

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
Faculty of Social Sciences
Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies

Anna Khomasuridze

Towards the Estonization of EU Foreign and Security Policy?

MA Thesis

Supervisors: Thomas Michael Linsenmaier, and Piret Ehin, PhD

Tartu 2025



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.

Word count of the thesis: 25, 656

Anna Khomasuridze, 19 May 2025

Non-exclusive licence to reproduce thesis and make thesis public

I, Anna Khomasuridze,

1. grant the University of Tartu a free permit (non-exclusive licence) to

reproduce, for the purpose of preservation, including for adding to the digital archives of the University of Tartu until the expiry of the term of copyright, my thesis

“Towards the Estonization of EU Foreign and Security Policy?”,

supervised by Thomas Michael Linsenmaier and Piret Ehin;

2. grant the University of Tartu a permit to make the thesis specified in point 1 available to the public via the web environment of the University of Tartu, including via the digital archives, under the Creative Commons licence CC BY NC ND 4.0, which allows, by giving appropriate credit to the author, to reproduce, distribute the work and communicate it to the public, and prohibits the creation of derivative works and any commercial use of the work until the expiry of the term of copyright;
3. am aware of the fact that the author retains the rights specified in points 1 and 2;
4. confirm that granting the non-exclusive licence does not infringe other persons’ intellectual property rights or rights arising from the personal data protection legislation.

Anna Khomasuridze

19/05/2025

Abstract

This thesis examines how the EU's framing of Russia as a threat converged with Estonia's foreign and security policy discourse between 2014 and 2024. It contributes to broader research on how small states' framings resonate with EU-level discourse during periods of geopolitical disruption. Without seeking to establish causality or direct influence, the study investigates whether Estonia's long-standing framing of Russia as a systemic threat became more aligned with EU discourse following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Estonia is selected as a case study due to its stable characterization of Russia as a revisionist and existential threat to European security, coupled with its emphasis on sovereignty, democracy, and legal accountability. The theoretical framework combines Europeanization and constructivism, focusing on norm diffusion and discursive alignment. Methodologically, the study employs qualitative framing analysis based on Entman's four dimensions, problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and policy recommendation, applied to selected Estonian and EU annual speeches and strategic documents from 2014 to 2024. The findings reveal that while Estonia's framing remained stable throughout the period, EU discourse shifted sharply after 2022, adopting more assertive language, attributing causality directly to Russian leadership, and articulating responses that mirrored Estonia's framing. This shift is interpreted not as direct uploading but as discursive convergence driven by contextual resonance in a moment of crises. The study concludes that small states can contribute to EU foreign policy discourse not through institutional power, but through consistency, credibility, and norm-based argumentation that align with the Union's evolving priorities.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors, Thomas Michael Linsenmaier and Piret Ehin, for their invaluable guidance and support throughout this research. I am also deeply thankful to the academic community of the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies at the University of Tartu, where I have grown both academically and personally over the past years. The intellectually stimulating environment and rigorous training I received there played a crucial role in shaping my skills. Heartfelt thanks also go to my friends for their motivation and companionship, and to my family for their unwavering encouragement, patience, and belief in me during this journey.

Table of Contents

Introduction	11
1. Theoretical framework	16
1.1 Europeanization and Small States in EU Foreign Policy	17
1.2 Rationalist and Constructivist Mechanisms of Europeanization	21
1.3 Framing as a Constructivist Mechanism of Europeanization	24
1.4 Small States and Uploading in the Context of Europeanization	27
2. Methodology	31
2.1 Research Design	31
2.2 Case Selection and Justification	32
2.3 Data Collection Methods	34
2.4 Framing Analysis	35
2.5 Research Limitations	44
3. Analysis	47
3.1 Estonia's Framing of Russia as a Threat (2014-2024)	48
3.1.1 Identification of Threat Framing (2014-2024)	49
3.1.2 Estonia's Framing of Russia as a Threat Before and After 2022	61
3.1.3 Summary of Findings	63
3.2 The EU's Framing of Russia as a Threat (2014-2024)	67
3.2.1 Identification of Threat Framing (2014-2024)	68
3.2.2 EU's Framing of Russia as a Threat Before and After 2022	79
3.2.3 Summary of Findings	81
3.4 Assessing the Convergence	85
3.5 Discussion	88
Conclusion	93

Bibliography	98
APPENDIX 1	103
APPENDIX 2	105
APPENDIX 3	106
APPENDIX 4	107
APPENDIX 5	108
APPENDIX 6	109

List of Tables

Table 1. Coding Framework.....	39
Table 2. Examples of Coded Text Segments.....	43

List of Figures

Figure 1. Estonia's framing of Russia as a Threat.....	66
Figure 3. The EU's Framing of Russia as a Threat	84

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
ESDP	European Security and Defense Policy
PSC	Political and Security Committee
EC	European Community

Introduction

In July 2024, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov described the European Union's (EU) foreign policy trajectory with a dismissive label: "It's the Estonization of the EU, and it's sad."¹ His remark followed the nomination of Kaja Kallas, Estonia's Prime Minister, as the EU's next High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. While intended as a slur, the phrase "Estonization" quickly gained traction, reinterpreted by Western analysts to signify the EU's growing assertiveness toward Russian aggression and its increasing alignment with the threat perceptions of small Eastern member states. Kristi Raik, Deputy Director of the International Centre for Defense and Security (ICDS) in Tallinn, observed that Lavrov had inadvertently introduced a new foreign policy paradigm, one that entails "pushing back Russian aggression and defending the sovereignty of Russia's neighbors."²

The intensity of Russian reactions, from Lavrov's lament to Dmitry Medvedev's apocalyptic threats, reflects growing discomfort with Estonia's symbolic rise as a moral voice in EU security discourse. As Estonian historian Mart Kuldkepp noted, such rhetoric betrays "panic" in the Russian political elite, particularly over the collapse of the Kremlin's long-standing discursive power in Europe.³ These reactions emphasize a shift that has been gradually materializing since 2014: the increasing congruence between Estonia's discursive framing of Russia and the EU's evolving foreign and security positions.

This thesis examines how Estonia, as a small member state, has articulated its threat framing in ways that may have become increasingly visible within the EU's foreign and security policy discourse over the past decade, particularly concerning Russia. It approaches this question through the concept of "discursive uploading" within the Europeanization framework, focusing on the ideational mechanisms by which national threat-based narratives may be gradually reflected and reinforced within EU-level discourse. Rather than evaluating institutional power or material capabilities, the analysis centres on framing practices as instruments of ideational agency. The central inquiry is not whether small states can exert direct influence on EU policy, but rather under

¹ "Sergei Lavrov: EU's Foreign Policy Is Being Estonised – Propastop," accessed May 11, 2025, <https://www.propastop.org/en/2024/07/01/sergei-lavrov-eus-foreign-policy-is-being-estonised/>.

² "Sergei Lavrov: EU's Foreign Policy Is Being Estonised – Propastop."

³ "Sergei Lavrov: EU's Foreign Policy Is Being Estonised – Propastop."

what conditions, through which strategies, and in what discursive contexts their framings may gain resonance or visibility.

The role of small state agencies, particularly that of the Baltic states, in EU foreign policy has gained increasing scholarly attention since Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, and even more so following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Scholarly debates have begun to emphasize the ideational and normative contributions of smaller actors, often overlooked in mainstream analyzes that privilege institutional weight or economic power. Estonia presents a compelling case, not only because of its early and consistent framing of Russia as a long-term security threat, but also due to its sustained advocacy for policy responses such as sanctions, military aid, and support for Eastern neighbors' sovereignty. This thesis contributes to the academic literature by examining whether, how, and to what extent Estonia's framing of Russia has found resonance in EU discourse between 2014 and 2024.

The objective of this thesis is to assess the extent to which Estonia's discursive framing of Russia has converged with the EU's foreign and security discourse over time. The core of this research lies in analyzing how Estonia, through rhetorical practices, has sought to portray Russia as a multidimensional threat, military, normative, and geopolitical, and how these portrayals have been reflected, adopted, or echoed in the EU's high-level communications. The underlying expectation is that Estonia's framing has remained stable throughout the analysis, while EU discourse has shifted, particularly after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Accordingly, the central research question is:

To what extent has the discursive convergence between Estonia's framing of Russia and the EU's foreign and security policy increased since the Russian invasion of Ukraine?

This question is operationalized through a comparative, temporal analysis of official annual speeches and strategic documents from both Estonia and the EU, covering the period from 2014 to 2024. It explores the hypothesis that post-2022 conditions, marked by increased threat salience and reduced ambiguity in threat perception, have facilitated greater discursive convergence between Estonia and the EU. In other words, the strategic framing employed by Estonia may have been "uploaded" more effectively under crises conditions, thereby altering the broader European narrative around Russia.

This thesis builds on Europeanization literature with a focus on bottom-up dynamics, emphasizing how member states contribute to shaping EU foreign policy through discourse. Rather than relying on material power, small states like Estonia may exert ideational agency through persistent, normatively anchored framing. Drawing on a constructivist lens, the study treats framing as a strategic mechanism by which states define threats, assign meaning, and advocate responses.⁴ Estonia's portrayal of Russia as a multidimensional threat, military, normative, and geopolitical, is examined not as a causal determinant of EU policy but as a discursive intervention that has gained resonance over time. The analysis explores how this framing, grounded in legal norms and sovereignty, may have found increasing uptake within EU discourse, especially under crises conditions that reduce ambiguity and elevate the value of ideological clarity. Estonia's role is thus conceptualized not in terms of influence through power, but through the rhetorical persistence of a clear, consistent narrative that aligns with EU values. In this sense, the thesis contributes to understanding how small states can shape the ideational landscape of EU foreign policy by offering convincing frames during moments of geopolitical disruption.

Three theoretical expectations guide the analysis. First, Estonia's framing of Russia is expected to demonstrate a high degree of stability across the 2014-2024 period, particularly in its emphasis on existential threat perceptions and normative anchoring. Second, the EU's foreign and security discourse is anticipated to exhibit discursive shifts over time, with increased alignment toward Estonia's framing, especially following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Third, any observed convergence is not interpreted as a direct outcome of Estonia's influence, but rather as a discursive alignment that may reflect shared normative concerns, increased threat salience, and shifting geopolitical conditions. While alternative explanations, such as broader EU institutional learning or the influence of larger member states, are acknowledged, the thesis focuses on how Estonia's consistent and normatively grounded discourse may have become increasingly resonant within the EU's rhetorical landscape. Rather than making causal claims, the study seeks to identify patterns of alignment and discursive resonance that characterize Estonia's potential ideational role within EU foreign policy discourse.

The methodology employed in this research is qualitative framing analysis, guided by Entman's (1993) four core dimensions: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation,

⁴ Robert Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of A Fractured Paradigm," *The Journal of Communication* 43 (December 1, 1993): 51–58, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>.

and policy recommendation. The primary sources for Estonia's security framing include annual "aastakõne" speeches delivered by Estonian Foreign Ministers between 2014 and 2024, which offer a consistent platform for articulating threat perceptions and foreign policy priorities. This is complemented by official strategy documents such as the Estonian Foreign Policy Development Plan 2030, which codifies Estonia's long-term diplomatic orientation. On the EU side, the analysis focuses on annual speeches by the President of the European Commission, which function as the Union's most visible articulation of external challenges and strategic goals. This is supplemented by key strategic documents, including the EU Global Strategy (2016) and the Strategic Compass (2022), both of which are central to understanding how Russia is conceptualized at the EU level. All textual material was systematically coded using a fixed set of sub-dimensions corresponding to each framing function. The framing analysis is operationalized in three stages: identification of threat framing using Entman's framework; comparison of framing patterns before and after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine; and evaluation of discursive convergence and the conditions under which Estonia's framing resonated at the EU level. The research design is both comparative and temporal, enabling a diachronic analysis of how Estonia and the EU framed Russia as a threat between 2014 and 2024. Furthermore, this approach allows the study to trace patterns of discursive continuity and transformation over time. Crucially, it distinguishes between Estonia's consistently articulated, normatively anchored threat framing and the EU's more gradual discursive evolution, especially in the aftermath of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, which is treated not as an isolated rupture but as a potential accelerant of pre-existing rhetorical shifts.

The structure of the thesis reflects its analytical and conceptual progression. Chapter 1 develops the theoretical framework, beginning with the concept of Europeanization and its relevance for small states in EU foreign policy. It then distinguishes between rationalist and constructivist mechanisms of Europeanization, introducing framing as a constructivist tool of ideational influence. The chapter concludes by situating small states' uploading strategies within the broader Europeanization process. Chapter 2 outlines the methodological approach, detailing the research design, case selection, data collection methods, and the specific operationalization of framing analysis. This chapter also discusses the study's limitations. Chapter 3 presents the empirical analysis, divided into four main parts: (1) Estonia's framing of Russia between 2014 and 2024, including both general patterns and changes before and after 2022; (2) the EU's framing of Russia across the same period, similarly distinguishing the before and after 2022 framing; (3) a

comparative evaluation of the temporal shifts in each actor's framing; (4) an assessment of discursive convergence between Estonia and the EU; and (5) the discussion, interpreting these findings through theoretical lenses, including expert interviews and selected political speeches, while highlighting symbolic developments such as the appointment of Kaja Kallas as EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The conclusion reflects on the implications of the findings for EU foreign policy, the discursive agency of small states, and future research on ideational Europeanization.

In sum, this thesis explores how a small member state, through consistent and normatively anchored discourse, may contribute to shaping the EU's collective foreign policy narrative. The case of Estonia illustrates that ideational agency, when strategically framed within conducive geopolitical contexts, can align with and resonate within EU-level discourse. Following recent geopolitical developments, the concept of "Estonization" has gained significance, capturing a process in which normative clarity, rhetorical coherence, and geopolitical consistency intersect within the broader discursive pattern of EU foreign policy.

1. Theoretical framework

This chapter presents the theoretical framework that guides the analysis of whether and how small EU member states contribute to the formation of EU foreign and security policy through discursive mechanisms. Grounded in the concept of Europeanization, this framework synthesizes different theoretical approaches of literature to capture the complex interplay between a small state's agency in foreign policy and EU-level policymaking. Europeanization, as both a top-down and bottom-up process, provides a dynamic lens through which to examine the dynamic relationship between member states and the EU, particularly in the intergovernmental domain of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).⁵ While much of the literature has focused on the domestic adaptation of member states to EU rules, increasing scholarly attention has turned to the agency of national actors in uploading preferences to the EU level, especially through ideational and normative strategies.

The chapter begins by defining the concept of Europeanization and explaining its dual dynamics, downloading and uploading, within the broader institutional context of the EU. It then distinguishes between rationalist and constructivist mechanisms of Europeanization, identifying their core assumptions, processes, and relevance for foreign policy coordination. Special attention is given to the constructivist logic, which foregrounds the importance of norms, persuasion, and identity in EU decision-making. Within this logic, framing is conceptualized as a key mechanism through which national actors contribute to shaping EU discourse. The chapter further explores how small states, despite material limitations, can influence collective outcomes by aligning their narratives with shared EU values, engaging strategically with institutions, and leveraging moments of crises. These insights set the stage for the empirical analysis that follows by offering a hypothesis on the conditions under which discursive convergence between a small member state and the EU is most likely to occur.

⁵ Some scholars distinguish *crossloading* as a third dimension of Europeanization, particularly in the context of CFSP, to capture horizontal exchanges of norms and practices between member states (Müller and Alecu de Flers 2009). However, due to the intergovernmental nature of CFSP and this thesis's focus on how national discourses resonate at the EU level, such interactions are treated as part of bottom-up uploading rather than a separate analytical category.

1.1 Europeanization and Small States in EU Foreign Policy

Europeanization is a multidimensional and dynamic process that captures the evolving relationship between the EU and its member states. It encompasses both the transformation of domestic structures in response to EU-level pressures and the efforts of national actors to shape EU policies and institutions. This conceptual framework has been subject to extensive scholarly debate, particularly concerning its definitional boundaries and its distinction from related terms such as convergence, harmonization, integration, and policy formation.⁶

One of the most authoritative definitions is offered by Claudio Radaelli, who conceptualizes Europeanization as the “processes of (a) construction, (b) diffusion, and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’, and shared beliefs and norms” initially defined at the EU level and incorporated into domestic structures.⁷ This definition emphasizes not only the transmission of norms and rules but also the transformation of political discourse and institutional practices. Börzel and Risse⁸ complement this view by describing Europeanization as a set of processes through which European integration prompts domestic adaptation, while also allowing states to upload their preferences to the EU level. Thus, Europeanization is not merely a top-down mechanism of alignment but a dynamic process involving mutual influence and strategic action by member states.

As mentioned above, Europeanization is typically understood to involve both “Top-down” (downloading) and “Bottom-up” (uploading) processes. Top-down refers to the adaptation of national institutions, policies, and procedures to comply with EU-level decisions, thereby highlighting the EU’s influence on domestic structures. Bottom-up, on the other hand, refers to the projection of national preferences and norms onto the EU level, allowing member states to shape collective rules and reduce the cost of future compliance.⁹

This research adopts a bottom-up conceptualization of Europeanization, particularly as it pertains to discursive “uploading” in the CFSP. Foreign policy remains a largely

⁶ Claudio M. Radaelli, “The Europeanization of Public Policy,” in *The Politics of Europeanization*, ed. Kevin Featherstone and Claudio M. Radaelli, 1st ed. (Oxford University Press/Oxford, 2003), 27–56, <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199252092.003.0002>, 30.

⁷ Radaelli, 30.

⁸ Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse, “Conceptualizing the Domestic Impact of Europe,” ed. Kevin Featherstone and Claudio M. Radaelli, *The Politics of Europeanization*, June 5, 2003, 57–80, <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199252092.003.0003>, 1.

⁹ Börzel, “Pace-Setting, Foot-Dragging, and Fence-Sitting: Member State Responses to Europeanization,” 2002, 193-194.

intergovernmental area, where formal downloading mechanisms are less prevalent. Instead, discursive interactions and consensus-building predominate. Therefore, this thesis investigates how small EU member states, Estonia, upload their foreign policy preferences to the EU by framing them in ways that resonate with shared norms and values. The following sections detail the dynamics of top-down and bottom-up Europeanization, with a particular emphasis on the latter.

Top-down and Bottom-up Dynamics

Top-down

In Europeanization scholarship, the top-down perspective has traditionally dominated analyzes of how EU membership shapes national institutions, policies, and practices. This approach conceptualizes Europeanization as the domestic impact of European integration, through which EU laws, standards, and norms exert pressure on national actors to adapt.¹⁰ The process involves legal, institutional, and normative alignment with EU requirements, often described as “downloading” European policies and rules into the national context. For instance, Ladrech¹¹ defined Europeanization as an “incremental process reorienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making”. This illustrates how EU-level dynamics begin to affect domestic procedures, policy narratives, and even political identities. It is typically associated with processes such as legal harmonization, policy compliance, and institutional restructuring. Accordingly, member states adapt their domestic arrangements to meet EU standards, which often involves significant legal and administrative reforms. This adaptation is driven by what scholars refer to as the “goodness of fit”, the extent of convergence between EU requirements and existing national frameworks.¹² When EU demands clash with national traditions, values, or institutional frameworks, member states face strong incentives to adjust, either through legal reform,

¹⁰ Green Cowles, Caporaso, and Risse 200; Dunia 2007; Mastenbroek 2005, cited in Patrick Müller and Nicole Alecu de Flers, “Applying the Concept of Europeanization to the Study of Foreign Policy: Dimensions and Mechanisms,” 2009.

¹¹ Ladrech 1994, 69 cited in Robert Ladrech, “EUROPEANIZATION AND POLITICAL PARTIES,” *PARTY POLITICS*, 2002.

¹² Börzel and Risse, “Conceptualizing the Domestic Impact of Europe.” 3.

administrative restructuring, or discursive reframing. According to this view, the greater the misfit between existing domestic structures and EU rules, the greater the pressure for adaptation.¹³

However, Europeanization through downloading is not uniform across all member states. Smaller states often experience more pronounced adaptational pressures due to their limited capacity to influence EU policy in its initial stages.¹⁴ Moreover, adaptation trajectories are shaped by domestic veto players, institutional resilience, and political cultures.¹⁵ For example, older member states may have helped shape the *acquis* from the outset, while newer ones, such as those joining after 2004, which was part of the Eastern enlargement, often adjusted previously defined policies to meet EU standards.¹⁶ Furthermore, indicators of top-down Europeanization include increased salience of EU policy agendas, alignment with common foreign policy positions, and adoption of shared objectives, especially in domains such as environmental regulation, judicial reform, and foreign policy rhetoric. Nevertheless, the top-down model has been increasingly complemented by analyses of member states as proactive agents of change.

Bottom-up

While the top-down perspective focuses on domestic adaptation, bottom-up Europeanization emphasizes the ability of member states to shape EU-level decisions, norms, and policy paradigms. Uploading occurs when national actors seek to reduce compliance costs or promote their interests by influencing EU outcomes.¹⁷ This strategic dimension of Europeanization highlights the interdependent and evolving nature of EU member state relations.

Uploading can take several forms, ranging from norm entrepreneurship to active engagement in negotiations, coalition-building, and institutional participation. For small states, which lack the material capabilities to dominate bargaining outcomes, discursive strategies become particularly important. As Müller and de Flers¹⁸ explain, smaller Member States with

¹³ Börzel and Risse; Francesco G. Duina, *Harmonizing Europe: Nation-States within the Common Market* (SUNY Press, 1999).

¹⁴ Tonra 2000b, cited in Müller and de Flers, "Applying the Concept of Europeanization to the Study of Foreign Policy: Dimensions and Mechanisms," 13.

¹⁵ Tanja A. Börzel, "Shaping and Taking EU Policies: Member State Responses to Europeanization," *Queens University Belfast* No. p0035. (2003); Radaelli, "The Europeanization of Public Policy." 47

¹⁶ Pomorska 2007; Zaborowski 2004, cited in Müller and de Flers, "Applying the Concept of Europeanization to the Study of Foreign Policy: Dimensions and Mechanisms." 18.

¹⁷ Börzel, "Pace-Setting, Foot-Dragging, and Fence-Sitting: Member State Responses to Europeanization, 194"

¹⁸ Müller and de Flers, "Applying the Concept of Europeanization to the Study of Foreign Policy: Dimensions and Mechanisms," 16.

limited bargaining power may still succeed in shaping EU foreign policy if they frame their national positions in terms of shared European norms and values, and are perceived as “honest brokers” promoting the common interest. For example, Jakobsen¹⁹ has illustrated that small Nordic EU countries, such as Sweden and Finland, have played a significant role in shaping the civilian dimension of the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP). Notable examples include Finland’s advocacy for the Northern Dimension and Sweden’s push to integrate conflict prevention into EU policy.²⁰

This bottom-up dynamic is especially salient in the realm of foreign and security policy, where formal legal harmonization is limited. The CFSP remains intergovernmental, but its deliberative format opens space for persuasion, socialization, and argumentative commitment. Member states upload their preferences by framing threats, policy priorities, or international norms in ways that resonate with the EU’s collective identity. For example, Estonia has consistently sought to frame Russia as a systemic and normative threat, particularly through its advocacy in the realms of cybersecurity and hybrid warfare.²¹

The process of uploading is not merely strategic but also ideational. Small states like Estonia often act as norm entrepreneurs, promoting interpretations of international events that align with EU values and long-standing narratives. This ideational engagement enables them to participate meaningfully in collective policy formation despite their limited hard power.²² By drawing on shared norms and procedural expectations, small states can present their interests as mutually beneficial, enhancing their credibility and influence.

Moreover, uploading and downloading are interlinked. States that successfully upload their preferences experience reduced adaptational pressure during implementation, as EU outcomes more closely reflect domestic templates. This is particularly advantageous for small states, which

¹⁹ Peter Viggo Jakobsen, “Small States, Big Influence: The Overlooked Nordic Influence on the Civilian ESDP*,” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 47, no. 1 (January 2009): 81–102, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2008.01833.x>.

²⁰ Arter 1996; Arter 2000; Björkdahl 2008 cited in Müller and de Flers, “Applying the Concept of Europeanization to the Study of Foreign Policy: Dimensions and Mechanisms,” 16.

²¹ Crandall, 2016, cited in Kristi Raik and Merili Arjakas, “Grasping the Opportunity for Small State Leadership: Estonia’s Response to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine,” *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, September 18, 2024, 13691481241280368, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13691481241280368>, 5; Maili Vilson, “BALTIC PERSPECTIVES ON THE UKRAINE CRISES: EUROPEANIZATION IN THE SHADOW OF INSECURITY,” 2017, 13.

²² Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change,” *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 887–917, <https://doi.org/10.1162/002081898550789>, 887-917.

often face capacity constraints and seek to avoid regulatory misfits. The two-level nature of EU decision-making²³ implies that national governments act as both “shapers” and “takers” of EU policy, negotiating at both levels to balance domestic priorities and EU requirements. Ultimately, the bottom-up dynamic emphasizes the potential for agency within Europeanization processes. It shows that even small states, through ideational leadership and strategic framing, can contribute meaningfully to the development of EU foreign and security policy. Estonia’s attempt to inject its security concerns into the EU agenda following the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine exemplifies how normative clarity and discursive consistency can challenge dominant narratives and push for a strategic shift within intergovernmental settings, a dynamic that will be further explored in the analysis chapter.

The following sections develop this bottom-up understanding by examining the mechanisms that enable small states to upload their preferences, with a particular focus on framing as a constructivist strategy in foreign and security policy.

1.2 Rationalist and Constructivist Mechanisms of Europeanization

To understand when and how Europeanization occurs, scholars have identified various mechanisms that explain the direction and depth of its effects. These mechanisms can broadly be categorized into two theoretical perspectives: rationalist and constructivist. Each provides distinct insights into the motivations and pathways through which EU member states adapt to, influence, or internalise European-level norms and policies.

From a rationalist institutionalist perspective, Europeanization is understood as a process of strategic maximization of interests driven by cost-benefit reasoning. States, particularly smaller ones, cooperate at the EU level not solely out of normative commitment but to pursue national interests more effectively. The concept of the “politics of scale effect” illustrates how participation in the EU allows states to amplify their external influence by pooling resources and acting collectively.²⁴ This logic is particularly relevant in foreign policy, where the EU’s external representation enables member states to shape outcomes they could not achieve unilaterally.

²³ Putnam 1988, 434, cited in Börzel, “Shaping and Taking EU Policies: Member State Responses to Europeanization,” 4.

²⁴ Ginsberg 1989, cited in Müller and de Flers, “Applying the Concept of Europeanization to the Study of Foreign Policy: Dimensions and Mechanisms,” 10.

Diplomats from smaller EU countries such as Denmark and Ireland have expressed appreciation for the enhanced influence, visibility, and stronger voice they gain through their membership in the EU.²⁵ However, rationalist scholars also caution that such cooperation consolidates power, facilitating mutual survival in an anarchical international system and often leads to the adoption of lowest common denominator policies, as states seek compromise to protect core national interests.²⁶

By contrast, constructivist explanations of Europeanization emphasize the role of norms, identity, and persuasion. Rather than acting purely out of interest, states engage with the EU because they internalise shared understandings of appropriate behavior. One central constructivist mechanism is socialization - the process through which national actors adopt EU norms and practices through repeated interaction with their European representatives. As national representatives participate in EU forums and committees, such as the Political and Security Committee (PSC) or COREPER, they are gradually embedded into EU practices and may begin to adopt an “EU mindset.”²⁷

Socialization within the EU foreign policy context operates on a spectrum, ranging from strategic adaptation to deep internalization of norms. In its instrumental form, member states adopt EU norms to enhance their legitimacy or garner support for national positions. Over time, however, sustained interaction within EU institutions, such as CFSP committees, can lead to a more profound form of socialization, in which these norms are internalized and begin to shape national identities and preferences.²⁸ This normative shift is characterized by a transition from a bargaining mode to an arguing mode of decision-making, whereby actors justify their positions concerning shared norms rather than material interests.²⁹ Known as “normative suasion”, this process enables member states to influence one another’s positions while simultaneously enhancing the legitimacy of their own. In this way, the strategic use of EU norms not only facilitates preference alignment and cooperative behavior but also fosters long-term convergence through repeated engagement and norm-based persuasion.³⁰

²⁵ Tonra 2000b, cited in Müller and de Flers, 13.

²⁶ Ginsberg 2001; Waltz 2000, cited in Müller and de Flers, 13.

²⁷ Juncos and Pomorska 2006, 170; Müller and de Flers, 13.

²⁸ Müller and de Flers, 25.

²⁹ Schimmelfennig 2001, cited in Müller and de Flers, 14-15.

³⁰ Wong 2007, cited in Müller and de Flers, 18.

Another mechanism frequently discussed in constructivist accounts is learning that emphasizes the diffusion of ideas and practices through interaction and experience. Unlike the gradual and coordinated learning fostered by the EU's Open Method of Coordination in areas such as employment, foreign policy learning is often driven by critical junctures, such as geopolitical crises or institutional failures, that expose the limitations of unilateral action and stress the need for collective responses. Major external shocks, rather than incremental processes, have historically prompted the most significant changes in national foreign policy preferences. Notable examples include the EU's inability to address the breakup of Yugoslavia and the internal divisions during the Iraq crises, both of which served as catalysts for strengthening the EU's foreign and security policy, including the development of the European Security and Defense Policy.³¹ Learning can also occur through policy diffusion, through which member states adopt successful foreign policy strategies implemented by others. For instance, France's alignment with Germany's trade approach toward China illustrates how mutual observation and best practice adoption contribute to policy convergence within the EU.³²

These rationalist and constructivist mechanisms are not mutually exclusive; rather, they often operate in tandem. Member states may pursue national interests strategically while simultaneously being shaped by the norms and expectations of the EU environment. Understanding how these mechanisms interact, particularly in areas such as foreign policy, where legal enforcement is limited, provides a more nuanced picture of how Europeanization unfolds in practice. Moreover, in the case of small states, the relevance of these mechanisms is especially pronounced. With limited material power, they rely heavily on persuasion, legitimacy, and strategic framing to influence outcomes. The constructivist emphasis on discourse and socialization is thus particularly salient for understanding how states like Estonia attempt to shape EU foreign policy through norm entrepreneurship and value-based advocacy. These insights lay the foundation for understanding the role of framing in the Europeanization of foreign and security policy, which will be discussed in the following section. Having explored the underlying mechanisms of Europeanization, the next section focuses on framing as a constructivist strategy through which small states exercise agency.

³¹ Wong 2005; Mahncke 2004, cited in Müller and de Flers, 19-20.

³² Wong 2006, cited in Müller and de Flers.

1.3 Framing as a Constructivist Mechanism of Europeanization

Among the constructivist mechanisms explaining how Europeanization occurs, framing plays a particularly significant role in enabling small states to project their policy preferences into the EU level. Framing is defined by Entman³³ as the act of selecting “some aspects of a perceived reality” and making them “more salient in a communicating text,” thereby promoting a specific definition of a problem, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and policy recommendation. In the context of EU foreign policy, framing is not merely a rhetorical device but a strategic tool through which national narratives are embedded in broader EU discourses.

Framing functions as an ideational uploading mechanism grounded in the constructivist “logic of appropriateness,” rather than in rational strategic maximization of interests driven by cost-benefit calculations. This aligns with constructivist understandings of Europeanization, which emphasize how ideas, norms, and discursive resonance shape collective outcomes.³⁴ Framing enables small states to act as “norm entrepreneurs”, agents who seek to redefine the boundaries of acceptable policy through discourse, moral argumentation, and value alignment.³⁵ When national concerns are framed in terms of shared EU values, such as democracy, the rule of law, and sovereignty, they are more likely to be perceived as legitimate and adopted at the EU level.

This mechanism is especially relevant in the field of foreign and security policy, where formal enforcement mechanisms are weak and influence is primarily exercised through discourse. Within the intergovernmental framework of the CFSP, the success of policy proposals often depends on their resonance with shared values and institutional priorities. In this context, framing allows small states to construct a discursive convergence between national narratives and EU agendas, ultimately contributing to both policy influence and collective interpretation. These discursive strategies are closely intertwined with socialization, a core constructivist mechanism discussed above. As state representatives engage in EU institutional settings such as the PSC or COREPER, they operate within deliberative settings where persuasion, argumentation, and norm-based reasoning are central.³⁶

³³ Entman 1993, 52.

³⁴ Thomas Risse, “Social Constructivism and European Integration,” 2004.

³⁵ Finnemore and Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change,” 897.

³⁶ Juncos and Pomorska 2006, cited in Müller and de Flers, “Applying the Concept of Europeanization to the Study of Foreign Policy: Dimensions and Mechanisms,” 21.

Critically, framing is not only a reactive adaptation to EU norms but also a proactive effort to shape them.³⁷ By articulating national interests in terms of broader European concerns, such as cyber threats, democratic backsliding, or violations of sovereignty, small states contribute to the discursive environment in which EU responses are formed. Over time, this can lead to gradual convergence between national framings and EU-level discourse, not through institutional redesign, but through evolving shared meaning.³⁸

Enabling Conditions for Effective Framing

The effectiveness of framing as a strategic tool for small state influence in EU foreign policy is not intrinsic, but conditional, contingent upon specific contextual factors. Following Mendonça and Simões,³⁹ frame analysis is a context-sensitive method that captures the interplay between discursive agency and broader socio-political structures. In this context, effectiveness refers to a state's ability to shape collective outcomes by advancing frames that resonate within EU deliberative settings. Drawing on constructivist and Europeanization scholarship, this chapter identifies three key enabling conditions for such resonance: (1) moments of crises, which disrupt dominant narratives and allow new perspectives to emerge;⁴⁰ (2) normative alignment, whereby national frames appeal to shared EU values and norms;⁴¹ and (3) strategic institutional engagement, through which small states sustain credibility and visibility within EU decision-making arenas.⁴²

First, *periods of geopolitical upheaval or institutional disruption*, referred to as “critical junctures,” serve as windows of opportunity during which established norms and power structures

³⁷ Thorhallsson 2000, cited in Baldur Thorhallsson and Anders Wivel, “Thorhallsson and Wivel 2006_ Small States in the European Union: What Do We Know and What Would We Like to Know?,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 19, no. 4 (December 2006): 651–68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557570601003502>, 659.

³⁸ Checkel, 2005; Schimmelfennig, 2001; Tanja Börzel, 2002; Wong, 2007, cited in Müller and de Flers, “Applying the Concept of Europeanization to the Study of Foreign Policy: Dimensions and Mechanisms,” 15-18.

³⁹ Ricardo Fabrino Mendonça and Paula Guimarães Simões, “Frame Analysis,” in *Research Methods in Deliberative Democracy*, ed. Selen A. Ercan et al. (Oxford University Press, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192848925.003.0024>, 352.

⁴⁰ Capoccia and Kelemen 2007; Krasner 1984; Anna-Lena Högenauer and Matúš Mišík, *Small States in EU Policy-Making: Strategies, Challenges, Opportunities*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003380641>.

⁴¹ Finnemore and Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change.”

⁴² Lewis 2005; Juncos and Pomorska 2006; Müller and de Flers, “Applying the Concept of Europeanization to the Study of Foreign Policy: Dimensions and Mechanisms.”

are temporarily unsettled. These moments create space for new or previously marginal discourses to emerge and redefine institutional trajectories.⁴³ For small states, which often lack material leverage, crises offer rare occasions to engage more equally with larger powers and elevate their framing to the EU level. During such junctures, small states may challenge prevailing assumptions, redefine their roles, and shape the development of new norms, policies, or institutions. In these periods of uncertainty, actors are more receptive to normative reframing. Estonia has effectively leveraged these openings, for instance, after the 2007 cyberattack⁴⁴ the 2014 annexation of Crimea, and the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, to advance frames that positioned Russia as a systemic threat and aligned with EU-level concerns on cybersecurity, sanctions, and strategic resilience. However, capitalizing on a crises requires more than passive presence; it demands proactive agency, where purposeful actors, often referred to as *policy entrepreneurs*, frame exogenous shocks in ways that resonate with institutional agendas and enable strategic transformation.⁴⁵

Secondly, *frames that align with widely accepted EU norms*, such as democracy, sovereignty, the rule of law, human rights, and multilateralism, are more likely to be perceived as legitimate and gain institutional support.⁴⁶ Constructivist scholars emphasize that the power of norms lies in their capacity to shape both identities and preferences, framing that aligns with shared norms is particularly persuasive.⁴⁷ Small states can act as norm entrepreneurs by strategically invoking shared values and by framing issues in a way that contributes to the EU's collective identity.⁴⁸ This process is especially effective when such states are perceived as credible actors with a strong domestic track record, relevant expertise, and reputations for consistency.⁴⁹ Additionally, discourse itself plays a crucial role in securing legitimacy for policy change, transforming the perception of policy dilemmas, and framing national preferences in ways that appear to serve the broader European interest.⁵⁰

⁴³ Capoccia and Kelemen 2007, 341-343; Krasner 1984, 228, cited in Högenauer and Mišik, *Small States in EU Policy-Making*, 163.

⁴⁴ Högenauer and Mišik, 163-166.

⁴⁵ Hacker 2005, cited in Högenauer and Mišik, 163-164.

⁴⁶ Manners 2002, cited in Thomas Diez, "Constructing the Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering 'Normative Power Europe'," *Millennium* 33, no. 3 (June 1, 2005): 613–36, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298050330031701>, 617-618.

⁴⁷ Finnemore and Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," 908.

⁴⁸ Ingebritsen 2002, cited in Högenauer and Mišik, *Small States in EU Policy-Making*, 162.

⁴⁹ Annica Kronsell, "Can Small States Influence EU Norms?: Insights From Sweden's Participation in the Field of Environmental Politics," *Scandinavian Studies* 74, no. 3 (2002): 287–304, 290.

⁵⁰ Radaelli 2003, 40-41; Schmidt 2001, cited in Radaelli, "The Europeanization of Public Policy," 37.

Third, the ability to frame effectively is also shaped by a state's *active participation within EU institutional settings*. Institutions such as the Council, Commission, and European Parliament provide structured arenas where small states can engage in deliberation, coalition-building, and norm-driven persuasion.⁵¹ In these venues, small states may deploy discursive strategies, such as playing the “Brussels game” or advocating for consensus-based outcomes, to amplify their influence despite limited material capabilities.⁵² Coalition-building and sustained engagement within multilateral frameworks not only enable norm diffusion but can also offer an “escape from smallness,” giving smaller actors a proportionally larger voice.⁵³ Engagement is most effective when backed by clear national priorities, negotiating expertise, and consistent interaction with key institutional actors such as the European Commission.⁵⁴ In sum, framing becomes an effective constructivist mechanism of Europeanization when small states utilize moments of disruption, root their narratives in shared normative foundations, and engage strategically with EU institutional structures. Under these conditions, national preferences are not only voiced but also integrated into the evolving fabric of EU foreign policy discourse.

Taken together, these three conditions reinforce the idea that framing is most effective when deployed strategically and contextually, especially by small states seeking to shape the EU's foreign and security discourse. The empirical chapters that follow assess whether and how Estonia has strategically used these conditions to frame Russia as a systemic threat and to promote its security agenda within the EU between 2014 and 2024.

1.4 Small States and Uploading in the Context of Europeanization

In the context of European integration, small states have often been perceived as policy-takers rather than policy-shapers due to their limited material capabilities and population size.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Thorhallsson and Wivel, “Small States in the European Union,” 659; Müller and de Flers, “Applying the Concept of Europeanization to the Study of Foreign Policy: Dimensions and Mechanisms,” 15-16.

⁵² Juncos and Pomorska 2006, cited in Müller and de Flers, “Applying the Concept of Europeanization to the Study of Foreign Policy: Dimensions and Mechanisms,” 15; Diana Panke, “Small States in the European Union: Structural Disadvantages in EU Policy-Making and Counter-Strategies,” *Journal of European Public Policy* 17, no. 6 (September 2010): 799–817, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2010.486980>, 776-778.

⁵³ Clive Archer, Alyson J. K. Bailes, and Anders Wivel, eds., *Small States and International Security: Europe and Beyond*, Routledge Advances in International Relations and Global Politics (New York: Routledge, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315798042>, 11.

⁵⁴ Thorhallsson and Wivel, “Small States in the European Union,” 659.

⁵⁵ 205.

However, scholars have challenged this structuralist bias, arguing that small states can exert influence through ideational and normative means. Within the framework of Europeanization, particularly in the bottom-up or “uploading” dimension, small states matter not because of their material power, but because of their strategic behavior, institutional engagement, and discursive coherence. As Börzel⁵⁶ articulates in her typology of member state responses to Europeanization, states may be categorized as pace-setters, fence-sitters, or foot-draggers. Pace-setters actively shape EU policy by promoting national preferences; fence-sitters adopt a more selective approach, supporting EU policies only when they align with national interests; and foot-draggers resist or delay Europeanization processes. This typology highlights that states with clear preferences and sufficient institutional capacity, regardless of size, can influence EU policy outcomes. It opens analytical space for understanding small states not as passive followers but as norm entrepreneurs capable of shaping EU policy under favorable conditions.

The academic literature on small states in the EU reinforces this perspective. Scholars such as Thorhallsson and Wivel⁵⁷ emphasize the importance of institutional adaptation, coalition-building, and strategic framing for small states to exert influence within multilateral frameworks. Thorhallsson⁵⁸ introduces the concept of “shelter theory,” which highlights how small states seek political and economic security through active EU engagement. This is complemented by Panke’s analysis, which identifies two overarching categories of strategic behavior employed by small states in EU policymaking: capacity building and shaping strategies.⁵⁹ The former includes efforts such as institutional engagement and knowledge accumulation, which serve to build the foundational conditions for effective participation. The latter are strategies aimed at external influence strategies designed to exert influence during policy deliberations. These may rely on either a constructivist logic, such as invoking shared norms, framing issues in value-based terms, or leveraging reputational credibility, or a rationalist logic involving negotiation tactics like offering concessions, forming coalitions, or trading support. Notably, Panke⁶⁰ argues that these strategic modes are not mutually exclusive: small states frequently oscillate between ideational persuasion and material bargaining depending on context. Despite their structural limitations, such

⁵⁶ Börzel, “Pace-Setting, Foot-Dragging, and Fence-Sitting: Member State Responses to Europeanization.”

⁵⁷ Thorhallsson and Wivel, “Small States in the European Union,” 652, 657, 660.

⁵⁸ Thorhallsson 2011, 2019, cited in Högenauer and Mišák, *Small States in EU Policy-Making*, 88-89.

⁵⁹ Panke 2012b, cited in Högenauer and Mišák, 88.

⁶⁰ Panke 2010; 2012b, cited in Högenauer and Mišák, 88.

as limited diplomatic resources and reduced media visibility, small states can enhance their credibility by consistently aligning their national narratives with the EU's normative framework. This credibility, in turn, strengthens their capacity to shape policy discussions, especially in areas where they are viewed as norm leaders or innovators.

Högenauer and Mišík⁶¹ further refine this understanding by showing that successful uploading by small states depends on both the domestic coherence of policy preferences and the EU's receptiveness to ideational arguments. In this context, Estonia emerges as a compelling case for studying bottom-up Europeanization. Despite its size, Estonia exhibits a high degree of institutional presence in EU institutional settings and has consistently attempted to frame its foreign and security policy through a normative, values-based lens. It does not merely react to EU developments but often seeks to proactively shape them, particularly in domains of strategic importance such as cybersecurity, the Eastern Partnership, and security policy more broadly.

Thus, the aforementioned justifies the focus on Europeanization through small state agency by highlighting how constructivist mechanisms, especially the framing of norms, identity, and credibility, enable small states like Estonia to act as norm entrepreneurs. These states leverage persuasion, narrative control, and institutional engagement to upload national preferences to the EU level. As a result, they challenge the assumption that power in the EU is monopolized by large states. Rather, under conditions of normative alignment and discursive resonance, small states can play a disproportionate role in shaping EU outcomes. Estonia, therefore, serves as a strong empirical proxy not only for understanding the strategic behavior of small Eastern European states but also for theorizing the constructivist dynamics underpinning Europeanization.

This chapter has established a comprehensive theoretical framework for analyzing how small EU member states can influence collective foreign and security policy through the constructivist mechanism of framing, situated within the broader context of Europeanization. By synthesizing rationalist and constructivist approaches, the chapter has shown that small states, while lacking material power, can strategically shape EU discourse by framing national preferences in ways that resonate with shared norms, particularly during critical junctures. Framing, understood as an ideational tool grounded in the logic of appropriateness, allows small

⁶¹ Högenauer and Mišík, 56-57.

states to act as norm entrepreneurs, effectively “uploading” their narratives to the EU level through institutional engagement, normative alignment, and timely action in moments of disruption.

Thus, this thesis advances the theoretical argument that under conditions of normative alignment, institutional engagement, and discursive opportunity, small states can act as norm entrepreneurs within the EU’s foreign policy system. By strategically framing security threats in ways that resonate with shared EU norms, they may shape collective policy outcomes despite limited material power. This mechanism represents a constructivist process of bottom-up Europeanization. While existing literature has examined small state strategies and norm entrepreneurship, few studies have traced discursive convergence over time in the CFSP context using framing analysis. This thesis contributes to filling that gap by offering a temporal, empirically grounded examination of how Estonia’s framing of Russia has evolved and potentially been reflected in EU-level discourse. From this theoretical foundation emerges the central expectation that guides the empirical investigation:

If a small EU member state consistently frames a security threat in terms aligned with EU norms, then in times of discursive disruption, such as a geopolitical crises, the EU is more likely to adopt that framing, resulting in increased discursive convergence between the state and the Union.

The following chapters apply this framework to the case of Estonia, examining whether and how its framing of Russia between 2014 and 2024 has been reflected in EU foreign and security discourse. This analysis tests the proposed hypothesis and contributes to broader debates on small state agency, normative power, and the dynamics of Europeanization in foreign policy.

2. Methodology

This chapter outlines and justifies the methodological approach adopted in this thesis, detailing the research design, case selection rationale, data collection procedures, analytical framework, and potential limitations. The overarching aim of the chapter is to explain how the study investigates the extent to which Estonia's national framing of Russia as a security threat has been discursively reflected in the European Union's foreign and security policy discourse between 2014 and 2024. To this end, the chapter first introduces the research design, explaining the rationale behind selecting a single case study focused on Estonia and establishing the relevance of the ten-year timeframe. It then elaborates on the case selection logic, drawing on methodological literature to position Estonia as a critical and illustrative case for exploring bottom-up Europeanization in foreign policy framing.

The chapter describes the data collection methods, which involve gathering political speeches and strategic documents from the Estonian and the EU. A qualitative framing analysis is applied to these texts, guided by an operationalized coding framework derived from Entman's (1993) four core framing dimensions. The framing analysis is structured in three analytical stages: identification of threat framing, assessment of normative anchoring, and evaluation of discursive convergence and strategic uptake. This structure enables a systematic comparison of how Estonia and the EU define, interpret, morally evaluate, and respond to the perceived Russian threat. The chapter concludes by acknowledging methodological limitations, including access constraints, language barriers, institutional asymmetries, and interpretive subjectivity. Collectively, this chapter establishes a rigorous and transparent foundation for the empirical analysis presented in Chapter 3.

2.1 Research Design

This study investigate how Estonia, as a small EU member state, has attempted to project (“upload”) its national framing of Russia as a security threat into EU-level foreign and security discourse from 2014 to 2024. Specifically, the research design enables the study to empirically assess whether Estonia's consistent national security discourse has been reflected in intergovernmental EU foreign policy framing, particularly following Russia's full-scale invasion

of Ukraine in 2022. Furthermore, by tracing discursive convergence over time, the design allows for investigating how ideational change may be initiated by a small, norm-driven actor.

Adopting a temporal qualitative approach, the thesis systematically analyzes discursive patterns over ten years to determine shifts, continuities, and convergence in framing. The single-case design is chosen because it aligns with the study's empirical aim: to assess the conditions and mechanisms through which a small state's strategic framing gains resonance at the EU level. Estonia represents a typical case for such discursive uploading due to its limited structural power, small size, and peripheral geographic location within the EU. Therefore, Estonia's case provides a valuable lens for examining how ideational factors, such as alignment with EU norms and shared values, may contribute to the visibility and potential uptake of national frames, without relying on material power or structural advantages.⁶²

This research does not claim direct causality between Estonia's framing and EU policy outcomes. Instead, it explores discursive alignment, investigating under what conditions Estonia's national framing became increasingly prominent and was strategically adopted by EU institutions. By doing so, it contributes to broader debates on small-state agency within EU foreign policy and the role of normative argumentation in international discourse.⁶³

2.2 Case Selection and Justification

This thesis explores how small EU member states can contribute to shaping intergovernmental foreign and security discourse through ideational means. The case is defined in both geographical and temporal terms: it focuses on Estonia, a small Eastern EU member state, during the period from 2014 to 2024. This timeframe captures both the long-term consistency in Estonia's security discourse and the post-2022 shift in EU rhetoric following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The case study method is particularly well-suited for this type of inquiry as it allows for in-depth, context-specific investigation into the mechanisms and conditions of change. According to Gerring,⁶⁴ case studies are valuable when studying complex causal processes, especially when the case is "typical" of a broader category. Estonia is chosen as a representative

⁶² Thorhallsson, Baldur., "Studying Small States: A Review.," 2018, 26.

⁶³ Finnemore and Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change"; Alexander Wendt, "Social Theory of International Politics," n.d.

⁶⁴ John Gerring, "Case Study Research: Principles and Practices," n.d., 91.

case of the Eastern flank member states that have persistently warned of the Russian threat, thus serving as an illustrative case that offers insights into broader regional patterns of discourse.

