strategic communication. To this end, the NATO Centre of Excellence for Strategic Communications (StratCom) operates in Riga. The Russian propaganda in Europe is a central concern of Latvian foreign policy. Latvia sees its role in raising awareness of disinformation and promoting better media quality in Europe. Moreover, it is considered to be particularly important to refute the Russian narrative targeting historical memory in Europe. Similarly to Estonia, recent history of the Baltic countries is very often referred to by Latvian Presidents and Foreign Ministers. Referring to Latvia's experience about the Soviet occupation and the aggressive Russian foreign policy since then, Latvia is claimed to have the responsibility to share its experience and help to counterbalance the Russian revisionist historical narratives in the European thinking.

Based on the communication of Presidents and Foreign Ministers, for Latvia, the EU and cooperation among the Baltic states represent the two most frequently mentioned frameworks for multilateral cooperation. Latvian foreign policy leaders seek to address regional and European issues, including terrorism, migration crisis, border management, energy security primarily through the European Union. The latter trend is perceptibly more salient in Latvian foreign policy strategy than in Estonia or Lithuania. Shaping EU policy together with the Baltic countries is often presented as a priority area. One of Latvia's key objectives is to promote energy efficiency and energy security. Amidst the hybrid threats targeting the Baltic Sea region and Europe, resilience is increasingly becoming a key term in Latvian foreign policy and an essential element of Latvia's projected image in the international community. During its presidency of the Council of Europe, Latvia set as a goal to promote digital and cyber security agenda, and to show Latvia's ability to tackle common foreign policy issues, and to prove its "Europeanness" (Rinkēvičs, 22.01.2015).

The other central category recurrently connected with 'cooperation' is that with the Baltic states. Trilateral Baltic cooperation seems to be significantly more important in Latvian communication than in Estonia, or, as we will see, Lithuania. In fact, presidential and ministerial communication refers to the Baltics more often than to Nordic-Baltic cooperation formats. The sense of community among the Baltic countries is often emphasised by Latvian Presidents and Foreign Ministers, partly drawing from shared historical memory, partly from shared views and interests in the present. In the Latvian political communication, the Baltics are seen as an example for other Europeans to show unity, solidarity and preparing to tackle hybrid threats. "I believe that until now the Baltic States have demonstrated a balanced approach and solidarity and have been the voice of reason in Europe." (Rinkēvičs, 26.01.2016).

Though with somewhat less frequency, NB8 cooperation is also regularly emphasized by Latvian foreign policy leaders. Apart from military defence, the most important fields of Baltic cooperation for Latvia are energy security and transport infrastructure, strategic communication and environmental issues, notably to deal with the pollution of the Baltic Sea. Latvia sees it as a mission of the three Baltic countries to implement joint measures against disinformation, to increase the awareness of the information warfare in the EU, and in the European Neighbourhood. In addition, illegal migration flow from Belarus has brought cooperation among Latvia, Lithuania and Poland to the forefront. Baltic and Nordic-Baltic regional cooperation frameworks are also put forward by Latvia in relation with other strategic partners, for example, with regard to strengthening relations with the US. Similarly, Latvian foreign policy leaders often seek to promote deeper NATO engagement in Europe and closer transatlantic relations on a Baltic or Nordic-Baltic regional level. The Baltic regional bloc also serves as a means for Latvia to strengthen the security and unity of the EU (Rinkēvičs, 26.01.2017). Unity with the Baltics is regularly emphasised by Latvian foreign policy leaders and is seen as a good ground to represent shared Baltic interest in NATO and EU and in other Euro-Atlantic international organizations.

Cooperation with Eastern Partnership countries is often named among the priority areas. One of Latvia's priorities during its presidency of the Council of the Europe was to promote EU support to its Eastern Neighbourhood. During this period, Latvia aimed to enhance security and resilience in Eastern Partnership countries, particularly resilience against the Russian influence in these countries. Since Eastern Partnership countries are perceived as especially targeted by Russian propaganda, promoting media literacy in those areas is set as a particularly important

mission. Latvia's active role played in EU's Eastern Neighbourhood policy is also hoped to raise Latvia's profile. In the meantime, raising the issue of territorial integrity of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, and demanding effective enforcement of international law, Latvia also seeks to draw attention to this region in the UN. Throughout the past ten years, the focus of Latvia's Eastern Partnership policy was on Ukraine. During the 2010s, Belarus was regarded as the second most important partner from that area, however, due to the political regime in Belarus, Latvia has lately concentrated its support exclusively to the civil society.

After 2022, the support for Ukraine and measures against Russia became to the centre of Latvian foreign policy communication. Similarly to Estonia, Latvia claims to be a leading force of Western assistance to Ukraine. In the meantime, Latvia also advocates building resilience, preparedness to counter hybrid threats on an EU level, especially in the field of energy security. Having already taken decisive measures in the previous years to discontinue Russian gas and oil import, Latvia regards itself a driving force behind the European energy independence. References to the elements of historical memory, especially the Baltic Way and the restoration of independence, are also aimed at showing that Latvia has been actively shaping its own destiny throughout its history. "We were not merely passive sufferers and victims of the division of spheres of influence by totalitarian superpowers, we were not mere objects in the flow of global history. We were also the makers of our own history." (Levits, 17.03.2022). Therefore, Latvia is among countries taking the initiative to promote the investigation of crimes committed in Ukraine. By demanding that Russia should be accountable for the crimes committed, Latvia also seeks to maintain rule-based international order and the force of international law. Similarly, active participation in EU and NATO partly aims to show Latvia's position as an equal member of the alliance, and its commitment to the protection of shared interests and values. "Latvia must focus on maintaining its international role in the next four years. It is vital for our own security." (Levits, 16.06.2022).

The role of regional cooperation has further increased in the Latvian foreign policy agenda.

"With the changing security environment, closer regional cooperation is not just the matter of political choice. It has evolved into an absolute necessity. Answers and solutions to our threats and challenges lie only in a coordinated action by the region's countries" (Rinkēvičs, 26.01.2023).

For Latvia, apart from the strengthening of defence capabilities, sanctions and the isolation of Russia have become to the centre of Nordic-Baltic cooperation. In addition, the Baltic countries often appear in the already mentioned historical context, and as the states showing example to Europe in the present. The Baltic States and Poland are presented as member states currently playing the leading role in EU policy. The Baltics and Poland are referred to as the most active countries in Europe in supporting Ukraine, shaping the European public opinion.

"Based on our vision, Europe has managed to build a consensus on support for Ukraine. Thus, active participation in shaping the policy and agenda of the European Union and NATO has given us a historic opportunity to steer it in the right direction." (Levits, 24.02.2023).

Thus, Latvia sees its historical role to, together with Estonia, Lithuania and Poland, shape common Western view on the Russian aggression, to convince its allies and reach a consensus within the Euro-Atlantic community on the measures to be taken.

4.3. Lithuania

4.3.1. Foreign and security policy strategies and annual foreign policy reports

The key categories of Lithuanian national role conception are ‘transatlantic relations’ and ‘values’. Transatlantic relations include close bilateral cooperation with the US in various fields, and the aim to increase NATO’s engagement in the Baltic Sea region and Europe. As it was the case in the other Baltic countries, due to the aggressive Russian foreign policy, the stability of the Eastern neighbourhood of the EU is regarded as a key condition for European security. It also implies that Eastern Partnership is the third recurring priority category. The frequency of Eastern Partnership figuring among the primary foreign policy purposes suggests that Lithuania has a particular commitment to this area. Lithuania’s policy regarding its Eastern neighbourhood includes the promotion of stability and democratic values in the region and calls for more attention to Eastern Partnership countries in the EU. Eastern Partnership policy is pursued by Lithuania individually. In the context of Eastern Partnership, cooperation appears only with EU, and, over time, increasingly often with Poland. However, Eastern Partnership and Baltic or Nordic-Baltic cooperation rarely appear together.

Lithuania presents itself as a responsible member of EU and NATO, taking an active part in these organizations in tackling hybrid threats and building resilience. Fighting against disinformation often appears among the prioritised areas where Lithuania can contribute with its expertise to the European stability. Another prominent area of Lithuanian engagement is cybersecurity. In terms of cooperation, the US and multilateral transatlantic relations are on the first place. Lithuania’s partnership with the US includes political, military, economic, energy security, social, cultural cooperation, and US-Lithuanian bilateral cooperation within international organizations. Similarly to the case of Estonia and Latvia, the value aspect is often emphasised in relation to the transatlantic partnership.

Though at the beginning of the examined period, Polish-Lithuanian relations are hardly mentioned, over time, Poland becomes one of the most important strategic partners for Lithuania, and the second most frequently mentioned partner when referring to cooperation. Cooperation is often mentioned together with NATO, the Baltics and the Nordic-Baltic region, and, though less frequently, the UK and Germany. Bilateral partnership and cooperation with Estonia, Latvia and Poland are mentioned mainly in military, transport, energy security fields. Cooperation is much less emphasised in relation to the EU. The EU mostly appears in the context of Lithuania’s ambitions to shape EU policy, to promote its visions in the EU institutions, and more effective EU policy to increase the EU’s geopolitical weight.

In the 2010s, active participation in EU policy, the synchronisation of the Baltic energy system with the continental network and strengthening cooperation with neighbouring and Eastern Partnership countries were the most prioritized foreign policy areas. Nordic-Baltic cooperation in these years was connected to energy and transport infrastructure, information security, but also the implementation of the EU's Eastern Partnership policy. From 2019 onwards, Polish-Lithuanian relations started to improve rapidly. Indeed, the codes of ‘cooperation’ and ‘Poland’ figure increasingly frequently together after 2019. Similarly, over time, Lithuania seems to pay more and more attention to deepening its transatlantic relations, and tightening cooperation with European powers (Germany, France, UK). In 2020-2021, the most important strategic partners

of Lithuania were the US, Germany, Poland, France, the UK and the Baltic states. In 2021, the strategic transatlantic dialogue, the sanctions against Russia and Belarus and the shaping of the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood policy in accordance with Lithuanian interests the main foreign policy priorities. During these two years, cooperation with the two other Baltic countries centred around border management and dealing with illegal migration flows from Belarus. The 2020 report outlines the aim of the Baltic states to coordinate their policies in the EU.

Focusing on Ukraine, the annual report from 2022 outlines Lithuania's crucial role in the international efforts to assist Ukraine, keeping the issue on the agenda in the EU and in various international organizations. However, the report does not mention any substantial policy coordination in this field with the Baltic or Nordic-Baltic countries, although in 2022, it was definitely one of the shared foreign policy priorities across the Baltics. Moreover, out of the five foreign policy priorities named in 2022, three are very much in line with the other two Baltic states' priorities and, arguably, are crucial issues for the Nordic countries as well. These priorities are energy security, countermeasures against Russia and deepening transatlantic relations. Strangely, none of these policy purposes include any substantial policy-coordination or joint action on a Baltic or Nordic-Baltic level. In fact, the only country mentioned as Lithuania's strategic partner in the assistance to Ukraine and the isolation of Russia is Poland. In 2023, the Nordic-Baltic cooperation is focused on regional military defence cooperation and energy security. Thus, the importance of the NB8 has increased but not substantially.