Estonia's small size, limited material capacity, and peripheral geographic position within the Union make it an analytically compelling case. It lacks the structural power usually associated with agenda-setting or coercive influence in EU foreign policy. Accordingly, if its security discourse is increasingly reflected in EU-level framing, such a development would likely be attributable not to material dominance but to ideational resonance, discursive consistency, and normative credibility. Estonia has issued early and persistent warnings about Russia, making it a relevant actor to study discursive uploading, defined here as the projection of national threat perceptions and policy frames into EU-level discourse. Nevertheless, this study does not treat Estonia as an isolated or exceptional case. Alternatively, it acknowledges that Estonia can be understood as a good proxy for other Eastern European states, particularly Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, which share similar geopolitical histories, threat perceptions, and normative outlooks.

By selecting Estonia, the thesis does not claim that there is a unique "Estonian model" of influence. Instead, Estonia is treated as a compelling example of how the EU may upload narratives from a subset of member states that "tick the right boxes" early articulation, alignment with EU norms, institutional visibility, and discursive clarity. If Estonia's discourse is adopted at the EU level, it is reasonable to assume that similar frames from Latvia or Lithuania have followed a comparable path. In this sense, Estonia provides both empirical depth and regional representativeness, allowing for cautious generalization about discursive influence from the Eastern flank.

The selection of Estonia also helps control for alternative explanations. If EU discourse reflects Estonia's framing after 2022, this cannot easily be attributed to pressure from central powers, such as France or Germany, nor transatlantic influence alone, as Estonia lacks both structural and coercive leverage. While NATO and the United States have played vital roles in shaping the EU's strategic context, Estonia's role is distinct in its early, consistent, and values-based articulation of the Russia threat. As such, the case helps isolate the ideational and normative mechanisms of influence from broader systemic dynamics.

Estonia's credibility is further enhanced by its growing institutional presence within the EU's foreign policy system, as illustrated by the nomination of Prime Minister Kaja Kallas to the position of High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy. Although Lithuania's Andrius

Kubilius was appointed Commissioner for Defense Industry and Space, his portfolio is less directly tied to foreign policy decision-making. Meanwhile, Poland's normative position has at times been undermined by internal political developments, and Latvia and Lithuania, despite being vocal, have remained less visible in EU-wide discourse. Taken together, these factors strengthen the internal validity of the study and the justification for selecting Estonia as a primary case.

The study examines whether and how Estonia's framing of Russia as a security threat has been acknowledged and echoed in EU foreign and security policy discourse. By systematically evaluating the extent of convergence across four core framing dimensions: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and policy recommendation, the thesis seeks to assess the conditions under which a small state's discursive framing may be internalized at the EU level. To achieve this, the research develops a detailed operationalization framework, allowing for structured diachronic comparison across the selected decade. The findings thus aim to offer both conceptual and empirical insights into the dynamics of bottom-up Europeanization through strategic discourse.

2.3 Data Collection Methods

This study employs qualitative framing analysis to systematically examine how EU foreign policy framings have aligned with Estonia's constant framing of Russia as a security threat from 2014 to 2024, particularly after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Given that framing analysis focuses on the construction and evolution of framings, the data collection process is designed to trace discursive patterns, thematic continuity, and shifts in emphasis in both Estonian and EU foreign policy discourse over time.

The dataset consists of two primary analytical units: (1) Estonia's framing of Russia as a threat, and (2) the EU's framing of Russia. It includes high-level political discourse drawn from primary sources, such as annual speeches delivered in parliament by key representatives and strategic documents outlining foreign and security priorities. The selection of texts is based on their institutional relevance, the representational role of the speakers, and their capacity to reflect broader policy orientations. Emphasis is placed on materials that enable the identification of framing patterns over time, particularly concerning major geopolitical developments such as Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Since Estonia is a sovereign state and the EU is an intergovernmental organization, their institutional structures, decision-making mechanisms, and policy instruments differ significantly. Consequently, the types of available data for Estonia and the EU are not identical. However, the selected data sources represent the most comparable sets of documents that allow for a systematic assessment of alignment between Estonia's and the EU's foreign and security policy framing. This ensures that, despite institutional differences, a meaningful comparative analysis can be conducted to track discursive convergence and intensification over time.

For Estonian security framing, the primary sources include annual speeches (“aastakõne”) by Estonia's Foreign Ministers (2014-2024), which serve as key texts for identifying how Russia is framed as a threat. Additionally, government-issued foreign policy strategy documents, such as the *Foreign Policy Development Plan 2030* (2020), provide a formalized articulation of Estonia's security concerns and diplomatic priorities.

For EU foreign policy framing, this study analyzes annual speeches by the President of the European Commission, as these represent the Union's official articulation of external security concerns and strategic priorities in response to geopolitical threats. In addition, key strategic and security documents, including the *EU Global Strategy* (2016) and the *Strategic Compass* (2022), are analyzed to determine how Russia has been conceptualized as a security threat at the EU level and to what extent this framing converges with Estonia's earlier narratives.

While the European Council plays a crucial role in determining the overall direction of EU foreign policy, its conclusions tend to reflect intergovernmental consensus and are often expressed in more diplomatic or ambiguous terms. This study, therefore, focuses on strategic documents issued by the European Commission that offer clearer and more sustained articulations of the EU's geopolitical positioning. It enables a systematic assessment of whether and how Estonia's security discourse has been echoed, adapted, or institutionalized in EU foreign policy framing over the past decade, thus providing a focused and coherent analytical scope.

2.4 Framing Analysis

This study employs framing analysis as the primary methodological approach to examine to what extent and how Estonia, as a small EU member state, has framed Russia as a security threat and whether this framing has been uploaded to the EU level over the period from 2014 to 2024.

Particular attention is paid to changes before and after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which serves as a potential turning point in EU threat perception. The aim is to trace discursive continuity and transformation across time, identifying resonance and strategic uptake of Estonia's frames within broader EU security discourse. By applying this method carefully, the study offers a nuanced analysis of whether, and under what conditions, small-state narratives can resonate within broader EU-level discourses, particularly during moments of geopolitical crises. This method is particularly suited to the research question, which explores how long-standing national frames can become resonant at the EU level during periods of geopolitical crises. By applying this method carefully, the study offers a nuanced analysis of whether, and under what conditions, small-state narratives can resonate within broader EU-level discourses, particularly during moments of geopolitical crises. Also, it enables the systematic identification of ideational continuity, rhetorical shifts, and discursive alignment, directly addressing the study's goal of assessing discursive convergence.

Framing analysis, as conceptualized by Entman⁶⁵ is a qualitative method that specifically investigates how political actors actively construct meaning, define security threats, attribute responsibility, and legitimize certain policy responses through the strategic use of discourse.⁶⁶ Unlike content analysis, which primarily quantifies the frequency or distribution of predefined themes or terms within texts,⁶⁷ framing analysis provides deeper insights into how issues are strategically represented and politically contextualized. Content analysis is limited in its ability to capture interpretative nuances, subtle rhetorical shifts, and implicit meanings, as it relies largely on quantifiable indicators of discourse rather than the interpretive significance of language.⁶⁸ By contrast, framing analysis aligns closely with the study's constructivist foundations by focusing explicitly on how meanings, identities, and norms are shaped through discourse, capturing subtleties in political language that reveal underlying ideational changes.⁶⁹ As framing inherently

⁶⁵ Entman, "Framing," 52.

⁶⁶ Mendonça and Simões, "Frame Analysis," 182.

⁶⁷ Teun A Van Dijk, "Van Dijk_Critics_Catherine_Analyzing Frame Analysis: A Critical Review of Framing Studies in Social Movement Research," *Discourse Studies* 25, no. 2 (April 2023): 153–78, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614456231155080>, 153.

⁶⁸ Clarissa C. David et al., "Finding Frames: Comparing Two Methods of Frame Analysis," *Communication Methods and Measures* 5, no. 4 (October 1, 2011): 329–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19312458.2011.624873>.

⁶⁹ Finnemore and Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," 892; Wendt, "Social Theory of International Politics," 96.

assumes that political meanings are socially constructed and strategically communicated, this method reinforces the constructivist logic underpinning the study's broader theoretical framework.

This research adopts a Europeanization “uploading” perspective, which focuses on whether and how member states seek to project their national preferences and policy frames onto the EU level. Given this lens and the study's single case design, Estonia serves as a critical example of a small state with early and consistent threat articulation attempting to shape EU foreign policy discourse through sustained norm-based framing of Russia as a threat. Therefore, framing analysis is methodologically preferable for this research because it enables an exploration of the process through which Estonia's long-standing discourse provided a “ready-made” framing of Russia as a security threat - one that was adopted or echoed by the EU in response to the geopolitical disruption caused by the 2022 invasion. While 2022 marks a clear turning point, the study deliberately treats the full 2014-2024 period to capture both continuity and transformation in security discourse. This method allows for the explicit identification and interpretation of the resonance and strategic uptake of Estonia's framing within broader EU security narratives.

To systematically assess Estonia's framing and its potential resonance within EU discourse, this research follows an inductive-deductive hybrid approach to framing analysis.⁷⁰ Therefore, the study operationalizes the framing analysis in three stages:

1. Identification of Threat Framing

To determine how Russia is framed as a threat by Estonia and the EU, the analysis draws on Entman's four core framing dimensions:

- (1) Problem Definition** - what is presented as the key threat or issue?
- (2) Causal Interpretation** - who or what is responsible for the problem?
- (3) Moral Evaluation** - why the issue is considered morally significant? and
- (4) Policy Recommendation** - what should be done in response?

⁷⁰ David et al., “Finding Frames,” 330.

An initial phase of inductive open coding was conducted on both Estonian and EU texts (annual speeches and strategic documents) to identify recurring patterns and emergent themes. These inductively derived categories were then organized deductively according to Entman's framework. This hybrid approach ensures both empirical sensitivity to the discourse and conceptual clarity. To facilitate analytical transparency, the resulting dimensions and sub-dimensions are presented in Table 1, which offers a visual overview of the coding framework used throughout the analysis.

Table 1. Coding Framework

Entman's 4 Framing Dimensionss	1. Problem Definition	2. Causal Interpretation	3. Moral Evaluation	4. Policy Recommendation
Questions	<i>What is framed as the central issue or threat?</i>	<i>Who or what is responsible for the problem?</i>	<i>Why is the issue morally significant?</i>	<i>What should be done?</i>
Sub-Dimensions	<p>Existential Threat to National Sovereignty</p> <p>Geopolitical Instability in Europe</p> <p>Russian Expansionism and Imperial Ambitions</p> <p>Undermining of International Law and Rules-Based Order</p> <p>Hybrid Threats and Information Warfare</p>	<p>Aggressive Foreign Policy of the Russian State</p> <p>Kremlin Leadership and Strategic Intent</p> <p>Energy Dependence on Russia as a Structural Risk</p> <p>Russian Disinformation and Propaganda Campaigns</p>	<p>Violation of International Law and Sovereignty</p> <p>Breach of European Democratic Values and Norms</p> <p>Moral Responsibility to Support Ukraine</p> <p>Condemnation of Authoritarianism</p> <p>Normative Commitment to Ukraine's Victory</p>	<p>Strategic Aid to Ukraine (Military, Financial, Humanitarian)</p> <p>Sanctions and Restrictive Measures Against Russia</p> <p>Strengthening EU-NATO Security Cooperation</p> <p>Boosting Cybersecurity and Digital Resilience</p> <p>Reducing Strategic Dependencies on Russia (Energy, Trade, Technology)</p> <p>Support for EU and NATO Enlargement (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia)</p> <p>Mobilization of Unity and Strategic Autonomy</p> <p>Refugee Protection and Civilian Solidarity Policies</p> <p>Legal Accountability for Russia and Expulsion from International Forums</p>

2. Temporal Comparison: Before and After 2022

This stage conducts a diachronic comparison of Estonia's and the EU's threat framing before and after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Using Entman's four framing dimensions as a guiding structure, the analysis identifies changes in rhetorical tone, normative anchoring, and policy urgency across time. The aim is to assess whether core European values, such as sovereignty, democracy, and the rules-based order, remain consistent or become more explicitly invoked. This temporal comparison enables the evaluation of both framing continuity and rupture, revealing how external shocks may accelerate convergence between national and EU-level foreign policy framings.

3. Evaluation of Discursive Convergence and Strategic Uptake

This stage assesses whether Estonia's framing of Russia was gradually absorbed into EU discourse, particularly following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Guided by Entman's four framing dimensions, the analysis identifies rhetorical and strategic patterns of convergence by comparing problem definitions, causal narratives, normative positions, and policy preferences over time. Convergence is evidenced by growing framing alignment, threat characterizations, and justificatory logic. On the other hand, to assess strategic uptake, the analysis identifies instances where Estonia's previously articulated frames appear in later EU-level discourse, especially in strategic documents. Uptake is inferred when previously minor Estonian framing gains salience, is repeated, and becomes institutionally embedded in EU discourse.

By applying this three-stage operationalization, the study first assesses the framing logic of both Estonia and the EU across the 2014-2024 period. The analysis is conducted diachronically, enabling the identification of both stability and change in each actor's threat narratives. Crucially, the study distinguishes between Estonia's consistent and normatively anchored framing of Russia as an existential threat and the EU's more gradual discursive shifts, especially after 2022. The invasion of Ukraine is thus treated as a turning point, but not in isolation from earlier developments; rather, it is examined as a moment that may have accelerated pre-existing trends.

Accordingly, the analysis facilitates two key comparative insights: (a) whether Estonia's framing has changed over time, and (b) whether the EU's framing has gradually aligned with

Estonia's persistent discourse. If Estonia's framing remained stable while the EU's discourse grew more aligned post-2022, this would suggest Europeanization through uploading. Moreover, by analyzing the content of this convergence, the study demonstrates whether Estonia's long-standing ideational frames, once marginal, gained rhetorical traction and were increasingly resonant and institutionalized at the EU level. By applying this method carefully, the study offers a nuanced analysis of whether, and under what conditions, small-state narratives can resonate within broader EU-level discourses, particularly during moments of geopolitical crises.

Coding Procedure and Implementation

The practical implementation of the coding process was adapted to the formal characteristics of the two main data types: annual speeches and strategic documents. The first step involved the development of the coding framework, grounded in theoretical foundations, particularly Entman's conceptualization of framing, and refined through a pilot examination of annual speeches. This pilot phase enabled the author to test the empirical applicability of the proposed dimensions and sub-dimensions and adjust the framework for conceptual clarity before full-scale coding.

The coding of annual speeches, which were originally delivered orally and subsequently transcribed, required a detailed approach. Segments, sentences, or even sub-sentences were treated as distinct coding units when discernible shifts in argumentative focus were identified, even within the same framing dimension. To enhance interpretive accuracy, the author listened to the original audio recordings alongside the transcripts. This practice allowed for a clearer understanding of the speaker's tone, emphasis, and rhetorical flow, critical factors in detecting subtle discursive shifts. Such detailed segmentation facilitated a more precise categorization of framing strategies and supported more effective navigation of the dataset during comparative and temporal analysis.

For strategic documents, segmentation was based on coherent textual units. When an entire paragraph aligned with a single framing dimension and sub-dimension, it was treated as one analytical unit. This approach preserved the internal coherence of the argument and avoided unnecessary fragmentation. As a result, consecutive segments with identical codes do not appear frequently, as segments were grouped holistically following the documents' discursive structure.

To ensure interpretive consistency and minimize subjective bias, the coding process followed a four-stage protocol: (1) an initial reading to familiarise with the content; (2) thematic segmentation, during which text segments were colour-highlighted according to the corresponding main framing dimension to aid visual differentiation; (3) coding each segment under the appropriate dimension and sub-dimension, with explanatory notes added in cases of ambiguity; and (4) a final review to verify coherence and completeness. After the initial cycle, the dataset was set aside and revisited after a short interval for a second round of verification. A third round followed, during which all codes were systematically cross-checked against their original context to ensure alignment and consistency.

Finally, a quantitative table was created to track the frequency of each framing dimension and sub-dimension by year. This allowed the identification of discursive trends, rhetorical intensification, and patterns of convergence across time. During this quantification phase, minor inconsistencies, primarily due to manual data handling, were identified and corrected. In total, 396 coded segments were compiled across Estonia's and the EU's annual speeches and strategic documents. The systematic, transparent, and repeated nature of the coding process enhances both the reliability and replicability, ensuring that interpretive choices remain theoretically anchored and methodologically consistent throughout the analysis.

Table 2. Examples of Coded Text Segments

Year	EU / Estonia	Data Type	Official's Position	Official's Names	Quotes	Entman's 4 Framing Dimantions	Sub-Dimensions	Notes/Findings
2022	EU	Annual Speech	President	Ursula von der Leyen	The use of hybrid tactics against the EU, its Member States and partners continues to increase. In 2023, the resilience of our critical infrastructure, such as underwater gas pipelines and data cables in the Baltic Sea, has been put to a test. Migrants at the EU's external borders continue to be instrumentalised. Foreign information manipulation and interference is on the rise.	1. Problem definition	Hybrid Threats and Information Warfare	Use of migration as a pressure tactic is a classic hybrid threat strategy.
2020	Estonia	Strategic Document	-	-	The security of Europe is affected by the growing aggressiveness of Russia's foreign policy...	2. Causal Interpretation	Aggressive Foreign Policy of the Russian State	Directly attributes Europe's security concerns to Russia's foreign policy behavior
2016	EU	Strategic Document	-	-	We will not recognise Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea nor accept the destabilisation of eastern Ukraine	3. Moral Evaluation	Violation of International Law and Sovereignty	-
2015	Estonia	Annual Speech	Foreign Minister	Keit Pentus-Rosimannus	There should be consequences for those responsible.	4. Policy Recommendation	Legal Accountability for Russia and Expulsion from International Forums	-

2.5 Research Limitations

This study applies a systematic qualitative framing analysis, which is not without limitations. While the methodological approach is appropriate for the research objective, several limitations regarding data access, language, structure, and attribution that constrain the scope and interpretation of its findings must be acknowledged.

First, access to an ideal dataset, namely confidential EU-level records and internal diplomatic communications, remains limited. The analysis relies exclusively on publicly available sources: official annual speeches and strategic documents produced by Estonian and EU institutions. Although these documents are authentic and institutionally representative, they do not offer insights into informal dynamics of decision-making processes or the internal reception of Estonian framings within EU institutions. Nevertheless, since the study's focus lies in how security threats are framed publicly, rather than in tracing internal bargaining or causal chains of influence, the use of public discourse is both justified and sufficient for assessing the dynamics of discursive uploading. Framing, by definition, operates through language that is meant to resonate with external audiences and influence perceptions. Hence, public and official communication is the primary domain in which such discursive strategies manifest.

Second, linguistic limitations constrained the dataset. Due to the researcher's lack of Estonian language proficiency, a substantial body of potentially relevant domestic political discourse, such as parliamentary debates or statements directed at local audiences, remained inaccessible. To ensure consistency and comparability, the analysis is based on English-language materials, including official translations of annual speeches and strategic foreign policy documents. While this may limit access to certain culturally embedded nuances in Estonia's internal discourse, the selected texts are those most directly targeted toward international and EU-level audiences. As such, they are the most appropriate for studying the mechanisms of discursive uploading.

Additionally, the author's Georgian background may have influenced the interpretive process. While regional expertise can enrich contextual understanding, it may also introduce subconscious biases, particularly when interpreting English-language political texts shaped by different cultural and historical experiences. To mitigate potential misinterpretations stemming from language barriers or differing interpretive frameworks, the analysis strictly followed the

framing analysis methodology outlined in the earlier chapter. This included the systematic, multi-stage data review process, which was consistently applied to ensure analytical rigor and objectivity. All interpretative decisions were carefully documented in line with the predefined coding framework, reinforcing transparency and the reliability of thematic classifications.

Fourth, structural asymmetries between Estonia and the EU create challenges for comparability. Estonia is a unitary state with a relatively unified foreign policy discourse, while the EU is a multi-level, intergovernmental entity composed of 27 member states. EU foreign policy discourse often reflects compromises and institutional balancing, making it less coherent than that of a single state. To mitigate this, the analysis focuses on the framing articulated by central EU actors, specifically the President of the European Commission and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, who serve as key figures in expressing the Union's collective geopolitical stance.

Fifth, the inherent subjectivity of qualitative analysis presents a risk of interpretive bias. Although the research employs a transparent, three-stage hybrid coding approach based on Entman's established framing dimensions, frame identification and thematic categorization ultimately rely on the researcher's interpretive judgment. This is a recognized limitation of qualitative framing studies. To mitigate this concern, the coding process was systematically documented and cross-referenced across multiple data points, ensuring consistency and analytical transparency throughout.

Finally, while the decade-long scope (2014-2024) allows for a robust diachronic comparison, the attribution of discursive change solely to Estonia's influence remains analytically constrained. Broader geopolitical shifts, including assertive advocacy by other Eastern European states (e.g., Poland, Lithuania), NATO's strategic adjustments, and changing U.S. foreign policy, may have also shaped EU security discourse. While these alternative explanatory factors are acknowledged in the case selection and contextual discussion, the precise weight of their influence relative to Estonia's remains outside the scope of this thesis. Accordingly, the findings are best interpreted as evidence of potential framing convergence, facilitated by Estonia's consistent, normatively anchored discourse, rather than definitive proof of causal influence.

Despite these limitations, the chosen methodological and analytical strategy remains appropriate for the study's aims. By focusing on public, high-level discourse and applying a

rigorous operationalization of framing dimensions, the research is well-positioned to assess whether and under what conditions a small EU member state's security framing can gain discursive traction at the EU level.

3. Analysis

This chapter presents the core empirical findings of the thesis by applying the framing analysis method outlined in Chapter 2 to assess whether Estonia's framing of Russia as a security threat has gained traction within EU foreign and security discourse. Using Entman's four framing dimensions: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and policy recommendation, the analysis observes patterns of discursive continuity, shifts, and potential convergence in Estonian and EU-level documents from 2014 to 2024, with particular attention to the post-2022 period.

The chapter is structured as follows: Section 3.1 analyzes Estonia's framing over the decade, focusing on the stability and intensification of its threat narrative and how it is normatively anchored. It includes a detailed breakdown of threat framing dimensions (3.1.1), a temporal comparison before and after 2022 (3.1.2), and a synthesis of findings (3.1.3). Section 3.2 mirrors this structure for the EU, tracing how its framing evolved from cautious ambiguity to normative clarity. It includes the identification of the EU's framing across dimensions (3.2.1), a temporal comparison (3.2.2), and a summary (3.2.3). Section 3.4 then assesses the framing convergence between Estonia and the EU, identifying how previously minor Estonian frames were absorbed and institutionalized in EU discourse following the 2022 invasion. Within each section, sub-dimensions are coded and presented in order of frequency, with visual summaries in Figures 1 and 2 and detailed data in Appendix 2. Together, this chapter evaluates how Estonia's stable threat framing gained strategic salience and rhetorical traction in the EU's evolving security discourse.

By systematically applying comparative framing analysis and linking the findings to broader theoretical debates on small-state agency and bottom-up Europeanization, the chapter explores how, and under what conditions, Estonia's framing strategies may have intersected with or influenced EU foreign policy discourse in a shifting geopolitical context.

3.1 Estonia's Framing of Russia as a Threat (2014-2024)

This subchapter applies the methodological framework developed in Chapter 2 to analyze how Estonia constructed Russia as a threat in its foreign policy discourse from 2014 to 2024. It operationalizes Entman's four framing dimensions to identify the mechanisms through which Estonia consistently portrayed Russian actions as a multidimensional security threat. The analysis draws on annual foreign policy addresses delivered in the Riigikogu (excluding 2014 and 2021, when no speeches were given due to government transitions following the resignations of Prime Ministers Andrus Ansip and Jüri Ratas) and on the strategic priorities outlined in the Estonian Foreign Policy Development Plan 2030.

Each dimension is examined systematically to trace how Estonia's framing evolved over time while maintaining framing stability. Selected quotations from political leaders are used to illustrate how statements were coded and interpreted, ensuring transparency. This approach demonstrates that Estonia's threat framing was not reactive or episodic but embedded in a coherent, normatively anchored narrative, forming a strong basis for subsequent comparison with EU-level discourse.

The subchapter is structured as follows: Section 3.1.1 unpacks Estonia's framing into the four analytical dimensions, applying the coding framework to highlight recurring themes and discursive strategies. Each dimension is illustrated with textual evidence and linked to theoretical concepts such as discursive resilience, small-state agency, and norm entrepreneurship; Section 3.1.2 presents a temporal comparison of Estonia's framing before and after the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It shows how Estonia's threat narrative intensified in tone and urgency without undergoing a fundamental framing shift, reinforcing its credibility as a stable and norm-driven actor. Following these two analytical sections, the subchapter concludes with a summary of the key findings on Estonia's framing approach. This synthesis provides the reader with a consolidated overview of Estonia's foreign policy discourse, setting the stage for the next analytical step - comparing Estonia's framing with the EU's evolving framing on Russia.