4.3.2. Speeches and statements

As it was pointed out earlier, Lithuanian foreign policy in the 2010s was famous for the strive to 'punch above the country's weight' (Janeliūnas, 2020; Park & Jakstaite-Confortola, 2021), a feature that was well reflected in the communication of Presidents and Foreign Ministers, particularly in the case of Dalia Grybauskaitė. Indeed, statements about Lithuania's strong position in the world appear particularly frequently in her communication. The most typical code associated with Lithuanian presidential speeches is 'values'. Promoting human rights and democratic principles both within and outside the European Union represents the most often emphasised foreign policy purpose. Lithuania is presented as a state that plays an active role in EU policy and is engaged in world politics. This image positions Lithuania at the core of the European community, in the role of an important driving force in responding to common challenges in the EU. Thereby Lithuania is presented as a state that stands out from the Baltics with its achievements and the ability to shape EU policy.

In some respects, Lithuania is even claimed to be a security provider in its neighbourhood, contributing to preserve international order in remote regions in the framework of NATO, OSCE or EU missions. Responsibility, readiness for and capability of crisis management are presented as the core feature of Lithuanian foreign policy.

"Lithuania, the first of the Baltic states, proved by its example that the success of the presidency is not determined by the size of the state, but by focus and consistent work to achieve consensus. During the presidency of the Council of the European Union, we gained even more confidence in our own strength." (Grybauskaitė, 06.05.2014).

Instead of being passive observer of global political events, Grybauskaitė wants Lithuania to be regarded as a state that takes the initiative on certain issues to induce joint action on a European level. “Our voice has weight in the European Union and NATO, Lithuanian ideas contribute to the creation of a more peaceful and modern world” (Grybauskaitė, 11.06.2019). This strategy is regarded as the best way for a small state to make its voice heard and have a stable position in the changing world.

Based on its value-driven foreign policy, ever since 2014, Lithuanian politicians have been constantly raising the issue of Ukraine, as well as Georgia and Moldova, facing Russian aggression. In various fora of the EU, NATO, UN, or other international organizations, Presidents and Foreign Ministers of Lithuania have been calling on other members to protect human rights more effectively, demanding immediate action to bring violation of international law and human rights to an end. During this period, Lithuanian presidents repeatedly warned the UN community about the dangers of the aggressive Russian foreign policy ambitions for Europe and the entire democratic world order. The core messages, conveyed by all the three Baltic countries, has often been carried in the speeches of Lithuanian foreign policy leaders in a particularly assertive form.

On most occasion when speaking before the international community, Lithuanian foreign policy leaders have strongly criticised the UN and other international organizations for their failure to prevent or even to stop breaches of international law and human right violations by Russia in its neighbourhood. If Lithuania is associated with responsibility and active engagement in protecting human rights, the UN is associated with dysfunction and failure act according to its core principles. Often, Lithuanian foreign policy leaders explicitly question the *raison d'être* of the UN. “We now have a choice to make: either we let this organization rise in the fight against abuse, or we make it fade to insignificance.” (Grybauskaitė, 19.09.2017). Similar criticism have been repeatedly expressed by the Foreign Ministers throughout this period.

While constantly emphasising Lithuania being part of the Western community, Lithuanian presidential communication shows less enthusiasm regarding regional cooperation with the Baltic states, or on a broader, Nordic-Baltic level. It is especially true for Grybauskaitė. Most of her statements analysed in this study lacks any reference to Nordic-Baltic cooperation. Even the Nordic and Baltic regions are relatively rarely mentioned at all. The exception is the mentioning of defence cooperation with Sweden and Finland. The Baltic states are mostly referred to in Lithuanian presidential communication in historical context, notably when evoking the fight for sovereignty and the restoration of independence. The other typical context where the Baltic states figure is the security field. In this context, the Baltic region is referred to as a territory under the same threat, and mostly mentioned when foreign policy leaders urge the strengthening of NATO forces in the Baltics. In many cases, the Baltic states appear as a regional bloc of countries among which Lithuania stands out with its achievements.

Gitanas Nausėda's presidency starting from July 2019 brought some new trends in Lithuania's attitude towards its immediate neighbours. While envisaging even deeper Euro-Atlantic integration, Nausėda has also set closer cooperations with regional partners both on bilateral and regional levels as a goal, first of all, with Poland, Latvia, and Estonia. In addition to energy security, defending shared interests in the European Union and NATO appears as a new element of Baltic cooperation in the Lithuanian vision (Nausėda, 10.07.2019). Gitanas Nausėda's presidential speeches refer more often to the 'Baltic neighbours' or the 'Baltic region' than it

had been characteristic for his predecessor's communication. Nausėda talks more often about the Baltics as a regional formation with common views, particularly those concerning their future in the EU. To him, the main function of cooperation with the Baltics, together with Poland and the Nordics, is to shape European politics together for shared Nordic-Baltic interests, and for the collective European community's good. Apart from defence cooperation within NATO, energy infrastructure and energy security, digitalisation and cyber security, and, increasingly, green transition figured in ministerial communication as the most important fields of Baltic and Nordic-Baltic cooperation before 2022. In addition, the Nordic-Baltic format also appeared as an opportunity to strengthen transatlantic relations together, meeting with representatives of the US to discuss cooperation with the Nordic-Baltic countries.

The presidential communication between 2014 and 2019 had not indicated a very close Polish-Lithuanian partnership, nor particular interest (at least on Lithuania's part) in improving these relations. The communication of the Foreign Minister reflected a similarly low enthusiasm. This is so despite the fact that, according to foreign policy strategies, Poland was one of Lithuania's most important strategic partners in military defence. Moreover, the planned connection to the continental energy network at that time, so crucial to Lithuania's energy security, required Poland's participation (Janeliūnas, 2020).

The 2020s brought a new era of very frequent contacts between the two countries' leadership. By the end of Grybauskaitė's presidency, the Lithuanian-Polish relations started to improve. The presidency of Gitanas Nausėda led to further, sudden improvement in Lithuanian-Polish relations. Having, by his own admission, particularly good personal relations with the President of Poland Andrzej Duda, Nausėda has always been committed to seeking closer cooperation with Poland. Throughout his presidency, Nausėda has repeatedly emphasised the like-mindedness and shared interests of the two countries, naming further improvement of Polish-Lithuanian relations as one of Lithuania's foreign policy priorities. The ministerial communication suggests a similar strategic importance of Polish-Lithuanian partnership on bilateral, regional and transatlantic level. The aim to counter regional and global challenges in cooperation with Poland is a recurring element of ministerial communication as well.