3.1.1 Identification of Threat Framing (2014-2024)

Problem Definitions

In the Estonian foreign policy discourse between 2014 and 2024 (excluding 2014 and 2021), the framing of Russia as a security threat revolved around several core problem definitions: *existential threat to national sovereignty, geopolitical instability in Europe, Russian expansionism and imperial ambitions, undermining of international law and rules-based order, hybrid threats and information warfare*, each reflecting evolving geopolitical realities while maintaining normative continuity.

The most prominent frame was *geopolitical instability in Europe*, which appeared recurrently throughout the decade. As early as 2015, Foreign Minister Keit Pentus-Rosimannus stated, “Today we are faced with Russian aggression in Ukraine. This has affected and will continue to affect the future of our bilateral and multilateral relations and activities, both in our region and beyond, in the most direct way,”⁷¹ directly linking Russian actions to wider instability in the European order. Similar concerns were echoed in subsequent years, including the 2016 address where the minister emphasized that “the security situation in Europe - including in our region - is unstable and remains as such for an unforeseeable period,” and again in 2018, when it was asserted that “the events in Ukraine [...] proved convincingly that the security of Europe and our neighborhood requires attention at the global level.”⁷²⁷³ Even as late as 2023, the Estonian government identified “an increasing confrontation between democracies and autocracies” as an escalating global trend, underlining the persistence of this framing across the decade.⁷⁴

Closely intertwined with geopolitical instability was the frame of *Russian expansionism and imperial ambitions*, which positioned Russia not merely as a disruptor but as an active revisionist power. The 2016 annual address portrayed the occupation of Crimea and military

⁷¹ “Address by Foreign Minister Keit Pentus-Rosimannus to the Riigikogu on Behalf of the Government of Estonia | Välisministeerium,” 2015, <https://www.vm.ee/en/news/foreign-minister-keit-pentus-rosimannus-speech-riigikogu-estonias-foreign-policy>.

⁷² “ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, MRS. MARINA KALJURAND TO THE RIIGIKOGU | Välisministeerium,” 2016, <https://vm.ee/en/news/address-minister-foreign-affairs-mrs-marina-kaljurand-riigikogu>.

⁷³ “Address by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Sven Mikser, at the Discussion of Foreign Policy in the Riigikogu | Välisministeerium,” 2018, <https://vm.ee/en/news/address-minister-foreign-affairs-mr-sven-mikser-discussion-foreign-policy-riigikogu>.

⁷⁴ “Foreign Minister Reinsalu in His Annual Foreign Policy Speech: Estonia’s Foreign Policy Focuses on Ukraine’s Victory and Russia’s Defeat | Välisministeerium,” 2023, <https://vm.ee/en/news/foreign-minister-reinsalu-his-annual-foreign-policy-speech-estonias-foreign-policy-focuses>.

actions in Eastern Ukraine as illustrative of Russia's "expansionism," a framing reinforced in 2017 when Foreign Minister Sven Mikser described Russia as "an authoritarian ex-superpower [...] trying to restore its lost hegemony via force of arms."⁷⁵⁷⁶ This characterization persisted into the later years, notably during the 2022 and 2023 speeches, where Russia's military build-up and aggressive rhetoric were interpreted as manifestations of an enduring imperial agenda.⁷⁷⁷⁸ The Foreign Policy Development Plan 2030 (2020) similarly cautioned against "acts of influence and interference in the internal affairs of other countries," reflecting institutional entrenchment of this threat perception.⁷⁹

Additionally, the Estonian discourse evolved to incorporate frames related to *existential threats to national sovereignty*. Throughout the period, particularly in 2015, 2016, and again in 2022, Estonia articulated Russia's actions as direct assaults on the core sovereign rights of neighboring states. In 2015, the Foreign Minister warned of "hostile actions by Russia which violate international law," highlighting the abduction incident as an "existential threat" to Estonia's sovereignty.⁸⁰ Similarly, the 2022 address stressed the enduring relevance of NATO and EU membership for Estonia's and its neighbors' sovereignty, remarking that for countries outside these alliances, Russian coercion remained "as relevant as it was 78 years ago."⁸¹

Another definition of a foundational problem was the *undermining of international law and the rules-based order*, an issue that Estonia consistently foregrounded as a systemic threat emanating from Russian behavior. As early as 2015, the abduction of Estonian security officer Eston Kohver was cited as a "violation of international law."⁸² By 2023, Foreign Minister Urmas Reinsalu firmly warned that "the founding principles of the international order, our future, are at

⁷⁵ "ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, MRS. MARINA KALJURAND TO THE RIIGIKOGU | Välisministeerium."

⁷⁶ "ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, MR. SVEN MIKSER TO THE RIIGIKOGU | Välisministeerium," 2017.

⁷⁷ "Report on Foreign Policy by Minister of Foreign Affairs Eva-Maria Liimets at the Parliament of Estonia | Välisministeerium," 2022, <https://vm.ee/en/news/report-foreign-policy-minister-foreign-affairs-eva-maria-liimets-parliament-estonia-0>.

⁷⁸ "Foreign Minister Reinsalu in His Annual Foreign Policy Speech."

⁷⁹ Government of Estonia (or Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia), "Estonian Foreign Policy Strategy 2030" (Tallinn: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020), <https://vm.ee/en/estonian-foreign-policy-strategy-2030>.

⁸⁰ "Address by Foreign Minister Keit Pentus-Rosimannus to the Riigikogu on Behalf of the Government of Estonia | Välisministeerium."

⁸¹ "Report on Foreign Policy by Minister of Foreign Affairs Eva-Maria Liimets at the Parliament of Estonia | Välisministeerium."

⁸² "Address by Foreign Minister Keit Pentus-Rosimannus to the Riigikogu on Behalf of the Government of Estonia | Välisministeerium."

stake,” portraying Russian aggression not as an isolated event but as an existential challenge to the entire post-World War II legal and political architecture.⁸³ The 2024 foreign policy speech reaffirmed this by emphasizing that “an international order without which the world would be considerably more uncertain and chaotic” must be preserved against authoritarian threats.⁸⁴

Expanding its threat perception, in 2020, Estonia also increasingly recognized *hybrid threats and information warfare* as modern extensions of Russian destabilization strategies. The Foreign Policy Development Plan 2030 notably warned that “the notion of threats has become more multifaceted,” emphasizing the emergence of “asymmetric threats [...] unconstrained by national borders,” including cyber threats and information warfare, which had “the same security impact as traditional security threats.”⁸⁵ This conceptual broadening of the security agenda allowed Estonia to capture the non-traditional dimensions of Russian aggression, such as cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns, within its threat framing.

Across the decade, Estonia consistently framed Russia as a revisionist imperial power, presenting its actions as driven by expansionist ambitions, violations of international law, and a direct threat to national sovereignty. This framing was reinforced by growing attention to hybrid threats, including cyberattacks and disinformation, especially from 2020 onward. Each of these threat dimensions was expressed through a stable and normatively grounded framing that linked Russian behavior to a broader undermining of the European security order. For a comprehensive visual and empirical overview of Estonia’s threat framing, see Figure 1 at the end of this chapter and Appendix 2.

Causal Interpretation

Beyond identifying Russia as a source of instability, Estonian foreign policy discourse in a given time framework carefully articulated the underlying causes behind the threat perception. Estonia’s causal framing of the Russian threat rested on four framing dimensions: *the aggressive foreign policy of the Russian state, the Kremlin’s leadership and strategic intent, energy dependence on Russia as a Structural Risk, and Russian Disinformation and Propaganda*

⁸³ “Foreign Minister Reinsalu in His Annual Foreign Policy Speech.”

⁸⁴ “Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna’s Annual Foreign Policy Speech | Välisministeerium,” 2024, <https://vm.ee/en/news/foreign-minister-margus-tshaknas-annual-foreign-policy-speech>.

⁸⁵ Government of Estonia (or Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia), “Estonian Foreign Policy Strategy 2030.”

campaigns. Rather than portraying aggression as incidental or reactive, Estonia systematically framed the Kremlin's behavior as the product of deliberate leadership choices, strategic calculations, and broader structural vulnerabilities.

A dominant causal narrative attributes regional instability directly to the *Kremlin's leadership and strategic intent*, portraying Russian actions not as isolated incidents but as manifestations of a long-standing imperialist mindset. Foreign Minister Keit Pentus-Rosimannus warned already in 2015 against repeating the international community's post-Georgia “mistake,” asserting that “a regime which sponsors the killing of civilians and annexes territories cannot be a partner.”⁸⁶ This line of reasoning persists across the decade, notably in 2022 when Eva-Maria Liimets cited George Kennan's observation that “the jealous and intolerant eye of the Kremlin can distinguish, in the end, only vassals and enemies,” framing Russia's worldview as structurally incompatible with peaceful coexistence.⁸⁷ In 2024, Margus Tsahkna reinforced this by stressing that “the crime of aggression is a crime committed by national leaders because they are the ones who plan, prepare and finally order an attack on another country,” thus systematically locating responsibility for instability within Russia's political leadership.⁸⁸

The second recurrent causal frame identifies an *aggressive foreign policy of the Russian state* as the direct driver of insecurity. Estonia persistently depicted Russian militarism and coercion as deliberate strategies. The 2016 foreign policy speech stated that NATO's recent decisions were “mainly driven by the immediate reaction to Russian aggression towards Ukraine,” indicating Russia's actions as the catalyst for security shifts in Europe.⁸⁹ Similarly, the *Foreign Policy Development Plan 2030* asserted that “the security of Europe is affected by the growing aggressiveness of Russia's foreign policy,” linking broader continental insecurities to deliberate Russian behavior.⁹⁰ This view was reaffirmed in subsequent years, with Tsahkna in 2024 condemning Russia's “war of attrition” and crimes against humanity, including the documented

⁸⁶ “Address by Foreign Minister Keit Pentus-Rosimannus to the Riigikogu on Behalf of the Government of Estonia | Välisministeerium.”

⁸⁷ “Report on Foreign Policy by Minister of Foreign Affairs Eva-Maria Liimets at the Parliament of Estonia | Välisministeerium.”

⁸⁸ “Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna's Annual Foreign Policy Speech | Välisministeerium.”

⁸⁹ “ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, MRS. MARINA KALJURAND TO THE RIIGIKOGU | Välisministeerium.”

⁹⁰ Government of Estonia (or Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia), “Estonian Foreign Policy Strategy 2030.”

deportation of Ukrainian children, as defining characteristics of a predatory foreign policy rather than incidents.⁹¹

A third strand of causal interpretation emphasizes the role of *Russian disinformation and propaganda campaigns* in destabilizing the European security environment. Estonia was acutely aware of the information domain as a battlefield. In 2015, Keit Pentus-Rosimannus cautioned that “‘news’ coming from the Kremlin’s media [...] should be taken with extreme scepticism,” a sentiment reiterated in 2023 by Foreign Minister Urmas Reinsalu, who warned that “Russian propaganda continues to find ways of spreading its false messages in Europe.”⁹² These interventions framed information manipulation as an intentional strategy to undermine public trust, sow discord, and erode the Western consensus.

In addition to military and informational threats, Estonia’s discourse increasingly frames *energy dependence on Russia* as a fundamental structural risk undermining European security. In 2016, Foreign Minister Marina Kaljurand emphasized that “development cooperation is how we immediately enhance security,” implicitly linking stability to diversification and resilience efforts that would reduce reliance on external powers such as Russia.⁹³ This logic matured further by 2023, when Foreign Minister Urmas Reinsalu asserted that “Europe has learnt a painful lesson from its energy dependence on Russia, and indirectly so have we,” highlighting how supply chain fragility and overreliance on Russian energy had created strategic vulnerabilities. Estonia’s decision to withdraw from the “16+1” cooperation format with China was explicitly tied to this awakening, citing Russia’s aggression and the broader risks of economic dependency on authoritarian regimes.⁹⁴ Through this lens, energy security was systematically interpreted as a vital pillar of national and collective European resilience.

In sum, rather than attributing instability to reactive behavior, Estonia systematically portrayed Russia as following a calculated, disruptive strategy aimed at undermining European security across military, informational, and economic fronts. These causal narratives remained remarkably stable from 2015 to 2024, helping to explain the roots of immediate threats while also justifying Estonia’s calls for stronger collective action within NATO, the EU, and other

⁹¹ “Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna’s Annual Foreign Policy Speech | Välisministeerium.”

⁹² “Address by Foreign Minister Keit Pentus-Rosimannus to the Riigikogu on Behalf of the Government of Estonia | Välisministeerium”; “Foreign Minister Reinsalu in His Annual Foreign Policy Speech.”

⁹³ “ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, MRS. MARINA KALJURAND TO THE RIIGIKOGU | Välisministeerium.”

⁹⁴ “Foreign Minister Reinsalu in His Annual Foreign Policy Speech.”

international platforms. At the same time, they underscored the need to bolster Western resilience on the international level. For a comprehensive overview of the empirical evidence supporting this interpretation, see Appendix 2.

Moral Evaluation

Beyond identifying underlying causes, Estonia’s foreign policy discourse over the past decade systematically framed Russia’s actions not only as threats but as clear violations of fundamental norms. This dimension of moral evaluation regularly embedded normative assessments that condemned Russia’s behavior and affirmed the principles underpinning the European and international order. The analysis of this framing dimension is further structured across five sub-dimensions: *the violation of international law and sovereignty, a strong ethical duty to support Ukraine, outright condemnation of authoritarian aggression, the defense of democratic values, and the conviction that Ukraine’s victory constitutes a moral imperative.*

Central to Estonia’s moral evaluation was the persistent framing of Russian aggression as a flagrant *violation of international law and sovereignty*, an act which Estonia consistently portrayed as not only illegal but morally unequivocal and deserving of firm condemnation. In 2015, Foreign Minister Keit Pentus-Rosimannus asserted that “our position about the Russian aggression against Ukraine is clear - it is a serious violation of the fundamental principles of international relations and international law,” while subsequent speeches, including in 2022 and 2023, emphasized that the protection and reinforcement of international law were not optional, but a “direct duty of Estonia.”⁹⁵ This normative anchoring remained unwavering, with calls to resist any normalization of Russia’s annexations and military interventions, as highlighted by statements such as “we do not recognize the annexation of Crimea by Russia” and appeals to ensure that peace is grounded in respect for territorial integrity.⁹⁶

Second, *moral responsibility to support Ukraine* emerged as a distinct evaluative frame, positioning Estonia’s actions within a broader collective ethical duty. From hosting approximately

⁹⁵ “Address by Foreign Minister Keit Pentus-Rosimannus to the Riigikogu on Behalf of the Government of Estonia | Välisministeerium”; “Report on Foreign Policy by Minister of Foreign Affairs Eva-Maria Liimets at the Parliament of Estonia | Välisministeerium”; “Foreign Minister Reinsalu in His Annual Foreign Policy Speech.”

⁹⁶ “Address by Foreign Minister Keit Pentus-Rosimannus to the Riigikogu on Behalf of the Government of Estonia | Välisministeerium.”

60,000 Ukrainian refugees to declaring that “we must not be afraid of the consequences of allocating more aid,” Estonia consistently framed humanitarian, military, and political support to Ukraine as essential for defending core principles and preventing the erosion of international norms.⁹⁷ This moral commitment was further reinforced by Urmas Reinsalu’s in 2023, invocation of historical memory, as he paraphrased Churchill’s warning: “If you have to choose between war and shame and you choose shame, you will eventually get war as well.”⁹⁸ His message points out the belief that passivity in the face of aggression ultimately leads to greater conflict.

A further moral theme was the *condemnation of authoritarianism and aggression*. Estonia did not shy away from bold language in its assessments, characterizing Russia’s conduct as abhorrent and morally reprehensible. In 2015, Pentus-Rosimannus declared that “a regime which sponsors the killing of civilians and annexes territories cannot be a partner,” while Urmas Reinsalu in 2023 decried Russia’s “terror and genocide” against Ukraine, stating that “the systematic bombing of kindergartens, theatres and residential areas is utterly wrong.”⁹⁹ Similarly, Margus Tsahkna in 2024 warned that “aggression must not succeed; it must not become a new acceptable reality,” reinforcing Estonia’s rejection of might over right.¹⁰⁰ The *Foreign Policy Development Plan 2030* likewise described authoritarianism and extremism as fundamentally opposed to democratic values, framing the global context as a battle of principles.¹⁰¹

Crucially, Estonia’s moral framing also advanced a strong *normative commitment to Ukraine’s victory*. Across multiple years, Estonian officials portrayed Ukraine’s struggle as a just cause integral to the defense of European values. This was made explicit in 2023, when Reinsalu opened his annual speech by emphasizing that “Estonia’s foreign policy focuses on Ukraine’s victory and Russia’s defeat,” and further declared that “the most important precondition for peace is Ukraine’s victory on the battlefield.”¹⁰² Estonia consistently framed supporting Ukraine not merely as political solidarity, but as a moral obligation critical to securing a just and durable peace.

In parallel, Estonia consistently framed Russia’s actions as an assault on *European democratic values and norms*. References to “forces in the European broader southern

⁹⁷ “Foreign Minister Reinsalu in His Annual Foreign Policy Speech.”

⁹⁸ “Foreign Minister Reinsalu in His Annual Foreign Policy Speech.”

⁹⁹ “Address by Foreign Minister Keit Pentus-Rosimannus to the Riigikogu on Behalf of the Government of Estonia | Välisministeerium”; “Foreign Minister Reinsalu in His Annual Foreign Policy Speech.”

¹⁰⁰ “Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna’s Annual Foreign Policy Speech | Välisministeerium.”

¹⁰¹ Government of Estonia (or Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia), “Estonian Foreign Policy Strategy 2030.”

¹⁰² “Foreign Minister Reinsalu in His Annual Foreign Policy Speech.”

neighborhood, which embody the complete opposite to our values” (2015) and later affirmations that the war “has boosted unity and highlighted our fundamental values” (2024) show that Estonia interpreted Russian aggression as part of a broader ideological confrontation between authoritarianism and democracy.¹⁰³ Foreign Minister Eva-Maria Liimets in 2022, stressed that Estonia's human rights diplomacy “reinforces the values-based international order on which our security directly depends,” explicitly tying normative commitment to strategic security imperatives.¹⁰⁴

In sum, Estonia's systematically portrayed Russia not merely as a geopolitical enemy, but as a morally unacceptable actor whose behavior violated fundamental principles of international law, human dignity, and democratic order. This framing casts Russia as a threat not just because of what it does, but because of what it represents: aggression, authoritarianism, and the erosion of shared values. By grounding its foreign policy in clear ethical judgments, Estonia positioned its support for Ukraine and its resistance to Russian actions as both a strategic necessity and a moral imperative. This principled stance underpinned calls for international solidarity and helped shape the broader normative justification for EU-level responses after 2022. For a full account of the evidence underpinning this interpretation, see Appendix 2.

Policy Recommendations

During this time, Estonia’s foreign policy articulated an extensive, multifaceted set of policy recommendations: *strategic aid to Ukraine (military, financial, humanitarian); sanctions and restrictive measures against Russia; strengthening EU-NATO security cooperation; boosting cybersecurity and digital resilience; reducing strategic dependencies on Russia (energy, trade, technology); support for EU and NATO enlargement (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia); mobilization of EU unity and strategic autonomy; refugee protection and civilian solidarity policies; and legal accountability for Russia and expulsion from international forums*, in response to the perceived Russian threat. These recommendations were deeply anchored in Estonia’s normative framing of the conflict as a violation of international law, sovereignty, and the European security order.

¹⁰³ “Address by Foreign Minister Keit Pentus-Rosimannus to the Riigikogu on Behalf of the Government of Estonia | Välisministeerium”; “Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna’s Annual Foreign Policy Speech | Välisministeerium.”

¹⁰⁴ “Report on Foreign Policy by Minister of Foreign Affairs Eva-Maria Liimets at the Parliament of Estonia | Välisministeerium.”

A central pillar of Estonia's policy framing was the demand for the importance of *mobilizing EU unity and strategic autonomy*. Throughout the period, Estonia stressed that Europe must avoid "strategic lethargy" but act decisively to confront security threats. Statements such as "security begins with us, with our desire to be protected, to bear responsibility and to protect freedom" (2015) and "the EU must take on more responsibility in its foreign and security policy" (2022) reflected a maturing view that resilience and agency must be cultivated within the EU itself.¹⁰⁵ The Strategic Compass, increased investment in defense, and the continuation of Eastern Partnership policies were all framed as essential elements for maintaining a coherent and credible European security position.

Next, Estonia consistently prioritized *strategic aid to Ukraine across military, financial, and humanitarian dimensions*. Early in the conflict (2015), Estonia called for military and financial support to Ukraine, stressing the urgency of restoring "Ukraine's control over its state borders and territory" and providing "rapid assistance" to its economy.¹⁰⁶ This commitment evolved into a long-term strategic position, such as Estonia's military aid to Ukraine reached an unprecedented "1% of our GDP," and it actively lobbied allies to match this benchmark. Initiatives such as the Tallinn Mechanism for cyber assistance, the proposal to deliver "1 million shells" to Ukraine, and systematic support for Ukrainian civil service training demonstrated Estonia's sophisticated understanding of Ukraine's holistic resilience needs. Furthermore, Estonia framed Ukraine's reconstruction not merely as a post-war necessity but as a political project closely linked to EU accession, arguing that "Ukraine's recovery from the war must go hand in hand with rooting out corruption and reinforcing state institutions."¹⁰⁷

In addition, Estonia expressed strong and sustained *support for EU and NATO enlargement, particularly for Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia*. Estonia consistently advocated for deepening the integration of Eastern Partnership countries, arguing that "grey areas are a breeding ground for wars and instability," and that Euro-Atlantic enlargement would enhance security and democratic resilience.¹⁰⁸ Estonian officials repeatedly pushed for the launch of Ukraine's EU

¹⁰⁵ "Address by Foreign Minister Keit Pentus-Rosimannus to the Riigikogu on Behalf of the Government of Estonia | Välisministeerium"; "Report on Foreign Policy by Minister of Foreign Affairs Eva-Maria Liimets at the Parliament of Estonia | Välisministeerium."

¹⁰⁶ "Address by Foreign Minister Keit Pentus-Rosimannus to the Riigikogu on Behalf of the Government of Estonia | Välisministeerium."

¹⁰⁷ "Foreign Minister Reinsalu in His Annual Foreign Policy Speech."

¹⁰⁸ "Foreign Minister Reinsalu in His Annual Foreign Policy Speech."

accession negotiations and argued for Ukraine’s future NATO membership as “an essential part of the future European and international security architecture.”¹⁰⁹

Alongside these security and institutional measures, *refugee protection and civilian solidarity policies* emerged as a complementary strand within Estonia’s foreign policy recommendations. Although less prominent than security-focused initiatives, Estonia consistently advocated for humanitarian aid to displaced populations, particularly Ukrainians, as well as support for reconstruction efforts and winter resilience measures. This approach reflected a broader understanding that civilian resilience was integral to strategic security objectives. In 2016, Estonia’s foreign policy address emphasized that “the refugee crises must be managed and solved,” directly linking humanitarian assistance to the maintenance of European stability and security.¹¹⁰

Closely connected to these positions, Estonia’s framing also involved *strengthening EU-NATO security cooperation*. Framing the collective defense system as essential for deterrence, Estonia persistently advocated for a robust Allied presence on NATO’s Eastern Flank, closer alignment between EU security initiatives and NATO efforts, and the adoption of NATO’s updated Strategic Concept. As early as 2015, Estonia emphasized that “the strengthening of the collective security architecture, that is NATO, as well as the EU, has been necessary, prompt and appropriate,” reflecting its dual commitment to both transatlantic and European security frameworks.¹¹¹ Over the years, Estonia systematically linked national priorities with broader collective strategies, advocating for enhanced military mobility, joint procurement initiatives, and the integration of cybersecurity capabilities. By 2022, following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Estonia reinforced its calls for “boosting the defense capabilities of NATO’s Eastern Flank” and actively supported the adoption of the new Strategic Concept, framing it as a critical adaptation to “current threats.”¹¹² Throughout the period, Estonia’s framing consistently situated national security imperatives within the logic of collective defense and Alliance solidarity, demonstrating a strategic convergence of national interests with broader Euro-Atlantic security rationality.

¹⁰⁹ “Foreign Minister Reinsalu in His Annual Foreign Policy Speech.”

¹¹⁰ “ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, MRS. MARINA KALJURAND TO THE RIIGIKOGU | Välisministeerium.”

¹¹¹ “Address by Foreign Minister Keit Pentus-Rosimannus to the Riigikogu on Behalf of the Government of Estonia | Välisministeerium.”

¹¹² “Report on Foreign Policy by Minister of Foreign Affairs Eva-Maria Liimets at the Parliament of Estonia | Välisministeerium.”