Apart from partnership with Poland, when referring to regional cooperation, Ukraine and other Eastern Partnership countries appear to be the President's foreign policy priorities. The sense of belonging together with Ukraine has often been expressed by the President. Thus, support for and solidarity with Ukraine is already a recurring element of the Lithuanian foreign policy communication prior to 2022. Yet, based on the communication of Presidents and Ministers, supporting Ukraine did not figure among the issues to deal with on a Baltic or Nordic-Baltic level. Instead, in Lithuanian foreign policy rhetoric, the solidarity with Ukraine is often connected to building close partnership with Poland. Setting Eastern Partnership among the main foreign policy priorities, Lithuania explicitly claims to be the driving force of the European Neighbourhood policy.

As we can see, the sense of community with strategic partners in the Lithuanian foreign policy perception is mostly based on 'historical ties'. Shared history, and particularly, past grievances are the most frequently used elements in presidential speeches to underpin the shared values of these nations, claiming to have a strong sense of community in the region. To some extent, this approach is also true for Lithuania's relation with Belarus, though in that case, the sense of belonging and solidarity refer exclusively to the civil society. This distinction makes Lithuania's

attitude to Belarus significantly more complex, however, the responsibility of Lithuanians to help the democratisation of the society in Belarus is clearly a crucial element of foreign policy visions. The President set as a goal to keep the Eastern Partnership on the EU agenda, claiming that Lithuania had an “exceptional, historical role” in leading the EU integration of the region (Nausėda, 08.06.2021). According to the President, this duty of Lithuania is rooted in shared history with like-minded nations across the Eastern Partnership countries. The other recurring connotation of Lithuania’s active engagement in Eastern Partnership is the fight against the Russian foreign policy ambitions in the region, thereby against the destabilisation of EU and NATO’s immediate neighbourhood.

The above-described focus of the presidential communication continues in a new context after February 2022. From the very beginning of the Russian invasion, Lithuania, along with the two other Baltic countries, shows strong solidarity with Ukraine. The sense of community and shared interests between Lithuania and Ukraine are in the centre of the communication. Raising the issues of human right violation in Ukraine, and also of the deterioration of human rights in Russia and Belarus, is another key element of the presidential communication. In the meantime, the failure to prevent the war in Ukraine or to deter Russia from further aggression is constantly brought up in the context of Western alliance and international organizations, especially regarding the UN.

As a result, being the driving force behind Western support for Ukraine has also become the central feature of Lithuania’s self-image. “Nowadays, Lithuania is among the leading countries consolidating international support for the ongoing battle in Ukraine. This is an expression of the moral stance of our country where both the authorities and civil society work in unison” (Landsbergis, 2022.09.09). Thus, Lithuania’s role in the Western countermeasures for the Russian aggression also enhanced the country’s visibility. Moreover, Lithuania’s engagement in the support for Ukraine is presented by foreign policy leaders both as a responsibility and as a source of moral superiority. According to the Foreign Minister, the efforts and uncompromising principles provides the country with an “unquestionable moral authority”, with the result that Lithuania’s “voice is more prominent and influential” in international politics (Landsbergis, 2022.09.09). Thus, according to both the President and the Minister, the immediate, consistent and unconditional support for Ukraine has raised Lithuania’s profile in the international community. Further, the moral authority is connected with the ability to influence political decision-making more effectively. “Through the power of its moral example, even a small state can change the prevailing narrative and influence the parameters of political choice.” (Landsbergis, 2022.09.09).

Another important element of the Lithuanian foreign policy role is the contribution to European resilience. In some key areas, Lithuania sees itself as an example to other EU members. One of them is energy security, given that the most important steps towards energy independence had been taken by Lithuania well before 2022. Increasing awareness of disinformation in Europe is also perceived as a mission in the Lithuanian national role conception. Expertise on this field, based on experience of information warfare led by Russia in the Baltics, is also regarded as a major contribution by Lithuania to the European security and stability. The enhancement of even closer transatlantic cooperation in Europe was named as the main focus of Lithuania’s foreign policy strategy in the President’s 2022 annual report (Nausėda, 16.06.2022). Against those pursuing European strategic autonomy, Lithuania has been advocating strengthening the US’s presence in Europe.

With a constant reminder of historically shared threats and interests with both Ukraine and Poland, the focus of the Polish-Lithuanian cooperation is now on developing defence capabilities of the region, and joint action of support for Ukraine. Strategic partnership with Poland, and joint action based on common values and interests have continued to be in the centre of Lithuania's foreign policy, at least from the President's viewpoint. In this period, Nausėda keeps referring to the shared history of Lithuanians, Poles, Ukrainians and Belorussians. In Nausėda's communication, shared historical memory as well as the common historical enemy connected Lithuania with these nations the sense of community.

Lithuania seems to be less interested in achieving these goals together with other like-minded states from the Baltic Sea region. Nordic-Baltic cooperation still appears relatively rarely in the context of Ukraine. In other words, it is not the Nordic-Baltic cooperation in the framework of which Lithuania intends to pursue its primary foreign policy objectives the most. The central issue for Lithuanian regarding Nordic-Baltic cooperation is to increase defence capabilities in the Baltic region, to building up resilience and to deal with shared hybrid threats. Nevertheless, since February 2022, the support for Ukraine and the hybrid threats in the region have been in the centre of Nordic-Baltic cooperation as well. Trilateral Baltic cooperation also figures in presidential and ministerial communication in the context of regional defence. In addition, an important shared purpose with Estonia, Latvia and Poland in this period is to increase awareness of the informational warfare in other EU member states with a view to fighting against the Russian propaganda in Europe.