Furthermore, Estonia's systematic support for *sanctions and restrictive measures against Russia* became increasingly prominent. The framing of sanctions evolved from conditional pressure for Minsk Agreement compliance (2015-2017) to a comprehensive strategic necessity by 2022-2024. Estonia repeatedly stressed that “sanctions are a substantial element of raising the cost of the aggression,” and that their objective was to ensure “the cost of continuing the aggression must be higher than the cost of ending it”.¹¹³ Specific actions cited included the removal of major Russian banks from the SWIFT system, freezing oligarch assets, setting price caps on Russian oil, and calls for tightening sanctions to counter circumvention efforts.¹¹⁴ Estonia's active participation in shaping nine successive EU sanctions packages and its advocacy for extending sanctions towards a total trade embargo positioned it as a normative and policy entrepreneur within the EU framework.

Simultaneously, Estonia persistently advocated for *reducing strategic dependencies on Russia* across critical sectors. Early concerns regarding energy security evolved into broader demands for economic and technological sovereignty. In 2023, Estonia championed initiatives to set and lower price caps on Russian oil, stating that “we are working to make sure that the price caps are reviewed and lowered.”¹¹⁵ Simultaneously, it pushed for the development of renewable energy solutions, such as a “network of offshore wind farms spanning the entire Baltic Sea,” integrating green transition goals with energy security imperatives.¹¹⁶ Estonia also identified the protection of supply chains and private sector investments in Ukraine as vital steps to fortify European economic resilience against authoritarian coercion.

Building on this, Estonia asserted the importance of *boosting cybersecurity and digital resilience* as an emerging front in modern conflicts. It warned as early as 2015 about the risks of Russian propaganda and disinformation campaigns, later expanding this to digital infrastructure protection.¹¹⁷ By supporting projects such as the development of a European digital union and spearheading cybersecurity cooperation, Estonia framed cybersecurity not only as a national priority but as a shared European responsibility.

¹¹³ “Foreign Minister Reinsalu in His Annual Foreign Policy Speech.”

¹¹⁴ “Foreign Minister Reinsalu in His Annual Foreign Policy Speech.”

¹¹⁵ “Foreign Minister Reinsalu in His Annual Foreign Policy Speech.”

¹¹⁶ “Report on Foreign Policy by Minister of Foreign Affairs Eva-Maria Liimets at the Parliament of Estonia | Välisministeerium.”

¹¹⁷ “Address by Foreign Minister Keit Pentus-Rosimannus to the Riigikogu on Behalf of the Government of Estonia | Välisministeerium.”

Finally, Estonia was demanding *legal accountability and Russia's isolation from the international community*. As early as 2015, Foreign Minister Keit Pentus-Rosimannus stressed that “there should be consequences for those responsible,” framing legal measures not as restrictive actions alone but as fundamental to upholding the integrity of the international order.¹¹⁸ Over time, Estonia became a vocal advocate for severing Russia’s participation in key international organizations, successfully pushing for Russia’s expulsion from the Council of Europe and suspension from the UN Human Rights Council.¹¹⁹ By 2023, Estonia was explicitly calling for Russia’s exclusion from institutions such as Interpol and sports organizations, arguing that “Russian functionaries have no place in international sports organizations” and that “it is unthinkable that the aggressor belongs in the governing body of an organization”.¹²⁰ Furthermore, Estonia’s support for establishing a special tribunal to prosecute Russia’s crime of aggression, alongside its backing of the International Criminal Court’s actions, notably the issuing of an arrest warrant for President Putin, revealed a strategic emphasis on building lasting legal precedents for post-conflict justice.

In sum, Estonia’s foreign policy recommendations were not isolated responses but formed a central element of how it framed Russia as a threat. By systematically advocating for support for Ukraine, sanctions, strategic autonomy, EU-NATO cooperation, and legal accountability, Estonia portrayed Russia as not only a military aggressor but a fundamental challenge to the international legal order, European values, and regional sovereignty. These policy choices reflected Estonia’s normative threat perception and reinforced a coherent framing of Russia as a complex, cross-dimensional security risk that demanded normative countermeasures. See Figure 1 at the end of this chapter and Appendix 2 for a detailed overview.

¹¹⁸ “Address by Foreign Minister Keit Pentus-Rosimannus to the Riigikogu on Behalf of the Government of Estonia | Välisministeerium.”

¹¹⁹ “Foreign Minister Reinsalu in His Annual Foreign Policy Speech.”

¹²⁰ “Foreign Minister Reinsalu in His Annual Foreign Policy Speech.”

3.1.2 Estonia's Framing of Russia as a Threat Before and After 2022

A temporal comparison of Estonia's framing before and after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 reveals both a continuation of established framings and a notable intensification of rhetorical urgency. While Estonia's core framing remained stable, presenting Russia as an existential threat to European security and values, the post-2022 context triggered a sharpened moral tone and reinforced calls for policy action, rather than altering the fundamental discursive architecture.

Estonia's Framing of Russia as a Threat Before 2022

Estonia's framing of Russia before 2022 already featured many of the discursive foundations that would later become central to broader European narratives following the invasion. Its official foreign policy framing systematically articulated a structured threat narrative grounded in critique and normative values. *Problem definitions* emphasized Russia's actions in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine as imperial and neo-revisionist, portraying Moscow as a persistent threat to European peace and state sovereignty. *Causal interpretations* frequently attributed regional destabilization to Kremlin-led authoritarianism and the erosion of the post-Cold War international order. In terms of *moral evaluation*, Estonia emphasized the violation of international law, the annexation of sovereign territory, and the undermining of democratic norms. This was accompanied by normative appeals to defend European values such as human rights, freedom, and the rule of law. *Policy recommendations* during this period included sustained support for Ukraine, diplomatic pressure on Russia, increased defense cooperation within NATO and the EU, and legal accountability. Estonia also signaled early concerns about hybrid threats, particularly disinformation and cyber operations, recognizing Russia's coercive power beyond traditional warfare. However, while Estonia's discourse was already ideationally robust, it was framed with a tone of long-term norm advocacy and strategic awareness, rather than with the heightened immediacy characteristic of post-2022 rhetoric.

Estonia's Framing of Russia as a Threat After 2022

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Estonia's framing underwent a rhetorical intensification across all four of Entman's dimensions, rather than a conceptual transformation. *Problem definitions* shifted from describing Russia as a regional destabilizer to framing it as an existential threat to the European order, invoking terms such as "genocide," "terror," and "imperial aggression." *Causal interpretations* attributed Russia's actions not merely to authoritarian tendencies, but to a long-standing imperial logic that rejected international norms and was directed at undermining the foundations of Western security. Estonia's *moral evaluation* intensified, characterizing Russia's war conduct as a profound violation of core democratic values, a direct affront to the moral and legal principles underpinning the international order. The discourse called not only for solidarity with Ukraine but for an active, moral duty to ensure Ukraine's victory. In *policy terms*, Estonia moved from recommending strategic alignment to demanding immediate, large-scale military and economic assistance, radical sanction packages, and comprehensive international criminal accountability. Estonia also actively promoted Ukraine's membership in the EU and NATO and framed post-war reconstruction as a strategic imperative tied to integration. Importantly, Estonia positioned itself as a norm entrepreneur, leveraging its long-standing consistency with Russia to gain credibility and shape collective EU discourse. The 2022 invasion was thus not framed as a shock but as a confirmation of Estonia's prior warnings, reinforcing its image as a consistently vocal and normative contributor to European foreign and security policy debates.

3.1.3 Summary of Findings

This section synthesizes the key empirical findings regarding how Estonia framed Russia as a threat to national and European security between 2014 and 2024. Applying Entman’s four framing dimensions, the analysis reveals clear rhetorical intensification following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The findings confirm that Estonia’s threat framing was ideationally stable, normatively anchored, and increasingly bold in response to major geopolitical developments, particularly the 2022 invasion, which functioned as a discursive critical juncture.

Throughout the period, the most frequent problem definition consistently framed Russia as a revisionist actor responsible for *geopolitical instability in Europe*, closely tied to themes of *imperial ambition, aggression against sovereignty, and undermining international law*. Estonia portrayed Russia not as a temporary disruptor but as a persistent and systemic threat to the European security architecture. Notably, even before 2022, Estonia’s framing of Russian actions in Georgia (2008), Crimea (2014), and Eastern Ukraine consistently emphasized Moscow’s disregard for sovereignty and multilateral norms. While the most urgent and morally charged framing appeared after 2022, when Estonia declared Russia an *existential threat to Europe* and explicitly invoked terms such as “genocide,” “terror,” and “imperial aggression.” This intensification, especially in moral evaluation and policy recommendation dimensions, marked the post-invasion moment as a turning point that heightened Estonia’s normative appeals and strategic demands.

Across the decade, all four of Entman’s framing dimensions appeared consistently in Estonian speeches and policy documents, with no full omission of any main dimension in any year with available data. While the conceptual architecture remained stable, the intensity of framing fluctuated in response to shifting political and geopolitical contexts. Sub-dimension analysis confirms that problem definition and causal interpretation were the most frequently employed dimensions, especially during periods of heightened tension (2015-2016, 2022-2024). Between 2017 and 2019, there was a relative dip in the volume of frames, although the core ideational structure persisted. Figure 1 further illustrates a relative decline in Estonia’s framing intensity between 2015 and 2019, which may be attributable to broader contextual factors, including shifting domestic priorities, the emergence of global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, or a reduced sense of urgency following the initial response to the 2014 annexation of Crimea. Although the discourse did not shift in direction, its urgency and normative clarity were notably diminished. For

instance, while the 2018 speech continued to highlight the Russian threat, it did so with less normative emphasis and fewer explicit references to legal or moral imperatives.

Conversely, from 2020 onward, the data reveals a sharp increase in both the frequency of Estonia's threat framing, culminating in peak intensity between 2022 and 2024. Notably, there was a statistically observable increase in the use of moral evaluation and policy recommendation frames after 2022, confirming rhetorical intensification. The number of references to EU unity, legal accountability, sovereignty, and Ukraine's victory rose significantly in both absolute and relative terms. While the salience of Estonia's threat discourse has fluctuated in response to external shocks and leadership dynamics, its underlying normative foundation has remained remarkably stable over time.

By contrast, 2020 marked a renewed increase in framing activity, particularly in policy recommendations, with the adoption of the Foreign Policy Development Plan 2030. This strategic document introduced a broad set of future-oriented security and resilience priorities, reflecting Estonia's intent to institutionalize its threat framing in long-term foreign policy planning. Accordingly, policy recommendation frequency rose sharply, and problem definition references also increased, but more modestly. This development signaled a shift back toward more structured and proactive discourse, paving the way for the intensified rhetoric that followed the 2022 invasion. Also, a notable inflection coincided in 2020, when Estonia assumed its seat on the United Nations Security Council. This elevated diplomatic role catalyzed a shift in discourse: the Kremlin's disregard for international law and democratic norms was increasingly framed not merely as a regional problem but as a global challenge to the international order. Estonia's framing began to reflect a more assertive identity as a principled and credible actor within multilateral forums, reinforcing its normative positioning within both the EU and global governance structures.

Before 2022, Estonia's policy recommendations focused on strategic vigilance, advocating for increased EU-NATO cooperation, the mobilization of EU unity, and various forms of support to Ukraine. However, the tone was largely preventive and future-oriented. Hybrid threats such as disinformation and energy dependence were identified, but calls to action were framed as gradual and institutional. Estonia advocated comprehensive military, financial, and humanitarian aid to Ukraine, EU and NATO enlargement (specifically to include Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia), and legal accountability mechanisms such as a special tribunal. The discourse also emphasized

strategic autonomy, with Estonia proposing concrete financial commitments (e.g., 0.25% GDP for defense aid) and broader integration as essential responses to Russian aggression.

However, from 2022 onward, Estonia's framing intensified dramatically across all four dimensions. The problem was no longer limited to regional instability but recast as an existential threat; causal attribution to authoritarianism and imperialism grew sharper; moral condemnation became more intense, invoking images of war crimes and violations of the European normative order; and policy recommendations expanded in both scope and ambition. In this post-invasion context, Estonia's rhetorical stance evolved from that of an alert state issuing early warnings to that of a normative anchor, attempting to shape EU-level debates and advocating for concrete policy shifts: sanctions, strategic aid, criminal accountability, and accelerated enlargement. The stability and escalation of Estonia's framing strategy not only affirmed its discursive foresight but also enhanced its soft power within the EU's evolving foreign and security policy landscape. Estonia's voice, once marginal, has become increasingly important in shaping the normative and strategic contours of the European response to Russian aggression. Figure 1 (see below) visually represents the changing frequency of framing dimensions over time, highlighting the peaks of discursive activity in 2015-2016 and especially 2022-2023. A full breakdown of coded dimensions and sub-dimensions by year is available in Appendix 2.

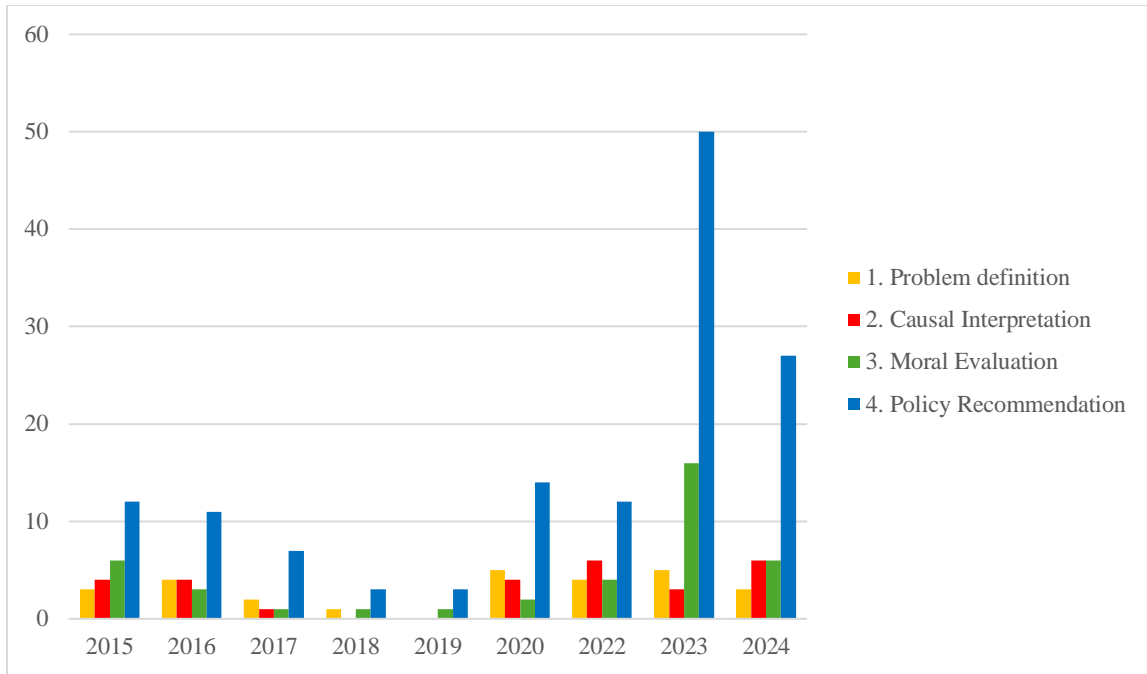


Figure 1. Estonia's framing of Russia as a Threat

Sources: Estonian Foreign Minister's annual speeches at the Riigikogu (excluding 2014, 2021) and Estonian government strategic document (Estonian foreign policy strategy 2030), from 2014 to 2024

3.2 The EU's Framing of Russia as a Threat (2014-2024)

This subchapter applies the same methodological framework introduced in Chapter 2 and used in Section 3.1 to analyze how the EU framed Russia as a security threat in its foreign and security policy discourse from 2014 to 2024.

The analysis is based on two main types of source material: (1) the annual State of the Union addresses delivered by the Presidents of the European Commission in the European Parliament (with exceptions in 2014, 2019, and 2024 due to the EU elections), and (2) two key strategic policy documents: the 2016 EU Global Strategy and the 2022 Strategic Compass. These sources are selected for their high-level institutional authority and their role in shaping the EU's external action framework, particularly during moments of geopolitical crises, such as the annexation of Crimea, the rise of hybrid threats, and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Each framing dimension is analyzed to explore how the EU's threat narrative evolved from earlier phases of cautious ambiguity to a more assertive and normatively grounded posture. Selected quotations are used to illustrate coding decisions and make the analytical process transparent. This approach reveals how the EU's framing transitioned from strategic hesitation to a morally explicit and policy response to Russian aggression, particularly after 2022. Within each analytical section, sub-dimensions are presented in order of their frequency across the dataset, reflecting the salience and emphasis placed on specific themes over time.

The subchapter is structured as follows: Section 3.2.1 applies the coding framework to examine how the EU's framing of Russia unfolded across Entman's four analytical dimensions. It identifies key discursive patterns and links them to broader theoretical themes such as normative power, strategic adaptation, and institutional coherence. Section 3.2.2 presents a temporal comparison of the EU's framing before and after the 2022 invasion and highlighting the rhetorical shifts.

Following these two analytical sections, the subchapter concludes with a synthesis of findings on the EU's evolving threat discourse. This summary provides a consolidated perspective on how Russia has been positioned within EU-level discussion, setting the stage for a direct comparison with Estonia's framing and broader conclusions about framing convergence and Europeanization.

3.2.1 Identification of Threat Framing (2014-2024)

Problem Definition

This section applies Entman’s problem definition dimension to examine how the EU identified and articulated key aspects of the Russian threat over time. Across the period, four sub-dimensions were identified out of five in the EU’s framing discourse, excluding the *Undermining of international law and the Rule-Based Order*. These sub-frames were not equally prominent throughout the decade but gained prominence, particularly in response to the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The foundational framing of *geopolitical instability* in Europe emerged as early as 2016, when the EU *Global Strategy* warned that “peace and stability in Europe are no longer a given,” reflecting anxieties triggered by Russia’s annexation of Crimea.¹²¹ However, the events of 2022 marked a discursive rupture. In her 2022 State of the Union address, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen stated, “Never before has this Parliament debated the State of our Union with war raging on European soil,” foregrounding Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as a historic shock to Europe’s security order.¹²² The *Strategic Compass* echoed this urgency, declaring that the war had “instilled further urgency” into the EU’s strategic transformation.¹²³ Crucially, the invasion was framed not as an isolated regional conflict, but as part of a broader destabilizing trend in the international system, with direct and ongoing implications for EU security.

Another central sub-frame was the problematization of *hybrid threats and information warfare*, which gained significant prominence after 2022. The EU identified disinformation campaigns, foreign interference, and cyberattacks as part of a sustained Russian effort to weaken democratic institutions and fracture societal resilience. Von der Leyen’s 2022 announcement of a *Defense of Democracy* package, along with the *Strategic Compass*’s introduction of the *FIMI*

¹²¹ “Strategic Compass” (European Union, 2022).

¹²² “State of the Union Address by President von Der Leyen 2022,” Text, European Commission - European Commission, accessed April 11, 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/ov/https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/ov/sp_eech_22_5493.

¹²³ “Strategic Compass.”

Toolbox, positioned hybrid threats as distinct, systemic challenges rather than mere supplements to military warfare.¹²⁴

Although not consistently central in earlier years, the EU twice portrayed Russia as *an expansionist threat with imperial ambitions* to European stability and security in 2016 and 2022. The 2016 EU Global Strategy referred to managing relations with Russia as a “key strategic challenge,” reflecting cautious recognition of Russia’s disruptive potential.¹²⁵ This framing was reinforced in the Strategic Compass, which described Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine as a “war of aggression” and highlighted its implications for regional stability. References to increased military mobility and Moldova’s security vulnerabilities pointed to growing concern over the broader impact of Russian actions.¹²⁶

This discursive shift was accompanied by an emphasis on the nature of *the threat to European sovereignty*. In her 2022 State of the Union address, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen stated that “much is at stake here. Not just for Ukraine - but for all of Europe and the world at large,” underscoring the perceived scale of the threat.¹²⁷ Thus, the EU constructed Russia’s actions not only as a security concern but also as a normative crisis requiring a robust and unified response.

The EU’s framing of Russia as a threat between 2014 and 2024 evolved from cautious, ambiguous references to a more explicit and normatively charged framing following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. While earlier framings highlighted geopolitical instability and labeled Russia a strategic challenge, the post-2022 discourse clearly framed Russia as a war aggressor, a source of hybrid threats, and an existential danger to European sovereignty and values. This shift reflects the methodological coding choices made in applying Entman’s problem definition dimension, showing a clear escalation and intensification in the EU’s threat perception over time. A chronological overview of the frequency and prominence of these framing patterns is illustrated in Figure 2 and further detailed in Appendix 2.

¹²⁴ “State of the Union Address by President von Der Leyen 2022.”

¹²⁵ “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign And Security Policy” (European Union, 2016).

¹²⁶ “Strategic Compass.”

¹²⁷ “State of the Union Address by President von Der Leyen 2022.”

Causal Interpretation

This section applies Entman’s causal interpretation dimension to examine how the EU identified and attributed responsibility for security threats arising from Russia between 2014 and 2024. Only three interlinked sub-dimensions out of four were identified during this period: *Aggressive Foreign Policy of the Russian State, Kremlin Leadership and Strategic Intent, and Energy Dependence on Russia as a Structural Risk*. These framings, while varying in intensity across time, collectively shaped the EU’s understanding of causality and helped justify its evolving security and energy policies.

The most consistently invoked causal narrative is Russia’s *aggressive foreign policy*. This framing assigns structural responsibility to the Russian state for violating international norms, destabilizing Europe’s security architecture, and threatening regional and global peace. The 2016 *Global Strategy* established the basis for later developments, stating that “Russia’s violation of international law and the destabilization of Ukraine” had fundamentally challenged the European security order.¹²⁸ From 2022 onwards, this interpretation became significantly more urgent and explicit. Von der Leyen’s 2022 address accused Russia of putting “its economy on the path to oblivion,” characterizing the war as the culmination of “Putin’s trail of death and destruction.”¹²⁹ The *Strategic Compass* further intensified this diagnosis, linking Russia’s war directly to disruptions in global arms control frameworks, the weakening of multilateralism, and the need for high-intensity traditional warfare capabilities.¹³⁰ Across these statements, the EU attributes the deterioration of Europe’s security environment to Russia’s aggressive state behavior, thus externalizing blame and justifying a broad spectrum of defensive measures.

Complementing this structural diagnosis is a more personalized framing of causality around *Kremlin leadership and strategic intent*. This sub-dimension emphasizes President Vladimir Putin’s role as the architect of aggression and destabilization. It builds on individual agency to reinforce the image of a purposeful adversary operating with long-term malign objectives. The 2020 address by von der Leyen offered a retrospective warning: “No pipeline will change Russia’s behavioral pattern, which includes election meddling, chemical attacks, and

¹²⁸ “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign And Security Policy.”

¹²⁹ “State of the Union Address by President von Der Leyen 2022.”

¹³⁰ “Strategic Compass.”

military aggression.¹³¹ In 2022, this logic intensified, as the EU reflected on the warnings of Eastern European states, dissidents, and journalists: “We should have listened to those who know Putin.” This quote not only holds Putin accountable but also validates the foresight of actors in Estonia, the Baltic, and other small EU states, reinforcing the EU’s discursive shift toward acknowledging regional voices.¹³² The 2023 address again referenced Russia’s influence in a series of destabilizing coups in Africa, framing Putin as a global disruptor.¹³³ This strategic of causality helps consolidate moral clarity, facilitates political unity, and amplifies support for hardline responses.

A more systemic but equally important sub-dimension involves the EU’s recognition of *energy dependence on Russia as a structural risk*. Although less emotionally charged, this framing reveals the EU’s introspective shift. The 2016 *Global Strategy* acknowledged “interdependence” with Russia, particularly in the energy sector, pointing to vulnerabilities that limit Europe’s autonomy.¹³⁴ This idea is not merely economic but strategic: the EU’s dependence on Russian gas is portrayed as a structural driver of Russian pressure. In her 2023 speech, von der Leyen referenced Putin’s use of gas as a weapon, linking economic manipulation to broader insecurity.¹³⁵ This causal framing has driven policy efforts to diversify energy sources, reduce reliance on Russian hydrocarbons, and reform the internal energy market, developments analyzed in greater depth under the policy recommendation dimension.

The EU’s causal framing of Russia between 2014 and 2024 remained limited and cautious until the full-scale invasion in 2022, after which it expanded sharply and decisively. Methodologically, the identification and coding of the three sub-dimensions demonstrate a post-2022 intensification of discourse. Russia is no longer depicted as a difficult or unreliable partner, but as a systemic aggressor; Putin is no longer framed as a strategic interlocutor, but as a primary source of instability; and energy interdependence is no longer a neutral policy condition, but a security vulnerability. These developments underpin the EU’s justificatory narrative for escalated responses in the domains of military security, energy diversification, and strategic autonomy. For

¹³¹ “State of the Union Address by President von Der Leyen 2020,” Text, European Commission - European Commission, accessed April 11, 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_20_1655.

¹³² “State of the Union Address by President von Der Leyen 2022.”

¹³³ “State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen 2023,” Text, European Commission - European Commission, accessed April 12, 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_23_4426.