All in all, the foreign policy program that Lithuania has reportedly been carrying out during the past decade suggests an orientation towards great and medium Euro-Atlantic powers, first of all, the US. Though the shaping of EU policy in accordance with Lithuanian interests is often stressed, this policy is not explicitly envisaged in cooperation with other countries. Regarding regional cooperation, while the NB8 format has been important throughout this period, it has never been the primary means to achieve foreign policy goals of regional matters. Since 2019, the Lithuanian foreign policy has shown an increasing orientation towards Poland. The full-scale war in Ukraine has intensified Nordic-Baltic cooperation in the fields of security and measures taken against Russia. However, Baltic or Nordic-Baltic cooperation still does not appear to be the primary means for Lithuania to achieve its foreign policy goals.

4.4. Nordic-Baltic cooperation

4.4.1. Before 2022

As it has become clear from the previous sections, societal values, norms and identities shaping national security and defence policy are largely the same across the Baltic countries. Throughout the ten-year period, the Baltic states have had almost identical foreign policy objectives. Furthermore, similar goals have been pursued largely with the same foreign policy strategies of shelter-seeking and status seeking, while the rhetoric in the three countries also contains more or less the same elements. The key categories to describe the foreign policy priorities of all the three Baltic states in the past ten years include military security, cybersecurity, digitalisation, values, international order, visibility, and transatlantic relations. Moreover, when comparing the fields where the Baltic states seek higher international status by

providing expertise, it becomes clear that they specialize mostly in the same areas, namely, digitalisation, cybersphere and information security. They also have similar visions regarding the EU as a union of nation states, where decision-making is based on shared values and consensus, and which is influential in global politics. Close transatlantic relations, as well as bilateral relations with the US, represent a cornerstone of Baltic foreign policy strategies. In the case of Estonia, and even more so in Lithuania, transatlantic relations get more emphasis than other foreign policy relations. In the case of Latvia, however, close relationship with the EU is in the foreground. Most Latvian foreign policy projects aim to be achieved in close cooperation with the EU.

Yet, the results of the present research confirm that regional awareness across the Baltics is different. The sense of community with the Nordic-Baltic region is the strongest in Estonia, which is the most committed to NB8 cooperation in a wide range of issues. At the same time, Estonia seems to be less enthusiastic about trilateral Baltic relations. In Latvian foreign policy strategies, apart from EU and NATO, the Baltic and the Nordic-Baltic cooperation are the two main frameworks to engage in international politics. In Latvia, the Baltic unity, based on shared identity, seems to be considered more important than in the case of Estonia or Lithuania. The role of the Baltic states as a bloc to represent their common interests is regularly emphasised in Latvian foreign policy strategy. Nevertheless, Nordic-Baltic cooperation appears to be equally important in the Latvian foreign policy strategy. The strategic goal of seeking higher profile internationally gives a particular relevance to Nordic-Baltic policy coordination. Acting as a united regional bloc, NB8 formation offers its members an opportunity to raise their profile, and to create the image of a united bloc which has a voice in Europe and is capable of shaping EU policy. Thus, Estonia, and even more so, Latvia regard Nordic-Baltic cooperation as a source of visibility. Although Lithuanian foreign policy leaders also perceive such opportunity in the NB8, they show less interest in particularly close regional cooperation with the Nordic-Baltic formation.

Lithuania's national role conception implies somewhat different regional self-positioning. In Lithuanian foreign policy, shelter-seeking strategy is pursued mainly through alliance with large states (first of all, the US and European powers), and membership in the most important international organizations. In Lithuanian national role conception, the sense of belonging has been increasingly manifested in relation with Poland and Eastern Partnership countries, and, to some extent, the Baltic countries. In the meantime, the Nordic-Baltic cooperation had been gradually given less and less attention in the Lithuanian foreign policy strategy prior to 2022. Interestingly, in the context of cooperation, instead of naming a specific formation, e.g., the "Baltic states", Nordic-Baltic region" or "Baltic Sea region", the partners to cooperate with are merely referred to as "regional strategic partners", "neighbouring EU and NATO members", "like-minded partners". In some cases, these circumscriptions might refer to the Baltics and Poland being involved together in the issue in question, for example, the border defence against illegal migrants. This wording also might suggest that Lithuanian foreign policy leaders do not want to stick to a particular regional cooperation formation, instead, they hope to maintain a flexible approach towards regional cooperation and choose partners depending on the specific issue.

4.4.2. The consequences of the full-scale war in Ukraine for the NB8 cooperation

In the new global political and security context, all three Baltic countries perceive their weight to be increasing in European politics. They regard the new situation both as an opportunity to advocate their views in the transatlantic community more successfully, and as a responsibility to set an example for other European countries.

As a result of the changes, the importance of Nordic-Baltic cooperation has also grown in all three countries. The foreign policy documents from 2022-2023 show a rise in reference to Baltic and Nordic-Baltic cooperation, the new focus being on regional defence cooperation and assistance for Ukraine. Supporting Ukraine, including in international fora, had been a recurring element of Estonian and Latvian foreign policy programs already before 2022. Among others, Ukraine had been in the centre of Eastern Partnership policy in both cases, and the issue of the aggressive Russian foreign policy in its neighbourhood had been repeatedly raised by them on international fora. However, Ukraine became a foreign policy priority for Estonia and Latvia as a result of the full-scale invasion. A new shared priority, the support for Ukraine, as a new area in these frameworks, has become the central issue of Baltic and Nordic-Baltic cooperation.

While like-mindedness has brought the three Baltic countries closer to each other, cooperation with Poland has also deepened in all three cases. The Russian invasion has brought shared priorities between Poland and the Baltics to the fore, and also highlighted the need to deal with certain issues together. They include border defence against migration flow, standing by Ukraine and taking the initiative in Europe to isolate Russia. As a result, after 2022, Poland is referred to in Baltic foreign policy communication increasingly often as a like-minded, strategically ally from the Baltic Sea region.

Surprisingly, shared visions or common threat assessment with the Nordic countries, notably Sweden and Finland, are not reflected. Undoubtedly, Finland and Sweden's NATO accession was supported by the Baltics. NATO enlargement has restructure regional security cooperation since 2023. However, further converging standpoints with the Nordic partners on regional or European matters do not figure in foreign policy communication. Apparently, in this respect, the Russian aggression, or the changes in Nordic foreign and security policy strategy, are not perceived by Baltic foreign policy leaders as a significant breakthrough in further regional cooperation perspectives.

Keeping the focus of the Euro-Atlantic community on the war in Ukraine has been an important policy purpose across the Baltics. Since issues connected to the support of Ukraine and the Russian aggression are shared foreign policy priorities across the Baltic region, they are often addressed together by the Baltic states. Thus, the importance of trilateral Baltic cooperation has also increased, especially in Estonia. The Baltic countries and the NB8 cooperation are increasingly important in Latvian foreign policy as well. Latvia's aim to pursue foreign policy goals together with the other two Baltic states, as a regional bloc, is especially salient. In the meantime, in Latvia, joint assistance for Ukraine is mostly discussed in the context of the EU and not so much on a regional level. In the Latvian strategy, the role of joint policy on both Baltic and Nordic-Baltic regional level is to keep the Russian aggression and Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration on the agenda in both the EU and other international organizations.

In the case of Lithuania, however, the overall picture is somewhat different. The Russian invasion of Ukraine put already existing foreign policy priorities into a new context. Lithuania reacted to it by continuing the same policy with even more commitment. The main priorities of Lithuania since 2022 show a significant overlap with the priorities of other countries in the Baltic Sea region, especially with those of Estonia and Latvia. Indeed, hard security issues, along with the support of Ukraine, have become dominant issues in the context of Nordic-Baltic relations for Lithuania as well. Yet, as for Lithuania's attitude regarding partners from the Baltic Sea region, the Baltic countries are more often mentioned than the NB8 cooperation framework. Although Lithuania's foreign policy goals are largely in line with the fundamental interests of every country in the Nordic-Baltic region, cooperation with the Nordic-Baltic countries appears to be but one of the means, and certainly not the most important one, for the Lithuanian foreign policy leaders in national role performance. Notably, the repeated evocation of shared history and the sense of community among people of present-day Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova confirms Lithuania's engagement this region. Especially the statements by the current President suggest that Lithuania's future is in closer relationship with Poland and Eastern Partnership countries.

In addition, the officially adopted foreign policy strategies and annual reports reflect a slightly different picture from what has been conveyed in the communication of the Presidents and Foreign Ministers of the respective country throughout the examined period. Such divergence can be explained by the fact that foreign policy documents reflect specific role performance more objectively, less affected by the views and ambitions of individual leaders. Speeches, in turn, rather reflect societal identities, a collective sense of belonging and regional self-positioning. They are affected both by societal perceptions or expectations and the policymakers' understanding and visions. In other words, speeches of foreign policy leaders reflect both individual perceptions and the central reference points of a collective sense of belonging, shaped by historically, politically, and culturally rooted narratives. Therefore, they tell us more about the national role conception of the respective state. Thus, the communication of foreign policy leaders might anticipate future dynamics of the Baltic countries' relations with their regional partners. In this case, we can conclude that visions on regional cooperation remain different in the three Baltic states. These are minor differences which, however, reveal some additional implications about regional awareness across the Baltics. Namely, different regional formations put in the forefront by foreign policy leaders in the Baltic countries might suggest preferences in terms of with which partners they will seek to strengthen cooperation the most in the future.

In Estonia, Presidential and Ministerial speeches refer to the Nordic countries more regularly while they rarely mention the Baltic countries. Most of all, bilateral relations with Finland are emphasised, although in foreign policy documents, Finland does not appear to be more important than other partners from the Nordic-Baltic region. As it was already pointed out, for Latvia, this kind of sense of belonging together is rather associated with the Baltic states as a trilateral formation. In speeches made by foreign policy officials, the Baltic states are referred to the most often after the EU while NB8 cooperation gets less attention. Trilateral Baltic cooperation is, indeed, the central element of Latvian foreign policy vision, the most central regional bloc Latvia identifies with. In Lithuania, during Nausėda's presidency, Poland and Eastern Partnership countries, especially Ukraine, have become the primary reference points in presidential communication as close partners in Lithuania's neighbourhood. Additionally,

regional awareness also connects Lithuania to the Baltics, rather than to the Nordic-Baltic region.

All in all, Nordic-Baltic regional cooperation has clearly gained momentum as a result of the new political and security environment in Europe. Nevertheless, the three Baltic countries still show considerable differences in visions and approaches regarding the role of regional cooperation in their foreign policy agenda. The shared priorities, along with the new opportunities of having a voice in European politics, have induced Estonia and Latvia to strive for realising their objectives in a Nordic-Baltic regional bloc. For Lithuania, on the other hand, there are alternative partnerships, and NB8 is not in the forefront of the foreign policy relations.

5. Conclusion

The aim of the research was to assess the role of Nordic-Baltic regional cooperation in the foreign policy of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the context of the changing security environment since February 2022. To this end, the foreign policy strategies of the three Baltic countries were analysed with regards to their engagement in various regional cooperation frameworks.