¹³⁴ “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign And Security Policy.”

¹³⁵ “State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen 2023.”

a visual representation of the frequency and salience of these dimensions over time, see Figure 2 and Appendix 2.

Moral Evaluation

The EU's moral framing of Russia and its war against Ukraine between 2014 and 2024 employed all sub-dimensions, including: *Violation of International Law and Sovereignty, Breach of European, Democratic Values and Norms, Moral Responsibility to Support Ukraine, Condemnation of Authoritarianism, and Normative Commitment to Ukraine's Victory*. These sub-dimensions, while present to varying frequencies throughout the decade, intensified notably after 2022. The EU's foreign policy discourse, during this decade, reflects a strongly normative orientation in its response to Russia's actions, especially following the annexation of Crimea and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Moral evaluations have served as a critical element of the EU's framing logic, reinforcing its geopolitical awakening with principled stances on international law, democratic values, and solidarity.¹³⁶ This normative anchoring was articulated through five key framing strands: the violation of international law and sovereignty, the defense of democratic norms, the condemnation of authoritarianism, the moral responsibility to support Ukraine, and a broader commitment to Ukraine's eventual victory and European integration.

Foremost among these was the EU's framing of a *sustained moral responsibility to support Ukraine*, framed as both an ethical obligation and a foundational element of European unity. As early as 2015, President Juncker asserted that Ukraine's aspiration for reform and peace, "the dream of the Maidan," was a European one, thereby tying Ukraine's fate to the EU's own normative identity.¹³⁷ This message intensified post-2022, with Von der Leyen pledging "whatever it takes" support, and repeatedly stating that Ukraine is "fighting not only for its survival, but also for our security." Refugee solidarity was also framed in moral terms, as in her praise of Ukrainian women and children fleeing bombs who "showed everyone what Europeans can achieve when we rally around a common mission."¹³⁸ The *Strategic Compass* further portrayed the EU's continued

¹³⁶ "Strategic Compass."

¹³⁷ Jean-Claude Juncker, "State of the Union 2015: Time for Honesty, Unity and Solidarity," *State of the Union*, n.d.

¹³⁸ "State of the Union Address by President von Der Leyen 2022."

aid and civilian protection efforts as part of its principled response to a war that “has no place in the 21st century.”¹³⁹

Closely intertwined with this framing was a *violation of international law and sovereignty*. The EU’s 2016 *Global Strategy* affirmed that the inviolability of borders, peaceful dispute settlement, and state sovereignty constitute the core of the European security order, and that “we will not recognize Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea.”¹⁴⁰ This position hardened in the wake of the 2022 invasion, with Ursula von der Leyen describing the atrocities in Bucha and the shelling of nuclear plants as “a deliberate attempt to discard” the international rules-based system.¹⁴¹ The 2023 State of the Union address further decried Russia’s assault on the principles of the UN Charter, highlighting the war’s implications for global legal and normative frameworks.¹⁴² The *Strategic Compass* reinforced this interpretation, stating that the core principles of the international order are “under attack” and must be actively defended.¹⁴³

In parallel, the EU’s framing articulated a *normative commitment to Ukraine’s victory* and integration into the European project. Repeated declarations such as “Slava Ukraini” and “the future of Ukraine is in our Union” transformed support into a moral mission.¹⁴⁴ This commitment extended beyond battlefield success to democratic consolidation and EU accession. Speeches emphasized Ukraine’s reform achievements and the irreversibility of its European trajectory. Enlargement was framed not only as geopolitically necessary, but as a fulfillment of shared values: “your future is in our Union, and our Union is not complete without you.”¹⁴⁵ The *Strategic Compass* similarly endorsed Ukraine’s victory as essential to a just peace, reinforcing the moral underpinning of Europe’s long-term engagement.¹⁴⁶

This normative binary was further sharpened through explicit *condemnation of authoritarianism*. Russian aggression was framed not merely as unlawful, but as morally unacceptable. The EU’s discourse emphasized the brutality of the Russian regime, with references to “the ruthless face of evil” and the murder of civilians, including the 2023 tribute to Ukrainian

¹³⁹ “Strategic Compass.”

¹⁴⁰ “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign And Security Policy.”

¹⁴¹ “State of the Union Address by President von Der Leyen 2022.”

¹⁴² “State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen 2023.”

¹⁴³ “Strategic Compass.”

¹⁴⁴ “State of the Union Address by President von Der Leyen 2022.”

¹⁴⁵ “State of the Union Address by President von Der Leyen 2022.”

¹⁴⁶ “Strategic Compass.”

writer Victoria Amelina as a “victim of a Russian war crime.”¹⁴⁷ Such language evoked a moral clarity reminiscent of post-WWII rhetoric, portraying the EU as a principled actor confronting authoritarian violence and moral depravity. The 2016 *Global Strategy* echoed this line, reaffirming the universality of democratic norms and condemning governance models that disregard international law.¹⁴⁸

Beyond critique, legal concerns EU portrayed the conflict as a *breach of European democratic values and norms*. The EU portrayed the war not only as a military confrontation, but as a symbolic battle between autocracy and democracy. Von der Leyen’s 2022 address declared that the war was “not only against Ukraine” but “a war on our values and our future,” drawing a sharp normative boundary between European liberal-democratic identity and authoritarian aggression. The idea that democracy must be protected “every single day,” both from external threats and internal erosion, marked a normative awakening in EU discourse.¹⁴⁹ These themes were reiterated across speeches that called for a renewed defense of the rule of law and democracy, linking Europe’s security to its foundational values.

In summary, the EU’s moral framing of Russia and the war in Ukraine evolved from general affirmations of international law and solidarity into a deeply normative discourse anchored in shared values, democratic identity, and moral clarity. The contrast between democracy and authoritarianism became a central axis of meaning, particularly after 2022, with the EU’s language exhibiting sharper moral condemnation and firmer ethical commitment to Ukraine’s future. This transformation reflects the methodological application of Entman’s moral evaluation dimension, highlighting an intensification of normative content in official discourse. The evolution of this framing across time and sub-dimensions is visually summarised in Figure 2, with detailed coding patterns presented in Appendix 2.

Policy Recommendation

The EU’s policy framing of Russia’s aggression between 2014 and 2024 (excluding the 2017-2021 period) drew upon a multifaceted set of recommendations, reflecting both short-term

¹⁴⁷ “State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen 2023.”

¹⁴⁸ “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign And Security Policy.”

¹⁴⁹ “State of the Union Address by President von Der Leyen 2022.”

reactions and long-term strategic objectives. Over the decade, all following sub-dimensions were mentioned in the EU's discourse: *Strategic Aid to Ukraine (Military, Financial, Humanitarian), Sanctions and Restrictive Measures Against Russia, Strengthening EU-NATO Security Cooperation, Boosting Cybersecurity and Digital Resilience, Reducing Strategic Dependencies on Russia (Energy, Trade, Technology), Support for EU and NATO Enlargement (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia), Mobilization of EU Unity and Strategic Autonomy, Refugee Protection and Civilian Solidarity Policies, Legal Accountability for Russia and Expulsion from International Forums.* These policy proposals evolved from modest initiatives to a robust, coherent architecture aimed at reinforcing the EU's credibility as a geopolitical actor.

One of the most sustained policy responses was the *provision of strategic aid to Ukraine, encompassing military, financial, and humanitarian dimensions.* Beginning as early as 2015 under President Juncker, the EU delivered macro-financial assistance and facilitated energy supplies, presenting these efforts as essential for Ukraine's survival and reform.¹⁵⁰ Under Ursula von der Leyen's leadership, this support was drastically scaled up following the 2022 invasion. The *Strategic Compass* details over €88 billion in total EU and Member State support, including €28 billion for military aid through the European Peace Facility. The creation of the Ukraine Assistance Fund, training of 60,000 Ukrainian troops, and initiatives such as ammunition procurement and infrastructure rebuilding were framed not only as acts of solidarity but as strategic investments in European security and values.¹⁵¹ This multi-sectoral support consolidated the EU's identity as a long-term partner in Ukraine's resistance and reconstruction.

Closely aligned with these efforts was the *mobilization of unity and strategic autonomy.* Throughout the decade, EU leadership repeatedly framed collective European action as a necessary condition for security. From Juncker's early calls for unity in defending the Baltic states to the operationalization of EU Rapid Deployment Capacity and military mobility initiatives under the *Compass*, the EU increasingly emphasized its ability to act cohesively.¹⁵² This was not merely a call for institutional reform, but an attempt to position the EU as a mature security actor capable of deterrence and defense. The emphasis on shared procurement, coordinated defense planning,

¹⁵⁰ Juncker, "State of the Union 2015: Time for Honesty, Unity and Solidarity."

¹⁵¹ "Strategic Compass."

¹⁵² Juncker, "State of the Union 2015: Time for Honesty, Unity and Solidarity."

and financial support for capability development further illustrated the growing operationalization of strategic autonomy.

A third major vector of policy framing involved the *reduction of structural dependencies on Russia, particularly in energy, trade, and technologies*. The 2022 energy crises revealed the vulnerabilities of overreliance on Russian gas, prompting swift diversification towards partners like Norway and Algeria and deep energy market reform.¹⁵³ The *Strategic Compass* elaborated a broader agenda for economic and technological sovereignty, introducing the European Defense Industrial Strategy, the Critical Raw Materials Act, and deepened investment in renewables and industrial capacity.¹⁵⁴ These policies addressed both security and competitiveness, presenting autonomy not as isolation but as resilience against authoritarian coercion.

Simultaneously, *refugee protection and civilian solidarity policies* emerged as a moral and practical pillar of the EU's response. The EU's unprecedented reception of millions of Ukrainian refugees, framed as "European heroes", was accompanied by policies ensuring access to housing, healthcare, education, and employment.¹⁵⁵ In 2023, von der Leyen announced the extension of temporary protection, portraying the Ukrainian case as a "blueprint" for future migration reform. Civilian protection was also supported via the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, including aid for chemical and radiological incidents, demining, and critical infrastructure recovery.¹⁵⁶

Additionally, the EU *strengthens EU-NATO security cooperation*, underscoring complementarity rather than competition. The Strategic Compass repeatedly stressed complementarity with NATO, highlighting joint initiatives in cyber defense, military mobility, hybrid threat response, and critical infrastructure protection.¹⁵⁷ Bilateral cooperation through the EU-NATO Task Force and joint exercises signaled a pragmatic approach: rather than competing with NATO, the EU framed its strategic evolution as reinforcing the transatlantic alliance.

Within the strategic transformation, *boosting cybersecurity and digital resilience* became critical. The *Compass* outlined actions such as the establishment of EU Hybrid Rapid Response Teams, the FIMI Information Sharing and Analysis Centre, and cybersecurity risk assessments.¹⁵⁸ These initiatives were particularly focused on threats emanating from Russia, including

¹⁵³ "State of the Union Address by President von Der Leyen 2022."

¹⁵⁴ "Strategic Compass."

¹⁵⁵ "State of the Union Address by President von Der Leyen 2022."

¹⁵⁶ "State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen 2023."

¹⁵⁷ "Strategic Compass."

¹⁵⁸ "Strategic Compass."

disinformation, energy sabotage, and manipulation of democratic institutions, especially in vulnerable states like Moldova and Georgia.¹⁵⁹

The EU also advanced *legal accountability mechanisms*, aiming to isolate Russia internationally and uphold international norms. Beginning with the 2016 *Global Strategy's* conditionality clauses, the EU later advocated for Russia's expulsion from international bodies such as the Council of Europe and the UN Human Rights Council.¹⁶⁰ The EU also supported the International Criminal Court's actions, including the arrest warrant for Vladimir Putin, and promoted the creation of a special tribunal for the crime of aggression.¹⁶¹ These legal initiatives stressed the EU's belief that the international order must be protected through enforceable norms, not rhetorical condemnation alone.

Complementing this was the EU's continued imposition of *sanctions and restrictive measures against Russia*. Since 2015, sanctions have been framed as both necessary and costly, but morally justified.¹⁶² Juncker emphasized unity in sustaining sanctions until full implementation of the Minsk Agreements, while von der Leyen in 2022 reaffirmed their permanence: "The sanctions are here to stay."¹⁶³ The 2022 *Strategic Compass* further introduced the Anti-Coercion Instrument, reflecting an evolution from ad hoc sanctions to systemic legal instruments designed to deter external pressure.¹⁶⁴ Sanctions thus became both an immediate response and a structural tool to uphold international law and constrain Russian capabilities.

Lastly, *support for EU and NATO enlargement*, particularly for Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, was framed as both a strategic necessity and a moral imperative. Von der Leyen repeatedly declared that the future of Ukraine is in the Union, tying enlargement to the defense of democracy and the stability of Europe.¹⁶⁵ The *Strategic Compass* reaffirmed the EU's role in facilitating reforms and aligning Eastern Partnership countries with the *acquis*, portraying enlargement as the long-term solution to the grey zones exploited by Russia.¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁹ "State of the Union Address by President von Der Leyen 2022."

¹⁶⁰ "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy."

¹⁶¹ "State of the Union Address by President von Der Leyen 2022."

¹⁶² Juncker, "State of the Union 2015: Time for Honesty, Unity and Solidarity."

¹⁶³ "State of the Union Address by President von Der Leyen 2022."

¹⁶⁴ "Strategic Compass."

¹⁶⁵ "State of the Union Address by President von Der Leyen 2022."

¹⁶⁶ "Strategic Compass."

Lastly, the EU's policy framing of Russia's aggression turned from limited, reactive measures to a clear and assertive strategic agenda. This evolution reflects the EU's transition from cautious diplomacy to a multi-domain geopolitical stance based on deterrence, values, and institutional readiness. The EU's conceptualization of Russia has thus shifted dramatically, with policy recommendations shifting from conditional engagement to sustained, deterrence, resilience, and integration policies. These findings are the result of methodically applying Entman's policy recommendation dimension, which enabled the identification of repeating patterns, escalations, and thematic focus. Figure 2 shows a chronological overview of the frequency and value of these policy sub-dimensions, while Appendix 2 details their distribution across the corpus.

3.2.2 EU's Framing of Russia as a Threat Before and After 2022

Building on the previous examination of Estonia's framing trajectory, this section traces how the EU's framing of Russia evolved between 2015 and 2023. It compares the EU's discursive framing across Entman's four dimensions, revealing how a cautious and restrained narrative before 2022 shifted into a strategically assertive and norm-driven discourse following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

EU's Framing of Russia as a Threat Before 2022

Before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the EU's foreign policy discourse revealed a cautiously critical framing of Russia as a threat, structured but restrained across Entman's four dimensions. In terms of *problem definition*, the EU acknowledged geopolitical instability in Eastern Europe, particularly after the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Donbas, yet often emphasized broader global crises such as migration and terrorism. *Causal interpretations* pointed to Kremlin-led aggression and Russia's violation of international norms, especially following events like the poisoning of Alexei Navalny and interference in EU politics. Still, these causal links were frequently balanced with rhetoric of targeted cooperation, reflecting energy interdependence and diplomatic caution. This caution was evident in continued economic cooperation, such as the approval of Nord Stream 2, even as rhetorical opposition to Russia's actions persisted.¹⁶⁷ *Moral evaluations* invoked democratic values, international law, and human rights, but often in generalized language aimed at preserving stability rather than confronting systemic authoritarianism. *Policy recommendations* included sanctions, strategic aid to Ukraine, and support for Eastern neighbors' resilience, but these measures were often portrayed as reactive and conditional. Overall, the EU's pre-2022 framing was norm-based but strategically cautious that avoiding confrontation and maintaining space for engagement.

¹⁶⁷ "The Nord Stream 2 Pipeline," n.d.

EU's Framing of Russia as a Threat after 2022

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the EU's discourse experienced a dramatic intensification across all four of Entman's framing dimensions. The *problem* was now defined as a systemic, existential threat to European security, sovereignty, and values - no longer peripheral but central to the EU's geopolitical identity. *Causal interpretations* became more direct and forceful, attributing the war, energy crises, hybrid attacks, and global instability to Russia's aggressive and revisionist leadership. In *moral terms*, the EU framed the conflict as a confrontation between democratic and authoritarian values, repeatedly invoking the violation of international law, war crimes, and solidarity with Ukraine as a moral imperative. The tone shifted from normative caution to normative mobilization. *Policy recommendations* multiplied in volume and ambition: comprehensive sanctions, long-term military and economic aid, institutional reforms, enlargement acceleration, and efforts to reduce strategic dependencies. New mechanisms, such as the Ukraine Assistance Fund and defense industrial strategies, reflected strategic planning for enduring conflict. Crucially, the EU began to adopt a more assertive role as a geopolitical actor, openly aligning its identity and strategic purpose with Ukraine's survival and European unity. This discursive transformation marked the emergence of a "geopolitical Union," where values-based framing evolved into an operational doctrine of collective defense and democratic resilience.¹⁶⁸ At the same time, the EU began to articulate "strategic autonomy" as part of this stance, signaling the EU's intent to bolster its security and defense capabilities independently while maintaining interoperability with NATO. This shift did not imply disengagement from the transatlantic alliance but rather a complementary evolution: greater EU responsibility within a reinforced collective defense framework, with a growing emphasis on internal readiness, resilience, and defense industrial cooperation. While Estonia similarly supported both NATO deterrence and stronger EU security capacities, it framed these efforts primarily through the lens of transatlantic unity and Eastern Flank deterrence, often prioritizing immediate threat response over structural autonomy. This indicates a shared orientation toward enhanced European security, though articulated with differing emphasis and strategic assumptions.

¹⁶⁸ "State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen 2023."

3.2.3 Summary of Findings

This section gathers the empirical findings on how the EU framed Russia as a security threat between 2014 and 2024. Applying Entman’s four framing dimensions, the analysis confirms that the EU’s framing evolved from initial strategic caution to a far more assertive and normatively anchored threat discourse following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The framing of Russia by the EU changed substantially: it shifted from episodic and cautious to assertive, culminating in a clear discursive rupture in 2022.

During the earlier period (2015-2016), Russia’s annexation of Crimea and hybrid warfare in Eastern Ukraine were framed as violations of international law and sources of geopolitical instability. These framings, while normatively grounded, were embedded within a normative narrative that emphasized sovereignty, territorial integrity, and adherence to the UN Charter. This legal framing was consolidated in the 2016 EU Global Strategy, which described Russia as a strategic challenge to European security while simultaneously signaling openness to engagement where interests aligned.¹⁶⁹ Although the EU upheld clear principles, its early moral positioning remained largely procedural and reactive, centered on legal norms rather than on a proactive values-based narrative. Between 2017 and 2020, however, the EU’s discourse shifted into a phase in which Russia-related security concerns received markedly less rhetorical emphasis and, in some instances, disappeared entirely from high-level framing. Accordingly, attention shifted to other crises, such as counterterrorism, migration, and the COVID-19 pandemic. With the exception for Ursula von der Leyen’s 2020 condemnation of the Navalny poisoning, linking it to broader patterns of Russian aggression in Georgia, Ukraine, Syria, and beyond, the EU largely avoided overt confrontation in its framing of Russia during this period.¹⁷⁰

This silence ended in 2022. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine marked a critical juncture that catalyzed a dramatic transformation in the EU’s discourse across all four of Entman’s dimensions. Russia was now framed not merely as a strategic challenge but as an *existential threat to European security*, values, and identity. *Causality* was directly attributed to the Kremlin’s long-term revisionist agenda, and energy dependence, previously seen as a vulnerability, was incorporated into the threat frame, prompting calls for diversification and autonomy. More

¹⁶⁹ “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign And Security Policy.”

¹⁷⁰ “State of the Union Address by President von Der Leyen 2020.”

significantly, *moral evaluation* became a central pillar of the EU's post-2022 discourse. The war was increasingly framed not only as a legal violation but as a symbolic struggle between autocracy and democracy. President von der Leyen's 2022 State of the Union address described it as a "war on our values and our future," constructing a sharp normative binary that redefined Ukraine not only as a victim of aggression but as the representation of Europe's democratic aspirations.¹⁷¹ Earlier symbolic gestures, such as President Juncker's 2015 description of the Maidan protests as a "European dream", were now elevated into a comprehensive values-based narrative.¹⁷² Ukraine was depicted as defending not just its sovereignty, but the ethical foundations of the European project. Likewise, *policy recommendations* became broader, more strategic, and normatively charged. The EU adopted long-term commitments to military aid, defense industrial modernization, energy security, enlargement, and institutional reform. The 2022 Strategic Compass institutionalized many of these elements, explicitly linking Ukraine's survival to Europe's security and democratic resilience.¹⁷³ Legal accountability mechanisms, support for war crimes investigations, refugee protection, humanitarian reconstruction, and educational investments were all framed as moral imperatives. Enlargement policy was also reframed as a democratic obligation, with Ukraine's candidacy increasingly described as a "moral contract" rather than a geopolitical choice.

The methodological coding confirms this trajectory. From 2015 to 2020, the frequency of threat-related frames remained low and uneven, with multiple years showing little or no invocation of key dimensions. From 2022 onward, however, the number and variety of frames sharply increased across all dimensions, particularly moral evaluation and policy recommendation, confirming a discursive intensification. The *Strategic Compass* marked a pivotal moment in this trajectory, not merely restating past values but translating them into structured action and institutional commitment.

In sum, this evolution confirms the EU's growing capacity to transform values-based discourse into coordinated strategic action. The EU's policy responses to Russia's behavior reflect not only reactive sanctions and emergency aid, but a broader geopolitical repositioning rooted in

¹⁷¹ "State of the Union Address by President von Der Leyen 2022."

¹⁷² Juncker, "State of the Union 2015: Time for Honesty, Unity and Solidarity."

¹⁷³ "Strategic Compass."

moral condemnation and long-term strategic ambition. These measures reflect a shift from a predominantly normative actor to one that combines ethical framing with operational credibility.

Crucially, this transformation also brought the EU's threat framing closer to that of front-line states such as Estonia, revealing a developing convergence within the Union's foreign and security discourse. Estonia's long-standing depiction of Russia as a systemic threat, rooted in democratic values, sovereignty, and strategic clarity, was historically overlooked within EU discourse. But following 2022, this framing gained EU-wide resonance. The *Strategic Compass* and related policy instruments signaled not only a rhetorical alignment but a deeper normative integration, where support for Ukraine became embedded in the EU's geopolitical identity. What began as an Eastern perspective evolved into a shared moral consensus, enabled by systemic crises, sharpened by leadership, and strengthened through institutional reform.

A visual summary of these evolving patterns is provided in Figure 2, which illustrates the variation in the frequency of framing dimensions over the examined period. It notably captures the spikes in discursive intensity during 2015-2016 and, more prominently, in 2022-2023. For a detailed annual breakdown of coded dimensions and their respective sub-categories, refer to Appendix 2.

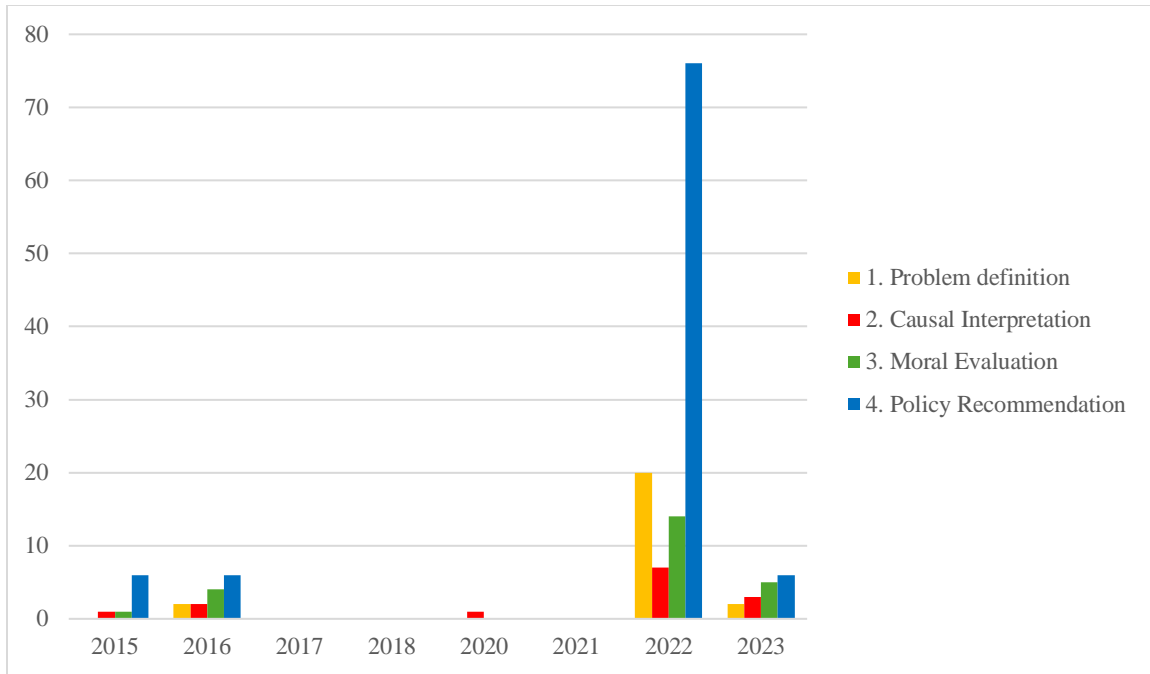


Figure 2. The EU's Framing of Russia as a Threat

Sources: The European Commission President's annual speeches in the European Parliament (excluding 2014, 2019, 2024) and the strategic documents (2016 European Global Strategy and Strategic Compass 2022), from 2014 to 2024

3.4 Assessing the Convergence

Findings uncovered above, this section evaluates how the EU's framing of Russia increasingly aligned with Estonia's long-standing portrayal of Russia as an existential threat, particularly in the aftermath of the 2022 invasion. Rather than Estonia adapting to broader EU discourse, it was the Union that gradually absorbed and institutionalized the core elements of Estonia's threat narrative, reflecting the perspective of a small eastern flank state whose warnings had previously been overlooked in EU security thinking.