For the past decades, the Baltic Sea region has witnessed a mushrooming of regional cooperation formations. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have been especially engaged in building close relationships with the Nordic countries. Security concerns, normative, value-based foreign policy and the aim for a higher profile in international relations can be considered as the essential motivation behind seeking close partnership with the Nordics. Still, the considerable differences between Nordic and Baltic foreign and security policy had limited joint regional policy. However, the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine has significantly altered the European security environment. As a result, the driving factors behind closer Baltic and Nordic-Baltic cooperation, namely the common threat assessment and the value-based character of the Baltic and Nordic foreign policies, got a new momentum. The changing of the political and security context was especially relevant regarding Baltic relations to the Nordic countries. Finland and Sweden's historic decision to join NATO has not only brought a new basis for security and defence cooperation across the Baltic Sea region but also implies approaching standpoints on shared regional interests. What is more, at the same time, the political environment in Europe has also become more favourable for the Baltic countries to influence European policy meaningfully. The question was whether the Baltic states prefer to use the opportunity to pursue individual foreign policy or to stand up for shared interests on a regional level. Therefore, the focus of the present research was on how the external changes impacted regional cooperation in the Nordic-Baltic region.

In order to see clear trends, the present Baltic foreign policy behaviour was compared with overall trends of the past ten years between 2014-2024 and was analysed in the context of overall strategic goals and foreign policy relations of the three Baltic countries. In other words, the research analysed the role and function(s) of Nordic-Baltic regional cooperation in Baltic foreign policy strategies compared to other issues and partnerships. The research aimed to find out the similarities and differences across the Baltics in the attitudes regarding regional cooperation frameworks.

The research was based on two closely related theories, namely, constructivist theory and role theory. They provided theoretical framework to analyse like-mindedness and self-identification of states (or foreign policy actors of states) with foreign policy roles, images and regional formations. The combination of the two theories enabled the researcher to assess the general understanding of Baltic foreign policy leaders of their country's position in international relations, as well as their views regarding Nordic-Baltic regional partners. These views, in turn, have a huge impact on a state's strategies of building partnerships. Particularly, the national role conception and role performance were suitable concepts to analyse motivations behind the foreign policy behaviour of a state. The visions of Baltic foreign policy actors about their countries' position and about regional cooperation were analysed with qualitative content analysis. Empirical data was gathered from written documents with the help of codes. The

analysed sources consisted of security and foreign policy strategies and annual foreign policy reports of the Baltic countries as well as speeches made by Presidents and Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the respective countries.

The research aimed to find answers to the following research questions:

1. *With which states and in what way do Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania seek closer cooperation?*
2. *What changes occurred after 2022, and why?*
3. *Where do these trends across the three Baltic states overlap or differ, and why?*

As the present analysis has shown, the national role conception shows important similarities across the Baltics. Consequently, there is a significant overlap in Baltic foreign policy priorities, visions and strategies. There are, nevertheless, some significant differences between the Baltic countries in terms of regional awareness. These differences are reflected in foreign policy strategies, and especially in the communication of the respective foreign policy leaders. Generally, Estonian foreign policy reflects the strongest sense of community with the Nordic-Baltic region. Estonia is the most committed to NB8 cooperation, envisaging a wide range of issues to be dealt with on a Nordic-Baltic level. Throughout the entire period, Latvia has a stronger sense of belonging to trilateral Baltic cooperation. The Baltic regional bloc is the primary regional formation for the Latvian foreign policy strategy. In the case of Lithuania, the Nordic-Baltic cooperation is but one of several strategic partnerships the country is actively involved in. By the 2020s, Lithuanian foreign policy leaders had started to regard Poland and Eastern Partnership countries as the main strategic partners.

The invasion of Ukraine has enabled the Baltic states to pursue their value-based foreign policy internationally more effectively than before and to reach a higher profile in the eyes of their strategic partners. The war is regarded by Baltic foreign policy leaders as a threat for the whole European security architecture on the one hand, and as a challenge that has brought the Baltic states closer to other EU members, on the other hand. Thus, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania perceive that their influence in the international arena has grown, and they can advocate their views more effectively in the international community. The war in Ukraine and hybrid threats in the Baltic Sea region have induced the three Baltic countries to engage more deeply in regional cooperation. As a result, both Nordic-Baltic and Baltic cooperation tend to get more attention in Baltic foreign policy strategies. The support for Ukraine appeared as a new focus of cooperation. In the meantime, the Baltics also regard themselves as a driving force behind dealing with hybrid threats in Europe. Estonia continues to be the most committed to the Nordic-Baltic cooperation while Lithuania remains the country showing the less interest in deeper cooperation with partners from the Nordic-Baltic region. All in all, differences in the sense of belonging continues to affect the functioning of Nordic-Baltic cooperation. Nevertheless, Nordic-Baltic cooperation has clearly gained momentum in the new security context across the Baltics.

However, it is remarkable how presidential and ministerial communication positioned Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in relation to other countries of the region. The speeches tell us more about the individual perceptions, visions and ambitions of the foreign policy leaders, which are affected by self-positioning, expectations and sense of community in the society. In this case, they revealed different attitudes to the functions and the importance of NB8 framework across the Baltics. The Baltic countries are committed to deepening relations with their Nordic

neighbours, but the Nordic-Baltic countries are still far from being perceived as one united regional bloc.

As it has been argued in this paper, role conception and role performance are based on international power relations and internal factors including societal expectations, values, norms and identities. The reason behind the different attitudes towards regional cooperation formations lies in the states' national role conceptions based on foreign policy leaders' understanding of their state's position in international politics, as well as internal attitudes and expectations. Finally, as it was pointed out by the constructivist theory, individual perceptions also must be taken into account. Since these patterns are especially characteristic for public speeches of foreign policy leaders, arguably, the explanation behind the differences lies exactly in individual perceptions, ambitions and attitudes to certain regional partners or cooperation formations.