The convergence between Estonia's and the EU's threat framings can be categorized as both rhetorical and increasingly grounded in shared strategic objectives. In the early years (2015-2018), Estonia's discourse remained peripheral to the EU's cautious and legalist language, exemplifying what Börzel and Risse have termed norm entrepreneurship emerging from institutional misfit.¹⁷⁴ Estonia persistently framed Russia as a revisionist and existential threat, while EU-level framing relied on legal condemnations and ambiguity about engagement. However, after 2022, the EU adopted a discursive structure that paralleled Estonia's: strong moral condemnation, causal attribution to Kremlin leadership, and comprehensive security-based policy prescriptions. This reflects a shift from rhetorical overlap to deeper procedural and institutional convergence, evidenced by the *Strategic Compass* and the EU's adoption of enlargement narratives longstanding position advocated by Estonia.¹⁷⁵ The convergence thus matured from linguistic overlap to shared strategic logic and policy alignment. While rhetorical alignment marks the initial phase of convergence, its institutional anchoring marks a more durable shift in EU foreign policy. Crucially, this adoption was not automatic. Estonia's framing gained traction because it aligned with a specific set of conditions that made framing more likely to be adopted in times of crises: sustained normative coherence, moral clarity, repeated portrayal in both national and EU-level discourse, and compatibility with the EU's own identity as a normative power. These conditions, what Risse and Radaelli conceptualize as discursive resonance and fit, help explain why Estonia's framing stood ready to fill the strategic and normative vacuum that emerged after the 2022 invasion.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Börzel and Risse, "Conceptualizing the Domestic Impact of Europe."

¹⁷⁵ "Strategic Compass."

¹⁷⁶ Risse, "Social Constructivism and European Integration"; Radaelli, "The Europeanization of Public Policy."

Moreover, the observed convergence was conditioned by geopolitical crises, particularly the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This event functioned as a critical juncture that reconfigured the EU's strategic priorities and created political space for previously minor framing to be mainstreamed. While other Eastern member states, such as Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia, also similarly framed the threat rooted in democratic values, historical experience, and strategic clarity, Estonia is analyzed here as a representative case. Its discourse exemplifies the broader Eastern flank narrative that framed Russia as an existential threat long before this became a common position within the EU. It is not that Estonia's framing alone fulfilled the necessary conditions for discursive uptake, but rather that it illustrates how Eastern perspectives, normatively coherent, consistently articulated, and aligned with EU identity, became increasingly resonant during the crises. The shift was not only reactive; it was also interdependent. Estonia's framing gained traction because it offered an already-articulated and normatively coherent response to unprecedented geopolitical crises. This aligns with Radaelli's notion of discursive fit, in which bottom-up Europeanization occurs when member state ideas align with shifting EU priorities.¹⁷⁷

The depth of discursive convergence is evidenced by the incorporation of Estonian themes into the EU's strategic language and policy design. These include the condemnation of aggression, the call for a special tribunal, the prioritization of strategic aid to Ukraine, and the use of normative terms such as "democracy versus autocracy." As shown in Figures 1 and 2, the rhetorical intensity of both Estonia's and the EU's threat framing peaked during 2022-2023, offering quantitative support for the observed convergence. Importantly, these framings were not only repeated, but they were also embedded into institutional instruments such as the Ukraine Assistance Fund, legal sanctions frameworks, and enlargement policy. Elements of the EU's broader strategic identity increasingly reflected aspects of Estonia's framing, once considered region-specific, suggesting a discursive alignment driven by shared threat perceptions and normative resonance rather than direct influence. This development lends strong support to the central argument of this research.

Despite significant alignment, notable asymmetries persist. Estonia's advocacy for NATO enlargement and the comprehensive geopolitical integration of Eastern Partnership states often exceeds the EU's more cautious, institutionally constrained approach. Similarly, Estonia's discourse tends to be more morally assertive, frequently invoking terms like "genocide" and drawing on historical analogies, whereas the EU typically maintains a more diplomatic tone in

¹⁷⁷ Radaelli, "The Europeanization of Public Policy."

official forums. Moreover, while both Tallinn and Brussels endorse the notion of strategic autonomy, the term reflects different emphases and strategic priorities in each context. These divergences highlight that discursive convergence does not equate to full coherence. Rather, they demonstrate the limits of alignment: although rhetorical and strategic convergence has deepened, it remains shaped by institutional mandates and diverse national priorities. Ultimately, this reflects a conditional alignment rooted in shared threat perceptions, compatible values, and the challenges of a shifting geopolitical landscape.

The Estonian-EU case illustrates how a small state's consistent and normatively anchored discourse may resonate within EU-level narratives during critical junctures. The post-2022 period marks a high point in the convergence between Estonia's long-standing framing of Russia as a threat and the EU's strategic discourse, not because Estonia directly shaped Union policy, but because its prior warnings gained analytical legitimacy. In a moment of systemic disruption, the EU turned to the stable discursive pattern of Eastern member states like Estonia as a ready-made framework for interpreting Russian aggression. This convergence reflects a recognition of Estonia's geopolitical experience as a form of expertise, particularly in moral, security, and institutional terms. While asymmetries remain, the EU's rhetorical and strategic alignment with Estonia's framing demonstrates how small-state narratives can become salient when structural conditions favor the uptake of previously overlooked perspectives.

3.5 Discussion

The previous chapters established that Estonia and the EU experienced discursive transformations in framing Russia between 2014 and 2024. Estonia's threat framing remained ideationally stable and normatively anchored, intensifying particularly after 2022. Meanwhile, the EU shifted from cautious legalism to a values-based threat framing in response to the geopolitical crises caused by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This chapter now moves beyond those findings to interpret their broader implications. It considers what Estonia's case reveals about small state agencies, framing dynamics, and the conditional nature of rhetorical convergence in EU foreign policy.

From the perspective of small state literature, Estonia's experience reflects how ideational consistency can become an asset in times of crises. Its portrayal of Russia as a revisionist and existential threat, present well before 2022, gained broader resonance when the EU framing shifted toward more normative, value-driven rhetoric. This resonance was not a result of direct influence or institutional dominance but of a ready-made narrative that aligned with the EU's need for moral clarity and strategic coherence after 2022. In other words, Estonia's framing gained traction not because it changed, but because the EU changed.

This pattern aligns with the theoretical expectation that bottom-up Europeanization can occur through discursive resonance. As Risse and Radaelli suggest, member state frames gain traction when they align with EU identity and strategic priorities.¹⁷⁸ Estonia's discourse did not seek to displace EU norms but offered a coherent, ready-made interpretive lens that matched institutional needs during a period of systemic disruption. Its framing became embedded because it fit the moment, enabling strategic uptake when institutional needs and normative outlooks converge.

Interviews with Estonian experts reinforce this interpretation. As Merili Arjakas noted: *"We've always seen Russia as potentially a direct existential threat to us... We were always sure of the intent."*¹⁷⁹ This framing has remained remarkably stable across the decade. As Maili Vilson explains, *"you don't see significant changes in the discourse or framing... that's probably one*

¹⁷⁸ Risse, "Social Constructivism and European Integration"; Claudio M. Radaelli, "Whither Europeanization? Concept Stretching and Substantive Change," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2002, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.302761>.

¹⁷⁹ Interview 1, 2025.

value of Estonia's foreign policy in general - that it is very consistent when it comes to its approach to Russia."¹⁸⁰ This long-term consistency has strengthened Estonia's credibility in Brussels, particularly as it has "tried to hold other EU member states accountable to whatever measures they agreed against Russia," especially on sanctions and summit diplomacy.¹⁸¹ These are not empirical findings per se, but help contextualize the legitimacy of Estonia's voice within EU discourse.

In parallel, institutional dynamics also play to Estonia's advantage as a small state. Baldur Thorhallsson notes that small states are attractive to EU officials because they are "less complicated," have "fewer interests," and can respond quickly and clearly to Commission initiatives, an efficiency that larger states often lack.¹⁸² Estonia exemplifies this profile: its administrative clarity, fast decision-making, and norm consistency have made it a reliable partner for EU institutions. These combined factors illustrate a paradox of power - despite structural limitations, small states can amplify their voice when their coherence aligns with institutional logic and broader strategic needs. In this way, the discussion highlights how consistency and credibility, not power or size, can enable small states to exert influence during discursive shifts. In Estonia's case, such alignment may have supported, but not driven, the resonance of its framing in the EU context after 2022, not through structural power, but through moral clarity and framing consistency.

Leadership plays a reinforcing role. Prime Minister Kaja Kallas's high-profile engagement in EU forums, especially following 2022, reflected Estonia's normative stance and strategic messaging. Her statements in the European Parliament and at the 2024 Munich Security Conference emphasized alliance unity and deterrence: "There are no second-class NATO members... When Russia is going to attack, NATO is going to defend all of us".¹⁸³ Her framing connected Estonia's material contributions, including over 3% of GDP spent on defense, with moral appeals to democratic solidarity and institutional preparedness. Additionally, her message linked Estonia's contributions to defense spending, innovation, and values-based diplomacy with the EU's emerging strategic posture.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ Interview 2, 2025.

¹⁸¹ Interview 2, 2025

¹⁸² *How Do Little Frogs Fly? Small States in the European Union*, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSH2b9rZZ5o>.

¹⁸³ "In It to Win It: The Future of Ukraine and Transatlantic Security - Munich Security Conference," February 14, 2025, <https://securityconference.org/en/msc-2024/agenda/event/in-it-to-win-it-the-future-of-ukraine-and-transatlantic-security/>.

¹⁸⁴ "In It to Win It."

The assassination of Alexey Navalny on the eve of the Munich conference further underlined the stakes. Kallas used the opportunity to emphasize the human cost of inaction and the importance of democratic resolve. Her symbolic role as a female leader from a frontline state, with a personal family history of Soviet repression, reinforced her moral authority and, by extension, Estonia's credibility. As Arjakas reminded, the High Representative “*does not speak for one country,*” and Kallas's presence should not be read as a proxy for Estonia.¹⁸⁵ Instead, her appointment reflects the growing legitimacy of Eastern perspectives in the EU's strategic discourse.

Indeed, the post-2022 shift in EU discourse created space for Estonia's framing to resonate strongly. Josep Borrell's 2022 address to the European Parliament acknowledged the EU's failure to recognize Russia as a revisionist power and called for defending the “European way of life.”¹⁸⁶ The *Strategic Compass* institutionalized frames long promoted by Estonia: defense of sovereignty, legal accountability, and sustained aid to Ukraine.¹⁸⁷ Actions such as sanctions, military assistance, and strengthening the Eastern Flank aligned with Estonia's ready-made discourse. These developments represent a case of bottom-up Europeanization, where a national framing became embedded in EU framing during a crises.

Indeed, the post-2022 shift in EU discourse created space for Estonia's framing to resonate strongly. Josep Borrell's 2022 address to the European Parliament acknowledged the EU's failure to recognize Russia as a revisionist power and called for defending the “European way of life.” The *Strategic Compass* institutionalized frames long promoted by Estonia: defense of sovereignty, legal accountability, and sustained aid to Ukraine.¹⁸⁸ Actions such as sanctions (including Russian elites), military assistance, and strengthening the Eastern Flank aligned with Estonia's ready-made discourse. These developments represent a case of bottom-up Europeanization, where a national framing became embedded in EU framing during a crises. Estonia, as a small but vocal member

¹⁸⁵ Interview 1, 2025.

¹⁸⁶ “The EU's role in a changing world and the security situation of Europe following the Russian aggression and invasion on Ukraine: opening statements by Kaja KALLAS, Estonian Prime Minister and by Josep BORRELL FONTELLES, HR/VP of the European Union,” Multimedia Centre, accessed May 19, 2025, https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/video/the-eus-role-in-a-changing-world-and-the-security-situation-of-europe-following-the-russian-aggression-and-invasion-on-ukraine-opening-statement-by-kaja-kallas-estonian-prime-minister_I219918.

¹⁸⁷ “Strategic Compass.”

¹⁸⁸ “Strategic Compass.”

state, exemplifies how discursive uploading can occur during crises when national narratives align with shared EU norms such as sovereignty, democracy, and human dignity

However, as the findings indicate, convergence was conditional and incomplete. Estonia's language often remained more morally charged, invoking terms like "genocide" and "imperial aggression," while EU discourse preserved a more diplomatic tone. Estonia's advocacy for rapid enlargement and stronger integration of Eastern Partnership states went beyond the EU's institutional preferences. These divergences point to framing convergence rather than full strategic coherence.

This suggests that the concept of "Estonization" should be approached with caution. What occurred after 2022 was not a complete transformation of EU policy in Estonia's image, but a moment of legitimation. Estonia's long-standing narrative gained traction because it was normatively coherent and consistent, a framework already in place when the EU required one. In this sense, Estonia's narrative did not reshape EU values, but rather gained visibility because it resonated with them in a moment of need.

Russia's strategic behavior since 2008 confirms Estonia's framing. The invasions of Georgia (2008), Crimea (2014), and Ukraine (2022) illustrate a deliberate effort to block Euro-Atlantic integration. As Mälksoo argues, this constitutes an "imperial war" to deny Ukrainian sovereignty and enforce the logic of *Russkii Mir*.¹⁸⁹ Estonia's framing of Russia as a systemic threat was not a reaction to singular events but a coherent diagnosis of regional dynamics. As Vilson's analysis shows, Baltic warnings were initially dismissed as "*Russophobic*" or excessively "*Europhilic*."¹⁹⁰ Arjakas reflected: "*The question was if [Russia] had enough capabilities, and if the broader geopolitical context allows them to behave in an aggressive imperialist manner.*"¹⁹¹

Estonia's framing is thus not rooted in historical trauma but in empirically grounded strategic foresight.¹⁹² Its participation in the so-called "anti-Russian camp" should be understood as principled opposition to authoritarianism, not as emotional or ideological hostility. The repetition of Russian aggression across the region has validated Estonia's concerns and confirmed

¹⁸⁹ Maria Mälksoo, "3. The Postcolonial Moment in Russia's War Against Ukraine," *Journal of Genocide Research* 25, no. 3–4 (October 2, 2023): 471–81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2022.2074947>.

¹⁹⁰ Vilson, "BALTIC PERSPECTIVES ON THE UKRAINE CRISES: EUROPEANIZATION IN THE SHADOW OF INSECURITY."

¹⁹¹ Interview 1, 2025

¹⁹² Raik and Arjakas, "Grasping the Opportunity for Small State Leadership."

its calls for deterrence and institutional preparedness. This stands in contrast to the slower, more cautious approaches favored by many Western EU member states.

Small state leadership, particularly Estonia's, shows how normative argumentation and strategic framing can compensate for material limitations. As Panke emphasizes, small states can exert argumentative and reputational power.¹⁹³ Estonia's proactive stance, leading by example, building coalitions, and consistently supporting Ukraine, has strengthened its credibility as a norm entrepreneur. Vilson notes that the shock of the 2022 invasion resulted in a "*much clearer, much less ambivalent, much stronger*" EU position on Russia.¹⁹⁴ Earlier moments of hesitation, such as Borrell's 2021 Moscow visit, revealed the difficulty of forming a unified voice. The crises recalibrated EU expectations.

The appointment of Kaja Kallas as High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy symbolized not just a personnel change but a paradigmatic shift. Her rhetorical stance, strategic clarity, moral determination, and skepticism of Russian diplomacy signal the emergence of a new normative boundary within the EU. As one interviewee observed, appointing a figure from the Eastern frontline "*sends a powerful signal not only to EU member states but also to Russia.*"¹⁹⁵ However, Arjakas cautions that Kallas's appointment should not be over-interpreted as Estonia's proxy victory. While the role allows agenda-setting and narrative framing, Estonia's influence will remain contingent on continued strategic engagement.¹⁹⁶

In sum, this chapter has explored the conditional convergence between Estonia's and the EU's threat framing of Russia. It has emphasized that Estonia's consistent, normatively anchored discourse provided a ready-made interpretive framework during a time of geopolitical upheaval. The alignment observed is not the result of direct influence but of compatibility, an outcome shaped by crises, institutional responsiveness, and the clarity of a small frontline state. Rather than claiming Estonization, the findings highlight discursive resonance and legitimation: Estonia's framing became visible and relevant because it fit the moment and the message the EU came to adopt.

¹⁹³ Panke, "Small States in the European Union."

¹⁹⁴ Interview 2, 2025.

¹⁹⁵ Interview 1, 2025.

¹⁹⁶ Interview 1, 2025

Conclusion

The objective of this thesis was to examine the extent to which Estonia's framing of Russia as a threat converged with the EU's foreign and security framing between 2014 and 2024. The research puzzle centered on how the EU, traditionally cautious in its external discourse, came to increasingly reflect the framing originally articulated by a small eastern member state, Estonia, especially following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022. The puzzling dimension lies not merely in the existence of convergence, but in the fact that this alignment appeared to unfold on Estonia's normative and strategic terms. How could the framings of a small state, long minor in broader EU security debates, come to resonate with the Union's strategic vocabulary? This question was particularly relevant given the historical tendency of EU discourse to overlook more alarmist or assertive narratives from the Eastern flank.

To address this puzzle, the study applied a theoretical framework combining Europeanization, especially its bottom-up dimension and constructivism, emphasizing the importance of discourse and norm diffusion. Framing analysis, based on Entman's four dimensions, problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and policy recommendation, was used to systematically assess Estonian and EU-level documents. The empirical material included annual speeches by Estonian foreign ministers and European Commission Presidents, as well as strategic documents like the Foreign Policy Development Plan 2030 (2020), EU Global Strategy (2016), and Strategic Compass (2022). A comparative, temporal analysis allowed for the identification of both divergence and increasing framing alignment across the decade.

The central research question asked: *To what extent has the convergence between Estonia's framing of Russia as a threat and the EU's foreign and security policy discourse increased since the Russian invasion of Ukraine?* The analysis found that Estonia maintained a stable and normatively anchored framing of Russia throughout the decade. It portrayed Russia as a revisionist, existential threat to European security and values, grounded in core principles such as sovereignty, democracy, and the rule of law. While the rhetorical intensity of this discourse varied over time, its ideational structure remained stable. Notably, Estonia's framing did not adjust in response to broader EU discourse. Instead, it served as a fixed normative reference point that gained resonance in the aftermath of the 2022 invasion.

By contrast, the EU's framing of Russia before 2022 was marked by cautious legalism and strategic ambiguity. Although violations of international law and hybrid threats were occasionally acknowledged, the Union balanced criticism with efforts to maintain engagement, particularly in areas such as energy cooperation. After the 2022 invasion, however, EU discourse underwent a discursive rupture - Russia was increasingly depicted as an authoritarian aggressor, a direct threat to European security and values, and the central object in a broader systemic conflict between democracy and autocracy. This shift was particularly evident in the Strategic Compass and speeches by high-level EU officials, which incorporated themes and framings that had long been central to Estonia's narrative.

Thus, the convergence between Estonia and the EU was substantial but conditional. It did not reflect policy influence, causality, or institutional uploading. Instead, it illustrates a form of discursive Europeanization through contextual resonance; Estonia's long-standing framing became increasingly aligned with the EU's evolving narrative because it offered a coherent and morally anchored interpretation that matched the strategic and normative needs of the EU during a moment of crises. The 2022 invasion created the conditions under which Estonia's discourse, previously seen as minor or overly alarmist, could be integrated into the EU-level foreign policy discussions.

This convergence was enabled by three decisive conditions. First, Estonia's framing was consistently norm-driven and rhetorically coherent across the decade, offering an interpretive framework rooted in the EU's own foundational norms. Second, the 2022 invasion acted as a structural rupture that disrupted previous EU consensus and created space for previously minor framings to be reconsidered. Third, the EU's search for strategic clarity and moral legitimacy in its foreign policy response allowed Estonia's framing, once peripheral, to be taken up as a credible and timely response. These conditions together explain why convergence occurred not gradually, but decisively after 2022.

This convergence was enabled by three decisive conditions. First, Estonia's framing was consistently norm-driven and rhetorically coherent across the decade, offering an interpretive framework rooted in the EU's own foundational norms. Second, the 2022 invasion acted as a structural rupture that disrupted previous EU consensus and created space for previously minor framings to be reconsidered. Third, the EU's search for strategic clarity and moral legitimacy in its foreign policy response allowed Estonia's framing, once peripheral, to be taken up as a credible

and timely response. These conditions together explain why convergence occurred not gradually, but decisively after 2022.

Answering the research question explicitly: the extent of convergence between Estonia's and the EU's framing of Russia increased significantly following the 2022 invasion, particularly in terms of moral evaluation, causal attribution, and policy prescriptions. However, convergence was partial, conditional, and mediated by institutional logic and differing geopolitical positions. While rhetorical alignment was extensive, especially in references to democracy, sovereignty, and support for Ukraine, differences persisted in the intensity of moral judgment, in the prioritization of strategic autonomy versus transatlantic deterrence, and in the pace and ambition of policy recommendations.

Empirically, this pattern was supported by the increasing visibility of Estonian themes, such as "existential threat," "imperial aggression," and "defense of democracy", in EU-level documents and speeches. These framings were not only repeated but embedded into institutional instruments, including the Ukraine Assistance Fund, legal sanctions frameworks, and enlargement discourse. Their emergence in EU statements was less a direct outcome of Estonian agency than a symptom of a broader shift in European threat perception. Thus, Estonia's role was not one of an agenda-setter, but of a norm entrepreneur, offering a stable interpretive framework when the EU required framing clarity and moral grounding.

In light of the evidence, the thesis confirms the theoretical expectation derived from bottom-up Europeanization and constructivist theory: discursive alignment between a small state and the EU is most likely when normative consistency, structural crises, and institutional resonance coincide. While no direct uploading of national preferences occurred, Estonia's discourse gained traction because it offered a normatively coherent and discursively ready framing at a moment of need. This confirms that Europeanization, particularly in its bottom-up discursive form, can operate through resonance rather than pressure, and supports constructivist claims about the power of ideas, identity, and framing in shaping foreign policy discourse.

The thesis contributes to existing literature by demonstrating that small-state agency in the EU does not require institutional dominance or coercive power. Instead, discursive credibility and normative coherence can provide smaller member states with strategic leverage, particularly in times of crises. Estonia's case exemplifies how ideational resilience and rhetorical consistency can transform a marginal perspective into a mainstream reference point. This insight advances the

understanding of multi-dimensional Europeanization, where convergence can emerge from structural disruption and ideational preparedness, and not only from top-down harmonization or policy transfer.

The findings show that rhetorical alignment between Estonia and the EU does not eliminate underlying distinctions in discourse. Estonia's discourse remains more morally charged and geopolitically assertive than that of the EU as a whole. It frequently employs terms like "genocide," emphasizes historical analogies, and calls for rapid integration of Eastern Partnership states, positions that exceed the EU's institutional tone and capacity. Additionally, although both actors support "strategic autonomy," Estonia tends to interpret the concept through the lens of NATO cooperation and Eastern deterrence, whereas the EU emphasizes defense industrial capacity and internal readiness. These divergences reflect differing security cultures, institutional roles, and geographic priorities.

The implications of these findings are twofold. First, they confirm that discursive alignment in EU foreign policy can occur without direct agency or influence, especially under crises conditions. Second, they show that small states may play a crucial role in shaping EU discourse, not by dominating the agenda, but by offering ready-made frames that gain salience under shifting conditions. Estonia's case reinforces the notion that credibility, consistency, and clarity can constitute powerful tools of discursive agency in multilevel governance systems like the EU.

Nevertheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. The analysis focused exclusively on official discourse and high-level documents, without assessing how narratives translated into informal decision-making, alliance-building, or institutional bargaining. Framing interpretations, while systematically coded, retain some subjectivity, especially in borderline cases. Although speeches provided consistent annual data, strategic documents were added later and may overrepresent 2022-2024. Additionally, the analysis did not incorporate other small Eastern European states that may have pursued similar framing strategies. Comparative research is necessary to understand whether Estonia's case is exceptional or representative.

Future research could examine how coalitions of small states collectively contribute to shaping EU discourse during times of crises, as well as how discursive convergence translates into tangible institutional or policy outcomes. Comparative analyzes of countries such as Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland could illuminate both shared narratives and divergent strategies in

framing Russia, along with their respective impacts on EU-level discourse. Methodological approaches, such as content analysis, may offer additional insights into how discursive dynamics evolve over time and across institutional settings.

Returning to the research gap, namely, the limited understanding of how small states can shape EU-level discourse without institutional leverage, the findings of this thesis offer a nuanced response. Estonia's case demonstrates that small states can become norm entrepreneurs whose consistent discourse is adopted during crises, not through direct influence, but through discursive resonance. This insight helps explain how ideational convergence occurs under crises, and why the EU's evolving foreign policy identity may increasingly reflect the perspectives of strategically coherent and diplomatically active smaller states.

In conclusion, this thesis has demonstrated that Estonia's framing of Russia as a systemic threat remained stable and normatively grounded between 2014 and 2024, and that this discourse gained increasing resonance within EU foreign and security policy after the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Rather than exerting direct influence, Estonia's consistent framing provided a discursive anchor during a moment of crises. The convergence observed is best understood as a process of discursive legitimation and resonance, conditioned by crises and the Union's need for strategic and normative clarity. Estonia did not reshape EU values, but its vision of the threat became increasingly compatible with those values. As such, the findings underscore the importance of ideational compatibility, normative coherence, and structural timing in explaining how small states can contribute to shaping EU foreign policy discourse, not through power, but through readiness.

Bibliography

- “Address by Foreign Minister Keit Pentus-Rosimannus to the Riigikogu on Behalf of the Government of Estonia | Välisministeerium,” 2015. <https://www.vm.ee/en/news/foreign-minister-keit-pentus-rosimannus-speech-riigikogu-estonias-foreign-policy>.
- “Address by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Sven Mikser, at the Discussion of Foreign Policy in the Riigikogu | Välisministeerium,” 2018. <https://vm.ee/en/news/address-minister-foreign-affairs-mr-sven-mikser-discussion-foreign-policy-riigikogu>.
- “ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, MR. SVEN MIKSER TO THE RIIGIKOGU | Välisministeerium,” 2017.
- “ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, MRS. MARINA KALJURAND TO THE RIIGIKOGU | Välisministeerium,” 2016. <https://vm.ee/en/news/address-minister-foreign-affairs-mrs-marina-kaljurand-riigikogu>.
- Archer, Clive, Alyson J. K. Bailes, and Anders Wivel, eds. *Small States and International Security: Europe and Beyond*. Routledge Advances in International Relations and Global Politics. New York: Routledge, 2014. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315798042>.
- Börzel. “Pace-Setting, Foot-Dragging, and Fence-Sitting: Member State Responses to Europeanization,” 2002.
- Börzel, Tanja A. “Shaping and Taking EU Policies: Member State Responses to Europeanization.” *Queens University Belfast* No. p0035. (2003).
- Börzel, Tanja A., and Thomas Risse. “Conceptualizing the Domestic Impact of Europe.” Edited by Kevin Featherstone and Claudio M. Radaelli. *The Politics of Europeanization*, June 5, 2003, 57–80. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199252092.003.0003>.
- David, Clarissa C., Atun ,Jenna Mae, Fille ,Erika, and Christopher and Monterola. “Finding Frames: Comparing Two Methods of Frame Analysis.” *Communication Methods and Measures* 5, no. 4 (October 1, 2011): 329–51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19312458.2011.624873>.
- Diez, Thomas. “Constructing the Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering ‘Normative Power Europe’.” *Millennium* 33, no. 3 (June 1, 2005): 613–36. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298050330031701>.

- Duina, Francesco G. *Harmonizing Europe: Nation-States within the Common Market*. SUNY Press, 1999.
- Entman, Robert. “Framing: Toward Clarification of A Fractured Paradigm.” *The Journal of Communication* 43 (December 1, 1993): 51–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>.
- European Commission - European Commission. “State of the Union Address by President von Der Leyen 2020.” Text. Accessed April 11, 2025. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_20_1655.
- European Commission - European Commission. “State of the Union Address by President von Der Leyen 2022.” Text. Accessed April 11, 2025. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/ov/https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/ov/speech_22_5493.
- European Commission - European Commission. “State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen 2023.” Text. Accessed April 12, 2025. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_23_4426.
- Finnemore, Martha, and Kathryn Sikkink. “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change.” *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 887–917. <https://doi.org/10.1162/002081898550789>.
- “Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna’s Annual Foreign Policy Speech | Välisministeerium,” 2024. <https://vm.ee/en/news/foreign-minister-margus-tshaknas-annual-foreign-policy-speech>.
- “Foreign Minister Reinsalu in His Annual Foreign Policy Speech: Estonia’s Foreign Policy Focuses on Ukraine’s Victory and Russia’s Defeat | Välisministeerium,” 2023. <https://vm.ee/en/news/foreign-minister-reinsalu-his-annual-foreign-policy-speech-estonias-foreign-policy-focuses>.
- Gerring, John. “Case Study Research: Principles and Practices,” n.d.
- Government of Estonia (or Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia). “Estonian Foreign Policy Strategy 2030.” Tallinn: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020. <https://vm.ee/en/estonian-foreign-policy-strategy-2030>.
- Högenauer, Anna-Lena, and Matúš Mišík. *Small States in EU Policy-Making: Strategies, Challenges, Opportunities*. 1st ed. London: Routledge, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003380641>.

- How Do Little Frogs Fly? Small States in the European Union*, 2015.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSH2b9rZZ5o>.
- “In It to Win It: The Future of Ukraine and Transatlantic Security - Munich Security Conference,”
 February 14, 2025. <https://securityconference.org/en/msc-2024/agenda/event/in-it-to-win-it-the-future-of-ukraine-and-transatlantic-security/>.
- Jakobsen, Peter Viggo. “Small States, Big Influence: The Overlooked Nordic Influence on the Civilian ESDP*.” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 47, no. 1 (January 2009): 81–102. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2008.01833.x>.
- Juncker, Jean-Claude. “State of the Union 2015: Time for Honesty, Unity and Solidarity.” *State of the Union*, n.d.
- Kronsell, Annica. “Can Small States Influence EU Norms?: Insights From Sweden’s Participation in the Field of Environmental Politics.” *Scandinavian Studies* 74, no. 3 (2002): 287–304.
- Ladrech, Robert. “EUROPEANIZATION AND POLITICAL PARTIES.” *PARTY POLITICS*, 2002.
- Mälksoo, Maria. “3. The Postcolonial Moment in Russia’s War Against Ukraine.” *Journal of Genocide Research* 25, no. 3–4 (October 2, 2023): 471–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2022.2074947>.
- Mendonça, Ricardo Fabrino, and Paula Guimarães Simões. “Frame Analysis.” In *Research Methods in Deliberative Democracy*, edited by Selen A. Ercan, Hans Asenbaum, Nicole Curato, and Ricardo F. Mendonça, 0. Oxford University Press, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192848925.003.0024>.
- Müller, Patrick, and Nicole Alecu de Flers. “Applying the Concept of Europeanization to the Study of Foreign Policy: Dimensions and Mechanisms,” 2009.
- Multimedia Centre. “The EU’s role in a changing world and the security situation of Europe following the Russian aggression and invasion on Ukraine: opening statements by Kaja KALLAS, Estonian Prime Minister and by Josep BORRELL FONTELLES, HR/VP of the European Union.” Accessed May 19, 2025. https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/video/the-eus-role-in-a-changing-world-and-the-security-situation-of-europe-following-the-russian-aggression-and-invasion-on-ukraine-opening-statement-by-kaja-kallas-estonian-prime-minister_I219918.

- Panke, Diana. "Small States in the European Union: Structural Disadvantages in EU Policy-Making and Counter-Strategies." *Journal of European Public Policy* 17, no. 6 (September 2010): 799–817. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2010.486980>.
- Radaelli, Claudio M. "The Europeanization of Public Policy." In *The Politics of Europeanization*, edited by Kevin Featherstone and Claudio M. Radaelli, 1st ed., 27–56. Oxford University Press Oxford, 2003. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199252092.003.0002>.
- . "Whither Europeanization? Concept Stretching and Substantive Change." *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2002. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.302761>.
- Raik, Kristi, and Merili Arjakas. "Grasping the Opportunity for Small State Leadership: Estonia's Response to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine." *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, September 18, 2024, 13691481241280368. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13691481241280368>.
- "Report on Foreign Policy by Minister of Foreign Affairs Eva-Maria Liimets at the Parliament of Estonia | Välisministeerium," 2022. <https://vm.ee/en/news/report-foreign-policy-minister-foreign-affairs-eva-maria-liimets-parliament-estonia-0>.
- Risse, Thomas. "Social Constructivism and European Integration," 2004.
- "Sergei Lavrov: EU's Foreign Policy Is Being Estonised – Propastop." Accessed May 11, 2025. <https://www.propastop.org/en/2024/07/01/sergei-lavrov-eus-foreign-policy-is-being-estonised/>.
- "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy." European Union, 2016.
- "Strategic Compass." European Union, 2022.
- "The Nord Stream 2 Pipeline," n.d.
- Thorhallsson, Baldur. "Studying Small States: A Review.," 2018.
- Thorhallsson, Baldur, and Anders Wivel. "Thorhallsson and Wivel 2006_ Small States in the European Union: What Do We Know and What Would We Like to Know?" *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 19, no. 4 (December 2006): 651–68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557570601003502>.
- Van Dijk, Teun A. "Van Dijk_ Critics_ Catherine_ Analyzing Frame Analysis: A Critical Review of Framing Studies in Social Movement Research." *Discourse Studies* 25, no. 2 (April 2023): 153–78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614456231155080>.

Vilson, Maili. "BALTIC PERSPECTIVES ON THE UKRAINE CRISES: EUROPEANIZATION
IN THE SHADOW OF INSECURITY," 2017.

Wendt, Alexander. "Social Theory of International Politics," n.d.

Data Collection**Data Collection: Annual Speeches**

EU/Estonia	Year	Officials' Name	Availability
Estonia	2014	Urmas Paet	N/A
Estonia	2015	Keit Pentus-Rosimannus	
Estonia	2016	Marina Kaljurand	
Estonia	2017	Sven Mikser	
Estonia	2018	Sven Mikser	
Estonia	2019	Sven Mikser	
Estonia	2020	Sven Mikser	
Estonia	2021		N/A
Estonia	2022	Eva-Maria Liimets	
Estonia	2023	Urmas Reinsalu	
Estonia	2024	Margus Tsahkna	
EU	2014		N/A
EU	2015	Jean-Claude Juncker	
EU	2016	Jean-Claude Juncker	
EU	2017	Jean-Claude Juncker	
EU	2018	Jean-Claude Juncker	
EU	2019		N/A
EU	2020	Ursula von der Leyen	
EU	2021	Ursula von der Leyen	
EU	2022	Ursula von der Leyen	
EU	2023	Ursula von der Leyen	
EU	2024		N/A

APPENDIX 1 CONTINUED

Data Collection: Strategic Documents

EU/Estonia	Year	Strategic Document Name
Estonia	2020	The Foreign Policy Development Plan 2030
EU	2016	A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy
EU	2022	Strategic Compass (2024)

List of Interviews

	Name	Date	Time (EET)	Occasion	Address
Interview 1	Merili Arjakas	28 th April 2025	12:00 p.m.	Online	Via Google Meet
Interview 2	Mai Vilson	30 th April 2025	10:00 a.m.	On-site	Office room at Lossi 36-313, University of Tartu

Estonia's Framing of Russia as a Threat (2014-2024)

#	Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
1.Problem Definition	Existential Threat to National Sovereignty	N/M	1	1	1	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	1	1	1	6
	Geopolitical Instability in Europe	N/M	1	1	1	1	N/M	1	N/M	2	2	N/M	9
	Russian Expansionism and Imperial Ambitions	N/M	N/M	2	N/M	N/M	N/M	2	N/M	1	1	1	7
	Undermining of International Law and Rules-Based Order	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	1	1	4
2.Casual Interpretation	Hybrid Threats and Information Warfare	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	1
	Aggressive Foreign Policy of the Russian State	N/M	1	2	N/M	N/M	N/M	2	N/M	3	1	1	10
	Kremlin Leadership and Strategic Intent	N/M	2	1	1	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	3	N/M	5	12
	Energy Dependence on Russia as a Structural Risk	N/M	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	1	N/M	3
3.Moral Evaluation	Russian Disinformation and Propaganda Campaigns	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	1	N/M	3
	Violation of International Law and Sovereignty	N/M	3	N/M	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	N/M	2	4	N/M	10
	Breach of European Democratic Values and Norms	N/M	1	1	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	2	2	1	7
	Moral Responsibility to Support Ukraine	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	4	2	8
4.Policy Recommendation	Condemnation of Authoritarianism	N/M	1	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	2	N/M	N/M	2	2	8
	Normative Commitment to Ukraine's Victory	N/M	N/M	2	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	4	1	7
	Strategic Aid to Ukraine (Military, Financial, Humanitarian)	N/M	2	2	1	N/M	N/M	2	N/M	1	7	7	22
	Sanctions and Restrictive Measures Against Russia	N/M	1	2	2	2	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	5	4	14
4.Policy Recommendation	Strengthening EU-NATO Security Cooperation	N/M	3	1	1	N/M	1	3	N/M	6	N/M	N/M	15
	Boosting Cybersecurity and Digital Resilience	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	3
	Reducing Strategic Dependencies on Russia (Energy, Trade, Technology)	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	1	N/M	2	N/M	1	7	1	12
	Support for EU and NATO Enlargement (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia)	N/M	N/M	2	1	1	1	2	N/M	N/M	10	4	21
4.Policy Recommendation	Mobilization of EU Unity and Strategic Autonomy	N/M	2	3	1	N/M	N/M	2	N/M	N/M	15	11	34
	Refugee Protection and Civilian Solidarity Policies	N/M	3	N/M	1	1	N/M	2	N/M	3	6	N/M	16
	Legal Accountability for Russia and Expulsion from International Forums	N/M	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	2
	Total	N/M	25	22	11	5	4	25	N/M	26	74	42	

The EU's Framing of Russia as a Threat (2014-2024)

#	Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
1. Problem Definition	Existential Threat to National Sovereignty	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	1
	Geopolitical Instability in Europe	N/M	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	9	2	N/M	12
	Russian Expansionism and Imperial Ambitions	N/M	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	3	N/M	N/M	4
	Undermining of International Law and Rules-Based Order	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M
2. Casual Interpretation	Hybrid Threats and Information Warfare	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	7	N/M	N/M	7
	Aggressive Foreign Policy of the Russian State	N/M	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	6	2	N/M	8
	Kremlin Leadership and Strategic Intent	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	1	N/M	1	1	N/M	4
	Energy Dependence on Russia as a Structural Risk	N/M	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	1
3. Moral Evaluation	Russian Disinformation and Propaganda Campaigns	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M
	Violation of International Law and Sovereignty	N/M	N/M	2	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	3	1	N/M	6
	Breach of European Democratic Values and Norms	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	3	N/M	N/M	3
	Moral Responsibility to Support Ukraine	N/M	1	1	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	4	1	N/M	7
4. Policy Recommendation	Condemnation of Authoritarianism	N/M	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	1	1	N/M	3
	Normative Commitment to Ukraine's Victory	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	3	2	N/M	5
	Strategic Aid to Ukraine (Military, Financial, Humanitarian)	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	20	3	N/M	24
	Sanctions and Restrictive Measures Against Russia	N/M	2	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	5
5. Summary	Strengthening EU-NATO Security Cooperation	N/M	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	6	N/M	N/M	7
	Boosting Cybersecurity and Digital Resilience	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	6	N/M	N/M	6
	Reducing Strategic Dependencies on Russia (Energy, Trade, Technology)	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	18	N/M	N/M	18
	Support for EU and NATO Enlargement (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia)	N/M	1	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	1	1	N/M	3
6. Conclusions	Mobilization of EU Unity and Strategic Autonomy	N/M	1	2	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	17	N/M	N/M	20
	Refugee Protection and Civilian Solidarity Policies	N/M	1	1	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	4	2	N/M	8
	Legal Accountability for Russia and Expulsion from International Forums	N/M	N/M	2	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	3	N/M	N/M	5
	Total	N/M	8	14	N/M	N/M	N/M	1	N/M	117	16	N/M	

Interview Guide

- How would you characterise Estonia's overall approach and framing of Russia as a threat between 2014 and 2024?
- Before 2022, how much attention did Estonia's concerns about Russia receive within the EU, and do you think they were sufficiently considered?
- Following the events of 2022, how would you describe any changes in how the EU speaks/acts about Russia?
- Looking at today's EU policies and communications, where do you see Estonia's or its neighbors' (e.g., Lithuania, Poland) earlier messages most strongly reflected?
- In your view, why was Kaja Kallas chosen as High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy at this particular time?
- Today, how close or different are Estonia's and the EU's framings of Russia?
- Looking ahead, how do you see Estonia's role evolving in EU foreign and security policy, especially considering recent leadership developments?

APPENDIX 5

Sample Recruitment Email

Dear _____,

I hope this email finds you well.

My name is Anna Khomasuridze, and I am currently writing my MA thesis in EU Studies at the University of Tartu. My research examines how Estonia has framed Russia as a security threat in its foreign policy discourse and the extent to which this framing has aligned with the EU's foreign and security policy, particularly following the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Specifically, I am tracing how EU foreign policy preferences have increasingly converged with Estonia's stance over the period 2014-2024.

Given your expertise in Estonian foreign policy and EU affairs, I would be grateful for the opportunity to conduct a semi-structured interview with you (approximately 30 minutes). The interview would be conducted in English and, with your consent, recorded solely for transcription purposes.

The interview can take place either online (via Google Meet or a platform of your choice) or on-site, depending on what is most convenient for you.

If you are open to participating, I would be happy to share the draft of the interview questions and the consent form in advance for your review.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch for any additional information. Thank you very much for considering this request. I look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,

Anna Khomasuridze

MA Student, University of Tartu

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

(for participation in the academic research)

Provisional Title of Study: Towards the Estonization of EU Foreign and Security Policy?

Department: Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu

Researcher: Anna Khomasuridze, Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, Emails: _____, or _____

Supervisors: Dr. Thomas Linsenmaier and Dr. Piret Ehin, Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu. Emails: _____, _____

Dear Madam or Sir,

You are invited to participate in the research project provisionally titled “Towards the Estonization of EU Foreign and Security Policy?” conducted by Anna Khomasuridze, a graduate student at the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu. You have been selected because you have expertise in, or direct knowledge of, Estonian and EU foreign and security policy or the broader dynamics of EU-Russia relations. This Information Sheet is designed to explain the study and help you decide whether you wish to participate.

If you have any questions, please contact the researcher at: _____ or _____

This study aims to explore how Estonia has framed Russia as a security threat in its foreign policy discourse between 2014 and 2024, and to assess whether this framing has become increasingly reflected in the EU’s foreign and security discourse, especially after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. It focuses on identifying patterns of discursive continuity, intensification, and convergence between Estonia and the EU, without seeking to establish direct causality, but rather highlighting strategic framing, normative resonance, and small-state agency within the Europeanization framework. Estonia is chosen as the case study not because there is an exclusive “Estonian model,” but because it represents a clear, consistent example of how small states in the

APPENDIX 6 CONTINUED

The region have framed Russia. Estonia effectively “ticks all the boxes” in its strategic messaging, and its case can offer broader insights into how the EU may also reflect the framings of similar states. *Your insights will serve as background validation for the study’s analytical findings and contribute to advancing academic understanding of EU foreign policy-making and mechanisms of small-state influence.*

If you agree to participate, you will be invited to a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 30 minutes, conducted either in person or online (via Google Meet), according to your preference. The interviews will be conducted in English, as the researcher is a native Georgian speaker. Before the interview commences, you will be asked to sign a Consent Form, agreeing to participate in the study and to be recorded. A precise date and location for the interview will be arranged by mutual agreement.

The interview will consist of open-ended questions regarding Estonia’s security framing of Russia as a threat and the evolution of EU foreign and security discourse between 2014 and 2025. A prepared set of main questions will guide the conversation, but the format will remain flexible, allowing you to elaborate freely on topics you find relevant. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded. These recordings will be listened to only by the researcher to produce transcripts, and will be deleted once transcription is completed. The researcher will personally transcribe the interviews; no external agency will be used. All transcripts and any contact details will be securely stored on a password-protected laptop.

There are no known risks associated with participation. You may refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. While there are no direct personal benefits, your contribution will support academic research in the fields of EU foreign and security policy, Europeanization, and small-state diplomacy.

All reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy. Personal identifiers such as your name, address, and email will not be published or associated with research outputs unless you explicitly

APPENDIX 6 CONTINUED

consent otherwise. Your private information will be used strictly under the conditions agreed upon in the Consent Form. Audio recordings and interview transcripts will be permanently deleted two months after the successful submission and evaluation of the thesis. Research findings may be published or presented academically, but your identity will remain confidential unless you provide written permission.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time without providing a reason. You also have the right to access your data collected during the study and request corrections if needed. If you believe your rights have been violated, you may contact the Estonian Data Protection Inspectorate or seek a remedy through the courts. If you wish to raise a complaint regarding this research project, you may also contact the supervisors of this project: Dr. Thomas Linsenmaier and Dr. Piret Ehin.

The study will be completed in late May 2025 and defended on the expected defense date: June 2025. Following the successful defense, the final thesis will be published through the University of Tartu and archived in the University of Tartu library's DSpace repository (an open-access archive for academic research). Should you wish to obtain a copy of the final thesis, you are welcome to request one from the researcher.

Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this Information Sheet and for considering participating in this research study. You will be given a copy of this Information Sheet and the signed Consent Form for their records.

Study Contacts:

Researcher: Anna Khomasuridze

Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu

Emails: ____ / ____

Supervisors: Dr. Thomas Linsenmaier and Dr. Piret Ehin, University of Tartu

APPENDIX 7

CONSENT FORM FOR EXPERT INTERVIEW PARTICIPATION

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Provisional Title of Study: Towards the Estonization of EU Foreign and Security Policy?

Department: Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu

Researcher: Anna Khomasuridze, Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, Emails: ____, or ____

Supervisors: Dr. Thomas Linsenmaier and Dr. Piret Ehin, Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu. Emails: ____, ____

Thank you for considering participation in this research project. Before agreeing to take part, the researcher will provide a full explanation of the study and its objectives. If you have any questions regarding the *Information Sheet* or the explanations provided, please do not hesitate to ask the researcher for clarification before making your decision. You will receive a copy of this *Consent Form* for your records and future reference.

By ticking each box below, I confirm my consent to that part of the study. If I leave a box unticked, it will be understood that I do not consent to that part. I understand that if I do not give consent for a required part, I may not be able to take part in the study.

Consent Details:	Tick Box
1 I confirm that I have read and understood the <i>Information Sheet</i> dated 27th April 2025, including the purpose and expectations of this study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and agree to participate in an individual interview.	
2 I understand that participation is <i>voluntary</i> . I may withdraw at any time without providing a reason, and without affecting my legal rights. I also understand that I may request the removal of my data within one week after the interview has taken place.	
3 I consent to the collection and use of my personal information (such as name, occupation, and place of study) for the purposes explained to me by the researcher.	
4 I understand that all research data, including interview transcripts and personal information, will be securely stored on a laptop (N drive). The data will be permanently	

APPENDIX 7 CONTINUED

	<p><i>deleted two months after the project's final submission</i> and evaluation at the University of Tartu. Research findings may be disseminated through academic publications and presentations, but your identity will remain confidential unless you provide written permission (please refer to point 11 in the consent form).</p>	
5	I understand that my data may be accessed by authorized University personnel for monitoring, quality assurance, or audit purposes.	
6	I confirm that I meet the inclusion criteria set out in the Information Sheet and communicated to me by the researcher.	
7	I acknowledge that no financial or other personal benefits have been offered to induce my participation, and that the responsibility for managing the collected data rests solely with the researcher.	
8	I consent to the anonymized use of my research data for future academic research projects conducted by the researcher.	
9	I agree to the audio recording of my interview, with the understanding that recordings will be securely deleted after transcription have been finalized.	
10	I am aware that I have the right to access any personal data collected about me and to request the correction of inaccurate information. If I believe my data protection rights have been violated, I understand that I have the right to contact the Estonian Data Protection Inspectorate or to seek remedy through the courts.	
11	<p>As a participant, I understand that my statements may be quoted directly in the research outputs. I agree that the researcher may use my words under the following conditions (please tick one option):</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> My real name and affiliation may be used alongside direct quotations.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> My affiliation may be mentioned, but my real name will not be published with the quotations.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Neither my real name nor my affiliation will be published alongside any quotations.</p>	

APPENDIX 7 CONTINUED

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
----------------------------	-------------	------------------

Name of Researcher	Date	Signature
---------------------------	-------------	------------------