In the Estonian and Latvian perception, one of the Nordic-Baltic cooperation's important advantage is that it provides visibility to its members, representing their interest as a regional bloc. Rising profile through regional cooperation frameworks is especially emphasised in Latvia. The main function of both Baltic and Nordic-Baltic regional cooperation in the Latvian foreign policy strategy is to coordinate their policy in the EU and other broader international organizations, to increase their weight in the eyes of the allies and stand up for their views more successfully. The state's perceptions of its position and possibilities leads to different foreign policy behaviour in the case of Lithuania. Using its close relations with Poland as a rising regional power, and the Eastern Partnership countries, especially Ukraine, Lithuania sees its future role in a potential new regional bloc in Central and Eastern Europe. Although such visions are never explicitly presented, the possibility to achieve higher status internationally is consequently related to this area in Lithuanian foreign policy communication. On the other hand, shelter-seeking strategy is reflected rather in seeking the attention and support of Euro-Atlantic powers, first of all, the US. Although transatlantic cooperation is a crucial element of Baltic foreign policy strategies in general, this is especially true for Lithuania, where close partnership with Western powers appears to be more important than pursuing foreign policy on a regional level.

While the focus of the present research was on like-mindedness and foreign policy roles in Baltic foreign policy strategies, analysing the perceptions and attitudes of foreign policy actors, practical results of the presented policy strategies remained out of the scope of the current analysis. Therefore, in future research projects, it would be useful to contrast the visions reflected in presidential and ministerial communication with practical achievements of the Nordic-Baltic cooperation in the past two years to see the extent they correlate with each other. In addition, a similar analysis focusing on the Nordic countries might broaden the scope of the present research project and reveal some additional trends in Nordic-Baltic cooperation. Namely, analysing the perceptions of foreign policy actors in the Nordic countries, especially Sweden and Finland, about the importance and function of regional cooperation would make future perspectives of Nordic-Baltic regional cooperation clearer.

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Appendix 1: The list of analysed sources

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Appendix 2: Table of codes

Categories	Codes	Preliminary code / Explanation, remarks
ESTONIA	Estonia	Estonian foreign policy, national role, self-perceptions
LATVIA	LATVIA	Latvian foreign policy, national role, self-perceptions
LITHUANIA	LITHUANIA	Lithuanian foreign policy, national role, self-perceptions
NB8	NORDIC-BALTIC COOPERATION	Regional issues, regional cooperation formations
	NB8	
	NORDIC-BALTIC COUNTRIES	
BALTICS	BALTIC STATES	
	BALTIC COOPERATION	
TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS	EU-US RELATIONS	European strategic autonomy
	NATO	
	US PRESENCE	US involvement in Europe
EU	EU	EU as an institution, partner
	EU POLICY	Common EU policy, measures, joint action on EU level
	RELATIONS WITH THE EU	Partnership with EU institutions, member states
	EU INVOLVEMENT	EU involvement in a certain issue, inside or outside Europe
	EU GLOBAL ROLE	
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS	UN	
	NATO	
	3SI	
	COE	
	OSCE	
	ICC	
PARTNER COUNTRIES	US	
	NORDIC COUNTRIES	
	FINLAND	
	SWEDEN	
	UK	
	POLAND	
	GERMANY	
	FRANCE	
	CANADA	
EASTERN PARTNERSHIP	EASTERN PARTNERSHIP POLICY	

	UKRAINE	Support for Ukraine, partnership with Ukraine
	BELARUS	
	MOLDOVA	
	SOUTH-CAUCASUS	Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan
	EU NEIGHBOURHOOD	EU policy concerning EaP countries
	EU INTEGRATION	Reforms
	SOVEREIGNTY	
	TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	
COOPERATION	REGIONAL COOPERATION	With whom? On what issues?
	COOPERATION	Cooperation outside the region
PRIORITY	FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITY	Foreign policy priorities, objectives
VALUES	DEMOCRACY	
	FREEDOMS	
	HUMAN RIGHTS	
	RULE OF LAW	
	INTERNATIONAL LAW	
	SOVEREIGNTY	
	SELF-DETERMINATION	
INTERNATIONAL ORDER	INTERNATIONAL LAW	Accountability, compliance
	RULE OF LAW	
	EU INFLUENCE	The EU's global position, presence, weight in international politics
	US GLOBAL POSITION	
	DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES	global influence
	STABILITY	
	SOVEREIGNTY	
	VALUE CLASH	Autocratic powers, ideological rivalry, competition for influence
	MISSIONS	NATO, US, UN, OSCE, foreign missions
	DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION	
	RUSSIA	Russian foreign policy ambitions, influence
	CHINA	influence
	VISIBILITY	DIGITALISATION
CYBERSECURITY		
IMAGE		
RESPONSIBILITY		
DIPLOMACY		
EXAMPLE		

	ACTIVE PARTICIPATION	EU politics, international politics, active contribution to global issues
SECURITY	COLLECTIVE DEFENCE	Defence cooperation, defence capabilities, threat assessment
	HYBRID THREATS	
	RESILIENCE	Society, Baltics, Europe
	ENVIRONMENT	Climate change, sustainability, Baltic Sea pollution
	NATO	Deterrence, defence capabilities, presence
	ENERGY SECURITY	Infrastructure, supply, Russian energy import, independence, sustainability
	DISINFORMATION	Russian propaganda, historical narratives, strategic communication, media literacy
	CYBERSECURITY	
	EUROPEAN SECURITY	Migration, terrorism, stability
	EU NEIGHBOURHOOD	Development cooperation, foreign missions
	BORDER MANAGEMENT	MIGRATION, BELARUS
	RUSSIAN AGGRESION	
HISTORICAL MEMORY	BALTICS	
	SOVIET OCCUPATION	
	HISTORICAL TIES	shared history with other nations
	WWII	Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact
	HISTORICAL NARRATIVES	RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA
	BALTIC SOVEREIGNTY	Baltic Way, Independence, European integration
	RESPONSIBILITY	
	HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE	
RUSSIA	AGAINST RUSSIA	Measures, sanctions, accountability

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